Sharon L. Silverman & Martha E. Casazza

Learning & Development

Making Connections to Enhance Teaching

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Learning and Development

The Jossey-Bass
Higher and Adult Education Series

Preface

This book is based on the idea that learning is best experienced in settings that acknowledge the uniqueness of individuals and that using a variety of different instructional approaches enhances learning. Teachers are expected to have competence in their subject matter, and often it is assumed that this is sufficient; however, competent teachers must go beyond content knowledge and explore the full range of human understanding in teaching and learning.

We believe that no one viewpoint or explanation of behavior can fully account for learning. An integrated approach is richer and more useful than one that stands alone. When different perspectives are combined to provide an explanation, we are better able to reconcile inconsistencies in observations, address problems in instruction, and work through puzzling situations. For example, to understand why some students learn easily in a particular setting and others struggle, many factors must be considered. One viewpoint is usually not enough to explain a complex situation, whereas a combination of views often yields explanations that address a variety of possible circumstances.

Our view of learning includes many educational environments—traditional college and university settings, community-based organizations, continuing and adult education programs—any setting in which individuals pursue education past secondary school. In all of these environments, the focal point is on learning inside and outside the classroom and on how these experiences affect the other. We focus on many contexts—formal and informal, academic and nonacademic, present and past—and emphasize the belief that learning in one setting often affects the learning that occurs in another. We use the terms *students* and *learners* to describe those seeking learning and employ the terms *teachers, educators, instructors,* and *facilitators* synonymously.

Our primary purpose is to present and integrate information from theory and research concerning learning and development and to apply this information to practical situations that teachers face every day. We include information from the fields of psychology, college student development, adult learning, and higher education research. We present theory and research in six areas: (1) self and identity, (2) motivation, (3) interaction with the environment, (4) ways of knowing, (5) learning styles and preferences, and (6) self-regulation and goal setting. Each of these areas is large enough to be the topic of one or more volumes, but our goal is to take the critical ideas of each topic and present them within a framework for application to teaching practice.

The framework we use is the TRPP model (theory, research, principles, and practice). Throughout, we use the six case studies presented in Chapter One to connect the findings of theory and research to practice. We show how the TRPP model can be used to strengthen the foundation of teaching and provide guidance for promoting successful student learning.

This is not a book about techniques. Too often techniques are embraced as quick fixes to problematic concerns. We do not presume to know how to handle all frustrating or challenging situations. There are as many ways to approach teaching and learning as there are teachers and students. In his recent book, *The Courage to Teach,* Parker Palmer (1998) stresses the importance of teacher identity and integrity in the formation of uniquely creative teaching practice. Effective teachers are fully aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, have a firmly grounded value system, and are ethical and honest. Successful teachers are on a journey of discovery; they are uncovering new truths about themselves and the students they encounter. Teachers who risk the journey and are open to its discoveries are likely to be more satisfied and to advance student learning, but the journey can be lonely and sometimes frightening. What if the journey reveals that established ways of teaching are no longer as effective as newer methods? What approach is needed for a new group of students who seem quite different from those in the past? Who can help when new approaches are tried but there is uncertainty about the results?

When faced with these questions, it is helpful to be able to make connections to others and to what is known about learning

and development. Our goal is to provide information and a process to help make these connections and to examine practice in order to enhance student learning.

Focus and Audience

Our focus is learning in postsecondary education in the broadest sense, including all places where such learning occurs—in colleges and universities, in proprietary schools, in the workplace, and in informal places where no predetermined structure is required. Throughout, we interchange the terms *educators, teachers,* and *instructors* to mean anyone who is involved with student learning. This book is intended for those who interact with students in the classroom, and the content is designed to benefit their daily teaching practices. For example, research on motivation emphasizes the importance of mastery goals over performance goals to increase engagement in learning. Mastery goals emphasize learning for its own sake, as opposed to performance goals, which center on student comparisons. In addition, consistent feedback regarding goal attainment and opportunity for individual choice and control over learning activities is known to increase motivation. Knowing these research findings and applying them to practice is more likely to promote student learning.

Other audiences for this book include educational administrators, student affairs professionals, and policymakers who interact with students and are responsible for developing programs to strengthen their learning and development. These persons may not always face students in the classroom, but they influence the nature and structure of educational experiences. For instance, orientation programs are developed to help students move into new educational environments. When the content and format of these programs are based on what is known about student development, program goals are more apt to be achieved. Research in higher education has shown that social integration and sense of community are linked to persistence in college. Residence hall directors can use this information to form positive environments for students while contributing to student retention. Directors of programs for returning adults need to know the importance of providing environments that allow for autonomy and self-direction. When this

knowledge is applied to program development for adults, successful outcomes are more likely. These are just some examples of how theory and research are important to nonteaching staff in postsecondary education and how the contents of this volume may be useful.

