

VII PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

iii Adult Learning Theory and Teaching

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Introduction

While learning how to teach and supervise others so that they develop the personal characteristics, knowledge, and skills for pastoral work is something that can be “caught” as a result of life experience and reflective observation of self and others – the process also involves being “taught.”

In the early days of the development of Supervised Pastoral Education, educational theory was mostly focused on how children learn and that was only very indirectly relevant for adult learners in pastoral/spiritual care educational programs. As a result, when Supervisors looked for a theoretical basis for their teaching and supervision, they often adapted a therapeutic model. Parallel to that, of course, was the research model developed by Anton Boisen, a model involving learning from the person being cared for – the “living human document.”

Brian Grant and David Moss describe the experience of supervision in the early days of the development of the modern pastoral care and counseling movement.

The analogy that describes these [training] experiences best is that training is like being tossed into a vat along with a group of other trainees. At the very edge of this vat, though not in it, are a small pack of ambivalently loved and hated supervisors, who periodically raise questions like, “How does it feel to be sinking and drowning in that mess?” and hopefully, “Isn't it great that you've learned to swim.” The focus of supervision has been on helping candidates, who are struggling to avoid being swept away, overwhelmed, or submerged in the training experience, to consciously articulate what is happening to them as a way of becoming more agile in coping with their confusion. They are becoming aware of their own processes and learning to conceptualize them while under substantial environmental stress.¹

¹ in Carr, John C., John E. Hinkle, Jr., and David M. Moss III. (eds.) (1981) *The Organization and Administration of Pastoral Counseling Centers*. Nashville: Abingdon. p.240 f.

This Module introduces the Reader to recent developments in adult learning theory and practice and affords opportunity to integrate that learning with the literature on supervision in general and pastoral supervision in particular. Some key books about learning are introduced in order to tempt the reader of this module to explore those books in depth.

A bibliography can be found at the end of this module. It includes several books on adult learning and on supervision. It also includes a listing of articles from *The Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry / Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*. The language of some of the older books is occasionally problematic in this more inclusive and gender-role-stereotyping-sensitive postmodern era. However, they are part of the process whereby we have come to our current understanding of the nature of adult learning and the supervisory process. One can gain also a sense of the evolution of pastoral/spiritual care learning theory and practice by scanning the titles of articles in *JS&TM/RP*. Indeed, the change of name of this important journal reflects something of a paradigm shift in our way of conceptualizing the process of learning in our field.

The Learning Covenant

Foundational to adult learning is involvement of the learner in the process of planning the learning process. That is often characterized by the development of a formal Learning Contract or Learning Covenant.²

This process may involve using a variety of personality and other standardized instruments – such as the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI), The FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation - Behavior), The Learning Styles Inventory (LSI), Peter VanKatwyk's Helping Styles Inventory, The Theological School Inventory, etc. One must receive training in order to use the MBTI and the FIRO-B but need not be a psychologist.

During my first full unit of Supervised Pastoral Education, the Supervisor involved a psychologist in the administration and interpretation of the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory). The MMPI was originally intended to be used for the diagnosis of major psychiatric disorders. However, many MMPI scales have been

² See Knowles, Malcom S., 1980, 1986, 2005

developed since the original scales were published – so that, in the hands of a skilled pastoral psychologist who has access to scoring of these additional scales, the MMPI (original edition) can be used to help pastoral/spiritual caregivers identify strengths and growing edges.

These instruments are not used as a way of “diagnosing” the learner – rather as a way of facilitating self-awareness and self-reflectiveness in the learner.

The learner is also encouraged to reflect on how their original family and current social context have shaped their way of relating to carereceivers, peers, supervisors, and other staff.

