



Conference Proceedings
Adult Higher Education Alliance
36th Annual Conference

**Current Explorations of Adult Learner:
Implications for Mentoring and More**

Edited By:

Kemi Elufiede
Bonnie Flynn

Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA)

AHEA serves institutions and individuals who advocate for, support, and advance adults in programs of higher education. We achieve our goals by fostering the exchange of ideas, sharing effective pedagogical practices and current research that support the learning of adults, and providing professional development to our members. We desire to help institutions of higher education and individuals working in higher education develop and sustain learning environments and programs for adults.

Our purpose is to help institutions of higher education develop and sustain learning environments and programs suitable for adults.

AHEA does this by:

- **Providing a forum** for professional educators to share resources and information about alternative degree programs on a national and international level.
- **Stimulating practitioner research**, thereby contributing to the integration of theory and practice, and to the improved quality of our efforts.
- **Serving as a vehicle** for cooperative consultation and collaboration among professionals in the field.
- **Integrating the interests and concerns** from a variety of areas within adult higher education including distance, international and liberal education.
- **Promoting rights** of adult students.
- **Influencing institutional and public policies** concerning the principles of quality practice applied to adult education.
- **Promoting cultural diversity and multicultural perspectives**, and maintaining that commitment through the incorporation of such perspectives into the policies, procedures, and practices of alternative degree programs for adults.

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Message from the President

The 36th Annual Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) Conference was held on March 10-11, 2016 in Orlando, Florida on the campus of the University of Central Florida. There were 48 presentations from scholars and practitioners from 20 states who participated in the conference. The contributions to these proceedings represent the best of the presentations by scholars in adult higher education from a practitioner perspective.

AHEA would like to thank the editors, Kemi Elufiede and Bonnie Flynn for work to publish this year's proceedings. We would also like to thank each of the presenters for the contributions of their papers to these proceedings.

Next year's annual conference will be held on Thursday and Friday March 9-10, 2017 again in Orlando, Florida on the campus of the University of Central Florida. We are inviting educators, practitioners, and adult higher education students to present at this conference. We hope that you will consider being a presenter. The conference theme is, "Quality of Life in Adult Learning." Conference information can be found on our AHEA web site: <http://ahea.org/>

We look forward to seeing you at our next conference and your presentation on your perspective to quality of life in adult learning.

Regards,

David San Filippo, Ph.D.



President, Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA)

Note from the Editors

Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure to present to you the 2nd Annual Conference Proceedings with AHEA. Special thanks to AHEA Board, Members, Contributors, and Reviewers. Without your support, this publication would not be possible.

Board Members, thank you for your continuous contribution to the mission of AHEA through outreach and perseverance. AHEA Members, you are the backbone of AHEA's growth and progression for networking and collaboration.

To Contributors, knowledge is the key to political debates for change and productivity. Thank you for sharing your research and/or theoretical selections. Reviewers, you play an important role in ensuring a quality product by providing critical and constructive feedback on the work of your peers. We appreciate your service to a community of professors, educators, and practitioners.

With continuous growth, we are always seeking new opportunities and strategies with the process for proceedings. Your feedback matters; we look forward to hearing from you, enjoy your read of the variety of engaging topics related to Adult and Higher Education.

Thank You,

Kemi and Bonnie

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Experiencing AHEA 2016

Jeff Aulgur

Arkansas Tech University

Abstract

As a first-time attendee at an Adult Higher Education Alliance Conference, the author describes the experience and how attendance at the 40th Annual Conference further informed his role as an adult mentor and educator. To set the stage, the author describes his unique path to higher education and its influence on his approach to adult learning. The article continues with a discussion of topics ranging from customer service versus student success, obstacles in the adult learners pathway, acculturation, and degree completion to mentorship.

Keywords: adult learner, success, retention, persistence, acculturation

First of all, please allow me to express my gratitude to the leadership of the Adult Higher Education Alliance [AHEA] for the opportunity to attend the 40th Annual Conference as the recipient of the Larry Murphy Scholarship. As a professional serving adult learners, it is my commitment to remain a lifelong learner to stay engaged and relevant in my chosen field. The conference experience offered the exploration of multicultural perspectives, presented varying methodologies of achieving student success, and placed mentorship squarely at the forefront of adult learning.

Much like the students enrolled in the online degree completion program at Arkansas Tech University, my path in academia has been anything but typical. However, each stop during my journey continues to inform my approach to the adult population in higher education. These four professions define the lens through which I experienced AHEA 2016. During what I consider my first career, I developed individual program plans in a residential setting for adults with developmental disabilities. Next, I delivered leadership and soft skills training to business and industry. For my third career, I served over 16 years as a part of the United States Army Training and Doctrine

Command [TRADOC]. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan progressed, the number of soldiers with combat experience in my classroom increased with each iteration. As with Paulo Freire, the Army's historical banking model of education no longer sufficed. I adapted my instructional methodology to extract the experience in each soldier. Now in my fourth career, I serve students seeking degree-completion in the virtual environment.

My personal AHEA 2016 presentation examined the demographic diversity and student characteristics enrolled in Arkansas Tech University's degree completion program. I also examined current and future constraints in Arkansas' higher education landscape: flat funding at the state level for the fourth straight year, a belief in the state legislature that administrative bloat increases tuition costs, and inequitable funding for Arkansas Tech University through the state funding formula. What I sought, and received, at AHEA 2016 were proven concepts for increasing persistence, completion and rates of retention.

In her opening keynote address, Elice Rogers (2016) posed two questions which set the stage for the conference: Where are we now and where do we go from here? The political, economic, and sociological landscape for adult learners has changed and will continue to do so. Institutions of higher learning are under increasing pressure to serve students as customers and adult students as a market. Dr. Rogers described in detail the highly volatile season in which we are operating and the ongoing challenge of satisfying many stakeholders in a market-drive society.

As leaders in higher education, we struggle to balance the desire for higher enrollment with successful outcomes for the adult learner. A fine line exists between customer service and student success with regards to retention. Extending enrollment opportunities for students after a term begins may be an excellent idea from a client service perspective. However, each institution and degree program must evaluate the student success and persistence rates for those who enroll after the term initiates and compare the outcomes of the students to those who enrolled before the start of the term.

Obstacles for persistence and degree completion for adults exist in the external environment (e.g., finances and life events), the internal campus environment (e.g., faculty support, academic advising), and student characteristics (e.g., marital status, parental education) upon entry to the Academy (Berman, Rose, & Shuck, 2015). Program attrition is going to happen, but minimizing the rate at which it occurs is possible. A responsibility exists to enhance the assessment of potential students before initiating the intake process. Intake assessment potentially reduces institutional time and resources by decreasing the number of students exiting early in the program of study. Ethically, should institutions be taking someone's money if we do not know if he or she has what it takes to succeed?

In her presentation entitled *A new look at self-efficacy, adult participation, and success*, Debra Fenty (Fenty, Simpson, & Rogers, 2016) described the emergence of self-efficacy as a factor linked to academic success and persistence. In his study examining self-efficacy and academic success in first-generation community college students, John Majer (2009) described self-efficacy as “a cognitive resource that involves an individual's confidence or belief in one's ability to effectively engage in behaviors towards desired goals” (p. 243). Prior research found self-efficacy to be a critical cognitive resource among first-generation immigrant students attending a community college (Robbins et al., 2004).

The deployment of enhanced intake assessment protocols for adult learners would not only allow the identification of a student's level of self-efficacy but also to minimize the barriers influenced by a first-in-family or Returning-after-Hiatus student who may not be familiar with the concepts, jargon, and processes of higher education. While the example may appear extreme, each term I confront this question from at least one new student: “What is an elective?” While it may not be feasible to decrease or change the risk factors to persistence presented by adult learners, identifying the factors with an active relationship to academic success that may be addressed before enrollment is the first step to risk mitigation.

Acculturation, or knowing the things you need to know, into higher education is not an easy process for traditional or non-traditional learners. The language of higher education is unfamiliar to most outside of the academy and processes (financial aid, registration, learning management systems, and so on) vary considerably from institution to institution. The lack of acculturation may compound fluctuations in the student lifecycle, which is not the linear progression many envision. Students enter higher education and leave, many of whom enroll again at a later date. The student lifecycle significantly increases the number of touch point opportunities an institution may have with any one student. A touch point is any interaction allowing discovery of what it is the student needs to persist and succeed.

In her session, *Success Notes: Student success and the adult learner*, Antonia Sheel (2016) conveyed the five components of the Title III Strengthening Institutions grant received by the University of New Rochelle, which was developed to raise the college's retention, persistence, and graduation rates. The five components are the establishment of student success communities, college-wide data management to monitor student progress, a library learning commons to offer developmental learning modules, faculty professional development, and the expansion of STEM-related coursework. As the Director of Student Success, Sheel considers herself as the chief student advocate and liaison to the institution's Student Services division. Perhaps more importantly, she recognizes her team members as cultural brokers between the student and the college experience. By acknowledging student touch points across the institutional experience, barriers to persistence and success may be identified, interventions implemented, and the efficacy of the interventions measured.

From a programmatic perspective, Nancy Rabidoux and Pam Jackson's (2016) description of the Finish What You Started program at the University of Rhode Island [URI] resonated with me due to its similarity with my department's degree completion program at Arkansas Tech University. The Finish What You Started program is a perfect example of identifying and meeting a need based on student preferences. While our courses are delivered online and asynchronously to a diverse, rural population in

Arkansas, the URI program achieves its goals with weekend and evening class delivery. Interestingly, the average number of days from inquiry to enrollment at URI is over 400 days. On the surface, the length of time to enrollment may appear lengthy, but what it reflects is the institution's commitment to remain in contact with prospective students until he or she is in a position to enroll, persist and succeed.

Two sessions during the conference asked me to re-evaluate my perspectives. First, Geleana Drew Alston's (2016) *Methodological considerations for feminist qualitative inquiry and mentoring* challenged me to examine mentoring through a feminist lens. The mentor and mentee relationship is binary and, as such, should be equal. However, adult female students often lack access to a female mentor. As a mentor, educator, and advisor, I must remain cognizant of various critical perspectives (e.g., class hegemony theory, critical feminist perspectives, critical race theory) as I have in my research regarding the governance of nonprofit organizations. Second, Xenia Coulter and Alan Mandell (2016) discussed the very foundational premises as to why we separate adult from traditional students. As adult educators, and as members of AHEA, it has been our role to serve as the champion of the adult learner. We argue adults learn differently (andragogy versus pedagogy) and, as such, should be separated from their traditional counterparts. However, Coulter and Mandell asked, is this separation a hidden form of segregation and, if so, why would we support such a position? If such separation is warranted, the adult learning community must decide if a binary system is sufficient or if we must further adapt instructional modalities to the adult stages of life.

