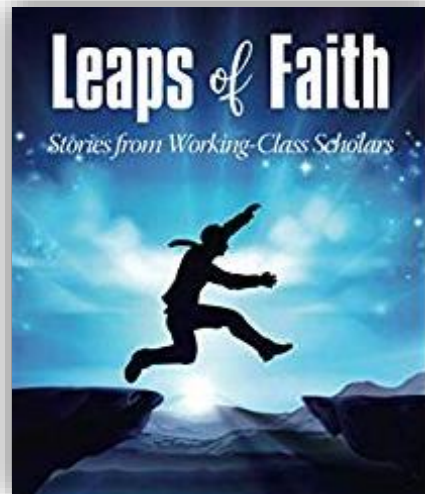




43rd Annual Conference Proceedings



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Edited By

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What is AHEA?

The purpose of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) is to help institutions of higher education develop and sustain learning environments and programs suitable for adults.

AHEA does this by:

- Providing a forum for professional educators to share resources and information about alternative degree programs on a national and international level.
- Stimulating practitioner research, thereby contributing to the integration of theory and practice and promoting the improved quality of our efforts.
- Serving as a vehicle for cooperative consultation and collaboration among professionals in the field.
- Integrating the interests and concerns from a variety of areas within adult higher education including distance, international, and liberal education.
- Promoting rights of adult students.
- Influencing institutional and public policies concerning the principles of quality practice applied to adult education.
- Promoting cultural diversity and multicultural perspectives and maintaining that commitment through the incorporation of such perspectives into the policies, procedures, and practices of alternative degree programs for adults.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present to you the Proceedings of the 43rd annual conference of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance (AHEA), held at the University of Central Florida in March 2019. We wish to extend special thanks to the AHEA Board of Directors, members, and contributors. Without their support, this publication would not be possible.

To the AHEA Board of Directors, thank you for your continuous efforts to support mission of AHEA through your outreach, service, and perseverance. To the members of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance, you are the reason we do what we do, and you are the backbone of AHEA's growth, networking, and collaboration. Thank you for your membership and participation in our organization and at our conference each year.

To those who contributed papers for these Proceedings, thank you for contributing your research, theory, and practice to our collective knowledge. Through your work, collected in this document, we can strengthen our efforts to educate and serve adult learners in a variety of contexts. We appreciate your service to the larger community of professors, educators, and practitioners.

As AHEA continues to grow, we are always seeking new ways to contribute our shared endeavor of educating adults. Your feedback and ideas for expanding our impact matters; we look forward to hearing from you. Enjoy your read of the variety of engaging topics related to Adult and Higher Education.

Thank You,

Kemi, Joann, and Lauren

Letter from AHEA President

Thank you for your interest in the Proceedings of the 43rd annual conference of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance. We met at the University of Central Florida and the Morgridge International Reading Center to explore this year's theme: "Leaps of Faith: Stories from Working-Class Scholars."

Our time together allowed us to explore this theme as graduate students, faculty, administrators, and practitioners. During the conference, we had the opportunity to hear about widely varying approaches to the best practices related the intersection of higher education and working-class students, scholars, and practitioners. Through these proceedings, you can join this conversation!

Make plans to join us for next year's conference, which is held every year in March. Find more information at www.ahea.org

Thank you!

Kathy Penno, AHEA President, 2017-2019

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How Does Experimental Learning Increase Skills and Knowledge Acquisition and Retention in the Non-Traditional Adult Learner?

David Antico

Abstract

In today's educational and workforce settings, the desire is for students to not only have "book knowledge" but also the ability to implement that knowledge into skills and abilities. Those desires are often met with decreasing time and money in order to help foster those knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA). Experimental Learning is a critical learning step to bridge that gap. In high-stakes settings, like healthcare and military education, where non-traditional learners are often found, experimental learning can help build the confidence and KSAs, ensuring skills and knowledge acquisition and retention in non-traditional adult learners. Experimental learning is an avenue to ensure non-traditional adult learners are able to put into practice knowledge learned to develop sound and critical skills and abilities.

Keywords: *Experimental Learning, Healthcare Education, Military Medicine*

As the demand for top-notch graduates and employees continues to increase, while budgets, training and education time shorten, we are continuously looking for ways to maximize a students' education and training. To help do so, experimental learning—specifically utilizing modeling and simulation—to increase skill and knowledge acquisition and retention in healthcare and military education is becoming more common. Increasingly, the overuse of platforms such as Blackboard are solely used to determine student success. To determine if the use of experimental learning was effective in healthcare education, a literature review on the use of simulation (high or low fidelity) for student acquisition of medical knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) was conducted.

Literature Review

The background of the problem is reflected in the research, which has demonstrated the need to utilize simulation (high-fidelity) for healthcare education, as well as the gap in research in this area. The literature showed the use of low- and high-fidelity in healthcare education but lacked formal research to support those uses. Most of the data for the use of simulation were anecdotal findings and outcomes.

Throughout the literature, there were several recurring themes that emerged. These topics include the benefit of high-fidelity simulation over low-fidelity simulation, the lack of research in the benefits of high-fidelity simulation, and the lack of consistent use or frequent use. The studies that were examined were a combination of meta-analysis, quasi-experimental study, systematic review, qualitative, and quantitative research methods. These broad research studies have yielded promising results, a way ahead, as well as identifying areas of improvement in literature and practice.

