

# Development and Use of The Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI)

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## Abstract

Over a half-century of research has revealed that teaching in adult and higher education is a complex, pluralistic, and multi-faceted enterprise. Yet within the past several years, much of the research has shown surprisingly high levels of correspondence in identifying qualitatively different perspectives on teaching. For example, in reviewing thirteen studies conducted between 1983 and 1996, Kember (1997) found only five substantively different views of teaching in higher education. All of those studies found that people conceived of teaching in ways that were remarkably similar to one or more of five different perspectives on teaching. Thus, while there may be a great many variations in personal style, there seem to be relatively few substantively different ways to conceptualize the teaching of adults -- at least in the context of higher education. To date there have been no published studies that move this work beyond identification and description toward measurement and quantitative forms of validation. This paper traces our progress in quantifying these five common perspectives on teaching adults with a new instrument called the *Teaching Perspectives Inventory* ([www.TeachingPerspectives.com](http://www.TeachingPerspectives.com)) and shows some of its uses as a means for institutional change, a tool for professional development, and a research instrument with new and experienced teachers.

## Conceptual Framework

Our work is grounded in the empirical and conceptual work of Pratt (1992; 1998). Four of his perspectives closely parallel conceptions found in Kember's review. A fifth perspective, *Social Reform* was kept intact because it represented the views of a small, but important group of adult educators involved in social change movements. We have taken these conceptual categories and translated them into items related to actions, intentions, and beliefs about learning, teaching, and knowledge. As they are now defined and operationalized, the five perspectives are labeled *Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform*.

## Instrument Development

Instrument development has evolved through successive stages of operationalizing Pratt's five perspectives into five separate scales concerning actions, intentions, and beliefs related to teaching. An initial 75-item, 6-point scale version has now resulted in a streamlined 45-item, 5-point scale version. In 1993, an original pool of nearly one hundred items was reviewed and refined by a panel of trained adult educators acting as judges who tested them against the conceptual framework; their inter-judge reliability in assigning items to the correct conceptual perspective was .87. The resulting 75 items were initially drafted into 6-point Likert-scale formats for response by 471 teachers of adult night school learners. Item analyses confirmed high test-retest reliabilities (.88) and internal scale consistencies ( $\alpha=.79$ ). Factor analyses showed that the internal structure among the items corroborated the scale scoring as posited by the item development procedures with correlations between factor scores and scale scores averaging .77. Of these teachers, 63% possessed one clearly dominant perspective and another 31% showed two dominant perspectives (Chan, 1994).

In 1997, a new group of eighteen adult educators reviewed a reduced and refined set of 45 items and classified them into the appropriate perspectives with over 95% accuracy. Their review indicated that the instrument could be further shortened without loss of precision. Table 1 shows sample items and the ‘response context’ within which respondents make their decisions and report their views. Action and Intention items are scored on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from ‘Never’ to ‘Always’, while Belief items are scored on a 5-point scale of ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’. Since each perspective contains nine items, scores can range from 9 to 45.

**Table 1: Sample Items from the TPI**

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**ACTIONS - What do you *do* when instructing or teaching?**

1. I cover the required content accurately and in the allotted time.
2. I link the subject matter with real settings of practice or application.
3. I ask a lot of questions while teaching.

**INTENTIONS - What do you *try to accomplish* in your instruction or teaching?**

17. My goal is to demonstrate how to perform or work in real situations.
21. I expect people to master a lot of information related to the subject.
30. I want to make apparent what people take for granted about society.

**BELIEFS - What do you *believe* about instructing or teaching?**

32. To be an effective teacher, one must be an effective practitioner.
  36. Teachers should be virtuoso performers of their subject matter.
  38. Teaching should focus on developing qualitative changes in thinking.
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This 45-item streamlined version was then further tested on more than 25 groups of teachers of adults in law, pharmacy, dietetics, workforce training, nursing, industry, fitness, as well as on adult education graduate students and in locations spanning Canada, the United States and Singapore. These thousand-plus respondents confirmed the high internal consistencies of the streamlined instrument’s five scales: alpha reliabilities are Transmission .81, Apprenticeship .88, Developmental .85, Nurturance .92, Social Reform .82 and overall internal consistency is .80.

