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### Part-time Instructors: Closing the Quality Loop

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#### Abstract

This article looks at ways to ensure client quality in continuing education part-time programs. It identifies the stakeholders involved in these programs as the instructor, the student, the college, and the employer. It then addresses methods of feedback to close the quality loop thus ensuring alignment of outcomes for all stakeholders. It was concluded that specific instructor tools and training are required to better prepare the instructor for the task at hand. The responsibility for some of the recommendations lies with the instructor; however, provision of the necessary resources must come from the college.

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According to a Price Waterhouse study in 1993, total revenues for Canadian Colleges were estimated at \$6 billion. Part-time enrollment of people active in the workforce was the fastest growing segment of this college market. From 1997 to 2002, "the involvement of Canadian workers in job-related training increased from 29% to 35%" (Peters, 2004).

Increasing economic and social pressures are forcing adults into continuing education programs. Mandatory upgrading of skills, efforts to increase credentials for employability, and career changes are constantly driving continuing education enrollment up. Colleges provide a significant portion of these courses or programs, and much of the adult success is dependent on the quality of the part-time instructors employed. Success of the continuing education programs is market driven by supporting the local economy through this employment preparation. Part-time and continuing education programs generate a significant portion of college revenue. A successful continuing education program will be one that continuously meets or exceeds learner expectations; consequently, meeting the needs of area employers. Effective instructor preparation or qualification contributes to that success. But what defines quality for continuing education instructors?

The purpose of this paper is to assess college instructor preparation for continuing education programs. It explores factors affecting instructor quality needed to successfully support the adult learner as a lifelong learner involved in continuing education. It reviews the literature dealing with three factors affecting instructor approaches to adult learners:

1. Adult learner motivations,
2. Prior learning experiences, and
3. Individual learner goals and objectives.

How these factors are considered by continuing education instructors is then explored. In particular, these influences are:

1. Testing or grading the adult learner,
2. Respecting learner differences, and
3. Instructor characteristics.

### **Instructor Goals**

What attracts individuals to the vocation of part-time instruction? Is it a second job to supplement income, to right the wrongs of past experience, or to fix current inadequacies? The reasons are as varied as the instructors found teaching these part-time programs. At the 2000 Symposium of Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda, Dr. Yvonne Hebert commented that “teachers and educators are on a quest to discover meaning in teaching” and “are searching for purpose in their work, as well as for quality in teaching”. Quality is a recurring theme in this search for purpose. It is pursued by the instructors, by the students, by the colleges, and by the employers. Instructors reflect on each lesson to make improvement in delivery. Students demand value for their tuition. Colleges expect the reputation of the Institutions to be upheld and enhanced. Employers value the graduates who are hired with the necessary aptitudes to perform in the workplace.

Instructors must balance the demands of these stakeholders by identifying expected outcomes. Furthermore, these outcomes must be achieved within the confines of a specific time allotment, and in isolation off-campus or after regular college hours. Continuing education instructors are normally offered a contract covering, for example, a single three-hour class once per week lasting twelve weeks. This 36 hour contract includes lesson preparation and subsequent marking of assignments and tests. Providing quality to all stakeholders conflicts with the rigid terms of this contract by demanding extra hours spent outside the classroom. This is more pronounced if it is the first time teaching a new subject matter. Even if the instructor has industry experience relevant to the subject matter, the depth of content in the teaching of the course may be overwhelming. “Planning for and organizing the course content or ‘what should be covered’ takes priority over thinking about how to teach the course so that students learn well” (Saroyan, Amundsen, 2004, p.16). Adults learn in a variety of ways. “[L]earning styles refers to individuals’ characteristic and preferred ways of gathering, interpreting, organizing, and thinking about information” (Davis, 1993, p.185). Employing a variety of delivery methods in teaching will accommodate a diversity of learning styles. Even though adult learners are “more intrinsically motivated to learn, bring a more practical, problem-solving orientation to learning, and are clearer about their educational goals” (Davis, 1993, p.52), they still require

