

Adult Learning Final

Adult Learning EAD 861

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Question 1

Attributes

Adult learners are typically defined as non-traditional students, meaning they are over the age of 25 and may have been out of formal academic training for a significant period of time (Dirkx, 2008). Although this classification is an accepted definition used by policy makers, it is not a hallmark for identifying all adult learners. Public policy makers measure the adult education activity by the number of people enrolled in formal programs or training activities. Employment related activities and self-development are the most common reasons why adults engage in educational endeavors (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007). On the contrary, a lack of time and money are reported as factors that contribute to why adults do not participate in educational activities. Adult learners usually have multiple simultaneous responsibilities, they can be parents, spouses, employees, friends and students. For example, students currently enrolled in EAD 861 Adult Learning, represent a variety of backgrounds, skills and experiences. The course consists of individuals from foreign countries, business owners, and industries such as healthcare, manufacturing and training. One can extract from this example, that there is not a set category or definition for adult learners.

When considering learning in adulthood, it is important to distinguish between whether the setting is formal, nonformal or informal (self-directed), (Merriam et. al, 2007). This classification is important because the level of participation and the learners in each setting will vary drastically. For instance, when considering formal settings such as higher education or job-related training, most under-educated adults will not be participants in that particular environment due to their educational attainment level (Merriam et al, 2007). In contrast, an under-educated adult may very well partake in a learning experience offered through a

community organization or faith-based institution, which are categorized as informal learning.

The needs of adults vary greatly in comparison to that of younger students. Malcom Knowles' research and introduction of andragogy presented adult educators a set of assumptions to understand the needs of adult learners (Merriam et. al, 2007). Andragogy covers six broad themes; that speak to the role of the teacher, honoring experience, education being seen as a vehicle to develop other competencies and adult motivators.

Adult learners are quite different from youth and children in their several key dimensions- the relationship between teacher and student, ability to guide learning objectives and motivation for learning. Children are more dependent on the teacher for teaching them about the subject matter. Adults tend to be more self-directed in their learning and look towards to the teacher for guidance, but not total dependence. Adults become colleagues and contribute to each other's learning based on their interactions in groups and overall participation in the course. In comparison to youth, adult students are motivated by the internal desires to succeed and obtain a better quality of life. Younger students are more motivated by their grades and parents' rules.

I think back to my own experiences as a high school student verses my time as a college student, and now enrolled in graduate school, I see is a definite difference. I expected my instructor to cover all the material in high school and was surprised when that did not occur in college. Throughout my maturation as a learner, I am more aware of the subjects that I want to learn about, because I have had life experiences to spark curiosity in topics of interest.

Learning

The needs of adult learners have lead to much research about the learning process in adulthood. Learning is the process of acquiring knowledge, which can result into new ways of thinking and changes in behavior. It is an on-going process of sub-conscious and conscious

efforts. Learning takes place all around us, yet the predominate theme of learning being seen as reserved for the classroom often precludes adults from viewing themselves as learners. The perception that learning is a formal process hinders everyday activities, such as locating a new route to work or preparing a new recipe being, classified as learning experiences or teachable moments. Philosophers such as David Kolb have worked to extend the concept of learning beyond formal instruction, which is evident in his statement, “learning is human beings’ primary mode of adaptation: if we don’t learn we may not survive, and we certainly won’t prosper” (Foley, 2004, p. 4). Therefore, learning is both formal and informal and can occur in the workplace, through interaction with family and other groups of people and as a result of participation in the political process and hobbies (Foley, 2004).

The learning process can be viewed from the following perspectives: acquisition, reflection, and practice- based community (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004). Each category posits learning as a function in different contexts. The acquisition perspective focuses on learning as obtaining new skills and developing competencies and how the new information leads to behavioral changes (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004). The goal of the case from Lesson 5 problem-based unit essentially focused on developing new instructional strategies to enhance the acquisitional learning process. The reflective viewpoint enables learners to use their past experiences as a point of reference to enhance the learning process. Lastly, the practice- based community vantage point allows learners to ascertain knowledge from their environment or workplace. These categories work together to form general overview of learning in adulthood. Many theories and models have been brought to the field to create frameworks for understanding the specificity of the learning process in adulthood.

Theoretical Perspective

I have best understood the role of the learning process in adulthood through McClusky's Theory of Margin, because it is all encompassing of the students' responsibilities. Unfortunately, the majority of adult students do not have the luxury of only being a student. As an adult educator, this model is helpful for me to understand how much time students may actually have to devote to educational activity. It then becomes my responsibility to maximize their availability through employing the most effective instructional strategies. McClusky defines a students' responsibilities as the "load" (L) of life and their ability to meet those obligations are the "power" (P). An increase of L diminishes P; hence, it limits students' ability to participate in the learning process (Merriam et al, 2007). The Theory of Margin is also useful for learners to increase their skills in order to create optimum performance. On the other hand, the limitation of this theory is that it does not give a framework for the technical aspects of the learning process.

