

**Paulo Freire & Jane Vella:
From Theory to Accessibility**

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Abstract

Paulo Freire is a name well-known in the field of adult education due to theories he began to develop during his work with illiterate farmers and laborers beginning in the 1930s in Brazil. Freire promoted what are considered radical ideas including the education as being political, incorporating dialogue into education, and conscientization. Freire had a great impact on Jane Vella, a Maryknoll Sister, who was introduced to Freire's dialogical approach to education from reading his book, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and then being introduced to him when he spoke at the Institute of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania where Vella was a teacher. The focus of this paper is to provide an in-depth explanation of what dialogue education is as defined by Freire and further developed and expanded upon by Vella. Vella's theory, dialogue education, became a registered trademark and is taught by the instructors at Global Learning Partners, Inc. Although Freire had many other contributions to adult education other than dialogue, this paper specifically addresses his theory and definition of dialogue in respect to education as a way of learning and knowing as well as how Vella has established effective learning principles, design steps, considerations, and quantum thinking to implement into her theory of dialogue education.

Paulo Freire and Jane Vella: From Theory to Accessibility

My goal for this paper is to explain the meaning of dialogue in relation to education as presented by Paulo Freire and further developed by Jane Vella as a course design to engage the learner in the process of acquiring knowledge. The word “dialogue” can mean having a conversation with someone, but this is not meaning when referring to learning in terms of approaching the object of knowledge. Freire explained that when referring to the meaning of dialogue in respect to education it should not be used as a tactic to involve students in a task and that it is not the same dialogue as a conversation between friends, but dialogue in an epistemological perspective (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Dialogue education, designed by Jane Vella and a registered trademark, can easily be interpreted as learners having open-ended questions and discussions. However, Vella strongly emphasizes the need and importance of structure in learning activities and believes that those who approach learning programs in the way described above are not being respectful of the learner. Vella approaches the learning process in a highly structured format incorporating the twelve principles she has determined to result in effective adult learning, seven design steps, and six aspects of quantum thinking.

Paulo Freire’s Professional and Educational Experiences

Paulo Freire was born on September 19, 1921 in Recife, Brazil in the state of Pernambuco. His family moved to Jaboatao, Brazil due to poor economic times, The Great Depression, and Freire experienced growing up in poverty. Being from a middle class family and experiencing conditions of poverty influenced Freire’s perspective on education (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). Freire’s family returned to Recife when his family’s financial situation improved and he became a literacy teacher while still in high school. Even at this young age, Freire developed an interest in dialogic education at this time due to his interest in wanting to understand his students’ expectations (www.pto.org, Bentley, 1999). Freire believed the way to approach teaching was through dialogue which allowed learners to influence the content of the learning process and make it relevant to their lives (Merriam et al., 2007).

Freire entered law school at the University of Recife in 1943. It was at this time he met Elza Maia Costa de Oliveira and they married in 1944. They had five children, three of whom became educators (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). Freire decided he wanted to pursue his career as an educator which his wife encouraged. In 1946, Freire became Director of the Pernambuco Department of Education and Culture of SESI (the Social Service of Industry). During this time working poor farmers and laborers who were illiterate, Freire continued to develop his unique philosophy of literacy and education (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). In 1961, Freire was appointed the director of the Department of Cultural Extension of Recife University which allowed him to apply his theories teaching 300 sugarcane workers how to read in 45 days (Gadotti & Torres, 2009).

A military coup in 1964 resulted in the overthrowing of President Goulard's government. Freire was jailed for 70 days and subsequently exiled from Brazil after being labeled and communist and a subversive. At the beginning of his exile, Freire spent a brief time in Bolivia then lived in Chile for five years working for the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Gadotti & Torres,, 2009). Freire wrote "Education, the Practice of Freedom" in 1967 and his most famous work, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" in 1968 (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). Freire was exposed to the philosophy called Liberation Theology that allowed him to pursue his theories of development and political theory and made him one of the most influential figures in popular education (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). Freire traveled to Portuguese-speaking African countries during the time they had won their wars of liberation and were in the early stages of development. Vella was a teacher at the Institute of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania at the time that Freire visited and this is how they met (J. Vella, personal communication, December, 2011).