When teachers’ perspectives scores are correlated with how well they recognize themselves (or their colleagues) in one-paragraph summaries of the five perspectives (Table 2), there are moderate and significant correlations between their scale scores and the descriptive paragraphs -- in other words, teachers’ TPI scores validate their self-descriptions. More importantly, it shows that when teachers examine their own profiles, they recognize themselves; and in subsequent debriefings, colleagues recognize each other in terms of their orientations to teaching as represented in their profiles.

Even though a bit dense, these Table 2 summaries are essential in order to grasp what the five perspectives measure and how they differ from each other. People unfamiliar with the concept of ‘perspectives’ sometimes confuse them with ‘teaching styles’ or even ‘teaching methods’, but perspectives are more fundamental and penetrating. It is important to note that no perspective is either good or bad, and that excellent forms of teaching can occur within each of them – as can poor teaching.

**Table 2.** *Summaries of Five Teaching Perspectives*

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**Transmission:** *Effective teaching requires a substantial commitment to the content or subject matter.* Good teachers have mastery of the subject matter or content. It is a teacher's primary responsibility to represent the content accurately and efficiently for learners. It is the learner's responsibility to learn that content in its authorized or legitimate forms. Good teachers take learners systematically through sets of tasks that lead to content mastery. Such teachers provide clear objectives, adjust the pace of lecturing, make efficient use of class time, clarify misunderstandings, answer questions, provide timely feedback, correct errors, provide reviews, summarize what has been presented, direct students to appropriate resources, set high standards for achievement and develop objective means of assessing learning. Good teachers are enthusiastic about their content and convey that enthusiasm to their students, and for many learners, they are memorable presenters of their content.

**Apprenticeship:** *Effective teaching is a process of enculturating students into a set of social norms and ways of working.* Good teachers are highly skilled at what they teach. Whether in classrooms or at work sites, they are recognized for their expertise. Teachers must reveal the inner workings of skilled performance and must now translate it into accessible language and an ordered set of tasks. Learning tasks usually proceed from simple to complex, allowing for different points of observation and entry depending upon the learner's capability. Good teachers know what their learners can do on their own and what they can do with guidance and direction; namely, engaging learners' within their 'zone of development'. As learners mature and become more competent, the teacher's role changes, and over time, teachers offer less direction and give more responsibility as they progress from dependent learners to independent workers.

**Developmental:** *Effective teaching must be planned and conducted "from the learner's point of view".* Good teachers must understand how their learners think and reason about the content. The primary goal is to help learners develop increasingly complex and sophisticated cognitive structures for comprehending the content. The key to changing those structures lies in a combination of two skills: (a) effective questioning that challenges learners to move from relatively simple to more complex forms of thinking, and (b) 'bridging knowledge' which provides examples that are meaningful to the learner. Questions, problems, cases, and examples form the bridges that teachers use to transport learners from simpler ways of thinking and reasoning to new, more complex and sophisticated forms of reasoning and problem solving. Good teachers work hard to adapt their knowledge to each learner's level of understanding and ways of thinking.

**Nurturing:** *Effective teaching assumes that long-term, hard, persistent effort to achieve comes from the heart, as well as the head.* People are motivated and productive learners when they are working on issues or problems without fear of failure. Learners are nurtured by knowing that (a) they can succeed at learning if they give it a good try; (b) their achievement is a product of their own effort and ability, rather than the benevolence of a teacher; and (c) their efforts to learn will be supported by their teacher and their peers. The more pressure to achieve, and the more difficult the material, the more important it is that there be such support for learning. Good teachers promote a climate of caring and trust, helping people set challenging but achievable goals, and providing encouragement and support, along with clear expectations and reasonable goals for all learners. They do not sacrifice self-efficacy or self-esteem for achievement. Therefore, the assessment of learning considers individual growth or progress as well as absolute achievement.

**Social Reform:** *Effective teaching seeks to change society in substantive ways.* From this point of view, the object of teaching is the collective rather than the individual. Good teachers awaken students to the values and ideologies that are embedded in texts and common practices within their discipline. Good teachers challenge the status quo and encourage students to consider the how learners are positioned and constructed in particular discourses and practices. To do so, common practices are analyzed and deconstructed for the ways in which they reproduce and maintain conditions deemed unacceptable. Class discussion is focused less on how knowledge has been created, and more by whom and for what purposes. Texts are interrogated for what is said and what is not said; what is included and what is excluded; who is represented and who is omitted from the dominant discourses within a field of study or practice. Students are encouraged to take a critical stance to give them power to take social action to improve their own lives; critical deconstruction, though central to this view, is not an end in itself.

