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Identifying Your Educational Philosophy: Development of the Philosophies Held by Instructors of Lifelong-learners (PHIL)

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Abstract

The Philosophies Held by Instructors of Lifelong-learners (PHIL) was developed to identify a respondent's preference for one of the major schools of philosophical thought: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, or Reconstructionism. Using the pool of items from an established instrument, its final form and content validity were determined by a series of discriminant analyses. Criterion-related validity was established through a three-part process, and reliability was established through the test-retest process. PHIL is a short, user-friendly tool that is designed for self-assessment for instrumented learning.

Introduction

Many people are involved at various levels and in diverse settings in the education of adults. One of the characteristics of professional development activities among this diverse group of adult educators is an attempt to better understand the teaching-learning process. For teachers, this involves better understanding what we do in the classroom and why we do it. One way to accomplish this is for teachers to become aware of their educational philosophies because "true professionals know not only what they are to do, but also are aware of the principles and reasons for acting. Experience alone does not make a person a professional adult educator. The person must be also be able to reflect deeply upon the experience he or she has had" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 9).

Educational philosophy can serve as the frame of reference for effectively analyzing this reflective thinking. Since "a philosophical orientation underlies most individual and institutional practices in adult

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education" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 37), this reflective process involves an understanding of educational philosophy and of one's relationship to the various philosophical schools. "Developing a philosophical perspective on education is not a simple or easy task. It is, however, a necessary one if a person wants to become an effective professional educator" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. 268).

A first step in this professional development process can be the identification of one's educational philosophy. In the field of Adult Education, the major instrument that has been developed for this purpose is the Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (PAEI) by Lorraine Zinn (2004). The PAEI was based on the descriptions of the schools of philosophical thought in *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education* by Elias and Merriam (1980). This important book related the various educational philosophies to the field of adult education and challenged adult educators to think critically about their educational philosophy and how it relates to practice. While the PAEI is a very useful instrument for identifying detailed aspects of one's philosophy, it is time consuming for taking, scoring, and interpreting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop a user-friendly instrument that could be completed rapidly for identifying one's preference for an educational philosophy (see Insert). This was accomplished by creating and establishing the validity and reliability for an instrument based upon the items in the PAEI. The process of establishing this validity and reliability are described in detail because these are crucial features of any instrument and without them the instrument "should not be used" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 162).

What Is An Educational Philosophy?

An educational philosophy refers to a comprehensive and consistent set of beliefs about the teaching-learning transaction. The purpose of an educational philosophy is to help "educators recognize the need to think clearly about what they are doing and to see what they are doing in the larger context of individual and social development" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. x). Thus, it is simply "to get people thinking about what they are doing" (p. x). By doing this, educators can see the interaction among the various elements in the teaching-learning transaction such as the students, curriculum, administration, and goals (p. 268). This can "provide a valuable base to help us think more clearly" (p. x) about educational issues.

Philosophy is abstract and consists of ideas. "Philosophy is interested

in the general principles of any phenomena, object, process, or subject matter" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 3) and "raises questions about what we do and why we do it" (p. 5). It is "more reflective and systematic than common sense" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 38) and "offers an avenue for serious inquiry into ideas and traditions" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. x). Although it is theoretical, it is the belief system that drives an educators actions. Consequently, "your personal philosophy of teaching and learning will serve as the organizing structure for your beliefs, values, and attitudes related to the teaching-learning exchange" (Heimlich & Norland, 1994, pp. 37-38). These abstract concepts are operationalized in the classroom by one's teaching style. "Teaching style refers to the distinct qualities displayed by a teacher that are persistent from situation to situation regardless of the content....Because teaching style is comprehensive and is the overt implementation of the teacher's beliefs about teaching, it is directly linked to the teacher's educational philosophy" (Conti, 2004, pp. 76-77). Recent research confirms this link between the beliefs of educators about educational philosophy and their actions in the classroom (Foster, 2006; Fritz, 2006; O'Brien, 2001; Watkins, 2006).

