

Five Perspectives on Teaching

© 2006—Dan Pratt and John Collins

Each of the paragraphs below is an abbreviated description of a perspective on teaching. No single perspective is universally 'better' than any other; each is best suited to specific people, aims, values, and contexts. However, since they represent contrasting and sometimes competing views of teaching and learning, individuals must value some perspectives more than others. It would be misleading, therefore, to say that all five perspectives are equally representative of a person's view of teaching.

In research involving over 50,000 educators from more than 100 countries, the vast majority held one of these perspectives as their dominant view of teaching with one or two additional 'back-up' perspectives allowing them to accommodate changes in learners and educational circumstances.

TRANSMISSION: *Effective teaching requires a substantial commitment to the content or subject matter.* Effective teaching means having mastery of the subject matter or content. Teachers' primary responsibilities are to represent the content accurately and efficiently. Learner's responsibilities are to learn that content in its authorized or legitimate forms. Effective teachers take learners systematically through tasks leading to content mastery: providing clear objectives, adjusting the pace of lecturing, making efficient use of class time, clarifying misunderstandings, answering questions, providing timely feedback, correcting errors, providing reviews, summarizing what has been presented, directing students to appropriate resources, setting high standards for achievement and developing objective means of assessing learning. Effective teachers are enthusiastic about their content and convey that enthusiasm to their students. For many learners, effective teachers are passionate presenters of their content.

APPRENTICESHIP: *Effective teaching is a process of socializing students into new behavioral norms and professional ways of working.* Effective teachers are highly skilled practitioners of what they teach. Whether they are in classrooms or in clinical settings, effective teachers are recognized for their professional knowledge and expertise. Effective teachers take time to reveal the inner workings of their skilled performance and translate that into language that is meaningful and accessible to learners. They also give students an opportunity to be involved in the work through an ordered set of tasks which usually proceed from simple to complex, allowing for different points of entry depending upon the learner's capability. Effective teachers within this perspective know what their learners can do on their own and where they need guidance and direction; they engage each learner within his or her 'zone of development'. As learners mature and become more competent, the role of a teacher changes; they offer less direction and give more responsibility as students progress from dependent learners to independent workers.

DEVELOPMENTAL: *Effective teaching must be planned and conducted "from the learner's point of view".* From this perspective, effective teachers must understand how their learners think and reason about the content to be learned. The primary goal is to help learners develop increasingly complex and sophisticated cognitive structures related to the content. The key to changing those cognitive structures lies in a combination of two skills: (1) teaching that engages learners with content while also challenging them to move from relatively simple to more complex forms of thinking, and (2) 'parking' their own answers in order to allow learners time to construct their own understanding of the content. Questions, problems, cases, and examples form bridges that these teachers use to transport learners from simpler ways of thinking and reasoning to new, more complex and sophisticated forms of reasoning. It is crucial, particularly in the initial stages of learning, within this perspective, that teachers adapt their professional knowledge to learners' levels of understanding and ways of thinking.

NURTURING: *Effective teaching assumes that long-term, hard, persistent effort to achieve comes from the heart as much as it does from the head.* Within this perspective, teachers believe that people become motivated and productive learners when the standards for achievement are clear and accompanied by a balance of academic and emotional support. Effective teachers, therefore, create a learning environment that provides challenging yet supportive conditions in which learners feel a sense of control over their education, work collaboratively with others, believe their work will be considered fairly and honestly, and receive feedback in advance of any high stakes judgement of their efforts. Within this perspective, effective teachers do not lower their standards; nor do they excuse learners from doing what is required. Rather, effective teachers help learners set challenging but achievable goals, reinforce effort as well as achievement, and acknowledge individual growth as well as absolute achievement as might be indicated on standardized examinations. They believe strongly that learning is diminished when the learner's self-concept is threatened.

SOCIAL REFORM: *Effective teaching seeks to change society in substantive ways.* Teachers in this perspective are concerned with changing the social norms of society or a profession. From this perspective, effective teachers awaken students to values and ideologies that are embedded in texts and common practices within their discipline or profession. It is the teacher's responsibility to challenge the status quo and encourage students to consider how they are positioned and constructed within particular discourses and practices. To do so, teachers help learners analyze and deconstruct common practices for ways in which such practices perpetuate conditions that are unacceptable. Texts are interrogated for what is said and what is not said; what is included and what is excluded; who is represented and who is omitted from the dominant discourse. Students are encouraged to adopt a critical view in order to take social action to improve their own lives and the lives of others. Critical deconstruction, though central to this view, is not an end in itself. The goal is not just to learn about the world, but to change it.

Dan Pratt: [dan.pratt@ubc.ca]

John Collins: [john.collins@ubc.ca]

www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/pratt.html

To get a profile of your own view of teaching you are invited to take the *Teaching Perspectives Inventory* (TPI) at: www.TeachingPerspectives.com

NOTE: Focus, Focus, **FOCUS**

As you take the TPI, stay focused on one subject, one venue, and a specific set of learners.

A more detailed explanation of these perspectives can be found in: Pratt, D.D. and Associates (1998/2005). *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education*, Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing.