

RE-NAVIGATING MAPS OF LOST SOULS: THE NEED FOR MORAL REFLECTIONS AS PEDAGOGY OF ADULT LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to theorize about reflections, particularly moral reflections, as a teaching method for adult learners. The purpose of this examination into moral reflections as pedagogy is to explore and better understand the concept of adults struggling to learn in ways that connect past experiences to present learning. Furthermore, moral reflections as pedagogy will address the issue of a more meaningful and problem-solving curriculum for adult education. This article illustrates how reflecting for clarity can be considered as a learning skill, which will help adults to achieve more than just intellectually learning objectives. In conclusion, moral reflections as pedagogy are needed in order to produce problem-solving and compassionate people.

Keywords: Moral reflections, pedagogy, adult learning, curriculum, memory, experiences.

INTRODUCTION

In the first book of his influential masterpiece *Nicomachean Ethics*, Greek philosopher Aristotle (Irwin translation, 1999) describes moral virtues as living in the soul because that is where human happiness exists and reflects on how we should live. Virtues of intellect, like wisdom, grow from experiences and moral reflections. Moreover, these reflections rely on memories of the past. Adult learners can grapple and thus reach conclusions through their reflections on positive or negative memories—specifically, moral reflections shape a person’s conscience. The metaphor of a map explains how we explore and navigate these moral reflections throughout our lives. In short, we find meaning and direction from reflecting upon the past. Therefore, adult learners are capable of using their moral reflections as a learning tool. In this article, I argue the value of “moral reflections,” theoretically conceptualized, as pedagogy of adult learners in order to address the issue of a more meaningful and problem-solving curriculum for adult education.

In this paper, to unpack the concept of moral reflections, I would like to express that every individual’s memory holds vivid feelings and considerations, which continually shapes inner thoughts. Moral reflections are a person’s careful consideration about ideas of right or wrong. Most adults, of course, endeavor to move toward virtuous actions by evaluating past experiences. Moral reflections use successful linking between the new moral experiences with previous moral experiences already embedded in the adult’s memory. Educational reformer John Dewey (1990) explains this as a personalized map in the *Child and the Curriculum* published in 1902. Humans naturally build from evaluated experiences. Childhood experiences can become a vehicle to imagine about the future. Given the observations of Dewey, education should coincide with the student’s own personal journey, especially adult learners. He reminds educators that the school curriculum contains personal experiences, albeit standardized learning objectives, “Through the

map every new traveler may get for his own journey the benefits of the results of other's explorations without the waste of energy and loss of time involved in their wanderings" (p. 166). Put succinctly, we can travel far with communal or collaborative reflections. Nonetheless, that being said, personal experiences and moral reflections should also be brought to the curriculum for new adult learning experiences.

The Struggle to Find our Way in the Conceptual Map of Life

To find meaning and proper direction, adults seek connections. In the conceptual map of life, adult learners can be viewed as narrators who share specific recollections and thus share knowledge. Memories can reveal specific events as remembered by the individual; in other words, how the narrator constructed meaning from those events. David Rubin (2000) acknowledges that most people will struggle to recall the event's exact date. Many people will store memory by "a cyclical timescale of years, seasons or months, and weeks" (p. 132). For example, a person might remember an event being a Saturday in December. Perhaps the exact year might escape the narrator's memory, but the estimate is usually close in regard to past memory. The adult may not know the exact date because the event is already sequenced in the individual's memory. Nonetheless, the time approximation will be close and significantly placed in a timeline within the narrator's own mind.

Past memories become a significant component amidst the curriculum for adult education. Certainly, humans must admit that feelings and emotions are a strong essence in past reflections (Atkins, 2008). Many of us can recall being in a class and questioning how we would ever use the learning objectives in the real world. A feeling of boredom could actually separate learners from conceptual maps in their mind, which should be robust with connecting images, words, and ideas. The map may have frayed edges as we struggle with names or dates, but emotions will help us to remember the happiest or saddest moments of our lives, as well as lessons that were learned from defining experiences.

Likewise, we usually have more than just neutral memories. Human nature is to recall emotional memories—namely, sad experiences may bring a person to tears while remembering joyful experiences could immediately induce elation. Indeed, personal identity involves the notion that one must be able to appropriate past actions to oneself as a subject. The event's significance can develop from reflexive consciousness. Hence, a person could reach self-understanding through different feelings, like guilt, anger, or joy. Memory has power due to associated emotions and should be used for clear thinking. Humans can use emotions to achieve understanding. In particular, significant emotions from a person's past can provide lessons and give guidance throughout a lifetime. As a result, humans face challenges, justify choices, and find meaning through their own personal experiences.