AHEA 2016 examined mentoring in a variety of contexts yet, at the end of the day, each presenter provided a vision of successful retention, persistence, and completion. My attendance motivated my desire to play a larger role in AHEA as an organization, in hopes of supporting its continued growth and success. As an alliance, it is our individual and institutional desires that will drive the future success of our students.

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Why Do We Separate Adults from Traditional-aged Students?

Xenia Coulter & Alan Mandell
SUNY Empire State College

Abstract

While accessibility issues may distinguish adults older than 22 from traditional-aged college *students*, an age-specific dividing line that distinguish them as *learners* cannot be justified. Adults do systematically change over time, but age does not ordinarily affect faculty selection of subject matter or teaching method. Practical, moral, and principled objections exist against subdividing adult learners by such developmental differences, even though they can impact learning outcomes. However, such differences can be easily accommodated when students become agents of their own learning, as when they are mentored in individualized studies. Rather than perpetuating a meaningless subdivision between young and older adult learners, we must give higher priority to creating personalized college-level studies for all.

Keywords: Adult development, Adult learning, Adult students, John Dewey, Mentoring

Why do the life circumstances that distinguish adult from traditional-aged *students* require that we make a similar distinction between adult and traditional-aged *learners*? Even though the particulars of the learning process can vary enormously among individuals, psychology considers the basic principles of learning to be universal. Moreover, adulthood itself is an amorphous idea at best, a socially constructed time of life that, today at least, begins at age 18 and continues up until death. Adults can be broadly distinguished from one another by various (presumed-to-be) age-related or developmental stages and by the ever-growing number and kinds of experiences that come with increasing age. However, stages are multiple, fluid, and complex; and experience, infinitely variable. So is it really necessary to draw a firm line between traditional-aged college students (18 to 22) and all others (see, e.g., Kazis et al., 2007)

We tend to draw such lines because of the two groups' different living situations. For example, it is largely only the traditional-aged student who lives on campus; most other adults do not. Having to commute to college clearly impacts how accessible higher education may be for older students. And many colleges, aware of the various barriers faced by their commuting (adult) students, have, in recent years, made strenuous efforts to address them. However, no matter how well these efforts may have improved the *physical* accessibility of the college for older students, it is not at all clear that new parking lots, multiple night classes, child care facilities, helpful staff available for longer hours, and, now, online advisement, library databases, and course offerings, have much to do with *intellectual* accessibility or enhanced learning.

When we met to discuss this issue at the March 2016 conference for the Adult Higher Education Alliance, we began our session by asking those present the following question: "If you've taught both traditional-aged and adult students, has your teaching been different for those two groups? If so, why?" In the lively discussion that followed, we heard repeated and heartfelt testimonials to the adult learner. Adults, we learned, have a different (and more positive) mind-set toward learning; perhaps because of their greater experience, they are eager for new information that meets their many and varied needs. They actively look for and find relevance in the materials presented. In other words, the participants argued, adult students are much more motivated to learn than traditional-aged students.

We therefore, might infer that adults are more in tune with the interests and goals of their adult instructors than are younger students. However, no one suggested that, as teachers, they used different forms of pedagogy with adult students. While college instructors (at least those at the conference) see older students as more amenable to learning and more enjoyable to teach, they did not report making any significant changes in resource materials, types of exercises, forms of discussion, or testing options when they worked with adults. The content of courses in Statistics or American History or Chemistry remained the same no matter what the student's age. Not only the subject matter, but it can be argued that also methodology and even educational philosophy are unaffected by age. When Carl Rogers, for

example, wrote many years ago about student-centered learning, it did not occur to him to apply his philosophy of teaching to only one particular age group. Indeed, in his first book, *Freedom to Learn* (1969), the first four chapters present four different instances of his singular approach to teaching, which were found in kindergarten, high school, college, and in advanced continuing education classes. Similarly, in his lab school, John Dewey showed how his principles of progressive education could be adapted to any grade (Mayhew & Edwards, 2007); and subsequent writers have gone on to show the relevance of Dewey's ideas in college and for adults (e.g., Coulter, in press; Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Dewey (1916) is especially relevant here. As he pointed out, learning is a process that is inherent to the human being. It takes place continually from birth until death. There are no age differences in the extent to which learners can successfully obtain, reflect upon, use, and evaluate information that relates to their needs and interests. The problem, as he saw it, is that the aims and purposes of formal education are not built around learner concerns. Instead, they reflect the needs and interests of professional scholars – i.e., teachers – and well-educated public intellectuals. As a result, students-as-learners are not their own agents, which seriously reduce their engagement with the material to be learned. When students are passive recipients of teacher-directed college studies, it also flies against the expectations and needs of a democratic society. But if, Dewey argued, education were redesigned so that it arose out of individual *learner* concerns, then, all that would matter from one year to the next is, not age, but awareness of their prior educational history. Thus, the age distinctions we make in higher education become particularly problematic since both groups – the 18 to 23 year olds and the older adults – ostensibly have the same educational background.¹

¹ While younger and older adults may have different life experiences (e.g., younger students presumably are more aligned with the world of formal education whereas older students are more associated with the world of work), theoretically these differences would tend to privilege the younger students. In practice, however, as evidenced in our conference discussion, the traditional-aged students' academic advantage appears to be easily balanced by older students' greater motivation to learn. Moreover, the disciplinary focus of so many college courses tends to render student life experiences, no matter what their context, relatively incidental.

Since Dewey's time, however, much research has been devoted to delineating other kinds of age-related changes particularly with respect to such characteristics as personality, ego strength, psycho-social challenges, defense mechanisms, career orientations, self-expressiveness, morality, faith, perspective, and happiness, to name just a few (see Table 1). From the point of view of adult development, then, it makes no sense to lump all adults over 22 into a single category. It can be easily argued that adults 23 to 32 are as different from older adults 33 to 42 as they are from young adults, 18 to 22. Why not then subdivide all adult learners by their differences on these other attributes that have been identified by social scientists as especially meaningful and important?

For example, why not create a special curriculum and set of learning activities for social science learners at lower stages of "morality" (e.g., Bjorklund, 2015, p. 283) that is different from what is designed for those at higher levels; or why not introduce evolutionary theory to biology learners with strong religious convictions that is different from how it might be introduced to such learners who are atheists; or why not create separate courses in philosophy for those students who claim to be happy and for those who identify themselves as anxious? It is not difficult to imagine how particular developmental stages or different levels of the myriad attributes that define the adult might seriously impact the quality and depth of what they are able to learn (e.g., Kegan, 1994). Research seems clearly to indicate the inverse: Higher education can affect both developmental growth (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Perry, 1981) and attribute change (e.g., Truluck & Courtenay, 2002).

Table 1: Various Developmental Theories

From Bjorklund, The Journey of Adulthood, 8th edition (2015)

- **Five factor theory of personality** (p. 243): The 5 factors = Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness. Data: e.g., with age, we become more agreeable and conscientious, less neurotic and open.
- **Erikson's theory of psychosocial development** (p. 255): 8 stages, each one a conflict that requires resolution – 4 or 5 stages occurring in adulthood. (9th stage in Erikson, 1982/97). Data: e.g., generativity (stage 7) higher at midlife than earlier or later.
- **Loevinger's theory of ego development** (p. 259): 7 stages (4 occurring in adulthood). Data, e.g., development is correlated with education (self-awareness decreases; conscientiousness and individualism increase).
- **Valliant's theory** (p. 261): based upon Erikson – looks at changes in defense mechanisms. Data, e.g., mechanisms employed become more mature with age (i.e., more consonant with reality).
- **Super's theory of career development** (p. 207): 5 stages of life-span career, 4 in adulthood (exploration, establishment, maintenance, disengagement)
- **Gutmann's gender cross-over effects** (p. 263): More fluidity in gender with age. Data, e.g., increased openness to expression of previously unexpressed parts of the self with age.
- **Positive psychology** (e.g., Maslow, Sligman, Csikszentmihalyi): One example – Ryan & Deci self-determination theory (p. 265). 4 stages of personal growth: happiness, competence, autonomy, relatedness). Data, e.g., graduates with personal (intrinsic) growth goals happier than those with only extrinsic goals.
- **Perry's theory of cognitive/emotional development** (1981): 3 main stages (12 levels in all) posting change from thinking in dualities to acquiring tolerance of uncertainty during 4 years of college.

In truth, even putting aside the sheer impracticality of such an approach in a traditional classroom, subdividing students by developmental stage or attribute difference is largely opposed by the academic community. College instructors define the scholarly disciplines they teach as a static body of knowledge that can be successfully inculcated regardless of individual differences among their students.² Moreover, many would question the appropriateness, even the ethics, of disciplinary experts assessing students on non-scholarly dimensions (see, e.g., Courtenay, 1996. And Dewey, believing

² As Rose (2007) quotes a colleague: “This is higher education, not adult education.”

that schooling in a democracy rests upon diversity in the classroom, would deplore such separations on principle (Hansen, 2006). The most important point here is that these same objections can also be fully applied to the separation of adult students by age. One can argue either that age differences are irrelevant to the subject being taught or that such a separation is morally or philosophically questionable (e.g., Coulter & Mandell, 2012).

Therefore, it is quite ironic that when students are not taught in classes, but work independently with a personal faculty guide, individual differences, not only in each student's stage of development but in his or her prior experiences, as well as variations in academic skills, can be (and are!) readily taken into account. Historically, independent study as a routine practice was initially introduced specifically for adult students who were forced to study at a distance from the campus – i.e., who faced the physical inaccessibility issues so common with busy adults.

In reaching across that distance as a way of supporting them in their forced isolation, such “academic mentors” (Mandell & Coulter, 2016) could not but help come to know (and want to know!) these older students in ways not possible as classroom instructors. In other words, the mentoring relationship makes possible great flexibility in the selection of what topics to learn, what resources to select, and what learning activities to engage. Thus, independent-study learning experiences can be easily designed that address the academic strengths and weakness of individual students while also being built upon and around each one's own interests and concerns.

Without comparable contact with traditional-aged students, we mentors rarely question the assumption that individual differences among young students are not extensive enough to merit the kind of personalized learning experiences that mentoring allows. And yet, these “emerging adults” (Arnett, 2000) are unquestionably as complex and diverse in experience and interest and in the range of questions that animate their lives, as any other group of adult learners. Indeed, (and perhaps this is something we “adult educators” are slow to recognize), it may be *because* of their varied states of immaturity, they have an even greater need to experience education as relevant to their own abilities, interests, and concerns, than nontraditional students.

