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Theory and Practice on Preparing Human Resource Development Professionals

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1995

Theory and Practice on Preparing Human Resource Development Professionals

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**ACADEMY OF
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

1995 Conference Proceedings

**March 2-5, 1995
St. Louis, MO**

**Elwood F. Holton III,
Editor**

THEORY AND PRACTICE ON PREPARING HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

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Theory and practice in college and university academic credit programs preparing Human Resource Development (HRD) Professional Practitioners have seldom been addressed in the same places or times. This paper Clarifies the terms, theory, practice, academic program, learning, learning organization; traces some history of the issue; provides a case illustration of how an HRD professional prepared in a program advocating a supportive connection between theory and practice, modeled that in his own professional career and developed support within the university setting

Theory and practice in college and university academic credit programs preparing Human Resource Development (HRD) Professional Practitioners have seldom been addressed in the same places or times. On one hand, there are those (Devlin, 1939, pp 1291 and 1732, Jarvis, 1990, p 338) who say the two ideas have been and should continue to be kept totally separate, having their own domains of operation. On the other hand, some (Knowles, 1962, in Dixon, 1991, pp 18-19, and in Brookfield, 1988, pp 43-49) advocate interaction between theory and practice to the extent that they be congruent in so far as possible within the abilities of those in charge of the preparation process. In addition, others (Cervero, 1991, in Peters, pp 19-36, Dixon, 1991, pp 31-45) suggest a variety of relationships. Ignoring theory, using theory and practice for emancipation, letting theory be the foundation for practice, recognizing theory or theories which guides one's practice, and understanding the theory and practice relationship as a function of the types of research permitted in various contexts.

Needless to say, with this disparity of viewpoints between theory and practice in preparing HRD professionals, few, if any, attempts have been made to bring them together at all, or in any coherent way. Nevertheless, expressions of concern, in academia (Benn, 1994; Cervero, 1988, p 81) and in corporations (Kouzes, 1993, p 47) imply, if not directly assert, the importance of addressing this at least to the extent academic institutions have any stake in the preparation. Additionally, a major component which involves academe in the preparation focuses upon learning. Some of these expressions of concern are made also in response to HRD conference presentations conducted by HRD professionals. They take the form of: "Why do HRD professionals violate everything they know about how learning takes place?" or, "Why don't we HRD professionals practice on ourselves what we theorize about how we learn?" or, "Why don't we practice what we preach?" or, "Why don't we walk the talk?" or, "Why aren't HRD professionals' actions consistent with their words?" or, "Why don't they do what they say?" or "Why should I stay in that session and tolerate being talked 'down to' like a little child?" or, "Please, no more long lectures!" or, "I want to 'actively participate' in learning rather than just passively receive teaching!" The list could go on, which adds up to the issue and question of an appropriate theory and practice relationship. Pondering this prompts the observation that a definition of terms could help clarify direction of the discussion.

Definitions

In strict dictionary definition, Devlin (1939) distinctly separates theory and practice: "Theory is a doctrine or scheme of things which terminates in speculation and contemplation without a view to practice," (p 1732) and, "Practice is actual performance distinguished from theory" (p 1291). Although these are general definitions, Jarvis' (1990, p 338) definitions which reflect an HRD perspective not only coincide with the above, but further separates the two. He asserts that theory focuses on knowledge which comes from theoretical analysis, and practice focuses on knowledge which arises from empirical evidence through the senses.

The separateness of theory and practice by their definitions, juxtaposed with the concerns and discontent on their separation in actual practice, may not be enough justification to warrant making a connection. After all, in the interest of presenting more than one point of view, there are many positive comments and evaluations that are made on HRD graduate or undergraduate programs and conferences as they are currently being conducted. Nevertheless, there are other aspects to this research paper which could help justify bridging the gap. This paper focuses on a discussion of college and university academic credit programs concerning the theory and practice of preparing HRD professionals. Consequently, definitions of HRD, program, learning, and learning organization may shed some additional light on the possibility of a connection between theory and practice being needed.

