

Chapter 8

Professional Learning Communities and Adult Learning and Teaching: Best Practices in Building a Community of Learners

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ABSTRACT

In addition to providing strategies to build professional learning communities within an environment of adult learners, this chapter has the objective that adult learners will carry the principles of professional learning communities from their own learning experience back to their own learning organizations as both followers and leaders. In this way, and based upon the author's own experiences, the learning and teaching strategies described here have impact beyond the adult learning classroom by influencing how multiple type of organizations in the field of business, K12 and higher education, public service, and non-profits learn, collaborate, and achieve results.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5712-8.ch008

INTRODUCTION

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in any learning organization can be defined as a model that moves beyond ensuring that students are taught but rather students learn according to DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour in *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning* (2005). PLCs were first developed and researched in the K12 educational systems. In this book devoted to fostering more effective learning and teaching strategies in adult education settings, the concept of Professional Learning Communities certainly can be applied to ensure adults are not just taught but also learn. The focus of PLCs on the three principles of learning, collaboration, and results (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005) relate directly to the essential elements of adult learning as defined in foundational explanation of andragogy, *The Modern Practice of Adult Learning; From Pedagogy to Andragogy* by Malcom Knowles. The principles of andragogy or adult learning theory are self-concept, adult learning experience, readiness, orientation, and motivation (Knowles, 1980).

In addition to providing strategies for instructors to build professional learning communities within an environment of adult learners, this chapter has the objective that adult learners will carry the principles of PLCs from their own learning experience back to their own work environments as both followers and leaders. This ideal of learning organizations, based upon the author's own experiences and the learning and teaching strategies described here, has impact beyond the adult learning classroom by influencing how multiple type of organizations learn, collaborate, and achieve results in the field of business, K12 and higher education, public service, and non-profits.

For the sake of this chapter, the term "adult learning environment" will denote any adult learning experience purposely designed to occur in the face-to-face classroom environment, a blended format with instructor providing instruction prior to the classroom experience (e.g., flipped teaching model), or a synchronous or asynchronous online format as frequently found in distance learning. The adult learning environment term seeks to encompass the number of learning modalities adults engage in today.

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