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Persistent Andragogical Patterns Across the Generations: From University Tutorial Classes to Postgraduate Online Education

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Abstract

The concept of design patterns in education raises the question of whether their validity can persist over a period of time or whether social and technological change means that yesterday's virtues are today's irrelevancies. Many see e-learning as something which is the latest and greatest form of education, possibly one that has made previous forms obsolete. However, when we look beyond the technology to the desired pedagogy, how much has radically changed? This paper compares two examples of how adults have been educated on a part-time basis in Britain; examples which are separated by 100 years. Because adults are involved, we should more properly talk of andragogy rather than pedagogy. It compares elements of University Tutorial Classes, which started in 1908 as a university outreach programme to deliver undergraduate level education to ordinary working people, with key features of an online Master's degree programme started in the 21st century. The University of Liverpool has been associated with both initiatives, and therefore provides a useful focus for comparison. On the face of it, the two initiatives could not be more different. However, if we strip away the differences in circumstances, motivation and technology, we find that the andragogical approach is remarkably similar. The same basic desirable elements are present.

Keywords: University Tutorial Classes, online education, andragogy, design patterns, discussions

1.0 Introduction

University Tutorial Classes, which commenced in 1908, taught largely social science subjects. They were fiercely non-vocational. They were attended by working people who had probably left school at the age of 13 or 14. The Master's degrees in Computing with which this author is associated are taken by people with honours degrees who study largely for vocational reasons. They have access to technology that the University Tutorial Class students could not have imagined.

Social and technological changes create new opportunities. The growth of the public library system from the second half of the 19th century, and the making available of scholarly papers and electronic books online in the 21st century are major landmarks, but it remains true that all higher education requires sources of research information. Today we may debate asynchronously over the Internet rather than face to face, but the value of discussion between adult learners, and their ability to learn from each other as well as from the teacher, persists throughout the generations.

Particularly in the field of technology, it is easy to adopt the view that there is constant progress. Yesterday's solutions quickly become out of date. The concept of design patterns in education raises the question of whether their validity can persist over a period of time or whether social and technological change means that yesterday's virtues are today's irrelevancies.

Increasingly, the general philosophical view that we can expect constant progress is not universally shared. An alternative view was set out by T.S.Eliot in his series of poems entitled *Four Quartets*.

“And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate – there is no competition –
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious.”
East Coker [1]

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”
Little Gidding [2]

Many see e-learning as something which is the latest and greatest form of education, possibly one that has made previous forms obsolete. However, when we look beyond the technology to the desired pedagogy, how much has radically changed? The examples set out in this paper deal with the education of adults, and

hence it would be more appropriate to talk of andragogy rather than pedagogy. The question is whether it is possible to examine instances of the education of adults separated by a century and discern persistent patterns which indicate that certain examples of good practice do not go out of date, even when they are operating in very different circumstances.

This paper is not about specific design patterns, but about more general persistent andragogical patterns in the way learning is delivered to adults. If certain practices remain valid a century apart, perhaps this provides some confidence that many specific design patterns will maintain their validity over the years.

2.0 University Tutorial Classes

Until late in the 19th century, there were just four universities in the whole of England and Wales – Oxford, Cambridge, London and Durham. Attempts were made to make university level classes available to the general public through the university extension movement, from around 1867 [3]. It would typically arrange a series of lectures away from the university towns. One of the fathers of university extension, the Cambridge academic, James Stuart, wanted “to establish a sort of peripatetic university the professors of which would circulate among the big towns” [4]. These classes tended to attract minimal subsidy and hence fees (also referred to as ticket prices) needed to be set at a level which would recover the full economic cost. This meant that attendance at lectures was restricted to those who could afford them, or they needed an attendance of several hundred to make fees more reasonable [5].

As the 20th century dawned there was an increased interest in extending at least some of the benefits of higher education to ordinary working people, and in 1903 the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) was formed with a good measure of cross-party support. At around the same time, a number of civic or red brick universities were being established in major industrial cities, usually after going through a form of apprenticeship as university colleges. The University of Birmingham (1900) was followed by Liverpool, and the Victoria University of Manchester (1903), Leeds (1904), Sheffield (1905), and Bristol (1909). James Stuart had been very supportive of the establishment of university colleges, and it does seem that Cambridge University’s extension work in Liverpool generated public support for the eventual establishment of a university in the city [6].

The first University Tutorial Classes were held in January 1908 in Longton, Staffordshire and Rochdale in Lancashire. The original idea was to have a maximum enrolment of 30 people for each class although, in the event, they were oversubscribed. Attendees committed themselves to study for at least two years (later this was to be increased to three years), and to contribute essays. Each week there would be a lecture, followed by a period of discussion. Oxford University was initially the main academic promoter of the tutorial classes, and the tutor in Rochdale was funded by a donation of £300 from New College [7]. Cambridge

followed in 1909, organising classes in Leicester, Portsmouth and Wellingborough [8].