Human Resources Development according to the American Society for Training and Development is defined as: "The integrated use of training and development, organization development, and career development to improve individual, group, and organizational effectiveness" (Marquardt, 1993, p. 7). Also indicated are the primary interventions of each: Training and development--planned individual learning of their work roles; organization development--influence on the relationship of individuals and groups to impact the organization as a system, and, career development--influence on self-knowledge and processes that effect optimal matches of people and work. Hence, in preparing HRD professionals, for the eleven roles and thirty-five competencies needed by HRD professionals, a university or college academic program of planned learning to accomplish this is our focus. But how is program to be defined?

According to Jarvis (1990, p. 89) and Marquardt (1993, p. 8) program in this context is identified much the same as the traditional word curriculum and carries many of the same elements such as objectives, content and sequence of activities. This, then suggests that program tends to mean the entire range of learning experiences provided by an educational institution.

A much clearer articulation of the particulars which "learning experiences" encompass is given by Knoll (1989, in Titmus, p. 29) using the German Education Council definition meaning the organized arrangement of learning processes and content with regard to certain aims and objectives which include techniques, behavior or type and degree of certain skills and aptitudes, or of knowledge. This could imply such questions as: Which knowledges, understandings, aptitudes, skills, interests, attitudes, values and behavior patterns is this "Learner - who is an HRD professional practitioner in preparation" to acquire? With which subject matter and content is this "HRD professional" to be confronted? What roles, competencies, and performances is this "HRD professional" to learn? When and where is this "HRD professional" to learn? How is this "HRD professional's" needs to be determined? By which learning steps and techniques, in which manner, with the aid of which materials is this "HRD professional" to learn? How is the attainment of the aims and objectives by this "HRD professional" to be determined? It could be assumed that to answer these questions will necessitate knowing various theories and schools of thought which will inform the selection of the very best practices or learning/teaching techniques which the HRD professional practitioner has at his/her command and level of competency.

To carry this a step farther, learning is (Senge, 1990, p. 13) a shift of mind, and (Knowles, 1989, p. 148) is what goes on inside learners as they undertake to gain or acquire new knowledge, understanding, skill, attitudes, values, and interests. The "what goes on" could be described as: perceiving--sensing and feeling concrete reality, thinking or reasoning abstractly; and, internalizing or processing--making it a part of ourselves by actively jumping in and trying it, or reflecting on and watching what's happening, so the HRD professional, whom it would be safe to assume is an adult learner, would have going on inside of her/him the perceiving and internalizing of new knowledges, understandings, skills, attitudes, values, and interests.

Lest we fail to complete the definition loop, Watkins and Marsick (1993, pp. 8-9) suggest that the learning organization is one that learns continuously and transforms itself. This means learning takes place in individuals, teams, organizations and society; is a continuous, strategically used process--integrated with, and running parallel to, work, results in changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors; enhances organizational capacity for innovation and growth, and, has embedded systems to capture and share the learning.

Consequently, an appropriate theory and practice connection in college and university academic credit programs preparing HRD professionals as learners and learning organization creators is the topic for consideration. Sub-questions implied from this are. What benefit can one expect to result from studying the relationship between theory and practice in HRD preparation programs? What determines the position one may take on the theory and practice relationship in preparing HRD professionals? What contextual/organizational connections within the university or college help advance an HRD preparation program? Although these questions we considered to be foreshadowing issues of the study, the following speculations or hypotheses emerged: studying the theory and practice connection helps develop a clear foundation upon which to base ones HRD preparation program; congruence between testing ones experience against what is read, perceived, reflected upon, abstracted and experimented with determines ones position regarding preparing HRD professionals; and, each contextual linkage with others in the university helps stabilize and advance an HRD preparation program.