Several studies show there is a growing use and need for simulation (high-fidelity), especially in the healthcare, and other high-risk/stakes professions (Boyde, Cooper, Putland, Stanton, Harding, Learmont, & Nicholls, 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2012; Cook, Hatala, Brydges, Zendejas, Szostek, Wang, & Hamstra, 2011; DeForest, Blackman, Alex, Reeves, Mora, Pere, & Walrath, 2018; McGaghie, Issenberg, Cohen, Barsuk, & Wayne, 2011; Perkins & Beekley, 2017; Zapko, Ferranto, Blasiman, & Shelestak, 2018). This type of hands on critical thinking-type training can be tied to higher retention of knowledge, skills, and abilities (Cant & Cooper, 2017; DeForest et al., 2018; Nauman, Bowley, Midwinter, Walker, & Pallister, 2016; Tivener & Gloe, 2015; Zinsmaster & Vliem, 2016). Successful use of high-fidelity simulation has shown to build confidence to participants who might otherwise only encounter a similar situation for the first time in real life, thereby decreasing their ability to perform and act as desired or trained to (Beekley, 2012; Cant & Cooper, 2017; Boyde et al., 2018; McGaghie et al., 2011; Perkins & Beekley, 2012; Tivener & Gloe, 2015; Zapko et al., 2018).

Many of the studies looked at healthcare professionals, such as nurses, doctors, dentists, athletic trainers, and other allied health professionals (Boyde et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2011; DeForest et al., 2018; Tivener & Gloe, 2015; Zapko et al., 2018). There were minimal studies completed on military medicine, pre-hospital, or combat medicine training and simulation (American College of Surgeons, 2016; DeForest et al., 2018; Military Health System, 2018; Perkins & Beekley, 2012). A lack of literature in the military medicine sector revealed a current gap in the literature and practice, despite current use and dedication to it from these communities of practice.

Another trend in the research and in practice is that lack of consistency and frequency of the use of simulation, including high-fidelity simulation. Several studies have shown that high-fidelity simulation is being used to some extent, but it is often done sporadically and haphazardly, leaving key learning objectives missed, not touched upon, or negatively reinforced (Boyde et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; DeForest et al., 2018; Stamper, Jones, Thompson, 2008; Zinsmaster & Vleim, 2016). There was also significant inconsistency amongst the studies that were reviewed in the areas of clinical topics, modes, designs, learner groups, and outcome measurements (Boyde et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2012; Cook et al., 2011; DeForest et al., 2018; McGaghie et al., 2011; Mumann et al., 2016; Perkins & Beekley, 2017; Stamper et al., 2008; Tivener & Gloe, 2015; Zapko et al., 2018; Zinsmaster & Vliem, 2016). Reasons for these results included the lack of dedicated staff, support, or services to augment the training (Boyde, et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; Zapko et al., 20018; Zinsmaster & Vleim, 2016). There was also not a push to utilize these services unless something bad happened in the healthcare field, and it became more of an afterthought (Boyde, et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; Zapko et al., 20018; Zinsmaster & Vleim, 2016).

The literature has also identified several common gaps, either in research or practice. One of the gaps that was identified was in the timeframe of the conducted studies and re-assessment of the skills. Previous studies are either short in duration, have a small sample size, or only examine a niche part of medical or nursing training (Boyde et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; DeForset et al., 2018; Tivener & Gloe, 2015; Zapko et al., 20018; Zinsmaster & Vleim, 2016). There are also gaps in the methods for the studies were conducted, some used written pre-, post-, and retention tests, where others just used demonstrated abilities at the time of simulation and shortly after (Boyde, et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; Zapko et al., 20018; Zinsmaster & Vleim,

2016). Most studies were done using qualitative methods, finding attitudes, feelings, confidence, and satisfaction, leaving only a few using quantitative methods. As there is a gap in research and practice; several studies suggested that a more detailed, large, and statistical-based study needs to be done to help promote the use of simulation; at the same time, these studies stated that anecdotal evidence already supports the move (Boyde, et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; Zapko et al., 20018; Zinsmaster & Vleim, 2016).

There are studies looking at low-fidelity simulation that are more than 15 years old. They only promote the use of “dummies,” “Rescue Randy’s,” and so on, and suggest a time where simulation materials be more lifelike and more able to provide a better learning experience for the student. The studies that did mention low-fidelity simulation suggested its use in settings where high-fidelity simulators were not available or could not be taken; they may also be useful in basic or static simulation in entry-level or basic courses (Boyde, et al., 2018; Cant & Cooper, 2017; Zapko et al., 20018; Zinsmaster & Vleim, 2016).

All the studies suggest more research is needed to validate this strategy, but weak evidence supports the frequency and routine use of simulation in all areas that require maintenance or acquisition of medical skills. Despite the lack of research in military medicine, the literature review would suggest that this skill is a critical element to learning.

The writer believes the current research does favorably support the utilization of simulation to influence the acquisition and retention of KSAs of the adult learner in healthcare and military settings. With those generalities and anecdotal (or weak) evidence, there is a firm basis to implement the use of simulation in healthcare and military medical training.

Theoretical Framework

Experimental Learning Theory is the theory of making sense of experiences, which can be supported and guided by the Adult Learning Theory by Malcom Knowles (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Knowles’ five Assumptions of Adult Learners and four Principles of Andragogy, coupled with Constructivism and Cognitive Apprenticeship Phase Theory provide the foundation and support for implementation experimental learning in the classroom (Merriam et al., 2007).

