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Applying Constructive– Developmental Theories of Adult Development to ABE and ESOL Practices

Deborah Helsing
Eleanor Drago-Severson
Robert Kegan

When adult educators walk into classrooms or workshops, they find a diverse group of learners who at one moment can draw on a rich store of life experiences and at the next may resist new ideas that challenge what they already know. Adults tend to be highly motivated to learn *yet* will sometimes focus on evaluations or grades rather than on learning. They think of themselves as "self-directed" *yet* they may feel shortchanged when an educator explains that she intends to be less a source of answers than a resource for learning. . . . Many adults who have successfully managed their own professional development nevertheless sometimes revert to classroom strategies that [previously] worked for them ("How many pages?" "Will this be on the test?"), generally trying to do "what the teacher wants." In the training environment, learners may seek to improve their job performance yet may deny themselves the practice it takes to develop the new skills.

—Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler (2000, p. 3)

Educators who have been frustrated by adult students in the just-mentioned ways may have wondered about the source of these differences and how

the differences can be best addressed.[1] In focusing exclusively on grades and correct answers, are these students simply being practical? Is the preference for self-direction or teacher-led classrooms simply a matter of past educational history or personal learning style? We suggest that by looking at these matters through the lens of adult developmental theories, particularly constructive–developmental theory, adult educators may gain a new understanding of the reasons for and implications of these differences in our students.

Most adults are familiar with the developmental differences they see among children. For a typical 4-year-old the future hardly seems real, and he or she may find it hard to wait to get something or to consider the consequences of actions. Captive of impulses, the child may have difficulty sitting still or keeping quiet. A 4-year-old does not distinguish between the unlimited potential of his or her fantasies and the rules of reality. But we expect 10-year-olds to understand themselves and the world in very different ways. We expect them to follow rules and anticipate consequences for their actions. We expect them to distinguish between fantasy and reality. We see that they have a whole different way of knowing and understanding their world (Kegan et al., 2001b).

Teachers of children have long understood the importance of considering their students' developmental capacities in order to facilitate the educational process. Knowing how a child conceives of the world enables a teacher to understand who that child is and what he or she needs to learn and grow. But how familiar are we with the different ways of knowing that adults use to understand their worlds? How well do we understand what adult learners need to continue to learn and to grow?

Although the adult students in any one classroom may be classified as similar in their skill level or familiarity with a subject matter (e.g., as beginners in math or as intermediates in computer skills), there are likely to be important differences in the ways that they take in, organize, understand, and analyze new material and skills. Adult educators may recognize some of these differences as deriving from fixed sources such as race, gender, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or learning style. But what if these differences result, in large part, from adult students' different developmental capacities? What if this more mutable source powerfully

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[1]Portions of this chapter appear in similar form in *Toward a "New Pluralism" in the ABE/ESOL Classroom: Teaching to Multiple "Cultures of Mind"—A Constructive Developmental Approach* (Kegan et al., 2001b) and/or its executive summary (Kegan et al., 2001a). They are used by permission of the publisher, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

explains why in some classrooms the very same curriculum, activities, and teaching behaviors can leave some learners feeling excited, with their needs well met, whereas others feel deserted or lost? In such cases, teachers may be using materials or strategies that are intended to reach everyone in the class but in fact are attuned to students at one developmental stage and neglect students at other stages. A teacher's enhanced capacity to support all students in a class, across a range of developmental levels, is likely to make more students feel recognized and valued for the meanings they bring to their learning (Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001b; Helsing, Broderick, & Hammerman, 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow, Diamond, & Rimer, 2001). Students who are adequately and appropriately supported and challenged academically are likely to learn more.

KEY ISSUES AND THEORIES IN ADULT DEVELOPMENT

The underlying premise of adult developmental theory is that processes of mental development do not occur only during childhood but continue throughout adulthood. Adults, like children, move through a series of qualitatively distinct levels in the complexity with which experience is organized or understood. Movement from one level to another occurs as a process of interaction between individuals and their environment that influences many dimensions of an individual's life (including cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experience; Kegan, 1982; Popp & Portnow, 2001). One key difference among theorists is the distinctions made between these levels or stages. Some distinguish stages in terms of the tasks adults generally undertake at different ages or phases in their lives (see, e.g., Levinson, 1978, 1996), whereas others distinguish stages in terms of degree of complexity, depicting the ways that the mind of an adult continues to grow and become more complex (see, e.g., Kegan, 1982, 1994). In this chapter we provide a brief sketch of two common models of development: age or phasic models and models based on gender differences. Then we describe a constructive–developmental model, illustrating how it might both incorporate aspects of these other models and provide the most useful framework for understanding differences in the psychological capacities of adult learners. We pay particular attention to a study supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Innovation (Kegan et al., 2001b) because it is the only study

we know of that applies constructive–developmental theory specifically to learners in adult basic education (ABE) and in classes for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).[2]

Age/Phasic Models

Some life cycle and adult developmental theorists (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1964, 1968; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Scarf, 1980; Vaillant, 1977; Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996; Wortley & Amatea, 1982) depict development as an individual's journey through distinct life phases: infancy, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. According to life cycle theorists, the physical, social, psychological, and emotional changes that individuals experience at given phases of their lives are interrelated and age dependent, following a predictable and some-what uniform course. In our 20s, for example, we are supposed to formu-late a dream that concerns our goals and vision for our future career (Levinson, 1978, 1996; Scarf, 1980).

Age or phasic models of adult development may help educators to illu-minate important similarities and differences in students engaged in age-related life tasks. In fact, research illustrates that, as a group, adult learners differ from traditional-age college students in terms of their learning style, motivation, assertiveness, and goals for attending college (Apps, 1981; Brookfield, 1987; Knowles, 1984; Knox, 1981; Mezirow & Associates, 1990). A teenage student experimenting with developing greater inde-pendence from his or her parents and with the formation of intimate rela-tionships may have concerns and motivations very different from those of a student in his or her mid-30s who is juggling the roles of student, parent, spouse, and worker. These two students may require and benefit from quite different forms of support if they are to thrive academically while coping with their life transitions. One way of meeting these differing needs is through the development of mentoring relationships in which students can find the support and challenge they need to make transitions in their lives (Brookfield, 1987; Daloz, 1986). Educators can also help students by explicitly discussing the types of stress students may experience as a result

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[2]From 1998 to 1999, Kegan et al. (2001b) were part of a research group that studied 41 adult learners from around the world who were enrolled in three different U.S. ABE pro-grams at a community college, a family literacy site, and a workplace site. As develop-mental psychologists and educators, we wanted to understand how these adult learners experienced their program learning. For a full report of this study, see Kegan et al. (2001b).

of multiple forms of transition, role conflicts, and the loss of former ways of being (Wolf & Leahy, 1998).

Although age or phasic models can be helpful, they also have been found to be somewhat limited in accounting for many important differences among students. They do not sufficiently account for the complexities and variations of culture, gender, and life experience (Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001), and they do not explain how individuals of the same age, facing the same major life tasks, might understand these tasks in fundamentally different ways (Kegan, 1994).

Relational Theories—The Role of Gender

Some scholars argue that traditional age or phasic models do not provide accurate descriptions of women's development. Traditional models tend to frame development as a process of increasing independence, psychological separation, and autonomy (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Taylor, 2000), qualities commonly expected of men as they mature. In contrast, women are encouraged to define themselves in relation and connection to other people (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Miller, 1991; Ross-Gordon, 1999; Taylor & Marienau, 1995). Some theorists (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Taylor & Marienau, 1995) have thus reasoned that developmental models should be devised to account for the unique patterns of change in women's lives. Gilligan (1982), for example, whose work has focused on women, showed that characteristics such as empathy, intimacy, and a concern for preserving relationships are not necessarily signs of weakness, deficiency, and immaturity, as earlier models, which were based solely on men, had suggested. In illuminating the value and integrity of women's perspectives on relationships, Gilligan (1982) noted that women are more likely to approach and understand moral problems in terms of an ethic of care, placing concern for important others as paramount. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to apply an ethic of justice, relying on rules and procedures to resolve moral problems.

