

ADAPTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING
STRATEGIES FOR THE ADULT POPULACE

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ADAPTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING
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ABSTRACT

ADAPTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING
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Since the end of World War II, there has been a steady increase in the number of adults that have been going back to school settings to increase their education base. With the constantly changing scope of technology, it is necessary to increase one's knowledge base to be able to stay competitive in the business market. Another aspect of the increasing need for quality adult education is the fact that the median age increases every year with the lengthening of the human life span and the baby boomers getting nearer to retirement time. Adult education opportunities are constantly increasing, yet adult education is still in the beginning stages of implementation. As the increase in dedication by both the governmental entities and educational entities rises, so will the progress of adequate and thorough adult education systems for the adults that want or/and need improved education. The research done in this paper has found quite a few good theories and practices as well as many practices and theories that are in need of major improvement. There needs to be a concerted effort by all parties so that we, as a country, do not fall even farther behind the world in education and technology.

Table of Contents

Approval Page.....	i
Title Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Chapter	
I. Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem	
Purpose of the Research	
Significance of the Problem	
Assumptions	
Delimitations of the Research	
Method of the Approach	
Definition of Terms	
II. Review of the literature.....	6
History of Adult Education	
Andragogy	
Teaching Strategies	
III. Adult Education Implementation Needs....	11
IV. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	15
V. References.....	18

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary buzzword, no matter the level of the learners or the teachers, is “educational or instructional strategies”. Instructional strategies are methods that are used in the lesson to ensure that the sequence or delivery of instruction helps students learn. In the past, teachers taught and students tried to learn. Teachers seldom adjusted their style of teaching to accommodate the student for increased learning. Instructional strategies are important for adult learners.

“The term adult learner can be applied to anyone from 18 to 108. Usually, however, the term is used to mean adults who have not studied for since leaving school or college” (Smith, 2008, p. 1).

Another aspect that needs to be understood about adult learners as compared to young people is the adult learners’ motivation. “Adult learners are volunteers. There is no compulsion involved when teaching adults and therefore motivation is not usually a problem. Adults tend to seek out learning opportunities. Often life changes, such as marriage, divorce, a job change, termination, retirement or a geographical change, serve as the motivation for the adult to seek new learning opportunities (Green, 1998, p. 1).

“Adults often seek out learning opportunities in order to cope with life changes. They usually want to learn something that they can use to better their position or make a change for the better. They are not always interested in knowledge for its own sake. Learning is a means to an end, not an end in itself.”(Green, 1998, p. 1).

With the increased need for additional education and the reduction of blue collar jobs in the American job market, there has been a necessary incorporation of the adult populace that are striving for higher education. “More than half of America’s 120 million workers between the ages of 25 to 64 have no postsecondary degree; in fact, no postsecondary credential of any kind. To put this in perspective, over the next 10 years a total of about 30 million young people will graduate from high school in the U.S. hopefully, many prepared for college—but there are today twice that many adults already in the workforce who have no postsecondary credentials. The adult literacy problem is equally severe. Findings from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy indicate that 31 million people, or 14 percent of Americans age 16 or older in the U.S. have “below basic” prose literacy and 48 million (22 percent) have “below basic” quantitative literacy. Especially in a global economy, these low literate adults are at very serious risk of never escaping subsistence or below-subsistence labor markets, and their limited job skills are a drag on national economic growth” (Green ,1998, p. 1). For these reasons there is a great need to understand how the adult populace learns, how to tailor the teaching, and how to improve learning and retention for this segment of society.

Statement of the Problem

Finding and utilizing teaching strategies that are conducive to the adult learner. The concept of andragogy, or adult learning, first was introduced in the 1920s by Eduard Lindman, there has been a plethora of research on what is the most successful teaching strategy that will aid the adult learner in an educational setting. While andragogy is, and

probably always will be, an ever changing and adapting theory, what teaching strategies are the most influential and productive for increasing learning and retention in the adult education field?

Assumptions

For the purpose of this paper, it is assumed that all research and review of the current literature is accurately reported. It is also assumed that the literature will make recommendations on how best to use the research available.

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted through the Karmann libraries (University of Wisconsin-Platteville) over a period of thirty-four (34) days. Primary searches will be conducted via Internet through EBSCO Host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Wilson Web. Key search topics will include “adult education and teaching,” “self directed learning,” and “teaching strategies.”

