Orientations to Learning and Teaching

The way we think about teaching and learning, the nature of human beings and the nature of the content we are teaching influence our choice of approaches in our teaching, curriculum design or relationships with colleagues or students.

Parker Palmer, in **Courage to Teach** (1998), challenges us to think beyond the normal questions that teachers ask:

- What are we teaching?
- How are we teaching it?
- Why are we teaching it?
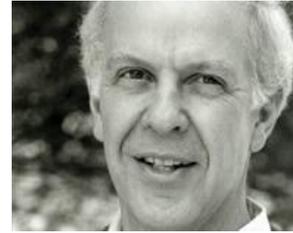
He challenges us to ask:

"Who is this self who teaches? How does this quality of self form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world?"

Despite all the latest teaching techniques, or subject advances he suggests that in the end "we teach who we are".

So who is this "I" that teaches? How do we find out? And how does this open us up to new possibilities?

The "who" of teaching is constructed from often unquestioned practices, habits and beliefs arising from our own enculturation within education and cultural paradigms. It is made up from our own cultural histories, and the expectations of our organisations. It is created by our journeys, our hard-won knowledge from dealing with dilemmas and challenges. It creates a lens through which we see our students, our subject and the issues that arise. It creates a complex teaching identity made up of different roles.

There are a number of approaches to mapping the different ways people think about teaching and learning:

- different philosophies about the nature of the human being, nature of learning and the purpose of education/training
- psychological and sociological learning and development perspectives
- different political orientations or mandates.

Two frameworks that we have found powerful are *curriculum metaphors* and *teaching metaphors*. Both provide a spectrum of different educational paradigms enabling us to consider our own orientations to teaching and learning. The danger in presenting these as frameworks, rather than deep experiences, is that we tend to interpret them from our existing lenses. The challenge is to be able to move into the "view" from a particular metaphor and explore how it changes our relationships with others and teaching and learning.

Teaching Metaphors
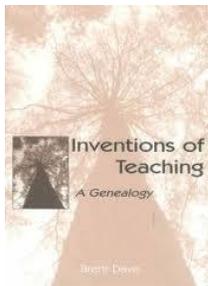
Brent Davis, in *Inventions of Teaching (2008)*, categorised eight key metaphors of teaching. For each one he maps its beliefs about teaching and learning and the origins of its philosophy. He suggests that the roles that we take on as teachers can be traced back to these origins. We can be unconsciously taking on particular roles, without questioning where they come from, thus reproducing current practice. The latter metaphors offer new ways of thinking about learning with the potential for development of creative learning opportunities.

Teaching Metaphors – Origin – Teaching roles

Teaching as drawing out	*Mystical traditions*	awakening, actualising
Teaching as drawing in	*Religious traditions*	indoctrinating, disciplining
Teaching as instructing	*Rationalist approach (cognitivism)*	informing, edifying
Teaching as training	*Empirical approach (behaviourism)*	grading, conditioning
Teaching as facilitating	*Structuralism/ constructivism*	mentoring, modeling
Teaching as empowering	*Critical theory/post-structuralism*	emancipating, giving voice
Teaching as occasioning	*Complexity science*	improvising, structuring complexity
Teaching as conversing	*Ecology*	mindful participation, pedagogical thoughtfulness

Activities for Reflection –
Your orientation to teaching and learning

1. Use the one page *Teacher Role Glossary* (Table 1) to determine the teaching roles you like, dislike, or find interesting. Tick the ones you do. Reflect:

   - Are there any you dislike and do? Why?
   - Are there any you like, but don't do? Why?

2. Now on the *Teaching Metaphor Genealogy* tables (Table 2) use different coloured highlighter pens to highlight those roles you dislike and do (e.g. blue), those you like and do (e.g. pink), and those you find interesting (e.g. green).

   - You may like to highlight additional roles you see.

3. Read the explanations on the *Teaching Metaphor Genealogy* tables that relate to the roles you have highlighted. Highlight those beliefs that you think might resonate with your teaching (pink). Check out some of the other sections and mark those beliefs and roles that intrigue you and which you might like to explore (green).

   - What tensions between different beliefs are you experiencing?
   - What roles do you think are missing?

4. What has intrigued you, inspired you, surprised you or challenged you about this exercise?

5. Autobiographical reflection as a learner –

   - What were your first experiences when a young child at school and which paradigms best describe them?
   - How did this change as you progressed as a learner?
   - What were some of your most valued experiences?
   - Who were your most appreciated teacher/mentors and what paradigms did they come from?
   - What were some of your most diminishing experiences?
   - How have these shaped who you are or want to become as a teacher?

