Understanding Adult Resistance to Learning

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ABSTRACT

Under certain circumstances, and with appropriate trigger mechanisms, adult learners may indulge in hostile classroom behaviors through which they resist learning, encourage others to do the same, and even engage in a direct, intentional, hostile attack upon the instructor. Hostile, deliberate, overt resistance to learning is very real, different from motivation, and rarely discussed. It is a significant problem in the field of adult learning, yet has received scant direct attention in the literature, despite its prevalence, high cost, and clear relevance to policy and practice. This paper describes the dynamic interactions among instructor and adult students in classroom learning environments, identifies the major relevant issues in play, and discusses each as potential causes of hostile resistance to learning. Learning is a process of change, and as such involves feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity, which create discomfort. Issues of power and control may arise, accompanied by power plays employed by manipulative people. Perceptual filters are used by the participants as mechanisms to interpret meaning and select appropriate responses are described. These filters vary by such factors as race, culture, gender, and life experiences. The participants react to the challenge of learning, in ways consistent with their behavioral predispositions, the degree of threat they perceive, and their personal views regarding their responsibility and ability to control their own life events. Participants' responses often include hostile, overt refusal to assimilate or even consider the learning material. The practitioner will be engaging in a dynamic assessment of the learning experience as it unfolds, gauging results so as to be able to adjust factors under the instructor's control, such as pace and style. The process does not end there, as the practitioner continuously engages in a reflective process of self-questioning concerning the progress and status of the learning activity.

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LEARNING PROCESS FRAMEWORK

The interactions among instructors and adult students in classroom learning environments are complex and dynamic. Yet the complexity of the interactions should not inhibit their exploration. Efforts to describe, explore, and generate deeper understandings are essential. As Brookfield observed, "viewing teaching as a process of unfathomable mystery removes the necessity to think about what we do. It works against the improvement of the practice. The teaching as mystery idea also closes down the possibility of teachers sharing knowledge, insights, and informal theories of practice, since mystery is, by definition, incommunicable" (Brookfield, 1995 p. 6).

Instructor as Change Agent

Change agents are people who act as catalysts and assume the responsibility for managing change activities (Osland, Kolb, & Rubin, 2001). In the world of adult education, the instructor is the change agent. The instructor is responsible to ensure that course objectives are met, and that the participants achieve their objectives. These objectives may stem from the personal and professional objectives of the learners, or the objectives of the manager who enrolled them. In either case the instructor is responsible to ensure that the requisite new, or changed, knowledge is available to the learner. Typically, the instructor is also assigned the responsibility for ensuring that the student actually masters the course material. As the obvious authority figure, the instructor – the change agent – is the natural target for both blame and praise that may be offered by the course participants and other stakeholders.

The instructor is tasked with organizing and delivering instructional material, and with ensuring a reasonable transfer of knowledge to or among the students. The instructor operates within a series of boundaries and constraints, some of which are externally imposed, while others are part of the instructor's background. The instructor must satisfy the institution's policies and meet its requirements. The instructor must remain within the boundaries and constraints of the subject matter, and often, the organization's view of the subject matter.

The instructor operates within the limits of his or her own education and experience, knowledge of the subject matter, and competency to teach. Educators of adults are rarely trained in skills and understandings needed for effective teaching. They are typically focused on a subject, and their education is generally limited to their area of subject matter expertise. When they are first assigned as instructors of adults, they naturally look back to their own student experiences, which generally reflect a pedagogical model for teaching techniques. The pedagogical model primarily emphasizes dominance and power, setting up an inclination toward an environment in which resistant behaviors may be expected (Kreisberg, 1992).

Change Process

Learning is a process of change in which new information, or updated information, is acquired and assimilated to enhance an individual's skills or to satisfy an individual's educational goals. Learning is unlike instinctive behavior because it involves change. The organism has no ready-made response available, and must develop one based on exposure to the learning situation. The transition from "an absence of effective behavior to emergence of effective behavior" is called learning (Goldberg, 2001 p. 44). Learning provides information that may cause the learners to modify their understanding of their world, or of their roles within their world (Morison, 1966). Among adults, learning is very likely to be supplantive, rather than additive, in that it replaces or updates material that previously had been mastered, thus creating situations that may be characterized by fear, uncertainty, and ambiguity within the minds of the participants (Atherton, 1999). Conner and Nevis agree, and also point out that the learning situation itself may be the proximate result of a situation in which the adult's knowledge has become obsolete, a circumstance likely to be accompanied by trepidation (Conner, 1992; Nevis, 1987).