Method of Approach

A review of literature related to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of the history of learner retention in adult education programs, and the impact that

orientation processes have on student retention and learner outcomes overall, will be conducted. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

Definition of Terms

Adult Basic Education. (ABE) instruction in basic skills, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and other skills required to function in society, offered to adults whose basic skills fall between a 0 – 8.9 (zero to eighth grade, ninth month) grade level equivalent

Andragogy. Initially defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn," has taken on a broader meaning since Knowles' first edition. The term currently defines an alternative to pedagogy and refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages.

The andragogic model asserts that five issues be considered and addressed in formal learning. They include (1) letting learners know why something is important to learn, (2) showing learners how to direct themselves through information, and (3) relating the topic to the learners' experiences. In addition, (4) people will not learn until they are ready and motivated to learn. Often this (5) requires helping them overcome inhibitions, behaviors, and beliefs about learning (Conner, 1995, p. 8).

Basic Skills. The ability to read, write, and speak in English, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.

Adult Education. The practice of teaching and educating adults. This often happens in the workplace, through 'extension' or 'continuing education' courses at secondary schools, at a college or university. Other learning places include folk high schools, community colleges, and lifelong learning centers. The practice is also often referred to as 'Training and Development'. It has also been referred to as andragogy (to distinguish it from pedagogy). A difference is made between vocational education, mostly undertaken in workplaces and frequently related to up-skilling, and non-formal adult education including learning skills or learning for personal development (Wikipedia).

Transformative learning: involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (O'Sullivan, 2003, p. 326).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

History of Adult Education

The need for adult education began to take root in the 1920s with the return of soldiers after World War II and Eduard Lindman's theories, the field of adult education has been refined up through the late 70s and early 80s, there was research and an increased desire to increase the literacy rate and reduce the high school drop-out rate. . With the world's economy in constant change, economic downsizing, and reduction of blue collar, there was not a huge push for adult education, an increased understanding of adult education and increased need to effectively teach the adult populace. At that time, with the enormous need for increased education, many adults re-entered the educational field to increase their chances to be hired in a field, increased education is mandatory for the adult learner. Whether the education is a short seminar or receiving a Ph. D, continuous education is a necessity to stay competitive.

The need for added education for the adult populace, coupled with the problems of educating adults is distressing.

Current federal policies designed to ameliorate these problems are failing. Adult basic education and language training programs serve only a tiny fraction of those who need help. Postsecondary student-aid policies are sharply skewed toward traditional students – recent high school graduates without dependents and with no labor market attachment. These policies promote postsecondary educational practices, such as structures and delivery methods, which simply do not work for

adults...And we offer little help to those low-skilled adults who are prepared to invest in their own education (Bosworth. 2007, p. 3).

While there is a severe lag with the financial aid for the adult populace, there have been many steps made to increase the retention of the “non-traditional” students.

Understanding that adult learners are different than traditional learners and have more to offer have given great insight into teaching the adult populace effectively. “Adult learners share several characteristics. First, adult learners are diverse. The diversity of their life experiences, education, and personalities increases with age and shapes their outlook on educational experiences, past and present. These experiences also influence their perspective on future educational events, including their motivation to engage in professional development activities (Lawler, 1991, p. 1). With this knowledge there have been four major areas of adult learning that have been identified. These are as follows,

1. Self Directed Learning
2. Critical Reflection
3. Experiential Learning
4. Learning to Learn (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1).

With this as a base line for educating the adult learner, teaching strategies can be developed to foster and build upon an adult learner’s past experiences.

Andragogy

The term andragogy (or adult learning) did not truly define itself until Malcolm Knowles attempted to define it in 1973. “In an attempt to formulate a comprehensive adult learning theory, Malcolm Knowles, in 1973, published the book *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. Building on the earlier work of Lindeman, Knowles asserted that

adults require certain conditions to learn. Knowles also borrowed the term andragogy (and-rè-go`jê) to define and explain the conditions.” (Conner, 1995, p. 9). Andragogy, initially defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn," has taken on a broader meaning since Knowles' first edition. The term currently defines an alternative to pedagogy and refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages.

