

Chapter 64

Program Development in Adult Education: An Example

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ABSTRACT

Education and training programs for adults come in all shapes, sizes, and formats (Caffarella, 2002, p. 2). It is the responsibility of adult learning professions to develop sound and meaningful programs for mature learners. Often times these programs are affiliated with certain universities. Any program proposals in adult education require essential components such as program standards, need for the program, mission and goals of the program, curriculum, faculty, assessment methods, external funding and survey results. Depending on institutions' needs, other components may be required. It is self-explanatory that the purpose of program development in adult education is to encourage continuous growth and development of mature learners. Adult learners should be the center of attention when it comes to the development of sound and meaningful programs. The chapter will provide an exemplary example for adult learning professionals who have just graduated from graduate programs in adult education.

INTRODUCTION

During the time of budget cuts and furloughs, it is vital that adult learning professionals learn to develop sound and meaningful programs for adult learners in respective institutions of higher learning. Graduates from adult education programs are often asked to develop adult education programs by their affiliated institutions. It has

almost become a trend that when the economy is in a bad shape, more mature learners return to schools to retool their skills and knowledge in order to find other employment when the economy recovers. University administrators are often professionals with other academic degrees than degrees in adult education. Naturally, these administrators will seek help from graduates from adult education programs called adult learning professionals. When these administrators come to adult learning professionals to assist them in

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developing programs, this means the administrators are committed to doing the right things for adult learners. Some university administrators may turn away from adult learning professionals and take any advice from professionals in other fields of study. When this happens, we say these university administrators are not committed to doing the right things for adult learners. Or we may say that university administrators place politics over students' needs. Then, it is adult learning professional's responsibility to fight on behalf of adult learners in order to win back the opportunity to develop sound/meaningful programs for adult learners in the field.

Once the opportunity is back in the hands of adult learning professionals, Caffarella (2002) reminds us that in addition to the purpose mentioned in the abstract, the four purposes in developing programs for adult learners are to (1), assist people in responding to practical problems and issues of adult life; (2), prepare people for current and future work opportunities; (3), assist organizations in achieving designed results and adapting to change, and (4), provide opportunities to examine community and societal issues, foster change for the common good, and promote a civil society. Her four purposes in conducting program development for adult learners do not deviate from the three kinds of changes that most educators and trainers are engaged in promoting, that is, the goal of program development is to foster three kinds of change: individual change, organizational change, and societal change (Rogers, 1995; Caffarella, 2002). Once the purposes or goal of program development are clear, adult learning professionals need to gather resources to include important and necessary components of a sound/meaningful proposal in order to persuade university or organizational administrators to buy into the proposal. Most administrators are reluctant to spend money on a new program. It is vital that adult learning professionals focus on existing resources to support the new program proposal in order to get full support from uni-

versity or organizational administrators. While many online universities do support adult learning programs for mature learners, so many other universities often treat adult learners primarily as a lucrative source of income. As noted by Bash (2003, p. 6), "because these programs typically require less overhead and diminished services, there are abundant examples of colleges and universities that opt for adult programs merely to satisfy financial than philosophical needs." Institutions that treat adult programs as the campus cash cow do not seem to understand the nature of adult learners or adult programs. When this happens, adult learning professionals are faced with tremendous difficulty in terms of implementing a sound/meaningful program that philosophically makes sense to adult learners. Readers can treat this chapter as a case study chapter in order to learn a lesson from vicissitudes and plight that the author's adult program had to go through between 2007 and 2010.

BACKGROUND

The PDW Department began to offer adult programs to mature learners since the founding of this public university in 1949. In California in the United States, there are so many what we call Regional Occupational Programs (ROP), adult schools, and community colleges. Naturally mature learners would need a place to obtain their teacher certification, BS degree, or MA or MS degrees in adult education or Career and Technical Education. The department used to be called Department of Vocational Education for so many years. Two decades ago, the name was changed to Department of Occupational Studies as some leading universities such as University of Georgia began to have a department called Department of Occupational Studies. Although the name is different from the previous one, all these departments are about serving the learning needs of adult learners. At the turn of the 21st

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