Development of PHIL

Educational philosophy is "the application of philosophical ideas to educational problems" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. x). Many philosophers wrote about education because "education is such an integral part of life that it is difficult to think about not having it" (p. x). Thus, an analysis of one's educational philosophy can be framed in the context of the major philosophies. In Western thought, these major philosophies are Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, and Reconstructionism (Ozmon & Craver, 1981). In relating these to the field of adult education, Elias and Merriam (1980) titled these thought systems as Liberal Adult Education, Behaviorist Adult Education, Progressive Adult Education, Humanistic Adult Education, and Radical Adult Education. Unfortunately, the terms "liberal" and "radical" can have political overtones, and therefore one may want to substitute "classical" and "reconstructionist" for these terms (Zinn, 2004, p. 53). While Behaviorism is most often classified as a psychological theory, it has been expanded to include many of the elements of a philosophy and is related to modern Realism (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, pp. 188-190).

Regardless of the terms used, Idealism or Liberal Adult Education

believes that "ideas are the only true reality" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. 2) and that the emphasis should be "upon liberal learning, organized knowledge, and the development of the intellectual powers of the mind" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 9). Realism or Behaviorist Adult Education hold "that reality, knowledge, and value exist independent of the human mind" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. 40) with modern Behaviorism emphasizing "such concepts as control, behavioral modification and learning through reinforcement and management by objectives" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 10). Pragmatism or Progressive Adult Education "encourages us to seek out the processes and do the things that work best to help us achieve desirable ends" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. 80) and "emphasizes such concepts as the relationship between education and society, experience-centered education, vocational education and democratic education" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 10). Existentialism or Humanistic Adult Education is concerned with the individual and how humans can create ideas relevant to their own needs and interest (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. 167), and key concepts for "this approach are freedom and autonomy, trust, active cooperation and participation and self-directed learning" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 10). Reconstructionism or Radical Adult Education holds that society is in need of constant change and that education is "the most effective and efficient instrument for making such changes in an intelligent, democratic, and humane way" (Ozmon & Craver, 1981, p. 120); consequently, education can be "a force for achieving radical social change" (Elias & Merriam, 1980, p. 11).

The Philosophies Held by Instructors of Lifelong-learners (PHIL) is an instrument that was designed to identify a respondent's preference for one of these major schools of philosophical thought. These philosophical schools differ in (a) their view of what constitutes knowledge, (b) the nature of the learner, (c) the purpose of the curriculum, and (d) the role of the teacher (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). While variance may exist among individuals within a philosophical school based on their degree of commitment to these different concepts and to the combination of these different degrees of commitment, the differences among those within a philosophical school are not as great as the differences between the philosophical schools. PHIL only identifies placement in one of these major philosophical schools; it does not identify or measure degrees of variance within these schools. As such, placement is not designed as a label for stereotyping a person; instead, it is designed to stimulate critical thinking and reflection about the teaching-learning transaction (Conti & Kolody,

2004, p. 187).

PHIL was created by an approach that combines various multivariate techniques to construct user-friendly instruments that can be completed quickly and are designed for instrumented-learning situations (Conti, 2002). This process involves using a pool of items from established instruments and then using powerful multivariate statistical procedures to reduce the number of items in the new instrument and to gain clarity for writing the items for the new instrument. This process produces an instrument that quickly and accurately places the respondent in a category. Once this information is known, it can be used for self-analysis and self-improvement.

The first step in the development of any instrument is to identify a pool of potential items for the new instrument. The pool of items for developing PHIL was the 75 items of the Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (Zinn, 2004). As a result, the construct validity of PHIL is embedded in the validity of the PAEI. The exact wording of the items in PHIL and the instrument's content validity were established by using the results of a series of discriminant analyses with a data base of 371 adult education practitioners. Criterion-related validity was established by comparing the classification on the PAEI for 46 adult educators to their placement on PHIL, by comparing responses to selected PAEI items for the various groupings on PHIL for 71 teachers, and by self-reported accuracy for these 117 participants. Reliability was established by the test-retest method with 39 practitioners. Thus, field testing to develop PHIL involved 527 participants.