## Access on the Web

Once a stable, defensible Inventory was available, access to successively wider audiences was made possible by installing it on the Web through an automatic scoring and profiling format. Currently, the TPI is accessible cost-free on the Web at [www.TeachingPerspectives.com](http://www.TeachingPerspectives.com), although cost-recovery options are under consideration. Visitors to the website can view a half-dozen pages about the origins and development of the TPI, uses to which it may be put, various professional groups who have taken the TPI, short biographies of the authors, or they can elect to begin taking the TPI immediately.

After an introductory paragraph, respondents complete the 45 TPI items, then answer a series of brief questions about their employment experiences, geographic locations, kinds of learners they most often instruct, and personal academic backgrounds. Once they click 'Submit', the web program automatically calculates their TPI scores and displays their profile on-screen and in a format that respondents can print if they wish to have a hard-copy version. Additionally, the website provides a printable version of the interpretive paragraphs (Table 2).

Not surprisingly, web availability has greatly increased the rate at which people's TPI scores become available for establishing new sets of norms. The site currently gets about 90-100 'hits' per week. This allows more stable comparisons across professions; institutional affiliation or academic background; or comparisons among people teaching credit, certificate, or non-credit courses. Additionally, we can contrast teachers of adults with those teaching secondary- or primary school youth. Finally, because the TPI is available on the web in Spanish we will be able to compare those who respond in Spanish with English-speaking respondents. A Chinese version is expected later this year.

## How Does the TPI Apply?

The range and variety of uses for the TPI is limited only by the inventiveness of its respondents. Perhaps its most important purpose is to reinforce the notion of pluralism: there is more than one right way to be a good teacher. An early page on the TPI website highlights five situations where a systematic and objectified examination of teaching perspectives is warranted:

- Anticipating an evaluation of your own teaching skills and style
- Observing and evaluating other teachers' performance
- Examining your personal beliefs and values about teaching
- Assisting 'Reflective Practitioners' about what to reflect upon
- Affirming that there is more than 'one right way' to be a good teacher

## Early Findings

In an earlier paper/pencil configuration, more than 1200 respondents contributed to establishing initial means, standard deviations, reliability estimates and initial baseline norms for different professional groups. As a result, people's individual scores can be compared against norms of large numbers of teachers of adults and specific occupational groups (Table 3 - *Dominant Perspective by Occupation*). Across all who have taken the TPI, mid-range scores (in the mid-30s) are common for Apprenticeship (36.0), Developmental (34.6) and Nurturing (36.0). Somewhat

lower mean scores are common for Transmission (33.4), and with still lower scores for Social Reform (29.3).

Respondents commonly possess one and sometimes two dominant perspectives; that is, perspectives with scores one standard deviation or more above their personal mean -- the mean of all five of their TPI scores. They also commonly hold one perspective as ‘recessive,’ a score which is one or more standard deviations below their personal mean. Teachers that are newer in their careers, and those still in training, tend to have higher Nurturing scores. Teachers whose learners are comparatively older show somewhat lower Nurturing scores. Professionals with greater fractions of their job duties devoted to teaching show higher Developmental and Nurturing scores (Table 3 – *Dominant Perspectives by Occupation*). None of the scales showed gender differences for this earlier sample of respondents.

**Table 3. Dominant Teaching Perspectives for Seven Occupational Categories\***

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Dominant Teaching Perspective</i>						<i>Tot N</i>	<i>Tot%</i>
	<i>None</i>	<i>Tran</i>	<i>App</i>	<i>Dev</i>	<i>Nur</i>	<i>S-R</i>		
Higher Ed Teachers	5.8%	10.6%	28.5%	16.4%	36.2%	2.4%	207	17.3%
Adult Educators	7.2	4.8	20.0	6.4	60.8	.8	125	10.4%
Dietitians	8.3	17.4	29.6	6.1	37.4	1.3	230	19.2%
Under-Grads from Professions	1.7	10.3	25.9	12.1	48.3	1.7	58	4.8%
Graduate Students	4.2	8.3	29.2	25.0	33.3	0	24	2.0%
School Teachers	2.9	6.1	9.7	10.0	68.6	2.6	309	25.8%
ESL Learners	7.3	43.7	18.4	13.1	15.9	1.6	245	20.5%
<b>Column N</b>	69	202	249	132	524	22	1198	
<b>Total %</b>	5.8%	16.9%	20.8%	11.0%	43.7%	1.8%		100.0%

\* The totals for Table 3 represent people who had taken the TPI as of mid-year 2000.