Our position is this, We may have good reason to want to divide the world of college students into two age groups – the so-called traditional-aged students as distinct from the so-called adults – in order to preserve the distinction between those who live on campus (not incidentally, a minority nowadays) and those who live in the “real” world. However, we do not believe that we should therefore consider these two groups as two different kinds of “learners.” They are not. They should be appreciated as a single group of highly diverse learners all seeking a higher education, with each person being viewed, as much as possible (and the challenges here are unquestionably large), as wholly distinct from one another.

There is no logical or empirical justification to assume that age is a key factor in determining what, how, and why a particular student engages a particular subject matter. If we are truly concerned with offering students of any age the opportunity to become engaged learners – importantly, a core belief in the “adult education” tradition (e.g., Kett, 1994) – we need to concern ourselves, not with age, but with the experience, knowledge, questions, and interests each learner brings with them to their college studies. Our role, indeed our responsibility, is to fight for the kinds of learning opportunities that can directly and meaningfully attend to such individual differences.

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Academic Mentoring as Precarious Practice

Alan Mandell & Xenia Coulter
SUNY Empire State College

Extended Abstract

On the occasion of the publication of the book, *Mentoring in Formal and Informal Contexts* (edited by Kathy Peno, Elaine Silva Mangiante, and Rita Kenahan), the authors of each chapter were asked to describe and discuss their particular subject area at the AHEA (2016) conference. In our presentation, we explained that our chapter, “Academic Mentoring as Precarious Practice,” particularly as applied to adult learners, is organized into three sections.

Keywords: Adult learners, Mentoring, Student-centered learning, Student-centered mentoring

In the first, we take up the definition of mentoring. Key here is the recognition that “mentoring” is understood differently depending upon the particular contexts in which it takes place (e.g. mentoring designed to help a new employee learn the ropes of a corporation is different from mentoring in an academic context that seeks to promote open-ended intellectual student growth). Second, we offer numerous examples in which we illustrate factors and conditions that challenge the effectiveness and sustainability of productive mentoring (e.g., the tension between a mentor’s need to nurture students’ intellectual interests and a mentor’s urge to “direct” those interest in conventional directions institutional hierarchies that make unbridgeable the apparent distance between the academic expertise of the mentor and worldly knowledge of the mentee).

And third, our discussion takes up many unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) questions associated with mentoring in an academic setting (e.g., questions that arise about the relationship of mentor and mentee at the micro-level, and those that pertain to the relationship between everyday

mentoring practices and the structures, policies and procedures of the institution in which those practices take place—i.e., at the macro-level). At the conference, we invited the audience to share specific instances--or cases—in which they, as academic mentors, face (or have faced) complex dilemmas with their individual mentees and also with their college institutions. Throughout the conversation, questions were raised about the scalability of academic mentoring, particularly within the confines of traditional institutions, along with issues about the meaning (and sustainability) of the concept of student-centeredness. We also sought to show that the very practice of mentoring exposes significant academic issues that can transcend any particular teaching methodology (i.e., about the very definition of who knows what and what exactly students do or should learn in college).

In effect, our chapter and subsequent discussion raises three major questions: First, how do faculty grapple with the tensions and problems associated with academic mentoring? Second, what actions can we take as adult educators that might put mentoring on a less precarious and more secure footing? And finally, is there any hope for this significant tradition of teaching with a strong student-centered focus, especially given the significant pressures that, particularly in the last decades, have thinned out its core?

Effective Mentoring for Nontraditional Adult Learners Pursuing an Undergraduate Degree

Kemi Elufiede, Hope Oliver, Darreon Greer
Tennessee State University

Extended Abstract

The demographics of undergraduate institutions are rapidly changing to include the non-traditional adult students. Adult students are returning to school at record rates, and life has often happened to the non-traditional adult student. It is not uncommon for the non-traditional adult students to work full-time and have family responsibilities that challenge their academic success. With cultural changes in higher education, the concept of one-on-one mentorships is expected to expand (Mullen, 2009). Mentoring of nontraditional adult learners requires patience and consistency. One third of undergraduate students are considered nontraditional as it relates to 25 years and older. (Markle, 2015). Although institutions may comprehend the importance of mentoring, there should be recognition of the different types of mentoring relationships. Effective mentoring strategies should focus on academic, career, personal growth and development.

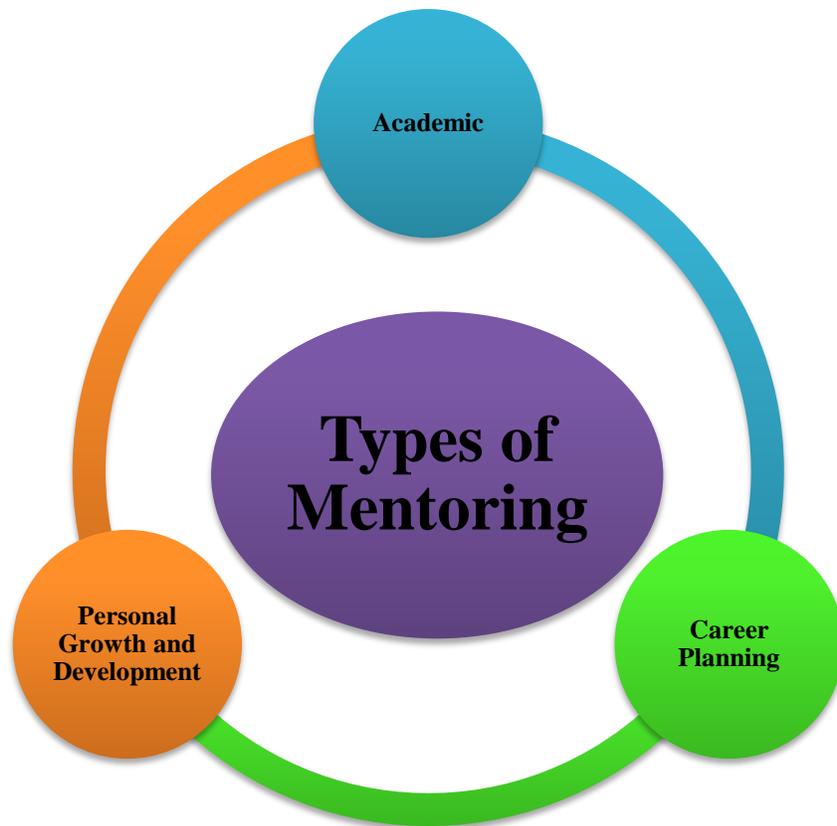


Figure 1. Types of Mentoring

Academic Mentoring

Academic mentoring is supporting learners by understanding their strengths and weaknesses as they relate to their academic readiness. Academic mentoring can be challenging for some learners because they may feel embarrassed discussing their learning difficulties. According to University of Dublin (n.d), academic mentoring should be confidential, built on trust and mutual respect. With the development of a healthy mentoring relationship with the learner, there is potential growth with academic achievement. Academic mentoring should include understanding your syllabus, communication with faculty, note-taking strategies, test preparation, learning styles, taking exams, critical reading, time management, and group study (Arizona State University, 2014, para 1). In order to promote stability with

academic mentoring, there should be an emphasis on learning styles, adult learning theory, and external and internal factors.

In 1992, Fleming & Mills developed the VARK Modalities which were comparable to the theories of Kolb, Gregorc, Mumford and Honey. The modalities include visual, auditory, read-write and kinesthetic. These are the most commonly used terms to describe learning styles. The recognition of learning styles impacts the way in which mentoring is achieved. This is the first step to building a rapport with the learners' ability to comprehend content in informal and formal environments. This developing task should be inclusive with new skills that improve current skills. Further, the adult learning theory must be taken into consideration as the mentor involves the specific learning style that meets the learners' academic needs. The theory focuses on self-direction, experience, goal orientation, relevancy, collaboration, and practical concepts. Self-direction relates to the experience that the learners reveals through their goals. With mentor collaboration, learner goals become relevant to their pursuit of undergraduate education, which is inclusive to practical life experience that is transferable in the formal learning environment.

Consequently, the negative academic experiences can overshadow the positive, which influence the external and internal factors. An external factor is the information that mentors know without knowing the learner personally. An internal factor is information that mentors learn from their learner as the mentoring relationship develops. The internal factors shape the learner's ability to confront educational barriers in the past, the future and the present. Unfortunately, the negative past experiences guide decisions made in the future, but with assistance from a mentor, it can transform a negative experience to a positive one.

According to Multiple Pathways (n.d), there are 10 concepts that promote good learning experiences (para, 7).

- The work was well connected to other ideas and to the real world.
- The content of the learning experience was personally relevant, interesting, useful, or meaningful to the learner.

- The learner had choices, shared authority, control, and responsibility.
- The learning was hands-on and experiential.
- The learner learned from and taught others.
- The learner had the support of a patient, supportive, and nurturing mentor.
- The learning was individualized and although there were standards for the work, the learner could meet them in his or her own way.
- There was a positive aesthetic component to the experience: it was fun or left the learner feeling good.
- The experience helped the learner understand him or herself.
- The learner had success and accomplishment with challenging work.

In all, academic mentoring is essential to the development of the learner's ability to matriculate in college and be successful with their academic tasks. These tasks can improve the learners' ability to enrich their critical thinking skills via mentoring rapport.

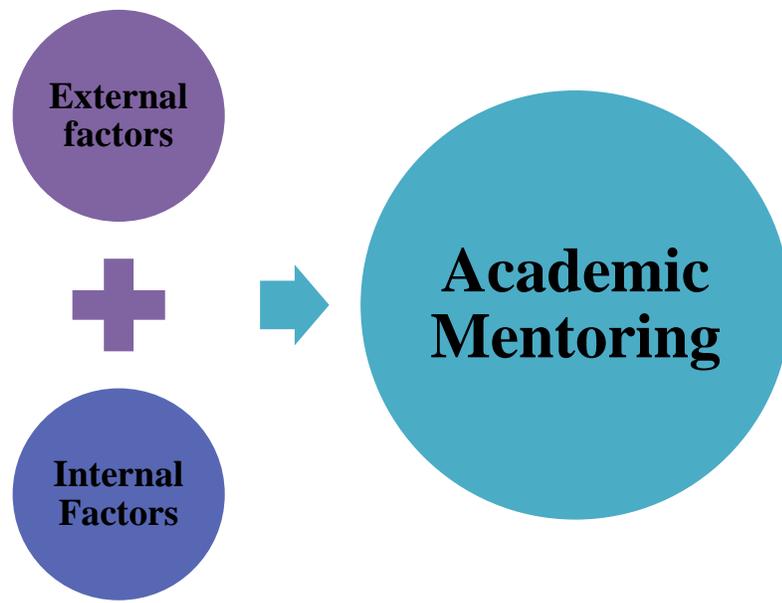


Figure 2. Factors with Academic Mentoring

Career Mentoring

Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Helen Keller have been credited with the saying that “life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.” This sentiment is applicable in education as learning can be a hands-on experience that allows students to see how academic learning can impact career development. This helps students make meaning from their experiences and education for greater personal satisfaction and professional success

One of the goals of career services for the undergraduate student is to provide multiple opportunities for experiential learning either through service learning, job shadowing, studying abroad, or internships to afford the student the ability to compete in the workforce. With that, the impetus for career planning may be quite different for the traditional undergraduate. According to Darrell Luzzo, the reasons that non-traditional students attend or return to college is mainly due to unmet needs in their career development domain (1993). Furthermore, Luzzo notes that a comprehensive assessment must be completed to identify the specific career development needs of the non-traditional student (Luzzo, 1993). The career counseling programs are lacking

due to the diverse career development needs of returning students. It is incumbent that counselors clarify the career development differences between the traditional and non-traditional college students (Luzzo, 1993).