Teaching strategies

Finding and utilizing teaching strategies that are conducive to the adult learner. The concept of andragogy, or adult learning, first was introduced in the 1920s by Eduard Lindman, there has been a plethora of research on what is the most successful teaching strategy that will aid the adult learner in an educational setting. While andragogy is, and probably always will be, an ever changing and adapting theory, there are some basic teaching strategies that are generally accepted to be successful for the adult populace.

The first teaching strategy that is generally accepted is self-directed learning. The basis of self-directed learning is that the learning is initiated and directed by the learner. They set their own learning goals, they decide on which learning methods they use, and they evaluate their own progress. With self-directed learning the learners learn more and better when they take the initiative in learning and are proactive. With this motivation the learners have more purpose, they tend to retain and use more of what is learned.

A second accepted teaching strategy is critical reflection. Critical reflection is a composite of three interrelated processes. These are “(1) The process by which adults question and then replace or reframe an assumption that up to that point has been uncritically accepted as representing commonsense wisdom. (2) The process through

which adults take alternative perspective on previously taken-for-granted ideas, actions, forms of reasoning, and ideologies. The use of role play, cases, and simulation are use in teaching. (3) The process by which adults come to recognize the hegemonic (means imperialistic) aspects of dominant cultural values “(Smith, 2008, p. 1). While this teaching strategy is newer in nature, it is shown by evidence that adults are capable of learning with this style whereas younger learners are not able to. There are a host of developmental psychology constructs that describe how adults come to think contextually and critically. These are embedded logic, dialectical thinking, working intelligence, reflective judgment, and post-formal reasoning (Kameenui and Carnine, 1998, p. 1).

A third teaching strategy that is effective for teaching the adult learner is lecture. Lecture is the most widely used teaching method in adult education. It is an efficient way of disseminating information and concepts. It is generally agreed by most educators that the purpose of lectures is to lay foundations as the learner works through the subject. In other words, lecture would be an excellent initial teaching tool to disseminate initial information that is uniform to all students. It is in my opinion that lecture is completely over-used in today’s educational setting. As an educator, I do understand the draw for lecture, it is simple to prepare for, it is easy to control the flow of the class, and it is teacher centered. Lecture is most effective for learning when it is used in combination with other teaching strategies.

A fourth teaching strategy that is an effecting learning tool for the adult learner and is most favored by the adult learners is discussion. The reason for the gravitation toward discussion learning is that it is interactive and encourages active, participatory learning. This format of learning encourages learners to analyze alternative ways of

thinking and behaving. It also allows the adult learner to explore their own experiences so that they can become better at critical thinking.

A fifth teaching strategy is guided learning. While guided learning is popular and appropriate for all age groups, it is especially effective with the adult learner in a hands-on setting. With guided learning, the teacher initially instructs the adult learner in what is expected and needed to fulfill the expectations. The teacher and the learner BOTH perform the initial task so that the learner sees and understands exactly what is to be done. The learner is then tasked to perform another task on their own. At the finish of this task, the teacher and the learner assess the task. The learner initially critiques the end product. After the learner critiques the task, the teacher then critiques the task to what is correct and expected. From that point, the learner reassesses the task and fixes any deficiencies.

A sixth and final teaching strategy is experiential learning. This learning is a defining feature of adult learning and should be grounded in the adults' experiences. It is believed that these experiences are a valuable resource and is cited as crucial by adult educators of every ideological belief. There are two believed pitfalls relying on accumulated experience as the defining characteristic of adult learning. These are, "First, experience should not be thought of as an objectively neutral phenomenon – rather, our experience is culturally framed and shaped" (Smith, 2008, p. 1). And "How we experience events and the readings we make of these are problematic; that is, they change according to the language and categories of analysis we use, and according to the cultural, moral and ideological vantage points from which they are viewed" (Smith, 2008, p. 1).

CHAPTER THREE

ADULT EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATIONAL NEEDS

Theory and practice of concepts are often not congruent. For this reason I would like to introduce some experiences of the previous theories and aspects that would increase the learning ability for adult education students. . These uses and experiences are then shown to have made a positive impact upon the adult students' learning and retention. Being as there is very little experimental research of adult instruction, it can be difficult to separate fact from theory. As Li-Kuang Chen et. al. have discovered with their research that there are three basic stereotypes that can affect analytical facts in theories and reporting.

“First, older adults have been portrayed as a homogeneous group in terms of age, gender, race, class, ethnicity, and able-bodiedness. Second, older adults have been viewed as capable and motivated learners with few cognitive or physical limitations. Third, programmatic responses have been driven by the life context of older adulthood” (Li-Kuang et al. p.1).

