Chapter 70

Designing Caring and Inclusive Online Classroom Environments for Non–Traditional Learners:
A Case Study Exploring the Andragogical Teaching and Learning Model

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ABSTRACT

Does andragogy successfully satisfy non-traditional learning needs and demands of a contemporary knowledge and performance-oriented economy? In her chapter on designing caring and inclusive online classrooms for non-traditional learners, the author explores the adult learning theory of andragogy supplementing it with an autoethnographic case study listing andragogical teaching strategies and then questions the need and validity of andragogy as the comprehensive holistic adult learning theory and model to design, develop, and implement online learning environments based on the three focal elements of caring, diversity, and cultural inclusivity for non-traditional learners. The author argues for the contemporary learning theory of heutagogy as the mantra of the knowledge and performance-oriented society.

INTRODUCTION

The face of contemporary education is changing at a rapid pace- be it rapid advances in technology, or changing learner populations ((Allen, Withey, Lawton, & Aquino, 2016). As early as 2011, the Sloan Foundation report titled, *Going the distance: Online Education in the United States*, reported that more than 31% of 6.5 million students enrolled each year (Allen & Seaman, 2011). This number i.e. online learner population in the United States has been steadily growing every year with more than 65% of students enrolled in fully online courses by end of year 2017 (Irvine & Kevan, 2017). Online learning

has been described as learning via the Web, or electronic learning. As such, it focused on the learner for its maintenance and success from concept to implementation (Gautam & Tiwari, 2016). Online learning was characterized by learner capacity, learner expectation, learner preferences and flexibility, and level of educational technology (Gautam & Tiwari, 2016). Online learning thus, lent itself to the non-traditional adult learner (NAL) who was not defined by age, but by demanding responsibilities (White, 2016). NALs were described as being under or above age 25, consumed with financial hardships, worked fulltime, were single parents, entered the job market after graduation from high school, and now were returning to do their degree (White, 2016). Although, NALs were identified as a growing learner population dominating design and delivery of education; universities and colleges seldom recognized their increasing importance and dominance in contemporary society (Rogerson-Revell, 2015). College and university were still seen as a youth-centric traditional educational bastion where focus was on campus-residing or commuting student (Chen, 2017). Traditional classroom learning prevailed on campuses pushing online learning as a component of the classroom format (Chen, 2017). However, inability of traditional classroom formats to fully engage, satisfy, and equip NALs with effective KSA (knowledge, skill, attitude) to function smoothly in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) technologically oriented global world where focus was on adaptability, dealing with diversity, being inclusive, civil, and problem-solving has witnessed a spate of theoretical and empirical research on online learning formats for NALs (Irvine & Kevan, 2017).

The author in her chapter focuses on the design and development of culturally inclusive online learning environments for NALs. The chapter objectives include a) exploring and explaining the adult learning theory and model of andragogy, b) showcasing different strategies and approaches for designing a caring and culturally inclusive online classroom for non-traditional learners, and c) critical analyses and discussion of the andragogical model. The author begins her chapter with a brief background of online learning environments (OLE) and traces the adult learning theory of andragogy as the theoretical backdrop to OLE for NALs. In her next section the author lists and discusses andragogical strategies and approaches with help of an auto-ethnographic case study, and follows it with a discussive debate on feasibility of the andragogical model as a teaching model for NALs in a contemporary VUCA world. Written with a scholarly-practitioner perspective, the author, through her chapter, aims to describe a foundational teaching online learning format for NALs to academic scholars and practitioners.

BACKGROUND

A Brief Overview: The Online Learning Environment

An online learning environment (OLE) has been described as a learning and teaching format that delivers educational content via the Internet (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011). OLE ranged from downloading content from the Internet such as iTunes University content, digital textbooks, massive open online courses (MOOC) that offered micro credentialing to fully structured online courses that included assessments and provided a qualification (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011). It differed greatly from distance education enabling students to reduce mail-time and interact with teachers and students in real time across the globe from the convenience and flexibility of their own home (Moore et al., 2011). Though, online education emerged globally more than 170 years ago; it became popular in the US only with the advent of the Intranet in 1960. University of Illinois along with the Department of Defense

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