

Personal Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

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It's not just education that transforms lives—it's educators who inspire change. As a lifelong learner, interpreter, and advocate for social justice, I know the power of using personal experiences to help others understand themselves and the world. Our stories shape us, but it's through teaching that we give others the tools to grow and create change. In this essay, I'll explore how education, grounded in experience, can be intentionally shaped to meet learners where they are. Educators hold the unique power to make a difference, one learner and one moment at a time.

My foundational beliefs about adult learners are shaped by the understanding that learning is deeply influenced by socioeconomic position, culture, and lived experiences. At 40, I recognize how much my beliefs have evolved since I was 20, demonstrating the transformative power of life experiences. Education builds on these experiences, and as educators, we can help adults find their path, provide hope, and offer validation during difficult times. Not all adults have access to the resources or support networks needed to succeed, and acknowledging these barriers is critical in teaching.

Merriam and Bierema (2013) explain, "Adults are motivated by wanting to improve their situation in adult life, whether that situation is work-related, personal...or social community-related" (p. 12-13). Learning often requires resilience and creativity, particularly for adults facing significant challenges. My beliefs align with McClusky's Theory of Margin, which examines the balance between load (responsibilities) and power (resources), highlighting that adult learners succeed when they have sufficient resources to manage their challenges (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 154).

As a critical thinker by nature, I resonate with Brookfield's assertion that critical thinking "describes the process by which students become aware of two sets of assumptions" and later

investigate them to ultimately “check the assumptions that [they] hold, by assessing for accuracy and validity of the evidence for these assumptions and by looking at ideas and actions from multiple perspectives” (Brookfield, 2012b, as cited in Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 213). This reflective process informs my teaching philosophy, emphasizing adaptability and empathy. By recognizing the unique needs and experiences of adult learners, educators can foster meaningful growth and create lasting change.

As an educator, I view my role as igniting a spark of curiosity and commitment in learners while nurturing it into sustained growth. This requires dynamic engagement, meeting learners where they are, and adapting instruction to their unique needs. Critical thinking, as Merriam and Bierema (2013) assert, is the process of examining ideas from multiple perspectives to evaluate their validity (p. 213). This skill is foundational to my teaching philosophy and informs my approach to fostering a supportive and intellectually rigorous learning environment.

Ethical responsibilities are integral to my practice, particularly the importance of inclusivity and cultural responsiveness. Education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge; it involves instilling confidence and affirming the voices of learners. In interpreting education, these ethical considerations are paramount. Interpreting is a demanding profession where many students begin working before they achieve full competence. This reality underscores the need for constructive, carefully crafted feedback that supports learners without undermining their confidence. Constructive feedback is a critical tool for professional development, and delivering it effectively requires patience, empathy, and experience.

Chickering and Reisser’s seven vectors of development (Patton et al., 2016, p. 300)—developing competence, managing emotions, fostering autonomy, building relationships, cultivating identity, finding purpose, and practicing integrity—align closely with the stages of

growth seen in interpreter education. These vectors reflect not only the individual development of learners but also the evolution of interpreting as a practice profession. Collaborative efforts between higher education institutions, businesses, and communities are essential to maximize the developmental potential of work and volunteer experiences (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 302). By fostering these partnerships, educators can contribute to the ongoing growth and refinement of the interpreting profession while empowering learners to reach their full potential.

Learning should be engaging, dynamic, and transformative. As an educator, I prioritize instructional methods that resonate with adult learners and foster meaningful participation. My approach relies on storytelling to create relatable scenarios for medical interpreters in training. Public speaking skills are essential to this process, enabling me to adapt my tone, incorporate visual and auditory elements, and use tools such as poll questions to maintain active engagement. I also structure opportunities for small group discussions, allowing learners to reflect, analyze, and collaboratively construct understanding.

I align with the constructivist perspective, which views educators as mediators who facilitate connections between learners and their environments. Brooks and Brooks (1999) describe educators as “mediators of students and environments, not simply as givers of information” (as cited in Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 37). Similarly, Kolb’s experiential learning cycle informs my emphasis on real-world applications, allowing learners to bridge theory and practice effectively (Kolb, 2015). By grounding instruction in their experiences, I seek to foster curiosity, critical thinking, and practical understanding.