Illeris's Three Dimensions of Learning Model gives a more in-depth analysis of the process of learning in adulthood and focuses on the combination of cognition, emotions and society or environment (Merriam et al, 2007). The gist of this model explains how the process of memory and analyzing combined with emotion response are internal concurrences that affect the learning process. This model recognizes the fact that learners may interpret activities differently through their emotional filter and the functionality of the subject being learned may come into question. Through this framework learners are seen holistically in their developmental process as a person and student.

Practice

Theories are often used to explain events and guide responses. In the story, "Learning to

Work,” the protagonist Dale Brown recalls her first experience in the workplace and how her learning or failure to learn created an emotional response and revelation of a learning disability (Brown, 2000). Dale’s struggle to perform basic tasks hinders her ability to serve customers, which is her responsibility as a waitress. Her co-workers begin to rail her because of her inability to complete seemingly simple tasks. According to Illeris’s model her cognition skills are working together and interpreting the environment which is her workplace. Yet, due to deficiencies in her cognitive ability the emotional response becomes more overwhelming and leads to unstable social integration. Dale is not aware of which area is more important in her waitressing job, to display pleasant demeanor intended to create positive interaction with those in her environment or make effort to improve the cognitive process. Adult learning is quite complex, at times knowledge is bounded causing educators and students to make irrational decisions based on a limited amount of information. Fortunately, Dale was not fired because of her errors and the job ended neutrally due unforeseen changes in her transportation. I would assume that had she been fired before learning of her learning disability, she would have suffered emotional issues and decreases in self-efficacy.

Reflections of My Role as an Adult Educator

As a previous diversity trainer for a non-profit organization, I had the opportunity to work with both adults and youth learners. Regarding working with adults, we experienced challenges in recruiting participants to attend our evening training sessions that were offered to the community. The trainings were from a social justice perspective and covered topics on racism, sexism, religious oppression and disability issues. Often times, participants enjoyed the workshops, but the challenge was to get them through the door. Admittedly, this was a

community event but there was a cost involved, because we served dinner. Perhaps, the cost was a deterrent to those that did not know what to expect of the workshop.

In terms of the learning process, our workshops could be most closely linked with the experiential learning theorists, such as Jarvis. Participants were asked to recall certain events in their life associated with the topic being discussed to create dialogue. In this type of work, the challenge becomes difficult in monitoring behavioral changes. We were not able to assess transformational learning in that moment, although it could have possibly occurred at a later date.

In retrospect, I do not feel our evening sessions responded to any immediate needs for our target population. The purpose of these sessions were to increase awareness about issues associated with diversity, but we did not respond to current issues in our participants lives. Jane Vella (2002) speaks of the need for immediacy in her book *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*. Yet, I am certain that we did not attend to making each topic respond to a lack or need. I have observed that most of Vella's stories reflect diverse people coming together to perform a task and as a team they were successful. How do you bring people together to repair attitudes rooted in injustice?

Question 3

Biological Age-Related Changes

Learning in adulthood encompasses issues and challenges beyond academic concerns that are not necessarily associated with learning as a child or youth. Age-related changes in adulthood are factors that contribute to adult learner participation and the overall learning process. Age-related changes create individual difference among adult students in the areas of biological, intellectual cognitive and psychosocial or socio-cultural differences.

Biological changes refer to changes that occur as a result of the natural aging process. They can be physical in nature and affect internal and external capabilities. The aging process has implications for all adult learners, although all adult learners are not affected in the same way. The aging process may have different results depending on the life-style and healthiness of the individual during the pre-aging years, which are considered to be early adulthood, ages 30-40 (Merriam et al, 2007). Alterations in the ability of sight and hearing are some of the most prevalent changes related to the aging process. One theory that suggests why aging occurs states that cellular damage occurs during the normal metabolism of oxygen and this damage builds up over time (Merriam et al, 2007, p.300). Although multiple theories exist, none of them are exhaustive and all require further research and development.

The sense of sight is a critical area in adult development because negative changes in sight has the ability to hinder the learning process if corrective tools are needed but not used. For example, it is common for adults in their 40s and 50s to have difficulty with reading small print and experience sensitivity to light (Merriam et Al., 2007). Adult educators have to be aware of possible difficulties in eyesight ability when creating programs for older adult learners.