Freire returned to Brazil in 1980 and joined the Workers' Party (PT) in Sao Paulo where he was the supervisor for the adult literacy program from 1980-1986 (Gadotti & Torres, 2009). Freire became the Secretary of Education for Sao Paulo once the Workers' Party had won the majority vote. Freire continued to write and implement programs in Brazil until his death in 1997.

Freire believed the way to approach teaching was through dialogue which allowed learners to influence the content of the learning process and make it relevant to their lives (Merriam et al., 2007). Freire argued that education could be and largely had been approached from the idea that the teacher had all of the knowledge and "deposited" knowledge into passive students, a concept he called "banking education." According to Freire, this approach gives the teacher the authority and continues to domesticate the oppressed. Freire stated that learners start in a least-aware state where they question nothing about their current situation or external forces that are responsible for it, then reach the midway where they begin to sense that they have some control over their lives and begin to question. The goal is to achieve critical conscientiousness which is the understanding that people control their own life and can become active in changing their reality into one that is more just (Merriam et al., 2007).

Jane Vella's Professional and Educational Experiences

Jane Vella was born in 1931 in an Italian immigrant family and raised in New York City. Her interest in pursuing a vocation in the Catholic Church led her to become a Maryknoll Sister in 1950 (www.globalearning.com, 2011). Vella went to Tanzania in 1956 after obtaining her B.Ed. degree from Rogers College in New York in 1955 and teaching elementary school in New York City. Vella continued to work as a Maryknoll Sister for twenty-two years in many countries in East Africa and obtained her Masters of Education degree from Fordham University during this

time which she completed in 1965. Vella taught at the Institute of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam which is where she was introduced to the major influences in her approach to learning including transformative learning by Sally Timmel and Ann Hope who created the Training for Transformation program, Julius Nyerere who was the former president of Tanzania, and Paulo Freire (www.globalearning.com, 2011).

Vella returned to the United States in 1977 earned her doctorate in 1978 in Adult Education from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where she completed research on Community Education for Development (Vella, 2002). After obtaining her doctorate, Vella began teaching at the North Carolina State University in Raleigh and as an assistant professor in adult education she taught in Peru and rural North Carolina (Vella, 2002). In 1981, while still working as a professor at North Carolina State University, Vella established the organization, Jubilee Popular Education Center, using the term, “popular education”, introduced by Paulo Freire as she had yet to create the term, “dialogue education” (www.globalearning.com).

My Conversation with Jane Vella

On October 2, 2011, I was reviewing the website for Global Learning Partners and noticed there was a link, “e-mail Jane” referring to Dr. Jane Vella. I sent this question in my e-mail:

Why do you think so many adult education programs fail to engage learners because they do not take the time to learn about the learners, do not see themselves as learners as well as instructors, and do not promote an interaction with the learners? I have found from being a learner, working with people in the social services field, and doing research on motivation that the best way to engage learners is to give them "ownership" of the learning process.

Much to my surprise and excitement, Dr. Vella responded to my e-mail by leaving me a voice mail message with her return telephone number. I had my cell phone charging in the other room while watching the Pittsburgh Steelers’ game which I later discovered Dr. Vella was also watching before she had to leave for church for the St. Francis Day blessing of animals. I returned her call and was able to speak with her for about 20 minutes and followed up with her later that day via email to clarify a few issues we discussed. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to be able to “interview” the person I selected for my biography and was also a bit “star struck” when I received a telephone call from her in response to my e-mail. I was also pleased and rather surprised that Vella responded to me so quickly and with such enthusiasm. Vella is really someone who is devoted to adult learning. However, Dr. Vella refused to answer my question saying that she would not speculate as to why others in fields who are teaching adults do not explore and try the system of Dialogue Education/ She said that it is “our” responsibility to both practice and refine it (personal communication with J. Vella, 4 October, 2011).