Construct Validity

Validity is concerned with what a test actually measures; while there are several types of validity, it has long been established that the three most important types recognized in educational research are construct, content, and criterion-related validity (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 457). These may be established in a variety of ways; however, they should be compatible with the overall purpose of the test (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 275).

Construct validity assesses the underlying theory of the test, and it asks the fundamental question of what the instrument is really measuring (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 167). It is the extent to which the test can be shown to measure hypothetical constructs which explain some aspect of human behavior (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 280). It is the element that allows for the

assigning of "meaning" to the test (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 461). The process of establishing construct validity for PHIL was to use the 75 items from the PAEI (Zinn, 2004) as a pool of items for developing the new instrument. Thus, the construct validity for PHIL was derived from the established validity for the items of the PAEI.

Content Validity

Content validity refers to the sampling adequacy of the content of the instrument (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 163). Although content validity is usually based on the expert judgement, the content validity for PHIL was assessed statistically because for PHIL content validity is concerned with the degree to which the items are representative of the five philosophical schools upon which the pool of items from the PAEI is based. Therefore, a series of discriminant analyses were conducted to determine the differences between each grouping. Discriminant analysis is a powerful multivariate statistical procedure for examining the differences between groups using several discriminating variables simultaneously (Kachigan, 1991, p. 216; Klecka, 1980, p. 5). This procedure produces a structure matrix which shows the interactions within the analysis and which can be used for naming the process that separates the groups (Klecka, 1980, pp. 31-34). When discriminant analysis is used with groups formed by cluster analysis or with groups like those in PHIL, it can be used for identifying the process that separates the groups and for describing the groups (Conti, 1996, p. 71). Several discriminant analyses were conducted. After each one, the findings from the structure matrix for the discriminant analysis were used to determine the wording of the items.

The database for constructing the items in PHIL consisted of 371 responses from community college instructors (Hughes, 1995), vocational rehabilitation professors (O'Brien, 2001), and adult education practitioners in Oklahoma and Montana. In order to start the data analysis, the logic of cluster analysis was applied to this database. That is, it was assumed that clusters or groups existed in the data in a hierarchical order. Just as the logic of experimental design can be used to understand other designs (Yin, 1994, p. 9), the logic of cluster analysis suggests that two distinct groups exist at the two-cluster stage. Based upon the descriptions of the five philosophies in the PAEI, it was hypothesized that the basic difference that separated the various philosophies at the two-cluster level was whether the philosophy supported either a learner-centered approach or a

teacher-centered approach to learning. Idealism and Realism were grouped as teacher-centered because these philosophies place a strong emphasis on the actions of the teacher to impart knowledge deemed necessary for the student to know. Pragmatism, Existentialism, and Reconstructionism were grouped as learner-centered because of their emphasis on the process of the personal development of the learner.

For the first discriminant analysis, the 371 participants were grouped as Teacher-Centered or Learner-Centered. The Teacher-Centered group consisted of the 115 participants in the philosophical schools of Idealism and Realism. The Learner-Centered group contained the 256 participants in the philosophical schools of Pragmatism, Existentialism, and Reconstructionism. Collectively, the relevant items in the structure matrix of the discriminant analysis indicated that the process that separated the two groups was the amount of teacher control in the learning environment (see Table 1). While the Teacher-Centered group supported control that fostered systematic movement toward defined objectives, the Learner-Centered groups favored a flexible environment that promoted learner's interests. This process was 87.6% accurate in discriminating between the two groups. The following precise item was written to describe this process: As an educator, I seek to create a classroom environment that has content and educational activities that are (a) Controlled with careful analysis by me of the material to be covered and concepts to be taught so that learners can systematically move toward the learning objectives [Teacher-Centered] or (b) Considerate of the learner's needs so that each learner can explore and make educational decisions in consultation with me [Learner-Centered] .