The rate and extent of change experienced today is unprecedented throughout history. Thus people find that they must frequently refresh their stock of

knowledge, or risk becoming unable to function within society. The systems of ideas and technology we use today have become so complex that man's ability to remain in control of them is questionable (Morison, 1966). People are required to process information today at ever-greater rates and quantities. Individuals find that much of the new information, when compared with their current knowledge, is ambiguous, inconsistent, or contradictory. This compounds the difficulty associated with the learning process (Coutu, 2002; Deutschman, 2005). As the gap between what is known and what must be learned – or relearned – increases, people become less able to function with their accustomed degree of ease and effectiveness. They become frustrated, angry, upset. They react defensively, in the ways they are by nature inclined to react (Fischer, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962).

Power and Control

The dynamic social relationships that exist among groups of people may be viewed in terms of the controlling pressures that some members may exert, or attempt to exert, over others. These pressures are a reflection of efforts to establish individual power, expressed as dominance, influence, and control. Kelly defines power as: "the [assumed] right to persuade, manipulate, or coerce others in order to achieve the objectives associated with the power-wielder's superior official status, profession, or role in the informal organization. Power includes a presumption of superiority" (Kelly, 1988 p. 25). Many people are enticed by power; they seek to acquire power in order to dominate and control others. People who have no claim to power based on position may still exert themselves to acquire power through manipulation (Simon, 1996; Steiner, 1981). Kayden (1990) argues that those who have power like to think they have it by virtue of birth, background, talent, intelligence, or accomplishment. They want to believe they are legitimately one of the powerful elite; that they belong there. They believe that they have the right to direct the actions or thoughts of others. This assurance of virtue is a point rejected by those who lack power; they expect equality (Kayden, 1990). Attempts to manipulate people will occasion a strong will to resist, and counter-maneuvers to resist manipulation. The person resisting manipulation will develop feelings of fear and anxiety toward the person attempting to establish control (Simon, 1996; Steiner, 1981).

Perceptual Filters

People understand and assess situations, interactions, and information through the lens of a set of perceptual filters. These filters are developed and tested over a lifetime. Many of them are instilled by the culture in which each individual is nurtured. While each individual is unique, people tend to share similar perceptual filters with members of the same group. Thus people who share a common gender, age, spiritual beliefs, set of life experiences, and socio-economic status tend to apply predictable, and similar filters. These filters provide both a means of interpreting information, and a set of heuristics for selecting the appropriate response. Cultural filters are of growing importance in the United States, as immigrants are increasingly less likely to adopt traditional American cultural values as they did in the past. Instead, in our multi-cultural society, immigrants are relying on their own heritage to provide the rules for behavioral norms, attitudes, and the roles people assume. Thus misunderstandings and communication problems arise (Foucault, 2001). Cultural values significantly influence the individual's perception regarding the appropriateness of independence, self-reliance, and personal initiative. While Western cultures place great store on such attributes, the collectivist societies from which many of our recent immigrants are drawn, do not. Thus while the American tradition views change, learning, and advancement, as both necessary and desirable, collectivist cultures prefer to hold to the traditions of the past, living in perpetually static conditions (Brislin, Yoshida, & Cushner, 1994). These cultural perceptions have obvious implications for classroom behavior and attitudes toward learning.

Gender differences are of equal magnitude. While men value autonomy and individuality, women place more stress on relationships and responsibilities toward others. These differences are ingrained from birth and reinforced during maturation. Gender-based perceptual filters are insidious in that members of the opposite sex, otherwise sharing similar backgrounds, do not necessarily recognize these perceptual differences. Age provides another major filter. As people mature they modify the assumptions, values, perceptions, and beliefs they employ as paradigms to interpret their worlds. Younger adults tend to adopt an external locus of control and responsibility, which includes destructive acting out and self absorption. As they mature, these same people become more internally motivated, and seek additional learning activities (O'Conner & Wolfe, 1991).