Conclusion

The implementation of experimental learning activities and practices are, and continue, to be a vital aspect of any educational program or course. It makes sense that putting students in the element they are preparing for can increase anxiety and allow them to answer questions in a safe, controlled setting. This will build confidence and experience and help ensure a successful adult learner. Failure to do so decreases confidence and productivity, while increasing time on task and re-training or learning of knowledge. This deliberate use and implementation are reciprocal. When students are more confident in the knowledge and its application to the real world, they continue to graduation, then graduate as a confident and competent assets to the workforce. This leads to a program that is valued and sought after by both students and faculty, which in turn leads to a better experience for the non-traditional adult learner, setting them up for future

success. Non-traditional and traditional adult learners alike benefit from experimental learning practices and experiences and should be integrated and implemented at every opportunity.

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Investigating Gender Exclusivity in the Military using CHAT

Kyle Bellue

Abstract

This paper examines the potential causes of gender exclusion and the tension women face within the military today by drawing upon Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to examine the interaction of mediating tools within the military, as well as cultural and historical factors, that inhibit gender inclusivity. Using this theory, contradictory elements within the activity system of gender inclusivity will emerge to spotlight areas of future research into women's activity in the military and the role they play as an underrepresented part of the organization. This will hopefully lead to finding areas of expansive transformation regarding how women learn and survive in the male-dominated working environment of the military.

Keywords: *Military, Gender, CHAT*

Although opportunities for women have greatly increased over the past several decades, barriers still exist for women who serve and lead within the military today (Carreiras, 2006; Maung, Nilsson, Berkel, & Kelly, 2017; Morral, Gore, & Schell, 2015; Turchik, Bucossi, & Kimerling, 2014). Exposing these barriers requires first shining a spotlight on women and observe their activity within the organization. This paper looks at the potential causes of gender exclusion and the tension that women face within the military today by drawing upon Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to examine the interaction of mediating tools within the military, as well as cultural and historical factors that inhibit gender inclusivity. From this, I then employ CHAT to spotlight potential contradictory elements within the activity system of gender inclusivity to determine areas of future research into women's activity in the military and the role they play as the underrepresented part of the organization. This will hopefully lead to finding areas of expansive transformation regarding how women learn and survive in the male-dominated working environment of the military.

Background and Problem

While the military has worked diligently to establish policies that enforce equality and accommodation for women in the military, women continue to experience bias in the workplace, sexual harassment and assault because of their gender (Keller, Hall, & Matthews, 2018). This review attempts to answer how military women, who are in the vast minority, participate and contribute to the construction of knowledge and culture as an underrepresented group within the male-dominated organization of the military.

Culture

Culture remains a very powerful and influential force within an organization's structure and can have a tremendous influence on the beliefs, values and standards of that organization (Schien, 2010; Tierney, 1988). To get to the heart of how an organization operates, one cannot neglect to examine the organizational culture that is accepted and nurtured. However, within this culture

can lie tensions and disagreements from underrepresented groups that may go undiscussed and unnoticed by the majority. These minorities may feel the need to simply go along with the majority culture in order to fit in and survive. William Tierney (1988) observed this while interviewing underrepresented subjects recently hired as faculty at an institute of higher education: “When they hire someone here, they don’t want only someone who can do the job, but someone who will also fit in with the personality of the place” (p. 11). Therefore, a tense silence caused by culture conformity may be a learned behavior for some underrepresented groups who do not believe they fit within the culture established by the majority.

Gender Performance

Melissa Herbert (1998) described another reaction caused by the pressures of culture conformity utilized by women in the military. In her book she observed how women manage and perform their gender within the military’s male-dominated organization. Herbert’s assertions lean heavily on Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) who stated that gender is a “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (p. 126) within society. Their belief is that gender is socially created and can therefore be altered given differing societal and organizational expectations and situations. Herbert’s work also leans heavily on Joan Acker’s (1990) identification of gendered organizations.

Herbert (1998) studied roughly 300 female military members through interviews and questionnaires in the 1990s. She posited that the military was indeed a gendered organization, and this phenomenon had an impact on how women behaved from a gender performance management standpoint. Her main thesis dealt with the phenomenon of females operating within the male-dominated military organization who were routinely forced to make gender decisions and negotiate the fine line between acting “too feminine” and “too masculine” in order to be accepted, respected, and not penalized as the underrepresented gender within that organization. Through her interviews, she identified that 70% of the female military members who participated in the study admitted to employing one or more feminine strategies to ensure their male counterparts knew they were female. To a much lesser degree, Herbert found that 13% of her participants felt the need to employ masculine strategies, while 17% balanced the art of employing both feminine and masculine strategies (p.103). The feminine strategies employed ranged from their choice of wearing feminine uniforms (e.g., skirts instead of pants), lack of use of profanity, lack of socializing with males, and making public their romantic relationships.

The results from this study more than 20 years ago lead to interesting questions today. Do women in the military today believe gender performances are still necessary in order to survive and thrive in their environment? Even though the military has improved its policies over the past 20 years to accommodate, protect, and value women who serve in the military, gender bias, sexual harassment, and assault continue to be key factors that drive women away from the military (Turchik et al., 2014). These results appear to lead to other elements within the military leading to this contradiction. Therefore, CHAT may be a useful model to examine and identify contradictory elements hindering the objective of gender inclusivity in the military.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Background

To answer these questions, I will look at CHAT to examine potential contradictory areas that exist between the gender-inclusive military policies and continued gender-exclusive activities within the military. Specifically, I use the activity theory model as developed by Yrjö Engström (2014). Engström has significantly contributed to the contemporary understanding of activity theory and views its evolution in three generational developments (Engstrom, 1999, 2014). His model incorporates the Vygotskyan concept of the subject—object relationship mediated by tools, signs, and instruments, and factors in the collective activity of rules, communities, and division of labor within the structure of human activity to provide meaning to that activity and produce an outcome.

