The Problem of 'Pedagogy' in a Web 2.0 Era

06/15/11

In a time of knowledge stability, teach; in a time of rapid change in knowledge, learn…

Clearly, we have left the time of knowledge stability and entered a time of incredibly rapid change. Web 2.0, a term coined in 2004, is a description of the new Web architecture, but is also a historical marker between the era of comfortable stability and the era of unsettling change. Many in higher education say we have accordingly turned to learning and away from teaching, but in fact we haven’t. Most educators I talk with are unaware of the degree of change necessary today or of the degree to which deep change will continue over the coming decades. And so, the dominant emphasis on teaching remains.

There is no requirement that faculty in higher education understand learning theory. Even saying that, and knowing it is true, seems astonishing. How is it possible to make the turn from teaching to learning without knowing what that means? This is the 800-pound gorilla in the middle of the room. Faculty members in higher education are researchers. The focus of their research has traditionally been on disciplinary knowledge and not on how humans learn. To make the turn from teaching to learning become a reality and not just a phrase, the first step should be toward a faculty development effort across the board to dramatically increase awareness of the basic research in learning theory of the past 30 years. Those who have been teaching for years without this awareness may find astonishing discoveries: “Oh, that’s why that innovation worked that I tried three years ago,” or “Okay, now I see why problem-based learning can work so well if designed correctly.”

Such discoveries can be epiphanies. Having a theoretical construct within which to work and grow is so much easier than reactivity or conformity without knowing why.

When we in higher education do talk about learning, we use the word “pedagogy.” Pedagogy, the word itself, refers to studying teaching. It is about teaching, about being, well, “ped-antic.” At its root, the word pedagogy also refers to “leading children,” which is, again, misleading in a time when undergraduate students, on the one hand, must get ready for an adult world that is less forgiving than ever, and on the other they often have children of their own, as the average age of undergraduates continues to climb. We need to understand how adults learn and design the undergraduate experience accordingly.

Faculty in higher education have been nibbling around the edges of learning research for decades, and have dealt daily with the issues of learning. They may find it actually refreshing to become more firmly grounded in learning theory. One research thread that seemed to lead to a rich lode of ideas about learning started with a Google search of the term “situated cognition”. Situated cognition, and
related research threads, seems to me a useful concept for beginning to understand the tendencies of information technology for teaching and learning.

Reading the body of research about learning is important right now. Most of us are still at the point of not knowing even the basic theoretical terminology to use so we can better understand the changes underfoot now and make informed decisions about changes. And this is after decades of the movement called “The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” (see [http://www.issotl.org/](http://www.issotl.org/)--and note, the next ISSOTL conference is in Milwaukee October 20-22, 2011). The Association of American Colleges and Universities as well offers sessions and conversations related to the turn to learning--the next AAC&U conference is in Washington, DC, January 25-28, 2012.

My own association, The Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning, also addresses new ways to think about the teaching-learning relationship and the changing roles of both teachers and students. The next AAEEBL (“able”) conference is in Boston, July 25-28, co-located with Campus Technology’s annual summer conference.

There is movement underfoot. This is not about technology, despite the crucial need to deploy and use technology in the best ways, but about how humans use our new technology.

With this issue of Web 2.0, we end the run of this newsletter. The newsletter has run for three-and-a-half years and has been a great pleasure for me to write. I will continue to write regularly in The Batson Blog at [http://www.aaebl.org/tbb](http://www.aaebl.org/tbb). Please join me there; we can continue the conversation. Meanwhile, continue your good work.

[Editor’s note: This is the final issue of the Web 2.0 newsletter. The overall topic of Web 2.0 continues to be important to Campus Technology, and it will be reflected in newsletters and other Campus Technology coverage going forward. Campus Technology would like to express its sincere appreciation for Trent Batson’s enormous contributions to the Web 2.0 newsletter and plans to feature Batson’s unique insights in future contributed articles in its other publications.]

About the Author

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