A second item in PHIL separates the Pragmatists and Reconstructionists from the Existentialists. For this discriminant analysis, the size of the groups were as follows: Pragmatists--191, Existentialists--56, and Reconstructionists--9. Collectively, the relevant items in the structure matrix of the discriminant analysis indicated that the process that separated the two groups was the focus of educational material (see Table 2). While the Existentialists group focused on the individual, both the Pragmatist and Reconstructionist groups focused on a problem external to the learner that can be addressed through instruction. The process that separated the Existentialists from the group of Pragmatists and Reconstructionists was 87.1% accurate in discriminating between the groups. The following item in PHIL describes this process: I believe that educational activities should (a) Start with the educator planning activities by identifying problems that

can be solved by the instruction [Pragmatism and Reconstructionism] or (b) Involve the learner in making key decisions in consultation with the instructor about what to include in the educational activity [Existentialism].

Table 1: Items Discriminating Between Teacher-Centered and Learner-Centered Philosophies

Corr.	No.	Item
-0.436	8C	In planning an educational activity, I try to create a controlled environment that attracts and holds learners, moving them systematically towards the objective(s).
0.367	2D	People learn best when they are free to explore, without the constraints of a "system."
0.351	1D	In planning an educational activity, I am most likely to assess learners' needs and develop valid learning activities based on those needs.
0.340	5A	Decisions about what to include in an educational activity should be made mostly by the learner in consultation with a facilitator.
-0.325	5E	Decisions about what to include in an educational activity should be based on careful analysis by the teacher of the material to be covered and the concepts to be taught.
0.321	6E	Good adult educators start planning instruction by asking learners to identify what they want to learn and how they want to learn it.
0.315	14E	My primary role as a teacher of adults is to facilitate, but not to direct, learning activities.
0.308	13E	Evaluation of learning outcome is best accomplished when the learner encounters a problem, either in the learning setting or the real world, and successfully resolves it.
0.303	9B	The learners' feelings during the learning process provide energy that can be focused on problems or questions.
0.300	7A	As an adult educator, I am most successful in situations that are unstructured and flexible enough to follow learners' interests.

Table 2: Items Discriminating Between Pragmatists and Reconstructionist Philosophies and the Existentialist Philosophy

Corr.	No.	Item
-0.437	6A	Good adult educators start planning instruction by considering the end behaviors they are looking for and the most efficient way of producing them in learners.
-0.431	5E	Decisions about what to include in an educational activity should be based on careful analysis by the teacher of the material to be covered and the concepts to be taught.
-0.424	6B	Good adult educators start planning instruction by identifying problems that can be solved as a result of the instruction.
-0.409	8D	In planning an educational activity, I try to create a clear outline of the content and the concepts to be taught.
0.396	5A	Decisions about what to include in an educational activity should be made mostly by the learner in consultation with a facilitator.

A third item in PHIL separates the Pragmatists and Reconstructionists. For this discriminant analysis, the Pragmatist group contained 56 respondents, and the Reconstructionist group contained 9 respondents. Collectively, the relevant items in the structure matrix of the discriminant analysis indicated that the process that separated the two groups was the purpose of the educational process (see Table 3). While the Pragmatist group focused on the learner's feelings, the Reconstructionist groups stressed the social and political impact of the learning. The process that separated the Pragmatists from the Reconstructionists was 95.0% accurate in discriminating between the two groups. The following item in PHIL describes this process: I believe that the effective instructor (a) Capitalizes on the learners' feelings during the learning process to accomplish the learning objectives [Pragmatism] or (b) Helps learners increase their awareness of significant social and political issues so that they can have an impact on these situations [Reconstructionism].