Figure 1 illustrates Engstrom's (1987) triad structure of the activity system. Engstrom's (2001) activity model is also summarized by five main principles. First, the activity system is the primary unit of analysis and, therefore, activity of the subject toward the object is influenced by the contributions of all of the elements within that activity. Second, each activity system is multi-voiced and has different perspectives and interests. Third, each activity system has historicity and only transforms over lengthy periods of time. Fourth, contradictions exist through tensions within the elements of the system. Lastly, these contradictions can lead to change and expansive transformation of the entire activity system.

By examining all elements within the activity system to include the impact that rules, community, and the distribution of work and power have within the military to foster (or inhibit) gender-inclusivity, I hope to reveal points of contradiction that can serve as an indicator for expansive transformation and learning within this activity system.

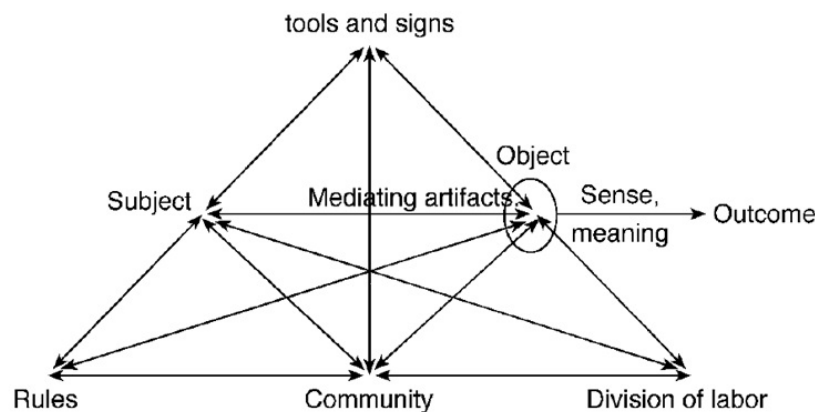


Figure 1. The Structure of the Human Activity System (Engström, 1987, p. 78).

CHAT and Women in the Military

To examine the activity of gender inclusivity within the military, I first assign the woman officer as the subject. In CHAT, the subject is the human agent(s) whose perspective drives the analysis of the activity. One could argue that in order to address the complete issue of gender-inclusivity all women in uniform must be included. . While this is true, a better place to start will be with

officers, whose placement in leadership positions can influence the activity. Next, I assign the Object as “becoming gender-inclusive.” The object directs the activity and is the primary motive of the subject. Engström (1997) described the subject as the “raw material” or “problem space” (p. 67) that the subject is steadily changing into an outcome. Creating and making meaning of a gender-inclusive workplace certainly fits the monumental task that military women face today. There is a sense of unfinished work between the subject and object as tools and community constantly provide voice and parameters to help the subject make sense of the object. The tools are the means by which the subject carries out the activity. In this example, tools can be language in the workplace, uniforms, and artifacts such as squadron emblems and morale uniform patches that are derogatory toward women and have been since banned in the military. These tools serve to mediate the activity between the subject and object and are culturally situated or a “repository of culture” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 203).

Rules are the cultural norms and policies that further direct the subject and mediate between the subject and the community. In this example, the rules are policies and cultural norms that both formally and informally dictate accepted behaviors. All officers, both actively in the military and retired, are considered “community” in this example. Since the community shares the same object-motive as the subject in the CHAT model, female officers who encourage and persuade the subject to continue working toward the objective. The division of labor refers to both vertical and horizontal separations of responsibilities and hierarchies within the system. In this case, the vertical separations are the hierarchal structures of the military, while the horizontal separations refer to the division of tasks between officers of the same rank.

Lastly, the outcome is the intended or unintended results of the activity. One outcome in this example could be the inclusion of women into more leadership positions, higher ranks, and combat positions historically reserved for males. However, one unintended outcome may be continued gender exclusiveness, gender performance, and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Conclusion and Future Studies

From these assignments into the CHAT model, I get the design depicted in Figure 2. I can begin to examine potential contradictive elements within the activity model that can direct the discovery of areas of expansive transformation regarding how females in the military learn and survive in male-dominated working environments. This will require further research to validate, but initially I can see three potential contradictions to be investigated further. First, there is a potential contradiction between the “multi-voicedness” of the community and the subject. There may be competing dialogue and narratives within the community that cause structural tensions between the community and the subject. These may include voices from retired male officers advocating for gender exclusivity while retired women officers advocate for the opposite. Second, there may be a contradiction between the mediating tools and the subject. Given the separate standards (grooming, uniform, physical fitness, etc.) for men and women, this has the potential to cause contradictions as the subject mediates toward the motive of gender inclusivity equipped with tools that are gendered.