Developing a Moral Compass and Re-Navigating the Path

Memories are critical to all learning subjects because friends, teachers, and even historians listen to narrators and enable opportunities to explain and reflect. Why do we relive memories? Throughout our lives, humans frequently recall the past in order to not make the same mistakes and grow for the future. On this view, David Rubin (1994) discovered that

people especially began to reminisce in their forties, and that from age fifty and over the act of remembering becomes a steady and perpetual endeavor. Rubin's research points out that from middle age on, people typically do not focus on memories from the current years of their lives; instead, people mostly reminisce about childhood, teenage years, and young adulthood memories. Accordingly, our moral reflections will continually influence the rest of our lives, whether we distinctly remember everything or implicitly recollect just a little.

As mentioned previously, formative events in our childhood can be more influential than later years. Curriculum in adult education could provide more opportunities to explore and search for memory. For instance, collaborative projects could help students to explore experiences. Journaling could be one tool to engage reflections about using knowledge for good. And yet, human memories are built upon many different glimpses and snippets that we inexorably attempt to better understand. Therefore, adult learners should have opportunities to seek awareness and knowledge of how events defined them and guided their moral compasses.

We may reflect that many formal classes feature reading assignments and taking a test to determine mastery. Although this teaching practice is useful to assess student's learning or lack of learning, teachers may never know if the ideas will ever be used. In fact, most learning that is not used will ultimately be forgotten. Moral reflections can be considered two-fold: analyzing previous knowledge and acquiring new knowledge. Rather than just memorizing new knowledge, students are pushed to understand how their skills can be used to help others. Informal learning, too, may embrace this pedagogy because any form of knowledge can be used to improve our lives. For that reason, formal and informal learning can use moral reflections to create deep understanding.

Teaching with moral reflections can be explained as shared memories and stories passed down by spoken communication. Many cultures have historically used this technique of passing down tribal knowledge. Current practices could focus on the value of stories within the framework of the learning objectives. In human history, songs and rhymes frequently were constructed in order to learn and to preserve memory. Yow (2005) addresses this idea through investigating the oldest learning tradition: oral history. She describes this tradition as recording personal testimonies. In all education, student learning relies on shared information from teachers and classmates. Furthermore, students learn how our educational experiences shape us, give us a sense of who we are, and where we have been. The past helps us to believe for the present and grapple with new ideas that we wish to know. As a result, moral reflections may serve as valuable data because it seeks to find answers to questions.

People search for meaning out of their experiences. This evaluation for meaning can become a moral compass on how we live the rest of our lives. Reconciliation between the desire to know the past and the desire to know the meaning for the present may be achieved through narrative reflections (Straub, 2005). To illustrate, life is built around narrative stories to learn lessons and develop understanding. Jerome Bruner explains, "our capacity to render experience is terms of narrative is not just child's play, but an instrument for making meaning that dominates much of life in culture—from soliloquies at bedtime to the weighing of testimony in our legal system" (p. 97). Accordingly, narrative reflections in educational contexts can place stories and events as critical learning contexts for adults.

Adults have the ability to think about their childhood, teenage years, and young adult experiences. Using moral reflections as pedagogy, teachers can explore the experiences of students and encourage communal learning. Most schooling supports competitive practices. Instead of competing against each other, moral reflections could bring students together to learn how knowledge can be useful in real-life. Whether the learning is formal or not, teachers can use approaches to build each student's moral compass. Adult learners can use moral reflections, which are vastly different from reflections, because these learners are not just reflecting to recall information. When we think and utilize moral reflections, adult learners are capable of drawing on many, many experiences of their life in order to seek improvement—namely, self-improvement but also communal advancements.

Furthermore, moral reflections examine experiences and development of virtues. Understood in this way, adults realize how knowledge and virtues can grow together. Virtues are needed for knowledge to be used in altruistic ways. Honesty, responsibility, temperance, care, respect, just to name a few salient virtues, should certainly be linked with the acquirement of new ideas. Otherwise, we face issues of how knowledge can be developed for detrimental outcomes. In other words, knowledge holds the idea of being used in positive or negative ways. On the contrary, moral reflections as pedagogy for adult learners strive to use knowledge in only positive ways for self and others. Adults, unlike youth, can problem-solve in ways that understand the importance of reaching conclusions for life.

FINDING A MAP'S DESTINATION AND REACHING CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this article, I have endeavored to extend my voice to conceptions of moral reflection as pedagogy. I have argued that adult learners can take a lot from experiences and moral reflections. Specifically, adult learners might use moral reflections to better understand educational curriculum and life. Despite adult education being geared to practitioners of various fields, adult education programs fail to emphasize moral reflections. Reflecting for clarity is an important skill that may be learned. To summarize, schools could create a more meaningful curriculum and develop adult learners into problem-solving and compassionate people if they teach moral reflections as pedagogy. May we all find roads to happiness and develop communities of teaching, learning, and loving now even while we build toward a future in which those conceptions can endure. Last but not least, as we embrace life's lessons, may we reflect and find happiness in our souls, again and again and again.

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