Chapter 3
A Qualitative Research Approach for the Investigation and Evaluation of Adult Users' Participation Factors through Collaborative E-Learning Activities in the Virtual World of "Second Life"

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ABSTRACT

In the last thirty years, participation factors have particularly attracted the interest of Adult Education researchers, and it could be said that this is probably one of the most discussed topics in this field. Hence, "participation theories" that relate organized educational activities can give a logical explanation for the complexity and multifactor nature of adult leading to educational practices. In these circumstances, the chapter presents recent findings of a qualitative research effort, conducted in the virtual world of Second Life (SL). This premise is recapitulated in an attempt to illuminate the theme of trainee users' broad participation in collaborative e-learning activities based on the interpretive framework of "adults' participation theories" that can interpret the motivational factors, recommended from McGivney (1993). The value-added effect helps one to understand the mobilization of different adults' perspectives and thoroughly enunciate the key factors that influence the decision to participate in teamwork activities.

INTRODUCTION

According to Cross (1981), it is unlikely to "formalize" a unified theory for Adult Education, but it is more likely to have another future concept that will help us to understand the learning process.. Hobson and Welbourne (1998), note that the development of adults is not determined by specific theories, but through a "patchwork" theory, which attempts to register the degree of interaction with internal and external forces that affect their lives. But, such an effort should be investigated regarding the evolution of the concepts used to achieve a more balanced approach to develop adult learning approach, which will not override existing perceptions in this area.

Houtkoop and Van Der Kamp (1992), suggest that the participation of adults and the need for learning depend on initial motivation. Following basic skills, such as learning, the native context or incentive is created (i.e., the need for learning). Consistent with Kidd's (1978) thoughts, the motivation is the driving inherent force, arising from human needs, manifested in the search for a wide variety of different "objects" (i.e., incentives). The incentives are linked directly with teacher's "means" to satisfy a need. If the teaching goal is reinforced during the process, then motivation must be maintained, thus connecting with the stimulus "medium" for an extended term bringing positive results (Lovell, 1987).

Through this hopeless effort to find a comprehensive theoretical approach in terms of mobilization and finding factors that led adults in group activities, McGivney (1993) has her own theoretical "framework" research. She argued that the participation of adults is directly related to the interaction of exogenous, i.e. environmental, situational factors and endogenous factors, mostly related to the disposal or the experience of the participants (McGivney, 1993). Theories relating to adult participation in organized educational activities (or "participation theories"), can give a reasonable explanation for the complexity and multifaceted nature of the leading causes of adult participation in an educational program or activity (McGivney, 1993). This "vision" is also argued for researchers in the area of incentives for participation should be connected mainly with the utilization of methods for the analysis of factors. Approximately, the subdivision or the variable number of responses, is given by both participants in other categories and analysis of similar characteristics that govern them, i.e. grouping all responses into categories according to their similarity (Vella, 2002).

Today, the reasons for adult participation in education, is considered as a very complex issue and therefore our contemplation will focus on the investigation and exploitation of motivation factors, which affect participation, learning needs and involvement. On this basis, we can say that the distance learning through the use of ICT (Information & Communications Technology) can provide an educational research important "context," in which students will be active while discovering knowledge. The components of the adults' "frameaction" includes the possible correlations between knowledge, values and management practices, which lead to the investigation procedures, in which knowledge is created:

- Through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984).
- By using a prior interpretation to build a new or a revised experience, as a guide for future action (Mezirow, 1981).
- In the sense of execution process active engagement between the inner and the external environment, must be taken seriously into account (Beard & Wilson, 2006).

The "framework" that we described above, requires the construction of new analysis tools and modeling interactions that should include four key pillars:

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