Many researchers and scholars who focus on women's development have highlighted the importance of attending to the relational aspects of the learning process (Fiddler & Marienau, 1995; Flannery, 2000; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996; Taylor & Marienau, 1995). In fact, Caffarella (1996) outlined the following four guidelines adult educators should utilize to address the importance of relationships and women's learning needs:

(1) use collaborative interaction as one of the fundamental ways to plan and organize learning experiences; (2) foster a climate for learning where learners and instructors support each other in the learning process, both in and out of formal learning situations; (3) use a cooperative communication style; and (4) recognize that feelings are a critical part of fostering relationships in learning experiences. (pp. 40–42, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, pp. 109–110)

Belenky et al., (1986, p. 214) described the importance of establishing a more collaborative and student-centered model of teaching as "connected teaching," arguing that teachers and classrooms that are structured according to these principles may cultivate development and learning among women, working against traditional and male models of teaching that may inhibit or even reverse women's growth. In the last few years, researchers have also begun to reconsider assumptions about the development of boys and men that have led to cultural and educational misunderstandings and the mistreatment of boys and men (Gurian, 1996, 1999; Gurian & Henly, 2001; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Levant & Pollack, 1995; E. Newberger, 1999; Pollack, 1998, 2000).

Constructive–Developmental Theories

Constructive–developmental theorists suggest that qualitative differences in the ways that individuals make sense of their experiences are not exclusively linked to matters of age, life phase, or gender.[3] Instead, these theorists describe developmental differences in terms of the complexity of individuals' meaning-making abilities. As we interact with our environment, we make sense of our experience, and through this interaction and negotiation—sometimes fitting our experience to mental models, sometimes adjusting our mental models to fit our experience—our meaning systems may gradually evolve and grow more complex. The pace of this growth and change varies, such that even two people of the same age may differ in the complexity of their meaning systems. Because constructive–developmental theories focus not only on changes within the individual but also

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[3]We acknowledge Nancy Popp and Kathryn Portnow for their summary of constructive–developmental theory. This section is a revised form of chapter 2 (Popp & Portnow, 2001) in *Toward a "New Pluralism" in the ABE/ESOL Classroom: Teaching to Multiple "Cultures of Mind"—A Constructive Developmental Approach* (Kegan et al., 2001b). It is used by permission of the publisher, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

on the context in which the individual is situated, they can accommodate theories that look at the ways that race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation can influence development.

In this chapter, we focus primarily on constructive–developmental approaches to adult development for three reasons. One reason is that the underlying principles of an adult's belief system shape every experience he or she has. By gaining a better understanding of these belief systems and the ways in which they can change, we can improve our understanding of the ways in which ABE and ESOL students experience learning in general and learning in the classroom. We gain a better understanding of what different students need in order to learn. The second reason is that in integrating concerns about the individual person as well as the surrounding context, these theories can incorporate key principles of other developmental theories that highlight one particular feature or domain of development. For example, the constructive–developmental models of Belenky et al. (1986), Baxter Magolda (1992), and Kegan (1994) all incorporate explanations of possible distinctions between genders. The third reason is that these theories offer a developmental perspective, as well as specific suggestions, on the most effective ways to support and challenge adult learners. From a developmental perspective, support, in its broadest sense, is confirmation of the learner and his or her current efforts. It includes, for example, positive feedback of all kinds, clear and explicit communications and directions, affirmation of what the learner already knows, and response to the learner's perceived needs. Challenge, in its broadest sense, is encouragement to stretch beyond what is currently familiar and comfortable to achieve some new level of competence. It focuses on what remains to be done rather than on what has already been accomplished. It may involve ambiguities, with the intention that the learner takes a more active role in decision making. Educators may also, after appropriate consideration, challenge adults by not responding to certain of their expressed desires (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 326).

Constructive–developmental theories are an extension of the work of Jean Piaget (1952, 1963, 1965), who saw each child as a kind of philosopher, someone whose beliefs and understandings arise from a distinctive way of knowing, with a coherence, wholeness, and dignity all its own. Piaget (1952) observed and interviewed children to illuminate the different forms of reasoning they were able to use to solve problems. He elaborated a continuum of stages, from infancy through adolescence, that depicts the ways in which children develop increasingly complex and distinct ways of making sense of a situation. In the last 30 years, many other researchers

have built on the work of Piaget.[4] One study (Kegan et al., 2001b) applies Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive–developmental theory of adulthood to learners in ABE and ESOL settings. To our knowledge, it is the first time this theory has been extended to a sample that includes mostly nonnative speakers of English and that is diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, age, past educational experiences, socioeconomic status, and social roles.

These theories are referred to as *constructive–developmental* because they consider the ways in which our beliefs construct the reality in which we live and the ways in which these beliefs can change or develop over time. When considered from this perspective, our beliefs amount to an interpretive lens through which we make meaning. This lens filters the way each of us takes in, organizes, understands, and analyzes our experiences. Constructive–developmental theories suggest that our relationship to these beliefs is not casual, random, or strictly idiosyncratic. Rather, these beliefs are durable for a period of time. They reflect an inner logic and coherence. They are central to our identities. The world we construct through our way of knowing may seem to us less the ways things look than the way they really are (Drago-Severson et al., Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b). We construct increasingly complex systems of meaning to better understand ourselves and our experiences in an increasingly complex world (Popp & Portnow, 2001). Our gradual evolution from a simpler way of knowing to more complex ways of knowing depends on the nature of the supports, challenges, and encouragement that are available to us.

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[4]Popp and Portnow (2001) provided a helpful summary of the scope of this work: Researchers and theorists of a neo-Piagetian persuasion have built on the key concepts of Piaget's research, extending the study of cognitive development beyond the development of Piaget's last stage of cognitive development, abstract thought (Basseches, 1984; Commons et al., 1990; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kohlberg, 1969, 1981; Perry, 1970). Other constructive–developmentalists have applied the key tenets of Piaget's framework to different domains of human development, such as adult learning and higher education (Belenky et al., 1986; Daloz, 1986; Macuika, 1990; Perry, 1970; Weathersby, 1976), moral and spiritual development (Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg, 1969, 1981; Parks, 1986), social and psychological development (Noam, Powers, Kilkenny, & Beedy, 1990; Selman, 1980), skill development (Kitchener & Fischer, 1990), and self- and identity development (Harter, 1999; Kegan, 1982, 1994). Constructive–developmental principles have also been used to research role capacity, particularly in exploring the ways in which increasing complexity in adult thought intersects with professional effectiveness and role leadership (Kegan & Lahey, 1983; Torbert, 1976, 1987, 1991), role efficacy and understanding as parents (C. Newberger, 1980; Roy, 1993; Sonnenschein, 1990), and spousal role communication and family patterns (Goodman, 1983; Jacobs, 1984, pp. 2–3).

Some readers may wonder if we are suggesting that higher levels are intrinsically better than lower levels or that a person is a better person just for having a more complex meaning system. We are not. We prefer to look at this question in terms of the natural learning challenges people face in their lives. If the complexity of one's meaning system is sufficient to meet those challenges, then there may be no need to construct a more complex meaning system. But if the complexity of the challenges and demands one faces surpasses the complexity of one's meaning system, then it would indeed be better, in a practical sense, to expand the capacity of one's meaning system (Drago-Severson et al., 2001a; Kegan, 1994).