Table 3: Items Discriminating Between Pragmatists and Reconstructionist Philosophies

Corr.	No.	Item
-0.434	9D	The learners' feelings during the learning process are used by the skillful adult educator to accomplish the learning objective(s).
0.384	1A	In planning an educational activity, I am most likely to identify, in conjunction with learners, significant social and political issues and plan learning activities around them
0.379	15D	In the end, if learners have not learned what was taught they do not recognize how learning will enable them to significantly influence society.
0.374	7E	As an adult educator, I am most successful in situations where the learners have some awareness of social and political issues and are willing to explore the impact of such issues on their daily lives.
0.339	14D	My primary role as a teacher of adults is to increase learners' awareness of environmental and social issues and help them to have an impact on these situations.

A fourth item in PHIL distinguishes the Idealists from the Realists. For this discriminant analysis, the Idealist group contained 30 respondents, and the Realist group contained 85 respondents. Collectively, the relevant items in the structure matrix of the discriminant analysis indicated that the process that separated the two groups focused on feedback to the learner (see Table 4). While both groups favored providing feedback to the learner, the Realists supported it more strongly. This process was 97.4% accurate in discriminating between the groups. The following item in PHIL describes this process: I believe that people learn best (a) From expert instructors who know what they are talking about [Idealism] or (b) From instructors who emphasize practice and continually provide feedback to the learners [Realism].

Table 4: Items Discriminating Between the Idealists and Realists Philosophies

Corr.	No.	Item
0.300	10B	The teaching methods I use emphasize practice and feedback to the learner.
0.274	13B	Evaluation of learning outcomes should be built into the system, so that learners will continually receive feedback and can adjust their performance accordingly.
0.252	9B	The learners' feelings during the learning process provide energy that can be focused on problems or questions.
0.243	4D	Most of what people know they have gained through self-discovery rather than some "teaching" process.
0.239	1B	In planning an educational activity, I am most likely to clearly identify the results I want and construct a program that will almost run itself.

Thus, content validity was established by using a series of discriminant analyses to determine the exact process that separates the various philosophical schools. The structure matrix from each analysis was used to form the item for each item in the instrument. While PHIL has only a few items, each item is based on the powerful multivariate procedure of discriminant analysis, and each question identifies the process that separates two groups of philosophical ideas. Instead of using an approach which involves summing multiple attempts to identify a characteristic, PHIL uses discriminant analysis to precisely describe the content for each item.

Criterion-Related Validity

Criterion-related validity compares an instruments scores with an external relevant criterion variable (Huck, 2004, p. 90). While establishing criterion-related validity for most instruments is usually the very straight-forward procedure of comparing the new instrument to an established instrument or behavior, it is a more difficult procedure with an instrument created in the model used for PHIL. This is because this approach uses a multivariate process to create a new instrument from items that are scored

in a univariate format. Thus, the process of establishing criterion-related validity in essence involves trying to compare a whole that results from a synergistic analysis to its parts. This is difficult because as the cliche suggests, the total is greater that sum of its parts. Therefore, three separate things were done to assess the criterion-related validity of PHIL. First, criterion-related validity was established by comparing the group placement on PHIL to the preferred group rating on the PAEI; this provided a measure of the comparison of PHIL with the instrument from which the items were drawn to form it. Second, responses were collected for the various PAEI items from the structure matrices that were used to construct the items in PHIL. The means were compared for each of the groups involved in forming the item; this provided a comparison between the responses of the philosophical groups and the specific items from the PAEI that were used to identify them. Finally, the participants were asked to self-report on the accuracy of the PHIL placement for them after they had read a description of the philosophical groups; this provided a check between the response on PHIL and the real-world of the respondent.

Both the PAEI and the PHIL were completed by 46 educators who had taken a course on the foundations of adult education. Participants responded to both instruments on the Internet. Responses on the PAEI were summed, and the scores for each philosophical school were standardized as a percentage of the respondent's total score for all items of the instrument (O'Brien, 2001). The philosophical school with the highest percentage score was used as the person's philosophical preference. The correlation between the highest score on the PAEI and the placement on PHIL was .785 ($p < .001$). The group was distributed among the various philosophical schools as follows: Idealist--4 (8.7%), Realists--8 (17.4%), Pragmatists--7 (15.2%), Existentialists--23 (50%), and Reconstructionists--4 (8.7%). Almost all (91.3%) of the respondents felt that PHIL had placed them in the proper philosophical school.

