

Chapter 11

Integrating Adult Learning and Technology for Effective Education: Strategic Approaches

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an examination of the influences involved in the integrating of adults into higher education. The chapter begins with an exploration of the increase in the number of adults in higher education since 1969. Comparing the changes in demographics from 1969 to 2007 shows how little large public universities have done to integrate adults into higher education. This examination shows significant participation by three types of institutions; community colleges, small private four year liberal arts institutions, and for-profit institutions created to meet the higher education needs of adults. The chapter defines adult and higher education and discusses how they differ or interact. A discussion of how adult students learn and effective techniques to facilitate learning in adult classrooms follows these definitions. Finally, a discussion identifying how teaching techniques that are effective for adults can be integrated into traditional classrooms in higher education brings the chapter to a close.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a faculty lounge in a medium sized Midwestern state university where there is a lively discussion taking place concerning the provost's idea to create programs specifically

for adult students. Some faculty members think it is a great idea as they will be able to reach students that they could not reach previously and provide them valuable tools. Other professors are worried that this nontraditional move will have negative effects on the intellectual strength of the

university, insisting that it is nothing but a money maker and adults should stay in the continuing education programs the institution already offers. Even worse, some faculty members might come to the conclusion that many of the andragogical methods used in adult programs have a place on their traditional campus, while their less flexible peers will cherish their yellowed lecture notes to their graves. This scene could be played out in any number of institutions, with similar but varying results. There is an ongoing debate in higher education as to the place that adults should occupy and whether programs for them are valid intellectual pursuits. Having taught undergraduate and graduate courses to adult students over 20 years, the authors are strong proponents of the application of adult learning theories and methods in a higher education setting.

Adult students have their own styles of learning which may differ from those most familiar to traditional age college students and most comfortable for traditional faculty who teach based on their own time proven pedagogy. Adults take more responsibility for their own education and often become very involved in their programs, to the point of being assertive. Some higher education institutions understand that adults are a unique population and are dedicated to meeting the needs of this demographic group. As a part of that dedication, these institutions create policies where instructors must attend developmental sessions on the principles of teaching adults, incorporating critical thinking and collaborative learning into the classroom, and how to enhance learning in the classroom with technology.

After modeling adult learning theories and methods while teaching adult students in a higher education graduate program, many instructors hear the question: "Why don't all college instructors teach this way? If we know this is how adults learn and I can attest that it works for me, why isn't it a job requirement for all instructors in higher education institutions?" This is an excellent question and one explored throughout this chap-

ter. The goals of this chapter are to discuss the adult student population in U.S. higher education institutions, compare the terms "adult education" and "higher education" and their relationship, highlight how adults learn, and show how adult learning and teaching strategies can be incorporated into higher education institutions.

BACKGROUND

In the mid 1960s, leading educators in the United States sensed a transition in the role and structure, amongst other things, of American higher education. They believed that a revolutionary change was coming which would create a "change in the basic character of the university from an institution primarily serving youth to one serving at least equally adults and community" (Knowles, 1969, p 3). This belief prompted the American Council on Education to study what they referred to as "Adult Higher Education" in the United States. This term is no longer widely used in the adult education community in the United States, but it accurately describes the issues of adult education that this chapter will examine.

These educators perceived that adult education in America was about to make the leap from the world of continuing education, focused on housewives and farmers, to an integral part of our system of higher education. They envisioned adults becoming as important to universities as the younger, traditional age students that they referred to as "youth." They spoke of the concept of Lifelong Learning as a new process emerging from the ashes of World War II and the enormous pressures that the administration and faculties of academic institutions were under to revise their way of thinking when it came to adults in higher education (Knowles, 1969).

Almost 25 years later, Carol Kasworm (1993) looked at the world of adult higher education in an effort to gain an understanding of where this concept stood internationally. She too was very

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