When mentoring a non-traditional student, counselors must consider the student's career goals to develop an action plan. A sound action plan should include job shadowing and networking opportunities that not only encompasses the student's goals but contributes to the student's enthusiasm of career success, considering the non-traditional student is returning to school due to career disappointment.

McMahon, Limerick, and Gillies (2004) state that career mentoring should be a guided activity that involves insight into the occupational field and career goal setting. This requires that the student has explicit goals and communicates clear career expectations. Mentoring as a career guidance activity benefits the student by:

- enhanced self-understanding;
- enhanced understanding of the work environment in which they live;
- assistance in identifying pathways to future education and training;
- assistance in feeling better equipped to have control over their futures; and
- enhanced ability to retrieve and evaluate appropriate and relevant career and course information in a deliberate manner (McMahon, Limerick, & Gillies, 2004, p. 8-9).

Career mentoring as a guided activity benefits the student by developing networking skills and an understanding of workplace culture (McMahon, Limerick, & Gillies, 2004). This affords the student confidence to negotiate or overcome any future challenges in the workplace and lends to career satisfaction and longevity.



Figure 3. Steps to Career Mentoring

While the McMahon, Limerick, and Gillies (2004) research was conducted with secondary students in mind, the implications of career mentoring as a guided activity are applicable to the post-secondary non-traditional student.

Personal Growth and Development

Personal growth and development is vital to academic success and matriculation for the undergraduate degree. Forming the motivational core of person-environment fit theories is the fundamental idea that people strive for in work settings that are consistent with their skills, abilities, interests, and values (Dawis, 2002; Holland, 1997). Once an individual is able to locate a reasonably good fit within the occupational world, there is an assumption that he or she will be motivated to engage in these activities because the tasks would be self-reinforcing and intrinsically interesting (Blustein, 2006). The nontraditional adult learners should be centered on the holistic model of how

the learner maintains his or her academic success, while simultaneously achieving optimal emotional, mental, social, and physical self-care.

Nontraditional adult learners often hold a valid apprehension of how they will fit in socially with their younger peers in the newfound or re-experienced academic setting. However, nontraditional students are wise enough to understand that isolating themselves from their younger peers may be academic suicide. The social setting that intertwines the younger, traditional student with the nontraditional adult student provides a concoction of a vast array of ideas, knowledge-bases, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and resources that all parties involved can benefit from.

The social constructionist perspective in mentoring is that the social learning atmosphere itself tends to be a breeding ground where positive academic results are grown and nurtured from a bevy of multiple angles. Bandura (1977) asserts that social learning theory is based on observational learning and mediational process. People learn based on their interactional experiences with others. As a result, this impacts mediational process with attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

The physical health status is highly important in maintaining academic success. It has often been stated that one cannot take care of someone else if he or she is not able to take care of him or herself. This demographic of students must seriously take into account whether or not they truly feel they have the stamina, both mentally and physically, to succeed. In regards to physical well-being, a healthy diet, consistent exercise, and regular doctor's visits, can promote productivity.

This population of learners must accept their age difference from their younger student peers, and apperceive their age and wisdom as necessary tools for their success. It is very common and necessary among this genre of learners to maintain the needed support systems such as family and vested academic mentors. From a mental and emotional standpoint, managing stress tends to be somewhat easier for the nontraditional adult learners. Often times, they have already experienced and overcame the vast array of the vicissitudes of life, such as family loss, divorce, empty nest syndrome,

financial burden, and a myriad of other issues associated with simple activities of daily living.

Johnson and Kestler (2012) investigated the differences with coping in traditional and nontraditional students. He found that nontraditional students are more apt to turn to task-oriented coping strategies to overcome the stressor, such as thinking about the steps to take next and devising a plan of action. Nontraditional adult learners have more adaptive psychological characteristics and these students tend to fare pretty well. It is imperative to assist adult learners with seeking mental health services, if necessary. Personal growth and development should not be overlooked no matter the age.

Further Research

In the future, researchers can conduct a study to measure nontraditional students' perceptions of mentoring support as it relates to academic, career, personal growth and development. These findings will be beneficial to the development of nontraditional support services. Comparatively, further research can focus narrative case studies about student, faculty, staff, administrative, community, and peer mentoring experiences. There should also be an evaluation of established mentoring programs' effectiveness.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, mentoring relationships are vital for traditional adult learners, but the non-traditional adult learner requires the same support with a variety of approaches that are based on the learners' life experiences, goals, family, and current and future employment. Non-traditional adult learners possess internal and external factors that prove rather significant in terms of how they are mentored with academics, career and personal growth. The social, emotional, mental, and physical aspects that are learned to navigate, master, and ultimately overcome adversity are critical to their success of obtaining their degrees.

Mentors should be aware that adult learners may possess a greater level of intrinsic motivation because their mental and career maturity has afforded them a greater conceptualization of having a clearer view of their goals. In

turn, this reciprocal mentor/mentee relationship should serve as a leadership model that is democratic, cooperative, and evaluative. There should not be a one-size-fits-all approach since what works for one student may not work for another. Every situation should be an opportunity to grow as a mentor.

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Building Community Through Mentoring Adult Learners

Jarrad Plante & Joshua Truitt
University of Central Florida

Abstract

The Volunteer UCF Community Connectors and Community Builders Program provides a connection between students and their community. The goal is to develop meaningful service opportunities for UCF students that contribute measurable results and systemic change through capacity building among adult learners. The ongoing, sustainable service experience for students may take place in the forms of internships, service-learning courses, and intrinsically motivated volunteer opportunities. This service opportunity is reflected in The Golden Circle illustration where we began with the “why – ” to create sustainable community impact, and worked our way out to the “how – ” utilizing community builders and community partners, and finally the “what – ” to provide skilled volunteers seeking service-learning and intrinsic volunteerism. The Adult Literacy League, as a community partner, requires building capacity to serve adult learners. These proceedings will highlight synergy between a university-based community service program and a partnering community agency serving adult learners.

Key Terms and Definitions

Capacity Building:

Provides a basis for a comprehensive approach toward democratization (Dryzek, 2008).

Community Engagement:

Community engagement is described as the collaboration “between higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Driscoll, 2009, p.6).

Golden Circle:

The Golden Circle is a type of process model developed by Simon Sinek and is the result of research into the success of the world's most influential companies and its leaders. When asked why their consumers choose their company, the strategic leaders explained that they led with the “why” question. They wanted to know what drove their customers to their business rather than how to make a profit. This led to the development of a three-circle model called *The Golden Circle* (Sinek, 2009).

Service-Learning (SL):

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), service-learning combines serving the community and student learning in a way that improves both the community and the student. Service-learning involves active student participation, fosters civic responsibility, and integrates an educational or academic component (“Principles and Concepts of SL and CBR,” n.d.). Similar to general community service, service-learning may be voluntary or mandatory where service activities can take place within or outside the school. Service-learning also draws lessons from critical analysis activities like classroom presentations, direct writing and group discussion, in addition to organized thoughtful reflection (Spring, Grimm, & Dietz, 2008).

Background

Traditional mentoring has historically been defined as a mentee entering into a supporting and unidirectional relationship “in which the mentee is the subservient role, molded by someone of greater age, wisdom, or position, who appears capable and complete” (Kochan & Trimble, 2000, p. 21). Thirty years of studies on mentoring provide guidance to bring about positive outcomes for mentees when the mentor promotes behaviors such as building trust with their mentee, offering acceptance, open communication, and respecting mutuality (Crosby, 1999). This case study investigates the relationship between a seasoned organization, the Adult Literacy League, and

a new initiative, Volunteer UCF's Community Connector program. This case study challenges mainstream literature to answer a crucial question, how do traditional college-age students perceive the value of their role in mentoring adult learners?

Initiating and maintaining mentoring and tutoring opportunities for adult learners takes leadership and collaboration. According to Rice (2015), Collaborative Leadership provides a leadership paradigm that has the capacity to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to solve the complex challenges that adult education, as well as many other organizations, face today" (p. 406). Rubin (2009) defines collaboration as a "purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives" (p. 2).

According to Hulquist (2015), "Meeting the needs of the adult student population in today's evolving global economy is a challenge being addressed by colleges and universities across the country" (p. 461). Wisseman and Verloop (2009) forecast the next development in higher education will be comprised of an increase of collaborative efforts with the surrounding community (Hultquist, 2015). This includes mentoring the adult learner. The purpose of these proceedings is three-fold; (1) The development of the UCF program based on the Golden Circle model, (2) The value of the university/community agency partnership to sustainable volunteerism, and (3) the role of the non-traditional ages in the mentor/mentee relationship. Two measures of college experience are represented by the amount of time and energy students put into their coursework and other educational opportunities, and an institution's use of resources to create opportunities for student learning and involvement (Truitt, 2013).

These opportunities include mentoring opportunities. According to Astin (1999), involvement is an asset of energy yielding positive student outcomes. Student involvement happens along a continuum and is measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. Student learning and development are openly associated with the quantity and quality of student involvement. Additionally, the effectiveness of educational policy and practice is reflected by the

capacity building of a practice or policy to increase student involvement (Astin, 1999). “Besides enrolling for classes, getting involved is the single most important thing one can do as a student...” (Plante, Currie, & Olson, 2014, p. 89). Community engagement is one example of involvement.

Community engagement is described as the collaboration “between higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Driscoll, 2009, p. 6). Many institutions of higher education have an office or center of community engagement. At the University of Central Florida, Volunteer UCF (VUCF) is an internally funded Student Government Association agency that is housed within the Office of Student Involvement. “It is the mission of Volunteer UCF to promote civic engagement and education on various social issues to the UCF student body” (Plante, Currie, & Olson, 2014, p. 90).

