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A GRADUATE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM  
LONG-TERM IMPACT EVALUATION

Dr. John A. Henschke

Associate Professor of  
Adult Education  
School of Education  
University of Missouri-St. Louis

and

Continuing Education Specialist  
University Extension,  
East Central Region  
University of Missouri

269 Marillac Hall  
Department of Educational Studies  
University of Missouri-St. Louis  
8001 Natural Bridge Road  
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499

Abstract:

The information explosion in our technologically oriented society has brought with it a shortened time span of cultural and factual knowledge change in each succeeding decade. Thus, professionals being educated in graduate Adult Education/Human Resources Development programs as teachers and for other roles need a lifelong learning perspective to prevent their becoming obsolete. These graduate programs have increased in North America from approximately thirty in 1960 to more than three hundred in 1990. However, a question remains for those who seek to serve these needs. How will the long-term impact of these graduate programs be measured, determined and evaluated? One program has sought to answer that major question. The University of Missouri-St. Louis has had competency-based adult education graduate offerings with nearly two hundred participants in less than a decade the graduate program has been actively in operation. A two-page "Impact Survey Report Form" was adapted and developed to include Kirkpatrick's evaluation paradigm of reaction, learning, behavior, and results. One hundred eighty-six different participants were sent forms with seventy-five responding. Questions included: what they gained, applied, the value to them and others, skill practice adequacy, cost/benefit ratio, benefits resulting, how the course could be improved, people served weekly, space to describe something they used and the results, how the use of self-directed learning affected other courses or their career, if they used learning contracts in other courses and in other education situations with people with whom they worked, and how self-directed learning was accepted in those situations.

## A GRADUATE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM LONG-TERM IMPACT EVALUATION

The information explosion in our technologically oriented society had brought with it a shortened time span of cultural change in each succeeding decade. Half of what we know as facts today will rapidly be replaced by new knowledge. Thus, professionals being educated in graduate adult education/human resource development programs as teachers and for other roles in adult, continuing and community education programs and corporate human resources development training programs need a lifelong learning perspective to prevent their becoming obsolete. Graduate adult education/resource development programs in North America educate and train many of these people, and have rapidly grown in numbers in the last three decades, from approximately thirty in 1960 to more than three hundred in 1990.

Technological, economic, and demographic change, as well as other forces continually create new needs for learning and to improve the way adult education/human resource development (AE/HRD) professionals learn to teach the adult work force. Lifelong learning is mandatory not so much from a policy or legal standpoint but from the perspective of keeping up to date or not becoming obsolete in a world and era of fast paced change. Thus graduate programs designed to prepare AE/HRD professionals need to keep on the cutting edge of new developments in facilitating the teaching/learning transaction.

### EVALUATION QUESTION AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

However, a question remains for those who seek to serve these needs. How will the long-term impact of these graduate (AE/HRD) programs be measured, determined and evaluated? If one were to inquire of various professors, responsible for the conduct, evaluation and improvement of graduate (AE/HRD) programs, concerning how and what to evaluate, multiple answers would be forthcoming, few of which would focus on the long-term impact. But with the press today for accountability, demand for effective practice and "the bottom line," even within the academic setting, an answer needs to be developed to help these graduate programs educate and train personnel who are able to link research and theory with their practice.

### METHODOLOGY

One program has sought to answer that major question posed above. In the few short years the adult education graduate courses at the University of Missouri-St. Louis have been offered and in operation, approximately eighty-five have been graduated with a masters or doctoral degree. The program has also served many special non-degree students who are interested in enrolling for one or more courses in adult education to help them become more competent in their work as adult educators without completing a degree. At present the program has grown to ninety-five active masters degree and thirty-one active doctoral students.

The objectives of the adult education emphasis and concentration are carried forward with the intention of equipping present and future professionals and paraprofessionals for new jobs and responsibilities who are competent and on "the cutting edge" of the future of adult education and human resources development. The definition in the program is that a competency is a cluster of knowledges, understandings, skills, attitudes, values, and interests that are necessary for the performance of a function.

Six graduate courses, each being three semester hours of credit, were included in the evaluation study. Their titles and objectives of each course were:

Adult Education 400-Learning How to Learn: Adult Style.

Objectives of this course were for participants to have increased/enhanced their:

1. Knowledge of research in and current concepts of facilitating individual and group self-directed contractual adult learning and the transitions involved;
2. Understanding how to apply this adult learning research and concepts to various aspects of adult education;
3. Skills in implementing the key processes of adult learning contracts with themselves and numerous situations for which they are responsible;
4. Positive attitude toward making the transitions involved in these processes;
5. Valuing the advantage derived by being on the cutting edge of adult self-directed learning; and,
6. Interest in adding new approaches for expanding their lifelong learning.

