

Teaching How to Reflect and Reflecting on Teaching

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1. Evidence: How adults learn

Adult learners, as compared to children, have unique potential when it comes to learning. Adult learners' life experiences allow opportunities to reflect and consciously make connections, which enhances understanding. As put by Sheckley and Bell, most connections in the human brain result from experience (2006, Chapter 6). Increased frequency of change-of-a-body-state (COBS) experiences leads to more robust, fired-together-wired-together (neural) memories (Sheckley & Bell, 2006, Chapter 6). Therefore, adult learners' past and present experiences provide a groundwork for integration by bringing conscious processing to the surface.

One learning theory, experiential learning, may be captured in the phrase "learning by doing" (Smart & Csapo, 2007). Learning through experience reinforces learning through one's whole-body, incorporating cognitive, sensorimotor, and psychosocial person systems. According to Jordi (2011, p. 6), it is a "complex mix of bodily held feeling, memory, external stimulus, internal emotions, ideas, and new and old information that require integration and meaning-making." This process allows for further understanding of concepts and integration of learning, including emotional responses to experiences (Jordi, 2011). Activities with more opportunity for COBS experience provide a broader range of reference points to utilize in future executive functioning demands (Sheckley & Bell, 2006, Chapter 6).

One element of executive function skills, problem-solving, fundamentally separates one learner from another in their experience of exploring and acquiring new knowledge. Teaching in the adult population is enhanced when learners can more readily solve problems in future situations with increased independence. Hulaikah et al. demonstrated that as compared to direct

instruction, individuals taught by experiential learning displayed increased problem-solving skills, including identifying, clarifying, and focusing on the task presented (2020, p. 877).

Reflection is a crucial component of experiential learning. Specifically, in Kolb's theory, four necessary elements must occur concrete experience, reflective observation, active experimentation, and abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 2014). In the study mentioned previously, the researchers implemented a "do-reflect-think-apply" format, demonstrated elsewhere (Butler et al., 2019; Hulaikah et al., 2020). Practically, learners engage in a concrete experience, reflect, develop theories, and formulate a conclusion to address the problem (Hulaikah et al., 2020, p. 869). This opportunity for application-based learning allows students to experience learning in a context more authentic to their future work. Long after formalized training is complete, this foundation instills a process with potential implementation when on-the-job learning begins.

Transformational learning builds upon experiential learning, using similar reflection elements and learning as a whole rather than in parts. Simsek (2012), defined transformational learning as "the process of deep, constructive, and meaningful learning that goes beyond simple knowledge acquisition and supports critical ways in which learners consciously make meaning of their lives." Therefore, transformational learning can strengthen the value of experiential learning by heightening the awareness of learning processes.

One element within transformational learning that builds upon this awareness is pre-reflection or contemplating existing knowledge and expectations for learning before the specific learning task. Meichenbaum describes the "Goal-Plan-Do-Check" cognitive training strategy in the Cognitive Orientation to Occupational Performance (CO-OP) approach, which enhances generalization through goal-directed activity (Wolf, 2012). CO-OP reflects similar benefits as the transformational and experiential learning frameworks combined. This added opportunity in pre-

reflection prepares the learner and builds a foundation for expectations and whole-person learning.

2. Responsibilities

The use of philosophy serves as an umbrella in teaching, providing a conceptual framework for instilling knowledge. Context matters, and no two teaching settings or teaching roles are identical. Therefore, it is worthwhile to acknowledge these nuances in various roles and environments.

Clinical educators have perhaps the most natural context for utilizing experiential learning, given the opportunity for application with clients and equipment at their fingertips. Simultaneously, reflective opportunities exist throughout a clinical day; however, this takes more thought and effort on the educator's part. Despite the internal – and potentially external - reflective process that clinicians experience daily, this can be more challenging in facilitating reflection with a student. Due to productivity expectations and insurance reimbursement, therapists often have limited time to lead students through conscious, reflective processes throughout the day. In some cases, clinical educators find it beneficial to schedule routine meetings with their student(s) with specific projects or assignments that allow for more in-depth processing.

