

Chapter 40

Mentoring in the Web– Class for Adult Learners

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ABSTRACT

Conventional learning, as we have come to know it, is rapidly changing due to the advancements in education provision. Strategies that focus on adult learners, particularly in ODL environments, have to be developed. This chapter endorses a discourse regarding web-mentoring as a principal form of ODL supervision that is suitable for adult learners and highlights the codes influencing their learning. It provides the quintessence and recognition of learning difficulties by determining issues arising from critical perceptions and identifying the significance of advancing learning in relation to the virtual mentor-mentee relationship. The discussion draws on both perspectives of UTAUT and the benefits of web-mentoring for adult learners. It gives prominence to features influencing technology acceptance and detects possibilities that strengthen or limit the essence of these factors by accentuating the value of netting socio-economic and techno-cultural differences to understand reception and need. Finally, it presents a framework for launching a sound mentoring relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Adult learners are realising that it is imperative to increase their personal value proposition, take a lead in their career development, and remain competitive to keep up with the ever-changing demands of their jobs and/or prospective occupations. We now see learners looking beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar institutions to virtual classrooms – which could be based anywhere around the globe – to learn and improve their skills base. Learning itself involves a change in attitude and skills (Nieman & Pienaar, 2015, p. 72). Thus, adult learners can also keep up with the changes and align themselves to the alternative offerings provided online. Green, McNeill, Gosper, Woo, Phillips, and Prestonlens (n.d.) point out that such education provision offers added flexibility agreeable to the demands of adult learn-

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ers. Therefore, the professional guidance and support for this choice of learning has to respond to these demands. In addition to the normal face-to-face means of support, the University of South Africa (Unisa) also provides support and guidance through online mentorship.

Open Distance Learning (ODL) and other online learning platforms, require a different kind of instruction offering (for example e-tutoring and continuous online support and guidance like electronic or online mentoring) to accede to the demands of virtual classrooms. This highlights the importance of planning for such developments. Marx (2006a, p. 97) maintains that distance learning is persistently entrenched as an integral feature within various instructional methodologies. Web-mentoring in this case is mounted as a significant form of ODL instruction, guidance, and support and scaffolds simulated adult learning. It implies virtual interaction of mentor and mentee. The mentor, who is deemed knowledgeable and experienced in the field has been appointed to offer guidance and support to those mentees who require direction to learn, develop, and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills outlined by the objectives of the online mentorship programme. It is the process of connecting a mentor (who is considered experienced) and a mentee (who may be a novice) outside the physical environmental parameters (Unisa, 2012 p. 53) and has the potential to draw large numbers of learners around the globe to interact with more experienced mentoring tutors who agree to take them under their tutelage.

If we accept the premise that a good quality online mentorship is sine qua non to supporting remote technological adult education, then we can reasonably argue that the challenges of supporting adult education and its principles will endure. Kram (1983) argues that a decision to pursue learning as an adult resembles a period of responding to striking self-inquiry about one's own competence, effectiveness, and ability to develop and achieve one's goals. This suggests that learning programmes for these adult learners have to create support mechanisms, particularly online guidance, to enable these adults to succeed. Similarly, a sufficiently compiled web-mentoring programme has to be lined up for adult learners' virtual learning to succeed. Adult web-mentoring has to be structured in a manner that inspires learning, collaboration, and the broader worldwide learning partnership, where distribution of skills, knowledge, attitudes (SKAs), and values (SKVs) extend beyond local boundaries. Collaboration opens up communicational channels and builds reliable relationships. Godden, Tregunna, and Kutsyuruba (2014) assert that the actual effect of the mentoring process originates from the worth of relationships. The stage that adult learners are at implies that they have numerous learning avenues and sources from which to acquire SKAs. When students take advantage of such support opportunities, they open themselves up to a multitude of developmental interactions (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Whereas there is an upsurge towards alternative learning (in the form of online tuition) for adult learners, little has been done to support an online tuition suitable for such learners. Some of the learners still grapple to use technology devices meant to enable them to attend virtual classes and stay connected to interact with fellow learners and tutors. This may have an adverse impact on these learners' ability to learn and progress, thereby limiting them to function within the normative online mode of operation and could as a result thwart the intention of online learning platforms. Since there is a need to recognise this challenge and plan for it accordingly, the objective in this chapter is to promote dialogue on web-mentoring by giving prominence to the principles of adult learning when planning for provision of assistance to address learning difficulties. Adult learners' acceptance of issues arising from critical perceptions, and identifying their significance to advance learning in relation to web-mentoring are equally determined. The intention is to ignite consideration for addressing challenges that may bar the success of web-mentoring for adult learners as well as developing an online mentorship framework for the success of adult online learners to particularly respond to their needs. A significant number of adult

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