

The Characteristics and Methods of Adult Learners

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Abstract—Lifelong learning is becoming more and more popular these days. Adult learners want to change their fates through continuous learning. In this fast paced world, many people do not have enough time to sit in a classroom and listen to a lecture by a professor for three to four hours. In this information age, a lot of teaching methods are utilized through modern technology means in the process of adult learning. Not all the methods; however, are suitable for adult learners. Many education researchers begin to pay close attention to in the area of MOOC about how adult learners learn. Then, it will discuss useful teaching methods according to the results of previous research. These include useful tips, practical orientations, and education settings which apply to specific characteristics of adult learners. The content of such education tends to be practical and focuses on newer knowledge and applicable skills. One major goal of such education is to meet the technological changes and constantly changing working requirements. Adults as a specific group of learners, acquire six unique characteristics. This paper is designed to address four questions: 1) The characteristics of adult learners; 2) The characteristics of adults learning methods; 3) when you would use which method. The purpose of this article is to provide adult learners some valuable methods and suggestions.

Keywords—adult learners; characteristics; suggestopedia; coaching; guided design; just-in-time training

I. INTRODUCTION

Much has been said and written about characteristics and methods about adult learning. Little of literature in the field is concerned with when each method was used? The purpose of this paper is to fill this blank. First, the paper will cover a general development of adult education, the uniqueness of adult education, and adult learners' learning characteristics identified through the research. Then, it will discuss some useful teaching methods according to the result of previous research. These include useful tips, practical orientations, and education settings which apply to specific characteristics of adult learners. This paper will compare different kinds of methods of and discuss which method is more useful for different adults. Help adult learners and instructors clearer, clear understanding of their own learning, teaching their own

characteristic problems and find appropriate adult learning, better and more valuable to help adult learners.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULTS LEARNERS

The spontaneous involvement in organized classes and curriculum settings by adult women and men is called adult education. There are many methods for adults continuing their study, by completing it with guidance through searching in library and various databases or being conducted in academic settings for formal classes. The goals of participating in adult education are also many: adults might want to study something missed in earlier schooling and broaden the practical skills in actual life, so that they can improve their professional performance and better understand themselves and their ability. The first adult education institution was established in the United States, called the Junto, which was founded by Benjamin Franklin and some friends in Philadelphia in 1727. With the development of education and work diversity, the need for adult education was increasing. In an effort to better understand how adults learn, adult learning theories are derived to help theorists and practitioners by providing workable and testable explanations in learning process. These theories seek to explain how the adult learning process.

There are several definitions of the adult learner throughout literature. The purpose is to allow adult learners knowledge and skills of the quality of behavior, adult learners trouble is not that we do not know what, but something had not already know this, so that adults inadvertently do things, cannot be a man. Merriam and Caffarella (1999. p. 70–71) identified the profile of the typical adult learner as being "remarkably consistent: white, middle class, employed, younger, and better educated than the non-participant." From the physiological perspective, adult learners vision loss, hearing loss, memory loss, slow response, thus affecting the learning amount per unit time, requiring instructors to slow down the pace of learning, increase student learning time, according to the specific circumstances of the students were teaching. From a psychological perspective, reasoning ability adult learners comprehension, judgment, reaction life, abstract thinking, the ability to deal with new situations and other

aspects have gradually decreased in order to make adult learners cognitive and learning ability is relatively stable, the instructor should more adult intellectual development, adult learning should be based on past experience. And adults in the community to play a variety of roles, social pressure is greater than other types of learners, often in the learning process, feel the time is not sufficient. Another point worth discussing, adult learning process, will maintain their own values and opinions, when natural methods are challenged, will feel personal attack, we need to guide members of a guide to learn the skills to new ideas. [8]

Adults as a specific group of learners, acquire six unique characteristics as follows (Stephen Lieb, 1991): First, they are autonomous and self-directed. They should be given more freedom to determine what and how they study. On one hand, grown people have more independent decision-making. On the other hand, adults have their own life and responsibilities which require more of their input. The education for adult should be given the autonomy so that learners can adjust the learning patterns more specifically according to their own needs. Second, adults have the accumulation of life experiences and knowledge that contain work-related activities, responsibilities, and earlier education. This characteristic determines the new knowledge should be connected with the existing knowledge and experiences of adults. Third, adults are driven and oriented by goals. They generally have a very specific goal, about either career or life, which they want to achieve or facilitate through education. Fourth, adults' motivation for receiving education is corresponded with their specific career or life need. That is to say, the education they received must be relevant to their interests. Fifth, adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson the most useful for them in their work. Practical skills, interpersonal skills, work-related expertise are generally more welcome than fundamental theories. Last, like all students, adults need to be shown respect, sometimes need even more.[7] Sixty, Adult learning is a kind of problem oriented and purposeful learning. Adult learning is very clear, and the purpose of the study is closely related to the current needs, rather than preparing for their future life. They have the clear awareness of what they want to learn, how extent to learn, and what the learning results. Learning is to apply, and solve the problems in the actual life and work. Most of their learning intention depends on the changing of life and work in the actual world. What you lack is what you need to learn. Therefore, for adult, more clear learning purpose gains higher learning efficiency. At the beginning of the learning process, the adult's mind is not blank. They in the long-term accumulation of learning, living and working in a large amount of knowledge and experience, the knowledge and experience as the background for further study, form the inner resource of their learning. On the choice of learning objective, learning content and learning method, which all influenced by it. Adults choose to participate in what kind of education, training and activities, and learn what kind of education content, and adopt what kind of study way, and evaluate how the result of their learning, which is based on their knowledge experience and life experience. And this available knowledge and life experience can not only conduct adults further their study, but also help adults understand the new information well in the learning process. But on the other

