

# Learning Strategies for Learning Centers

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*Present technology provides us with the means to generate teacher centers in which we can continuously work to expand our range of competence and test the single proposition on which we rest our case.*

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LET US begin with several relatively simple propositions. Each is a thesis supported by theory and/or evidence, but arguable.

First: We have available an extensive range of teaching and learning strategies. Some are person-centered, some group-centered, some information- and idea-centered, and others focus on tasks and reinforcement schedules.<sup>1</sup>

Second: There is a *real* difference among these strategies. They require different teaching skills, ask different learner responses, further different learning outcomes (there is overlap of objectives), and

<sup>1</sup> See: Bruce R. Joyce and Marsha Weil. *Models of Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.

represent different philosophies of life. Which strategies are employed for which objectives will make a difference to the student.

Third: Different learners respond differently to the strategies. Learners vary in cognitive development, flexibility, need for structure, etc., and these needs are manifested in learning style, which means (in this context) capability for responding productively to different teaching strategies. *Learning style interacts with teaching strategies to affect cognitive outcomes, satisfaction, and feelings about self.*<sup>2</sup>

Fourth: Learners need to develop a wide repertoire of learning styles both so that they can learn more effectively but also so that

<sup>2</sup> See: David E. Hunt and Edmund V. Sullivan. *Behavior, Person, and Environment*. Chicago: Lyons and Carnahan, 1974. Also: David E. Hunt, Bruce Joyce, et al. "Conceptual Systems and Models of Teaching: Theoretical and Empirical Coordination of Two Models." *Interchange* 5 (2): 1974.

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Of the extensive range of teaching strategies available, some are person-centered, some group-centered, some information- and idea-centered, and others focus on tasks and reinforcement schedules.

they can teach *themselves* a wider variety of things and experience the realities of different living-learning environments. Learners who can respond to only a few environments are severely limited in their life and living possibilities. Thus, a major educational objective is to help children acquire a broad range of learning—and, thus, living strategies.<sup>3</sup>

Fifth: Teachers can master a wide variety of models of teaching. Not only that, but in-service teachers can master new strategies even more rapidly than preservice teachers can. Also, even teachers whose normal style approximates a recitation strategy can learn an expanded range of new models of teaching.<sup>4</sup>

Sixth: Without concentration on maintaining an expanded repertoire, teachers are gradually "pressed" or "drift" toward a directive, recitation mode for teaching. Unless we provide ourselves with training, feedback, and social support, we all tend to move

<sup>3</sup> For a rationale, see: Joyce and Weil, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> See: Bruce R. Joyce, "Models of the Teaching Community: What Have We Learned?" Paper presented to the 1974 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Also: Bruce Joyce, Marsha Weil, Rhoda Wald, *et al.* "The Teacher-Innovator: Models of Teaching as the Core of Teacher Education." *Interchange* 4 (2-3): 47-60; 1973.

rapidly toward an eclectic mean of practice. Unless we institutionalize (an ugly word, but necessary) in-service training (an even uglier, but more necessary term) and collegial teaching, we become routine.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, we old dogs *can* learn new tricks and need to.

My stance is that competence in teaching is the possession of the range of teaching models necessary to:

Achieve a range of educational objectives  
Help reach learners of widely different learning styles

Help learners acquire an expanded repertoire of learning strategies

Keep ourselves from becoming routine and dull.

Where do we find the strategies we need? Recently we scoured curriculum plans and educational theories to identify the range that is available to us. Educators, psychologists, sociologists, systems analysts, psychiatrists, and others have produced theoretical positions about learning and teaching. Curriculum development projects, schools and school districts, and organizations representing particular curriculum areas or disciplines

<sup>5</sup> See: Ned Flanders. *Analyzing Teaching Behavior*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1971.

have also developed approaches to teaching and learning.