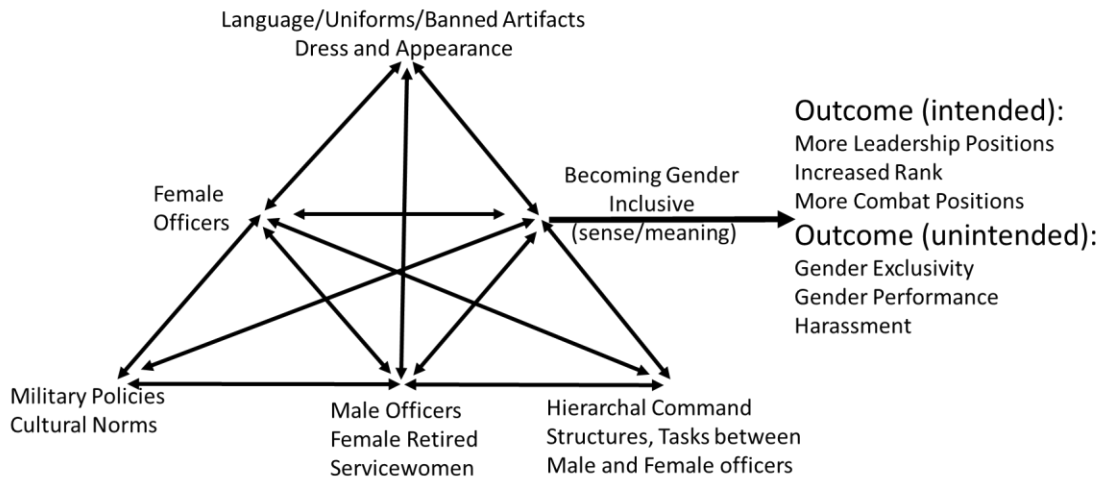


Figure 2. The general activity system of gender inclusivity in the military

Lastly, there may be tension and contradiction between the policies and cultural norms and the subject. The military has worked to create a more gender-inclusive environment for women from opening combat positions to accommodating women’s lifestyle and family decisions. However, has the culture changed enough within the male-dominated organization to accommodate, accept, and even applaud these policy changes?

The purpose of this paper was to examine the potential causes of gender exclusion that still exist within the military today. I drew upon Cultural-Historical Activity Theory to examine mediating tools, as well as cultural and historical factors, within the military that may foster or inhibit the activity of gender inclusivity within the military. I then attempted to inspect the relationships within the structure to spotlight potential contradictory elements within the activity model that could lead to areas of learning and expansive transformation regarding how females in the military learn and survive in male-dominated working environments.

For future studies, I intend to conduct a qualitative analysis of female officers attending the three schools within Air University: Squadron Officer College (SOC), Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), and Air War College (AWC). The data collection will consist of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The intent of the analysis is to observe and determine if women in the military today still believe gender performances are necessary for survival, learning, and contribution within the organization and to determine what factors inhibit gender inclusivity within the military. From this analysis, I will be able to validate the contradiction assumptions made above and will be able to pinpoint how women in the military learn and survive in male-dominated working environments.

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Democracy and Education: Dewey and Adult Learners Today

Xenia Coulter and Alan Mandell

In our conference presentation, we sought to emphasize that in his well-known book, *Democracy and Education* (1916), John Dewey's goal was to describe an education appropriate to a democracy. Certainly, he also believed that that his approach was a more humane way of teaching and, as many have argued since (e.g., Paley, 1992; Rogers, 1969, 1983), a more effective way for students to learn. However, his primary goal was to argue for a form of education that allowed students to be their own free agents in learning. (For a contemporary restatement of this viewpoint, see also Biesta, 2017.) Although he wrote about education for children, his ideas are easily applied to education at all stages of life. (Dewey is sometimes credited with being one of the first to advocate "life-long" learning; see e.g., Cross-Durant, 1987.)

As we think about Dewey's philosophy of education, two key components stand out:

- his emphasis upon creating independent and free-thinking individuals who, working with others, are flexible enough to respond productively to new developments in the modern age and
- his determination to maximize diversity by supporting individual student interests, talents, and purposes.

In other words, he strongly opposed a model of learning that assumes information must be poured into empty brains. And, he stood firmly against standardization as an appropriate goal or outcome in education. As presented in the first few chapters of *Democracy and Education* (and also in his later book, *Experience and Education*), he uses the insights he gained from observing informal learning in everyday life as the basis for the school-based pedagogy that he proposed.

Today, many writers have noted that a substantial number of American citizens seem to be showing an increasing preference for autocracy in our government (e.g., Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Rebell, 2018). We would argue that this preference may be due, at least in part, to our failure to educate students in the ways proposed by Dewey. Surely, as Dewey would understand it, our current educational purposes and methods—with their emphasis upon learning from lectures and textbooks, or pre-written online courses, in order to reproduce established knowledge on standardized tests—are more in tune with an autocratic society than a democratic one.

Most students today graduate from high school poorly prepared to be effective participants in a democracy. They have not been taught to follow their own train of thought, to entertain doubt or uncertainty, or to appreciate the value of diverse perspectives that inevitably emerge when they work with each other. It is not simply that students are insufficiently educated; they have been taught the wrong skills. Without doubt, they been thoroughly exposed to vast quantities of information, but when they graduate, instead of welcoming the challenges of the future, they desperately look for the security of authority in an already-known world. Thus, college instructors who do want to encourage critical thinking, open-mindedness, imaginative approaches to ill-defined or as yet undetermined problems find themselves being forced into trying to undo 12 years of prior education rather than what they may have expected to do—to strengthen students' capacity to think for themselves.

Older college students, however, are quite interesting. They also come to college similarly anticipating that they will learn about the right authorities to look to in obtaining information they are expected to ingest and feed back onto tests. Yet as adults, many years out of school, they have been learning on their own to make decisions and choices, to acquire skills needed at home or at work, to improve life for others, and to contribute to their communities. In short, in the many years out of school, adults typically have acquired an impressive set of work skills along with personal knowledge of importance in their lives. They have reared children, made a living, managed a household, dealt with complicated human relationships, all of which have resulted in a considerable amount of knowledge they acquired on their own and considerable skill in dealing with problems, raising questions and assessing options.

