Portfolio

Instructional Competencies

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Abstract

All my life I have been an adult educator and have been seeking new opportunities to learn more about adult education and older adult or late life learning. Given that adult learners are mostly self-directed, experienced, orientated and motivated to learn, an effective approach to older adults learning would be similar to Freire's problem-posing process with a focus on topics of immediate value to the learner. Must encourage dialogue and be collaborative and participatory in nature. Adult learning also depends on effective instructors who possess and demonstrate professional instructional competencies, key principles of adult learning, and attention to age factors that influence learning and strategies for teaching older adults. Professional competencies and key principles of adult and older adult learning were considered in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my life I have been an educator and as such I continually seek new opportunities to improve program facilitation and to challenge my own teaching style. Instructional competencies demonstrate the ability to assume the roles of teacher or learning facilitator, conference presenter, or workshop leader. Although I served as leader in many youth groups my presentation/facilitating experience have primarily been linked to adult learning, as well I have taught sessional academic classes at UPEI. More recently my focus has been on older adult learning through ongoing workshops and informal education sessions including Senior's College courses which are non-credit 24 three hour semester sessions. Within this paper I will show competencies I used related to supporting adult learning specifically through education sessions within seniors college classes.

EXPERIENCE AS AN ADULT EDUCATOR

Learning and teaching has always been part of my life, and the value of learning I suspect was instilled in me by my great grandfather. My own adult teaching began as a nurse in a doctor's office, where there was always teaching moments for prenatal patients, new mothers and older women who were gynaecology patients. I also taught as a health educator with St. John Ambulance. As a learner I was constantly taking short courses related to topics of interest, eventually I became a full time student at UPEI and obtained my undergraduate degree in Sociology at the tender age of 48. As a 'mature student' on campus I noted a lack of support for the non-traditional students and was involved in establishing an organization on UPEI campus

for mature and part-time university students (MAPUS), that organization is still in existence and has benefited many older undergraduate students since its inception in 1982. As an advocate and continuous learner I also served on a national organization for part-time students called the Canadian Organization for Part-Time University Students (COPUS), initially two years as vice-president and then two years as president. Following graduation I became more focussed on older adult learning and took a course in adult education at UPEI, but my knowledge about teaching older adults continued to be limited primarily to instinct and good intentions.

It was during this time that I became interested and involved with new learning opportunities for older adults and explored the concept of learning in retirement or third age learning. I surveyed a group of seniors about their interest in such a concept and they confirmed that there was an interest and enthusiasm thus a proposal was submitted to the Knowledge Economy Partnership seeking funding to conduct a feasibility study and develop the idea of a seniors learning program and the proposal was successful. Five of us attended the Northeast Regional Conference of "Institutes for Learning in Retirement" in Amherst Massachusetts. This conference proved to be beneficial as many of the sessions dealt with how to start a learning center and others dealt with course development and marketing. Armed with this new information we returned home with enthusiasm and motivation. In May 1997 an information session about learning opportunities for older adults was held and approximately 25 people attended. From that meeting seven people indicated an interest in exploring the possibility of establishing some type of learning opportunities for older adults on PEI. A steering committee was established and I was asked to serve as chairperson. A consultant was hired to conduct a survey to gauge the interest of older adults and to determine the viability of establishing a seniors' educational program on PEI. Ongoing research and negotiating resulted in the

establishment of a self-directed Seniors College of Prince Edward Island that was affiliated with UPEI. The first Memorandum of Agreement with the University was signed on July 8, 1998 and as chair of the steering committee I signed the agreement on behalf of the new organization. In a press release announcing the launching of the Seniors College on September 1998 it was stated by Dr. Lawrence E. Heider, Acting President of UPEI and Dr. John Crossley that UPEI is pleased to partner with a community group in the fulfilment of learning needs and supports the involvement and leadership of seniors in the planning and delivery of education programs designed for seniors.

It was only during my PhD student experience that I really began to understand and value the educational considerations and instructional competencies one needs to be a successful adult and older adult educator. This understanding highlights the importance of course design having sufficient space for older adults to reflect and share experiences with each other; considerations for possible cognitive changes and decreases in visual and auditory acuity; and being centered on the learning needs of the participants.