The task of actually listing sources of models confirmed the large numbers. Included were the works of counselors and therapists like Carl Rogers, Erik Erickson, and Abraham Maslow; learning theorists like Skinner, Ausubel, and Bruner; developmental psychologists like Piaget, Kohlberg, and Hunt; philosophers like Dewey, James, and Broudy. Curriculum development projects in the academic subjects and specialists in group dynamics provided many examples. The patterns of teaching from the great experimental schools like Summerhill made their way onto the general list. Still others do not appear on the list because they seem too vague to provide reasonable general approaches to teaching. Others were eliminated because of weak rationale.

#### **Four Models Are Available**

We began to group the theories on the basis of what sources of reality their theorists had used in focusing on the learner and his or her environment. The models were organized into four families, representing different orientations toward people and their universe—even though there was overlapping among and within families. The four families of sources are: (a) social interaction, (b) information processing, (c) the individual person, and (d) behavior modification.

In emphasizing the relationships of the person to society or with other people, social interaction sources reflect a view of human nature giving priority to social relations and the creation of a better society. With respect to goals, then, models from this orientation are directed toward the improvement of an individual's ability to relate to others. Many of the models developed from a desire to improve democratic processes and to educate students to improve the society. The social relations orientation does not assume that the area of social relations is the only important dimension of life. Social theorists are just as concerned with the development of the mind and the self and with the learning

of academic subjects. Some, of course, have developed models specifically for the improvement of social relations or have used social relationships as the primary vehicle for education; but the educational theorist is rare who is not concerned with more than one aspect of the learner's development or does not use more than one aspect of the environment to influence that development.

Information-processing sources, the second large family of models, share an orientation toward the information-processing capability of students and toward systems by which they can improve their capabilities. Information-processing refers to the ways people handle stimuli from the environment, organize data, sense problems, generate concepts, solve problems, and employ verbal and nonverbal symbols. Some of these models are concerned with the ability of the learner to solve specific kinds of problems, others concentrate on creativity, still others are concerned with general intellectual ability. Some emphasize the teaching of specific strategies for thinking. Nearly all models from this family share a concern with social relationships and the development of an integrated, functioning self. But their primary sources remain the student's capacity to integrate and process information and to use systems, especially academic ones, which can help individuals to process data.

The third family, personalistic sources, shares an orientation toward the individual person as the source of educational ideas, emphasizing the processes by which an individual constructs and organizes his or her reality. Frequently focusing on psychology and the emotional life of the individual, these models are directed toward one's internal organization as it affects relationships with the environment and with oneself. Some concentrate on personality, particularly the capacity of people to reach out, make contact with others, and venture where they have not been before. Others are more oriented toward an individual's feelings about self. Still others are concerned with helping an individual develop an authentic reality-oriented view of self and of society.

As with the other families, this one is

not exclusive. Most of its models which are oriented around the development of the self are also concerned with the development of social relations and information-processing. Its distinctive feature is the emphasis on personal development as a source of educational ideas. Hence, while the focus is on helping the person develop a productive relationship with the environment and to view himself or herself as a capable person, it is expected that one of the by-products will be richer interpersonal relations and a more effective information-processing capacity.

A fourth grouping, behavior modification sources, has evolved from attempts to develop efficient systems for sequencing learning attitudes and shaping behavior by manipulating reinforcement. Reinforcement theoreticians like B. F. Skinner have developed these models, using operant conditioning as their central procedure. The term "behavior modification" has been applied to these efforts because of a reliance on changing the student's external behavior, and descriptions of him or her in terms of extremely visible be-

havior rather than underlying and unobservable behavior.

Operant conditioning has been applied to a wide variety of educational goals ranging from military training to interpersonal behavior, even goals of therapy. Its general applicability has led to its use in many domains of human behavior which characterize the other families of models.

Our families of models, therefore, are by no means antithetical to one another; in fact, the actual prescriptions for developing learning environments emerging from some are remarkably similar. Also, within the families certain of the models share many features with respect to goals and the kinds of means that they recommend.

Is it reasonable for us now to build teacher centers based on the expansion of learning strategies? We believe so. Present technology provides us with the means to generate teacher centers in which we can continuously work to expand our range of competence and test the simple propositions on which we rest our case. □

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