Assessment 3: Informal Learning Report (group project)

Group Members:

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Introduction

This report offers an analysis of informal learning experiences among adults. It is derived from a collaborative effort in coding and analyzing interview data from group members. The objective is to identify recurring themes and patterns in adults learning outside the formal educational contexts. For data management and analysis, we used Atlas.ti and applied a thematic coding method guided by previous research on informal learning.

Methodology

To conduct our analysis, we gathered interview data from group members regarding their informal learning experiences. We questioned their opinions on how they learn outside formal instruction. The questions varied depending on the interviewer and the interviewee. Some of the questions presented: 1) How do you intentionally learn new things outside of formal school? 2) How do you unintentionally learn new things outside of formal school? 3) What would you say is your learning style? 4) Which online platform do you find yourself using the most? 5) How valid or trustworthy would you consider information outside of a formal school setting to be? 6) Which do you prefer: formal school settings or informal independent learning? Follow up with: 7) Why do you think this is so? 8) What was your study method in helping with the retention of information? The collected data was imported into Atlas.ti for coding and analysis.

We employed a thematic coding approach to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data. This approach is consistent with the grounded theory methodology proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which highlights that thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data and is about other qualitative analytic methods that search for themes or patterns. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further and interprets various

aspects of the research topic" (Bruan & Clarke, 2006, p. 80), The collaboration of iterative data collection with the analysis of thematic coding.

> "The advantages of thematic coding method (thematic analysis) are flexibility, relatively easy and quick method to learn, and do, accessibility to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research, results are generally accessible to educated general public, useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators, can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set, can highlight similarities and differences across the data set, can generate unanticipated insights, allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data, can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development." (Bruan & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

In fact, "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." (Bruan & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Initial codes were generated from an early review of the interview transcripts and were later refined through group discussions and consensus-building among members in the course Advanced Using Integrated Software taught by the prominent figure in educational technology leadership Christopher Shamburg.

Themes of Informal Learning

Our analysis revealed several key themes related to informal learning:

1. **Experiential Learning**

A significant theme that emerged was the crucial role of hands-on experience in promoting learning. Participants shared how they learned by experimenting, solving problems, and engaging in activities that required practical application. This aligns with the idea of learning by doing, which underscores the importance of experience in constructing knowledge. Experiential Learning emphasizes gaining knowledge through hands-on experience and observation.

2. **Social Learning**

Many participants emphasized the importance of social interaction in their learning experiences. They frequently learned through discussions with friends, colleagues, or mentors.

Sharing knowledge and collaborative problem-solving were identified as essential elements of informal learning. Social learning emphasizes the importance of interaction with others in the learning process.

3. Informal Learning

Informal learning emerged as a key theme. Participants shared that they acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes through everyday experiences rather than structured educational settings. The Participants also shared their learned interactions with their environment, hobbies, or by participating in social activities. They mentioned learning from family, friends, colleagues, media, or personal experiences. Informal Learning represents the broad theme of acquiring knowledge outside a formal structured environment.

4. Professional Development

Our analysis revealed the interest in professional development among the participants. They are interested in the continuous pursuit of knowledge, and skills to stay updated in their field and excel in their role. Professional Development highlights the overall goal of improving and advancing professional skills.

5. Formal Learning vs. Informal Learning

An important theme that emerged was comparing the potential combination of both learning environments (Formal Learning and Informal Learning) by the participants.

Levels of Measurement

The themes presented within this body of work are participant-produced documents. They all have a consistent level of measurement that emerges in the variables. The variables all fit into a nominal measurement system. For example, experimenting, solving problems, and engaging, are variables of experiential Learning; discussions with friends, colleagues, or mentors, are variables of social learning; learned interactions with their environment, hobbies, or participating in social activities are variables of Informal Learning; and the pursuit of knowledge, and skills are variables of professional development. “The empirical rule for assigning categories of variables is 1) they must be exhaustive and 2) they must have mutual exclusivity. All the

variables stated above fit into the categorical context of informal learning. Also, the variables have mutual exclusivity by community building, (Singleton & Straits, 2005, pg.86).

Conclusion

This collaborative analysis of adults' informal learning experiences has provided important insights into the complex nature of learning beyond formal educational environments. Themes of experiential learning, social learning, informal learning, and professional development highlight diverse and dynamic methods adults use to acquire knowledge and skills. Further research is needed to investigate the connection between informal and formal learning as well as the role of technology in shaping informal learning practices. Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of the factors influencing informal learning and educational policy in creative strategies that support and enhance lifelong learning opportunities.

Article Cited Based on Our Decision

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

Singleton R. A. & Straits B. C. (2005), Approaches to Social Research, Oxford University Press, NY, 4th Edition