CONSTRUCTIVE–DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY AND ADULT LEARNERS

Constructive–developmental theories emphasize the many differences in students' underlying belief systems that influence the ways in which they may understand their experiences.[5] These theories suggest, for example, that students will bring deeply held assumptions about the nature of knowledge to the educational enterprise. As Belenky et al. (1986) noted in their introduction to *Women's Ways of Knowing:*

> We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality. (p. 3)

Moreover, students' assumptions about the nature of knowledge also influence their goals for themselves as learners, their understanding of the role of student and teacher, their interactions with knowledgeable

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[5]We acknowledge Maria Broderick for devising this overview and synthesis of developmental theories and their application to adult learning. It appears in a slightly different form in chapter 4 (Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001) of *Toward a "New Pluralism" in the ABE/ ESOL Classroom: Teaching to Multiple "Cultures of Mind"—A Constructive Developmental Approach* (Kegan et al., 2001b). It is used here by permission of the publisher, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

authorities (texts and teachers), and their satisfaction with their learning experiences. Teachers may recognize evidence of a student's commitment to a particular way of knowing in his or her expectations of teachers, opinions about coursework, or apparent ease or difficulty in meeting certain academic requirements. A teacher who understands how students' ways of knowing shape their learning experiences has powerful information with which to support their growth.

Students' understanding of the nature of knowledge will also change as they develop more complex capacities of mind. As they increasingly recognize the constructed nature of knowledge, they move away from conceptions of knowledge as being handed down from authorities or made up only of concrete facts and literal meanings. They increase their ability to evaluate any claim to knowledge based on the premises behind it and the appropriateness of the argument being made. Developmental educators who work with adults believe that these transformations can help learners master increasingly complex tasks as they progress through educational systems. These transformations can also enable learners to achieve the goals of critical literacy: to recognize, oppose, and organize against social and economic injustices (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Freire, 1981; Quigley, 1997). Because these types of change do not unfold naturally and may in fact be resisted by learners, developmental educators have to facilitate change by challenging students' current understandings. To offset the potentially damaging impact of extreme challenge, developmental educators must also build into the educational experience useful and timely supports that will help students who are being asked to stretch their current conceptual frameworks.

The Development of Adult Learners

Developmental theorists who have studied adult learning have for the most part concentrated on the transformations of mind that college students undergo during 4 years of liberal arts education. In the various frameworks constructed through research, developmental educators aim to explicate the stages or phases that learners go through (ideally or in practice) as they expand their capacity for critical thinking. Although adult students may differ from traditional-age college students in terms of age and life experience, some constructive–developmental theorists have found that these groups "do not appear to be dramatically different" (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 170) in terms of their developmentally related cognitive capaci-

ties, such as demonstrations of reflective thinking. Furthermore, samples of ABE and ESOL learners who vary in age, educational background, social class, country of origin, ethnicity, gender, and social role vary in their developmental levels along a continuum not unlike those found in studies with a similar range of diversity among participants' socioeconomic status (Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Portnow et al., 2001). The profile of ABE and ESOL learners does not show a skew toward the low end of a developmental continuum, and the differences in capacity are not highly associated with level of formal education (Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Portnow, et al., 2001). Thus, we have reason to suppose that developmental trajectories based on traditional-age college student populations also apply to those of nontraditional adult student populations.

If there is a key lesson on traditional settings of higher education that is broadly applicable to adult education in all settings, it is this: Adult learners can undergo important transformations of their perspectives that shape the way they understand, embrace, and (sometimes) resist education. Adult learners can anticipate having the ground of understanding shift as they engage in learning experiences that challenge their frame of mind. Educators of adults benefit from understanding what forms these shifts will take and what forms of instruction can elicit them.

Many adult learning researchers in this tradition (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Kegan, 1982, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; Weathersby, 1980) state an intellectual indebtedness to William Perry (1970), the first developmentalist to explore adult students' meaning making and to cast his views into a framework. Researchers who study the development of adult learners also tend to focus on cognitive abilities (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1970; Weathersby, 1980). Fundamentally, it is the identification of students first as knowers that sets developmental schemes apart from other models of adult learning. However, a person's underlying beliefs shape and influence multiple aspects of his or her life, including emotions, self-understanding, and interactions and relations with others. In taking on the role of student, the individual may prioritize cognitive abilities and growth, but we argue that it is also important to consider these other domains of students' lives, which surely have an impact on their learning experiences.

Four Levels of Adult Development in Learning

Although individual theorists have their differences (in terms of the number of levels they describe or the distinctions between the types of learners who share a level), they generally agree about the nature and direction of developmental growth. Next, we summarize the levels identified in five models (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Kegan et al., 2001b; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1970) directly derived from studies of adult learners primarily in higher educational settings using a Piagetian perspective. Based on extensive discussion with students, these models offer representations of students' own descriptions of their knowing and provide a rubric for locating students in the trajectory of their own development and for defining appropriate developmental challenges. This section is not intended to be an exhaustive review or rich critique of each of these perspectives. Instead, it is an opportunity to delineate some key elements of and differences in adults' views of knowledge and knowing, as well as to emphasize the implications of these differences for students' understandings of the learning and teaching process. Table 5.1 provides an example of how learners at different developmental levels conceive of one aspect of their learning—their understanding of what makes a good teacher.

Level 1. Across the five models summarized in Table 5.1, the descriptors vary, as do the number of levels represented. In the most global sense, however, it is possible to sketch a common trajectory. The first major position, level, stage, or way of knowing evident in all five models is characterized primarily by the learners' commitment to an absolutist stance toward knowing (Perry, 1970). Knowledge is seen as "certain or absolute" (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 75), and learners do "not understand that real problems exist for which there may not be an absolutely correct answer" (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 47). Learners at this developmental level understand knowledge as something directly observable and based on facts that are not subject to multiple interpretations. Learners who view knowing through this frame are philosophical dualists: They perceive a polar distinction between what they believe to be true or false. As Perry (1970) wrote, "From this position, a person construes all issues of truth and morality in . . . terms of a sweeping and unconsidered differentiation between in-group [and] out-group. The division is between the familiar world of authority-right-we [and] the alien world of illegitimate-wrong-others" (p. 59).

These students understand their roles in terms of how well they can "obtain knowledge" (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 75) from their instructors. They believe that good students study hard, follow clear instructions and rules, find the right answers, get good grades, and possess the correct facts and skills. They expect their instructors to communicate knowledge clearly, giving them the rules to follow to get the right answers. Good instructors make sure that the students understand the subject matter (Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Portnow, et al., 2001).

Level 2.   With growth and differentiation, students begin to revise their ideas about the absolute certainty of knowledge. In what Baxter Magolda (1992) named "transitional knowing," the learner recognizes that some knowledge is only "partially certain" (p. 30). This is a state brought about, in the learner's view, not by the relative nature of truth but by the incomplete state of knowledge in certain disciplines or subdisciplines. Knowledge will ultimately be complete, but that ideal state has not yet been realized by authorities in the field. Movement to this level signals an awareness or acknowledgment that uncertainties exist in what is known, but it does not necessarily indicate a tolerance for the incomplete state of knowledge. Rather, the learner "accords pluralism of thought and judgment the status of a mere procedural impediment intervening between the taking up of a problem and finding the answer" (Perry, 1970, p. 78).

These learners do not simply obtain knowledge but are interested in understanding it so that they can apply it in class as well as to other parts of their lives (Baxter Magolda, 1992). They begin to understand themselves as students in terms of their internal characteristics—their attitudes toward themselves and the subjects they are studying. When they have learned something they can feel it; but they also look to the teacher for acknowledgment that they have learned (see, e.g., Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001b; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Helsing, Drago-Severson, et al., 2001; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow, et al., 2001). Seeking rapport with teachers, these students focus on teachers' human qualities, appreciating kindness, patience, caring, and encouragement (Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001b; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001b; Portnow, et al., 2001).

