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ADULT EDUCATION: SOME GLOBAL TRENDS

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In the past thirty-five (35) years, since 1964, there have been numerous research findings accumulated around the world in the Field of Adult Education. Some of these findings have developed into trends which have special significance for this historic Adult Education Scholarly Exchange, between The Peoples Republic of China and the United States of America, near the close of the twentieth (20th) century. A few of these trends I present here.

1. Adult and Child Learning.

Malcolm S. Knowles, a pioneer in adult education, was a person that believed in and promoted the 'break-through' trend that there is a difference between how children learn and how adults learn. In 1968, he made popular the idea of how a teacher could help adults learn more effectively. Following is how he graphically explained it. And he continues to be a standard-bearer on trends in adult learning.

The Assumptions and Process Elements of the Pedagogical and Andragogical Models of Learning

ASSUMPTIONS			PROCESS ELEMENTS		
About	Pedagogical	Andragogical	Elements	Pedagogical	Andragogical
Concept of the learner	Dependent personality	Increasingly self-directing	Climate	Tense, low trust Formal, cold, aloof Authority-oriented Competitive, judgmental	Relaxed, trusting Mutually respectful Informal, warm Collaborative, supportive
Role of learner's experience	To be built on more than used as a resource	A rich resource for learning by self and others			
Readiness to learn	Uniform by age-level & curriculum	Develops from life tasks & problems			
Orientation to learning	Subject-centered	Task- or problem-centered			
Motivation	By external rewards and punishment	By internal incentives, curiosity			
			Planning	Primarily by teacher	Mutually by learners and facilitator
			Diagnosis of needs	Primarily by teacher	By mutual assessment
			Setting of objectives	Primarily by teacher	By mutual negotiation
			Designing learning plans	Teachers' content plans Course syllabus Logical sequence	Learning contracts Learning projects Sequenced by readiness
			Learning activities	Transmittal techniques Assigned readings	Inquiry projects Independent study Experiential techniques
			Evaluation	By teacher Norm-referenced (on a curve) With grades	By learner-collected evidence validated by peers, facilitators, experts. Criterion-referenced

The body of theory and practice on which teacher-directed learning is based is often given the label "pedagogy," from the Greek words paid (meaning child) and agogos (meaning guide or leader) – thus being defined as "the art and science of teaching children."

The body and theory and practice on which self-directed learning is based is coming to be labeled "andragogy," from the Greek word aner (meaning adult) – thus being defined as "the art and science of helping adults (or, even better, maturing human beings) learn."

These two models do not represent bad/good or child/adult dichotomies, but rather a continuum of assumptions to be checked out in terms of their rightness for particular learners in particular situations. If a pedagogical assumption is realistic for a particular situation, then pedagogical strategies are appropriate. For example, if a learner is entering into a totally strange content area, he or she will be dependent on a teacher until enough content has been acquired to enable self-directed inquiry to begin.

2. Self-Directed Learning.

One side of self-directed learning is a process in which learners (students) take responsibility for their own learning, including diagnosing needs, developing objectives, designing learning experiences, finding resources, and evaluating learning outcomes.

On the one hand, characteristics of highly self-directed learners are:

- Self-Confident,
- Inner-Directed,
- Reflective,
- Achievement Motivated,
- Accomodating,
- Creative, Holistic Thinker, and,
- Not Dogmatic.

Which ones characterize you? Rate yourself on each on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).

On the other hand, skills of individuals with high levels of self-direction are:

- Strong Goal Setter,
- Good Decision Maker,
- Accurate Observer,
- Effective Listener, and
- High Reading Level.

How do your skills match these? Rate yourself on each on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).

The other side of self-directed learning is being a facilitator of learning – the kind of person who can help make self-directed learning happen in others. Facilitators of self-directed learning, must know the following:

- How adults acquire and use skills, knowledge, and attitudes,
- How to apply different learning styles,
- How to help individuals, and groups with personal needs, ethical issues, and problems,
- How to help people establish personal and work-related goals,
- How to offer feedback on a timely basis,
- How to observe groups unobtrusively and gain information and insight,
- How to influence people to accomplish tasks and learn continuously,
- How to manage conflict in work settings at the individual, group, and organizational levels,
- How to negotiate so that all parties win,
- How social systems at work influence productivity and quality,
- How to communicate often and effectively in visual, oral, and written formats,
- How to gather information and stimulate insight in individuals, work teams, and groups through the use of interviews and other techniques,
- How to use quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze skill and learning needs,
- How to establish positive, workable relationships across a broad spectrum of people and groups,
- How to gain others' short- and long-term commitment to learning,
- How to build cohesive, viable work teams and self-directed groups,
- How to model self-esteem and foster self-esteem in others,
- How to apply workplace-learning and performance-improvement theories,
- How to develop and maintain learning environments that are conducive to creativity,
- How to accept uncertainty and get others to accept uncertainty,
- How to use positive interpersonal skills in various work settings,
- How to show concern and empathy for diverse learners and workers,
- How to use listening skills in different work settings,
- How to understand nonverbal communication among diverse individuals and groups,
- How to coach individuals and groups,
- How to give appropriate verbal and behavioral responses in stressful work situations, and,
- How to help reduce learners' stress in different work settings.

How do you score on these? Rate yourself on each on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).