The Volunteer UCF board of directors includes a Student Director, Assistant Student Director, a Marketing team, and social topic directors. Student leaders – ranging from traditional to transfer and nontraditional to adult learners, become expert educators in one of twelve social topics: Animal Awareness, Arts & Recreation, Civic Engagement, Different Abilities, Education & Literacy, Elderly & Veterans Awareness, Environment, Health, Humanitarian Relief, Hunger & Homelessness, Relationship Violence Awareness, and Youth & Mentoring. Student leaders work with their committee members to coordinate and implement episodic volunteer and educational events around their social topic to engage the student body and larger community.

The Alternative Break Program falls under VUCF where coordinators plan week-long service events based on the social topics and takes place during winter and spring breaks. Some VUCF large-scale signature service events include Knights Give Back, UCF’s largest day of service – attracting over 1,500 students and alumni to serve the Central Florida community; Day and Knight of Service, Volunteer UCF’s 24-hour service event to serve the region; and the Volunteer Summit, VUCF’s largest educational event where

nonprofit organizations promote their agency to the student body with the anticipation that those who are interested will volunteer with them. Approximately 6,500 student volunteers participated in over 400 service and educational events serving more than 35,000 hours and supplementing their budget by more than \$13,000 in fundraising, in-kind donations, and mini-grant awards during the 2015-2016 academic year.

Nonprofit leaders across the region often cite the need for consistent volunteers. This need led Volunteer UCF to use the Golden Circle model to pilot a new program, Volunteer UCF's Community Connector and Community Builder Program. Community Connectors pair students' interests, social topic interest, and availability via an online survey and follow-up consultation, with nonprofits and ongoing service opportunities to make a larger impact.

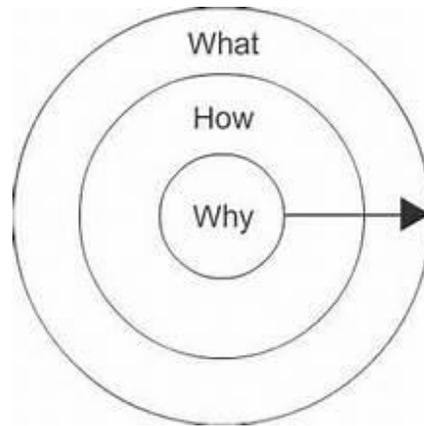
Golden Circle Model

The Golden Circle is a process model developed by Simon Sinek (2009) – and is the result of research into the success of the world's most influential companies and its leaders. It is a process by which one begins with the “why” then works toward the “how” and finally the “what.” For example, when asked why their consumers choose their company, the strategic leaders explained that they led with the “why” question. They wanted to understand why their customers choose their company over competitors, rather than simply asking how to make a profit. This led to the development of a three-circle model called *The Golden Circle* (Sinek, 2009).

The Golden Circle consists of 3 concentric circles. The innermost circle is the *why*, the middle circle is the *how*, and the outermost circle is the *what*. The *Why* describes the drive, belief, and inspiration that organizations possess and, regardless of size, communicate from the inside. The *How* describes the process by which the organization does what it does, the explanation for why their product or service is better or different when compared to another's. The *What* is the product and/or service the organization provides to its clientele. Most organizations focus on the “what” and move inward toward the core;

however, when using the Golden Circle, the effective leaders begin with the “why” and move outward (Sinek, 2009). This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Simon Sinek’s (2009) *Golden Circle*



From Theory to Practice

Building strong communities requires building capacity. Volunteer UCF launched its Community Connector program during the 2015 academic year to match college students to partners in the local community. The purpose of the Volunteer UCF Community Connectors and Community Builders program is to provide a connection between students and their community. The goal is to develop meaningful service opportunities for UCF students that contribute to measurable results and systemic change through capacity building in community agencies. The Adult Literacy League is the example used in this case study.

The ongoing, sustainable service experience for students may take place in the forms of internships, service-learning courses, and intrinsically motivated volunteering opportunities. The experiences are reflected in The Golden Circle illustration where we began with the “why” (to create sustainable community impact), and worked our way out to the “how” (utilizing community builders and community partners), and finally the “what” (to provide skilled volunteers who are looking for opportunities in service-learning courses, internship, and intrinsic volunteerism).

The Community Connector program utilized three Federal Work Study students to market the program to Volunteer UCF's most frequented nonprofit organizations. These nonprofits were invited to conversations about establishing deeper, more meaningful service and project leadership opportunities for students, their agency, and the larger community. Twenty nonprofit organizations completed applications to become resources for students looking to participate in long-term service. Following conversations with nonprofits, the community connectors began marketing the program and encouraged those seeking ongoing volunteerism opportunities to reach out to a community connector and begin the process.

After making contact with a community connector, the student seeking volunteer opportunities, a.k.a. the community builder, takes a volunteer interest survey. Once complete, a face-to-face meeting takes place between the community connector and the community builder to review the volunteer interest survey. Based on the volunteer's schedule, skill set(s), and social topic interest(s), the community connector makes recommendations of partner organizations for the community builder to explore. Once a partner is decided upon, the community connector 'connects' the community builder and nonprofit agency via email and the community builder begins serving at the organization. In this case study, the Community Connectors are traditional undergraduates who are Federal Work Study students from UCF; the location is the Adult Literacy League, and the Community Builder is a graduate student from UCF.

Adult Literacy League: A Case Study

The Adult Literacy League was one of the first organizations to complete the Community Connectors application and was the first partner to receive a community builder. This particular community partner requires building capacity of their mission to serve adult learners. The Adult Literacy League assists adults seeking employment, economic self-sufficiency, driver's license, and citizenship. The League also educates adults in reading, writing, math, spelling, and computer skills. There is a lab for students to prepare for

their GED, and participate in Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses. Additionally, Adult Literacy League works with non-native students within the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Adult learners from the Adult Literacy League often take college courses at higher education institutions such as UCF.

Carina (her real name being de-identified), a graduate student in Public Administration at UCF, was the first community builder to be matched to an organization. With her availability, enthusiasm for mentoring adult learners, and skill sets such as tutoring and mentoring non-native students, she was matched with the Adult Literacy League. After on-site orientation, Carina was paired with a family from Egypt to begin tutoring the mother in English in order to prepare her for employment. Carina's semester-long service project began in January 2016.

About half-way through her tutoring experience with the Adult Literacy League, further strategic dialogue took place to get a sense of how the program was progressing. Carina's service to the Adult Literacy League was used as a case study for program evaluation with the Volunteer UCF Community Connector and Community Builder Program. Several themes were discovered including involvement, tutor experience, lessons learned, and recommendations with the information being illustrated in several tables.

When asked the reasons for becoming involved in the VUCF Community Connector program, Carina explained that her goal was to volunteer for a service project and give back to the Central Florida community. This information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Involvement

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quotes
Involvement	How did you get involved with Volunteer UCF's Community Connector program, and how did that lead you to the Adult Literacy League?	Give back	"I decided that I wanted to <i>give back</i> to the Central Florida community by taking on a <i>volunteering project</i> ."
		Volunteering	
		Interest survey	"I got in contact with them, and I filled out an <i>interest survey</i> , where I talked about my <i>skill set</i> , my social topic of interest, and also my availability. After that initial contact was established, we scheduled a consultation and we were able to sit down and talk about the different volunteering opportunities, which is when the Adult Literacy League came up."
Skill set			
Social topic of interest			

Carina explained that prior to joining the community builders program; she had tutored fellow students on several occasions. She was a conversation partner at the Center of Multicultural Multilingual Studies at UCF and also mentored Portuguese students at the university. She also assisted Brazilian students with the application process at American universities. When working with an adult learner older than she, Carina explained that it was a reciprocal relationship; she was able to help academically while she learned life lessons from her mentee. Conversely, when asked what her mentee's perception was of working with someone younger than her, Carina explained that at first, it was a shock for her, but after rapport and trust were established, age was not a factor. When asked about working with someone who was pursuing the 'American Dream,' Carina responded that at first, there were unrealistic expectations of the American Dream; one must work on learning the characteristics of a new culture and eventually assimilate to that culture. Carina expressed that she felt responsible for providing the right resources to her mentee so that she could be successful in the United States. This information can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Tutor Experience

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quotes
Tutor Experience	Before starting at the Adult Literacy League, had you tutored before?	Tutoring	“I was a <i>conversation partner</i> for the Center of Multicultural Multilingual Studies at the University of Central Florida, I was a conversation partner for the Portuguese students at UCF, and I was also a <i>mentor</i> with the National Brazilian Student Association helping Brazilian students apply to American Universities”
	Did the Adult Literacy League provide you the necessary training needed to succeed as a tutor?	Conversation Partner	
		Mentor	
		Mandatory Orientation	
	What is it like working with and adult learner who is older than you are?	Policies	
		Resources	
	How do you think the adult learner views learning with someone younger than they are?	Trade Off	
		Life Experiences	
	What are some challenges working with someone from another country who is learning from you to speak English and pursuing ‘The American Dream’?”	Surprise/shock	
		Trust	
	Misconceptions	“I think initially there is a surprise factor when the student realizes they may be working with someone who’s a lot younger than they are. In my case, the student is about my mother’s age, so I think she was surprised/shocked at first when she met me”	
	Unrealistic	“First, the idea of an ‘American Dream’ is full of misconceptions and unrealistic expectations.”	
	Adapt	“So you do have to learn, regardless of your age, – you have to adapt to the American culture, you have to get used being in a new situation, and a new life. So you re-identify yourself, you reevaluate what your identity is, and what it means to you.”	
	Identity		
	Personally Responsible		
	Resources		
	Successful	“[...] as a mentor, I feel personally responsible for providing the resources she needs to be successful in the United States”	

Carina described the lessons learned through this process, and shared that as a graduate student she was not sure if she could handle the workload and dedicate several hours per week mentoring an adult learner, but she refined her time management techniques, which, in turn, helped her with her coursework. She was also unsure how she would be able to connect with an adult learner from another country. As she refined her time management skills, Carina has been able to directly help her mentee and indirectly help her children by providing resources for relocating to the United States from Brazil. This gave Carina a sense of paying it forward and gave her more confidence in herself as a community leader. This information can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Lesson Learned

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quotes
Lessons Learned	What lessons have you learned through this unique programming process?	Trust	“Program I was able to trust myself in taking on that time commitment and realizing that I could do a lot more than I thought I could because I had their support, so I had other people supporting my interests and telling me that yes, you can do this.”
		Support	
		Connect	“ I think that being able to connect with my student, I was able to realize that one semester wasn’t as much as I thought it was going to be and that it made me want to do more, because of that relationship I was building with that student. So, working with the Adult Literacy League made me realize that my impact was stronger than I thought it was going to be because you can see how connecting with that student changes their lives but it also changes yours.”
		Building Relationship	
		Impact	
		Change Lives	

When asked to make recommendations to her peers, nonprofits, and institutions of higher learning regarding this style of mentorship, Carina indicated that regardless of education, mentorship is important and that her peers should get involved. She emphasized that nonprofit organizations should partner with institutions of higher education to take advantage of these campus resources, “utilize college students as assets for fulfilling your mission, because they will help you reach your goals” (Carina, personal communication, February 29, 2016). This information can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Recommendations

Theme	Questions	Codes	Quotes
Recommendations	Conference attendees may see this video and be interested in replicating your successes. What recommendations would you make for your peers, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher learning regarding this style of mentorship?	Important	“I think that mentorship is important regardless of what level of education you are talking about.”
		Level of Education	
		Campus Resources	“I would just emphasize that it is really important to take advantage of resources available on campus.”
		Long-Term Volunteering	“Long-term volunteering is very impactful, and it is really important and you may not think that you have time to do it, but once you start you will realize that you do have the time to dedicate to that project, whatever that project may be.”
		Impactful	
		Time	
		Assets	“Utilize college students as assets for that mission, for fulfilling your mission, because they will help you reach your goals.”
Mission			

Conclusion

The case study of utilizing the Adult Literacy League as a deeper, more intentional nonprofit partner with Volunteer UCF through the Community Connector program demonstrates a programmatic avenue where traditional college-age students *can* and *do* play an integral role mentoring adult learners while challenging traditional literature on mentoring adult learners.