Use of language is an important aspect of the learning experience. People from different regions, or from different ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds use different words, and apply different meanings to their words. Thus people from different backgrounds are

likely to experience difficulty in precisely understanding one another. Further, people with an inadequate vocabulary will be significantly handicapped in terms of understanding and expression (Wilson, 1960).

Given the range of possibilities that emerge when perceptual filters are considered, together with diversity of a typical student body, and the likely complexity of subject matter, it is not unlikely that some individuals may begin to feel they are imposters in the classroom. Brookfield used the term Imposter Syndrome to describe the situation that exists when a participant in the learning process concludes that he is out of place, due to lack of academic preparation, abilities, ethnic, gender, or cultural differences. In such circumstances, the imposter is uncomfortable, and does not wish to be revealed as a fraud. He develops defensive strategies to avoid being unmasked. He does not participate in the discussion; he withdraws; he feels demeaned and voiceless. Brookfield and Preskill contend that this is the most common reason for resistance to learning (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

Response Process

Participant responses to the learning experience typically vary among individuals. Factors important to their choice of response include their assessment of whether the activity is threatening, and their behavioral predispositions. The instructor dynamically assesses the on-going learning experience as it evolves, and adjusts to achieve greater effectiveness. The participants may accept the material offered, or they may refuse the material and the learning opportunity as well.

Threats to Security

Psychologists, educators, and organizational consultants agree that people resist situations in which they are faced with problems that differ from their capabilities. Such situations are threatening. People fear and try to avoid situations where their knowledge and skills are irrelevant or inadequate. When faced with situations involving changes they cannot control, people undergo a predictable sequence of actions, including an initial state of immobilization, denial, and anger, followed by bargaining, depression, testing and acceptance . People are more willing to accept change, and more able to assimilate change, if they are allowed a degree of control over the rate and extent of change . Resistance to change represents a reaction to perceived loss of control, loss of familiarity, and lack of time to make appropriate adjustments. The degree to which a situation rife with uncertainty and ambiguity is resisted depends upon the degree to which people feel that the situation threatens their fundamental needs. As described by Maslow, human needs may be viewed as a hierarchy. The lower level needs must be adequately met before the next level may be addressed, and once met, people are naturally inclined to advance to the next level. The most fundamental needs are those related to survival and safety, found at the bottom of the hierarchy. Higher up are the more abstract needs, including belonging, recognition, achievement and self-actualization. People react defensively when these needs are threatened, with the lowest level needs being most aggressively protected (Maslow, 1970). Although the threats to be found in a classroom are intellectual rather than physical, threats to an individual's security exist, particularly when current knowledge is devalued, and loss of stature is risked. This perceived threat could lead to hostile resistant behavior, expressed in a way consistent with the individual's temperament and values. Resistance to change is an emotional, high-energy response. People, having chosen to resist, adhere to their resistant behavior with tenacity (Lewin, 1951; Nevis, 1987).

Personality Type and Behavioral Predisposition

Although people vary significantly in the ways in which they interpret and understand their environment, evaluate situations and events, and express themselves, several broad descriptive trends are apparent. Beginning at least as far back as Jung in the 1920s, researchers have undertaken efforts to "type" people in ways that allow insight into their thought processes and likely behaviors. At the present time there is a considerable body of knowledge in this area, and an effective typing system is in widespread use (Jung, 1971; Keirsey & Bates, 1984). The Myers-Briggs personality typing system includes four basic classifications, each of which is expressed as a continuum between two extremes, such as, extraversion versus introversion. Under the Myers-Briggs scheme, people may be described as tending towards either end of each continuum, and thus grouped into 16 categories. Each of these categories is described in terms of personality types.

Kiersey and Bates assert that the Myers-Briggs method is an effective way to predict people's behavior and likely responses to varied situations (Keirsey & Bates, 1984). The Myers-Briggs approach is consistent with research into locus of control issues (Baumeister, 1994; Lefcourt, 1976; Phares, 1976). This research indicates that people vary in the degree to which they derive their motivation toward actions from internal resources, as opposed to reliance on external motivations. This is closely linked to the individual's view of personal

responsibility for achieving a given outcome. Some people, variously described as proactive or self sufficient, attribute their failures to their own deficiencies, while others are prone to cite someone or something else as the reason for failure.