Sometimes, sight issues require more than corrective lenses, surgery is commonly used among adult students to help restore sight. Cataracts and muscular degeneration are two common sight related diseases (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 302) that adults may face when preparing for learning programs. The implications of vision challenges for educators is to be cognizant of the lighting in the room, distance between students and visual aids and the font size and type used to create written material.

Intellectual Age-Related Changes

Whether or not intelligence decreases as adults age is a highly contested issue. Yet, before one can discuss whether intellect fluctuates over the life-span, it appropriate to define what is intellect. The formal meaning of intellect is the ability to process information, rationalize complex issues, and create critical reasoning of occurrence (Merriam Webster). Fluid intelligence is the ability to maneuver through everyday life and participate in novel activities (Merriam et al, 2007), such as learning how to complete a task for the first time. Learning new software or eating with chopsticks are examples of novel activities. Children have a high sense of fluid intelligence, whereas adults may be intimidated by novel learning. On the other hand, adults benefit from higher crystallized intelligence, which allows them to easily retreat to former learned behavior. For instance, learning how to ride a bike is a common childhood activity. Crystallized intelligence will enable an adult to ride a bike even though it may have been twenty years since the last the person rode a bike. The average adult learner is not aware of the formal rationale of intelligence and may think that their level of intelligence measures their ability to learn. The various definitions present intelligence in linear framework.

Through the work of Gardner, adult educators are able to comprehend a non-linear and categorized perspective of the multiplicity of intelligence through the Gardner's Theory of

Multiple Intelligences (MI), which encapsulates former research and suggests that people have multiple intelligences in eight different categories: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, music/rhythmic, body/kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Dirkx, 2008). He suggests that all humans possess varying degrees of these intelligences. With this theory in mind, it is my belief that the role of the adult educator is to facilitate growth and development among adult students to increase their own self-awareness. With better self-awareness adult students will become able to manage their own development and become more self-directed learners. MI covers a wide variety of intellectual difference; however, when considering the need for the emotional development of students it is important to consider the theory of emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) refers to the ability to manage emotions within self and those of others. Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence* popularized the term and posited that self-awareness alone is insufficient to success, one must be equally aware of the emotional process of others. Goleman's claims are an extension of the work of Salovey and Mayer, but not identical. Salovey and Mayer defines Emotional Intelligence as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Merriam et al., 2007).

Throughout the course of the semester we have seen repeated examples that reiterate the necessity of emotional intelligence in adult education. In the case of Jack and Letitia from Lesson 5, the inability to manage emotions is a contributing factor of conflicts in the work environment. It became increasingly important for workers to delineate their feelings from the conflict in order to reach resolution.

As learning professionals in the work environment, it is important to create atmospheres

that nurture the soul and emotions of employees. The distress of working in a non-nurturing environments is evidenced in “Piece Work” (Adilman, 2000), the story of women working in a clothing manufacturing facility. Poor working conditions and management condemnation creates a longing in the women to exercise emotional freedom. As educators, if our goal is to attend to all aspects of the educational process, it is necessary to equip adult workers and learners with tools and students require tools to effectively control their emotions in order to reach their goals

Cognitive Difference

The procedure of receiving, processing and restoring messages are known as cognitive skills. The cognitive process differs among adults learners and may become an area of concern throughout the aging, specifically the memory process (Merriam et al., 2007). In terms of adult development memory is referred to as sensory, working and long-term memory. Sensory memory is a portal for incoming messages before they are processed to working memory. Working memory is a filtering system that determines which information should be discarded or filed in long-term memory. Long-term memory is the permanent record keeper of memories associated with events, people and places and is most associated with the memory in adult hood.

Significant life events spur activity in the long-term memory. “The Management of Grief” (Mukherjee, 2000) is a sad story of a community’s epic loss. Yet, the learning point here is that the long-term memory has the ability to recall significant life events that are not part of the conscious thought process. For instance, Mrs. Bhave, the story’s protagonists, is able to recall early memories of her deceased children’s life and small details about her husband’s personality and behaviors. Grief propelled her long-term memory to recall these experiences. Therefore, emotions are also connected to the memory process. This connection echoes the need for

emotional intelligence in the learning process.

Nevertheless, the most effective way to increase memory capabilities is through linking adults with their preferred learning style. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory is the most commonly used instrument to students identify learning preferences. Making students more aware of their learning preferences is an effort to help them become more productive (Merriam et al, 2007). The frequency in the usage of Kolb's Inventory proves its effectiveness.