3. Learning Styles.

Learning styles – what are they? People are unique and learn in four (4) different ways, contrary to the long standing idea that everyone learns the same way. A learning style is made up of two (2) major component parts: Perceiving – how we take in information; and, Processing – how we make that information a part of ourselves.

First, Innovative Learners perceive information by sensing and feeling concrete reality; but, they process information by watching what is happening and reflecting on it. Second, Analytic Learners perceive information by abstract reasoning and thinking; but they process information by watching what is happening and reflecting on it. Third, Common Sense Learners perceive information by abstract reasoning and thinking ; but they process information by actively experimenting with it through jumping in and trying it. And fourth, Dynamic Learners perceive information by sensing and feeling concrete reality; but, they process information by actively experimenting with it through jumping in and trying it.

Learning styles are somewhat similar to the trend in brain research and learning.

4. Brain Research and Learning.

One of the recent trends in brain research and learning takes us beyond the description of the left brain being cognitive, technical or linear, and the right brain being emotional, creative or global. The trend now is toward explaining how emotional intelligence outweighs cognitive ability and technical skills as a contributor to constructive success in the workplace or any other context.

On the emotional intelligence framework, Social Competence and Personal Competence are the two major components. Social Competence determines how we handle relationships, and is comprised of Empathy – awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns; and Social Skills – adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. Personal Competence -- determines how we manage ourselves, and is comprised of Self-Awareness – knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions; Self-Regulation – managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources; and Motivation – emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals.

5. Application of Learning.

If the trend of lifelong education is to succeed as the heartbeat of the twenty-first (21st) century, it must be organized around four (4) types of learning and applied as the pillars of knowledge interacting together throughout a person's life: Learning to Know – acquiring the instruments of understanding; Learning to Do – ability to do a job of work and act creatively on one's environment; Learning to Live Together – to participate and co-operate with other people in all human activities; and Learning to Be – enabled to determine for themselves what they believe they should do in the different circumstances of life.

All of this application will reveal the treasure within the learner and grows from each person selecting out of their learning experience one or more ideas they would like to try out in their back-home situations. Then they identify the steps they would take in applying the idea(s), and any obstacles or resistances they anticipate encountering in putting the idea(s) into effect. Lastly, strategies may be suggested which will help in dealing with and overcoming the obstacles and resistances for bringing about change. Application of learning ultimately culminates with learning and worthy performance going hand-in-hand as being two sides of the same coin.

6. Building Blocks of Adult Learning Experiences.

I have observed the trend that adult learning experiences need to have a structure – Building Blocks are what I call those elements of structure. In general, these elements may include our: Beliefs and Notions about Adults as Learners; Perceptions Concerning the Qualities of Effective Teachers/Facilitators; Phases and Sequences of the Learning Process (theory of how adult learning takes place); Teaching Tips and Learning Techniques, and, Implementation of the Prepared Plan.

This process structure (or any other design one may develop according to adult learning principles) when used, will help move adult learning experiences from concept to reality. But to enhance the experience to a higher level, one last trend needs to be articulated: modeling lifelong (adult) learning in our behavior and life.

7. Modeling Adult Learning.

As adult educators, we are models. Students learn more from our actions than our words. They want to see if our actions match our words. Congruence between theory and practice are important. With this in mind, if we believe that adults learn in a certain way, then it follows that we take it upon ourselves to model the conduct and attitude that demonstrate and support what we're trying to teach them. In other words, the personality of the adult educator is the teaching. For us, whose task is to help other adults learn, it means risking being ourselves, trusting our feelings and acting on them, thereby engaging a like commitment from our students. To be effective, an adult educator needs to have trust in the ability and potential of adult learners to understand the learning process and make the right choices. The adult educator must initiate trust with the adult learners. Those adult educators who care enough to exemplify trust in their adult learners are:

- Purposefully communicating to learners that they are each uniquely important;
- Believing that learners know what their goals, dreams and realities are like;
- Expressing confidence that learners will develop the skills they need;
- Prizing the faith that the learners will learn what is needed;
- Feeling learners' need to be aware of and communicate their thoughts and feelings;
- Enabling learners to evaluate their own progress in learning;
- Hearing learners indicate what their learning needs are;
- Engaging learners in clarifying their own aspirations;
- Developing a supportive relationship with learners;
- Experiencing unconditional positive regard for learners; and,
- Respecting the dignity and integrity of learners.

How much do you exemplify these trust factors? Rate yourself on each on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). A lack of trust seriously hampers the learning process. However, if trusted, the adult learners may learn something, which otherwise, they would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all. Trusting adult learners is a golden opportunity to help them fulfill their enormous potential.

Conclusion.

It is a fact that we all know more about excellence than we put into practice. However, I wish to accept the challenge myself and invite others to join me in allowing these trends to transform us into more excellent adult educators. These trends -- adult and child learning, self-directed learning, learning styles, brain research and learning, application of learning, building blocks of adult learning experiences, and modeling adult learning -- may have a huge impact upon us. Then, we will not only be talking about adult education, but also we will be doing it and doing it better than we ever have before now. It will be like putting together the warp and the woof of an exquisitely beautiful cloth weaving. It will be paying tribute to those who have given so much of themselves in adult education to our benefit. We will also be refining costly and precious gems – adult learners. It will come together like the warp and the woof of an exquisitely beautiful cloth weaving. Thus, we will create a better climate with the adult learners for nurturing their seeds of adult learning into a glorious flower that flourishes and contributes to the communities, nations and world in which we live.