Locus of Control, Aggression, and Self-Defeating Behavior

People who feel that the life events they experience are largely the result of choices they have made are internally motivated and are more likely to view change as a positive matter. These people tend to see change as a challenge and an opportunity. Externally motivated people – those who do not feel a sense of responsibility for their own circumstances, or recognize their ability to influence events – are more likely to view change with fear, as a problem to be avoided .

Research by Bandura and others also indicates that people who believe themselves to be externally controlled, rely on external sources for confirmation of their worth. This dependence upon external sources for one's self esteem creates situations in which strong, even violent defensive reactions are undertaken. People with low self-esteem tend routinely to react defensively as a normal response. People with high but unstable self-esteem are pre-disposed towards aggressive and violent responses when they perceive a threat to their self-esteem. High but unstable self-esteem results when people hold favorable but fluctuating views of themselves; this is a characteristic of bullies who seek to dominate others. Such learned aggression becomes an automatic response (Bandura, 1994; Baumeister, 1994; Mehrabian, 1970; Rotter, 1966).

People may engage in self-defeating behaviors that include aggression, withdrawal, and dependence on others as primary means to protect themselves from humiliation (Curtis, 1994). These behaviors may occur in reaction to situations where they feel that they have been insufficiently recognized for their accomplishments. Similar self-handicapping behavior may occur in which individuals suffering from low self-esteem create barriers to their own success, thus providing an excuse for failure. This is accompanied by feelings of stress and deprivation. Personal perceptions of the degree to which the individual is able to exercise control over events that affect him are of considerable importance in determining whether the person views a challenge as an opportunity to be exploited, or a problem to be avoided. People who tend to view themselves as externally controlled, and are then confronted with evidence that they are not able to overcome obstacles, will quickly either reduce their efforts or give up entirely (Bandura, 1994; Baumeister, 1994; Curtis, 1994).

These observations strongly suggest that potential hostile behaviors may be brought into the classroom by the participants in a learning program, as part of their normal human responses to situations that may be perceived - or remembered - as threatening. Incidences of hostile behavior may be triggered by events that take place outside the classroom, or are associated with factors well beyond the instructor's control. In such cases, if the practitioner is unaware of the potential causative factors of resistance to learning, and not supported by the benefits of an effective dialogue, the practitioner may wrongly attribute the hostile behavior to their own inadequate preparation. The victimized instructor will have difficulty in recognizing the problem, and developing an effective remediation or coping strategy.

Dynamic Assessment and Adjustment

The instructor, or leader of the learning process, is of course also using perceptual filters to interpret the classroom situation and the participants' response to the learning activity. Regardless, the instructor will be performing a dynamic assessment of the learning environment, and will routinely adjust the methods of delivery and other aspects under the instructor's control to improve the apparent effectiveness of the process. The instructor will employ a number of methods to gauge the effect of instruction in the classroom. Prime among these may be the ability to: interpret body language and assess reactions through the glass of the Johari Window.

Body language refers to the fact that people unconsciously communicate a great deal of information concerning their emotional state, and their level of understanding of the information being presented, through gestures, facial expressions, posture choices, and tone of voice. Interpreting body language is an intuitive capability that long predates recorded history, though it may be refined and reinforced through formal training (Nierenberg & Calero, 1979, 2001). The instructor becomes, as it were, a classroom detective, ferreting out the participants' hidden responses through exploitation of body language.