On the other hand, educators in academia have precise time set aside, and expectations for assignments, reinforcing learning through discussions or writing prompts, which help bring reflections of learning experiences to the student's mind. However, experiential learning in academic contexts often requires more planning time, resources, and creativity than direct instruction. Tenure-track faculty may be at an advantage in this way, with more time devoted to enhancing a course over many years and pulling from concepts learned through immersion in

teaching. Alternatively, adjunct faculty typically have limited-term contracts. They may have fewer resources or experience in educating, which increases the workload and potentially limits room for flexibility in teaching, especially when provided with a course outline to follow.

As a master's student, I remember a course taught by an adjunct who primarily worked in clinical settings. During one class, the instructor showed a controversial segment from a morning show, which resulted in an emotional argument in the class, including hurtful comments and significant damage to interpersonal relationships. Despite this instructor's best intentions to create an opportunity for discussion, she did not have the training in education that tenure-track faculty often have. Therefore, she was unprepared to anticipate this situation and foregrounding with "rules of engagement," or guidelines to avoid personalizing arguments and offer cool-down activities, as encouraged by Svinicki and McKeachie. (2018, pp. 323-324). This unintentional but impactful misstep highlights the most common ethical issues in education: teaching without adequate preparation (Svinicki and McKeachie, 2018, p. 320).

Many assume that individuals who fill teaching positions do so because they enjoy teaching or impacting their field and students' lives. Regardless of intent, as demonstrated in the example above, teachers are not exempt from ethical challenges - many of which are not obvious or readily acknowledged as a matter of ethics. Additionally, individuals such as clinical educators who went into the field planning to see clients may not enjoy their role as educators, for example, if they take students due to pressure from their administrators. As a result, educators may not give sufficient attention to ethical obligations such as keeping up with the latest evidence, condescending negativism, differentiating fact versus opinion, and giving equal consideration to all students (Svinicki and McKeachie, 2018, pp. 320-326).

First and foremost, educators must view and treat all students with respect. Adequate preparation for the class; interactional, procedural, and outcome fairness; providing ample opportunities for communication; and avoiding harassment are naturally in line with a core tenant of respect for persons (Rodabaugh, 1996). If respect lies at the root of an individual's actions, then ethical practices should follow. Regardless, educators are fallible and vulnerable to misconduct, just as any other human.

Since there is not always a straightforward answer to ethical dilemmas, Svinicki and McKeachie (2018, p. 327) advise the following domains for consideration in reflection and decision-making, as attributed to Brown and Krager (1985) and Schön (1983): autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and acting consciously. I believe that a routine check-in with these specific values places the educator in a position of periodic reflection, monitoring one's motives, and putting more structure around actions than an absence of this regular examination. Despite the nearly impossible feat of exemplifying a model for ethical behavior, continual self-evaluation using the framework described above provides a foundation for ongoing growth.

3. Personal Philosophy

Upholding ethical standards is at the climax of my personal teaching goals and expectations for myself. I believe that a foundation of respect, trust, and fairness lay the grounds for a culture conducive to learning – and failing – safely. It is imperative to uphold respect in teaching adult learners, given existing knowledge and experiences, which are often learning opportunities for instructors. If approached well, teaching becomes an opportunity for life-long learning in the instructor, the mark of a dedicated educator. Additionally, as suggested by Ellsworth (1992, p.107 as cited in Cook-Sather, 2002), those in positions of authority must confront “the power

dynamics inside and outside our classrooms [that make] democratic dialogue impossible.” As a result, Cook-Sather (2002) suggests that empowering students with the skills to shape the educational process can improve education, giving teachers a greater understanding of student viewpoints and increasing collaboration, enhancing motivation and participation.

In addition to respect, trust lies at the root of any learning environment. If students cannot trust - their instructor or the environment where learning occurs - the learning and learning context suffer as a result. For example, in a clinical setting, imagine a student who feels fearful of an instructor due to an abuse of power or past experiences of discouraging responses to student performance. This scenario may begin a cycle of insecurity leading to disengagement and a fear of failure. Through the process of learning, we often learn best from making errors and learning from those mistakes. Similarly, in a classroom environment, if a student cannot trust that an instructor will respond in kindness to an incorrect answer, that student is less likely to participate. Scarbrough (2013) found a correlation between trust related to mood and cognitive function; the author concluded that changes in levels of trust might impact critical thinking.