Those of us who have worked in the area of prior learning assessments (PLA; where students request academic credits for what they learned outside the academy) are regularly impressed with the depth and breadth of our adult students' non-academic knowledge (e.g., Smith, 2010, 2018). Most relevant to our argument and presentation, we have also noted that when they are encouraged to seek credit for this knowledge (the extent of which they often fail to fully appreciate), they are far readier to approach their academic studies in the ways Dewey recommends than are traditional-aged students without this extended period of learning on their own.

Thus, it seems to us, given the current rather rigid state of education (e.g., its domination by textbook companies, testing industries, government bureaucracies, and demands for credentials), that the best place to begin rethinking current-day educational practices, which we believe may be helping to undermine our democratic institutions, should be with our adult college students.

Conference Approach

We began our session by giving a brief description of Dewey's philosophy of education and his belief that schools should reflect the society in which the education they offer takes place. We also noted the extent to which our current methods of education seem better suited for autocratic societies and that, alarmingly, many our citizens today do indeed seem drawn to autocratic leaders (or at least leaders who claim to know the truth). We then asked the adult educators in attendance whether our current methods of teaching need to be reconsidered. We posed the following two basic questions:

- Can we as teachers break away from the standardization so prevalent in colleges today at least with our older students?
- Could prior learning assessment be used more intentionally as a tool for helping students recognize the value of their natural learning methods and increase their appreciation of freedom in learning as critically important in a democratic society?

Conference Outcomes

Approximately 20 teachers and graduate students participated in the discussion. All were deeply concerned about the current challenges to democracy in everyday life; most were receptive to the important role of education; and at least half of those present were eager to share their relevant

teaching experiences. Six or seven teachers described in detail some of the innovative methods they introduced to either encourage students to think creatively about the subject area, to be substantively involved in shaping the course itself, to identify their own relevant interests and experiences, or to work collaboratively on open-ended issues. Without exception, these examples were drawn from face-to-face classes. The few online courses that were mentioned were “blended” versions; thus, it may be that a focus on independent thinking is most easily accomplished in brick-and-mortar classrooms. For the most part, the classes described were at the advanced (or graduate) level, and the students were older.

Surprisingly, no one took up prior learning or its assessment as a potential area for intentionally advancing student independence and freedom of thought. Time was too short to investigate reasons for ignoring this topic. We can speculate, however, that those present were not personally involved in or knowledgeable about PLA. At most institutions, the award of credit for prior knowledge is largely a process for undergraduates, and many of the conference attendees represented graduate programs. Also, it is our impression (and somewhat contrary to our own personal experience) that prior learning requests are increasingly the outcome of a course taught by an expert in the field; thus, the only individual faculty who would come to know about this process are those few called upon to do formal assessments. It’s also the case that in many institutions, PLA itself has been shaped around standardized exams, thus undercutting its openness to student efforts to identify knowledge they have gained on their own. If these speculations are correct, we should not have been surprised to find no one interested in pursuing this possible area. One of us has argued elsewhere (Coulter, 2017) that if prior learning assessments could encompass any form of college-level learning and include all faculty in its assessment, the college itself—and faculty attitudes toward the nature of knowledge—would be greatly enriched. To that argument, we can add here that such a broad approach might also enhance students’ understanding of and appreciation for the freedoms a democratic society offers. How that might take place is clearly a subject for a future presentation.

In seeking to better prepare our students to live democratically (and to resist the attractions of autocracy), we are faced with the near-impossibility of empirically testing whether graduates who experience so-called progressive (i.e., Dewey-inspired) education are better able to navigate the messiness of democracy than those who experience more authoritarian methods of education. It might, however, be possible to at least measure student attitudes about freedom and democracy before and after individual classroom experiences that do or do not emphasize student independence, or to engage in other ways of investigating the impact of student autonomy in the classroom on their readiness or willingness to engage in democratic behaviors in other settings.

Thus, we conclude this presentation summary by urging faculty who teach adult students to reconsider their dependence upon lectures, textbooks, and standardized exams. If we want our students, particularly undergraduates, to value and thrive in democracy, we urge the reader to study Dewey and other progressive educators in order to try out more democratic ways of teaching. Note, for example, current interest in the so-called “flipped classroom” (Reidsema, 2017) or ways technology, rather than spawning pre-set online courses, can also help promote independence, creative thinking and collaboration (e.g., Collins & Halverson, 2018). We would argue that if ability to navigate in a diverse, complex and question-filled world is our ultimate goal rather than high test scores and

soaring grades, we *can* find ways to determine whether that goal can be advanced by what we do in our individual classrooms if we make the effort to do so.

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Preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution with Creative and Critical Thinking

Patricia Coberly-Holt and Kemi Elufiede

Abstract

We currently find ourselves in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution, a time when everything around us is evolving at an exponential pace, which is disrupting virtually every industry around the globe. With today's transformations and changes in the workplace, there are skills needed to remain employed. As we continue along this path, workplaces will require adaptable people whose jobs are reimagined, enriched, or facilitated by the technology they work alongside. This paper will begin with skillsets that will be needed by workers, followed by current descriptions of two of these crucial skills, and finally discuss how the two opposed skills can be brought together for learners.

Keywords: Critical thinking; Creative thinking; Fourth Industrial Revolution; Workplace needs; Creative critical thinking

We have entered the fourth industrial revolution, a time of ubiquitous change characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres (Klaus, 2015). This digitization and automation of work is considered by many to be the most important societal and economic trend in the world—one that will fundamentally change the nature of work, business, and society in the coming decades (Arntz, Gregory, & Zierahn, 2016).