The experience has established a successful synergy between VUCF Community Connectors and Adult Literacy League. The benefits to students from Adult Literacy League include greater exposure to its programs, services, and community events. It also provides valuable and relevant work experience to the Community Builder and assesses their volunteer programming.

Benefits to the partnering agency from the Community Connectors include utilizing time and talent from the community builder. In this case, Carina's experience as an ESL student who emigrated from her home country of Brazil allowed her to apply those experiences during her mentorship. Experiences like these make sustainable impact in the Central Florida community and give credence to academic experience being combined with the service component. Beginning with the *why* in the Golden Circle, this experience can be applied to other like-minded institutions of higher education who seek to implement a similar program. "It is one thing to study our community as academics, but we must also participate in serving our community as citizens and achieve participatory excellence" (Plante, 2015, p. 181).

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Adult Student Emotions That Negatively Affect Learning

Patricia G. Coberly-Holt & Caroline Braun
Armstrong State University

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the prevalence of indicators in adult students at various levels of study that suggest a student might suffer from imposter syndrome, which occurs when students do not feel that they possess the intelligence or skills to do well in an educational setting, and/or cultural suicide, which consists of students being criticized by friends and/or family for participating in learning. This study sought to determine if certain adult education programs, demographics, or personal factors influenced students' experiences of either of the conditions. Through written surveys with adult students at various levels and programs of study, the study sought to reveal any correlational relationship between any of the variables we reviewed to either impostership or cultural suicide. Therefore, our survey included myriad variables that might be associated with adult learners on an individual basis. Variables included basic demographics such as gender and age, students participating in various programs from English as a Second Language to graduate school, and personal factors such as marital status and accesses to financial aid.

Keywords: Impostership, cultural suicide, adult learners, negative emotions, secondary education

As the gulf in lifetime earnings between high school diploma holders and bachelor's degree holders widens, it becomes even more vital for colleges and universities to make strides to improve student recruitment and retention. In his book *The Skillful Teacher*, Stephen Brookfield identifies two conditions that have an adverse effect upon institutional efforts to recruit and retain students: impostership and cultural suicide. According to Brookfield (2006), impostership is the feeling students experience when they fear that they are not intelligent or qualified enough to meet the demands of higher education. Cultural suicide, on the other hand, is a process that Brookfield

contends students undergo when their families, friends, and communities penalize them for pursuing higher education, an act that they perceive as a betrayal. When students believe that they are imposters or when they fear that their decision to pursue education will result in backlash from their communities, their abilities to participate meaningfully in the process of college are hindered immensely.

Consequently, a consideration of the effects that impostership and cultural suicide have upon students is especially important in light of the increasing diversity on college campuses throughout the country. Historically, college has been the domain of white males of traditional college age; however, the landscape of college has shifted to include students of different races and ethnicities, veterans, and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, women are pursuing higher education in increasing numbers, and many adults who are beyond traditional college age are returning to school or pursuing higher education for the first time. By considering the effects that cultural suicide and impostership may have upon a diverse nontraditional student population, higher educational institutions will be better equipped to provide services that may increase student recruitment and retention. The purpose of this study is to determine if there are variables associated with higher education students that may help predict certain students more at risk for either impostership and/or cultural suicide.

Literature Review

Impostership, also known as the imposter syndrome, plagues students across all races, genders, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. McDowell, Grubb, and Geho (2015) identify six characteristics, or symptoms, of the imposter syndrome that Brookfield discusses. These include: 1.) Feeling like an intellectual fraud, 2.) Believing that luck rather than ability explains personal successes, 3.) Believing that past accomplishments cannot be achieved again, 4.) Fearful of criticism and evaluation from others, 5.) Feeling unable to enjoy past achievements, and 6.) Fearful that others will realize their incompetence. As stated by Zinko, Ferris, Blass and Laird (2007), an

individual's perception, either of self or the organization, becomes the reality that these individuals live with. Regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, they lead to both positive and negative outcomes (Suls & Wills, 1991). When these six symptoms are considered within the context of the college classroom, the damage they can inflict upon learners' academic performance and self-esteem can be devastating.

Adults at all levels of education are susceptible to the damage that the imposter syndrome can wreak upon their identities as students. According to Brookfield (2006) neither remedial learners nor doctoral students are spared. He theorizes that those who experience the imposter syndrome throughout their educational careers have a tendency to create an image of the ideal student as one who is all-knowing, who is already an expert. When these students realize the distance that lies between their current state and that of their idealized version of the student role, they become disillusioned and begin to doubt their abilities (Brookfield, 2006).

As such, if the feelings of impostership are not addressed, Brookfield argues that they can damage students' ability to engage in the critical thought processes vital to the students' success in school. He contends that if students feel like imposters, they will hesitate to perform critical analysis of profound thinkers and works within their field. This will limit their development as learners and critical thinkers. Because of the emphasis that higher education places upon critical modes of thinking, it is vital that authorities make efforts to identify and address students' feelings of impostership. Such efforts will create an environment in which students can engage in the types of thinking that will make them successful in both college and their careers.

In addition to feelings of impostership, some students must also contend with feelings of cultural suicide. Cultural suicide involves a conflict between students' home cultures and the culture that they encounter at school. One aspect of college culture that often clashes with the home culture is the emphasis that higher education places upon critical thinking (Brookfield, 2006). When students begin to engage in critical thinking, they may begin to

question aspects of their home culture that they may have previously accepted without question. They may begin to reconsider traditional roles and religious beliefs in light of new experiences, and this can cause them to become isolated from family and peers. Loved ones often react to students by accusing them of “putting on airs” or of becoming too subversive (Brookfield, 2015). Numerous demographics of learners find themselves exposed to this phenomenon.

Therefore, Brookfield (2006) identifies several groups that are particularly vulnerable to the experience of cultural suicide. These include minority students, working class students, first generation students, and nontraditional aged adult learners. College campuses have traditionally served mostly white, middle class students of traditional college age; however, the demographics of many campuses have transformed dramatically. First generation students are enrolling in universities in increasing numbers, and, due to the demographic composition of this group, these students are particularly at risk of experiencing feelings of cultural suicide. According to Jehangir (2010), first generation students “are more likely than their more advantaged peers to be students of color, older than 24 years, female, nonnative speakers of English, and born outside of the United States” (p. 14).

One particular issue that may place minority students at increased risk of cultural suicide is the notion of “selling out.” Some scholars, such as Kennedy (2008) argue that minority students, particularly black students, may be accused of “selling out” if they choose to pursue higher education. While the notion of selling out is a controversial one, Randall asserts that many African Americans who become successful in multiracial environments, such as the university, will eventually be accused of “selling out.” Randall suggests that the values of African American students’ communities may initially appear to be at odds with the values that are promoted within higher education. As a result, he concludes that when African American students begin to show signs of adopting these new values, they are seen as rejecting aspects of their original culture. Similarly, Jehangir (2010) agrees that the conflict between the student’s home cultures and the culture of higher education can be difficult to navigate. She suggests that first

generation students often receive the unspoken message from their families that they should “go out and learn things, be smart, but not too smart” (p. 23). She adds that the changes that first generation college students undergo throughout the education process can make family members and friends feel as if they are losing the student.

Method

Participants

Grounded on our goal of analyzing the prevalence of impostership and cultural suicide in adult students, we wanted to sample a diverse array of adult students. Since we were searching for students experiencing one or both of the conditions, we sampled adults currently enrolled in a structured adult education setting. We desired to sample several levels of students, so the survey was disseminated to undergraduate students at the sophomore level as well as graduate level students working towards a master of education degree at a small culturally diverse state university situated on the Atlantic coast. The survey was also provided to adult students including adults enrolled in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program and General Education Degree (GED) preparation classes at an urban coastal technical college in the same county.

Materials

A written survey was designed by the second author which included Likert-style response inquiries, yes/no closed answer questions, and short answer inquiries to determine if a correlation existed for various variables and the incidence of Imposter Syndrome and/or Cultural Suicide. The survey was created based primarily on what was learned through a review of the literature on the topics being studied.

We developed and piloted a short survey consisting of thirty-six items focused on demographic data, program data, living situation, and questions which we thought would provide us with evidence of either Imposter Syndrome and/or Cultural Suicide. These survey questions included inquiries

such as military background, significant other's level of education, family income as a child, and if the learner was a first generation college student. Two open-ended questions were included that provided opportunities for respondents to describe experiences to scenarios that are commonly descriptive of an individual experiencing impostership or cultural suicide. The final survey was disseminated through SurveyMonkey, an online software survey site.

Design

The initial design plan of this study was to be a mixed-methods research framework (Creswell & Clark, 2007). As Creswell and Clark (2007) wrote, by mixing quantitative and qualitative data sets, the researcher provides a better understanding than if either dataset had been used alone. Due to the small number of participants who chose to provide contact information, follow-up interviews were not completed. Therefore, the study was conducted as a descriptive quantitative research design.

Procedure

The instructors of three sophomore level undergraduate courses and three master's level courses added a link to the survey website on the institutional learning management system and provided these students with an orange slip of paper with the website address of the survey, gave a brief rationale of the study and requested they complete the survey. All students were assured that neither taking nor choosing not to take the survey would affect their course grade. Several verbal reminders were provided during classes. In addition, the survey link was sent via email to the Dean of Adult Education at the technical college. Students in the ESL and GED classes were asked to take the survey if they were comfortable doing so.