As an occupational therapist with a disability, I would be remiss not to address the importance of a fair and inclusive environment for learning related to individuals with disabilities. Although Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects children and adolescents in grade-school with a “free appropriate public education,” higher education often comes with additional challenges (US Department of Education, 2007). In the case of differences in ability levels, fair does not always mean equal. In most cases, instructors can make reasonable accommodations that will enhance learning and contribute to a more diverse student body. The American Occupational Therapy Association Centennial Vision included an image of a “diverse workforce,” and subsequently, the 2025 vision begins with “as an inclusive profession” (2007;

2017). In teaching occupational therapy students, I place a high value on recognizing individual learners' unique needs and working to identify fair teaching practices and provide opportunities for learning in a student-partnered fashion.

Ultimately, I aim to develop comprehensive thinkers who can problem-solve and seek to acquire new knowledge through experiential learning across the lifetime. Not only is this true for students, but in treating clients with chronic conditions, due to the need for empowerment and self-management rather than depending on a medical professional to “fix” them. As an occupational therapist, I aim to offer experiences in the clinical environment, which simulate daily life activities, partnering alongside my clients as they engage in problem-solving and strategy use.

Just as clients benefit from gaining tools for self-management of their medical condition, students benefit from feelings of empowerment (Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1983 as cited in Cook-Sather, 2002), which may or may not be impacted by various forms of assessment. Summative assessments, or pre-determined standards of measurement which allow for comparison across organizations and classes, are often necessary. For example, to ensure students measure up to an expected level compared to peers, the National Board Certification in Occupational Therapy requires students to take standardized exams. However, these quantitative instrumentation methods may result in student feelings of inadequacy and failure in the classroom.

Alternatively, formative assessments allow opportunities for insight into students as individuals and their learning process. The opportunity to utilize multiple formative assessments creates a comprehensive look into a learner's abilities and areas of challenge. These assessments may allow for dialogue between teacher and student and facilitate additional discussions or

review sessions in areas that the instructor may not have covered sufficiently. Despite the need for summative assessments in traditional academic environments, providing opportunities for formative assessments throughout the semester allows students to grow and pursue additional learning, before a rigid testing environment, for example. Additionally, instructors may choose to implement aspects of summative assessment routinely in a traditionally formative fashion, such as exit tickets in classes with specific demands relative to the topic discussed in class (Wind, 2019).

In the Occupational Adaptation theory, individuals experience a desire for mastery, and the environment presents a demand for mastery, which results in a press for mastery (Schkade & Schultz, 1992). Although individuals often internally assess their performance through occupational challenges, conscious evaluation strengthens the adaptive process, and more positive evaluations lead to an increased likelihood of adopting that experience in the adaptive response mechanism (Andersson, 2004, pp. 8-9; Schkade & Schultz, 2003, pp. 203-204). Therefore, experiential learning, combined with transformational learning, facilitates an adaptive response through engagement combined with reflection.

As a field, occupational therapy continues to push toward occupation-based practice, rather than providing techniques or teaching strategies in a contrived context, without an opportunity to apply the learning. Similarly, the education of occupational therapy students and consumers should reflect these values. As mentioned previously, the CO-OP approach reflects similar benefits of experiential combined with transformational learning, with goal-directed, reflective learning rather than targeting impairments (Wolf, 2012). Application-based teaching, using specific experiences with opportunities for reflection, creates an environment that allows for a range of learners to acquire knowledge, consciously recognize new learning, and subsequently

generalize and transfer knowledge to new situations, given the ability to problem-solve with increased independence (Luckner & Nadler, 1997).

Learning is a life-long process. As a result, we must equip learners (whether clinicians, students, or clients) with the tools to continue learning and growing even beyond the concrete time they are in formalized learning environments. To build upon a diverse and inclusive learning environment (and workforce), teachers must provide opportunities for various learners with a sense of empowerment and ability-mindset. Given the experiential nature of occupational therapy and the evidence of adaptive response mechanism in the occupational adaptation theory, hands-on training coupled with reflection on experiences leads to optimal, longitudinal learning.

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