The instructor may also recognize that, while behavior is to a large degree driven by perceptions, some perceptions occur at an unconscious level. The Johari Window is a useful construct to use when attempting to judge a student's state of mind. The underlying research postulates that an individual's perception of

self may be divided into four quadrants. Thus, from the individual's point of view, there is some personal information known to others as well as the self; some known only to the self; some perceived by others but not by the self; and some known to no one. The individual will act to protect private information that is not already known to others, and will worry about things known to others but not to the self (Luft, 1970). The associated fear of exposure (imposter syndrome) may result in establishment of a defensive barrier, by withdrawing or otherwise overtly resisting learning (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

RESISTANCE TO LEARNING

The participants in the learning process may choose to accept the learning experience and assimilate the new knowledge, or they may find it threatening and choose to resist. Some may view it as an opportunity, others as a threat to be avoided (Bandura, 1994). If the material is ambiguous or contradicts previous learning, assimilation is difficult and requires additional energy to reconcile the dissonance (Atherton, 1999; Conner, 1992; Coutu, 2002). The act of learning challenges the learner. It may produce a feeling of loss as current knowledge and skills are devalued, and may be accompanied by feelings of frustration and anger. The new knowledge may invalidate previous knowledge and thus be perceived as a threat to the learner. This is a destabilizing factor and a source of stress. People will often take steps to protect themselves from the effects of such changes.

Nature and Prevalence of Resistance to Learning

A greater exploration of the issue of resistance to learning has been made among trainers, than among academic educators. Carl Pickhardt, a Texas-based consulting psychologist, observes "every trainer eventually encounters an audience determined to resist" (Pickhardt, 1980a p. 6). "Resistance is a predictable, natural, and necessary part of the learning process" (Block, 2000 p. 139). Allard describes corporate training classes as including three kinds of students: "…vacationers, prisoners, and sponges." Allard describes these as "The prisoners and vacationers do not want to be there at all, or feel they have no need of the training and hence do not plan to learn anything. These are resistors" (Allard, 1991b p. 58). Atherton states "Resistance to learning is common and well known among trainers of adults, but has "received remarkably little attention in the literature" (Atherton, 1999 p. 77).

Candace Pert, who has done pioneering research in the area of mind and body chemistry, discusses state-dependent memory, or dissociated states of learning. She has demonstrated that an emotional state stimulates recall of material learned previously, under the same emotional state. Further, not only memory is affected by emotional state, actual performance or behavior is similarly affected. Emotions and learning are closely coupled. As people experience bad outcomes in a learning situation they become predisposed to assume that other learning experiences will also have negative effects. Pert's observations are supported by other experts in the field (Pert, 1992).

Atherton argues that resistance to learning is very prevalent, and is not the same as lack of motivation. The evidence is sufficiently strong that the issue should be taken seriously, and is likely to be a component of many educational and training programs, including undergraduate education (Atherton, 1999).

Atherton's research reveals that resistance is more prominently seen when the material to be learned is supplantive, rather than additive. This is in turn an attribute of the learner, not of the material taught. Most learning involves adding information to the student's body of knowledge, hence the new knowledge is "additive." When the new information is to replace knowledge or skills already held by the learner, it is termed "supplantive." Atherton's research indicates that the single most defining characteristic of resisted learning is its supplantive character. He believes this is because the supplantive knowledge threatens the skills and expertise the student already holds.

During his research, Atherton found that the resistant students articulated a loss of certainty, a loss of confidence in their skills and abilities, and that this was triggered by the experience of the course. The uncertainty and ambiguity created in the student's minds when their current knowledge bank was devalued caused the new knowledge to be resisted.
Aronson argues that if an adult has a history of success with the set of skills and knowledge he owns, but is told that those skills are no longer adequate, and offered new replacement knowledge, he is most likely to respond by distorting the evidence to fit his preconceived facts. He will try not to think about any evidence of inadequate skills; he will remember how well they have served in the past, and will recollect only the flimsiest arguments in favor of the new knowledge. This is irrational; it is also characteristic of human behavior (Aronson, 1992 p. 175).

Atherton discusses models of change in the context of resistance to learning. He notes that Knowles' approach to adult learning could be interpreted in terms of reduction to situational resistance. Lewin and Mezirow contend that a process of alienation or destabilization is necessary to establish the conditions under which an individual will be receptive to supplantive learning. Such destabilization normally accompanies crisis situations - Mezirow cites death, divorce, being passed over for promotion, laid off from work, retirement - as events followed by emotional disorientation. The circumstances that create a need for supplantive learning are not likely to be of this order of magnitude. However, the process of supplantive learning will create confusion, frustration, and uncertainty, and the learner will be sorely tempted to hold on to the familiarity of the old knowledge.