Between mid-December and early March, fifty-one students, 43 females and 8 males completed the online survey in the three months it remained active. Of this number, 5 (9.8%) were in ESL classes, 4 (7.8%) were in GED preparation classes, 18 (35.3%) were sophomore level undergraduate

students, 13 (25.5%) were master degree students, and 11 (21.6%) did not report a level of study. Participants were of diverse races, including 2 (3.9%) Asian, 18 (35.3%) black, 8 (15.7%) Hispanic, 1 (2.0%) Native American, 21 (41.2%) white, and 1 (2.0%) other.

Data Analysis

Responses to each of the thirty-six individual questions on the survey were initially summarized using descriptive statistics by the SurveyMonkey software that was utilized to gather respondent data. Based solely on the individual participant replies to the Likert-style questions, it appeared that more students suffered from feelings of impostership than from cultural suicide, with almost half (47.06%) noting fear that people would find out that they are not as intelligent as they think that they are. Seventeen additional students indicated on the short answer questions that they do not feel intelligent enough to succeed in college either presently or in the past, a strong symptom of impostership. Nine respondents provided responses on the short answer questions that revealed that at least some of their friends and/or family were unsupportive or had been unsupportive at the some point, an indicator of cultural suicide. At this point, we began to review for correlations between the various variables and impostership or cultural suicide. This was accomplished by exporting the data from SurveyMonkey into IBM SPSS Statistics 24. We ran a variety of nonparametric tests, including chi-square, t-tests, and paired sample correlations with multiple variables.

Findings

We found that the multiple choice, Likert scale, and closed questions which requested demographic data, program data, living situation, and questions which we felt would provide us with evidence of either Imposter Syndrome and/or Cultural Diversity did not communicate effectively if either condition existed. For example, participants tended to strongly agree with the statement that they felt confident in their ability to do well when they took a class. However, by means of the two open-ended questions, participants began providing multiple examples of how and when they experienced one or

both of the situations. When asked, “If you have ever felt that you were not intelligent enough or qualified enough to attend school, please share those experiences,” respondents shared experiences that were by definition analogues to impostership.

Overall, thirty-seven (72.5%) of respondents suggested they often felt symptoms of impostership. However, no statistical significance was noted that suggested a correlation to participant demographics, level of program, marital status, or any of the other variables that were observed.

Of the participants from all programs, ten (19.6%) indicated that they experienced the phenomenon of cultural suicide. Again, no statistical significance was detected based on age, race, gender, income, prior military service, or any other observed variable. Of the fifty-one participants from all of the programs surveyed, nine (18%) responded that they experienced indicators of both impostership and cultural suicide. As with those experiencing only one of the situations, they came from various programs, ages, races, and income levels, with no statistical significance observed with any of the variables.

Discussion

Brookfield (2014) states that impostership plagues students across all races, classes, ages, genders, and levels of education. The responses from participants indicated that this was true of those who participated in this study. The same was true in regards to cultural suicide. We found no correlations with our respondents with respect to level of education, gender, race, income, marital status, age, or any of the other twenty-five variables we observed. With such a high proportion of adults experiencing one or both of these adverse conditions in the classroom, and without a way to determine which adult students are more likely to suffer, we must be prepared to help students deal with negative emotions associated with formal education at all levels of education and personal demographics that walk through the classroom door.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that although more students participating in structured adult educational classrooms experienced impostership, there are no definite markers for identifying adult students experiencing impostership or cultural suicide. These results do indicate that as noted by Brookfield (2006) and McDowell, Grubb, and Geho (2015), students from all walks of life are plagued by impostership at relatively high rates. Brookfield (2006) identified several groups of students who were more susceptible to cultural suicide, including minority students, working class students, first generation students, and nontraditional students. The data from this study did not support this statement, as adults from across variables were found to experience the effects of cultural suicide. The authors of this paper believe that both of these conditions have an effect on recruitment and retention of adult students across the country. Realizing that high numbers of students are facing adverse emotions associated with learning suggests that staff, faculty, and administrators need to prepare and be proactive in their approaches to guiding students to circumvent the adverse emotions that are often associated with transitioning various levels of higher education.

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How to Assess if QM Can Break Down Barriers

Roy A. Kaelin

National Louis University

Abstract

Requiring savvy, online courses can present a perceived barrier to adult learners for a variety of reasons, but ease of access due to inadequate navigability should not be one of those barriers. Re-tooling online courses to standards of Quality Matters (QM) can lessen that barrier to access, making adult learners more participatory. Internal statistics gathered routinely by a learning management system (LMS) can test this claim, as a way to show successful, measurable increases in participation. Though only an approximate method at this time, as presented herein, a detailed examination of user-progress data from a standard, stable LMS appears nominally promising for development into a prospective analytic tool of assessment of adult learners.

Keywords: adult learner, ahea, analytics, assessment, desire2learn, d2l, learning management system, lms, national louis university, online course, quality matters, user progress data

A typical learning managements system (LMS), like Desire2Learn (D2L), collects an ongoing amount of data about students as they access and navigate a digital environment for a given online course (Brightspace Tutorials, 2015). These data, known as user-progress data, are readily available to the course's instructor in an effort to track performance, identify problem areas, and, to maintain an accurate assessment of levels of participation as a basis for grading. At National Louis University, the use of these data for tracking students is similar (Brightspace Tutorials , 2015).

Once the course is completed, these data are still available for instructors to return for a deeper assessment of whether the course was cleanly accessible to students, or, as one means to determine whether there are unintentional roadblocks and barriers that prevent students, especially adult learners, from accessing online content. In that assessment, one can likely turn to ways to make content more readily accessible for adult learners. For example, in recent years one way requires the application of principles utilized by Quality Matters (Underlying Principles of Quality Matters, n. d.).

Quality Matters (QM) is a nationally recognized and tested system of increasing the utility of online courses by streamlining these courses' navigability for potential and active users. Colleges and universities that apply QM principles to their online courses find greater accessibility due to greater ease of online navigation within those courses. That is, prior research on the efficacy of Quality Matters has shown its demonstrable improvement for the navigability of online courses (Regon, 2007). It is the intent herein to present a simple, straightforward approach by which one might measure that improvement in navigability using data gathered by a LMS.

Re-tooling a course in QM, after evaluation by a team of qualified QM peer reviewers, can allow a course's content to become more readily accessible. Though QM makes no determination on the quality or quantity of a course's content, its application to a course does allow an instructor to make the course's navigation cleaner so that access to its content can be improved.

The initial premise of this paper is that user-progress data, gathered by a LMS, can be used as one means to determine whether a course can become more readily accessible after an application of QM principles. A supporting premise is that online courses, once defined by, or revamped under, QM principles can allow greater access to online users, such as adult learners, than they might otherwise have an opportunity to navigate successfully.

The overall assessment from these two premises is based on the prospect of a relatively measurable rate of improvement through a comparison of user-

progress data of two courses gathered by a LMS, namely, D2L, through which courses, before-and-after QM re-tooling, were offered at National Louis University.

Since the user-progress data were readily available from two NLU courses, both before and after a controlled application of QM principles, it seemed a likely test of whether QM re-tooling can be as efficacious as QM asserts. To do this effectively, under controlled circumstances, one would need before-and-after data that can be compared from an offering of the same course at different intervals. Ideally, it would be useful to have an identified cohort of students on which to compare these data, though that may not be possible at all times. Also, it would be necessary to have some indication that the course was composed entirely of adult learners, in order to test the validity of the two premises.

Note that while the number of students from course-to-course ought to be more equivalent in number for an accurate comparison, there is no actual control for the number of students signing up for any given course. To set the premise for any comparison, though, one can assume that the majority of students in any given course at NLU tend toward the expected demographic of an adult learner, since that is the anticipated audience to which NLU has appealed for students.

That is, these students are often, but are not limited to, those who are greater in age than the typical career student, working at one or several jobs, and, have genuine, day-to-day family concerns. This demographic often includes students returning to complete an academic degree, either undergraduate or graduate (NLU at a glance, 2014). Pertinent to this sample, it was fortunate to be able to compare two science courses, primarily in an effort to determine the efficacy of QM as one more means to assist adult learners in apprehending the content increasingly provided by universities in an online environment. As QM does require a certain level of online familiarity for users to get the most benefit, it seemed reasonable that one may be able to track the efficacy of a website's improved navigability through the use of a LMS. While a lack of familiarity with digital technology may be problematic

to certain student populations, it can be perceived as a distinct mental barrier to participation for adult learners. QM may offer the chance to detect and reduce this perceived barrier.

In addition, as adult learners, students in an online environment may confide a lack of ability to their instructor in an attempt to preface their performance within a digital environment if they have not had productive exposure to online courses. QM also appears to present an opportunity to encourage those same students to convey a greater level of confidence in their ability to apprehend content better with greater ease of navigation in an online environment.

Conceptualization

The technical requirements to access a typical learning management system may discourage adult learners from engaging in an online course. This can present a very real barrier to successful progress, requiring intervention by the host institution. Though adult learners are largely self-directed in taking online courses, it is a trait of adult learners that if they continually find the course inconsistent in its presentation or difficult in its navigation, one can reasonably assume that adult learners will participate less in the course as a whole (Pappas, 2013). As a systematic means to improve course presentation and navigability, QM can encourage greater participation for adult learners.

While QM's utility is demonstrable among online courses, its success as a way to reduce the perceived barrier that online courses presents to adult learners can be shown, but with obvious and prudent caveats. That is, while QM does improve the navigability of online courses, its specific improvement among adult learners can be best measured under controlled circumstances, allowing for measures that take into account specific requirements of adult learners. To that end, this presentation offers a small measure of possible evidence to bolster this latter assertion. Comparing the same kind of online courses that do (and do not) employ recognized standards of QM appears an adequate way to test whether adult learners can increase their rates of participation to access online courses. That is, one can test for increased rates of participation before and after the application of

QM, thereby drawing a measurable inference, not only of the relative efficacy of QM, but as a means to lessen the perceived barrier.

Design & Development

QM offers a tested means to organize a cleanly accessible online presentation with straightforward navigation to encourage greater participation. While QM does not validate or assess the specific content presented in a given online course, it does offer the instructor helpful recommendations to organize that content, promote its presentation, and streamline its access (LinkedIn SlideShare, 2014). As application of QM principles can improve students' online experience, it offers adult learners confidence in online navigation. Greater confidence can lead to greater participation. To test for this greater participation, one can readily compare science courses before-and-after QM re-tooling. General education science courses offer a good environment, as they often have little subjective content. This makes the tally of user progress unambiguous. Fortunately, a LMS does often employ internal statistics to monitor the progress of students through specific online courses. This user progress is often typically available to the instructor as one of several online analytic tools (Meyer, 2015).

