

Chapter 10

Adult Learners: Standards for Teacher Effectiveness and Conditions for Optimal Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a framework for both the instructor and student to use as they understand the principals of effective teaching and learning practices for the adult learner. The author addresses the importance of professional standards as a means to ensure educational program quality, and gives an brief overview of the evolution of the American educational system. Comparing and contrasting assumptions about teaching children (pedagogy) vs. teaching adults (andragogy) will be discussed as well as examining learner development, learner engagement through reflective discourse, and transformational learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a framework for both the instructor and student to use in understanding the principles of effective teaching and learning practices for the adult learner. Comparing and contrasting assumptions about teaching children (pedagogy) versus teaching adults (andragogy) is discussed as well as learner development and learner engagement through reflective discourse and transformational learning environments.

Professional Standards: A Plumb-Line for Quality Assurance

A standard is defined as something established by authority, custom, or general consent as a model or example, something set-up and established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality (“Standard,” n.d.). Just as a plumb-line is a weight at the end of a cord used to ensure proper vertical alignment, professional standards provide a measure of quality against which one can measure what has been designed or developed. Professional standards serve several functions. They outline the requirements needed to ensure quality, provide aspirational guides for continuous improvement, and assist in establishing a healthy organizational culture by identifying resources and supports. Philanthropic foundations, such as the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations, have played crucial roles in the research and development of standards that define components of quality teaching and learning environments for elementary education, secondary education, and postsecondary practices in American educational systems. Beginning in the late 1800s, the support from the foundations contributed significantly to the professional standards and principles by which many professions modeled and measured themselves. The research findings of early reports surfaced characteristics that defined professionalism and established a belief that a high degree of qualifications and ethical standards must be recognized and regulated (Cesar & Smith, 2005).

The American Medical Association was formed in 1847 followed by the American Bar Association in 1878. Both associations included national councils that regulated standards for the quality of professional preparation programs at the state and local levels (Cesar & Smith, 2005). In the 20th century, the Flexner report on medicine commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation identified the discrepancies within the quality of teaching at medical schools in the U.S. Prior to the 20th century, most medical education in the United States was administered using models such as apprenticeships where hands-on instruction was facilitated by a local practitioner, proprietary schools, physicians who owned the medical college and taught there, or by a university system where students received clinical training in lecture halls and hospitals. Because of differences in approaches to the educational training of

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