

BOOK REVIEWS

Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 214 pp.

Jane Vella's illustrative work on adult education was first published in 1994. The foreword, written by premier adult educator Malcolm Knowles, praised Vella as "one of the most gifted adult educators I have known" and promised the reader that "you will learn more from it than any textbook written by me (or anyone else)" (p. vii). Many supervisory CPE students use Malcolm Knowles as their primary author for adult learning theory, and so I found this endorsement of Vella's book remarkably compelling. I eagerly read the 2002 revised edition and simultaneously applied what I learned to my own course design. *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* soon became a trusted and reassuring companion in my own efforts in adult education.

The 2002 edition includes a helpful preface pointing out the features of this new edition, such as the inclusion of theoretical components from her other works, *Training Through Dialogue* (1996) and *How Do They Know They Know* (1998). Vella also draws upon her own ongoing learning in this new edition by including the quantum theory or "quantum thinking" of Margaret Wheatley and Danah Zohar. Vella selected six ideas from quantum physics—relatedness, a holistic perspective, duality, uncertainty participation, and energy—and affirms that these ideas are newly informing her twelve principles of adult education. And, as in the first edition,

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Vella also shares her experience as an educator from a number of cross-cultural contexts, providing much-needed cultural sensitivity and relevancy to learning theory in an increasingly global world.

The book is organized in three parts. The first is a review of the twelve principles of adult learning and the ideas of quantum thinking and how they are used for course design. The second section provides a chapter for each of the twelve learning principals and explores how such principles are applied in specific learning contexts. The process of evaluation and design challenges are also offered as a workshop to help the educator practice and integrate the learning. Part three offers a review of the twelve principles and their relevance in the preparation for teaching and the evaluation of learning.

Vella shares the ways she designed the experience of learning with the students in mind, over the course of her career, in very personal ways. I was impressed that she often invited students and their significant others over to her home for dinner before the start of the course as her way to get to know the students and to complete a learning needs assessment. I recall my own invitation to Dr. Robert Dykstra's home back in 1998, and it remains one of the more lasting impressions of my seminary education. This is one way in which Vella personalizes her learning principles. She reminds us that the principles are applied according to our personality and teaching style.

What I found most helpful, overall, was the pastoral voice of Vella assuring me that as an educator it is my task to get to know the learner as the subject and to design the experience of learning with the student's learning goals in mind. As the educator engages the learner as the subject of their own learning, and offers as many opportunities for choice as possible, the learning happens in the doing and the deciding. Vella assists the adult educator in becoming more keenly aware of this process.

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