Adult learners are different than child learners, not just with the huge difference in experience, there are also physiological differences. It is a fact that there is memory deterioration in adults, while it is often not severe until extreme old age, deterioration does exist. For this reason memorization and meaningless learning is a large detriment to an adult learner. The retrieval of long term memory can be more difficult for an adult learner to access due to physiological changes in the adult learners' brain. To

compensate for this, relating new material to something that is already known increases the ability for an adult learner to retain and store this new information more effectively. With the fact that adult learners store and retain information slightly differently, modifying the curriculum would be the first logical step to increasing an adult learner's retention of the information that is trying to be delivered. Not only is there a difference with the memory of adult learners versus child learners, there is also a difference to how adult learners react and act to a classroom situation varies. With the fact that adult learners have not necessarily been in school for a period of time, had other education and work experiences, and varied opinions, adult educators need to review and modify their curriculum to accommodate the differing learning needs of adult learners. Lacefield (1999) lists a collection of guidelines or suggestions for creating an inclusive learning curriculum.

- Individuals bring multiple perspectives to a learning situation as a result of their religion, gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, and/or physical abilities. Build a curriculum which acknowledges these perspectives.
- Reflect the experiences of learners, both as individuals and as members of particular social groups. Value these experiences and use them as a basis of learning and assessment. They are powerful additions to the curriculum.
- Acknowledge the power disparity between the instructor and the students. Create an environment which allows students to disagree with the instructor. Do not require that students agree with a particular viewpoint or 'fact'
- Be aware that participants are positioned differently in relationship to each other and to the knowledge being acquired. All learners do not bring with them the same ability to think critically, analyze results, etc. If you plan to require these skills, build an opportunity to learn them into the course. (Lacefield, 1999, p. 2)

The belief that student centered programs are simply accepted as better based on theory, not on fact. While student centered teaching is applicable and positive when the learners are already highly invested and educated on the subject that is being taught. Lack of this knowledge does not warrant the need to have student based learning. This proves, in my

theory, that teacher based learning is the most productive teaching strategy for new and unfamiliar information. DiVesta (1954) tested the effects of instructor-centered and student-centered approaches to teaching on learning achievement tests, attitudes about leadership and behaviors in a 20-hour human relations training program for 118 Air Force personnel. This student-centered program included extensive student involvement in planning and carrying out learning activities, experiential learning, individual problem focus and extensive peer interaction. Both methods produced more learning, attitude and behavior change than the control group. However, there were no significant differences in learning between the two instructional approaches, although the instructor-centered program did tend to produce more learning and change than did the student-centered program (DiVesta, 1954).

The lack of flexibility is a huge hurdle for many adults wanting to increase their educational professional needs. As adult education is becoming more popular and more prevalent, many colleges and universities are increasing the amount of off-hours and internet classes. While this is better than the past, (which classes were almost completely held at traditional education time slots), there are still many limitations that can make it difficult for many adult education students. From personal experience, even having two classes during a week's time frame, can be a difficult juggling act with work and family. Not many adults are financially able to reduce their work hours so that they are able to attend classes, this along with the fact that the traditional 9 to 5 work days are becoming more and more scarce, which equals a difficult time fitting school into an already hectic schedule. Internet classes and on-line schooling are becoming more popular and more prevalent as the years go on. Many are able to give accredited BA, BS, and MA degrees

for on-line schooling. While on-line schooling is the easiest way to get an education while utilizing free time, there are 2 prevalent downfalls to the on-line learning process. The first downfall is the fact that not all people have access to computers and the internet. There could be multiple reasons for the lack of internet access and/or computers, the most logical reason is the fact that many middle/lower income families simply do not have the funds to purchase a quality computer or/and are not able to afford the fee for internet access. The second major downfall is the fact the many middle aged/elderly people are still ignorant of how to use a computer at all let alone get online and do class work.

The largest hurdle, in my opinion, for adults to increase their education is the financial burdens placed upon them by trying to go to school, whether it is traditional schooling, off hours schooling or online schooling. Unlike what many researchers allude to, a large number of adults learners “seek out learning experiences in order to cope with specific life-changing events—e.g., marriage, divorce, a new job, a promotion, being fired, retiring, losing a loved one, moving to a new city...the more life change events an adult encounters the more likely he or she is to seek out learning opportunities. Just as stress increases as life-change events accumulate, the motivation to cope with change through engagement in a learning experience increases (Zemke & Zemke, 1984, p.2).