Adult Education 412: Foundations of Adult Education

Objectives of this course were for participants to have developed or increased:

1. Knowledge of historical as well as current role, scope problems, concerns, future trends and strategies of the field of adult education;
2. A comprehensive, systematic understanding of that knowledge and its various application of the field of adult education;
3. Skills in analyzing the relationship in the various dimensions of the general field of adult education as well as in specific instances of the education of adults;
4. An attitude of excitement about the expansiveness of the field of adult education especially as the pragmatic philosophy and objectives relate to the continuing education of the adult in a dynamic and progressive social context;
5. Value the organic nature and development of adult education as a field of social practice as well as the tools available for improving man's quality of life; and,
6. Interest in making a personal and professional contribution to the forward movement and advancing the field of adult education.

Adult Education 413: Improvement of Instruction in Adult Education

Objectives of this course were for participants to have increased or enhanced their:

1. Knowledge of the vast array of methods, techniques, devices, and research findings available for helping adults learn;
2. Understanding of the application of the various learning theories, research findings, and techniques for helping adults learn in their adult education programs;

3. Skill in the appropriate use of many methods, techniques, and devices in conducting learning experiences with adults.
4. An attitude desirous for growth in conducting adult learning experiences.
5. Values consistent with using methods, techniques, and devices that will facilitate the learning and growth of the adults in their educational programs; and,
6. Interest in trying new and improved approaches and strategies, methods, techniques, and devices for helping adults learn.

#### Adult Education 414: Curriculum Theory and Development in Adult Education

Objectives of this course were for participants to have developed or increased their:

1. Knowledge of curriculum theory and development in adult education programs in which they are involved;
2. Understanding of various applications of curriculum theory and development to their adult education programs;
3. Skills in using curriculum theory and development in adult education programs they are responsible for conducting;
4. A beginning and/or continuing positive attitude in theorizing about and developing a curriculum in adult education;
5. Clarity concerning their values in curriculum theory and development of an adult education program; and,
6. Their interest and perspective in how curriculum theory and development breathes life into an adult education program.

#### Education 415 and Adult Education 404: General Seminar and Emphasis Area Doctoral Seminar-Leadership in Adult Education

Objectives of this course were for participants to develop and enhance their:

1. Knowledge of research in and current concepts of leadership;
2. Understanding how to apply the leadership research and concepts to various aspects of the adult education enterprise;
3. Grasp of leader competencies, small group functional and dysfunctional leadership behaviors and variations of feminine/masculine leader behaviors in a service economy;
4. Skills in implementing the key strategies of leadership in numerous situations calling for adult education transactions;
5. Positive attitude toward being leaders in the field of adult education;
6. Valuing the advantage derived by being on the cutting edge of new leadership developments; and,
7. Interest in providing flexibility which will advance the field.

## Adult Education 490: Internship in Adult Education.

Objectives of this course were that:

1. The participant gain professional benefit;
2. The institution receive a return equal to the effort expended with the intern;
3. It live up to the standards one would expect from a university graduate course;
4. An equivalent of work hours be involved for each credit hour (45 clock hours to one credit hour); and,
5. It bring together in one package an application of various ideas in adult education.

### EVALUATION DESIGN

Each course had finished the last session of the semester with a fairly typical end of course reaction evaluation form. A verbal critique is also conducted. One item calls for suggestions for improvement of the course. Each subsequent time a course is conducted some of the suggestions for improvement are implemented. Reactions are quite positive with the number of returning and new participants continuing to increase and to populate the courses and the program. However, the long-term effect some years late of what the participants have gained and are still using in their professional practice was the main concern which initiated this study. When the question of determining the effectiveness of the programs was raised, a second question needed to be answered: Effective in terms of what? Kirkpatrick's (1987) Four Step Paradigm helped develop the answer. Reaction indicated how well participants like the program. Learning targets the principles, facts and techniques to be acquired as well as the attitudes that changed. Behavior identifies the changes in job behavior which were implemented. Results encompass the tangible reduced cost, improved quality, improved quantity, etc. It was acknowledged as Kirkpatrick indicated, that in evaluation, evidence is much easier to obtain than proof. Thus, most of what could be obtained years later from participants evaluating this program would be evidence rather than proof.

A two-page Impact Survey Report Form was adapted and developed from literature in the adult, continuing and community education field of practice. A form was developed for each course with accompanying objectives. A demographic form was also attached. A cover letter was sent along with the forms to current and past participants from the program. They were requested to complete and return the form indicating their viewpoint of what and how these courses contributed to their professional practice and current delivery of services. A reminder card was sent three weeks after the original letter. A second letter and materials was sent three weeks after the card to those who had not responded. A personal evaluation interview was considered for a randomly selected group of participants and each of their bosses. This idea was later abandoned because added benefits from this step were not warranted by time and cost involved.