Organization of the Book

We have organized the contents into three parts. In Part One, we begin by addressing the foundation of learning and development. Chapter One introduces demographic and descriptive information about students and personalizes some of these data with the presentation of six student stories; the students are from different backgrounds and educational situations. We use these case studies throughout the book as the focus of discussion about how theory and research are applied to student learning and development. Chapter Two includes an overview of theories covering three of the six areas related to student learning: self and identity, motivation, and interaction with the environment. In Chapter Three we discuss the other three basic topics: ways of knowing, learning styles and preferences, and self-regulation and goal setting. Chapter Four then presents the TRPP model (theory, research, principles, and practice), which provides a framework for applying theory and research to practice.

In Part Two, we focus on specific research findings in the six topic areas. Findings of recent research as well as those of classic studies are included. In each of the six chapters, we recap briefly the theories from Part One, selected research findings, and an application to practice using the TRPP model, along with the case studies from Chapter One. Last, we provide reflection questions for further application to the reader's unique situation.

Part Three has two main goals: (1) to guide readers to critically reflect on the material presented throughout the book and (2) to help readers begin a process of change. In Chapter Eleven, we present a five-step procedure, ReCreate, for organizing new information and include a set of six surveys, each focusing on one of the topic areas from Part Two. The surveys are for use in collaboration with peers to better assess teaching effectiveness and promote and strengthen student learning. Chapter Twelve is designed to stimu-

late thought about the expanded role of the educator as researcher, innovator, and change agent and to encourage the development of these three components of an educator's role. It provides questions for the future, and we discuss ways to answer those questions.

Concluding Thoughts

We are grateful for the many researchers who have contributed so extensively to the literature in student learning and development. They have shown that success and failure in learning do not occur by chance. It is not simply lucky when labors succeed and ill-fated when they do not. Success is the result of understanding how learners conceive of themselves and persist toward their goals.

Finally, there are no universal prescriptions for success. Basic principles provide guidance, but each teaching and learning situation is unique and is the personal creation of those experiencing it. This is an invitation to experience the journey of teaching and learning and to delight in its wonders and challenges. The journey is never-ending and worthwhile as long as students want to learn, and we join them actively in the pursuit.

In Appreciation

We want to thank many individuals who in different ways contributed to this work. First, we are indebted to all of the students we have taught and who have shown us that helping them learn is extremely rewarding and meaningful. We have learned so much from them and continue to marvel at their curiosity and productivity while sometimes facing significant barriers and challenges. In addition, our professional colleagues have been enormously supportive and encouraging. While observing them, we have been inspired to emulate their successes and advance our own practice. The collegiality experienced in interaction with peers in our own offices and in other postsecondary institutions and organizations has stimulated and motivated us to write this book. We especially thank Juele Blankenberg for her tireless reading of our early sections and her thoughtful feedback. To Erin Neumeir, who thought she would never leave the library where for hours she copied microfiche documents, requested books, and searched the ERIC database, we offer

our sincere appreciation. Other students whose dedication seemed endless include Kathryn O'Connell, Joanna Krzywdzinska, and Dagmara Wisniewska. Without Lillian Hardison, the manuscript would never have been input and formatted in such a timely fashion. At the end, and across the oceans, it was Karen Kruse, Rose Novil, and Linda Sweeney who did the detective work that helped us complete some elusive citations. We thank administrators at our own institutions, Loyola University Chicago and National-Louis University, who support our daily work and encourage us to think beyond the present and plan for the success of students we have yet to meet. In addition, we acknowledge our colleagues in South Africa who provided the opportunity for us to use material from this volume in faculty and staff development. We also fondly remember the vervet monkeys who visited us there while we were making final manuscript revisions. They certainly helped us keep our sense of humor. With support from the Fulbright Commission, University of Port Elizabeth, and others in South Africa, we were reinforced that student learning and development have global commonalities. Applying theory and research to practice is important worldwide.

Finally, we are grateful for the love and support of our families. Martha especially thanks Larry, who regularly provided encouragement as he patiently waited to regain his space at the desk. We both thank our children Joshua, Daniel, Christopher, and Justin, who have been our best teachers, showing us always that what matters most are the connections made and maintained with those you love.

August, 1999
Chicago, Illinois

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Martha E. Casazza developed and now directs the developmental studies graduate program in the adult education department at National-Louis University (NLU), Chicago. She received her doctoral degree (Ed.D.) from Loyola University Chicago in the area of curriculum and instruction. Her master's degree is in reading. Casazza regularly consults in the areas of reading strategies, teaching and learning, and program evaluation. She speaks and writes frequently on the value of integrating theory and research with practice. She is one of the founders and is currently the coeditor of *The Learning Assistance Review* and serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Developmental Education*. She has been active in establishing standards as well as a process for program certification for the field of developmental education through her committee involvement with the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE). She currently serves as the president of NADE and was recently named a Fulbright Senior Scholar to teach and conduct research in South Africa.

