A Survey of Adult Learning

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Key Factors in Adult Learning

✓ Individual needs and uniqueness are honored; abilities and life achievements are acknowledged.

✓ Foster intellectual freedom and encourage exploration.

✓ Faculty treats students as intelligent experienced adults whose opinions are appreciated.

✓ Self-directed learning: students work with faculty to design individual learning programs which address what each person needs and wants to learn.

Key Factors cont..

✓ Pacing: challenging people just beyond their present level of ability- optimal flow.

✓ Active involvement in learning: students and instructors interact; students try out new ideas in the workplace; exercises and experiences are used to bolster facts and theory.

✓ Regular feedback mechanisms: students tell faculty what works best for them and what they want and need to learn.

Motivation to Learn (Again)

✓ Adults seek out learning experiences in order to cope with specific life-changing events - e.g., marriage, divorce, new job, promotion, being fired, retiring, losing a loved one, moving to a new city.

✓ Adults who are motivated to seek out a learning experience do so primarily because they have a use for the knowledge or skill being sought.

✓ Increasing or maintaining one's sense of self-esteem and pleasure are strong secondary motivators for engaging in learning experiences.

In The Classroom

✓ The learning environment must be physically and psychologically comfortable; long lectures, periods of interminable sitting and the absence of practice opportunities rate high on the irritation scale.

✓ Adults have expectations; need to take time to articulate all expectations before getting into content.

✓ Adults bring a great deal of life experience into the classroom.

✓ Feedback has to be a two-way process.

✓ Learning and teaching theories function better as resources than as rules.

Curriculum Design

✓ *Transformational Learning:* Adults prefer courses that focus on the application of the concept to relevant problems

✓ Design programs to accept viewpoints from people in different life stages and with different value sets.

✓ Adults prefer self-directed and self-designed learning projects over group-learning experiences led by a professional; they desire to control the pace.

✓ Regardless of media, how-to is the preferred content orientation (hands-on nature of the class).

Our Goals

✓ To explore learning patterns and attitudes that differ between "traditional" and continuing ed. students.

✓ In particular we wanted to examine two aspects:

– the motivational aspect that draws the individual back to school, and

– the kind of instruction these students prefer

✓ Prior notions:

– Major motivations: current career demands, a career change, and self-improvement.

– Preferred instruction medium: classrooms that are more collaborative, ones that involve active participation and include hands-on experience.

Our Methodology

✔ Examine these issues within CU's School of Continuing Education

✔ Develop survey of 10 questions ranging from statistical data about age and education level, to more subjective areas like class preference and learning styles.

✔ Conduct survey and observe classes from three categories:

  Boulder Evening Credit - Communication & Society

  Computer Applications - Advanced HTML

  Personal Enrichment - Intro. to Drawing

Agenda
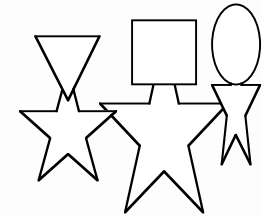
✓ In-Class survey

✓ Comparison with study surveys

✓ What the numbers say

✓ Evaluation against Null Hypotheses

✓ Questions

✓ In-class discussion

Communication & Society

✓ Age: 20yr olds

✓ Education Level: High School diploma

✓ Work Experience: Have little to no work experience

✓ Course Purpose: Convenient time slots (athletes, day jobs, course availability)

✓ Learning Style: Discussion and Hands-on

✓ Group Learning: Most prefer small groups

✓ Technology Integration: Moderate use

✓ Outside experiences have only minor influence

Advanced HTML

✓ Age: Largely 20-40yrs

✓ Education Level: Most have Undergraduate degree.

✓ Work Experience: 3-5 yrs experience

✓ Course Purpose: Enhancing current job skills

✓ Learning Style: Most preferred hands-on

✓ Group Learning: Individual projects

✓ Technology Integration: Complete

✓ Outside experience steered class discussions

Introduction to Drawing

- ✓ Age: Broad age range with a majority over 40yrs
- ✓ Education Level: 50% have Graduate experience
- ✓ Work Experience: Extensive in unrelated fields
- ✓ Course Purpose: Personal enrichment
- ✓ Learning Style: Hands-on
- ✓ Group Learning: Most prefer individual projects
- ✓ Technology Integration: None
- ✓ Outside experiences have little to do with in-class work

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¿Preguntas?

✓ Do you have any?

✓ We have some!

- – How would you integrate technology with a class like Introduction To Drawing?
- – How would you avoid technology dominating a class like Advanced HTML?
- – Do surveys like these help? Are they conclusive?

Additional Resources

✓ *Seven Characteristics of Highly Effective Adult Learning Programs* - Dorothy D. Billington, Ph.D., The Adult Learner in Higher Education and Workplace.

✓ *30 Things We Know For Sure About Adult Learners*. Innovation Abstracts Vol. VI, No 8, Mar 1984