Historical Background

One of the earliest references relating to the preparation of HRD professionals (Houle, in Jensen 1964, pp. 69-83) makes no mention of a connection between theory and practice. In the standards for graduate programs which appeared in 1986 (Brookfield 1988, pp. 234-241) the connection is very loosely made by indicating that the full-time HRD faculty member needs a continuing commitment to HRD theory, research, and knowledge of current practice. It should be noted that no connection between theory and practice in the faculty classroom behavior is indicated or required.

Comparing university adult education in England and the USA, (Taylor 1985, Preface) theory and practice are mentioned regarding the liberal school of thought in relation to the general field of adult education with no reference to preparing HRD professionals. Knapper (1985, pp. 106-120) outlines some innovative instructional methods which could be practiced by HRD professionals thought by some to be consistent with adult learning theories that emphasize a high degree of learner participation (also Brager, 1993, p. 12). Although Bright (1989, Title) addresses the theory and practice issue, the argument is limited to the study of adult education in its relationship to epistemology. Usher (1989, Title) takes the view that theory and practice are not inextricably connected, but in a captive triangle with research. His argument is directed toward the field in general, but can be applied to preparing HRD professionals.

Moreover, McCullough (1987, p. 53) supports the connection by indicating that the professional development of an adult educator/trainer will be greatly advanced by letting others know what competencies (which are identified by the theory) you are trying to improve and asking for feedback on your progress. Collins (1991, pp. 21-39) on the other hand, argues that the preparation of HRD professionals is not helped by the current obsession with technique without the vocational commitment to engagement in critical, ethical, and political issues. Outlining the changing relationships between theory and practice during nearly thirty years, Cervero (1991, in Peters, pp. 19-41) asserts that currently there is a great disparity between theory and practice in preparing HRD professionals frustrating practitioners while at the same time concerning theoreticians.

Soder (1988, pp. 299-305) thinks that by studying the way other professions educate and prepare their professionals, educators can learn valuable lessons for the ways people are prepared to enter the ranks. In his study of how these professionals are prepared, there is no mention of any connection between theory and practice in the process, despite his findings that there are fifteen features in their training programs which are commonly shared with the professional education of educators. One could conclude that either that aspect of a preparation program has been inadvertently overlooked, or it has been considered unimportant and irrelevant to the extent that no space or time should be devoted to its consideration.

Almost by accident, or at least implication, Marsick and Watkins (1994, p. 114) emphasize the importance of a theory and practice connection within an organization, citing an airlines preparation and continued daily treatment of professional flight attendants. Emphasizing that an

organizational culture of disrespect and fear squelches learning, they underscore the fact that the American Airlines threat in response to the 1993 Thanksgiving Holiday Season flight attendant strike, to hire replacement "scab labor," dealt a blow to attendant "self-respect," and fear of job loss. (Kilborn, 1994, in Marsick, p 114) It is not hard to conclude that disrespect and fear are not earmarks of a "learning organization," and a learning organization is one of the results that seems important to develop and support in an HRD professional preparation program.

"Do what you say you will do," (DWYSYWD) is the "critical difference" of what leadership credibility is all about (Kouzes & Posner, 1993, p 47), which is the bottom line of a theory and practice connection. Leaders, in a free society—in corporations, health care, religion, society, government, human resources development, etc., — who are honest, competent forward-looking, inspiring, credible and trustworthy, gain commitment and are followed by many other people (1993, cover jacket) And creating a learning climate—which is required of an HRD professional academic preparation program—is one building block in the disciplines of credibility (p 51), and is an essential precursor of any successful organizational change efforts (p 168). This is further supported on the individual level by Kolb (1974, p 355), who found that individuals who are successful in achieving their change goals will be more likely to feel that the control of reinforcement that they receive during the change process rests with themselves than those who are not successful, and, less likely to feel that control of reinforcement that they receive during the change process rests with those who are not successful

