



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *Practice What You Teach!*

Andragogy is a learning model based on the concept that an open and accessible educational facilitator learns as much from the student as the student learns from the facilitator. By applying principles of andragogy, the classroom becomes a laboratory for learning instead of a pedagogical forum. The facilitator can assist students in recognizing, analyzing, and developing individual learning styles. Once a student develops an effective personalized learning style then he/she can begin an independent conquest for knowledge in any area of interest. The most authentic way to guide a student through the learning experience is to model learning by participating in the process.

Each spring the Oklahoma Society of Radiologic Technologists (OSRT) holds a scientific research essay competition for both students and registered radiographers. For the last five years, Rose State College radiography students have won state awards recognizing their exceptional essay writing abilities. I have admired their dedication and delighted in their success. One year I decided to put my philosophy of andragogy into practice by modeling essay writing skills and competing in the registered radiographer category. It was a perfect opportunity for me to learn along with the students.

The students and I followed the same course goals and objectives. The syllabus outlined the research process step-by-step, including weekly deadlines for each phase of the writing process. It was specific, but not rigid; the most important objective was that each student be successful at each step in the research process.

### **Reviewing Specific Examples**

During the first class meeting, the previous award-winning essays by former Rose State students were distributed to the students, reviewed, and discussed. Now they had specific examples, knew which topics had been covered, and could avoid repetition.

### **Receiving Topic Approval**

Within a week students were required to submit a research topic for approval. I counseled them not to choose a topic because they thought I would want

them to select it, but because they were excited about the idea. I encourage freedom of thought, creativity, spontaneity, and enthusiasm, and have never rejected a topic. Over the years, students have developed spectacular ideas which are innovative, cutting-edge, and entertaining.

I shared with the class the idea I had for a paper based on a difficult ethical question we had discussed earlier in the semester. It was important to include students in as much of the process as possible, and I used this as an example of how their opinions and questions could be used as the basis for valuable research.

### **Identifying Learning Resources**

During at least one class period, the students met in the Learning Resources Center so that the staff could give a thorough description of currently available material and how to access it electronically. Many students had not attempted to use the computer system, and this afforded them the opportunity to ask questions and begin researching the topic. Most students were amazed at how quickly they could find resources on their topic.

### **Discussing the Research Process**

Discussions included various methods of research, requirements for competition, and so on. But instead of reciting a list of objectives, we discussed how each objective applied to our works in progress. I shared my approach and the logic behind each step I made toward completing the essay by presenting transparencies of my incoherent notes, brainstorming ideas, rough drafts, editing, etc. I emphasized the idea that learning is a unique experience, as diverse as people and methods of learning.

Editing is the key to molding ideas into an organized, informative, and enjoyable form. As the paper progressed, I gave examples of the editing process and how words, sentences, and entire paragraphs might be moved several times within a text before the ideas would flow smoothly. This helped students see that a paper does not begin by being perfectly organized. Also, I documented the amount of time spent each day



on this project with the hope of modeling how consistent daily or weekly effort results in a final product that is completed on time, thus eliminating the last-minute frenzy that procrastination creates.

#### **Adhering to Deadlines**

Just as each student confronted deadlines at each stage of the assignment, I, too, confronted them. From the first deadline of choosing a topic to the final oral presentation of the essay, I participated as a member of the class. It was important that I adhered to the same guidelines in order to participate fully in the process and share in the same pressures students experienced. I asked students to help me critique the final draft by asking if the paper was adequately researched, if the writing style was easy and enjoyable to read, and if there were any improvements I might have made. My participation served as a valuable model about how to receive constructive criticism and how to develop self-assessment tools.

Students uncover unique "steps for success" by discovering what best facilitates the individual quest for knowledge. Many students procrastinate because they are fearful of failing, and so they miss opportunities for success. If facilitators are willing to share in the learning process, then students will see how we all confront many of the same struggles. By walking through the process with the students, we can show how learning is challenged by misdirected efforts, false starts, frustration, and confusion; and how perseverance can prove critical to success. In this way, the classroom truly becomes a laboratory for learning.

The year I took part in the competition, Rose State students won three of the five awards, and I won in the registered technologist category. This collaborative approach with the students added a new and stimulating dimension to my classroom skills. I would encourage facilitators from all disciplines to try this activity at least once a year—join your students in an assignment and model your own learning process, organizational skills, and creativity. It will build a spirit of camaraderie and develop andragogy.

**Marcia J. Bishop**, *Professor, Radiologic Technology*

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**Suanne D. Roueche, Editor**

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