Chapter 3
Framing the Role of Culture Reflecting on How Culture Affects Learners in Transformative Learning Settings:
The Adult Learner Culture Defined

Priscilla Bamba
Grand Canyon University, USA

ABSTRACT

From the simplest cell phone to virtual reality headsets, students today are bombarded by technology, so this is bound to affect their expectations in the learning environment and the way they relate to cognitive challenges. Today's culture is an immersion of advanced methods of communicating with each other and with their instructors. Adult learners who return to the world of higher education after having been away for some time have often felt the need to strive harder to show they fit into that world. With a broader worldview, more responsibilities, and often more wisdom gained from having held jobs, sometimes for years, they also bring a richer way of relating to the academic world. At the same, time, though, sometimes responsibilities, including full family lives, limit their time and energy they are capable of devoting to studying and completing assignments.

INTRODUCTION

From the simplest cell phone to virtual reality headsets, students today are bombarded by technology, so this is bound to affect their expectations in the learning environment and the way they relate to cognitive challenges. Today's culture is an immersion of advanced methods of communicating with each other and with their instructors. Adult learners who return to the world of higher education after having been away

for some time have often felt the need to strive harder to show they fit into that world. With a broader worldview, more responsibilities, and often more wisdom gained from having held jobs, sometimes for years, they also bring a richer way of relating to the academic world. At the same time though, sometimes responsibilities, including full family lives, limit the time and energy they can devote to studying and completing assignments. Yet, American culture is moving more toward valuing, expecting, and even requiring a degree at the higher education level. Thus, adult learners have increased in number dramatically in the past few decades. Concurrently, higher education has evolved into a more technologically-driven environment. Classes and entire degrees are now obtainable through distance learning platforms, making it a convenient means of adult learners obtaining a high-quality teaching/learning experience that is also transformative for both the instructor and the student.

This chapter discusses this phenomenon and what is has meant to the returning, non-traditional student and his or her goal and ability to achieve a degree for both professional and personal development. Today's adult learner will find a whole new world of ways to experience learning in a transformative setting. The following pages will address several different ways in which culture affects or influences adult learners, centering at least in part on how the phenomenal changes in technology affect them.

The Adult Learner

Society and culture in the U.S. regard an individual to be an adult when he or she reaches the age of 18. However, it is well-known that this is just a number and that adulthood occurs when a person is mature and consider themselves to be mature. By the time learners reach the age of 18, they have generally finished their secondary education, thus making them eligible to pursue a higher education. When a person is young, before declining years, is ideal for absorbing new information, but that does not mean that such physiological changes would prevent older individuals from learning (or teaching) or that it would prevent anyone from being a lifelong learner, which is becoming more and more necessary in today's world.

Labouvie-Vief (1993), in fact, claimed that learners who willingly continue to interact with others, as do most individuals, within the same society/culture also continue to collect and define who they are. In other words, each time a new activity or concept is experienced, learning can (and for most, usually does) take place. Adult learners usually have similar characteristics, including but not limited to self-directed learning (to some degree) and motivation.

Adult learners who follow the pressure from their culture to obtain a higher education (and degree) might need time to adjust and sharpen skills academically. According to Turner (1997), one must become a sponge and take advantage of all tips and support offered (p. 7). Becoming an active learner and staying motivated are crucial to success. Turner goes on to explain that adult learners must spend a great deal of time overcoming any possible previous negative learning experiences and wipe the slate clean, so to speak, with a positive attitude and expectations.

Culture Defined

The combination of individual life experiences and the values modeled by adults, serve as inputs into how learners interpret the surrounding world. Understanding this important phenomenon helps the framers of curriculum and instruction. Components that can inform individual a person's culture can include ethnicity, religion, gender, and socioeconomics. The values, behaviors, beliefs, and figurative

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