Dr. Jane Vella considers education to be a science and spoke of the importance education has had in the field of science throughout history. For example, she had me research several

people including Joseph Lister who discovered that washing medical aprons between each patient reduced the spread of infection. My main question for Dr. Vella was why she thought that so many adult educators fail to incorporate dialogue into their teaching methods. Dr. Vella stated she would not speculate on this. She was very hopeful in her outlook on the future of adult education by saying, "It's coming, Rachel" referring to the paradigm shift in adult education from the traditional lecture setting to that of interactive dialogue (personal communication with J. Vella, October, 2011). Vella noted that change is coming and that she could see it evidenced in my e-mail letter to her, a graduate student in Pittsburgh, PA.

I experienced her teaching methods first-hand. She had me researching historical figures prior to talking with her again and I did so without question. She also made the point of telling me the three axioms of effective learning are "time, time, and time" (personal communication, J. Vella, October, 2011). Vella believes that time is needed to adequately prepare a program and time is needed for the learner to process the content and be able to use it in their everyday lives. Vella also stated, "It all boils down to education. It creates our culture and is the basis for democracy," (personal communication, J. Vella, October, 2011). I observed and summarized from what she was saying to me was that education is and should be considered a science. Vella wholeheartedly agreed and said that not only is education a science, but the system of how to teach is a science (personal communication, J. Vella, October, 2011).

Vella used an example of how a midwife in Iran contacted her on how Vella's approach to teaching has helped her in her profession. Compared to a midwife in Iran, a graduate student in Pittsburgh does not seem so impressive. Vella continued to explain that education is not just a reflection of our culture it is a paradigm of the culture. Adults learn through dialogue which she stated is a concept that has always been "new" to many people (personal communication, J. Vella, October, 2011). Vella admitted she has heard the statement, "Just tell me what I need to know" from learners (personal communication, J. Vella, October, 2011).

Vella's Introduction to Freire

Vella stated she was close to burnout and was considering a career change in the early sixties. She wanted to teach Tanzanian teachers to be autonomous and culturally appropriate teachers, but felt as if she was teaching as a part of a colonial whole (Vella, 2002). While she was reading "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," Vella discovered that the author, Paulo Freire was speaking at the Institute of Education. Vella hurried to the lecture and while listening realized Freire was speaking of was an alternative to current teaching practices (Vella, 2002). Vella describes her first introduction to Freire (Vella, 2002, p. 5) as follows:

"As we greeted Paulo at the end, I asked: "Do many women tell you they love you after these lectures?" "Oh, yes", he replied. "Many Catholic nuns?" "Yes, in fact, I am a member of a Catholic religious community of nuns: the Maryknoll

Sisters! The Sisters in Chile, after a course I taught them, made me a member.”
We laughed together, and a love affair began.”

Vella began to teach Freire’s theories and ideas to her students despite their difficulty with the English translation and Freire’s writing style. Vella pointed out that Freire wrote and taught densely due being a seminal thinker, philosopher, epistemologist, and political strategist (Vella, 2002).

I asked Vella if her ideas and those of Paulo Freire could be considered to promote Communism. Her laughing response was, “Hardly!” She said viewing her approach to education as Communist is a real misinterpretation because Communism is an oppressive form of government that does not promote learning. She stated it was much like Capitalism in this sense. She stated that perhaps her ideas could be considered Socialist, but that the goals of education as she views it are to promote democracy. Freire seemed to have an even stronger view that education was political and that capitalism led to the oppression of many by the oppressors (personal communication, J. Vella, October, 2011).

Vella describes Freire in the following e-mail response: Paulo Freire was as a great-hearted human being – sweet and tough at the same time.

My friend Karen Ridout said once: Jane has done for Freire what Myers and Briggs did for Jung: made his thought accessible. I love her saying that. I do not think Paulo would... He was a deep thinker, a philosopher and theologian. He would, I speculate, have abhorred the idea of his work having been made accessible! But I speculate! (personal communication, J. Vella, December, 2011).