ARTEFACTS

To demonstrate my instructional competencies to facilitate learning for older adults, I have selected the following three artefacts:

1.1 Highlights of the Instructional Competencies used through Seniors College

1.2 PowerPoint Presentation at a Seniors College class

1.3 Video example of student engagement

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

As noted by several authors the development and presentation of older adult

educational/training courses requires; consideration for course design and the development of

learning materials that take into consideration possible cognitive decline, decreases in sensory

functions and have sufficient space for sharing and reflecting on experiences and motives for

participating in learning opportunities. As noted by du Plessis, Anstey, Schlumpp, (2011) older

adults motive for participating in educational programs are influenced by personal interests,

social contact, and a desire to maintain a high level of self-efficacy and functioning; and found

that formal study (through process and content) contributes to older adults' quality of life, and

they provided the following course design considerations:

- Cater for a wide variety of interests and skill levels by adapting the learning to the learner, given that older adults bring diverse life experiences and expertise to the educational setting □
- Develop tasks that are challenging, yet doable, and which progress the learner from beginner to advanced levels
- Include frequent breaks to minimise fatigue, especially if□the learners are on medication, have health problems or are experiencing stressors (e.g. family concerns, health issues, money worries, or impending life transitions such as loss of driver's license or shift to a rest home) □
- Reduce distractions in the learning environment, as older adults may have more difficulty inhibiting irrelevant information □
- Allow sufficient time to complete tasks □
- Develop built-in adaptable print and audio functions to allow for larger text, higher contrast text and louder audio when using online formats □
- Include larger, high contrast text where possible and test audio to ensure all learners can hear in class-based teaching □
- Use a constructivist paradigm that facilitates peer-to-peer learning, group discussions and social contact □
- Enable learners to participate in planning the pace of their course and encourage self-directed learning □
- Include clear, mutually agreed upon boundaries at the start of the course regarding discussions and group participation □
- Include information about the learning process and memory exercises to enable transfer to other domains of functioning □

- Repeat instructions if learners forget and normalise memory concerns ☐
- Give clear, prompt and personalised feedback to learners (169-70).

Parallel to Freire's philosophy, the above authors suggest a constructivist approach to education, which means a paradigm shift from instruction to learning emphasis based on an active self-constructed acquiring of knowledge, skills and competence. Choi 2009 noted that in the field of adult education, peer teaching is a terms not found in widely referenced introductory adult education textbooks such as Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998), Merriam and Brockett (1997), and Wilson and Hayes (2000) (831-32). Choi 2009 suggest that peer teaching is important for older adults as an experience of learning and discovery and is defined as a pedagogy in which self-governing members design their own schedule of course offerings and take on faculty roles from within the membership. This concept aligns with the first of the Seniors College of Prince Edward Island's goals: to provide stimulating peer learning opportunities.

Other researchers Delahaye & Ehrich (2008) focused on barriers to learning opportunities and suggested that the principal hurdle for older learners was the feeling of anxiety specifically on the fear of rejection from their peer group or the instructor. These authors also noted that many adults do not think of themselves as very good learners and generally lack confidence in their own abilities, suggesting that some fear or dislike learning as a result of their negative experiences at school, while others avoid learning in the belief that it would be of no benefit to them. Sloane-Seale & Kops (2010) observed that efforts to encourage participation normally begin with the removal of barriers and the provision of opportunities, but because institutional responses have typically focused on increasing opportunities without the necessary removal of obstacles, little has changed for older adults. Formosa (2007) stresses the need for lifelong

learning that included an emphasis on later life and includes a strategy for wider participation so as to respond to older adults who are still educationally excluded and socially disadvantaged.