Level 3.   With further growth, the learner comes to understand that uncertainty of knowing does not depend solely on the status of truth but has more to do with the nature of truth. Models vary in the number of

TABLE 5.1
Adult Learners' Conceptions of Good Teachers

Level, Stage, Position, or "Way of Knowing"[a]	*Corresponding Development Levels From Three Constructive–Developmental Theorists*	*Adult Learners' Conceptions of Good Teachers*	*Comments From Learners*[b]
Level 1	Absolutist stance (Perry, 1970) Absolute knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992) Instrumental way of understanding (Kegan, 1982, 1994)	Good teachers show learners how to learn. Good teachers give learners their knowledge and the rules they need to follow to get the right answers. When these learners can do something (demonstrate a behavior) and when they get a good grade (a consequence), they know that they have learned.	Good teachers "give you that little push" . . . they "make me learn . . . explain how to do it, ask you to write it down, and you write down exactly how to do it. Then we'd do it."
Level 2	Dualism (Perry, 1970) Transitional knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992) Socializing way of understanding (Kegan, 1982, 1994)	Good teachers care about learners and explain things to help them understand knowledge. Good teachers really listen and offer support. Good teachers know what is good for learners to know and tell learners what they should know. Good teachers are described as having certain qualities; they are kind, patient, and encouraging. These learners feel inside when they have learned something and the teacher acknowledges that in them.	Good teachers "keep explaining things in different ways, show you different ways to learn . . . help you feel important and accepted . . . never forget you." Good teachers have a "kind heart"; they "don't give up on students." "If you don't have a good teacher, you're not going to be self-confident." "If [the teacher] doesn't teach you the way you learn good, that doesn't help you."
Level 3	Between dualism and the full emergence of relativism (Perry, 1970) Independent knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992)	Good teachers encourage and support students' independent thinking. They care about students as people and understand learners' backgrounds, and this support helps students with their learning. Good teachers listen	Good teachers "consider when you are asking a question, they answer you, they don't ignore you." "They really understand people and care for their students." "I can ask a good

TABLE 5.1 *(Continued)*

Level, Stage, Position, or Way of" Knowing"[a]	Corresponding Development Levels From Three Constructive–Developmental Theorists	Adult Learners' Conceptions of Good Teachers	Comments From Learners[b]
	Socializing/self-authoring transitional way of understanding (Kegan, 1982, 1994)	to student feedback so they can improve their own teaching. Good teachers are described as polite and patient, and they help their students learn what they need to learn to pursue their goals.	teacher for help with what I know I do and do not understand." "I think it's very tough for a teacher to teach and listen and explain all the time."
Level 4	Multiplicity correlate or relativism subordinate (Perry, 1970) Contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992) Self-authoring way of understanding (Kegan 1982, 1994)	Good teachers promote application of knowledge in context. They support evaluative discussion of various perspectives. Good teachers are one source of knowledge, and these adult learners see themselves and their classmates as other sources. These students think that good teachers use a variety of teaching strategies in their practice and help them meet their own internally generated goals. They know that they have learned something, and when they have, they can then think of different ways in which to teach what they know to others.	Good teachers "understand their students." "She learned from me, I learn from her." "No matter how good a teacher you have, if you don't really want to learn, you're not going to learn nothing." Good teachers "make learning interesting. It has to be interesting to the student." "What you do with knowledge after it's given to you is of your own choosing." Good teachers "do their jobs and help me to do better, I'm proud of that."

Note. Adapted from chapter 7 (Drago-Severson, 2001) and also drawn from chapter 4 (Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001) of *Toward a "New Pluralism" in the ABE/ESL Classroom: Teaching to Multiple "Cultures of Mind"—A Constructive Developmental Approach* by R. Kegan et al. (2001b). It appears here by permission of the publisher, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

[a]The terms *level, stage, position,* and *way of knowing* are used interchangeably by developmentalists. Each is understood to represent an internally consistent frame of reference from which the learner interprets educational experience.

[b]From Kegan et al. (2001b).

levels named as part of this transition, but they are fairly consistent in their descriptions of the overall framework. Here, the realization dawns that truth is neither ultimate nor singular "but multiple and infinite" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 63). In an ironic twist, the learner who previously embraced authority's perspective on truth as unquestionable now maintains that "all opinions are equally valid; everyone, including the self, has the capacity and the right to hold his or her own opinions" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 63). The quality of the learner's feelings and attitudes about knowledge shift; the perspective moves from one of a search for ultimate answers and certainty to an openness that reflects the tentative abandonment of authority. Baxter Magolda (1992) found that the word *openness* captured the core assumptions of learners at this stage of knowing. She explained:

> They believed that knowledge was open to many interpretations, that people should be receptive to others' ideas, that instructors should be open to students' ideas, and that many possibilities existed in the choices confronting them. This openness facilitated the emergence of individually created perspectives because the risk of being wrong was eliminated. Because knowledge could be seen in so many ways, there was no obligation to make judgments about various views. Although independent knowers did make decisions about what to believe, they rarely identified criteria upon which these should be based. Thus, the independent knowers were free to think for themselves, and they could use their voices with minimum risk. Subsequently, they valued expressing their opinions in all realms of learning and expected others to do the same. (p. 146)

The development of relativism makes possible the beginnings of critical thinking. To reflect on their own assumptions or on the precepts of his or her community, learners first must be able to detect the multiple assumptions that make up any claim to truth. Yet, to bring critical faculties fully to bear on the determination of which truth to privilege, learners must further develop standards and criteria by which to assess multiple claims to truth.

These students want to think for themselves, develop their own perspectives, and share them with others in the class. These students may acknowledge their peers as legitimate sources of knowledge, but they may also be "impatient and dismissive of other people's interpretations" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 84) as a way of protecting and defending their own stance and authority. These learners expect their instructors to promote and reward independent thinking (Baxter Magolda, 1992) and value instructors who nurture and affirm their thoughts and values.

Level 4.   In making the move to this level of learning, the learner shifts from relativism to a formal appreciation of how context affects the interpretation of what is worthy or the truth and how evidence can be evaluated on the basis of its origins and the rigor with which it was developed. As Baxter Magolda (1992) observed, "Contextual knowers incorporated the exchange and comparison of views in their learning process, which was aimed at thinking through knowledge claims and integrating information in order to apply it within a context" (p. 177). The learner at this level makes use of authoritative views in a field as potential perspectives on which truth may be built but not as voices that determine that truth. Learners at this level have come to respect not the status of authority but the process through which an authoritative argument is constructed. Critical thinking is fully possible, and the tools through which it can be readily applied are now meaningful for the learner.

Learners at this stage view good students as those who can create and explain their own complex ideas, which may differ from teachers' ideas. They can construct their own standards for self-evaluation and take responsibility for their own learning. These students are able to offer feedback to teachers about their teaching and expect that good teachers will listen. They appreciate teachers who use a variety of teaching strategies and who encourage students to evaluate the validity of an argument (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001b; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001b; Portnow et al., 2001).

Admittedly, the four levels briefly reviewed here collapse important transition steps and cloud interesting distinctions between models. Some models delineate multiple moves between these levels or identify the different ways in which different groups of learners within any one level may express a position. We believe, however, that the range of perspectives and values depicted in this trajectory is likely to represent the range of developmental levels adult educators have in any given classroom. This means that students will have fundamentally diverse understandings and expectations of their teachers, themselves, their peers, and the subject matter.

Transformation and Transformational Learning

As Cranton noted, "Transformational learning occurs when an individual has reflected on assumptions or expectations about what will occur, has found these assumptions to be faulty, and has revised them" (Cranton,

1994; Mezirow, 1991, as cited in Cranton, 1996, p. 2). Although each level of development or way of knowing has its own strengths and limitations, each successive level represents growth in the capacity to organize and reflect on experience. This growth occurs when individuals experience challenge, an experience that disturbs their current belief system and calls on them to reconfigure that belief system on a new, more complex level. Constructive–developmentalists refer to these changes as transformations. However, such growth can be a painful and difficult process, requiring the person to relinquish core beliefs. According to Perry (1970), because each step in the process of development is "a challenge to a person's previous assumptions and requires that he redefine and extend his responsibilities, his growth does indeed involve his courage" (p. 44). Many of us do not seek out such changes to our way of knowing and may actually resist such invitations to change the whole way we understand ourselves and our world. Kegan (1994) reminded us that "only a fraction of the adults entering school programs do so with the hope or intention of personally growing from being in school. Most have what they . . . would consider far more *practical* goals" (p. 293). We can understand these more practical goals as *informational* learning, learning that "primarily focuses on the acquisition of more skills and an increased fund of knowledge" (Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Seveson, & Kegan, 1998, p. 22), whereas *transformational* learning not only increases knowledge but, more important, "leads to deep and pervasive shifts in a [person's] perspective and understanding" (Portnow et al., 1998, p. 22).