Soon the Tutorial Classes, which were meant to be of an honours degree standard, were put on a more formal organisational basis, with local joint committees being set up to run them, containing both WEA and university nominees. They were supported by a Central Joint Advisory Committee on Tutorial Classes from 1909 [9]. Most importantly, the Board of Education was persuaded to pay grants to support the Tutorial Classes, and this made student fees more affordable. Often only a nominal payment was required. Some scholarships were made available by charitable trusts [10]. At the University of Liverpool, the scholarship amounted to £13 and 2 shillings [11]. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge established a tradition of each hosting a residential Summer School for Tutorial Class students.

All English universities began to organise Tutorial Classes. They were joined by the university colleges which made up the University of Wales, and by Queen's University, Belfast [12]. There was limited support for the initiative in Scotland [13].

Appropriately enough, T.S.Eliot taught one of these classes in Modern English Literature in Southall under the auspices of the University of London, commencing in 1916 [14]. The first one promoted by the University of Liverpool was held in Birkenhead, starting in 1909, on the topic of The Evolution of Modern Social Conditions [15]. Later that year, the first class in the City of Liverpool was launched, with students studying The Social and Political History of England Since the Eighteenth Century [16]. In 1910 a Joint Committee on Tutorial Classes was set up with seven representatives nominated by the WEA and seven by the University of Liverpool. Classes were soon being offered in Accrington, Barrow, Crewe, Lancaster and Wrexham [17].

Liverpool established its own Summer School in 1923, to be held each year in Chester [18], and "by the eve of the Second World War there were no fewer than 67 classes, many of them in their 4th, 5th, or 6th years, with a total of 1,056 enrolled students. More than one-third of these classes were in Liverpool itself. The work was supported by grants from the University, the Board of Education, and the Local Education Authorities" [19].

The high tide of the Tutorial Class movement was probably reached just after the Second World War. In 1947-48, Liverpool was sponsoring 113 Tutorial Classes with a total of 1,631 students [20]. Thereafter, students began to show a preference for shorter courses, and there were more opportunities for bright children to stay on at school and apply for entry to higher education courses which led to a qualification.

3.0 Comparison With Online Postgraduate Education

In Table 1, there is a brief summary of some of the differences between Tutorial Classes and the kind of postgraduate online education offered by the University of Liverpool. There follows a more detailed discussion.

Table 1: University Tutorial Classes and Postgraduate Online Education

	University Tutorial Class	Postgraduate Online Education
Funding	Significant public subsidy	Student fees cover the full economic cost
Subjects	Social Sciences, Economic History	Business/Management, Computing, Public Health
Motivation	Militantly non-vocational	Predominantly vocational
Sources of Research Information	Public libraries, boxes of books	University online library, the Internet
Teacher Supplied Information	Lectures	Written lecture notes or video lectures
Discussion	Face to face	Asynchronous online
Assignments	Essays	Essays, practical exercises or group projects

4.0 Funding, Subjects and Motivation

Those who enrolled in both programmes of study would be mature adults. Beyond that, the differences could not be more stark. That is why it is probably a good test of whether there are common features which not only persist across the generations, but can be applied to adults in quite different situations.

University Tutorial Classes would have been attended predominantly by employed people with modest incomes who lived within easy travelling distance of the study centre. They would have typically left school at the ages of 13 or 14. The organisers saw themselves as promoting working class education, and some seemed to be uncomfortable if too many people in white collar occupations

attended the classes. Significant public subsidies were made available so that cost would not be a serious obstacle to participation.

Online programmes at the University of Liverpool are, by contrast, completely self-funding out of fee income. This inevitably means that participation is limited to those who can pay the necessarily high fees, or who can persuade their employers to pay for them. Students would typically be already educated to honours degree standard. The reluctance of governments to subsidise online postgraduate education is no doubt influenced by the fact that students are predominantly vocationally motivated, and can reasonably expect a Master's degree to advance their career. It is often argued that where the benefit is largely to the individual rather than to society, public subsidy cannot be justified. There is also the factor that online degrees are now taken mainly by students resident outside the United Kingdom (and often outside the European Union). The case for public subsidies for overseas students would be weak.