A third presage factor, one that is perhaps unique to Third Age people, is that older learners are accustomed to exercising judgment in setting priorities and allocating their time, and should be given more opportunities to plan and control their learning experiences, and that older learners feel more comfortable learning with a similar aged cohort (Chappell et al., 2003; Gelade et al., 2003; Taylor & Rose, 2005). Other researchers focused on appropriate instructional methods for older learners and suggested material should be organized into small units (Chappell et al., 2003), and noted that older learners' are high motivation with substantial and diverse life experiences, and mature interpersonal skills which provide a rich foundation for collegial learning strategies such as group discussions, small team projects, and learning exercises (Chappell et al., 2003; Gelade et al., 2003; Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999; Taylor & Rose, 2005). It was further suggested that facilitators should use active, discovery-based learning methods rather than passive instructional methods (Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999; Chappell et al., 2003), cited by Delahave & Ehrich 2008. These authors identified a fourth general theme to support learning for older learners, which deals with facilitation techniques and quoted Spigner-Littles and Anderson (1999) and Fisher (1998) who assert that new information needs to be connected to, and build upon, prior knowledge and real-life experiences. In addition, facilitators should use probing, thoughtful, open-ended questions and prompts that allow the learners to describe their individual experiences and knowledge and promote the sharing of that knowledge with other learners (Fisher, 1998; Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999). In summary, these themes describe the activities that can enhance the learning of older adults: presage factors, learning environment, instructional methods, and facilitation techniques that I kept in mind and

tried to incorporate into the development of my course curriculum and into my own facilitation

of the senior college classes. Education or learning opportunities should help students gain

knowledge and basic skills. Therefore, designing an appropriate curriculum is considered (as) a

foundation stone for high quality programs and services, regardless of the type of educational

programs and institution and students Kahn & Law (2015). My perceptions of older adult

education and learning resulted from my course work, readings and an opportunity to meet two

international researchers who focus on older adult education. Until this past autumn I was not

aware that there were researchers who focus primarily on education for "older" adults and that

there is a need for older adult education that includes the values of social justice and social

equity.

When designing developing and facilitating the seniors college course entitled, "The

Realities and Fallacies of Aging" for the spring semester 2015, the following were considered;

seniors college non-credit course classes are presented throughout three semesters (fall, winter

and spring) and offered in three-hour sessions once a week for eight weeks. The course I initiated

was being offered during the spring session and since all students sign up for their yearly courses

during the fall registration, I was able to design and develop the curriculum with input from the

potential incoming students. Thus was able to able to adapt the course contend to the wants of

the learners. By knowing some of the learning needs of the potential students I was able to

incorporate tasks that challenged their critical thinking and used a variety of teaching and

learning techniques within each class. A classroom learning environment was enhanced with

access to audio/visual equipment and consideration was given to audio/visual acuity by ensuring

that attention was given to font size, volume and lighting. Peer-to-peer learning was encouraged

through group discussions, question and answer sessions, and the sharing of materials related to

class topics. Recap at the beginning and or end of each session gave the learners and teacher an opportunity to dialogue and reflect on what was learned and offer suggestions or comments to benefit future learning sessions. Handout were provided with most classes and in some cases the participants were asked to read a handout and be prepared to offer comments about the content and the relationship to the session for the day. Social opportunities were made possible through break sessions and with various participants taking turns to bring treats to share with the rest of the class.

COMPETENCIES USED

Although I have had many years of practice providing learning opportunities for older adults, I have been teaching and facilitating based on instinct rather than adult learning theory principles and processes. Since starting my PhD program I have learned the importance of late life education and from education theorist Paulo Freire that critical reflection is an important element in adult learning and this happens most naturally when the content of a class invites involvement, and when students are encouraged to respond to the material by drawing from their life experiences.

Throughout the curriculum development process, class preparation and delivery, I used a variety of competencies including the knowledge and skills necessary to develop a curriculum for a twenty-four hour course program, as well as the competencies required to teach, facilitate and co-ordinate eight weekly three-hour class sessions. This included the ability to adapt the course content to the needs of the learners, present the learning materials in a variety of ways to accommodate learning styles and accommodate audio/visual acuity. Other competencies used related to organizational and communication skills such as classroom organization, coordination of guest speakers and catering to their presentation needs, communicating with and managing

people. With respect to communication I often shared readings with the students via e-mail and

that resulted in more active participation by some of them who shared articles they found related

to a class session. That worked for the majority of the class but two did not have a computer so

they ended up receiving the materials at the next class. Class discussions worked well and

improved as the semester continued. All guest presenters were prepared to present to adults and

included opportunities for interactive learning. Most classes ended with dialogue and some

reflection on what was learned and sometimes how the participants might use new knowledge.