The concepts underlying transformation may be most familiar to readers of Paulo Freire (1981, 1989) or Jack Mezirow (1990, 1991, 1996).[6] According to Freire (1981), students and teachers engage in dialogue to explore issues central to students' life experiences and interests for the purpose of developing an "increasingly critical understanding" (p. 46) of the surrounding culture. Ultimately, this heightened awareness can lead to greater political and social democratization. Mezirow (1996, p. 162) also subscribed to the emancipatory power of learning, believing it can counter the corruption caused by unequal social power and influence. For both

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[6]Note that neither Freire nor Mezirow relied on constructive–developmental theory as the basis for his model of transformation. Furthermore, despite Mezirow's (1989, 1992, 1994, 1996) claims to the contrary, some critics suggest that, unlike Freire, Mezirow did not provide enough emphasis on social action against injustice in his conception of transformation (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law; 1989; Cunningham 1992; Hart, 1990; Tennant, 1993).

theorists, the process by which these changes occur shares many features of the developmental understanding of transformation. As Merriam and Caffarella (1999) noted:

> Mezirow's and Freire's approaches to adult education emphasize the importance of inner meaning and mental constructs in defining the nature of learning in adult life. Key to both of their theories is change—change brought about by critical reflection on the origin and nature of our submerged assumptions, biases, beliefs, and values. Tentative new understandings and new meanings are tested out in discourse with others. The process does not end there, however. Our new meanings, perspectives, or consciousness need to be acted on. (pp. 325–326)

Similarly, the models developmentalists put forward are not value neutral. Growth in these models is desirable; higher levels of development are viewed as advances that learners would be well served to accomplish. As with education generally, goals are inherent to the developmentalists' perspective, and these goals preference steady movement in the direction of greater capacity. According to Perry (1970):

> The word "growth" suggests that it is *better* to grow than to arrest growth or to regress. . . . The values built into our scheme are those we assume to be commonly held in significant areas of our culture, finding their most concentrated expression in such institutions as colleges of liberal arts, mental health movements and the like. We happen to subscribe to them ourselves. We would argue, for example, that the final structures of our scheme express an optimally congruent and responsible address to the present state of man's predicament. These are statements of opinion. (pp. 44–45)

It is not, in other words, a commonly held opinion among developmental educators that a Level 1 frame of reference and a Level 3 frame of reference are equally adequate for all tasks a learner might face. However, in seeking to encourage transformations, we should be aware that development is a gradual process and that complete transformations commonly take years to occur.[7] Furthermore, the nature of and impetus for transformation varies across individuals, as does the timing. Every person grows at a unique pace. Yet, there is some evidence to suggest that one's environment may support or constrain the motion of development.

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[7]All adult educators do not agree on this point. For example, Mezirow (1996, 2000), who is not a constructive–developmentalist but who does write about transformations, identified some types of changes that can occur rather suddenly.

The Holding Environment

The exercise and transformation of our ways of knowing always occur in some context. The British psychologist D. W. Winnicott (1965) coined the term *holding environment* to refer to the psychosocial environment that supports the healthy development of an infant. Others, notably Erikson (1968) and Kegan (1982), have since worked out conceptions of the holding environment throughout the life span. The idea of *holding* "refers not to keeping or confining, but to supporting (even 'floating,' as in an amniotic environment) the exercises of who the person is" (Kegan, 1982, p. 162). A healthy holding environment can, therefore, affirm individuals as they are as well as assist in their development.

A good holding environment serves three functions (Kegan, 1982, 1994). First, it must *hold well,* meaning that it recognizes and confirms students as they are currently making meaning without creating frustration or demands for change. Second, a good holding environment lets students move on when they are ready, challenging them to grow beyond their existing perceptions to new and more complex ways of knowing. Third, a good holding environment remains in place to recognize and sustain individuals' growth and change. Although some ABE and ESOL classrooms may have difficulty providing the kind of longer term continuity and availability suggested by this third characteristic of good holding, any classroom can include the first two features; programs with very different structures can provide learners with substantial benefits (Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Drago-Severson, Helsing, Kegan, Popp, Broderick, & Portnow, 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow et al., 2001).

Holding environments encourage growth when they supply an optimal balance of challenge and support (Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 1982, 1994). Too much support without enough challenge may be comfortable but insufficiently stimulating, and adult learners whose classrooms are overly supportive may feel bored or disengaged or remain dependent on the program. Conversely, too much challenge without enough support can generate defensive resistance and withdrawal, and adult learners who are overly challenged may feel threatened, alienated, and overwhelmed. McGrath and Van Buskirk (1999) noted that the community college environments that "are particularly successful in educating at-risk populations" achieve an optimal balance between challenge and support. They provide safe places for students to try out new identities and new ways of

behaving while structuring out anxiety-producing considerations. They stated that:

> By helping students reinterpret their experiences in ways that build a sense of competence, they allow them to concentrate on the task at hand. . . . At the same time that these programs "hold" students in a safe and supportive environment they also encourage independence so that they can move on. As students develop new competencies, they must shift their attention to the future and move on to new educational or professional settings. The programs must shift their orientation from immediate support to promoting a sense that the organization will still "be around for them. . . ." This balance of "holding on" and "letting go" that Kegan describes as essential to adult development (Kegan, 1982) produces graduates who are neither alienated from the organization nor overly dependent on it. (pp. 32–33)

SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATIONS IN ADULT LEARNERS

Some constructive–developmental theorists provide specific descriptions of how these theories can inform classroom practice (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Kegan, 1994; Kegan et al., 2001b; King & Kitchener, 1994). There are also adult educators (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton 1994; Freire, 1981, 1989; Mezirow, 1991, 1996) who do not identify themselves as constructive–developmentalists but who do describe the ways in which adult learning experiences can cause shifts of consciousness or transformations in learners (Taylor et al., 2000). Because the attention to processes of transformation is quite consonant with key principles of adult development, teaching practices drawn from or inspired by these theorists and educators are included here.

First, however, one key point should be made about this group of educators. Often, the types of transformations they wish to facilitate in learners do not account for how learners might move from Level 1 to Level 2 or from Level 2 to Level 3. Instead, they tend to focus on one particular transformation—that of the most complex kind we describe (to Level 4). They attend to or seek to support students' ability to be self-directed learners and critical thinkers who can welcome multiple perspectives on a given issue and can consider themselves and their peers as sources of authority in the classroom. For example, Freire (1981, 1989, p. 66) advocated "problem-posing education," which encourages learners to reflect on imbalances of

power in their lives to transform them. He was looking for learners who can enter into new, more liberated and collegial relationships with teachers. To support the development of critical consciousness, educators[8] are thus advised not to simply present students with facts and information but to encourage them to develop and express their own ideas and understandings about the subject matter.

These teaching practices would appropriately support learners who are developmentally poised near Level 3 or Level 4, but they may not be very supportive of learners who are solidly stationed at or around Level 1 or Level 2. These learners demonstrate motivation and enthusiasm for learning when teachers act as authority figures and keepers of knowledge. They report feeling mystified when asked to be equal partners in teaching and learning. Because these learners may not be ready to take on the types of learning associated with Levels 3 and 4, teachers who insist on utilizing only these practices in the classroom will find many learners who are overwhelmed and undersupported (Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001). Thus, developmentally conscious educators will not only teach in ways that expect and reward students' capacities to demonstrate higher stage ways of thinking and acting but will also find ways of meeting students at their level. Tinberg and Weisberger (1998) noted that "the journey is not the same thing as the destination" (p. 54) and cited Kegan's (1994) metaphor of "bridges" that can be constructed to help students toward the gradual accomplishment of higher level reasoning over time. We present the following recommendations for practice in this spirit so that they may serve as bridges that connect to all students' ongoing development.