Vella Incorporates Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”

Vella described the challenges of teaching educators, specifically professors, to use dialogue education in their classes and encourage the students who are not used to this approach to accept it in Chapter 12 of the book, “Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach.” Several professors at the Maryknoll Graduate School of Theology, after reading Paulo Freire’s book, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” expressed an interest in learning how to use dialogue education in their classrooms. Vella designed a three-day workshop and in addition to some professors from the school of theology, there were others from various institutions (Vella, 2002). The concerns they raised included how the students would respond to a dialogue approach when they are used to the “banking” approach, an idea developed by Paulo Freire, which basically means that the teacher deposits knowledge into the learner (Vella, 2002). The workshop was designed using the approach including presenting content, having the learners shares their concerns about using dialogue education, and working in small groups to design their own dialogue lesson.

Vella cited what Paulo Freire once said to her, “Only the student can name the moment of the death of the professor,” (Vella, 2002, p. 179). Vella has added to this that the professor

must do something more difficult which is to live and learn taking on a new role as the learner (Vella, 2002).

Twelve Principles for Effective Adult Learning

Although Vella mentioned 50 principles in her book, "Training Through Dialogue," of which she found all to make dialogue education effective, she defined twelve principles which she described as "interconnected, intrinsically related to one another" in the revised edition of "Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach," (Vella, 2002). These twelve principles are:

1. Learning Needs and Resources Assessment: Assessing the learners' context and allowing them the opportunity to present their expectations of the curriculum and will therefore, bring a higher energy about their learning.
2. Safety: Providing a safe context for adults to learn and feel comfortable exploring skills or theories new or uncomfortable for them and being able to express themselves.
3. Sound relationships: Creating a sense of respect between teacher and learners as well as within learners obtained through affirmation.
4. Sequence of content and reinforcement: Using a holistic perspective, design content to be sequenced and reinforcement to fit the group and connect the parts of the content with the whole picture in mind.
5. Praxis: Respect for adults' learning experiences and allowing them to apply their learning to being an active participant.
6. Respect for learners as decision makers: Directly related to participation, this principle, using quantum thinking, teaches that each person has a unique perspective of what is being learner.
7. Learning with Ideas, Feelings, and Action: Again, using a holistic perspective of the universe and relates to the energy needed for effective learning.
8. Immediacy: Reaching learners with content that is both relevant and immediately useful, also refers to participants and how they use the content.
9. Clear roles and role development: Clarify role as teacher using the quantum concept of duality which means having the role of both decision maker and learner and having the same goal of meaningful learning as the learners.
10. Teamwork: Designing learning tasks for learners to work in small groups
11. Engagement: Learners are using all six identified quantum concepts.
12. Accountability: Accepting mutual responsibility for learning and understanding how accountability affects energy in the learning-teaching relationship.

The definition of a principle according to philosophers is the beginning of an action. Vella has tested these principles in community education settings in various countries and situations

throughout the world, she believes they can also work for teachers and professors in more formal educational settings as well (Vella, 2002). Vella believes that even with different teaching styles based on personality and various groups of learners, the twelve principles can still be applied and that all of them must be used in order to for effective dialogue to occur (Vella, 2002).

The Seven Design Steps

Vella's seven design steps are used to develop the course which allows for the use of the twelve principles (Vella, 2002). The first two of the seven questions are: Who are the learners and why is a program needed? All twelve principles are involved in these two questions. The program needs to be designed according to who is going to benefit and why is a program is needed. "Where is the program going to take place" is the third question and Vella points out that the location and environment should encourage safety. "When" is another logistical question that addresses the learners' availability and the accessibility of the location. What are the learners' needs and what objectives are to be accomplished. Immediacy and accountability are two key principles that must be considered in this step. "What For" refers to what is hoped to be achieve during the program and how what is learned will be used by the learners. "How" refers to the learning tasks that will be used to accomplish the objectives. Vella's seven steps are used to develop the course which allows for the use of the twelve principles (Vella, 2002).