The class on ageism resulted in dialogue related to ageism, the growth of anti-aging medicine

and an article written by a futurist, which was given as a handout. Peer-to-peer learning became

evident from class one starting with a couple of participants actively participating through

questions and experiences and this progressed as the semester progressed.

LESSONS LEARNED

I have learned that as Findsen 2007 noted an educator does not impose knowledge on

others but works with them to jointly construct knowledge, that older adults should be

encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, that teachers and learners

are,co-learners in a situation where mutual respect must operate and that learning is not

something done to learners but is a process and result of what learners do for themselves. This

was demonstrated to me beginning with getting input from the potential students to develop the

curriculum through class discussions and sharing of information. It was always amazing how

animated the students became when they were actively involved or informing the class about

their experiences in given situations. The above events mimics one of Malcolm Knowles 1984

assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that as a person matures he/she accumulates

a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning and his principles

that adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction and that experience

(including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities. The focus is on the learner and the

learning strategies are interactive rather than passive. Findsen (2007) also stresses the idea that

older people should assert their rights and possibly take collective action to effect change is

arguably an important function within civil society and that it is this aspect for older adulthood

practice that best connects with a Freirean approach. In his study on lifelong education for older

adults in Malta, Formosa (2012) found late-life education in Malta does result in various social

benefits to older learners and argues that learning bodies overlook the unique barriers faced by

older women such as their low expectations of their successful participation in educational

pursuits, their difficulties reaching learning centres due to inadequate transport amenities, and

problems in finding time for educational pursuits when caring is so time consuming. He also

notes that living in rural areas presents a strong barrier to participation in late life education, that

many (especially women) do not own a driving license, nor a car, and live in areas where public

transport (if any) is very limited.

What follows are photographs of the class participants who gave their permission to share their

photographs in presentations and organized themselves into groups so I could include them all.

Class Schedule Given to Each Student

DATE	Topic	Presenter	Picture
March 27, 2015	Normal Aging	Olive Bryanton Course Facilitator	
April 10, 2015	Ageism	Olive Bryanton Course Facilitator	
April 17, 2015	Oral Health	Allison MacDougal Dental Hygienist	
April 24, 2015	Abuse of Older Adults	Olive Bryanton Course Facilitator	

May 1, 2015	Falls Prevention and Physical Activity Literacy	Valerie Abd-El-Aziz Bill Montelpare Masters Student Research Chair	
May 8, 2015	Putting Your Affairs in Order at Any Age	Kelly Robinson CLIA Program Coordinator	
May 15, 2015	Hospice and Caregiving	Casey McGannon Bereavement Coordinator Hospice PEI	
May 22, 2015	Fitness to Drive	Graham Miner Acting Director Highway Safety	

CONTINUING MY PhD JOURNEY

As I continue my PhD journey I hope to improve my skills as a researcher, to increase my expertise as a Photovoice method researcher, learn ways to keep older adults engaged in learning which can support them as they maintain personal independence, and retain a sense of purpose and meaning in late-life. Late-life education can fulfil various positive social and personal functions such as helping lonely older persons to re-socialise themselves by increasing their interests, as well as providing opportunities and stimulation for the use and structure of free time. I anticipate understanding how an adult learner actually values education in relation to their life stages, the removal of institutional and societal barriers and the provision of a wide range of learning opportunities will change the situation for older adults, who historically have been marginalized by many educational institutions. I hope to explore intergenerational learning opportunities to challenge ageism and stereotyping of older adults and younger people, destroy the silo's into which people have been delegated and improve intergenerational equality. Finally

I hope to encourage my own educational institution to start recognizing and catering to the

learning needs of the growing population of learning-inclined older.

CONCLUSION

Life-long learning is a necessity not a luxury. Older adults want to keep learning, and

have much they can teach others. However, there is much to be researched in the various aspects

of older adult life including: how older adults actually value education in various stages of their

life; what are the motivating factors (internal and external) and barriers to older adult learning;

and where do older adults seek information or ongoing learning opportunities.

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