One hundred eighty six past participants from the program were sent requests for evaluation information. Seventy-five different participants responded with a total of two hundred and forty-six forms. The number of responses for each course were: ADU ED 400 28, ADU ED 412 72, ADU ED 49, ADU ED 414 50, EDUC 415 & ADU ED 404 23, and ADU ED 490 24.

## EVALUATION RESULTS

The title and objectives of the two-page Impact Survey Report Forms were appropriate to each adult education graduate course under consideration at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Returns on the Impact Survey Report totaled 246 forms from 75 students who had completed graduate courses in adult education and/or who had completed a graduate degree. The returns on these indicated the following.

1. What they gained by taking part in these courses is indicated by the number of responses to each item.

198--Useful resource materials

176--New ideas to try

176--Insights from hearing what others are doing

168--Contact with other participants

161--Development of a new skill

148--Answers to questions

134--Reinforcement that you probably are doing things right

130--Contacts with experts in my field

94--Help in making a decision

8--Nothing much

7--Other: included increased knowledge, a new philosophy, new interest area, and improvement in how to write mutual objectives in a job setting.

2. With the Likert type scale of 1=Low, 3=Moderate, 5=High, participants awarded their overall median rating as 4.27 on the following fifteen items:

Median	Item
<u>4.03</u>	a. Amount of information that you actually applied and used?
<u>4.10</u>	b. Degree to which course gave practical skills you wanted to develop?
<u>4.25</u>	c. Degree to which course gave practical information you wanted to learn?
<u>4.18</u>	d. Degree to which course gave theoretical information you wanted to acquire?
<u>4.27</u>	e. Degree to which course has been of value to you?
<u>3.92</u>	f. Value to someone else (professional practice, employer, students, family)?
<u>4.11</u>	g. Adequacy of skill practice allowed for you to use it on your own (back on the job)?
<u>4.46</u>	h. Degree to which you liked this course?
<u>4.32</u>	i. Degree to which course met your expectations?
<u>4.25</u>	j. Degree procedures and conditions of the class helped you accomplish your goals?
<u>4.29</u>	k. Degree to which course met your needs?
<u>4.41</u>	l. Degree to which course held your interest?
<u>4.39</u>	m. Degree to which you benefited from group interaction?
<u>4.68</u>	n. Degree to which adult education principles were used?
<u>4.46</u>	o. Degree to which learning contract benefited your personal development?

3. From the one hundred fifty-seven responses to question three, almost seventy-three percent (116) said "Yes, definitely" that their gain from the program was worth the time and money they spent. More than twenty-two percent (33) said "Probably yes." Less than four percent (6) said, "Probably no." Just over one and one quarter percent (2) said, "Definitely no."

4. The benefits resulting from their use of the ideas from the courses included other things in addition to the Most Important ones of Personal Satisfaction and Personal Confidence, as indicated by the number of responses on each item.

212--Personal satisfaction

186--Personal confidence

166--Increased thinking ability

165--Greater skill

147--Better service to students

131--Better planning

120--Improved decision-making

107--Greater satisfaction from the people you serve

104--Better personnel relations

101--Better management

99--Better use of time

53--Improvements in community

52--Improved handling of regulations, forms, etc.

50--A new position or promotion

30--Increased income

9--Other

5. To the question, "How could this course be improved?" the answers indicated a desire for "smaller classes," "more preliminary information courses," "longer time for group presentations," "instructor to facilitate more," "having students identify before and after philosophy," "more enthusiasm and better attitude," "workshops," "introduce a breakdown of the learning contract," "more discussion of the texts," "tougher critiques," "more instructor feedback on learning contracts," "to leave the courses as they were since they were fantastic and could not be improved upon," and, "let other disciplines utilize more adult learning techniques."

To the question, "How could the Adult Education Program (Emphasis Area) be improved upon?" the answers included: "more assistance in the program," "more professors and instructors," "more detailed information to more people as to what the program is all about," "individual presentations," "higher profile for the program," "replace required secondary education courses with more adult education classes," "offer more of the courses in the summer," "keep courses in sequence," "program and courses as currently presented are excellent," "couldn't be improved-it is fantastic," and, "more networking opportunities to accomplish desired ends of adult education."

6. To the question of, "Approximately how many persons are served by the respondents during the average work week," the answer was a total of 174,704.