Contents

Understanding Learning and Development

In Part One, we begin the discussion with ways to enhance learning and development for all students. We present the view that theory and research have much to offer in guiding choices for meeting educational challenges. This discussion is needed because much has changed in recent years, and expertise from many different disciplines is required to address these changes. Students today are not like those in the past. Individual differences are more pronounced than ever before, and these differences must be considered in all learning situations. Teachers, administrators, staff developers, and student affairs professionals are facing many demands, including the need to retain students to degree or certificate completion, to be accountable for achievement of learning objectives, and to prepare competent employees for the workplace. We confront these challenges here in Part One.

The primary purpose of this section of the book is to set the stage for using theory to enhance student learning and development. We begin with demographic information about today's students and then provide six case studies illustrating these data; we continue with a discussion of theory as it helps explain the dynamics of learning. The discussion of theory is divided into two chapters: personal development and cognitive development. We emphasize, however, that personal and cognitive development

occur together and should not be viewed separately. Finally, we present the TRPP model, which includes the components of theory, research, principles, and practice, and demonstrate how the model works using the case studies. Later, in Part Two, research takes center stage and is connected to theory in a dynamic process using the TRPP model.

Demographic information centers on students in the United States, and the student stories reflect those in U.S. culture. We recognize that many learning and development concerns are universal and hope the reader will find the stories applicable to students in a more global environment. For example, students of color in the United States are considered minority students, but in other nations they are the majority. Regardless of the population proportion, histories of disadvantage or lack of opportunity have very similar learning outcomes.

Today's Learners

Everyone seems to bemoan the fact that students just aren't what they used to be—that they are not as prepared or as motivated as they were in the "good old days" of teaching. Perhaps the reader has had similar thoughts. Even though the changes may be difficult to articulate, they are real. Today's students represent a wide range of learners who bring with them unique experiences and expectations.

In a classic text, *Beyond the Open Door*, K. Patricia Cross (1971) introduced the "new" students of the 1970s. These were students who were often the first generation in their families to pursue education after high school. They were also students who scored in the bottom third on traditional tests of academic ability but who saw education as "the way to a better job and a better life than that of their parents" (p. 18). In the 1990s, teachers have come to expect these "new" students; in fact, this picture has become rather a common one.

How is today's picture different? Who are the new students of the 1990s, and what will students be like in the decades to come? A brief summary of the demographics related to education in the United States will provide a more focused lens through which to view today's learners. By reviewing the completion rates at different levels of schooling in addition to the changing population groups who are accessing postsecondary institutions, teachers in all settings will be better prepared to understand the needs of their students

The numbers show that high school enrollment increased 13 percent from 1984 to 1994. Although the number of white youths has declined in this population, the participation of blacks and

Hispanics has been growing. From 1972 to 1992 the percentage of black high school seniors increased 6 percent, and for Hispanics the growth was 15 percent. Along with this increased enrollment have come higher completion rates. There has been a 12 percent increase for black students from 1975 to 1995. For Hispanics, the rates are more varied, but in 1995 the completion rate was 58.6 percent—an increase of 4 percent from 1990 (Hussar and Gerald, 1996, p. 9).

Not only are more students graduating from high school, but increasingly they are planning to pursue higher education. The proportion of high school students, including all racial and ethnic groups, expecting to graduate from college has risen 20 percent since 1972. The percentage of graduates going directly to college following high school was 62 percent in 1994, compared with 47 percent in 1973. This rate varies, however, among ethnic groups from 62 percent for whites to 50 percent for blacks and Hispanics. College enrollment for students of color increased almost 68 percent from 1984 to 1995. From 1990 to 1995, Hispanics had the largest gain among the four major ethnic minority groups, with an increase of 39.6 percent. The number of Asian Americans in higher education more than doubled from 1984 to 1995 (Carter and Wilson, 1996–97, p. 2).

The numbers also indicate that high school students are taking more rigorous coursework than in the past. The "New Basics" curriculum has placed an emphasis on academic course taking; the requirements are four years of English, three years of science, and social sciences and math. In 1982 only 14 percent of those in high school took such a stringent curriculum; in 1996, 61 percent enrolled in college preparatory courses (Fiore, 1998). According to a 1996 government report, "From a course-taking perspective at least, it appears that all racial and ethnic groups are better prepared for college today than they were in the early 1980s" (Carter and Wilson, 1996–97, p. 6).

The same report states that the reading skills of seventeen-year-olds have improved since the mid-1970s, with greater increases being seen in the test scores of black and Hispanic students than in those of white students. In addition, the math proficiency levels of seventeen-year-old blacks and Hispanic students have risen to narrow the gap that formerly existed with white students. At the