

Adolescent Learning vs. Adult Learning Reflection

Having explored multiple resources, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are considerations to make when designing adult learning as compared to designing learning experiences for adolescents. In particular, three points have given me key elements to leverage in planning for adult learning.

Perhaps the most important distinction between adolescent and adult learners is the transition adults make into fully independent individuals. As Caruth & Caruth (2013) explain, through the natural course of growing up, adults adopt a level of self-conceptualization; an ability to direct and own their learning, and a desire to have that ability respected and acknowledged. This acknowledgement implies the learning process is a mutually designed experience between both the teacher and the learner (Caruth, 2013).

Another major consideration to account for when designing adult learning is the amount of experience the average adult brings to the table as compared to most children. Having lived longer, an adult brings that knowledge and experience as well as their corresponding values and beliefs to the table every time they engage in learning (Tate, 2012). Tate highlights the importance of acknowledging that these vast and wide ranging experiences “makes the adult a valuable asset to the learning environment, however, it also makes a group of adult learnings more heterogeneous than a group of younger students” (2012, p. 4). This is a point that cannot be ignored when planning for adult learning.

A final key consideration regarding the difference between adolescent and adult learners is acknowledging the ego of the adult learner more deeply. Adults may come to a learning experience feeling hesitant or uncomfortable acknowledging the gaps in their expertise, while

children may feel it more acceptable that they have a lot yet to learn. This hesitation on the part of adults might manifest itself in the form of behaviors such as a reluctance to ask questions or even agitation in the face of having their learning gaps revealed (Marshall, 2015).

Thinking of these three key differences from my learning, there are a few actions I would take in the design of adult learning. To address the self-concept of adult learners, I would absolutely leave room for plenty of self-directed learning. I would also engage in a great deal of insight gathering about the needs and wants of the adult learners I was working with in order to co-design learning experiences to the best of my ability. In recognition of the wider range of experiences adult learners bring to the table, I would similarly do my best to engage in constructivist minded strategies that leverage those experiences. That said, I would also go into any adult learning experience expecting beliefs to be entrenched, and quite possibly, a barrier to change. Given the content, it might be beneficial to engage in strategies to bring mental models to the surface if I feel they might impede on an adult learner's ability to engage. Lastly, to account for the embarrassment or discomfort adult learners may feel having their learning gaps revealed, I would be very aware of how I am developing a safe environment to ask questions and be vulnerable. This could take the form of developing group norms that everyone agrees to uphold or offering alternative ways for teachers to articulate their needs that are not as open to public scrutiny (e.g. allowing questions to be asked via email).

References

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