In a typical criterion-related validity analysis, scores on one instrument are compared to those on another. However, different sets of items in PHIL are used to identify the various philosophical groups. Therefore, separate analyses were conducted for each set of items that were used to distinguish the various groups. Responses were gathered from 71 teachers in the Tulsa Public Schools for PHIL and for the items from the PAEI that were in the structure matrices for forming the items in PHIL. Thus, the group placement in PHIL was compared to the criterion of the items from the PAEI that were used for group placement. Ten items were used from the

structure matrix for the discriminant analysis between the teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches to form the first item in PHIL. The 48 in the learner-centered group scored higher as was expected on eight of these items than the 23 in the teacher-centered group; they scored slightly lower on one item; the groups were equal on the other item. For the second item in PHIL, five items from the PAEI separated the Existentialists from the Pragmatists and the Reconstructionists. The 37 Existentialists scored lower as was expected than the Pragmatists and Reconstructionists on 3 of the 5 items. However, on two of the items they scored higher. For the third item in PHIL, five items from the PAEI were used to separate the Pragmatists from the Reconstructionists. The six Reconstructionists scored higher as was expected than the five Pragmatists on all five of the items. Finally for the fourth item in PHIL, there were three items from the PAEI that separated the Idealists from the Realists. There was only one Idealist in the group, and on all three of the items, the Idealist scored lower as was expected than the 22 Realists. Thus, for each set of items from the various structure matrices, the groups identified by PHIL scored as was expected on the items that were used to form the items for PHIL; these scores were strong for three of the four analyses while they were mediocre for one. Moreover, 93% of the respondents felt that PHIL had placed them in the correct philosophical group.

Thus, because of the multivariate procedure that was used for creating PHIL, criterion-related validity was assessed in three different ways. Because of the strength of the correlation between placement on PHIL and on the PAEI, because of the same relationship between scores on the selected items in the PAEI and placement on PHIL, and because of the extremely high testimony by respondents of the accuracy of the group placement by PHIL, it was judged that PHIL has criterion-related validity.

Reliability

"Reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 169). Reliable may be measured as either stability over time or as internal consistency. The reliability of the PHIL was established by the test-retest method which addresses "the degree to which scores on the same test are consistent over time" (p. 171). PHIL was administered to a group of 39 adult education practitioners with a 2-week interval. The coefficient of stability for these two testing was .742 ($p < .001$). This is above the generally accepted

minimum coefficient of .7 for assessment instruments (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 324).

Description of PHIL

PHIL consists of four items that are organized in a flow-chart design (see insert). Each item begins with a sentence stem that leads to two options. Each option leads the respondent to another box which either instructs the respondent to proceed to another page with an additional item on it or which provides information about the respondent's correct group placement. Once the group placement is identified, the respondent is directed to the page with the descriptions of the various educational philosophies. By responding to two or three items, a respondent's preference for an educational philosophy can be identified. Depending upon a person's reading level, PHIL can be completed in approximately 1 to 3 minutes. Although PHIL appears to be a very simple instrument, its contents are based on powerful multivariate statistical procedures.

Discussion

"Most adult educators want to be the best they can be and are willing to work to improve. They can do so by understanding how their beliefs and behaviors relate to teaching and learning" (Heimlich & Norland, 1994, p. 3). This path to continuous self-improvement and professional development should start with an assessment of one's educational philosophy. Respected leaders in the field of adult education have long stressed the need for systematically identifying one's working philosophy and using it to guide practice (Apps, 1976, 1989). Developing such a conscious knowledge of one's beliefs and values can foster a "sensitivity to what we do and why we do it", help "us consider alternatives--other ways of doing what we do", and nurture an awareness of "our fundamental beliefs and values" (Apps, 1989, pp. 17-18); "ultimately, an analysis of our foundations as a teacher can help empower us" (p. 18). PHIL can be used as a tool to initiate this critical analysis.