hand they get used to it with their own experience and understanding to judge something new which will be a barrier to accept new things, for they will instinctively reject new things.

Galbraith (1990) said that "adults different from children and youth as learners in many respects." Because of different characteristics compared with other learners, instructors need to use different methods from those of traditional pedagogy which would likely be more effective with them. Compared with other learners, adult learners' lack of flexibility, greater need for a relaxed and pleasant, independent space, you can play your own ideas learning environment. [9]

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULTS LEARNING METHODS

Adult Learning To follow the recent effect, that study and analysis of recent events that most affected; to be appropriate, namely textbooks and teaching to meet student needs; have a motive, that is to meet the students' desire to learn; to have effect in advance, ensure the quality of learning the first lesson; to two-way communication, to keep abreast of student expectations requirements; to multi-sensory learning, take the initiative to overcome the vision, hearing, memory degradation phenomena; to timely feedback, timely inspection and assessment of student learning.

The four different adult learning methods were accelerated learning (Meier, 2000; Molnar, 2001), coaching (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Leat, Lofthouse, & Wilcock, 2006),[5] guided design (Coscarelli & White, 1986; Wales & Stager, 1978), and just-in-time training (Davis, 2005; Rosen, 2005). Each adult learning method constituting the focus on this analysis includes similar features as well as elements unique to each strategy. Accelerated learning, also called suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1978), an adult learning method that includes procedures for creating a relaxed emotional state, an orchestrated and multi-sensory learning environment, and active learner engagement in the learning process (Meier, 2000). According to Hargreaves & Dawe (1990), "Coaching is a...method of transferring skills and expertise from more experienced and knowledgeable practitioners...to less experienced ones" This adult learning method includes procedures for joint planning and goal setting, coach information sharing and modeling, learner information gathering and practicing, analysis of and reflection on the learner's experiences, and coach feedback (Leat et al., 2006). [6] Guided to design was developed to promote critical thinking and self-directed learning (Hancock, Coscarelli, & White, 1983).[4] This adult learning method is characterized by a decision-making and problem solving process that includes procedures for using real world problems for mastering learning content using small-group or team processing and facilitator guidance and feedback (Wales & Stager, 1978). Just-in-time training includes a number of different methods and strategies used in the context of real-life challenges and in response to learner requests for guidance or mentoring (Beckett, 2000).[2] This adult learning method provides individualized, tailored training in response to a request specific to an immediate concern or need (Redding & Kamm, 1999).[8] Experiential learning as the defining feature of adult learning: Because of the habitual ways we draw

meaning from our experiences, and these experiences can become evidence for the self-fulfilling prophecies that stand in the way of critical insight. Uncritically affirm people's histories, stories and experiences which make them under the risk of idealizing and romanticizing. Experiences are neither innocent nor free from the cultural contradictions that inform them. Specific requirements for the learner experience and experience, to experience and feel, from the specific events in the general level of abstraction to feel something for reflection and thinking, to promote universal, rise to the theory, and the theory is willing to try to use the actual circumstances their action plan to the next practice and new learning. Characteristics of adult learning, to focus on practical, adult learning with a strong purpose, namely learning content to be able to work to solve the problems, so learning to pay attention to the timeliness of the content taught; on the other hand, adults in the learning process, instructors should pay attention to their own growth into the adult experience in teaching methods, the guide for adults on their own experience to analyze, optimize, sublimation, and expansion. When learning to meet the adult experience and interests, learning motivation will be stimulated, since this is the end of adult learning.

IV. WHEN WOULD YOU USE WHICH METHOD?

According to the characteristics of adult learners, educators should apply educational theories and approaches in combination with the adults' specific needs. Teachers should make the plan together with adult learners. Their opinions, special needs and conditions are taken into consideration as much as possible. If learners participate actively, teachers should share responsibilities in the process of study (plan, implementation, supervision).