Psychosocial or Socio-Cultural

Psychosocial or socio-cultural forms of individual difference evaluate how the learner's identity has been formed through interaction with his or her environment. Psychosocial development is critical to understand how the environment relates to social development. Usually when adults have been assimilated into an environment is difficult for them to unlearn behaviors associated with the environment.

Jane Vella's training experience in Musoma illustrates the potential for cultural influence on identity. After completing a needs assessment, Vella (2002) and her colleagues have to determine strategies that will enable groups of diverse individuals to dialogue with each other. In this small village men do not listen to women in authoritative positions. During a role-play the women were asked to complete a challenge though only using their own resources. The women successfully completed the mission without enlisting the help of the men in the group. Even though the women were joyous about their victory, the men did not share their excitement. The roles of women and men are distinctively strong in this environment and contribute to the both women and men identify themselves. Initially, the women were going to ask the men for help because that is their tradition, either this custom is a result of choice or forced behavior is debatable. In their reflection, the women agreed that they were able to view themselves as

individuals and not through the lens of their male counterpart (Vella, 2002, p. 79).

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development posits the individual as moving through a series of stages of development that creates either negative or positive reactions. The theory begins with the need to create self-identity then progresses to a need of affiliation, afterwards there is a desire to care for others and lastly the need to classify and utilize the lessons gained (Dirkx, 2008). Transition is a key theme of Erikson's work. In terms of understanding the changes in adult development this model provides a comprehensive context for evaluating life experiences to locate the sub-conscious developmental need.

In contrast, Levinson's Age-Graded Model describes changes in the development process in correlation to chronological age. The periods of transition are from seventeen to twenty-two to twenty-two to twenty-eight. The next phase begins with thirty-something related transition, which takes place during the ages between twenty-eight to thirty-three. The final stage of transition occurs from thirty-three to forty and late adulthood in the sixties (Merriam et al, 2007). Common life events such family, marriage, faith and friendships are reference points of the model. This model does not take into account the timing of life events related to age. For example, I lost my father at age 25 and share commonalities with others who have lost their father despite age differences. On the other hand, the model does provide an alternative point of perspective for adult educators.

Question 4

Self-Directed Learning

For many adult educators and students becoming independent in their learning is the ultimate goal of adult education. In addition to self-directed learning being seen as a goal, it is also referred to as a process and instructional strategy (Merriam et. al, 2007) Self-directed learning promotes a concept of learner independence, which refers to a learner's ability to guide his or her ability to think critically and reason complex issues.

My personal belief is that self-directed learning is becoming more of a venue to promote lifelong learning, the notion that learning is inevitably connected to the life experience. Furthermore, the lifelong learning aspect of self-directed learning acknowledges that learning occurs most in adulthood through informal settings and interaction with others. I view self-directed learning as a mechanism to reinforce the importance of people envisioning themselves as learners. A challenge of adult education is that most adults are disassociated with the learning concept. Therefore, self-directed learning has the potential to bridge the gap between learners and the learning process.

The accepted goals of self-directed learning are to enhance the ability of adult learners to become self-directed in their learning, foster transformational learning and promote social action (Merriam et. al, 2007). These goals help educators identify their roles and create a common learning objective for both students and educators and seemingly are most related to the formal academic learning environment. In order for self-directed learning to achieve its first goal, educators must be able to provide learners with tools and skills to become independent. For example, if a graduate student is interested in conducting research in a specific area, he or she needs to be informed about the process of gathering data, the data assessment process and how to

create reports for others to increase awareness about the research. Because research is a typical component of graduate school and resources are already established, this process of becoming self-directed is easier in comparison to someone not participating in the formal education.

Hypothetically, if an individual became curious about their genealogy and pursued learning more about their heritage, they would need skills and competencies to become self-directed in the process.

Garrison's Dimensions of Self-Directing Learning Model clearly expresses the process of achieving self-directed learning and provides tools to achieve the goal. The model assumes that learners are motivated by the task at hand and have the cognitive ability to process the aspects of accomplishing the task (Merriam et al., 2007). This motivation can be the result of internal influences such as a need for achievement or external factors, such as providing for family members. Through self-monitoring and self-management learners are attuned to their role in the learning process. As a result, they are able to guide their learning; thus, becoming self-directed. Garrison's model is flexible and not relegated to only the academic environment. It can be used to explain the learning process of the graduate student or the individual researching their ancestry.

Learning Through and From Experience

Experiential learning is the opportunity for learners to become totally engaged in the learning process through involvement in hands-on activities. This concept is two-fold because experience can be used as an instructional method for future learning or past experiences can be used to identify learning moments. Experiential learning is embedded in the constructivist approach of learners constructing meaning of their experiences and employs all forms of cognition and intellectual ability.