Using PHIL in this way is a form of instrumented learning. Instrumented learning uses instruments to provide information for participants so that it can be used for various types of self-improvement (Blake & Mouton, 1972). This information is provided in a context and in relationship to a particular model so that the participant can use it to focus

learning. With PHIL, the goal is to get a quick and accurate group placement in one of the established educational philosophies so that the planning of learning can begin.

A key element of instrumented learning is metacognition. "Metacognition is popularly conceived of as thinking about the process of thinking" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 9). "Simply put, learning instruments provide adult learners with metacognitive references for reflecting upon their experiences. Thus, the instrumented learning process is analogous to the learning process of reflective practice" (Hulderman, 2003, p. 86). Since one's educational philosophy encompasses the person's values and beliefs, an awareness of these choices can inform the educator of things that need to be done to implement adult learning principles. While these learning principles are stable, there are various ways to implement them. Knowing and reflecting upon one's personal philosophy can help educators determine how to more effectively apply these learning principles; this in turn can lead to more reflection. Along the way, "your working philosophy may change--indeed, in most instances it will change--as you face new challenges and problems. But the process for examining and find-tuning your beliefs can serve as a constant" (Apps, 1989, p. 27).

Thus, a knowledge of your educational philosophy can help you in many ways in your professional practice. First, it can help you know yourself better. Research shows that when instructors are consistent in their teaching style, students are able to learn more effectively (Conti, 1989). While some like to think that their approach to the teaching-learning transaction is unique, the reality is that the actions in the classroom are congruent with elements of one of the major philosophies. The key element of a philosophy is that all of its parts are consistent with each other. Those who are eclectic are in fact practicing behaviors that are in conflict with each other. This behavior by the teacher can send confusing messages to the learners and inhibit them in employing the full strengths of their individual learning styles and strategies. It is equivalent to hugging them one day and pop quizzing them the next. By becoming aware of how your actions relate to the various philosophies, you can consciously make your teaching style consistent. This leads directly to the second benefit of providing an environment for students to empower themselves for greater success in your classroom. Third, by understanding your philosophy and how the characteristics of the various philosophies are practiced by your colleagues, you can interact with your colleagues in a more professional rather than personal way, and "many current debates on educational policy

and practice could be conducted more rationally if basic philosophical differences were clarified" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 38). Fourth, a knowledge of your philosophy can help clarify how you relate to the mission and goals of the organization in which you work. Finally, this knowledge of your professional beliefs can help clarify how you relate to specific field in which you teach and to the overall field of education. Thus, your knowledge of your educational philosophy can stimulate reflective thinking at many levels of your professional practice. An instrument such as PHIL can be a useful tool for starting this personal journey of increased understanding of professional practice.

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Appendix

Attached as an insert is a copy of PHIL that you may reproduce and use. To use it, print the two pages of PHIL back-to-back on one sheet of paper. Fold the outside edges toward the center of the page on the lines marked “fold”. This will produce an instrument that is 5.5" x 8.5" with the directions on the left-hand flap and with the name of the instrument (PHIL) on the right-hand flap. To replicate the original, print on light blue paper.

PHIL™

Philosophies
Held by
Instructors of
Lifelong-learners

Considerate of the learner's needs so that each learner can explore and make educational decisions in consultation with me.

Open this flap, and proceed to the next box.

Fold Here

Continue from front flap.

I believe that the effective instructor:

Capitalizes on the learners' feelings during the learning process to accomplish the learning objectives.

Helps learners increase their awareness of significant social and political issues so they can have an impact on these situations.

You are in Group 3.

You are in Group 5.

Go to the **Description of Philosophies** section in the middle of the other side of this page. Read the description of your educational philosophy.