There are some who think HRD professors—the people who have a major stake in designing and implementing HRD professional programs—have a unique responsibility to model the behaviors and skills they are trying to teach Gardner and Korth (1994, p 10) assert that most critical in the process is personal behavior This could be illustrated by teaching on the importance of giving and receiving feedback, yet not being open to receiving feedback from the class in a constructive fashion, thus resulting in a decrease of our influence on student behavior Consequently, we have not walked the talk. If participation in decision-making is an important concept to teach, yet we make arbitrary decisions affecting students, we lessen the likelihood that enhanced learning will take place Although the words are not used by Gardner, consistency between theory and practice in the teaching/learning transaction is being emphasized The saying seems true that if we do not model what we are teaching, we are teaching something else

Bierma (1994, pp 8-9) suggests that as HRD professionals the time has come to step back and evaluate our own learning and ask if we practice what we preach Her penetrating analysis points up our need to Get past the notion that practitioners are not interested in research or theory, and that academicians don't value what practitioners have to say, build a collaborative venture of relying on each others strengths; partner together in advancing HRD teaching, research and practice, turn the Academy of Human Resources Development into a truly collaborative learning organization, and formulate partnerships between theory and practice

Rose, (1994, p 6) in what appears to be a counter point of view and rebuttal to Henschke's (1992a, p 9) rationale for practicing adult learning principles in conference settings, emphasizes that there is no research base to justify bringing the two together, so they will have to remain apart Hayes (1993, pp 173-186) also seems to support that position Reischmann (1993, pp 220-224) seems to brush aside the need for practice to be consistent with theory However, Henschke (1993a, pp 214-217) raises questions about what constitutes research, posing the possibility that research already exists in the area regarding the case Rose makes

Perhaps the earliest published statement of support for a theory and practice alliance in preparing HRD professionals came from Knowles in 1962 (1991, in Dixon, pp 18-19) and (1988, in Brookfield, pp 43-49) with the publication of *A General Theory of the Doctorate in Education*. The purpose of the theory would provide guidelines for the development of a program for each degree This theory was later enhanced (fleshed-out) and implemented by Knowles in the graduate programs in preparing adult educators and HRD professionals at both Boston University and North Carolina State University A few specific enhancements were published on Knowles' theory of andragogy—which he defines as the art and science of helping adults learn (1980, pp 1-63), competency rating scale (1990, pp 236-243), and self-directed learning (1975, pp 1-135) In 1980, Knowles was named to the HRD Hall of Fame. This was done through a poll taken from

people in the HRD field. It was reported in Training Magazine, an international publication whose subtitle was at that time, "The Magazine of Human Resources". Beyond his publications, Knowles, the Adult Education and HRD Professor, seemed to exemplify as a co-learner and a facilitator of learning in others, the theory and practice connection in the academic program he developed for preparing educators of adults, and HRD professionals.

The ideas of how adults learn, which includes how HRD professionals learn, that were included but not limited to these statements, said that adults have a desire and capacity for: Actively participating in the learning process, having an extensive amount of control over their learning process, being treated as "grown-ups" instead of as "children", engaging in a variety of experiential learning techniques, discussion time being allotted in conjunction with a lecture if one is given, interaction with others in small groupings that helps them internalize information, hands-on practice, opportunity for each to share his/her expertise with others, raising questions about and exploring problems and various possibilities of practical application, self-directedness in learning, knowing exactly what step to take next in learning, innovation, excitement to carry a new idea forward, openness to new insights, an attitude of caring about what happens to students, clarity about differences between process and content, in short, meeting the adult learners' learning needs as they perceive and understanding them, as well as congruence between saying and doing or theory and practice in education i.e. making the medium and the message coincide.