I mentioned that Vella has several podcasts available on the GLP website. Listening to her explanation of the seven design steps offered a greater insight into why she uses all of these as part of learning design. Vella stated she preferred the word design to describe the process instead of planned which is more deterministic and joked that when she had plans things did not work out as she planned. Vella stated that the learner needs and resource assessment is completed prior to implementing the seven design steps, but they can also be done together. Vella also stated that many educators start with content which are small packets of information, but in the seven design steps, this is not started until the question "What?" is being addressed. Achievement-based objectives are the way to apply how the content will be used by the learners and that the learners learn when doing tasks which is called praxis (www.globalearning.com).

Vella responded to how critics have stated that her approach to learning is too structured and lack spontaneity. She argued the more learning is structured the more spontaneity and greater creativity can occur. She stated that the issue of accountability to the whole group of learners comes into play at this point because one learner may ask a question that is specific to his/her interest, but if it is not part of the course, the learning contract, then the learner needs to be told it will be covered in a later course or has even invited people to meet her after class to discuss the particular issue and even volunteered to bring the wine as long as they brought food (www.globalearning.com).

Six Considerations

Vella stated she learned from teaching in Tanzania that there are six concepts to consider that result in effective learning and teaching which are:

- Political: Power and the distribution of power both in the process and content.
- Problem posing: Dialogue around adult themes that evoke affective, psychomotor, and cognitive responses. Vella notes she would now call this consideration “examining potential” from a quantum thinking approach.
- Part of a whole: Learning must have follow-up and continuity considering the whole context of the learners’ situation.
- Participative: Everyone involved has time to speak, listening and be actively engaged. Using quantum terms, each learner constructs new skills, concepts, and attitudes to fit their context.
- Person-centered: The purpose of learning is the development of all of the people involved, not just sharing information.
- Prepared: Learning is prepared by using the learning needs and resources assessment and the seven design steps for the particular group of learners and adequate time is used.

Vella explains in more detail in one of her podcasts that in the fifth design step, “What,” that content in relation to “who” and “why” needs to address the set of nouns including cognitive (ideas), psychomotor (skills), and affective (feelings). The sixth step, ‘what for,” addresses what the learners will do with the content which is being learned which are actions or verbs (www.globalearning.com). These considerations have become part of dialogue education as they address the power of the teacher who must give up some of the power in order to also have the role of a learner. Vella stressed the importance of a needs assessment as being critical to designing any program because it must address what the learner needs to know and how they will use what they have learned and apply them to the necessary tasks (Vella, 2002). What I found to be interesting was that Vella developed these six considerations early in her career while beginning her work in Tanzania which she has been able to continue to expand and have ultimately led to the concept of dialogue education.

Laws of Physics Applied to Education: Quantum Thinking

Vella’s compared traditional teaching methods to that of Newtonian physics which promotes a mechanistic way of looking at the world (Vella, 2002). Vella presents the idea that Newtonian physics has formed all institutions including education with the idea that humans are to accept “hierarchy, certainty, cause-and-effect relationships, either-or thinking, and a universe that

works like a machine – in short, mechanistic thinking,” (Vella, 2002, p. 29). Education is still largely presented in the mechanistic manner today. The idea that the teacher is the authority and that the students are to listen to what is being said, often in a lecture format with permission to ask questions at the end, is that that Vella considers this form of teaching to be from the seventeenth century, yet is not considered uncommon or out of the ordinary to this day. A classical approach to education is one which is rigid where material is taught as doctrine and content is indisputable (Vella, 2002). Vella has applied the works of adult education theorists including Danah Zohar and Margaret Wheatley who have used quantum concepts in their approach to adult education (Vella, 2002).

Quantum physics is a branch of science that deals with energy and matter at the molecular, atomic, nuclear, and other microscopic levels and that the laws governing macroscopic objects do not function in the same way. Vella (2002) stated that dialogue education is informed by quantum concepts and selected six that she believes are relevant to learning:

1. Relatedness: All we do including the twelve principles are related to one another
2. A holistic perspective: The whole is more than the sum of its parts or learners learn more than what is taught
3. Duality: Using open questions allows for both/and thinking
4. Uncertainty: Theories are constructed when applied to new contexts
5. Participation: The observer is part of what is observed, each person’s perception of reality is different
6. Energy: Learning requires energy and many principles of dialogue education raise and sustain the learners’ energy

Vella revised the book, “Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach” after researching the concept of quantum thinking and applied it to the twelve principles of effective learning and seven design steps to further develop her theory, dialogue education. Vella describes the importance of quantum thinking as the way to encourage learners. I decided to present the following the following statement by Vella from that second edition in its entirety, so as not to lose any of its meaning:

Consider how educational systems are affected by such a seventeenth century, materialistic perspective, which stresses product over process. It is the source of an educational curriculum that prepares young men and women merely for the world of work, not for the work of the world, which is discovery, creation, integration, peace making.