Human resource executives at some of the world's largest companies anticipate profound disruptions from the increased adoption of mobile Internet and cloud technology, the use of big data, flexible work arrangements, 3-D printing, advanced materials, and new energy supplies, according to early results from a survey by the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2015).

As technology increasingly takes over knowledge-based work, the cognitive skills that are central to today's education systems will remain important, but behavioral and non-cognitive skills necessary for collaboration, innovation and problem-solving will become essential as well (Schwab, 2015). In the future, talent, more than capital, will represent the critical factor of production (Klaus, 2015). Workplaces will rely more heavily on adaptable people whose jobs are reimagined, enriched, or facilitated by the technology they work alongside (Butler-Adam, 2018).

At the 2016 Future of Jobs forum (which looks at the employment, skills, and workforce strategy for the future), chief human resources and strategy officers from leading global employers were asked what the current shifts mean, specifically for employment, skills, and recruitment across industries and geographies (Gray, 2016). According to Gray, the resulting view coming out of the forum is that the demand for higher cognitive skills such as creativity, critical thinking and decision making, as well as complex information processing will grow through 2030 at

cumulative double-digit rates, with two of the four top 10 skills workers will need the most in 2020 being creativity and critical thinking. While both critical and creative thinking are usually viewed as divergent activities, a combination of the two will be necessary in order to remain successful in the new workplace.

Critical Thinking

Scriven (1985) explained critical thinking as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.” Critical thinking involves analyzing and developing possibilities to compare and contrast many ideas, the improvement and enhancement of ideas to make effective decisions and judgements, thereby, providing a sound foundation for effective action (Treffinger, 2008).

“If you can’t think critically you will behave in ways that have less chance of achieving the results you want” (Brookfield, 2012, p. 1). The ability to digest and analyze information critically is only important if a student can persevere through the challenges associated with the journey of thinking critically and can then act upon this new-found knowledge in a way that brings meaning to the world around them (Pieratt, 2017). From here, we can begin to support them not only by allowing them to better anticipate challenges but also how to support them in their ability to tackle these problems when they arise in the future. This skill set enables learners to persist in the face of challenging work and prepare our students to solve complex problems, many of which are problems we cannot currently anticipate. By preparing future workers and leading them to developing a sense of self and ownership amongst our students we can trust that, coupled with critical thinking skills, our future will be in good hands (Pieratt, 2017).

Critical thinking involves remaining open-minded, willing to consider a variety of viewpoints, evaluating all reasonable inferences and interpretations, and not being too quick to reject unpopular views. There are multiple formats for critical thinking, such as reflection, looking for more than one possible answer, or simply playing with a theory or suggestion. It is important to remember that making and learning from mistakes is part of critically thinking and should be rewarded as a learning experience, by allowing learners to learn from what has not worked.

Creative Thinking

Creative thinking has the ability to bring about a fresh perspective and may lead to an unconventional solution for solving a problem. Newell et al. (1958) noted that the creative process is a method to problem solve because it is a product of thinking, the unconventional strategy to thinking, the motivation for thinking, and the formulation of the problem. Creative thinkers enhance effective communication, the exploration of various opportunities, and the transition of change.

Effective communication is integral to expressing ideas as it must be expressed clearly, so that others can understand the concept. Tripathy (2018) stated that creative thinking is the most

influential role of communication which reacts just like an agent for an impulsive innovation” (p. 4). With a full understanding, new opportunities arise that develop strategies to solving everyday problems and challenges as this process provides a pathway for the change. Sparre (2012) noted that innovation develops change for a new field within different structures.

The reality of creative thinking is to continue to advance skills by considering yourself a creative thinker, supporting creative thinking within groups, recognizing the benefits, and understanding the challenges of creativity. To become a creative thinker, one must be productive in their own thought patterns. Kohls (2012) explained that when people experience a challenges, their thoughts are associated with solutions that focus on the conventional ways of thinking. In collaborative situations, one must be in support of the concept of creative thinking, so that others feel connected interpersonally. While creative thinking has benefits, there are challenges depending on the situation.

Bringing it all Together

Until recently, critical and creative thinking have been viewed as divergent activities, with critical thinking being a left brain function focused on probability and associated with judging involving a logical rationalizing mindset to make informed decisions and creative thinking being a right brain activity focused on possibilities and associated with generating ideas from a fresh perspective in order to conceive of something new or original.

Creativity benefits from our recognizing the role of critical thinking in ensuring the value of novel ideas. In turn, critical thinking comes into clearer focus when we recognize it as a creative act that enriches understanding by giving rise to something that wasn't there before (Bryant, 2017). In fact, many of the great breakthroughs and discoveries in art, science, and innovation have resulted from combining creative and critical thinking skills (Coughlan, 2007-08). Although the approaches to both differ considerably, it is the synergy created by the combination of both skills that can benefit and enrich learning.

Summary

In order to be successful in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, individuals will need to cultivate a new way of thinking, along with a strong skillset, including our creativity and our capacity for thinking critically. This ability to think critically and vet multiple probabilities after creatively generating various fresh possibilities is crucial. “To develop the requisite deeper, more holistic approaches to learning, it is essential to foster creative and critical thinking skills” (Coughlan, 2007-08). Developing the next generation with the skills to innovate and improve our world we can no longer teach students *what* to think—we must teach them *how* to think (Pieratt, 2017). We must empower students to become creative thinkers, critical thinkers, and problem solvers—people who are continually learning and who can apply their new knowledge to complex, novel, open-ended challenges; people who will proceed confidently and competently into the new horizons of life and work.