By comparing levels of user progress for the same courses for which specific content is presented, one may determine a relative rate of access by adult learners before-and-after re-tooling. The rate of access can be gauged by activity levels of adult learners during randomly chosen times during which all students are obliged to access specific content. Internal statistics on user progress for any chosen time frame typically reveal amounts of time spent on areas within the LMS for that course.

To attempt this comparison, an existing 300-level natural-science course was chosen that was representative of adult learners attempting to take and access an online course. The course, LAN 300 Ecology, is an online course with a laboratory component, according to the NLU Course Catalog (NLU Course Catalog, 2016). There are two main reasons for its straightforward selection, namely, the course was a relatively long-standing course in the roster of

courses offered online at NLU, but it was offered as an online course on a well-known and stable LMS; and, though its content and textbook were largely the same, QM principles had been applied to the layout of the course over the past year (i.e., by 2015) to make it more straightforward to navigate.

In selecting this course for its inclusion in this presentation, there are several obvious caveats. For example, for this to be a truly accurate assessment of course navigability before-and-after an application of QM principles, the class would have to consist of the same composition, size in numbers, and age range of adult learners. Ideally, one might need the exact same class, in order to assess improvement from learners “before” QM to learners “after” QM. Of course, no class would likely take the same course twice.

In addition, to show conclusive results of a demonstrable improvement for adult learners, that is, for a true course-to-course comparison of progress before-and-after QM re-tooling, the course content would need to remain the same (or largely the same, after updating, as needed) while its navigability would be streamlined by application of QM principles. In this latter instance, that course content was preserved. So, though the comparison is not learner-to-learner, an initial comparison can be made course-to-course.

To a lesser extent, then, it would be useful to know the identity (i.e., relative age) of those adult learners taking this course successively online. While personal information on students is not made available for this presentation, one can infer from its weekly discussion forums that a majority (if not all) were adult learners. This inference can be gleaned from the incidental content of the discussion forums, namely, by what the students revealed about themselves as they took the 10-week course and attempted to meet its online requirements of assignments, quizzes, discussions, and a final exam.

Implementation

The straightforward approach of applying QM has already been underway at NLU since 2014 (Donahue, 2014). This is why it can be instructive now to compare selected courses before-and-after QM re-tooling. To determine

whether the application of QM principles to streamline the navigability of online courses might actually improve their accessibility for adult learners, a pair of natural-science courses, made available online one year apart, were selected for an examination of their user-progress data as archived by the LMS on which the courses were offered. That is, two courses of LAN 300 Ecology were selected as representative of before-and-after examples of QM re-tooling. The first ten-week course was offered in NLU's Spring Quarter 2014 (from 04/01/2014 to 06/03/2014) and hosted eight students. The QM-retooled course was offered in Spring Quarter 2015 (from 04/06/2015 to 06/14/2015) and hosted sixteen students. Re-tooling to QM occurred just prior to the start of the course in SQ 2015.

To effect a comparison between these two courses (viz., LAN 300 Ecology offered at two distinct times) before-and-after QM re-tooling, user-progress data were compared from both courses. On the LMS known as D2L, user-progress data indicate the actual times of logins, and length-of-stay during those logins, among all enrolled students for the duration of the ten-week course. This collection of user-progress data is a built-in analytical tool of (Brightspace Tutorials, 2015) to assist teachers in tracking how often and for how long students are actively engaged in their assigned work for an online course.

From the initial two premises of this paper, it is assumed that an established rate of logins over a distinct period of monitored time within a given course may offer an indication of the relative barrier that online courses might offer to adult learners. That is, if online courses present a true barrier to adult learners, that barrier may be perceived by the frequency, or lack thereof, of logins over a selected period of time as students become acclimated to a given online course. If the frequency of logins appears to increase, or, if a previous dearth of login frequency does not manifest itself after the application of QM principles, all other things equal to the extent that can be known, then a course re-tooled by QM may be perceived as less of a barrier to adult learners than a non-re-tooled course. Repeated logins and a relatively high percentage of completion of content may infer a constant search for content and a sincere level of engagement. By comparison, few logins and

scant time spent in any given area obviously show a distinct lack of engagement and interest. While the former instance may show a genuine attempt by adult learners to access content, the latter instance offers no other logical conclusion than disinterest as an adequate explanation.

Of course, one cannot gauge access based on time of day, since online adult learners will access content asynchronously; rather, one likely has only to look at both the frequency of login and each login's duration to gain any insight into any hesitancy with accessing an online environment. So, without any other corroborating evidence, such as specific complaints from students about inaccessibility to content or difficulty in navigation, one can reasonably assume that poor presentation and difficult navigability present distinct barriers to the learner's participation.

For a QM-tooled course, the increased number of consistent logins over a defined period of time and their increased duration can infer a relative ease with access and navigability. Coupled with a relatively high rate of successful content completion, as indicated by the LMS analytics, one can infer that QM offers improved presentation and navigability, which lowers the barrier to adult learners' participation.

Evaluation

A formal, side-by-side comparison of the same course, before-and-after QM application, may show similar, encouraging results to engage adult learners. This side-by-side comparison is worth exploring as host institutions seek to attract and retain adult student populations. Though the courses, as noted earlier, were not set up for review under controlled circumstances (that is, complete demographics of adult learners were not known with certainty and frequency of logins could not be directly attributed to a full application of QM principles), only a rough comparison can be made at this time. In a more complete evaluation, an adult student cohort participating in a series of before-and-after QM re-tooled courses with a built-in template to guide navigation and access would be needed for a more accurate assessment.

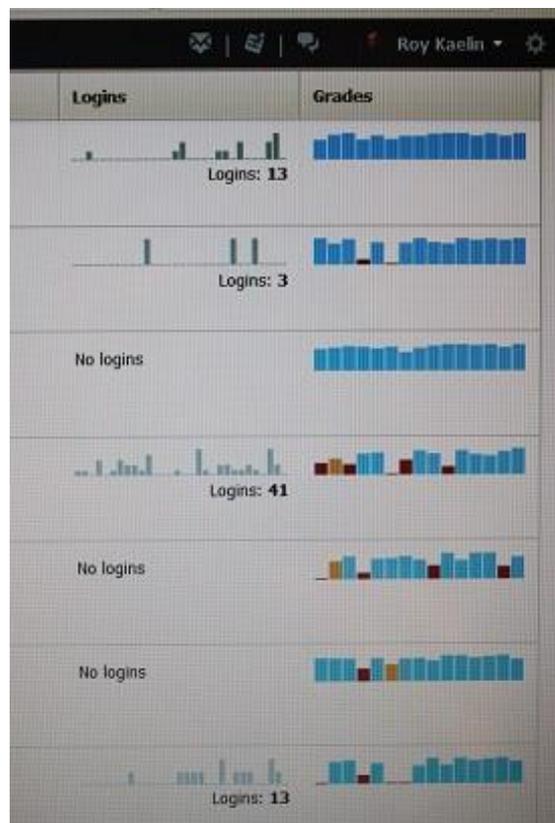
So, for the purpose of this paper, one can examine available user-progress data for a rough approximation. For example, comparisons of LMS user-progress data showed that the earlier course (in SQ 2014, pre-QM) had spotty access to content modules, and, logins appeared primarily to meet designated deadlines. Though the course offered a full set of content-rich weekly modules, the adult learners appeared not engaged. More to the point, the user-progress data, while useful to see logins over a period of time, show little regularity. (See Screenshot 1.) Presumably, too, there were other reasons for poor engagement. For those learners who did access the previous course, the duration of time spent on content areas inferred that the content was presented in an unappealing manner.

By contrast, the latter offering of that same course (in SQ 2015, post-QM) shows students far more engaged in accessing the course; that latter course has a slightly more welcoming presentation and clearer navigation, i.e., more neatly arranged content modules, than its previous installment as an online course. Like its previous installment, this latter course contained the same, full set of content-rich weekly modules, along with (at least) some QM-added navigational assistance (such as a welcome module). In the latter course, the user-progress data show more and regular access by all students. (See Screenshot 2.) Certainly, for example, twice as many students in the latter course would stimulate more logins, as students were required to respond to one another in weekly discussions, but the access is demonstrably greater than the previous (pre-QM) course.

There are obvious caveats to keep in mind. Certainly one cannot infer too many reliable conclusions based on this rough comparison. This paper is intended simply to offer an insight for instructors who may wish to craft a similar assessment on their own, in order to determine the efficacy of QM re-tooling. This approach might be useful for those institutions that have started to apply QM principles, but requires more time to do a thorough job of it. As these institutions seek to apply QM principles to online courses, they might add to their QM re-tooled courses an internal (perhaps weekly) checklist (usually available on the LMS) to organize their adult learners toward completing various assignments, so that their user progress can be more

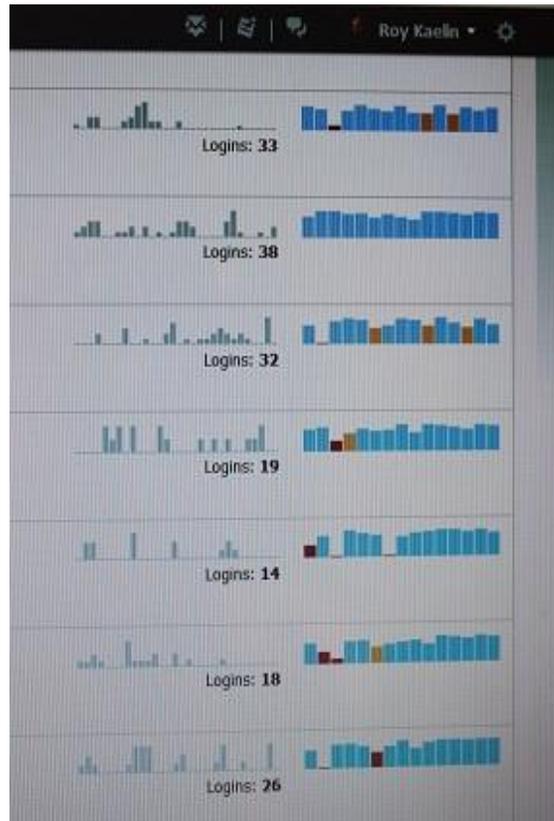
easily interpreted after the course concludes. While this paper offers just one approach of assessment, it is likely that a more controlled comparison between online courses, “before” and “after” QM, is necessary to have a more meaningful discussion of data. That controlled comparison may determine whether the application of QM principles can indeed improve navigability enough to remove barriers for adult learners to access course content. In the interim, it may be useful as well to seek user-progress data from the QM organization itself, in an attempt to carry forth this assessment.

LAN 300, SQ 2014, pre-QM application



Screenshot 1. User-progress data, while useful to see logins over a period of time, show little regularity in access to

LAN 300, SQ 2015, post-QM application



Screenshot 2: User-progress data, while useful to see logins over a period of time, show demonstrably greater access in

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