Those participating in Tutorial Classes usually had little secondary education. Albert Mansbridge, the secretary of the WEA, was a key figure in getting the universities, trade unions, educational civil servants, politicians and church leaders behind the University Tutorial Class initiative. He pointed out that "the range of subjects is limited to those which do not demand a long period of school education; for instance, mathematics and languages are beyond this range, and the same may be said generally of pure and applied science, although some of the more successful classes have been held in biology" [21]. Classes were more likely to focus on the social sciences and humanities, with Economic and Industrial History being particularly popular subjects.

By contrast, online postgraduate degrees tend to concentrate on vocationally relevant subjects. Those which have proved to be particularly successful when delivered online are Business/Management, Computing/IT, and Public Health. At a Master's level they require a good level of prior knowledge or academic ability.

The attitudes of Albert Mansbridge, and the trade union leaders and academics who supported him, were militantly non-vocational. We could say of some of them that they supported the idea of a liberal education, one which was pursued for the sake of learning alone rather than for vocational advancement. "In its purity, Adult Education has little or nothing to do with any ulterior motive", and wanting to progress one's career was such a motive [22]. For these reasons, Mansbridge was opposed to the issuing of certificates of attainment in Tutorial Classes lest they be used for vocational reasons [23].

He claimed that "certificates would tend inevitably to attract an inferior type of ambitious student – not slow to appreciate the fact that the certificate attached to the highest type of non-technical education outside the Universities would stand him in good stead for purposes of professional advancement. The repudiation of certificates has given great encouragement to those who believe that true study is its own sufficient reward" [24] (Mansbridge, 1913, pp.57-58). This has always

been an unusual argument, because the academic supporters of this idea have never been slow to use the degrees they have obtained to advance their own academic careers.

There was another anti-vocational motive, which was based on a particular view of class loyalty. The WEA secretary wrote about “working class lads who pass up the ‘ladder’ of education to the University...It is one of the most poignant causes of regret that such scholars turn to work in the professions and cease to be interested in their own people” [25]. There was a strong school of thought that working class students should get an education and then return to their own communities to become officials in trade unions, the co-operative movement, or the Labour Party. There was very limited support among such people for the idea of upward mobility.

Although it was sometimes claimed that this attitude was shared by students who participated in Tutorial Classes, it is likely that they had a range of views on the subject. The Cambridge Tutorial Class archives show that, in a survey prior to World War II, “the students’ view was that ‘no sane person would re-enter a Coal Pit as an employee if he could avoid it’, or ‘locals would have regarded [a return to previous employment] as a sign of failure’. Apparently only one student ‘never regarded the obtaining of a job as the primary end of education’...Many of the first students afterwards regretted that they had not been allowed to take a degree. The gap between the thinking of the University and the adult students shows in itself how important it was to bring the two sides together” [26].

It can be seen that Tutorial Class and online Master’s students are, in many ways, as different as it is possible for two groups of learners to be. However, it is now time to look at those aspects of the higher education of adults which may be similar, and capable of persisting across the generations.

5.0 Sources of Research Information

Higher education courses expect students to read what others have written on a particular topic so that they can analyse and critique it before drawing their own conclusions. That requirement has not changed in 100 years. The sources of information that are available to students are, however, influenced by social and technological changes.

The Public Libraries Act of 1850 was aimed at establishing publicly provided institutions where books would be made available to the working classes [27]. The first of these libraries was opened in Manchester in September 1852 at a ceremony attended, among others, by the Earl of Shaftesbury and Charles Dickens. Liverpool followed a month later with a public library built under powers bestowed by a local Act of Parliament [28].

These libraries were to provide important support to university extension, and later to the University Tutorial Class initiative. Tutorial Classes were also supported by

the Central Library for Students in London, which was initially funded by grants from charitable bodies [29]. Each sponsoring university usually provided a box of books for each class [30, 31]. This did not usually involve the provision of multiple copies of a particular book. Occasionally it was possible to get cheap editions of particular works published, which students would buy themselves [32].

Social, economic and technological realities provide both constraints and opportunities for education but, surprisingly, they often do not change what is desirable. Online students at the University of Liverpool have available to them a range of published sources which a Tutorial Class student could only have dreamed about. Universally accessible websites are one important source of information.

However, a key change which provided a boost to online education was the decision by the publishers of academic journals and books to make them available in an electronic form to universities who paid a subscription. Where universities like Liverpool made the additional investment to make these resources available outside a local campus network, it opened up a vast array of quality academic material to online students anywhere in the world who had an Internet connection and an appropriate password.

I think it is fair to say that University Tutorial Class students would have loved to have a similar access to published information. What is desirable has not changed significantly, only what is possible at different points in time.

6.0 Teacher Supplied Information

University Tutorial Classes always started with a lecture lasting for one hour. This was the main method by which the tutor presented information to his or her students. It would have been very unusual for all members of a class to each have a copy of the same book, so that it could be used as a textbook.

