Chapter 18
Andragogical Design Considerations for Online Multicultural Education

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ABSTRACT

Online education is expanding in higher education as a means of cost-effective, accessible, convenient, and flexible environments for learning. Such environments are popular amongst the growing population of diverse adult learners. This growth mirrors the need for diversity and multicultural education to both meet students' needs and prepare them for a multicultural, globalized world. Instructional design considerations that address diverse adult online learners' needs are examined and discussed. This chapter also examines some instructional design considerations that were used to develop and implement multiculturally inclusive materials and activities tested in graduate and undergraduate level courses. Recommendations for the development of online materials geared toward diverse adult audiences are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education looks a great deal different than it did 50 years ago – or even 25 years ago. The increased diversity in educational dissemination beyond traditional face-to-face, didactic instruction, such as the increase in online, hybrid, and blended opportunities (Bonk, Lee, Kou, Xu, & Sheu, 2015; Picciano, 2017), has mirrored the increase in both diverse student populations in higher education institutions and the need for diversity and multicultural education (Banks, 2012). Online education is gaining ground in public, private, and for-profit arenas of higher education as cost effective, accessible, convenient, and flexible environments for learning (Kidd, 2010; Nguyen, 2015) and is appealing to diverse, adult audiences. Instructional design considerations that address the needs of both adult learners and diverse

audiences must be examined and implemented to further develop these expanding environments. Additionally, the construction, dissemination, and study of multicultural education materials for myriad learners may help prepare students for their futures in an ever-changing and diverse world. In this chapter, we will discuss the growth of online environments and their appeal to diverse, adult learners, the increasing need for designing multiculturally inclusive materials, and some instructional design considerations that were used to develop and implement materials and activities that were tested in both graduate and undergraduate level courses.

According to Seaman, Allen, and Seaman (2018), while overall higher education enrollments are declining, distance education and online offerings have been increasing steadily over the last several years. The number of students studying on campuses is also decreasing, while the number of students studying exclusively in online environments is increasing (Seaman et al., 2018). Even in 2010, Jukes, McCain, and Crockett envisioned "a shift from textbooks, brick-and-mortar classrooms, lectures, worksheets, standardized tests, bells...to learning whenever and wherever it can best happen" (pg. 16). These changes in the diverse offerings of learning bring with them changes in audience demographics and students' needs. However, like every other area of diversity, not all instruction is created equally.

With these changing needs, the U.S. saw a surge in for-profit higher education institutions, massive open online courses (or MOOCs), and blended options. While these flexible and accessible environments offer experiences for diverse groups of learners from all over the world, they still face criticism regarding academic rigor, motivation, community development, persistence, and completion (see Bali, 2014; Bennett & Monds, 2008; Coole & Watts, 2009; Hart, 2012; Hew & Cheung, 2014). Here, we will not focus on for-profit online education or MOOCs, rather we will turn our attention to online environments in traditional, non-profit higher education settings that serve adult populations.

BACKGROUND

The Needs of Adult Learners

It was not until the 1920s that learning differences between adults and children were acknowledged, and it was even suggested prior to the 1920s that adults were unable to learn anything new at all (Knowles, 1980; Merriam, 2001). Now, we readily accept that adults learn differently than their younger counterparts. Andragogy, or the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, pg. 43), focuses on the unique needs and learning principles necessary when designing for or instructing adults. Knowles (1980; 1984) identified five assumptions that distinguished adults from child learners:

1. Self-concept and self-direction
2. Motivated internally
3. Readiness to learn
4. Real-life experience
5. Interested in application of learning

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) added a sixth assumption indicating that adults need to know why they are learning what they are learning and the immediate value of that information.

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