Dialogue vs. Dialogue

My discovery of the article “Dialogue: Culture, Language, and Race” which is an excerpt from an ongoing dialogue beginning in 1983 between Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo was a great

relief. Although I understand the amount of structure involved in implementing dialogue into an educational setting from reading Vella's book, "Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach" and can argue that dialogue in this sense is quite the opposite of sitting around in a circle talking about experiencing and feelings with a lack of direction, the explanation from the source of incorporating dialogue into education, Freire, provides the best clarification. Donaldo Macedo posed the idea to Freire that educators who try to follow Freire's ideas relinquish their authority in order to develop a democratization of power within the classroom and resort to being "facilitators" (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire argued that being a teacher involves facilitating, but that they still have authority due to the fact that they grade the students' work and design the curriculum. Freire continued by stating that teachers cannot be non-directive as no educational practice can exist without an objective (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Being indifferent, sometimes seen as a characteristic of a facilitator, is not encouraging the learners to think critically.

According to Freire, an educator has the responsibility of placing an object (the objective to be learned) as the mediator between him/her and the students (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire further explains the concept of dialogue in regard to education:

That is to say, the dialogue about which we are now speaking, the dialogue that educators speak about, is not the same as the dialogue about a walk up the street, for example, which becomes no more than the object of mere conversation with friends in a bar. In this case, people are not necessarily engaged in a search for the delimitation of a knowable object. Here I am referring to dialogue in a strictly epistemological perspective," (Freire et. al, 1995, p. 380).

Macedo summarized Freire stating that the idea of dialogical teaching as a process of sharing experiences equates to teaching as a form of group therapy. Macedo pointed out that many Freire-inspired teachers have not read Freire's work and do not require his work to be read as part of the course. This leads to the teachers to become promoters of Freire's ideas of dialogue as a method instead of a process of learning and knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995). He further explains that dialogue is not a method that allows for sharing experiences without theorizing about the experiences and not linking them to the politics of culture and critical democracy. Dialogue can be misinterpreted as a process of "coming to voice" which continues to encourage conversation in a group therapy sense (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire agreed and again addressed that this process can produce some dialogue, but is overall conversation focused on individuals and removed from the object of knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Freire explained curiosity as a fundamental and natural aspect of all human beings. He stated that teachers who do not engage education with curiosity are not involved in dialogue as a process of learning and knowing, but rather a conversation lacking the ability to develop experiences into knowledge (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Another stumbling block for many educators who are trying to incorporate dialogue is that they create a mechanistic way of promoting participation by assigning time slots for the teacher and each student to speak.

Freire argued that this does not lead to developing curiosity because once again, the teacher and the students are having an unstructured conversation that does not lead to learning and knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Freire warned that the turn-taking approach becomes formalism and “everything, but dialogue.” Two essential tasks of the educator are to “1) remain epistemologically curious and 2) practice in a way that involves epistemological curiosity that facilitates his or her process of learning and knowing,” (Freire, & Macedo, 1995, p.384). Freire advises dialogue educators to maintain this epistemological curiosity and continue to increase critical reflection which is necessary to challenge students to engage in this type of learning so as to steer away from reading and thinking in a mechanical manner (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Freire pointed out the amount of effort on the part of the educator is significant and that students are not used to this type of approach to learning. It is apparent from Vella’s principles and steps that the process of dialogue education is time consuming in order to achieve the goal of learning and knowing about the object of knowledge. Freire summed up a rather detailed discussion with Macedo by clarifying what is and is not meant by dialogue education (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 385):

As you can see, Donaldo, my pedagogical posture always implies rigor, and never a laissez faire dialogue as conversation orchestrated by facilitators. A mere appearance does not transform itself into the concreteness and substantiality of the actual object. Then, you cannot realistically have a dialogue by simply thinking that dialogue is a kind of verbal ping-pong about one’s historical location and lived experiences.