7. This item asks respondents to "Please describe something that they used from the course and the results obtained." The answers are rich and varied, including:

- It helped me compose mutually understood annual goals in my work setting.
- Makes decision-making easier.
- I used several techniques for a presentation in another class; positive feedback from the class; made difference between "A" and "B" grade.
- I'm more able to initiate contracts with people because of the confidence building experiences in the class.
- Good results from the Adult Learner Readiness Inventory.
- Eduard C. Lindeman, an early adult educator, became a great influence in my life.
- Used these methods in my teaching at Purdue University.
- Better classroom evaluations.
- Very gratifying to students and myself.
- Use contracts in my nursing work.
- Used Smith's change model as a role model for my own.
- This approach is being used throughout our department.



- Students are working more in groups and attempting to give input into solving problems on social issues in education.
- Learned to regard students as equals.
- Appreciate the principles I learned in the course.
- More ownership of the students in the course by using these techniques.
- Variety of presentation skills were learned.
- Students allowed to do research within the scope of the course content on something of importance in their lives and relay it to the remainder of the class in an informal setting.
- Learned a lot about group theory.
- New ideas for presentation methods.
- Used for design of training programs.
- Had the experience of putting together a curriculum.
- Able to share resources with other trainers.
- Course was very effective and thorough.
- This course helped me plan a course for West County Christian Church.
- I began to act like a leader.
- Helped me to develop a philosophical basis for much of what I do, and allowed me to be able to express this rationale.

8. This question, "How the use of self-directed learning affected other courses or the person's career." To this the answers varied, and some included:

- Used with students in career planning.
- It has revolutionized the way I think.
- I read more material.
- I'm more aware of how adults learn.
- I have greater satisfaction.
- It has confirmed the validity of my own self-directed studies.
- It spoiled me in that I like this method so well and blocked me for other classes.
- I rely on myself as a good learning resource.
- I feel I learned and retained more.
- It increased my desire to learn.
- This improved my overall approach to learning.
- Once you've been introduced to self-directed learning, it's hard to adjust to teacher-directed learning.
- I'm more motivated.
- This improved my self-confidence that I could learn.
- I'm thankful to have taken this course.
- This had a definite impact on the way I structure seminars and workshops.
- This increased my desire for more knowledge.
- It has affected my career in a positive way.
- I have been able to retain information better.
- I ask more questions and read more.
- It has influenced me as a high school English teacher.
- I had always been self-directed but didn't know it until now.
- It has helped me in gaining resources that can be utilized or developed into practical use for classwork and the incorporation of varieties of techniques that can be shared with other indicators.
- This improved the use of my time.
- This helped me take charge of my own learning.
- I used self-directed learning with inmates.
- This helps me measure where I am and where I need to be in learning.
- I am convinced I can learn anything and everything that I want or need to know.
- This increased my leadership qualities.
- It has led me to major resources and materials that I was never aware of before.
- I wrote a proposal used in a job interview.

- Students are allowed input into the classes and I am more aware of their needs to go beyond the class itself and yet not feel that their time is infringed upon.
- I have attempted to be more facilitative in classes.
- It changed my method of learning and influenced how I teach others.
- The program helped me indicate to my employer that I am trying to learn, keep up with changing times. Am ambitious and not content to "rest on my laurels."

9. - To the question of whether they are using learning contracts in other courses there were ninety-six "Yes" responses and sixty-five "No" responses.

10. Eighty indicated they were not using learning/training contracts with people with whom they worked. Sixty-six responses indicated they were using learning/training contracts with people with whom they work. Following is an iteration of what they were doing and how the program had been accepted.

- It helps document the program's academic quality.
- Some liked the contracts after more time was spent explaining its use.
- We are exploring the use of contracts in our company.
- Less useful but will use in job.
- Because of clerical nature of work, it has not been useful.
- Students all appreciate the chance to have more impact into course content and methods. They seem to learn more and be more motivated.
- I use contracts in my advanced programming class.
- I use contracts in various rotations.
- Students liked the opportunity to be more responsible for what they are learning, and putting it in writing helps them to focus on their learning.
- A relaxed free type of learning atmosphere and approach for contracts based on the course objective.
- Generally well received as I use them in seminars at the police academy.
- Students contract for work above and beyond the set curriculum to expand their knowledge of various areas of interest surrounding the set guidelines.

Fifty-seven responses indicated no use of learning/training contracts in other education situations. Eighteen indicated use in other education situations, which included: in my daily work activities, training program for youth and personal planning for my internship.

### FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the report data from the Impact Survey Report Form, it seems safe to assume the graduate Adult Education courses at the University of Missouri-St. Louis have accrued some value in the life and work settings of the participants. In addition, the form can contribute to making sound program decisions, provide understanding of important benefits to participants, aid in clear reporting of results, help improve graduate preparation of scholars and practitioners, and be adapted and applied to use with a wide variety of professional groups and programs of long or short duration.

Additional information on results and a copy of the Impact Survey Report Form is available upon request from the author.

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