The constructivist approach of situated learning theory most clearly expresses my perception of learning through and from experience. Learners are placed directly in a community of practice thereby framing their understanding of the environment. I am most reminded of the power of situated learning theory illustrated by Vella's work with Ethiopian teenagers hired to implement a Save the Children Initiative to transport food to remote areas (Vella, 2002, p. 58). Although the teenagers were not familiar about the process, they were successful by being trained in an environment that closely resembled their future area of work. Neither language nor cross-cultural communications were prohibitive in the learning process. Through participating in the training course, the teenagers developed their own community of practice. They also became self-directed learners, because they were aware of their roles and responsibilities and continued the program's implementation without the assistance of their instructor.

Reflection

Critical reflection allows the learner a sense of emancipation in recognizing their learning achievements. Praxis, action with reflection is built in experiential learning activities (Vella, 2002). Reflection can either be an act of contemplating over past actions or reflecting while completing the task. In reflection-on-action, students and educators reviewing events to decide whether they hold validity in meeting the learning objective. Boud is a proponent of reflection-on-action by articulating the need to realize feelings and emotions that underscore past behavior (Merriam et al., 2007). Conversely, reflection-in action allows participants to dialogue about events in the moment. In this methodology, facilitators ask questions to inquire about an individual's thought process while the action is taking. Schon is most well known for his advocacy of reflection-in-action. By examining the actions in progress, it is easier to reconstruct

defunct policies and structures (Merriam et. al, 2007).

Before taking this course, I had never really considered reflection-in action. As a result of my experience with the power of reflection-on action, I am still more favorable to that perspective. "A Sistah Outsider," (Riley, 2000) is an example of the power and self-revealing process of reflection. The story is actually the journal of a young lesbian African-American college student that tells of her undergraduate experience. Through recapturing her life experiences in written text, she was able to identify her socialization process and the events that lead her to become more self-accepting. The reflection process was a tool for the women to evaluate her actions in the environment and how other perceived her. As a result, she made transformational changes that contributed to her development. The reflection process led her to become connected to social justice work and she assumed the responsibilities of becoming self-directed in her learning. Reflection was her tool to monitor her progress.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning occurs as a result of the learning process creating a change in perspective and behavior. Individual and socio-cultural changes are two lenses of viewing transformative learning. The socio-cultural perspective is a tool to provide understanding between an individual's spirituality and positions in society associated with race, gender and class. Tisdell supports this theory and concludes that transformational learning is a deliberate daily occurrence that provides connection between the individual and the environment (Merriam et al., 2007).

Mezirow's work is a better complement to my view of transformational learning. Transformation occurs when there is a change in our thoughts and beliefs and lead to behavioral change. Often these changes are held in parts of being that are taken for granted. For example,

the mother in the “La Tortillera” (Martin, 2000) took for granted that her daughter would value the custom of cooking and preparing authentic tortillas in the same regard as she. The mother embarked on a transformational journey to save her child and grandchildren from losing aspects of their ethnic identity by insisting that the daughter learn how to make the ethnics staple. Both unexpected incidents and expected can create points of transformation. Losing a job, travelling or meeting new people are all factors that can lead to transformation learning.

My Experience in EAD 861

First I must say, this course has contributed significantly to my professional development. I entered the Higher, Adult and Higher Education (HALE) Master’s program with a keen interest in understanding adult learners. This course serves as my foundation for achieving this goal. Overall, my stereotypes of adult learners have been dispelled, which I consider to be transformational learning. I am more sensitive to aging process and its relationship to learning. Before, I thought my adult learners were just not putting forth sufficient effort to learn. Consequently, I am more aware of learning limitations connected to sight and hearing challenges.

Through my own reflection exercises and that of my classmates, I was able to gain more insight into the relationship between theory and practice. For instance, the reflections on the biological changes gave me an authentic understanding of changes people face during aging. As stated earlier, reflection is key component of experiential learning. Therefore, transformational learning occurred through becoming better connected to my own experiences and learning new perspectives from my group members.

The group element of online learning also contributed to my growth as I formed relationships with team members. Collaborating on the Power Point for our case study was the

most difficult assignment for me in the course. I was facilitated this lesson and was responsible for producing the Power Point. As a result, I have indentified improving my technology skills as key learning objective during my time as a graduate student. The online learning environment itself enabled me to become more self-directed in the learning process. I was responsible for conducting further research on the topics that piqued my interest. Transformational learning is a process, throughout the process of participating in this course I have changed my perspective on adult learning.

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