The Student–Teacher Relationship

As Taylor et al. (2000) noted, "though some people succeed in growing and changing without [a mentor or] guide, it is a much lonelier and more difficult process, and like any challenging journey undertaken alone, more prone to missteps, injury, and losing one's way" (p. 330). Researchers in

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[8]Previously in this chapter, we used the pronoun *we* to refer to ourselves as researchers and authors. In studying and writing about theories of adult development, we have also been quite interested in the implications of these theories for our own and others' work as teachers. We offer some ideas about these implications in this second half of the chapter. Because it could be confusing to readers to shift the use of the pronoun *we* to include both ourselves and others as teachers, we tried to avoid using pronouns for the word *teachers* where possible and resorted to *they* in a few instances. It is not our intention, however, to sound prescriptive or preachy, an unfortunate potential consequence of using the pronoun *they.*

the field of adult development suggest that teachers' knowledge, experience, and teaching personality can both support and challenge students. One dimension of the teaching role that can encourage transformational learning is that of the teacher as advocate, counselor, or mentor (Belenky et al., 1986; Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 1994; Daloz, 1986). In taking on this role, teachers may bolster students' sense of self-worth and the expectations they hold for themselves, providing a climate of safety in which "the risk of exploring new ideas is minimized" and students are "encouraged to experiment in ways that [they] might not otherwise try" (Daloz, 1986, p. 226).

Teachers can also consider how issues of authority may be perceived by and may influence learners. Here, there is an interesting disagreement among advocates of transformational learning that the developmental perspective may illuminate. Some educators (Cranton, 1994; Daloz, 1986; Freire, 1981, 1989; Taylor et al., 2000) believe teachers should project less formal authority, with the goal of empowering learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Taylor et al. (2000) suggested that "one of the more effective ways of abandoning our [teachers'] pedestal is to admit being human, flawed, and still engaged in our own process of growth and development" (p. 305). Similarly, Daloz (1986) advocated the importance of self-disclosure from mentors and teachers, stating that such openness blurs authoritative lines and can empower students "to see more deeply" (p. 177). But, as we suggested, all learners may not be developmentally ready to take full responsibility for their learning. Although student self-direction may be the ultimate goal, teachers who abandon the position of expert or authority may also be abandoning those students who rely on authorities as the source of their own values (Grow, 1991; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan, 1994).

Instead, teachers can exert authority to show students actively and explicitly how to become more responsible for their learning (Gajdusek & Gillotte, 1995). Teachers can do so by modeling developmentally related skills, such as critical thinking, and welcoming and developing in students a greater complexity of understanding (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 1994; Daloz, 1986; Fiddler & Marienau, 1995; Gajdusek & Gillotte, 1995) by using exemplary student work as models (Gajdusek & Gillotte, 1995), mirroring students' ideas and actions to help make their assumptions explicit (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 1994; Daloz, 1986), using evocative language such as rich metaphors that offer students new ways of thinking about the world (Daloz, 1986), and employing techniques such as brainstorming and envisioning alternative or preferred future scenarios

(Brookfield, 1987; Daloz, 1986). Finally, teachers can talk frankly with students about the ways that social power structures operate in the larger culture, learning institutions, and classrooms, providing students with opportunities to increase their awareness of the ways in which such factors influence their own and others' experiences (Brookfield, 1987; Freire, 1981, 1989; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

In coordinating these multiple aspects of their role, teachers need to exercise a flexibility and responsiveness to learners' different needs and abilities and to the nuances of classroom life. In assessing how to best support students' thinking at any given time, teachers may have to shift from one strategy or role to another. Brookfield (1987) named this flexibility and responsiveness "critical teaching," wherein teachers function sometimes as "catalysts of discussion and inquiry, sometimes as contributory group members. We perform such diverse roles as being advocates for missing perspectives, adversaries to propaganda, recorders of sessions, mediators of divisive tendencies, and resource persons" (p. 80). Similar to the models of teaching advocated by Freire (1981, 1989), Mezirow and Associates (1990), and Belenky et al. (1986), this type of involvement and on-the-spot decision making demonstrates great depths of engagement, personal commitment, versatility, and awareness on the part of the teacher.

Student Assignments

As Taylor et al. (2000) noted,

> Using experience as a basis for learning can be both liberating and constraining. Learners who have just begun to trust in their own *voice*—for whom knowledge formerly resided in others, including educators and authority figures—feel empowered when their experience becomes text. However, there is a crucial distinction between using one's experience as *a text* for learning . . . and using it as *the only text* (p. 313).

Although teachers can employ a developmental perspective to teach any subject, certain subject areas and assignments lend themselves better to this perspective than others. For example, when students are asked to relate subject matter directly to their own lives through the use of journals, autobiographical assignments, and reflective writing assignments about their learning, they are being encouraged to step back from their experiences to examine them and the assumptions behind them (Armstrong, 1998; Cranton, 1994; Drago-Severson, 2001; Gajdusek & Gillotte, 1995; Portnow et al., 2001; Rossiter, 1999; Walden, 1995). As Rossiter (1999) explained,

> The process of telling one's story externalizes it so that one can reflect on it, become aware of its trajectory and the themes within it, and make choices about how one wishes to continue. Thus, learning activities in which learners are encouraged to draw autobiographical connections, to work with their own stories, and to reflect on alternative plots for their lives are key to education that is responsive to individual developmental trajectories. (pp. 68–69)

In attending to the richness of any one learner's story, the teacher can play the important role of a supportive and encouraging listener as well as the role of a critical friend or coach who can ask questions and help clarify the assumptions at work in the stories.

The specific ways that teachers construct and communicate these assignments can make developmental demands on learners. For example, students making meaning at Level 1 can relate the facts and circumstances of their own experiences, but they have difficulty generalizing and theorizing about these experiences and may experience frustration, confusion, and discomfort when asked to reason abstractly in these ways (Tinberg & Weisenberger, 1998). Among those students who are able to reason abstractly about their experience, some (those making meaning at Level 2) may be uncomfortable if asked to provide a critical evaluation of their own experiences or to assess contradictory information and opinions expressed by authorities. Some who feel comfortable expressing their opinions and making their own decisions (e.g., those making meaning at Level 3) may not be able to identify the criteria on which these opinions and decisions should be based (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Student Interactions

Teachers must also develop the ability to manage the group dynamics in a classroom, especially regarding ethical issues and conflicts (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 1994; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). In part because of differences in developmental capacity, some students (those making meaning at Level 4) are likely to feel that ethical disagreements and debates, even about deeply held values, are exciting and supportive of their learning. However, other students (those making meaning at Level 2) may experience such conflicts as threatening and confusing. These students may be looking to their teachers to settle disputes and declare what is the truth on a matter.

A certain amount of conflict and disagreement may be necessary to help students make their underlying assumptions more explicit and can provide the kind of challenge necessary for students to reconsider these assump-

tions (Brookfield, 1987). Still, some educators caution that such issues must be handled carefully. Rather than structuring conversations in a manner that polarizes differing perspectives, which often leads students to become more deeply entrenched in their own position, teachers should use dialogue to help students "engage with different perspectives, different ways of viewing a problem or a phenomenon" (Daloz, 1986, p. 226). It is important to maintain a climate in which each student's values are respected and in which students are free from pressure to change those values (Cranton, 1994). One strategy that can help students explore differences of opinion in a less charged atmosphere is asking a student to summarize the comments of another student before expressing his or her own opinion. Teachers can also ask students to engage in role plays in which they take on a perspective different from their own and defend it (Brookfield, 1987).