diverse accommodations to meet their needs. Continuing education is a big decision for the adult learner. Education reentry may be the result of a personal struggle or life development. The decision for retraining may not be internally motivated, but rather the result of external forces acting on the individual. It may be a first experience in the college setting and they may be nervous about what is ahead. As an instructor, you need to recognize these indicators and remove any resistance or lack of self-confidence. You need to help prepare the learner by outlining course expectations and then provide tools for their success, provide suggestions for homework habits to keep the learner current with the course content, provide guidelines for study habits to help the learner prepare for course exams or assignments, provide opportunities for early success and then provide them frequently to give the learners confidence in their abilities. By utilizing an informed mix of delivery methods, an instructor can maximize a learner's experiences. However, "lectures, student discussions, and exams account for close to two-thirds of all class time regardless of whether the instructor is part or full-time" (Leslie, Gappa, 2002, p.64). The act of teaching goes beyond merely regurgitating the course content from the text. Some instructors may elect to put in this extra effort, working outside the boundaries imposed by the contract and choosing not to be compensated for extra hours spent on course preparation. The college administration argues in favour of this approach maintaining that the more frequently an instructor teaches the same course, the easier it becomes; therefore, less preparation time is needed. But if the college does not provide the instructor with the proper tools, how many learners are being left alone with a minimal chance of success?

### **Instructor Success**

Proper tools include an understanding of ones own pedagogy. Understanding a personal teaching and learning strategy is one step toward competency in teaching.

Subject-matter expertise is used to clarify and articulate the student learning that is desired, becoming the reference point for all subsequent decisions. Competency is thus developed through the practice and close examination of decision sequences and teaching actions. Self- and peer analyses assist this process because they enable an individual to explore alternative possibilities and potential outcomes; moreover, they foster an openness to different ways of approaching the teaching task (Saroyan, Amundsen, 2004, p.19).

This process of self-analysis includes Schon's (1983) work on reflection in action. Reflection in action implies the ability to understand consequences of delivery methods, at an upper level of learning. Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of learning lists the following levels in order of increasing awareness:

1. Knowledge
2. Comprehension

3. Application
4. Analysis
5. Synthesis
6. Evaluation

Reflection in action uses Bloom's levels of synthesis and evaluation, all done during the moment of teaching. This ability to think and adapt is highly skilled and generally unavailable to the novice instructor. However, reflection on action is a skill used to analyze decisions after a lesson is over. It uses Bloom's levels of application and analysis. This method provides the luxury of knowing consequences to decisions and reflecting on them at a more leisurely period of time.

Reflection on teaching is particularly important in a [college] environment where individuals are not necessarily taught how to teach or provided with access to knowledge about teaching. Professors are expected to build their knowledge of teaching and learning largely from their own teaching experiences. Hence, developing a reflective capacity will go a long way in helping individuals take charge of their own learning about teaching (Saroyan, Amundsen, 2004, p.26).

This ownership means having a variety of delivery methods to enable the instructor to substitute a method fitting the current student population, student goals, and planned outcome. They must be able to accommodate a variety of learning styles, provide specific examples to abstract theories, and plan individual and interpersonal tasks.

Grading the adult learner and those experiences requires creativity with some course topics. Fuhrmann and Grasha (1983) have applied question headings to each level of Bloom's taxonomy. Davis (1990) provides a condensation of this list:

1. To measure knowledge (common terms, facts, principles, procedures), ask: Define, Describe, Identify, Label, List, Match, Name, Outline, Reproduce, Select, State.
2. To measure comprehension (understanding of facts and principles, interpretation of material), ask: Convert, Defend, Distinguish, Estimate, Explain, Extend, Generalize, Give Examples, Infer, Predict, Summarize.
3. To measure application (solving problems, applying concepts and principles to new situations), ask: Demonstrate, Modify, Operate, Prepare, Produce, Relate, Show, Solve, Use.
4. To measure analysis (recognition of unstated assumptions or logical fallacies, ability to distinguish between facts and inferences), ask: Diagram, Differentiate, Distinguish, Illustrate, Infer, Point out, Relate, Select, Separate, Subdivide.
5. To measure synthesis (integrate learning from different areas or solve problems by creative thinking), ask: Categorize, Combine, Compile, Devise, Design, Explain, Generate,

Organize, Plan, Rearrange, Reconstruct, Revise, Tell.

