


Chapter 3

Teaching and Learning for Wholeness and Wellness in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Modern institutions of higher education (IHEs) are undergoing social, cultural, and political changes, prompting higher education professionals to challenge the dominant epistemology that has long been embedded in the teaching and learning process. This chapter aims to highlight the dominant assumptions that hinder the wholeness and wellness of adult learners in today's context. In doing so, it also seeks to integrate meaning-making theory within a culturally responsive framework, one that expands rather than limits frames of reference. Higher education professionals are encouraged to situate the multidimensionality and intersecting identities of adult learners at the center of the teaching and learning process, honoring internal consciousness and promoting integration in modern IHEs. This approach is important because the way adult learners understand the world may shape how they respond to it, underscoring the epistemological complexity needed to navigate their social, cultural, and political realities in pursuit of wholeness and wellness.

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INTRODUCTION

The activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we are the meaning-making context.

—Robert Kegan (1982)

The landscape for modern institutions of higher education (IHEs) is changing, influenced by the social, cultural, and political contexts that shape their climate. For this reason, higher education professionals are called to disrupt the dominant epistemology that has long been rooted in the teaching and learning process. Dominant epistemology refers to historically included group(s) whose ways of being and knowing are widely accepted and imposed on historically excluded group(s) within social structures like IHEs. This chapter aims to uncover the assumptions of dominant epistemology that hinder the wholeness and wellness of adult learners in the current context. This goal also presents an opportunity to integrate meaning-making theory within a culturally responsive framework, expanding frames of reference rather than preserving them—a set of pre-existing assumptions based on data from lived experience and cultural standards. In this chapter, higher education professionals are encouraged to center the multidimensionality and intersecting identities of adult learners in the teaching and learning process, honoring internal consciousness, and promoting integration within modern IHEs. This is important because how adult learners interpret the world shapes their engagement with it, emphasizing the epistemological complexity needed to navigate their social, cultural, and political realities in pursuit of wholeness and wellness. By engaging with these frameworks and approaches, higher education professionals can foster adult learner well-being and create institutional cultures of wellness that support all adult learners.

MEANING-MAKING THEORY

In general, meaning-making theories describe how learners interpret information, lived experience, interpersonal relationships, and the self (Ignelzi, 2000). Constructive developmental theorists emphasize the importance of developmental considerations in the teaching and learning process, which are key to understanding how adult learners make sense of the world. Ignelzi (2000) summarizes three key principles of constructive developmental theories: 1) adult learners actively construct their own reality, 2) meaning-making develops over time based on lived experience, and 3) the teaching and learning process is inter-related with how adult learners make meaning. This chapter is grounded on the developmental considerations of

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