Both Freire and Macedo elaborate a great deal on the issue of dialogue more so than the summary I have provided. I wanted to present their points as they clearly debunk the concept or “myth” that incorporating dialogue into educational practices is merely a tactic to promote conversations about experiences. Vella admits she has altered Freire’s theories somewhat. Her theory of dialogue education encourages the idea that the object of learning and knowing can only be achieved through a critical, inquisitive approach.

Dialogue Education

Dialogue Education is “a transformative, learner-centered framework for effective adult learning, transfer, and retention” (www.globalelearning.com, 2011). What does this mean? Vella describes the process of how she found the importance of dialogue by learning from the villagers in Tanzania. Vella (2003) discovered the six considerations mentioned previously. Vella breaks down the word “dialogue” based on the Latin meanings, “dia” which is between and “logos” which means word, so the definition of dialogue is “the word between us (Vella, 2002). Vella writes in her book, “Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach” of many examples of experiences she has had implementing adult education programs and how she provided the content needed and then had the learners meet in small groups with objectives to demonstrate

how they use what they have learned and be able to apply the content to activities they will need to do after they leave the course. Vella makes it clear that learners do not make the decision of what is taught, but they do make the decision of what is learned (www.globalearning.com). She also stated that dialogue education is a theory and said she would praise the person who could dispute this theory because that is the only way it could be improved.

Vella strongly emphasizes the need and importance of structure in learning activities and believes that those who approach learning programs in this way are not being respectful of the learner. Vella used the example of how design that allows for structure such as when she told her contractor she wanted windows built on her back porch. The structure is that the contractor will design and build windows, but the overly structured way would have been to say how many windows she wanted and the specifications of how many feet long and wide they had to be (www.globalearning.com).

Vella emphasized the importance of structure as the “backbone” of dialogue education in Chapter One of her book, “On Teaching and Learning.” Vella stated that dialogue education is a structured system and is useful for meaningful learning to occur. The entire process of the educational design must be structured, not just the content. This includes the learning needs and resources assessment which Vella describes as the teacher contacting the students prior to the course to determine what knowledge they already have about the subject of the course and what they hope to learn during the course (Vella, 2007). Vella admits the process for dialogue education is “demanding, challenging, time-consuming, and strenuous,” (Vella, 2007, p.15). I would not doubt that this is a reason why educators do not follow this design model. It takes time for dialogue education to be effective (Vella, 2002) Vella described the challenges of teaching educators, specifically professors, to use dialogue education in their classes and encourage the students who are not used to this approach to accept it in Chapter 12 of the book, “Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach.”

Conclusion

As a graduate student in Adult and Community Education, I have the role of a learner who is learning to become an educator. My perspective on welcoming a dialogue approach to learning may not be the same as those in other fields or even in the field of adult education. The traditional teaching methods Vella describes as mechanistic and hierarchical are still very common in many settings, including universities. I would hope that those pursuing graduate studies would expect to be more participative in the learning process, but I would not be surprised that in many fields, students want the professor to tell them what they need to know and are content with a passive learning experience. Freire refers to this as the banking approach. The banking approach according to Freire and Vella does not allow for learners to be

active participants in the learning process because the learners are not actively involved in the dialogue that is necessary for learning and knowing. Vella has used her dialogue education approach for nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, educational institutions that provide programs in many areas of adult education which demonstrates this approach can be used for those completing programs in any field. Although Vella speculates that Freire would not be appreciative of making his ideas “accessible,” the way she has implemented his ideas into developing dialogue education provides a comprehensive framework for educators to accurately use this method to acquire true knowledge and not have a program become what Freire would not want it to be, a mere conversation.

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