6. To measure evaluation (judging and assessing), ask: Appraise, Compare, Conclude, Describe, Discriminate, Explain, Justify, Interpret, Support. (p.241)

Traditional pedagogical testing methods often rely on Blooms' first level of recall, or memorization of knowledge. This is not always the most suitable level of testing for the adult learner. Hence, you should use a variety of questions suitable to the other levels in Bloom's taxonomy when it is necessary to test. Teach the learner how to approach multiple choice tests, invite collaborative test efforts, or allow the use of resources such as texts during the test. Test for knowledge using a variety of approaches such as those offered by Walker & Soltis (1997).

1. Replicative learning is the ability "to repeat and use what we have learned" (Walker, Soltis, 1997, p.41).
2. Associative learning is the ability to "link things previously learned with new things" (Walker, Soltis, 1997, p.41).
3. Applicative learning is the ability to see "the connection between what one knows and what one wants to achieve" (Walker, Soltis, 1997, p.41).
4. Interpretive learning is the ability to apply knowledge and use it "for understanding a situation and not for solving a problem or answering a question" (Walker, Soltis, 1997, p.41), in an effort to make sense of our world.

Learning differs for each individual. Collect feedback to confirm learning using the appropriate methods, including: test questions, group discussions, and nonverbal cues. Provide opportunity for extra assignments for top learners to gain extra knowledge and for other students to improve marks by reviewing concepts with supplementary materials.

### **Learner Goals**

The adult learner has paid tuition to cover a published course outline. They expect to be taught new knowledge and how that knowledge fits with their existing knowledge. However, the instructor must balance their demands on the student, to learn and be tested, with existing time demands that the student brings with them to class. Adult learners have "competing and multiple demands on their time: family responsibilities, job commitments, social and community obligations, and commuting" (Davis, 1993, p.53). The instructor must be sensitive or cognizant of these demands when assigning course work for completion outside of class time.

Adult learners involved in continuing education reflect an array of today's multiculturalism and bring those cultural beliefs to the classroom. Instructors must understand, respect, and modify their teaching style to reach each participant in this variety of learner and teaching beliefs. "[T]reat each student as an individual, and respect

each student for who he or she is” says Davis (1993, p.40). Each individual must be treated as a specific member of a general group. Although membership in a particular group may be important to the individual, each person has reasons for attending continuing education, and those specific reasons must be valued by the instructor. All learners must be treated with the individual respect they deserve. Instructors must be cognizant of cultural differences in learning styles and elevate the learners confidence through a visible show of respect for the individual.

Instructors must understand the goals of each learner and identify how the lesson fits with those goals. New learning must be connected to existing knowledge. Adult learners bring a wealth of experience to the continuing educational setting. Therefore instructors must use a variety of methods to entice the learner to relate these experiences to other learners, and to themselves, during group discussions. Communication methods used during group discussions may be intuitive to some instructors, but are a learned skill for others. The college must teach these skills and others to new instructors. Instructors need to understand the relevance new information brings to each learner. Building on past experience and knowledge is key to the adult learner. The instructor must point out how this new learning is meaningful in the context outside of the classroom by identifying essential skills or knowledge from previous learning. What may seem obvious to the instructor may be an important moment of associative learning-to link past knowledge with the newly acquired knowledge for the learner. The learner realizes the true value of previous learning by understanding the context and bringing relevance to the learning moment. Brookfield (1990) defines this learning as experiential. It is a “cycle of concrete experience, reflection on that experience, abstract conceptualization, and application of insights in new contexts” (p.51).

