

Negotiating Education: Exploring our Educational Philosophies

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Education is a fundamental part of our work
in public health and is often a buried
and dispersed activity.



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The primary purpose of adult education is...

- To develop conceptual and theoretical understanding
- To support the learners' capacity to solve individual and societal problems
- To facilitate personal development on the part of the learner
- To develop the learners' competency and mastery of specific skills
- To increase learners' awareness of the need for social change and to enable them to effect such change.

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Outline

1. Education is called many things and is often a buried activity.
2. Challenge the notion of one model of adult learning by briefly examining our own philosophies of education.
3. Demonstrate different educational philosophies from three sectors in public health.
4. Argue that within the context of partnerships our educational approaches are negotiated.
5. Raise some implications for our educational practice and programs.

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In the broad field of public health, where our notions of partnerships continues to expand, we have multiple and often competing notions of what constitutes educational best practice.

- Different sectors within public health
- Professional groups and associations
- Organisations and networks
- Individually – through our own philosophies of education

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My primary role as an educator is...

- Systematically lead learners step by step in acquiring new information and understanding underlying theories and concepts
- Help learners identify and learn to solve problems
- Facilitate, but not to direct, learning activities
- Guide learners through learning activities with well directed feedback
- Increase learners' awareness of environmental and social issues and help them learn how to have an impact on these situations.

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Evaluation of learning outcomes...

- a. Lets me know how much learners have increased their conceptual understanding
- b. Is best done when a learner encounters a problem, in the learning setting or the real world, and successfully resolves it.
- c. Is best done by the learners themselves, for their own purposes
- d. Should be built into the system so learners will continually have feedback and can adjust their performance accordingly
- e. Is not of great importance and may not be possible because the impact of learning may not be evident until much later.

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a. Liberal Philosophy

- To develop the intellectual powers of the mind; to make a person literate in the broadest sense – intellectually, morally and spiritually
- Seeks knowledge rather than just information – conceptual
- Educator is expert ‘transmitter’ of knowledge and clearly directs learning process.

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b. Progressive Philosophy

- To give learner practical knowledge and problem solving skills
- Stress experiential and problem solving approaches
- Developed through ideas of John Dewey
- Emphasises the experiences of the learner in determining problem areas
- Educator guides learning through experiences.

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c. Humanistic Philosophy

- To develop people open to change and continued learning
- To enhance personal growth and development – possibly leading to self-actualisation
- Learner is highly motivated and assumes responsibility for learning
- Educator promotes but does not direct learning; facilitator.

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d. Behaviourist Philosophy

- Particularly interested in measurable changes in behaviour — a basic premise of the scientific method
- Focus is on overt, observable behaviour
- Behaviour of learners is a response to their past and present environments and all behaviour is learned
- Educator directs learning outcomes and designs learning environment that elicits desired behaviour
- Competency-Based Vocational Education and Training in Business and Industry.

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e. Radical Transformationist Philosophy

- To bring about fundamental, social, political, economic changes in society through education
- Consciousness raising; critical thinking
- Dialogue, problem-posing
- Knowledge can transform individuals
- Equality between educator and learner
- Educator is provocateur and guides learning.

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Benefits of examining our own philosophies of education

- Helps us to become critically aware of what we do as practitioners (our default responses)
- Exposes us to alternative approaches including program planning, learning devices
- Illustrates how our values, ethics, personal histories affect our beliefs
- Can improve our educational practice.

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What philosophy is this?

- ...much more time, resources and energy has gone into pre-training and setting up training in an effort to try and change or optimise the learner environment

And I guess that has been through building of trust and relationships.

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What philosophy is this?

- In some cases we need to rethink what education is. Sometimes we see education as a process of facilitating dialogues.

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And this?

- Increasingly our educational work is becoming more organisationally focussed. This means that we often have to assess not only individual learner needs, but the various organisational structures and goals. We try to 'sell' our value before engaging in training. Now we're being asked to demonstrate changes in work practices... those are high benchmarks to achieve.

ROD WILLIAMS 

And this?

- Midwifery is political. Midwifery is about changing the status quo. It involves change at national and local levels. Midwifery change agents have incredible passion – it drives them to make a difference to the experiences of childbearing women in Australia. To come together to share experiences and stories with laughter, nurtures the support and ignites the passion and drive.

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- ...role modelling, mentoring, being an inspiration for young midwives, challenging them and encouraging them to question.
- Role models are an essential component in bringing about change.
- Persuasion is an important strategy in midwifery.

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Adult Learning in Public Health

- Draws from multiple evidence bases including those of research, professional traditions, personal histories, program evidence and policy directives
- Often involves a diverse mix of people in the planning of that educational activity – and that diversity will increase (the New Public Health)

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Implications for our educational practice and programs

- Educational programs could benefit from seeking clarity about our own educational philosophies and a shared understanding of potential outcomes
- A great deal of our educational work is political and aligns with more transformational approaches to learning ...in other words learning continues beyond the end of a program, campaign...
- Transformational education is often an incremental, long-term process full of set-backs and requiring different ideas about outcomes.

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- What words or phrases would describe an educational philosophy that reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities?

Relationship between educator and learner?

Who sets the educational goals?

Histories?

Methods?

Stories?

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The New Public Health

My starting point is that no theory offers an entire solution to understanding the world and providing a basis for public health action. Consequently, I use theories eclectically, selecting bits here and there as they help me to understand the world and explain it to others. ...

The one certainty that I cling to is that our world is complex – far too complex to be neatly understood through any single theoretical lens.

Burns, 2002: The New Public Health, p xiv

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