A Case Example

Cervero (1991, in Peters, p. 36) points out that although the relationship between theory and practice is an issue that will not be resolved, we should set our sights on understanding and being critical of the circumstances that shape our actions about this issue. Thus, it could help clarify for the reader the viewpoint of this author, to state that he received his doctorate in Adult Education and Human Resources Development at Boston University during Knowles' years there. Additionally, what will be presented regarding this influence supports the axiom that we teach how we have been taught. Consequently, the remainder of this paper is not intended to and will not resolve the relationship of theory and practice in the preparing of HRD professionals. However, this paper is meant to be descriptive of some ways which one person prepared as an HRD professional in the 1960's, has "played out" this relationship in the nearly three subsequent decades with the stated point of view, without trying to speak for others and their varying perspectives on the theory and practice connection. Thus, what follows includes not only the ideas on how adults or HRD professionals learn set forth in the last paragraph of the previous section, but also will add special ideas applied and used in each program described.

The contextual setting of this HRD professional's perspective is in his dual role as a continuing learner of how to become an HRD professional and as a facilitator of helping others become HRD professionals. He has a split appointment position at the University of Missouri, of Associate Professor of Education with masters and doctoral adult education and HRD students at the St. Louis campus, and Continuing Education Specialist in University Extension serving the individual and organizational learning needs of the general adult population. The University Extension position has been fulfilled in both rural and urban Missouri.

The earliest and most effective educational and innovative experiences of this HRD professional becoming a faculty member with University Extension was to participate in an inservice education orientation program for a seven week period. It was highly individualized. One could "shadow" other specialists as they worked and daily operationalized the role of University Extension faculty. Theory and practice were congruent. It was preparatory to the process that would be expected when one worked in the field setting in a very self-directed manner to implement her/his own ideas. This became a viewpoint expressed by Pinchot (1985, p. 22) when describing an entrepreneur, in which he suggested, that the one excited about an idea be responsible to carry it forward in the organization. However, this was counter to the apparent viewpoint of Hays (1993, pp. 173-186) when she seems to question the appropriateness of educators confronting learners with that kind of responsibility without having first determined their stage of readiness. However, Knowles (1975, pp. 31-38) emphasized that in his redefining the role

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Seminars and conference sessions focusing on adult learning have been provided for both full and part time HRD professionals. These have been of various lengths. From forty-five minutes up to four hours. They have been implemented with HRD practitioners, HRD professionals, adult basic educators, nurse educators, educational developers in church international ministries, church educational leaders in eight countries on three continents, and conferees at state, regional, national and international conferences. Without exception, the sessions designed and conducted to include both adult learning theory and practice of the theory; received positive feedback from participants on giving attention to both aspects (Henschke, 1992a&b, All pages). The times I have failed to take into account all aspects of a presentation for learning or overlooked something which made the practice incongruent with the theory drew negative feedback underscoring importance of the theory and practice connection.

An advanced graduate credit course on Methods and Techniques for Teaching Adults was conducted in 1991 with HRD professionals and professional adult educators on a telephone network with sixty-five people at twenty-two locations in one state. The interactive element was assured (no interaction on a teleconference equals grinding learning to a halt!) with twelve groups forming to make presentations which required each group to involve the full class actively (not passively) in the presentation/learning experience. Incidentally, they "pulled it off."

A graduate credit course on Teaching Adults in University Extension was provided by the HRD professional in 1991 & 1992 to University Extension personnel in two states in two different formats. A four-weekend, consecutively on Friday nights and all day Saturdays, and, four consecutive days in one week and three consecutive days two months later. Each format worked equally well and the subject matter was applicable in both contexts.

A credit course was offered, by a team of this and another HRD professional, within a prison on preparing adult literacy tutors who are prison residents to function as tutors with other inmates. The twenty-four participants effectively took active responsibility for their own learning and had no difficulty in supporting each other in the process (Henschke & Perry, 1989, pp. 89-95).

Two different non-credit forty-hour inservice education courses on Methods and Techniques for Teaching Adults were conducted by this HRD professional with HRD professionals at the Federal University in Brazil. Forty participants in 1985, and twenty participants in 1991. Each group also participated in the design of their course (Henschke, 1987b, pp. 414-422). Their perceptions at the beginning of its not being in touch with their reality, changed to their feeling at the conclusion that each course was very relevant to them and their real world.