### **Instructor Preparation**

Statistics Canada reported in 1993 the college system employed 25,000 full-time instructors and an estimated further 150,000 part-time or occasional instructors. Yet “less than one third of college faculty had formal teaching experience prior to entry. This is especially true for part-time instructors. The part-time instructors acquire teaching skills on the job” (Association of Canadian Colleges, 1993, p.21). The repetition of teaching the same lesson can bring a familiarity of the subject matter to the instructor, but this repetition does little to improve the quality of delivery. An acquisition of teaching skills on the job requires reflective practice skills that are not intuitive. There is no mechanism of specific feedback to teach the novice instructor methods that work. Instructors can use memories of their educational learning in the hope of recreating that learning experience. However, what may have worked in a pedagogical setting can be ill-suited to convey meaning to the adult learner in an andragogical setting. The learning experiences an instructor brings to the classroom often dictate, consciously or subconsciously, their own classroom methods. “We have found that these perspectives often seem to act as

facilitators or barriers to adopting and implementing a learning-centered approach” (Saroyan & Amundsen, 2004, p.23). Typically, continuing education feedback consists of a one-page evaluation questionnaire that rates the instructor and course on a Likert scale. These questionnaires are usually distributed at the end of a course with the feedback to benefit the next group of learners. Sometimes they are a blind instrument and only after final marks are submitted will the results be sent to the instructor. Scores are tallied for averages but are seldom accompanied by college sanctioned suggestions for improvement and sources of information. This type of rating cannot be used formatively and does little to help change the way an instructor approaches lesson delivery. Alternative methods of constructive instructor evaluation must be offered in workshops and seminars provided by the college. One method of formative self-evaluation is through informal peer monitoring. The feedback is all for the observer and not necessarily provided to the instructor. Discovery of new methods and ideas can occur from sitting in on lessons delivered by other instructors. This method serves a second purpose by encouraging and maintaining a teaching excellence by all instructors. With a variety of opportunities like peer monitoring, workshops, or seminars, some form of remuneration to the instructors can be offered as incentive. An hourly credit used toward the attendance of such sessions may be provided (i.e., 2 hours of professional development per 36 hour contract or 3 hours per two 36 hours contracts). Whatever method is employed, the college needs to close the quality feedback loop. “Part-time employment is an expanding feature of college human resources practices” (Association of Canadian Colleges, 1993, p.27). This practice is less costly and has benefits over full-time employment. It supports programming flexibility, part-time enrollment, and off-site or remote campuses. The college, in turn, needs to support the instructor by providing knowledge and offering the resources for their professional development opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Part-time instructors are being hired on the merits of their professional workplace activities. They have little formal teaching experience. The college should ensure that the instructor has the necessary communication skills to bring that rich experience to the learners through appropriate delivery methods. One option may be to increase instructor prerequisites by hiring instructors with specific subject matter industry experience as well as adult education theory. However, the college that implements a program of professional development shows commitment to developing people within the institution, thus instilling the concept of lifelong learning, and continuing to increase the quality of education in the classroom. The practice of supporting lifelong learning of instructors will also give credibility to a public vision statement of lifelong learning for the student.