Fold Here

Directions: Read the sentence stem in the box below, and choose one of the two options that best applies to you. Follow the arrow, and ***flip open your flap.*** Continue the process until you find the number for your group. Only read the material in the boxes to which you are sent.

As an educator, I seek to create a learning environment that has content and educational activities that are:

Controlled with careful analysis by me of the material to be covered and concepts to be taught so that learners can systematically move toward the learning objectives.

Open this flap, and proceed to the next box.

I believe that people learn best:

From expert instructors who know what they are talking about.

From instructors who emphasize practice and continually provide feedback to the learners.

You are in Group 1.

You are in Group 2.

Go to the **Description of Philosophies** section in the middle of this page. Read the description of your educational philosophy.

Description of Philosophies

Group 1 is **Idealism** which holds that *ideas* are the only true reality. This philosophy goes back to ancient Greece and claims greats such as Socrates and Plato. This school seeks to discover true knowledge rather than create it. The aims of the philosophy are to search for truth and further the character development of learners. The role of the teacher is to serve as a guide for immature learners, judge important material, and model appropriate behavior. The instructional process is holistic, seeks to develop critical thinkers, and deals with broad concepts rather than specific skills. This is a content-centered approach to education with a heavy emphasis on seeking universal truths and values and with a strong and defined role for the teacher.

Group 2 is **Realism** which holds that reality exists independent of the human mind; matter in the universe is *real* and independent of man's ideas. This philosophy grew out of the Age of Enlightenment and strongly supports the use of the scientific method. Its aims are to understand the world through inquiry, verify ideas in the world of experience, teach things that are essential and practical, and develop the learner's rational powers. The instructional process seeks to teach fundamentals, encourage specialization, and teach the scientific method. The role of teacher is to present material systematically, encourage the use of objective criteria, and be effective and accountable. **Behaviorism** is congruent with this broader teacher-centered philosophy.

Group 3 is **Pragmatism** or **Progressivism** and is associated strongly with the works of John Dewey. It seeks to inquire and to then do what works best; that is, it seeks to be *pragmatic*. However, everything centers on the human experience. It seeks to promote democracy by developing strong individuals to serve in a good society. It supports diversity because education is the necessity of life. Its aims are to seek understanding, coordinate all environments into a whole, teach a process of inquiry, and promote personal growth and democracy. The instructional process is flexible with a concern for individual differences and for problem solving and discovery. In this learner-centered approach, the role of the teacher is to identify the needs of the learner and to serve as a resource person.

Group 4 is **Existentialism** or **Humanism** and draws heavily from the ideas of Carl Rogers. This philosophy focuses on the individual and believes that individuals are always in transition. People interpret the world from their own perceptions and *construct* their own realities. Its aims are to promote self-understanding, involvement in life, an awareness of alternatives, and the development of a commitment to choices. Learning is viewed as a process of personal development which seeks to provide learners with options. The role of the instructor in this learner-centered philosophy is to be a facilitator. The cornerstone of this philosophy is trust between the teacher and learner.

Group 5 is **Reconstructionism**. It strongly believes that education can be used in *reconstructing* society. In order to achieve social justice and true democracy, change rather than adjustment is needed. This philosophy is futuristic and takes a holistic view of problems. Its aims are to encourage social activism and the development of change agents. Its purpose is to empower people to think critically about their world, develop decision-making abilities, get involved in social issues, and take action. The role of the teacher in this learner-centered philosophy is to help learners develop problem-posing skills and lifelong-learning skills. This school of thought has been greatly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton.

I believe that educational activities should:

Start with the educator planning activities by identifying problems that can be solved by the instruction.

To continue, ***flip this sheet over***, and go to the box that says "Continue from front flap."

Involve the learner in making key decisions in consultation with the instructor about what to include in the educational activity.

You are in Group 4.

Go to the **Description of Philosophies** section in the middle of this page. Read the description of your educational philosophy.