It is interesting to note that in a conference where the theme on theory and practice in training and professional development in adult and continuing education was presented, the structure of the paper presentation sessions supported theory and practice congruence. Instructions given to paper presenters by the conference organizers included: you have ninety minutes for your session, don't read the full text of your paper to your session participants, take five to ten minutes at most to present a capsule of what your paper says; then, let discussion occupy the remaining time. This author wondered if that would work when he presented his paper. For his own session as well as sessions of other author/presenters he attended, much to his delight the full time was occupied by productive interaction. Even more time for each session could have been beneficial. It certainly exemplified the notion that adults value active participation in their learning experiences.

A Missouri state certification regulation requires that emergency medical technicians (EMT) who aspire to become certified EMT instructors, must have, among other things, a forty clock hour course in instructing adults. A St. Louis medical facility asked this author to develop and teach such a course. The major components of the course in making this a live laboratory for learning include: How adults learn, designing learning experiences, methods and techniques for teaching adults, applying the above elements and designing a two-hour EMT subject matter block of learning, teaching a fifteen minute segment of the above designed program, and critique each others learning designs and teaching task. This is an application of making theory and practice congruent. In 1994, two of these courses were conducted with nineteen people. The experience helped them "catch" what helping others learn was all about.

Building coalitions with others on the University of Missouri-St. Louis campus has been

very fruitful. It has yielded strength and growth to the program. Enrollment in courses has numbered over 2,200 from Fall 1983 through December, 1994. Sixteen doctoral students have been graduated. There are presently twenty-five doctoral students actively working on their programs. Eighty masters degree students are working on their programs, with one hundred twenty-five having been graduated. Five undergraduates are in the program with five having been graduated. This author has a 50% appointment for professing in HRD and Adult Education. He has researched and published enough to be initially appointed to the university doctoral faculty in 1990, and enough to probably be reappointed in 1996. He has been major advisor to all the doctoral and masters HRD/Adult Education students. He has chaired four of the doctoral dissertation and has been a member of the other twelve doctoral dissertation committees. Working with at least three other professors on each of sixteen HRD/Adult Education dissertations built in those professors an understanding of HRD/Adult Education. It also built some interest and investment on their part and a cooperative spirit into helping this program area succeed.

Cooperative conference presentations and joint publication of papers with Professor Dr Henry Weinstock in the Department of Educational Studies at University of Missouri-St. Louis has also built understanding and support to this new field of study.

Eleven of the doctoral graduates now teach in eight different higher institutions in three countries. One of them teaches in the Educational Studies Department in Foundations and Administration. Support for HRD/Adult Education has now reached the point of proposing a special doctoral emphasis area in Adult and Higher Education with sub-specializations in Human Resources Development, Community Education, and Vocational Business Education.

Conclusions and Summary

Results indicate the hypotheses of this study were accepted and a strong support was indicated for theory and practice congruence in university and college academic programs preparing human resource development practitioners. This paper also provided clarification of the terms theory, practice, learning, learning organization, and academic program relating to education. It has also addressed the issue of theory and practice connection regarding the academic program of preparing HRD professionals, traced some historical background of this issue which some think will not be resolved, and, provided a case illustration of how one HRD professional prepared in an academic program not only supportive of the theory and practice connection, but also advocated congruence between the two. In addition, the case illustration described how that HRD professional worked on the theory and practice issue in his professional context as he has continued to learn as well as facilitate the preparation of other HRD professionals. It highlights the theory and practice congruence insisted on, in the structure of the paper sessions, by conference organizers where the theme was on university preparation of educators of adults. The varieties of academic linkages were also described which helped advance the HRD program at University of Missouri-St. Louis.

It is important, however, to note that these results are not conclusive since much, although not all, of the case data were drawn from one academic program. Nevertheless, elements in this one program which has helped it grow exponentially could provide some important clues that may be considered and tested by other college and university programs desiring to develop a strong foundation and growth pattern for their HRD professional preparation program.

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