These processes help the learner to focus what they need to learn in their clinical experiences – and also provide the beginnings of learnings about how to relate to others. They are then able to articulate their learning goals more clearly in a covenant with the Supervisor(s) and others involved in their clinical learning. Thus, there is ownership by the learner both of the learning processes and of the goal of the learning – very different from being “thrown into the vat” with the hope that they will not only survive, but also learn – very different from understanding the learning process as a matter of living up to the expectations of the Supervisor, the institution, or even a professional association.

Learning as Liberative Experience

Grounded in Central and South American Liberation Theology and the writing of Paolo Freire,³ the characterization of learning as a liberative experience is also important for adult learning. The role of the Supervisor in Clinical Pastoral Education, Pastoral Counselling Education, and Education for Supervision, is to assist the learner to escape into themselves (my language for what others might call the achievement of self-actualization). The assumption is that learners already have within themselves the wisdom and knowledge which they need in order to be effective spiritual caregivers or pastoral/spiritual care teachers/supervisors, and that the task of the learning process is to

³ *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, 1988. Freire developed his understanding the nature of the learning process as he worked with struggling peasants in Brazil who were trying to improve their lives. Together, they created “base camps” which were the means by which life transformation might occur.

bring that out of themselves or, as Sheldon Kopp put it, get “back to one.”⁴

My characterization of self-actualization and liberation as an “escape into the self” is rooted in my understanding, as a Christian pastoral theologian, that we are “created in the image of the Divine.” For me, escaping into the self means being that which we are intended to be - indeed, already are becoming. From a Judaeo-Christian perspective, this principle invites me, as Teaching Supervisor, to experience the learner as carrying the image of the Divine Caregiver. Other theologies and belief systems offer similar ways of conceptualizing the nature of the learning process.

Learning as Mastering Content

There are rich resources available which are capable of informing learners in pastoral/spiritual care and of helping them equip themselves for service as caregivers and facilitators of the learning of others. In the past few decades, there has been an explosion of journal and book publication and, of course, of access to even more resources via the Internet. One needs to be careful about using information taken from the Internet. Internet information is not necessarily vetted responsibly. At the same time, the postmodernist might affirm that there is something to be learned even from information that does not have wide acceptance!

In an Adult Learning model of supervision, the supervisor’s role is to guide the learners towards the resources which are responsive to their specified learning needs. Thus, Learning Groups are more like seminars than lectures. The Learning Group affords opportunity for learners to process what they are discovering in their reading and other experiences - with the Teaching Supervisor present as facilitator of the process and as the one who can point to resources not yet discovered and who can help learners discover how to discover/uncover the resources which they need.

The following principle is operative here. If you provide a starving person with a fish, they will still be starving next week unless you can find more fish for them. If you provide them with a net, there is a high probability that they will not only not be starving next week but will be beginning to thrive.

⁴ *Back to One: A Practical Guide for Psychotherapists*. 1977. Kopp served as a Psychotherapy Supervisor for the Pastoral Counselling and Consultation Centres in Washington.

Learning from Carereceivers, Peers, and Supervisors

Anton Boisen spoke and wrote about learning from “the living human document.” Qualitative research focuses on being informed by co-researchers. The central figure of the Christian narrative spoke about being led by a “little child.”

An extension of Adult Learning theory is the principle that the learners learn from those they seek to serve and that Teaching Supervisors learn from those whom they supervise – learning that is transformative. We cannot be involved in the healing, changing, and learning processes of others without, ourselves, learning and being healed and changed.

Thus, the Teaching Supervisor needs to attend carefully to the makeup of the Learning Group and the clinical assignments of the Learners. Taking into account the learning needs of the applicants for a program can be an incredibly complex task and there are, more often than not, severe limitations in the Teaching Supervisor’s choices about these matters. Teaching Supervisors in larger centres probably have more ability to make choices than do Teaching Supervisors in small centres.

When a particular Learning Group is not optimal for a particular applicant, the Teaching Supervisor and the applicant have two choices. (1) They may decide that a particular Learning Group is not a good choice for the applicant. (2) They may decide that even though the Learning Group is not the optimal choice, it can be good enough with careful attention to the unfolding of the learning processes. The same options are available when the Learning Context is not optimal.

