Chapter 52
Examining the Adult Learning in "Giving Back" Initiatives

Rochell R. McWhorter

 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2053-1610
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

Mark Owens
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

Joanna Neel
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

Jessica A. Rueter
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

Gina M. Doepker
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

ABSTRACT

Service-learning has been identified as a high-impact, experiential teaching practice by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. This chapter examines how service-learning (SL) initiatives at one public institution of higher education allowed students opportunities to give back to their community while gaining valuable adult learning experiences. Three cases are presented describing how graduate and undergraduate students (N=229) enrolled in one of four courses (Political Science, Special Education, Early Elementary Education, and Business) incorporated a service-learning component for relevant and purposeful adult learning outcomes. Following the presentation of each of these cases of service-learning, a cross-case analysis and key terms and definitions are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Service-Learning has been found to be a high impact instructional method for "giving back to the community" (McWhorter, Delello & Roberts, 2016, p. 80) by providing adult learners with meaningful opportunities that meet local needs where students live. Also, SL provides students an opportunity to transfer skills learned in their higher education coursework to positively impact adult education (Hendrix, 2019; Niehaus & Crain, 2013).

The tenets of adult learning theory recognize the transformative power of incorporating authentic meaningful experiences in the learning process. Gibb's 1960 functional theory of adult learning (as cited in Trotter, 2006) embraces the belief that, "learning should be problem and experience centered and meaningful to the learner" (p. 11). Service-Learning experiences can provide adult learners with meaningful opportunities to serve their local community while also learning through purposeful application of new academic skills.

This chapter explains how Service-Learning (SL) fostered adult learning through four different academic lenses which include political science, early elementary education, special education, and business for both graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in face-to-face, online, and blended courses at a south-central university. The students, academic institution, and community partners benefitted from meaningful, relevant, and purposeful SL experiences.

The objectives of this chapter are three-fold. First, we will discuss relevant literature on the topic of adult learning (including theory and practice) within community engagement activities including SL initiatives in higher education that can promote adult learning. Second, we will identify and present three diverse cases of SL at one public university in the USA to provide readers a variety of ways that SL can be implemented to promote adult learning in higher education; then, we will provide a culminating cross-case analysis and synthesis of SL practices and offer recommendations to maximize adult learning in various disciplines.

BACKGROUND

Adult learning is concerned with experiential learning, creating meaning, and formal as well as informal learning (Bennett & McWhorter, 2020; De Vito, 2009; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Okojie, Okojie-Boulder, & Boulder, 2008). Because Service-Learning as an instructional method is "growing in popularity for giving back to the community while connecting the experience to course content" (McWhorter, Delello & Roberts, 2016, p. 80), it is ripe as an adult learning pedagogy since it allows for students to customize their own learning while experiencing and applying knowledge from higher education courses to a community context. Experiential learning "is one of the central concepts of andragogy" (Sato, Haegele, & Foot, 2017, p. 455). Also, experiential learning has been described as a "process of using life experience to internalize knowledge. Learning by experience works cyclically: one gains external experience, reflects on observations of that experience, forms new abstract concepts from that reflection, and reapplies what is learned to new experiences" (LeBaron, Runyan, Jorgensen, Marks, Li, & Hill, 2019, p. 436; see also Kolb, 2014).

Experiential learning is also a part of Knowles' andragogy theory and according to Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) includes six assumptions regarding adult learners which are: the learner's need to know, self-concept of the learner, role of the learners' experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/examining-the-adult-learning-in-giving-back-initiatives/279772

Related Content

Dynamics of Public Training in a University Setting: Promoting Excellence through Leadership
Bantu Morolong, Rebecca Lekokoand Veronica Magang (2015). *Cases on Leadership in Adult Education (pp. 281-295).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/dynamics-of-public-training-in-a-university-setting/133788

Creating a Scale for Service: The Volunteer UCF Continuum
Jarrad D. Plante, Thomas A. Bryerand Haley G. Winston (2019). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 54-65).*
www.irma-international.org/article/creating-a-scale-for-service/233907

Foundations of Adult Education, Learning Characteristics, and Instructional Strategies
Mabel C. P. O. Okojieand Yan Sun (2020). *Handbook of Research on Adult Learning in Higher Education (pp. 1-33).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/foundations-of-adult-education-learning-characteristics-and-instructional-strategies/249776

Creating a Scale for Service: The Volunteer UCF Continuum
Jarrad D. Plante, Thomas A. Bryerand Haley G. Winston (2019). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 54-65).*
www.irma-international.org/article/creating-a-scale-for-service/233907

Collective Transformation of Three Generations of Chinese Adult Learners in K-20 Education
Viktor Wang, Marianne Robin Russoand Karen M. Fay (2014). *Adult and Continuing Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1849-1864).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/collective-transformation-of-three-generations-of-chinese-adult-learners-in-k-20-education/105346