

Chapter XLVIII

Curriculum Development for Adult Learners in Career and Technical Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses pertinent issues concerning the development of meaningful curricula for adult learners in career and technical education. Although developing a curriculum or a course in adult vocational education depends on a competency-based model which has been borrowed from foreign countries, adult learning theory promotes a humanistic orientation for the development of self-actualizing persons. The chapter discusses how the two different models contribute to curriculum development in career and technical education.

INTRODUCTION

For years, scholars in different fields have been trying to come up with precise definitions of learning and teaching. One of the definitions learning researchers often cite based on the work of Zull (2002), Bloom and Krathwohl (1956) and Kolb (1984), defines learning as a physical change in synaptic pathways in the brain brought about by confronting real-life situations that either confirm or challenge our mental models. Johnson, Johnson,

and Smith (1998) view teaching and learning in terms of several principal constructs:

- Knowledge is discovered, transformed, and extended by students.
- Students actively construct their own knowledge.
- Learning is a social enterprise in which students need to interact with the instructor and classmates.
- Faculty effort should be aimed at developing students' competencies and talents.

- Education is a personal transaction among students and between faculty and students as they work together.
- Learning is best when it takes place within a cooperative context.
- Teaching is a complex application of theory and research that requires considerable instructor training and continuous refinement of skills and procedures.

Interestingly enough, these scholars' definitions of teaching and learning do not deviate much from the way adult learning scholars perceive teaching and learning for adults. The foundation of adult learning theory postulates:

- Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, there are the appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities.
- Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects.
- Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.
- Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.
- Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, pp. 39-40).

Adult education has not been a field that operated by itself; rather, its relationship with

career and technical education (formerly known as vocational education) has been an important arena for serving adult learners. Many land-grant universities in the United States have a department called Department of Vocational and Adult Education. Those departments known only as Departments of Career and Technical Education offer courses for adult learners as the majority of adult learners enter the field of career and technical education. Even today, we still have the Office of Vocational and Adult Education housed under U.S. Department of Education that handles a massive enterprise of career, technical, and adult education. As an overview, this is how the Office of Vocational and Adult Education addresses the interrelationship between career and technical education as one area and adult education as another:

Career and technical education is a massive enterprise in the U.S. Thousands of comprehensive high schools, vocational and technical high schools, area vocational centers, and community colleges offer career and technical education programs. Virtually every high school student takes at least one career and technical education course, and one in four students takes three or more courses in a single program area. One-third of college students are involved in career and technical programs, and as many as 40 million adults engage in short-term postsecondary occupational training. (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2008, para. 1)

Indeed, when one thinks of the two closely related fields, one cannot help but think of teaching and learning in the two fields. It is true that adult learners in career and technical education construct knowledge and their learning is a social enterprise. Above all, they learn by confronting real-life situations and relying on their prior experience as the best resources for learning. As adult learners age, their knowledge increases, knowledge that they can disseminate among the

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