The seven vectors of development outlined by Chickering and Reisser (as cited in Patton et al., 2016)—including developing competence, managing emotions, and fostering autonomy—

align closely with the stages of growth I observe in interpreters. Patton et al. (2016) further emphasize the importance of collaboration among businesses, communities, and educational institutions, which enhances the developmental potential of learners (p. 302).

To enrich the learning experience, I incorporate examples from works that have been influential in my life, encouraging learners to engage with broader perspectives and explore complex ideas. Accessibility is also a guiding principle in my teaching. By utilizing platforms such as Canva, LearnDash, and Zoom, I design visually engaging and inclusive materials. Tools like Camtasia's captioning feature ensure that content meets the diverse needs of learners and fosters equitable participation.

By combining constructivist principles, experiential learning, and carefully selected examples, I aim to create a dynamic educational environment that empowers learners to critically engage with their world and build the skills necessary for meaningful growth and change. Inclusivity and cultural responsiveness are at the heart of the learning environment I aim to create. Inspired by Brookfield's critical pedagogy, I believe in the power of diverse perspectives and mutual respect to create meaningful learning experiences. When learners draw from their cultural and professional backgrounds, it enriches the group's understanding and builds a collaborative, dynamic atmosphere.

Creating safe spaces where learners feel supported and empowered is non-negotiable. Encouraging active participation and dialogue ensures that every voice is heard, and learners gain confidence in their abilities. I also recognize that financial barriers can be a significant obstacle to higher education. Patton et al. (2016) highlight that "[a]ffordability plays a major role in whether college is even possible" (p. 247), especially for first-generation, low-income, and working-class students who often view college as "financially prohibitive" (Schwartz, Donovan,

& Guido-Di Brito, 2009, as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 247). This reality reminds me how critical it is to create accessible and flexible learning opportunities.

Merriam and Bierema (2013) also emphasize that “85 percent, or about 15 million undergraduates, are a diverse group [of students] that includes adult learners, employees who study, low-income students, commuter students, and student parents” (Soares, 2013, as cited in Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 16). The diversity of today’s learners pushes educators to move beyond traditional models and meet students where they are. By creating inclusive, responsive environments, I help learners overcome barriers, recognize their strengths, and define success on their own terms.

Integrating theory and practice is at the heart of my teaching philosophy. Kolb’s experiential learning theory guides my approach, emphasizing the way we construct understanding through experience (Kolb, 2015). In interpreter training, I use simulated interpreting scenarios and storytelling to address real-world challenges. These activities engage learners in the experiential learning cycle—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—helping them bridge theory with hands-on application. By engaging with these experiences, learners build practical skills and deepen their ability to apply knowledge effectively.

Reflection plays a critical role in constructing meaning. Activities like journaling and group discussions provide opportunities for learners to analyze their experiences, identify patterns, and uncover assumptions. This reflective process not only enhances their understanding but also connects their individual experiences to broader theoretical concepts, reinforcing their ability to apply what they’ve learned in dynamic and meaningful ways.

I believe we learn best when we actively engage with and reflect on our experiences. By integrating Kolb's experiential learning theory with practical application and critical reflection, I create learning environments that are dynamic and transformative. This approach empowers learners to construct understanding from their own journeys, equipping them with the tools and confidence to navigate complex challenges both personally and professionally.

Implementing a learner-centered approach has its challenges, especially when it comes to addressing the diverse readiness levels and learning preferences of adult learners. A key part of this journey is being willing to examine and refine my approaches and techniques over time. There is no single method that works for every learner, and I recognize that I won't always be the best educator I can be. On those days, I remind myself to give grace and remember that this happens to everyone—it's part of the human experience. I plan to welcome innovation while staying grounded in the connections and insights that make teaching so meaningful. Through continuous reflection, learner feedback, and a commitment to growth, I can adapt to meet the unique needs of my students while staying true to the values that guide my work.

My philosophy of teaching and learning is grounded in the belief that education is a powerful tool for change, built on the foundation of experience and connection. By focusing on constructivist principles, I aim to create learning environments that foster autonomy, inclusivity, and critical reflection. Education is about more than knowledge—it's about helping learners make sense of their experiences and grow into their potential. This philosophy shapes my practice and keeps me committed to continuous growth, knowing that every interaction has the power to make a meaningful difference.

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