Not surprisingly, the largest single fraction of these teachers indicated Nurturing as their dominant perspective (43.7%); and as expected, less than two percent of all respondents held Social Reform as their dominant perspective. However, of these thousand-plus respondents, only 11% held a dominant Developmental orientation to teaching—a finding that seems to contradict the conventional discourse about constructivist orientations to learning and teaching<sup>1</sup>. Some 16.9% showed Transmission as dominant, 20.8% showed Apprenticeship, and 5.8% showed no dominant perspective. Since the TPI became readily available on-line, the total number of respondents well exceeds 3,000; on-line responses are essentially similar to the earlier paper/pencil versions.

<sup>1</sup> The *Developmental Perspective* closely resembles constructivist notions of knowledge, learning, and the desired role of a teacher, as can be seen in Table 2.

## **TPI Uses: Institutional, Departmental and Individual**

Initially the TPI was exclusively used on a local basis by its authors and their students with volunteers in various courses engaged as “test groups”. As the Inventory’s conceptual underpinnings became more widely known through Pratt’s 1998 text, people in various geographic locations began to request information about “ways to measure these ideas”, or “workshops to help our teachers clarify their orientations to teaching”. Table 4 summarizes some of the various institutions, groups or individuals that have used the TPI for various purposes.

**Table 4.** *Projects Involving the Teaching Perspectives Inventory Since 1998*

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### **Informing Institutional Change**

University of Calgary: Developing campus-wide ‘Explicit Syllabi’

Monterrey Institutes of Technology (ITESM), Mexico: Changing to a collaborative learning model

### **Facilitating Reflection on Instructional Orientations**

Alberta Fitness Instructors, Professional Development

Burnaby School District (BC), Instructors of English as a Second Language:

Douglas College (BC), Professional Development

Dublin Institute of Technology, Staff Training and Development

Hong Kong Polytechnic University: Professional Development

Human Resources Canada: Employment Counselors

Manitoba Association of Secondary Educators of Adults

Revenue Canada, Training of Tax Auditors

University of British Columbia, ISW Facilitator Training Program

University of British Columbia, Teacher Certificate Program

University of East London, Dept. of Innovative Studies

University of Indiana, Nursing Instructors, Professional Development

University of Nebraska, Teaching and Learning Center

University of Tasmania, Education Program

University of Vermont, Law School, Conference Workshop

### **Clarifying Students’ Instructional Preferences**

Burnaby School District, Adult Learners of English as a Second Language:

Ritzumeiken University (Japan), Exchange Students in Canada

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In addition to the various ways learning institutions may employ the *Teaching Perspectives Inventory*, individual teachers and educators have also reported their own intentions for using the TPI. A final, optional page on the website invites respondents to report two or three ways they plan to make use of their TPI information. They suggest many potential uses – both institutional and personal. Some of their more illustrative ideas are represented by comments such as these: “*Greater commitment to nurturing students and attention to my social responsibilities*”, “*...as a*

*check about how I actually teach”, “...to foster more active learning among my students”, “to be more varied in my approach to teaching”, “I’ll share the TPI with colleagues at the college’s Teacher Excellence Retreat”, “...to develop a better-articulated statement of my teaching philosophy for my CV”, “...to compare my TPI results with other teaching style inventories”, “...to help me recognize the reality of all five perspectives”, “...to encourage other to examine their foundational beliefs”, “I’ll review my high Social Reform scores to see whether it creates a barrier with some of my students”, “I’ll re-do the TPI in a year and look for any changes”, “...to help me to write a philosophy of education paper”.*

Finally, the TPI is being used in a number of research projects. We have several research projects underway and in various stages of completion, each of which examines changes in perspectives and factors that are perceived to have influenced the evolution or shifting of perspectives on teaching. The first study involves about 350 students at The University of British Columbia who are completing a one-year teacher preparation program. (Jarvis Selinger) Upon completion of an undergraduate degree, students at our university can enter an intensive one-year teacher preparation program. They come to the program as successful students in two regards. First, they have successfully completed an undergraduate degree in a ‘teachable subject’; second, they have been successful at writing a position paper to argue for their admission to teacher preparation. Thus, the dominant social role they embrace as they enter teacher preparation is that of ‘student’. This study explores their journey from student to teacher and asks, “What challenges are associated with making the transition from student to teacher?”

