Chapter 16
Summarizing Teaching Approaches in the Traditional Classroom and in the Virtual Environment

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ABSTRACT
Teachers in today’s information society are required to rethink their teaching approaches to accommodate the learning needs of children and adults, either in the traditional classroom settings or the virtual environment. Logically speaking, children require instructors to teach them by using the pedagogical methods. Likewise, adults require teachers to help them learn by using andragogical approaches such as facilitation methods. When it comes to teaching children or helping adults learn in the online teaching and learning environment, it is the epistemological positions of the teachers that predetermine their instructional methods. In this chapter, the author compared and contrasted those pedagogical teaching methods with those andragogical approaches.

INTRODUCTION
Scholars and researchers have been examining historical trends of preferred teaching methodologies. As soon as graduate schools of education were established in the early twentieth century, scholars and researchers began to study why certain teaching methods might facilitate learning and why certain methods might stifle learning. Throughout the book, we have demonstrated to our readers that there exists “pedagogical teaching and learning” and that there exists “andragogical teaching and learning” because teachers are charged with responsibility of either teaching children or
helping adults learn in the new century. Doctors have the responsibility to “prescribe” the right medicines to their patients. Likewise, teachers have the responsibility to “prescribe” the right teaching methodologies to their students, or clients in educational psychologists’ terms. We do not want to prescribe the facilitation methods when we are teaching children who are so dependent on their teachers. Similarly, we would not want to prescribe the pedagogical model to adults who are self-directed in learning. These general directions or generational instructional modes should help teachers select the right teaching methodologies in either the traditional classroom or virtual environment.

In the virtual environment, it is all the more important for instructors to select accurate teaching methodologies because teaching online is compounded by the physical separation between course instructors and learners who may be at a remote learning site. School administrators, accreditation bodies, and course evaluators are always skeptical whether students actually learn in the online environment. Therefore, course instructors have the historic responsibility to demonstrate that their teaching methodologies online should facilitate learning, rather than stifle learning. To do so successfully, teachers need to know what kinds of epistemological positions they take because it is these positions that actually determine what to teach and above all how to teach. In writing this book, we posit that the popularity of online learning is driven by four epistemological positions: postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. Without interpreting the four positions, readers may wonder how learners engage in learning online via technology.

Postpositivists believe that knowledge is created by humans conjecturing and that, for learners to create an understanding, it is important that they work with and challenge the conjectures (Creswell, 2009). In the virtual environment, course instructors can arrange knowledge by specifying course syllabus, course assignments, discussion topics, course evaluation methods, and learning resources. Then, online learners come to the virtual environment to study, observe and even challenge these conjectures in order to determine effects or outcomes. Course instructors justify the course’s existence by saying, “there are laws or theories that govern the world, and these need to be tested or verified and refined so that you, as learners, can understand the world.” If we try to connect this position with instructional methods, we can likely say that this position is in agreement with andragogy instead of pedagogy simply because instructors link learners to learning resources. Learners do the “legwork” by embarking on Habermas’s instrumental knowledge and practical knowledge in order to attain emancipatory knowledge—perspective transformation in Mezirow’s terms.

Constructivists assume that individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Creswell further indicates that these meanings are varied and multiple, leading the learner to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. Based on this position, online learners’ tasks are clear: learners construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. Then course instructors may arrange more open-ended questions, case studies, and analysis of personal experiences. These instructional methods all fit well with this position. In adult education, this epistemological position penetrated into the field many years ago. When scholars address “experiential learning,” they want learners to make meaning out of their experience. Some universities in the United States grant college credits to adult learners based on experiential learning. If learners can turn their prior experience into knowledge, skills or attitudes, why require them to take redundant courses to waste their time or money? In the virtual learning environment,
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