Chapter 15

Key Aspects of Teaching and Learning in the Online Environment

Maria M. Witte
Auburn University, USA

James E. Witte
Auburn University, USA

Suzy Westenkirchner
Auburn University, USA

ABSTRACT

Online education provides increased accessibility and possibilities for learners in various locations and situations. Once learners decide to participate in online education, there are key aspects to consider in the teaching and learning environment to ensure the experience is effective. The purpose of this chapter is to identify characteristics of adults as learners and the role of learners and instructors in this setting. In addition, fostering competent online learners requires a dedicated support system and effective feedback processes. Future trends consist of an increase in informal learning and a decrease in formal training and workshops. Informal learning tools are being used to change the culture and learning curve within educational and organizational communities. This trend will also impact the form and function of learning assessments within the teaching and learning online environments.

INTRODUCTION

Allen and Seaman (2008) reported that online enrollments are increasing yearly at a rate higher than post secondary education institution enrollments. There were over 3.9 million students who took at least one online course during Fall 2007 which was a 12 percent increase from the previous year. The majority of online learners in the United States are adults between 25 and 50 years of age. Moore and Kearsley (2005) revealed that as a result of this finding it would be valuable to understand the nature of adult learning to best appreciate the online learner. Based on the Knowles' (1990) concept of adult education, adults prefer to have some control over the learning situation

and be able to exercise personal responsibility. They also prefer to define their learning tasks and make decisions about how to learn, what, when and where to learn that fits their needs best. Adults appreciate serving as a learning resource because they bring considerable experiences and background to the teaching and learning environment. Most adults want to acquire knowledge that can be used to solve today's problems and this type of motivation encourages them on an intrinsic level. Adult learners may be anxious about the online format, requirements, new institution, new technologies, and about whether or not they can actually complete the course.

Moore and Kearsley (2005) revealed that the source of anxiety is usually the learner's concern about being able to meet institutional and individual expectations, which is natural fear of failure. The instructor's role would be to assure the learner and ensure they are familiar with administrative procedures, course requirements, and accessibility with the online tools and system.

The decision to pursue online education goals will require more than just financial obligations. Additional responsibilities come from family, work, and social arenas and this extra time and effort are extracted from current time allowances. Therefore, adults will typically be highly motivated and task oriented with specific goals and reasons to begin an educational program. The adult learner usually has more experience working with others in classroom situations and with administrators in organizational systems.

To the adult student, teachers gain authority from what they know and the way they deal with their students, not from any external symbols or titles. Physical distance tends to further reduce the dominant psychological position of the teacher (probably one reason some classroom teachers do not enjoy being at a distance). (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 162)

Resources are available to guide and harness the use of the internet and World Wide Web and to "…change traditional teaching and the way people work and learn in schools" (Provenzo, 2005, p. v). The teaching and learning environments are constantly changing and new programs, software, and resources are redefining how we live and learn. This chapter will provide an overview of adults as learners and primary motivations and learning principles that shape their experiences. The number of online learners is increasing as opposed to classroom-based programs and the following section provides a general profile of the online learner. To support the needs of online learners it also requires an adoption of efficient online service from staff and administrators as well as productive and effective instructor interaction and feedback. These key aspects of teaching and learning in an online environment will also include future trends related to an increased use of informal learning and corresponding assessments.

BACKGROUND

Adults as Learners

Adults will participate in teaching and educational settings for a variety of reasons. Adults may want to learn new skills, knowledge, or attitudes about specific topics but their decision to participate may be enhanced or hindered by the available options. Prior educational experiences may also filter an adult's decision to return to a learning environment, whether it is in a face-to-face or online format. Building an awareness of why individuals may or may not want to participate is a key aspect in understanding adults as learners.

Knowles' (1980) core set of adult learning principles, known as andragogy, are based on a unique characteristics of adults as learners and consider the learner's need to know; self-concept of the learner; prior experience of the learner; readiness to learn; orientation to learning; and,

14 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/key-aspects-teaching-learning-online/46577

Related Content

Learning Programs or Educational Curricula for Prisons in the Twenty-First Century?
Idowu Biao (2018). *Strategic Learning Ideologies in Prison Education Programs (pp. 232-245).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-programs-or-educational-curricula-for-prisons-in-the-twenty-first-century/189987

Can We Talk? Electronic Portfolios as Collaborative Learning Spaces
Gary Greenberg (2006). *Handbook of Research on ePortfolios (pp. 558-566).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/can-talk-electronic-portfolios-collaborative/20344

Confucian and Western Teaching and Learning
Viktor Wangand Geraldine Torrisi-Steele (2015). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 52-64).*
www.irma-international.org/article/confucian-and-western-teaching-and-learning/121594

Information Literacy in the Digital Age: Implications for Adult Learning
Terry T. Kiddand Jared Keengwe (2010). *Adult Learning in the Digital Age: Perspectives on Online Technologies and Outcomes (pp. 126-133).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/information-literacy-digital-age/36864

Transformative Learning and Lean Six Sigma Programs: Adopting an All-Collar Approach
Kimberley Gordonand Kendall Ross (2019). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 20-38).*
www.irma-international.org/article/transformative-learning-and-lean-six-sigma-programs/233905