In an online degree, there are more options. Students at Liverpool would typically be asked to each obtain a copy of a textbook in paper or electronic form. They would be referred to a range of references which would be readily accessible over the Web, or in the electronic resources held by the University library. Nevertheless, it would still be common for students to be presented with a series of lecture notes in electronic form produced by some member of the teaching staff. These summarise key points and provide specific information which will be needed to complete assessments. Videos of lectures may also be available, but always backed up by written material to improve accessibility for those with disabilities.

There are different views on the role of the teacher, but it is difficult to imagine a situation where it is not useful for the person supervising the class to provide some information to adult students. This remains something of a constant across the generations, although technology will influence the form in which that information can be presented.

7.0 Discussion

In Tutorial Classes, a period of one hour was scheduled for discussion following the lecture, although sometimes this session was extended until such time as the hall caretaker's patience was exhausted. The inclusion of the word "tutorial" in the title displayed the influence of Oxford University in launching this initiative.

What became known as the Oxford tutorial usually involved a tutor meeting with one student or a very small number of students for one hour. Those students would learn from an expert, often through one of their number reading an essay which the tutor and the other students would discuss. One of the main aims has been to get students to think for themselves [33].

Of course, such a method of teaching is very expensive, and there were nothing like enough teaching resources devoted to University Tutorial Classes to make it possible. What was transferred into Tutorial Classes was the slightly different concept of a group discussion lasting one hour, with one-to-one interaction being exceptional.

There is another reason why the Oxford tutorial did not migrate well into the field of adult education. It was typically based on the idea of learning from an expert in the field. Mansbridge asserted that in the Tutorial Classes "each student was held to be a teacher and each teacher held to be a student" [34]. This is a common feature of andragogy. Students are likely to possess valuable practical knowledge about how theories turn out in practice. They may be able to produce examples which challenge or confirm generalizations. Adult students are therefore often just as likely to learn from each other as the teacher.

It is not unusual for the tutor or instructor to become the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage. In modern online education, the instructor will often be described as the moderator of a discussion, and it is in this kind of role that a tutor 100 years ago would be urged to ask questions and guide discussion when interaction flagged or was in danger of getting too heated [35].

Online postgraduate education, through the wonders of the Internet, has escaped the restrictions of geography. Tutorial Classes were attended by those who could travel to a particular location once a week. Online classes can attract participants from all over the world. Asynchronous discussions, where two or more parties do not need to be present at the same time in order to communicate, overcome the problem of students living in quite different time zones.

In Liverpool's version of online education, discussion is central, to the extent that a significant portion of total marks are devoted to this assessed element. Students must show that they can put forward a point of view in answer to a specific question, and then defend, amend or abandon that position in the course of discussion. They learn how to think rather than what to think.

Again, we can see common patterns in examples of the education of adults a century apart. The main difference is that technology has made asynchronous

participation feasible. That would have been a great benefit to busy working adults at the beginning of the 20th century.

8.0 Assignments

Students in University Tutorial Classes wrote essays as part of what we would today describe as formative assessment. They received feedback to help them learn, but it did not contribute towards obtaining a qualification.

Assessment in modern online education is more summative. Students need a graded qualification to achieve vocational advancement. Fortunately, they can do this without being accused of having an ulterior motive, or of being an inferior type of ambitious student.

Essays are still used for assessment, but because subjects are often more technical, assignments can also involve the production of an electronic artefact, such as a computer program, which can be submitted online. Group work is something that has been made possible for part-time students by changes in technology.

Students attending Tutorial Classes a hundred years ago would probably have enjoyed working in groups on projects, but it would have been extremely difficult for groups to meet together outside the one session per week on which they attended a lecture and discussion. The Internet has meant that asynchronous collaboration is possible throughout the week in moments that are convenient to each student, even though they may live on opposite sides of the world.

We have retained what was valuable practice in earlier times, but technology has once again now made possible what was probably always desirable.

9.0 Conclusion

Mansbridge thought that the ideal size of a Tutorial Class was 24 [36]. In the Liverpool online courses, the class is rarely allowed to exceed 20. This is a number at which discussion is manageable. Even in the detail, some things do not change. Many things do change, and sometimes for the better. At other times, change takes place because of a rather shallow attachment to constant novelty. Things of value can be discarded carelessly.

What is important in these circumstances is to have a balanced and critical attitude towards new initiatives. If it is not broken, it is often unwise to try and fix it. Across the generations, the value of certain things does not diminish, although social and technological change often makes possible that which we always wanted.

There is every reason to believe, therefore, that design patterns in education can provide solutions of persistent value.

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