Overt Hostile Resistant Behaviors

Carl Pickhardt (1980) identified three overt hostile resistant behaviors. He describes the most benign expression of resistance, hostile withdrawal, as "participants who refuse you both verbal and nonverbal responses" (Pickhardt, 1980a p. 18). The same behavior is variously described as "stony faced silence" or "as if I were talking to the row behind them" or "crossed arms and glaring (expression)…"or "tuning out" (Pickhardt, 1980a p. 20). Pickhardt goes on to offer a vernacular description of Hostile Withdrawal as "If you can't reach us, you can't teach us" (Pickhardt, 1980a p. 18). This form of resistance is subtle and often overlooked by instructors.

During a hostile diversion, participants initiate their own social interactions independent of that which the instructor is orchestrating for the larger group. The student imposes another's agenda on the classroom. Pickhardt characterizes this resistance by the statement "If we secede from your control, we can encourage others to do likewise" (Pickhardt, 1980a p. 18). The hostile diversion is not necessarily recognized by the instructor as a resistant behavior. A student may entice the class and the instructor with a change of topic, thereby diverting the teacher from his/her objective, diluting the teacher's control, and wasting instructional time.

Pickhardt explains that the participant who directly challenges the instructor's authority, opposes the instructor's directions, or criticizes the instructor's message has staged a hostile attack. This form of resistance is obvious to all, both students and instructor, and often causes loss of instructor authority and credibility, creating a schism between the class and the instructor. Pickhardt's vernacular version states: "If we refuse to go along with you, that rejection will undermine your confidence and destroy your poise as a leader" (Pickhardt, 1980a p. 18). This is by far the most destructive form of overt resistance in the classroom.

Other researchers have made similar categorizations: Kreisberg describes examples of all three behaviors occurring within institutions employing hierarchic power structures, which he attributes to students' effort to gain control over their circumstances (Allard, 1991b; Kreisberg, 1992). Block identifies a number of symptoms that indicate resistance is occurring, including a hostile attack with angry words; or silence, where the client is passive, with no particular response at all (Block, 2000). DeValk describes students who display resistance in obvious ways: such as by folding their arms and glaring at the instructor; or choosing to read novels in class; or chatting among themselves about unrelated topics (DeValk, 1994b). Maurer (1996) identifies several signs of resistance, immediate criticism, denial, sabotage, silence and others. Silberman (1990) describes a series of negative behaviors that are used to attack the instructor and/or the course itself, such as monopolizing, withdrawing, arguing excessively, and continually complaining.

Reflecting on Resistance

Conner (1992) notes that resistance to change may be expressed overtly, or covertly. He argues that overt resistance tends to be more constructive for the organization, because it allows the resistance to be heard and addressed. Covert resistance, on the other hand, may go unnoticed until it is too late to redress the problem. Conner suggests that open resistance is healthy. He provides an example in which a speaker, presenting new ideas to a tough audience, is constantly challenged by the audience to present supporting evidence testifying to the validity of his assertions. Conner contends that understanding the ways in which people resist, and the reasons for the resistance, are essential to achieving the desired effect. Conner identifies key precepts for dealing with resistance as:

- Accepting resistance as normal and healthy;
- Interpreting resistance as a symptom of a deficiency of ability or willingness;
- Encouraging and participating in overt resistance.

Conner makes two key points concerning human behavior in situations involving change. These are particularly salient to an adult learning situation:

- People seek control. They fear and avoid the ambiguity caused by the disruption of expectations where their abilities do not match the problems they must solve.
- People will be more resilient to change if they can exercise some degree of control over what happens during the implementation of change, and if they are able to assimilate change at a rate commensurate with the pace of change around them.

Kaeter draws upon the recommendations of several training practitioners, from both corporate training departments and consulting firms, to provide a set of recommended actions for dealing with resistance. These include preparatory work done by the trainer prior to the course, in order to develop an understanding of the current corporate climate, assess employee concerns, and to review examples used in the training material with the supervisor on the line activity to ensure it relevance. The course itself should be conducted in a participatory manner, not as a lecturer but as a facilitator; benefit to the individual should be emphasized; and the instructor should be available to the students after the class is completed to answer questions. Resistant episodes should be addressed immediately; if not it will haunt the class for the duration of the course. If the instructor experiences a personal attack, the remainder of the group should be enlisted to address the attack (Kaeter, 1994, 1995).