Table 1. Teacher Role Glossary

Role	Meaning	Indicate if you *Like*, *Dislike* or find *Interesting*	Tick if you Do
Nurturing	Helping to flourish and grow.		
Awakening	Helps learner to achieve self-realisation.		
Actualising	Helps learner to reach transformative potentials.		
Guiding	Shows the learner the way.		
Disciplining	Brings learner onto the right track.		
Inducting	Brings learner into the way of doing and knowing things.		
Instructing	Provides a logical development of knowledge or skills.		
Directing	Sets straight learners' understandings.		
Edifying	Helps learner construct a coherent structure (edifice) of knowledge.		
Grading	Determines the level that the learner is at and directs them into suitable learning.		
Diagnosing/ Remediating	Determines psychological or learning problems and provides learning to help overcome these.		
Supervising	Oversees learner's actions and directs to ensure doing correctly.		
Facilitating	Helps learner to learn for themselves.		
Orchestrating experiences	Provides experiences for learners from which they can create shared meanings.		
Enculturating	Helps learner into professional ways of doing things or communities of practice.		
Empowering	Helps the learner develop the power to do something for themselves.		

Giving voice	Enables silenced learners to speak up in different contexts.		
Emancipating	Helps learners free themselves from social and political labels which others give them, and to question the way things are framed.		
Improvising	Engages attentively, creatively and responsively with others in a collective project.		
Structuring Complexity	Provides the necessary conditions (e.g. diversity, redundancy, liberating constraints, decentralisation) to enable the arising of complex co-activity and emergence.		
Participating	Enables evolution of personal and collective knowing through the shaping of personal and collective possibilities, activities and responsibilities.		
Conversing	Inquiring into. No pre-determined outcomes. Allowing emergence and sensitive to contingencies.		
Caring	Brings pedagogical thoughtfulness in relationships with learners.		
Mindful Participation	Mindful participation in the unfolding of personal and collective identities, culture, inter-cultural space and the biosphere.		

Table 2. Teaching Metaphor Genealogy

ROLES: *Educating* (leading out) *Nurturing* *Fostering* *Actualising* *Awakening*	*Tuition* *Inducting* *Training* *Guiding* *Indoctrinating* *Disciplining*	*Instructing* *Explaining* *Recounting/telling* *Informing* *Edifying* *Directing* *Lecturing* *Professing*	*Schooling* *Supervising* *Grading* *Inculcating* *Conditioning* *Diagnosing* *Remediating*
METAPHOR: **Teaching as drawing out**	**Teaching as drawing in**	**Teaching as instructing**	**Teaching as training**
BELIEFS: Knowledge comes from inside. The learner has an inner knowing and intuition which can be drawn out. Learners are imbued with particular traits and potentials. The learner develops mastery and self-discipline. Teaching is understood in terms of learner's response – anything can be the teacher. Socratic method	Truth comes from outside. The teacher is master. Teaching resides in the teacher's aims. Students grasp ideas, acquire knowledge. Students are an empty vessel to be filled.	Learning is a rational process (*Cognitivism*). Teacher enlightens and illuminates. Knowledge is put into a coherent and logical form. Students construct a logically coherent world. Linear movement through topics to build understanding. Brain as a computer.	Focus on what can be measured *(Behaviourism).* Students have a developmental readiness *(Psychology).* Students can be classified as "average" or "special needs" – inflexible brains, fixed learning styles – normative assessment. Learning is seen through observable changes in behaviour – learning objectives, learning outcomes. The environment influences learning experiences – not all learning is through a rational process.
ORIGIN: Mystical traditions	Religious Traditions	Rationalist Approach	Empirical Approach

Facilitating *Guiding/steering* *Enabling* *Mediating between students* *Mentoring* *Modelling* *Orchestrating experiences* *Enculturating into professional ways of doing things*	*Emancipating* *Liberating* *Empowering* *Subverting* *Giving Voice* *Advocating*	*Improvising* *Occasioning* *Structuring complexity* *Framing* *Participating*	*Mindful participation* *Conversing* *Caring* *Pedagogical thoughtfulness* *Eco-justice* *Hermeneutic Listening* *Minding*
METAPHOR: **Teaching as facilitating**	**Teaching as empowering**	**Teaching as occasioning**	**Teaching as conversing**
BELIEFS: Explicit knowledge is just the surface of informal, tacit, embodied experience – knowledge is action, action creates knowledge. Learning is a complex, flexible, uncontrollable – arising out of experience, biologically enabled, culturally conditioned, socially situated. Teachers facilitate purposeful interactivity, driven by particular needs, embedded in a community of practice, mediated by learning tools enabling students to develop understandings and capacities.	How are understandings of the world being shaped for students, and shaping their identities? Liberating students from identifications of themselves made by others Concerned with critical discourses – politics, social issues, cultural movements. Understanding power relations. Making the familiar strange – challenging what is normal Uncovering assumptions and paradigms	Individual knowing, cultural identity, collective knowledge are three intertwining aspects of the whole; each useful for explaining different aspects of learning. We are all natural teachers; coupling with learners in empathic relationship Classrooms as self-organising coherent entities – principles of diversity (novel responses), redundancy (familiarity), liberating constraints (tasks with organisational freedom), decentralised control (understandings can't be pre-stated)	Concerned with ethical know-how, rather than only practical know-how. Ethical action arises from the knowledge that oneself is a fluid, always emergent, biological-and-cultural form – a response to the world. Conversation enables interlocking consciousness – hive mind – more than the sum of the parts. Teaching is being mindful in, being conscious of, the emergent collective.
Structuralism/ Constructivism Approach	Critical Theory/Post-structuralism	Complexity Science	Ecology

Curriculum Metaphors

Schubert (1998) suggests eight core metaphors that people may use in considering curriculum design. Consider which ones you or your organisation use. Which ones intrigue you?