Moreover, Teaching Supervisors need to be intentional in their choices about persons who apply to learn alongside them. Supervisors have the right to say “No” to applicants when working with those applicants would not be a good thing for the Supervisor.

I was a Teaching Assistant, as a doctoral student, in a seminary located in a large urban area with many CPE programs.⁵ One of my responsibilities was to make an assessment of seminarians who were applying to do CPE for credit in their M.Div. program. I then brought my assessments to our weekly departmental meetings and we decided which CPE programs would be optimal for each of the seminarians. In that

⁵ This occurred during the 1970s.

process, we were guided by the knowledge which our two professors had of the Supervisors in the region and of their contexts. We did not do a comprehensive evaluation of the seminarians' experiences during my tenure but the anecdotal feedback (as reflected in written evaluations and conversations with the seminarians was mostly positive).

Informed by Adult Learning theory and practice, the decision-making process just described would be more egalitarian and dialogical, less hierarchical and paternalistic if -

1. The seminarians would have had more of a sense of participation in formulation of their learning needs (many of them were already quite self-aware and assertive of their needs, but there was no formalization of their Learning Goals).
2. I would have had more of a sense of involvement in the decision-making process about what to recommend to the seminarians (although, I did become increasingly assertive concerning what would be appropriate to recommend to the seminarians as I became more experienced with the process and knowledgeable about the options).
3. There would have been more of a consultative tone in my conversations, after the departmental meetings, with the seminarians – although I was intuitively heading in that direction towards the end of my tenure in this responsibility.
4. The Supervisors would have been more directly involved in the decision-making process. (I met one of the Supervisors many years later and spoke, with him about the process. He did not know how it was that the Seminary was sending him the students who applied to his program – only that they almost always “fit” for him and that he enjoyed working with them.)

Here are brief snapshots of the foundational methodological work of three Christian theologians: Mary E. M. Moore, Parker J. Palmer, and Bernard J.F. Lonergan.

Process Theology⁶ and Educational Methodology (Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore)

In *Teaching from the Heart*, Moore draws on “movements within process theology, a self-consciously organic view of theology, and on educational methods that have forged

⁶ Grounded in the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and John Cobb

new possibilities in organic teaching.”⁷ The educational methods that Moore puts in conversation with Process Theology (which Moore says might easily be “designated organic theology”) are: case study, gestalt, phenomenology, narrative, and conscientization.

Here is a taste of what this worldview called process/organic theology includes.⁸

- God is the empowering center of life – the spirit moving and creating in the universe, inspiring and requiring our love.
- Knowledge is energy; the heart of the matter is not matter at all, but energy.
- The world comes together in every moment of experience.
- Living is an art; hence, teaching is an art.
- Learning is a rhythmic process of discovery.

Moore characterizes “teaching from the heart” as follows.⁹

- Teaching is revering God – giving reverence to the spirit and source of life.
- Teaching is revering the other – other persons, other cultures, other parts of the environment.
- Teaching is revering oneself.
- Teaching is revering relationships – among teachers and students, people and the subject matter, thinking and feeling, theoretical concepts and practices, play and work, imagination and logic.
- Teaching is revering the vocation of teaching – the vocation to nourish the body and receive and replenish the depleted blood.
- Teaching is revering the process of education – including the rhythms of the educational process.
- Teaching is revering the ordinary – valuing every actual occasion, every throb of experience.

⁷ Moore, p. 6

⁸ Moore, pp. 208 - 212

⁹ Moore, pp. 212 - 220

The Contemplative Tradition and Educational Methodology (Parker J. Palmer)

In *To Know as We Are Known*, Palmer “argues for teaching and learning that engage the whole person and allow room for ultimate concerns. Palmer provides teachers a way of cultivating educating, and helping their pupils reach their full potential – helping them become aware of life’s inner truths as the first step in a lifelong process of drawing closer to the deepest truths at the heart of existence.”¹⁰

The chapter titles in *To Know as We Are Known* give us a sense of the nature of teaching-learning as contemplative practice.