Beary uses an "ask before you tell" strategy to deal with, or preempt resistant episodes. His experience has shown him that properly constructed questions may be effective in identifying barriers to learning. He cites nine purposes served by this approach, three of which are directly applicable to dealing with or avoiding hostile behaviors: to determine knowledge levels; to expose attitudes; to deflect misdirected hostility. Beary suggests that through use of this questioning strategy, hostile behaviors may be avoided or corrected. He is supported by Leeds (Beary, 1994; Leeds, 1993).

DeValk mentions as issues both the hostile attack and the hostile withdrawal. He notes crowding, perceptual filtering, and fear of embarrassment as underlying reasons for these hostile actions. DeValk recommends that resistant behaviors be addressed directly and immediately (DeValk, 1994a).

Allard reports that a major problem is participant hostility arising from mismatched expectations. He encourages the instructor to set and enforce standards and expectations, to "say what you are going to do and do it." Allard notes with straightforward common sense, the "learner is free to decide what to learn, if anything, and regardless of what anybody else says. Learning cannot be imposed; even if class attendance can be" (Allard, 1991a p. 65).

Laus and Champagne identified classroom "ghosts" that create hostility and resistance to learning in the corporate training arena. They define a "ghost" as a haunting memory that helps define a reality that the individual believes to be true. These memories are associated with painful emotional feelings, which are recalled when the ghost is resurrected (Goldberg, 2001; Ornstein, 1991; Pert, 1992). Ghosts derive from the life experiences of the student, and the student's assumptions and perceptual filters. Laus and Champagne identify several "ghosts" of students' previous experiences that may lead to hostile resistant behaviors (Laus & Champagne, 1993). These are beliefs that:

- Learning is a passive process; responsibility for the outcome rests with the instructor.
- The classroom is a threatening environment in which survival is a major issue.
- The classroom is home to boring, trivial, and irrelevant matters.
- Training is a punishment for poor performance.
- People who are already successful at work do not need training.
- Being a member of an unfamiliar group will make the experience uncomfortable.
- The class should be used as a way to impress everyone.
- Training experiences reveal personal inadequacies.

Pickhardt states that whenever dealing with a group that is under undue pressure, the instructor should expect to be attacked in two ways: first, attacks on the instructor's expertise, and second, attacks on the instructor's authority. He attributes this to the fact that the audience will perceive the trainer as an authority figure, as an expert there to exert control or to develop skills in people – the students – who do not posses these skills or possess them to a lesser degree than needed. The instructor becomes a natural target for the anger, frustrations, and pressures felt by most people as a normal part of their work environment. The instructor is the scapegoat, and may be challenged, criticized, and punished with relative impunity (Pickhardt, 1980b).

Pickhardt describes hostile resistant behavior in military terms, speaking of diversions, attacks, and withdrawals. Whatever the form, however, the

resistant behavior is "always a statement of protest." The resistant learner is saying," I don't like being in this training situation. … I do not like what you are asking me to do" (Pickhardt, 1980b) Pickhardt's suggestions for dealing with hostile resistance center on moving quickly to defuse the situation and regain control over the training session.

Altizer describes resistant behavior as most commonly taking the form of disruptive activities, such as stage whispers, or direct challenges of the relevance of the course material, or of the course itself, or of the credibility of the instructor. He recommends the instructor be prepared to address these challenges principally by enlisting the group to respond. He cautions against a "one-on-one duel" with a hostile student (Altizer, 1993).

Knick reports, "Most training classes are conducted with little or no trouble. But bringing a diverse group of people into one room for a concentrated period of time always holds the potential for personality conflicts." "Such conflicts can be devastating and can even eliminate any productive training for the class" (Knick, 1993 p. 20). Knick describes common clashes in the classroom, arising out of "personality clashes." He cites examples of hostile withdrawal, diversion, and attack. He cites an example of students who just "…stared at me as if I were talking to the people behind them" (Knick, 1993 p. 20). Knick also points out that hostile conflicts may occur among the students, particularly when they are formed into groups. He suggests the instructor monitor the body language for indications of trouble (Knick, 1993).

