Chapter 13
Creating an Andragogy for Adult Learning Advantage

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this chapter is to provide a framework for creating learning activities for adult learners that rest on a firm theoretical foundation and are based on a definition that highlights the actual learner characteristics involved in successful adult student performance. To achieve this goal, it is important to establish a definition of adult learning that can be used to guide the selection of the important instructional elements that must be addressed in the design of learning activities that provide adult learning advantage. This chapter will provide a framework for the design of an adult andragogy that incorporates teaching and learning principles derived from theory and research in the learning sciences.

INTRODUCTION

The great educator, E.L. Boyer (1997) in his Scholarship Reconsidered, provided a perspective on the goal of teaching that can serve to inform the goal of creating adult learning advantage. Boyer stated that teaching should, ''…create a common ground of intellectual commitment...[and] stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over'' (p. 24).

Adult learners tend to have different characteristics than traditional learners (Rabourn, BrckaLorenz & Shoup, 2018; Knowles, 1978, 1980). Adult learning advantage can be achieved if an institution adopts an educational philosophy that addresses these characteristics though the adoption of a model of learning that is student-centered and aims to produce student agency, that is, autonomous and self-determined learners. To achieve the greatest adult learning advantage, the ability to direct one's own learning, it is important to deliver instruction in a way that integrates knowledge, cognitive and behavioral skills in active learning exercises. The design of learning activities for this type of adult learning requires a unique

andragogy, a teaching philosophy and methodology with a sound theoretical foundation that addresses the unique characteristics of the adult learner.

The genesis of an andragogy for adult learning advantage must be nested in the deliberations of a school or department as it engages in reflection about the best way to educate its students. This is a process many institutions may go through for accreditation and the culmination of this exercise should produce a cohesive educational philosophy that defines and guides both instruction and assessment. It is the perspective of this chapter that the institutional educational philosophy needs to be focused on producing student agency in learning by addressing the unique features of adult learners as well as incorporating what is known about student learning from the learning sciences.

Once an institutional educational philosophy is created, the next phase of andragogy specification for agency involves translating the educational philosophy into a learning model that will integrate teaching and learning, assessment and student support. This chapter will aim to show how the process of defining an andragogy that supports adult learning agency requires the development of an integrated learning model that incorporates an understanding of adult student learning and how student support personnel, faculty and a learning management system (if one is used) will work in concert to promote student agency and success.

The lynchpin of efforts to produce adult student agency is a learning environment where student efforts to learn interact with the learning and assessment activities developed from the institutional educational philosophy. This learning environment, or educational interface, is the instantiation of the institution's goal to produce students who are agentic, i.e., self-directed and intrinsically motivated to learn.

Figure 1 below is a basic schematic of a process for developing an educational interface that affords active learning and assessment activities that interact with adult student learning characteristics to produce student agency.

The process begins by translating the institutional educational philosophy into an integrated learning model that is comprised of a standard teaching methodology that addresses basic human needs thought to be critical to the development of agentic students and an integrated support system focused on student success. This integrated learning model is used to produce active learning and assessment activities that become the educational interface with which students interact in their efforts to learn. The interface of student-centered learning and assessment activities and adult learning characteristics produces affordances for students to develop agentic learning strategies which will serve them in all their learning endeavors.

BACKGROUND

Adult Learner Characteristics

Malcolm Knowles, one of the original leading lights of the adult education movement, helped to focus attention on the more salient differences between adult and traditional learners when he made the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy. Pedagogy of course, is the traditional term that describes the methods and practice of teaching as they relate to children. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1991) in developing the concept of andragogy, the methods and teaching related to adults, Knowles (1978, 1980) was attempting to develop a model of adult learning focused more on characteristics relevant to learning such as a greater desire for self-direction rather than just describing aspects of their lives such as being employed full-time or having dependents.

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