Since adult learners generally have their own unique experiences, Adult experience, learning is a valuable resource, not only for individuals to make use of in the study, but also can take advantage of each other, learn from each other and jointly explore the truth, rich collective understanding. Needs and goals, teacher should help the learners exploit their own experiences and relate these with the new knowledge and skills if the learning process is supposed to be related to and making use of the learner's experiences.

The first method is suggestopedia which is originally applied mainly to foreign language teaching, and it is often claimed that it can teach languages approximately three times as quickly as conventional methods. The biggest advantage about suggestopedia method is that it has a different class setting which makes the students relaxed during the learning process. Methods also decorate the class of posters or something suggestopedia which can make students' mind relax, such as by putting flowers or an aquarium in the corner of the class. By using posters, the students will always learn even if they just look around the classroom. It is aimed to make students more focused on the lesson. The first disadvantage is that it is difficult to be practiced in the undeveloped country, where one class has at least 30-40 students. In such a country, the teacher will find it difficult to control them one by one. The second disadvantage is that the cost of this method will be expensive, so it will be difficult to

be practiced in the poor school or country; therefore, the suggestopedia method is best for teaching languages or small classes.[9]

The second method is coaching which is comprised of command, task, guided discovery, problem solving, interactive, active learning, peer teaching and modeling. Coaching is a learner driven process facilitated by a coach's encouragement and use of his or her knowledge and skills to promote learner understanding and use of newly acquired knowledge and skills. Coaching is conceptualized as a cyclic process that improves knowledge and skills, self-confidence, and collegial relationships as a result of ongoing coaching episodes. The coaching method has many advantages, such as actively involving players in the learning process; enhancing their task master; enhancing their conceptual understanding and promoting both simple (Low-order) and complex (High-order) thinking. The disadvantage is that this method only was used by coaches and trainers. It is difficult for traditional instruction. Different coaching methods focused on the different learning environments.[6]

The third method is guided design. The procedure was first used to teach decision making skills to engineering students (Colvin, Kilmer, & Smith, 1972) but is now widely used in a number of fields that involve decision-making and problem solving (e.g., Goldberg & Shuman, 1984b; Turner & Bechtel, 1998; Yang He, & Drueck hammer, 2001). [3]As a summation of expert overview of the topic, consisting of explanatory text, selected reading resources and follow up material, and activities in which the learner can engage experientially with the subject. Each object stands alone as a discrete learning opportunity, which the learner might hope to complete in one study session. The possibilities of collaborative working include various activities which can establish a synchronous or asynchronous discussion area associated with the objects. The benefits of this adult learning method include higher-order problems solving and meta-cognitive thinking abilities. The first disadvantage of this method is that the teacher should spend much time preparing the materials. The second one is that this method is difficult to manage many small groups of large classes.

The forth method is just-in-time training which is "often conceived as anywhere, anytime learning that is just enough, just for me, and just in time" (Bersin & O'Leonard, 2005). [1] This adult learning method include[s] access to or provision of information needed to improve performance or complete a task, on-the-job use of the information or guidance, and the availability of input from a mentor, supervisor, or coach on an as-needed basis (Bersin & O'Leonard, 2005).[1] The primary outcome of just-in-time training is context specific improvement on knowledge and performance. The advantage of just-in-time is that this method provides learners with key information at the time which is needed, and it can help employees to do more work in less time and learn new tasks quickly. The disadvantage of just-in-time training is that this method needs to use more electronic tools. It is always used in the distance education.

Based on the status of learners, educators should use appropriate approaches. Teachers should examine teaching

theories carefully in order to achieve high efficiency and compatibility. Using theoretical models as a guide, teachers should also apply flexibly. Adult learning activities as a carrier to provide learning tasks; to apply as a standard, focus on practicality; should take development as the goal, to improve the quality of adult learners to benefit as the purpose, to meet the expectations of learners. In addition, those who want to teach in a realistic problem-centered teaching design, to solve practical problems, to defect to the participants as the starting point to define important issues, and actively guide students to correct deficiencies, to improve their knowledge, practical skills to induce adult cognitive desire to meet student demand for new information technology

V. CONCLUSION

At present, adult learners make up a large and growing portion of students in higher education. Instructors should be aware of this trend. As the number of adult learners in the college classroom increases, Compare to teens and children, adults have their unique characteristics as learners. Instructors should understand that the needs, expectations, and experiences of these students may differ from those of "traditional" students. This paper has introduced many characteristics about adult learners and methods, but it is just a beginning. Because of the particularity of its adult learners to learn, often need to be different to other learners learning methods and learning styles, and, in the learning process, we should pay attention to not only the result of learning objectives and learning, should also be Note that communication between instructors and adult learners, both fusion and connection information. In the increasingly rapid development of the information society, adult learners will be growing desire to learn, learning needs will be growing, so we

should actively develop a wide range of learning programs and objectives. According to the different curriculum, instructors can decide to which method is more useful in their class for adult learners, in hopes that every adult learner can achieve a perfect balance of learning.

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