Teachers often employ collaborative learning strategies in the classroom to promote transformational learning (Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow et al., 2001). In a research study with ABE and ESOL learners, Drago-Severson and Berger (2001) found that different models of collaborative learning seem to work best with learners at different developmental levels. For example, learners making meaning at Level 1 might appreciate collaborative learning activities that help them achieve specific, concrete behavioral goals. Learners making meaning at Level 2 or Level 3 might value collaborative work for the important emotional and psychological support it can offer as they balance the multiple demands in their lives, such as work, family, and school. Learners making meaning at Level 4 might want to focus on how to appreciate the different perspectives that other students bring to any particular learning activity and how to use these differences to broaden their own perspectives.

Teacher Development

As Taylor et al. (2000) noted,

> Educating others . . . is a developmental challenge. No matter how seasoned an educator we might be, all of us constantly struggle with making meaning of our teaching and training experiences and strive to learn from them. Many of us recognize that as adult educators we are also adult learners, and that engaging in critical self-reflection about our existing assumptions, values, and perspectives can further prompt our development" (p. 317).

The primary focus of a teacher's work is the growth and learning of students, but teachers are also engaged in growing and learning, and these processes—the students' and the teacher's—are interrelated (Lyons, 1990). Teachers who are aware of and attend to processes of self-development increase the chances not only of finding fulfillment but also of becoming better teachers.

The foremost developmental tool for practitioners is described in the literature on reflective practice (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton 1994; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schön, 1983). According to this literature, when teachers recognize a problem in practice that cannot be resolved easily, they may need to examine and perhaps modify the fundamental assumptions or deep-seated beliefs at work in their teaching. To do so, they may try to gather more information about how students experience their classes and to experiment with alternative methods of instruction. Such pursuits can lead to the development of new theories about both the student and the teacher, as well as about the processes of learning and teaching. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) viewed reflective practice as "a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development" (p. 19). They maintained that the self-awareness that comes with reflective practice is necessary for behavioral change and that this kind of awareness is difficult to attain because every individual's theories in use (the assumptions on which personal behavior is based) are not easily articulated.

The fundamental goal of reflective practice is to improve one's teaching (Bright, 1996; Brookfield, 1995; Osterman & Kottcamp, 1993), including an emphasis on the psychological well-being and development of the teacher. Brookfield (1995), for example, contended that reflection can help teachers ground themselves emotionally so that they are not completely governed by the day-to-day ebbs and flows of the classroom or by students' expressions of resistance or eagerness to learn. When teachers work to clarify and question their underlying assumptions, they can develop a more robust rationale for practice that can serve as the basis for even the most difficult teaching decisions.

Teachers can also benefit from participating with colleagues in groups designed to support professional development (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; McDonald, 1992; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). The purposes of these groups might be to provide an environment for personal support and idea exchange, arrange for peer observations and feedback, discuss examples of student work, examine and experiment with

the ways the work of teaching is understood and discussed, and develop and share case studies or autobiographies of teaching experiences. All of these activities can help teachers identify and perhaps modify the assumptions at work in their own and others' practice, and they can also lead to changes on a more institutional or organizational level.

Other School-Based Supports

Certain features of program design help to create effective holding environments for developmental transition and transformation. We briefly discuss two: ancillary supports and the cohort effect.

Students who can rely on ancillary supports such as tutoring services, access to course-related computer software, therapeutic and psychological counseling services, and extensive academic advising and mentoring are more likely to be well-held by their institution. These services can provide learners with the academic and emotional support they may need to continue their development. For example, when protracted conflicts arise among students or between students and their teacher, learners who are not developmentally ready to generate their own critiques of their classroom experiences may need to be counseled about their option to (and the procedures to) drop a class (Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001).

Another feature believed important to student development is the change that occurs when a group of learners ceases being merely a class and becomes a *cohort,* a tightly knit, reliable, common-purpose community of learners (Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001). Researchers supporting this view challenge the belief that adults, who often enter a program with well-established social networks, are less in need of entrée to a new community than, for example, older adolescents, who are psychologically separating from their families of origin and who have not yet established new communities (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Cross, 1971, 1981; Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001b; Knowles, 1970, 1975; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow et al., 2001). Cohorts, or learner networks, can make a critical difference to students' academic learning as well as their emotional and psychological well-being (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton 1994; Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001b; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow et al., 2001).

Learner cohorts can also provide members with opportunities to clarify and broaden their perspectives and assumptions. The sharing of ideas can

challenge students to experiment with and enact new ways of thinking and behaving, serving as a catalyst for some students to make developmental transitions and transformations. It may not be possible to design every program such that learners all enter and exit at the same time and study together toward the same goal, but program developers can look for ways to maximize the consistency, cohesion, and endurance of learner cohorts within existing programmatic restraints (Drago-Severson & Berger, 2001; Drago-Severson et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b).

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS, PROGRAM DESIGNERS, POLICYMAKERS, AND RESEARCHERS

An adult developmental perspective has multiple implications for teaching and learning in ABE and ESOL settings.[9] Not only does it help teachers understand how students are making sense of their classroom experience, it also helps teachers form realistic expectations for students and find ways of helping students grow to meet new challenges.

A New Pluralism in the ABE and ESOL Classroom

By orienting themselves to diversity of developmental level in addition to the other important types of diversity among learners, ABE and ESOL teachers and program developers can achieve powerful new insights into learners' experiences and the ways in which programs can best respond to learners' strengths and needs. Learners who share a developmental position also share important ways of understanding themselves, their learning, and their environment. These similarities reach across many aspects of learners' lives, including the ways they conceive of their learning experiences, their aspirations, their classrooms and teachers, the programs and institutions in which they are enrolled, and their relationships to their own and other cultures (Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson & Berger,

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[9]A similar version of these implications appears in *Toward a "New Pluralism" in the ABE/ESOL Classroom: Teaching to Multiple "Cultures of Mind"—A Constructive Developmental Approach* (Kegan et al., 2001b) and its executive summary (Kegan et al., 2001a). The material appears here by permission of the publisher, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Popp & Boes, 2001; Portnow, et al., 2001). A teacher who can support all of the students in a class, across a range of ways of knowing, can increase the chances that more students will feel recognized and valued for the meanings they bring to their learning. Students who are adequately and appropriately supported and challenged academically are likely to learn more and feel more competent. Teachers may need to utilize a wider variety of instructional designs, encompassing a better understood range of adult learners' ways of knowing (Drago-Severson et al., 2001b; Helsing, Drago-Severson, et al., 2001).

Research with ABE and ESOL learners has found that students who share a developmental level also share assumptions about the student–teacher relationship (Drago-Severson, 2001; Helsing, Broderick, et al., 2001; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Portnow et al., 2001). For example, students operating primarily at Level 1 or Level 2 may be more responsive to a teacher-driven approach, whereas learners making meaning at Level 3 or Level 4 may prefer a student-driven approach. For teachers who aim to extend themselves to the broadest possible range of students, a developmental perspective can serve to lend meaning to potentially puzzling differences in student responses to the teacher's practice and presence. It may serve to build tolerance for these differences and point to possibilities for enhancing flexibility in teaching style. And it can help teachers gauge the ways in which innovations in practice might be received by students who have grown accustomed to other forms of pedagogy.

Adult educators might, therefore, use a developmental perspective to ensure that students' preferences are taken into account when debating the merits of different forms of instruction. Considerations of how to pace the introduction of new forms of thinking such as self-reflection or critical inquiry can benefit from a developmental perspective. Program designers and teachers can better or more fairly set expectations for the time it will take to help students build higher order thinking skills when they are aware of the enhanced developmental capacities such a goal implies (Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b).

Toward More Appropriate—and Varied— Expectations

An awareness of adult development can inform teachers' expectations for students. Popp and Boes (2001) described how many desired skills or competencies can be successfully performed from a wide range of devel-

opmental stages, although the purposes and nature of the performance will differ at each stage. For example, competence for students making meaning at Level 2 would involve taking responsibility for their own learning by making sure to follow the teacher's rules and by completing assignments according to the given instructions. Students making meaning at Level 3, however, would experience competence in exercising their own sense of authority over the best way to learn something, relying on the teacher for support and validation.