Altorfer describes two sources of resistance, internal and external. Internal resistance occurs when an individual desires to change or accomplish some action, but cannot actually implement the change, for reasons contained within himself. Internal resistance is based on attitudes that have become ingrained as habits. Altorfer proposes an attitude management approach to resolve resistance problems. He notes that attitudes were learned over time through repetition and reinforcement, and contends that they can be unlearned and changed. Habits can be eliminated through the same steps by which they were formed (Ronis, Yates, & Kirscht, 1989). An automatic pattern – an incipient habit - begins as a conscious act of will. It is reinforced through countless repetitions until it becomes automatic. He believes that an instructor can only be successful if he or she addresses the causes of individual conflict and resistance with appropriate attitude-altering approaches and tools (Altorfer, 1992).

People who are in the act of resisting are at that time filled with energy. The instructor's goal should be to redirect that energy to attain the desired outcome. Maurer (1996) contends that resistance can be converted to support, if sufficient attention is paid to the resistance and the reasons for that resistance. However, there is some compromise involved. Overcoming the resistance requires that the underlying problems be understood, and that the instructor be willing to air the problems and even modify the instructor's plan in response. Maurer identifies typical – and unhelpful – strategies to deal with resistance as: attempts to use power to roll over the resistor with brute force, or ignore resistance as if it were just a nuisance (Maurer, 1996). These strategies actually increase resistance, as they are based on the notion of a zero sum game. Maurer suggests unconventional strategies, based on engaging the resistors, to set up a situation where all can benefit. Maurer states "resistance is people's assertion of their identity as they presently construct it" (Maurer, 1996 p. 50). He says that people do not resist change so much as they resist being changed – they have a self organizing capability and do respond to altered circumstances. He suggests that if people participate in the change from the beginning they are able to "re-identify or change their identity so that it doesn't feel threatening" (Maurer, 1996 p. 51).

Maurer identifies the following five fundamental means of dealing with resistance:

- Maintain a clear focus – the change agent needs to maintain his attention on the objective – accomplishing the change. This requires patience, and the ability to maintain a long view of matters.
- Embrace resistance – To build support for the change, the real reasons people resist the change must be understood. If they are understood it may be possible to redress the problems.
- Respect those who resist – listen to their views, speak truthfully with them, assume their motivations are positive.
- Relax – relaxation is necessary to maintain perspective, and to remain calm and self controlled even while being attacked.
- Join with the resistance – look for common fears and common interests. Look for ways to change the game such that each can win.

Block notes that resistance is an emotional process, and that people cannot be talked out of resistance. Block contends that an effective approach to dealing with resistance begins with getting the resistor to put his concerns into words. Full expression of the resistance

should be encouraged, so that the resistors pass beyond the resistance (Block, 2000).

Osland (2001) identifies several tactics for dealing with resistance. Each tactic begins with some empathy in the sense of trying to understand the others' experience. Osland recommends:

- Participation and Involvement – involve others in the design and implementation of the process; create buy-in;
- Facilitation and Support – provide encouragement and support for those affected by the change;
- Co-option – defuse the resistance by co-opting its leader; giving the leader a role in the change process;
- Negotiation and Agreement – offer incentives in return for decreased resistance;
- Coercion – force the cessation of resistance through disciplinary measures (Osland et al., 2001).

Review of theory and literature demonstrates that there is considerable evidence that hostile resistance to learning occurs routinely. Regardless, there is scant discussion of resistance to learning among researchers in adult education, and little information in the body of knowledge directly supporting instructors of adults and their learning community. Yet, while the topic of resistance to learning is almost unmentioned in the research within the field of education (excepting discussions of resistance to process, such as self-directed learning), training journals are routinely populated with anecdotal discussions of trainers' experiences, and prescriptions for tactical responses. These anecdotal descriptions typically make no attempt to tie the observed behavior to any body of theory. The effect is that professional practitioners have little real support of their efforts to understand what is happening when they experience hostile resistant behavior, and to develop strategies for remediation or intervention.

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