This paper was written to clarify how to make the most effective

use of part-time faculty. This is important to colleges since they “employ a higher proportion of part-time faculty than any other sector of higher education” (Anthony & Valadez, 2002, p.42). The discussion was specific to faculty teaching adult learners who are in transitional training upgrade programs and need positive learning experiences to achieve success in continuing educational studies. “In 2002, an estimated 4.8 million adult workers participated in formal, job-related training. These workers represented slightly more than one-third of Canadian workers aged 25 to 64” (Peters, 2004). “Retraining is becoming a common requirement of Canadian industry. The net effect on colleges/technical institutes is an expansion of the demand for retraining, a demand which is expected to continue with on-going restructuring” (Association of Canadian Colleges, 1993, p.39). Colleges have traditionally hired instructors with practical, industry based experience. “The applied learning context of the colleges/technical institutes is reflected in the deliberate priority given to hiring people with practical experience in industry” (Association of Canadian Colleges, 1993, p.28). Students are looking to gain a competitive edge in the workforce through retraining and new skills acquisition. Colleges are in competition for that student market. Students of the college system expect full value for their money by demanding instructors with both the practical experience and application, delivered with the effectiveness of a trained teacher. This is a dichotomy of the traditional Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) approach and of today’s student expectations. Most colleges fail to increase the instructors knowledge of the adult learner through any professional development opportunities. “In hiring from industry, colleges/technical institutes are typically not hiring people with teaching experience” (Association of Canadian Colleges, 1993, p.29). “This general lack of emphasis on selecting for previous teaching experience means that college/technical institutes must invest in instructional skills development”. (Association of Canadian Colleges, 1993, p.29) Adult education instructors currently bring skills as mentors to the college. However, they also require knowledge of pedagogical theory applied in an adult learning environment.

### **Recommendation**

Part-time faculty have increasing demands using their own unpaid time for lesson preparation, content familiarity, and evaluation of student learning. This all contributes to the need for delivery of an administrative orientation package including adult education teaching strategies and knowledge that is convenient and attractive to part-time faculty. In addition to providing these resources, the college must be responsive to the local economy and supportive of employers by reading current economic trends and reacting with programs as a response to the community. Demand for instructors is tied to this cycle of economic change in industry. It is a direct relation to the growth in industry and their demands for retraining. Lifelong learning is important to economic growth. A sustained quality initiative for instructors is necessary to maintain support of this growth. One such approach is the PDCA (plan, do, check, act) quality loop, that is: plan

a strategy, implement the plan, check the results, and then act on those results for modifications. Initial hiring practices may be used to raise the bar for part-time instructors by requiring knowledge of adult learning theory in addition to practical experience and teaching knowledge. This will provide direction for the college to seek out instructors with backgrounds more aligned with college outcomes. Instructors are needed with a history of lifelong learning, who are genuinely concerned with furthering the quality of the college experience. The college must also develop these skills with existing faculty within their system. "Most students respond positively to a well-organized course taught by an enthusiastic instructor who has a genuine interest in students and what they learn" (Davis, 1993, p.194). Turnbull (1998) lists characteristics of effective college teachers as:

- a. communication skills
- b. expertise
- c. evaluation
- d. instructional ability
- e. personality
- f. motivational
- g. organization
- h. teaching enthusiasm
- i. availability helpfulness
- j. invitational teaching techniques
- k. observational-affective skills.

The college administration must balance the risks and benefits in any proposed program designed to support the changing demands of part-time instructors. There is a high level of instability in the continuing education market, risking losses of college resources during lean economic periods. However, new part-time instructors "need more support and resources in order to succeed" (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2002, p.15). Evaluation and development must fit into a planned strategy for part-time instructors. There is an "absence of recognition of the benefits of such programs and the need for them to be integrated into teachers' workloads" (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2002, p.12). Participation must be visible and widespread throughout the institution to be recognized as legitimate and desirable. An example of a successful model is the peer review process. This can be incorporated as a "mentorship program for new teachers" (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2002, p.12).

The PDCA (plan, do, check, act) quality model may be used to simplify administrative implementation of any improvement program. The PDCA process begins with formulating a plan by identifying the outcomes as goals needed within the program. The action of "doing" involves developing usable methods to reach targets and achieve those goals. The "checking" step is the development of evaluation instruments to verify effectiveness of the actions taken. The final "act" step is the return to close the loop and revise goals, methods, or

evaluations as required to match current outcomes and objectives. Whatever implementation method is employed, the end result will be a college that provides a service and results in satisfied stakeholders. Quality is thus achieved for the instructor, for the student, for the college, and for the employer.

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