Curriculum as Discrete Tasks and Concepts	The curriculum is seen as a set of tasks to be mastered and is derived from training programmes in business, industry and the military.
Curriculum as Content or Subject Matter	This metaphor portrays a traditional image of curriculum that stretches back to Pythagoras and Plato. This curriculum is one which receives contents from traditional academic disciplines and transmits them to the learner.
Curriculum as Cultural Reproduction	The curriculum metaphor is concerned with the notion of transmission of cultural knowledge and values from one generation to another.
Curriculum as a Programme of Planned Activities	Student learning is regarded as a planned program which is directed and executed by learning organisations. It includes written documents – teacher guides, lesson plans, scope and sequence chart, and curriculum implementation packages.
Curriculum as Intended Learning Outcomes	Curriculum is a process of goal setting and drawing pathways to those goals. The outcomes are expressed in general terms like *"understanding the value of…"* Today most curriculum frameworks have incorporated this image.
Curriculum as Experience	This image of curriculum, following John Dewey, emphasises experience rather than sets of activities. Learners select a learning experience according to its significance in their life.
Curriculum as Agenda for Social Reconstruction	This view of the curriculum holds that learning institutions should provide an agenda of knowledge and values that guides students to improve society and the cultural institutions, beliefs and activities that support it.
Curriculum as "Currere"	The curriculum is the interpretation of the learner's lived experiences – the learner comes to understand their past, how it drives the present and how it directs the future of their personal and professional life. Individuals come to a greater understanding of themselves, others, and the world about them.

Implications for trainers and courseware designers

What might it mean to explore a different metaphor or mindset?

Example – My role is to build professional capacity of trainers in the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) system. A key approach that I have been involved with is the development of a diploma course. You could say this is curriculum as learning outcomes, as content, as programmed activities and even discrete tasks. But what I have become interested in is the notion of ***curriculum as currere***. I am wondering about what makes a potential teacher/trainer, a good teacher/trainer. Is it the actual course? Are we getting it right? Or is it something that is inside them, that they need to be born with?

When I think about it as ***curriculum as currere***, I find I am wanting to understand about the individual's learning journey from a novice to a competent teacher. I am interested in people's careers through the system, where they go, why they move, what it is like to be in a new context, what causes them to drop out. I find myself now thinking beyond merely getting the course right, and wondering about what is needed in the wider system to support teachers.

Example – I would see myself as a ***facilitator***, guiding, modelling for my students. But I realise that a lot of the time I was ***instructing***, out there at the front, with a key message to drive home. As I began to allow myself to be more authentic, rather than the perfect teacher, the guru, I found I began to relax and relate to my students in a different way. I trusted them more, and I trusted myself more. I could sit back and encourage conversations, and allow them to go where they needed to go, rather than restricting them to the planned activities, with specific goals that I had set for that session.

We would do things out of order, but in a timely way, yielding much greater depth than if I had stuck to my plan. Something would emerge that was bigger than I could have foreseen. I could then draw this together into a coherent whole. Everyone participated to providing a growth of understanding for the whole group. I was minding the process – moving to ***Teaching as conversing*** – where teaching is being mindful and conscious of the emergent collective.

References

Palmer, P. J., (1998). *Courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Acknowledgements & Background

This resource was put together by Dr Sue Stack (pictured, top) based on activities she developed with Dr Helen Bound (bottom) for the Tools for Learning Design project.

This and other content related to the Tools for Learning Design project can be found on the Tools for Re-imagining Learning website, a resource for trainers, curriculum and learning designers, and training leaders in the Singapore Continuing Education and Training sector interested in deepening understanding of their practice to create innovative and enlivening possibilities for their adult learners.

The Tools for Re-imagining Learning website and the Tools for Learning Design project overview can be found at www.ial.edu.sg.

For more information on the Tools for Learning Design project or the Tools for Re-imagining Learning website (content), please email Dr Stack at susan.stack@utas.edu.au or Dr Bound at helen_bound@ial.edu.sg.

We welcome questions or feedback on this publication, the Tools for Learning Design research report or the Tools for Re-imagining Learning website (layout or technical issues). Please email research@ial.edu.sg.

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The Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) aims to contribute to the competitiveness of Singapore by developing an effective, innovative and responsive Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector that is able to meet the needs of industries and the workforce. It achieves this by raising capabilities, catalysing innovation, and leading research in workforce learning.

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