

## **Attuning Your Philosophical Position on Adult Education**

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**Interview Transcript:** [https://otter.ai/u/R2UW3Gc3cnWlbgpyilEB4yQ6-cs?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/R2UW3Gc3cnWlbgpyilEB4yQ6-cs?utm_source=copy_url)

**Interview Summary:** [https://otter.ai/u/R2UW3Gc3cnWlbgpyilEB4yQ6-cs?utm\\_source=copy\\_url](https://otter.ai/u/R2UW3Gc3cnWlbgpyilEB4yQ6-cs?utm_source=copy_url)

## **Adult Learning Setting and Background**

Eric is an adult educator with a background in youth ministry and facilitation. He works for Eagle Village in Ewart, Michigan, a nonprofit organization. His title is Vice President of Prevention and Intervention Programs. Eagle Village receives funding to support Michigan Foster Care programs in this rural area of Michigan; Eric is in charge of facilitating the adult learning necessary for their residential care staff as well as other groups who desire to be trained in trauma-informed care. His training for his staff versus guest groups that come to learn about trauma-informed care differs based on audience and use of the information. During our time together he specifically described a program he facilitated for the staff of a private, scholarship-based, religiously oriented school for impoverished and marginalized youth in the Grand Rapids area. Eric's worldviews are shaped by his time as a college pastor, a missionary in the Dominican Republic, a foster parent, and his experience as a camp director for a religiously-based summer camp (Eric, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024).

## **Interviewee's Beliefs about Learning**

Eric believes that adult education and formal K-12 education are nearly identical, aside from extended lived experiences and the agency adults have. He does not differentiate between andragogy and pedagogy, because his learners will be able to use the pedagogical activities modeled in practical ways. By describing his design of the program we discussed, it was clear that while he valued the goals of the guest group leader, he already had preconceived ideas about the content the group should be interested in learning. This points to an underlying assumption

that as the instructor or facilitator, Eric values his knowledge and desires to help others understand what *he* is passionate about. This assumption leads me to believe that Eric is a somewhat instructor-centered facilitator as described in Kerka's 2001 paper on the differences between adult and child learners (p. 3). However, he did point out often that the practical activities he used and the questions he asked did guide his instruction and facilitation of the content being taught (trauma-informed care). This idea leads me to believe that while he may position himself as the expert and learning as transactional, he also values participation and directs adult learners to engage with content in meaningful ways. He described promoting connection and movement through using a juggling activity to get to know his learners while modeling for activities they could use in their context as teachers but was not explicit about his modeling because he prefers learners to realize it on their terms. Eric values experiential learning and desires adult learners to come to conclusions on their own, yet he also described a challenge that he believed adults already think they know enough of what he is teaching. He does emphasize that he believes in the self-directed learning that Brookfield (1995) describes, but is seemingly disconnected from the methods required to create self-directed learning as described in Berder's 2001 study (Kerka, 2001, p.3). He also expressed that there is a general disengagement in adult learners, but did not link it to the fact that in this case, it is a formal, forced educational experience for work, or the motivation of the learner, which deeply impacts the process of learning itself.

## My Philosophies on Learning

Personally, as primarily an educator of children (especially young children) I still feel my ideas on adult education are developing. In my undergraduate educational experience, I had the opportunity to lead a college club group of around 20 women, advise my peers as a Resident Assistant, and be a Career Peer Advisor with MSU Career Services. These adult education experiences as a facilitator, though deeply impacted by COVID-19, have shaped my views on *why* and *how* adults learn. I find that adults are motivated heavily by earning potential to learn- which is even why I am pursuing my Master's degree. I also find that adults require more explicit instruction than children- because it feels more honest and valuable to them than expecting them to "figure it out." In reading, reflecting, and interviewing Eric I also found that I could relate to the disengaged feelings he described receiving from his participants as I feel that way often when I sit through my district's professional development opportunities that center student learning rather than practical teaching application (that would in turn center student learning). Pedagogical methods, even for the purpose of modeling them to use later, *do* disengage adult learners because they are not cognitively appropriate. I like the idea that andragogy is a spectrum, and every learner of every age falls in a different spot of preference on the amount of teacher instruction (Merriam, 2013, p. 57). I do not fully believe that *why* they are learning matters as much as the fact that they have a specific application in mind and that the delivery of the learning needs to support the application of the knowledge learned. This does require facilitators to know their learners, center their learners, and include them in *how* things should be learned. Adult educators need to ask good, specific questions of their learners. Another belief I hold is that while as educators we can try to create an informal learning experience in

hopes of deepening learning, if it is happening in a formal setting this will be nearly impossible to recreate because the motivations for informal learning and formal learning are completely different from one another. Adults require straightforward methods of learning in formal settings that are predictable, inclusive of their knowledge, sensitive to their identity markers, challenging, and flexible. I hope that the ideas I hold and have described here continue to grow and change as I reflect on adult learning. It is not my area of expertise, and as a lifelong learner, I am committed to the reflective process required to be a successful learner.

## References

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Adult Learning: An Overview*.

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