1. Knowing Is Loving
2. Education as Spiritual Formation
3. The Teaching Behind the Teaching
4. What is Truth?
5. To Teach Is to Create a Space ...
6. ... In Which Obedience to Truth is Practiced
7. The Spiritual Formation of Teachers

Parker Palmer’s *The Courage to Teach* “goes beyond *To Know as We Are Known*” in that it has a “sustained focus on the practice of teaching and an approach to the inner life that is open to the varied paths of the devoted teachers [Palmer has] met.”¹¹ Among many other contributions, Palmer proposes that “The Community of Truth” replace “The Objectivist Myth of Knowing.”¹²

As a further introduction to Palmer’s contribution to our understanding of the teaching-learning process, here is what Jon Kabat-Zinn has to say about *Courage to Teach*.¹³

The *Courage to Teach* is a profoundly moving, utterly passionate, and inspired articulation of the call to, and the pain and joy of, teaching. It is must reading for any and every teacher, at any level. It wakes us up to the enormity of the challenge and to the adequacy of our own generativity and genius, if we can but listen to and honor the calling moment by moment.

¹⁰ Front flyleaf of *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education*.

¹¹ p. xv, *The Courage to Teach*

¹² pp.100 ff., *The Courage to Teach*

¹³ Advance Praise for *The Courage to Teach*, inside front flyleaf, 2nd page

Parker Palmer reminds us that teaching is nothing less than the inner work of a lifetime, a love affair with life itself, both beyond subject and intimate with subject. He shows us how authentic teaching has to be an ongoing relational process, a practice of exquisite and wide-ranging attention refining teacher and student – including the student in the teacher and the teacher in the student – in the flames of solitary and collective inquiry and in a courageous commitment to seeing, knowing, sharing, and belonging: in a word, to truth.

Bernard Lonergan's Theological Method and the Teaching-Learning Process

Bernard Lonergan, in *Method in Theology*, proposes that theology must proceed through the same phases that all human learning follows: experience, initial understanding, judging (or critical reflection), and decision. This is a break with Aristotle's deductive system of beginning with unquestioned "truths" and then proceeding logically to a final conclusion. Lonergan begins by outlining four operations or levels of consciousness through which we move to decisions about the meaning of events and about how we respond. These four movements are: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. Lonergan elaborates on how we attend to our experiences, articulating our initial understandings and testing them by reflecting upon them in the critical light of other information to come to decisions.¹⁴

It seems to me that these are ways of learning which we can encourage in our students.

Finally, here is an introduction to a book which gathered together the threads of research and theory building about adult learning during the last two decades of the 20th century. These notes are based on the 2nd edition – and one can expect that the 3rd edition, published in 2006, is even more comprehensive than the 2nd edition.

¹⁴ Robert T. O'Gorman, Kathleen Tolvocchia, W. Michael Smith. Teaching From Community Context: The Role of the Field Educator in Theological Education in *Theological Education*, Vol. 37, Number 2, 2000, p. 30

Merriam and Caffarella: A Comprehensive Guide to Learning in Adulthood

The book is divided into five parts.

1. A description of the context of learning (societal context; adult learning opportunities; participation in adult education; provision of learning opportunities)
2. Adult development and learning (biological and psychological development; sociocultural and integrative perspectives; adult cognitive development; intelligence and aging)
3. The learning process (memory, cognition, and the brain; experience and learning; key theories of learning)
4. The learning transaction with adults (andragogy and other models of adult learning; self-directed learning; transformational learning; critical theory and postmodern and feminist perspectives)
5. Reflections on practice (ethics and adult learning; integrating theory and practice)

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