Appropriate goals for one student's performance will be inappropriate for another student who is operating with different developmental capacities. Any subject matter or general skills goal might be appropriate if it is taught at a level of complexity that matches the learner's developmental capacity (Popp & Boes, 2001). Educators may do well to consider the different ways students can demonstrate competence and to scrutinize the overall program goals and individual lesson objectives for ways in which they may be inappropriately cueing students to perform at a certain level of complexity in their meaning system. Does a particular instructional design favor students at one developmental stage over those at another? Are there ways to make sure students at other developmental stages are also engaged?

Practitioners can also benefit by remaining alert to the ways in which learners' meaning systems can change over time so as to support students' emerging identities and capacities. In inviting development, educators should consider the potential costs as well as the gains to individual learners. Rather than imposing expectations on learners in the form of curricular or programmatic requirements, teachers should meet students at their particular level, orienting themselves to students' existing frames of knowing.

We suggest, therefore, that ABE and ESOL teachers can improve their practice by increasing their familiarity with the theoretical and practical insights of adult development theories. A background in these theories may be relatively uncommon among practitioners, however, because many have teaching certification in K–12 programs, which are more likely to stress issues of child and adolescent development (Perin, 1999). But several states are now developing ABE teaching standards or certification programs. Massachusetts recently developed qualifications for a new ABE teaching license that is somewhat unique in its scope and depth, legal status (recognized, although not required, by the state), and attention to issues of adult development (Mary Jayne Fay, personal communication, August 2, 2001). Providing ABE teachers with this type of knowledge of

the unique and diverse needs of adult learners can lead teachers to better understand students' current capacities as well as potential for growth.

Program Design: From Either–Or to Both–And

In the realm of adult literacy and learning, there are familiar and long-standing debates between advocates of progressive, student-centered designs; those favoring cognitive, skill-based designs; and those who promote critical or emancipatory designs. Because the theoretical literature highlights the tensions and disagreements, it pays scant attention to the ways in which the perspectives might interrelate and complement each other (Wray, 1997). Each side of the debate seeks to persuade practitioners of the importance of accepting its point of view and devalues and criticizes the others. Each comes with prescriptions and moral mandates for teachers' and program developers' actions. Practitioners, therefore, face decisions about how to regard these conflicting perspectives. One strategy for addressing this dilemma would be to choose from the theories in either–or terms. One might then choose, for example, to be a skills-centered teacher or a learner-centered teacher or a catalyst for personal, social, and political emancipation.

A developmental perspective offers an alternative stance, one that embraces and integrates these positions. This perspective neither favors nor condemns one particular educational philosophy or approach to program design, recognizing that no one particular theory of instruction can address the developmental needs of all learners. What would be least helpful would be to design programs and provide instruction in a way that meets the developmental needs of only one type of learner.

For example, one approach to skills-based education might utilize a very concrete, highly scaffolded type of learning. In such a class, students might engage in rote learning that involves the memorization and accumulation of facts and information. Although these facts and skills may be important and this type of curriculum might appeal to some learners (especially those making meaning at Level 1 or Level 2), it would likely underwhelm those at higher stages and also underprepare them for the types of work they are ready to do.

Similarly, it would be unhelpful for progressive, learner-centered instructors to expect all students to be able to prioritize the needs of the group over their individual needs without providing some supports and scaffolding for learners who have not yet developed these capacities. Furthermore, learner-centered instructors might also consider how to help

some students (those who are making meaning at Level 3) and recognize that others (those making meaning at Level 4) rely less on their peers and teachers for confirmation of their learning.

Finally, among educators who embrace critical pedagogy, there is danger in the assumptions that all learners will have developed the abilities for ideological critique and self-directed learning and will feel empowered when the class is set up in this way. Learners making meaning at Level 1 or Level 2 will expect and find confirmation in teachers able to act as authorities who actively set guidelines and make decisions on behalf of the students, even when the teachers feature a sociocultural, critical stance, if that is their preference.

A straightforward interpretation of this implication is that program designers might use a developmental perspective to ensure that teachers' and students' actual preferences are considered when debating the merits of different forms of instruction and program design. Teachers with different personalities and philosophies are likely to have different pedagogical strengths. One may engage and challenge learners by focusing on how to help them meet their immediate goals of passing the general educatioal development test battery, writing a resume, or interviewing for a job. Another may encourage growth by helping learners explore their fears and hopes about the future through conversation and writing. However, both teachers can share a common philosophy of dedication to learners' ongoing development, a philosophy that can undergird and incorporate methodological differences.

Overall, a developmental framework accommodates the different experiences of learners, their goals and aims for their education, and the experiences of teachers in classrooms who intend to make learning a sustained possibility. It also recognizes the significance of individuals' similarities in meaning making, the important influences of culture, language, social role, and age notwithstanding. Learners who share a developmental level also share a loyalty and adherence to a way of making meaning that is the product of their persistent engagement with the struggle to know. The consistencies apparent in these meaning-making systems do not dilute their importance or the extent of their influence on each learner's individual experiences.

Policy Recommendations for Forms of Support

Nurturing development is complex work. Learners engaged in transformation are undergoing deep and profound changes, reconstructing their

fundamental beliefs about knowledge, society, themselves, and those around them. Effective policies for the adult education field will take the complexity and enduring nature of this process into account. Instead of measuring successful growth in terms of immediate, measurable change, policymakers can best support learners' development by focusing on the more long-term, overall purposes of literacy (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). We must commit to providing the financial and political resources necessary to the stable and ongoing support of learners that comes with an experienced, well-trained faculty with secure jobs; the cohesion among learners who are members of cohorts; and the web of ancillary supports that complement basic classroom learning experiences.

The most effective policies will also be informed by the knowledge of adult educators and by the expectations and experiences of adult learners. The political and popular images of literacy and adult learners become misguided and inaccurate when shaped by demands for impressive statistics, dramatic and inspirational stories of success, and clear outcomes (Quigley, 1997). These erroneous assumptions can lead to the types of policies that interfere with learners' existing social and economic networks (such as their families, sources of child care and employment, and grassroots organizations) and contradict their self-created goals. An alternative approach is to consider how policies can connect with and strengthen these networks. In their research on single mothers' journeys out of poverty, Holloway, Fuller, Rambaud, and Eggers-Piérola (1997, pp. 207–209) identified some examples of these policies, such as the provision of tax benefits to qualifying households that contribute to the support of individual mothers.

Studying and Supporting Teacher Development

We urge other researchers in the field to consider closely the meaning making of teachers in ABE settings. Like learners, teachers typically encounter barriers that keep them from working in ways they find effective and professionally satisfying. Active debates over directions for teacher development, teacher socialization, and the professionalization of the field would benefit from richer understandings of teachers' preferences for their own learning. Underresourced, undercompensated, and often underappreciated, teachers, like learners in ABE settings, face issues of social and economic marginalization. Also like learners, some teachers find ways to work successfully in the context of considerable constraint. By studying effective teachers and exploring their meaning making, we might identify

aspects of professionalism associated with success in spite of constraints and in the midst of the slow process of systemic reform.

If teachers are asked to become knowledgeable about the ways in which issues of adult development can inform their teaching practice, then institutions and policymakers must commit to supporting teacher development. Traditionally, the vast majority of ABE and ESOL teachers have worked on a part-time or temporary basis; thus, adult literacy programs have suffered from high rates of teacher burnout and turnover (Perin, 1999). Employing institutions have not invested in nurturing the growth of these teachers or provided them with the types of long-term professional development they need (Perin, 1999). Minimally, we must designate adequate funding and time for training teachers in adult development. A more substantive type of support would provide resources on behalf of ABE and ESOL teachers' own continuing development, such as that afforded by full-time employment and the opportunity to participate in long-term reflective practice groups. The work of ABE and ESOL teachers is extraordinarily important. It is shortsighted not to invest in supporting them while we expect them to sustain the high-dividend support they extend to their students.

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