A majority of adult education students are unable to take a class load that would consider them a full time student. If the student takes less than a half-time load of classes, they are not eligible for financial aid and few have access to other forms of grants or scholarships

..because of limits on individual eligibility for aid and limits on the kinds of education and training programs eligible students may pursue, almost all of the federal aid resources (and the state programs that tend to mirror federal eligibility requirements) is directed to traditional students—recent high school graduates with no dependents and without attachment to the labor market (Bosworth, 2007, p. 17).

A large percentage of adult learners that do not choose to enroll, are not enrolling due to the cost of going to school.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Adult education is still in its infancy from the reading. There is still much that has to be researched and known before there can be any truly definitive facts in adult learning and education. There is an excellent basic understanding that is being utilized greatly in theory. The problem is the difficulty or inability for this information to be utilized consistently for the adult populace. Even though the teaching strategies for adult learners are not consistent nationwide, they are well on their way to being constituted for the advancement of all adult education settings. An unforeseen positive impact of the improvement of adult teaching strategies is the impact these strategies have had on the traditional teaching strategies. My initial desire to research the topic of adult teaching strategies was the mistaken assumption that the adult teaching strategies were being derived from advancements in pedagogical teaching strategies. The research found not only refutes this mistaken assumption; it also proves that the reverse is true. Standard pedagogical teaching strategies have greatly improved due to the advancements in andragogical teaching strategies. "Continued expansion of educational attainment levels over the next several decades will have substantial impact on future growth. In a flat world economy where innovation in technology and strategy flow freely across national borders, the economic consequence of producing more educated workers may be even greater than over the past several decades" (Bosworth, 2007, p.5). This demonstrates the most pronounced lag in advancements to accommodate the adult populace in achieving their learning needed to be prepared for the next decade. This lag is the lack of proper

funds to allow these adults to have the opportunity to improve their education. There needs to be increases in economic and strategic advances in adult educational opportunities for this country to continue to flourish in the world setting. “There are obvious financial barriers. Adult workers with no college credentials do not make much money at all. Paying even \$300 to \$500 in tuition and fees per course as a community college (much less \$800 to \$1200 or more for one course at a public four-year college) competes very poorly against other necessary living expenses” (Bosworth, 2007, p.13).

There are some very sobering facts. “From, 1980 to 2000, there was virtually no increase in the percentage of individuals ages 25 to 34 with a high school degree or better and, among males, that percentage has actually declined over the period”(Bosworth, 2007, p.7). The college bachelor degree attainment has also mirrored this trend. While these facts are startling, the last fact is extremely troublesome. Of the reduced number of college entrants, the actual graduation rate has decreased over the past 20 yrs. There was about a 58% graduation rate in a five year time frame, for a four year college, in 1983, and a 44% graduation rate in a three year time frame at two year colleges. In a twenty year period, the graduation rate for four year schools has dropped to 55% (41% at public colleges and universities where most students are enrolled) and 39% at two year colleges (Bosworth, 2007, p.7).

Recommendations

The American educational system is under a great upheaval at this time. Teachers are being expected to adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate all students. The government is making school systems financially responsible to teach students how to pass all standardized tests that the government deems important. The money crunch that has enveloped state, community and city governments that has caused cutbacks in educational programs, materials and teachers. In my opinion, it is not a coincidence that the corrosion in educational support by the government mirrors the reduction in success in the educational system. With this problem continuing, the need for the adult education system to continue advancements in effective teaching strategies is imperative. It has been proven that the new strategies developed by the adult education system has and is been effective for pedagogy as well as andragogy. With this fact known, the increased advancements will benefit the complete educational system and may help to reduce the damage the economical and governmental restrictions have imposed in the pedagogical setting. Most of the readings that I have studied were based upon adult education almost secularly. While I feel this is necessary, this is not the solution to the problem. Even if the advancements in adult education close the gap educationally and financially with the traditional post-secondary educational environment, the reduction in the volume of traditional post-secondary students will still overwhelm the adult education system and cause the United States to continually lag behind the rest of the world educationally as well as technologically.

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