As they leave the teacher preparation program we are following them for an additional three years as they make further transitions into specific schools and cultures of teaching. It is our assumption that their immersion in places of work will further challenge and stretch their perspectives on teaching. Thus our second study asks, “Do perspectives on teaching change during the first three years of teaching? And if so, what is perceived to have influenced those changes?”

The third longitudinal study tracks twelve university professors enrolled in a one-year, voluntary Teaching Certificate Program at The University of British Columbia. This program is very popular and has approximately 60 applicants per year. Because it is labor intensive and has but one instructor, program enrollment is kept intentionally small. During the 2000-2001 program year, twelve faculty volunteered to participate and to allow us to follow their progress. As with the previous two studies, administration of the TPI, supplemented with interviews, occurs at the beginning and end of the program. We were interested in knowing two things. First, does the program facilitate critical reflection on beliefs and intentions related to teaching and learning? And if it does, can we see evidence of that in changed TPI profiles? Neither the second or third study is yet far enough along to report results.

A fourth, cross-sectional study using the same 350-student cohort of teachers-in-preparation explored the relationship between students’ perspectives on teaching and their disciplinary majors (Collins, Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, 2001). All students admitted to our university’s teacher education program must have bachelor’s degrees in a ‘teachable subject.’ Consequently, they have spent several years immersed in the culture of their discipline while learning specific norms and conventions related to knowing, learning and teaching. We conjectured that they come to the teacher preparation program with prior beliefs about teaching and learning that or may not ‘fit’ with new messages concerning teaching and learning. These students have been exposed to powerful models of teaching and to specific expectations as learners. Together, these beliefs, norms, conventions, models and expectations constitute a ‘perspective on teaching’ that students bring with them to teacher education. Whether those perspectives are justified or even reflected upon, they nevertheless influence what is adopted, what is adapted, and what is rejected while

these future teachers engage in their teacher education program. This study demonstrated that there are systematic differences in the ways students viewed their teaching roles and responsibilities, and that these differences were linked to students' academic backgrounds and gender.

A fifth study (already completed) moved outside the usual realm of classroom teaching to examine the educational role of dietitians. As with many of the health professions, dietetics is highly engaged in educational work, both among its professionals and with its clients. This study explored the "educational perspectives" (as they were re-named for this study) among 240 registered dietitians in British Columbia and examined whether their TPI scores were correlated with work location (urban, rural), practice setting (hospital, community, private, etc.), professional role (direct practice, administration, research, etc.), specialization within the profession, years of service, years of training, ethnicity (Chandy, 2000). As with other research projects, the TPI has been one part of an overall study, supplemented with survey, qualitative, and anecdotal information.

In each of these five studies, we have been mindful to view people's Teaching Perspectives as an indicator embedded in a context of many others. In combination with other sources of data such as interviews, observations, and surveys, the TPI has proven to be a useful source of information with which to initiate meaningful conversations about teaching and learning.

## **Discussion**

Over the past several years, there has been a resurgence of interest in teaching in adult and higher education. In adult education, this can be seen in the increased presence of papers on teaching within the proceedings of adult and higher education associations in North America, Europe and Australia. Within higher education this resurgence is evident in the emergence of centres for faculty development and teaching at colleges and universities around the world. Once again, teaching has reclaimed a place of honor in adult and higher education.

At the same time, there is a call for teachers of adults to be critically reflective in their practice of teaching. For several years now professions have pushed for their members to reflect critically on the underlying assumptions and values that give direction and justification to their work. For many teachers this is not an easy task. What is it that one should reflect upon? How are the underlying values and assumptions to be identified? In other words, the objects of critical reflection are not self-evident. Indeed, it is something of a new twist to look not only at the world, but at the very lenses through which we view the world.

The *Teaching Perspectives Inventory* gives direction to the process of critical reflection by providing a baseline of information as well as articulating teachers' own beliefs about learning, knowledge, and the social role of "teacher." Initial work with the groups mentioned above suggests that the TPI provides a means of tracking and looking more deeply at the underlying values and assumptions that constitute teachers' perspectives on teaching. The TPI also provides a well-articulated basis from which to justify and defend approaches to teaching when under review or evaluation.

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