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Experiences of Two Academics Teaching Abroad: The Impact of Culture

Nancy Garcia and Modupe Soremi

Abstract

This paper explores the collective experiences of two academics teaching in Beijing, China. Emphasis is placed on the impact of this experience on personal and professional development. In addition, this paper will provide recommendations for embarking on a professional assignment abroad. Thus, by sharing experiences, challenges, and strategies, fellow academics embarking on a similar journey will be better prepared to teach abroad and, as a result, prepare students for a diverse and global workplace.

Keywords: Faculty Professional Development, Teaching Abroad, Culture, Chinese Education

Institutions generally place an emphasis in internationalization of faculty, but these opportunities are not always evident. Certainly, there are faculty who maintain a relationship with counterparts abroad or travel overseas for conferences or international studies. Other faculty participate in short-term international visiting scholar programs such as Fulbright Visiting Scholar, Fulbright Occasional Lecturer Fund, Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, and Scholar Rescue Fund. While the lack of resources for professional development opportunities might limit the availability of institution-sponsored short-term visiting faculty programs, that doesn't mean that the opportunities are not available.

According to Gu (2018), summer schools targeting Chinese students enrolled in universities in the United States and wish to transfer the credit back to the U.S. have opened consistently since the early 2010s. These schools are a different breed of summer school in that they are organized by third-party platforms, rather than the Chinese institutions, that offer opportunities for students but also to faculty interested in teaching abroad.

JNC, an American-style summer program in China catering to Chinese-born students, targets Chinese students enrolled in universities in the United States who intend to transfer the credits back to their U.S. institution and thus speed up the degree completion process (Gu, 2018; McMurtrie & Farrar, 2013). Before enrolling, however, students must obtain pre-approval for a credit transfer from their university (Gu, 2018). Programs like JNC hire professors from American higher education institutions to teach for a few weeks in the summer. The professors' qualifications and course content are vetted by the program and, if approved, a contract is issued. The employment contract offered consisted of five weeks of summer teaching with meetings of an hour and a half every day of the week for a total of 25 days per course taught. In Dr. Soremi's case, the load was three courses in the subjects of Principles of Economics (Macro), Principles of Economics (Micro), and Money and Banking, while Dr. Garcia taught one Introduction to Oral Communication course.

Throughout the five weeks of the program, we faced personal and professional challenges that are worth highlighting along with the elements that made our experience abroad unique. In this paper we review the benefits of global teaching, cultural challenges experienced, issues in adaptation, and preparation suggestions for those considering a teaching assignment abroad.

Opportunities: Global Teaching for Professional and Personal Development

Teaching abroad increases personal and professional competence via knowledge of the self, skills, and dispositions. Research provides evidence that there is also an increase in instructional pedagogical creativity, self-learning, and genuine multiculturalism (Clement & Otlaw, 2002; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Stachowski, Richardson, & Henderson, 2003). When teaching abroad, one learns to be creative in curricular planning and delivery of instructions due to limited resources compared to the United States (Hamza, 2010). Additionally, personal growth occurs as a result of feeling isolated, homesick, and out of place during the first weeks in the host country. These elements contribute to self-efficacy building after the experience. With that said, Gibson and Dembo (1984) reported that teachers with higher self-efficacy guide, motivate, and praise students much more (positive reinforcements).

According to Kim (2015), foreign instructors with postgraduate degrees who teach in China do so for career advancement through research and international teaching experience and/or they are seeking to explore something new and different. Similarly, the opportunity to teach in China for five weeks was seen as one from which both academics could benefit and use for development, both personally and professionally. We can agree that the benefits from a teaching abroad experience include learning how to adapt curriculum developed for American audiences to the host country; developing independence and maturity; altering of personal and professional dispositions due to the exposure to the unknown and the challenges in communication; increased cultural awareness and global thinking; self-examination and personal reflection of aspects of our own culture that may have never been examined prior; developed empathy for students with limited language proficiencies; and an increase in cultural sensitivity.

The Impact of Culture on Development

Culture is regarded as our way of life. It includes beliefs, customs, languages, traditions, history, ideas, and creativity. Culture defines the quality of our life and sense of belonging. Therefore, before venturing to a global assignment, it is necessary to identify the cultural differences that may exist between one's home country and the host country to create awareness and assess drastic challenges that might arise.

Personal Challenges

Beijing's population is dense. The mannerisms and etiquette are also different than those in the American culture; there is poor sanitation, air pollution, and constant traffic jams. Navigating the "new environment" was challenging and, at times, discouraging. At the same time, the idea of living in a developing society might be fun and exciting for those seeking for something new and different. Beijing can also be seen as energetic, full of movement, and vibrant with culture.

In adapting to the culture, we faced a series of personal challenges. These challenges included feeling isolated or homesick, language barriers, internet censorship, and limited flow of information. Being African American in China also posed some challenges. We are not sure if the Chinese reactions to seeing a Black person were fascination, curiosity, or racism, but their reaction was something that I, Dr. Soremi, was not accustomed to. Even though the Chinese curiosity is obvious around all foreigners, it was magnified because I was not a typical tourist, I was a Black tourist, which was a unique experience for them to encounter. I was pointed at; my picture was taken with or without permission; at times they touched my skin without permission

to see if the skin color will peel; children screamed out of fear when they saw me. Though, the feeling was uncomfortable, I never felt that my life was in danger. I did not perceive anger from the spectators, I could not understand what they said or while they smiled or laugh at times though.

Professional Challenges: The Chinese Classroom

We expected culture shock when being in the new environment but adapting to the classroom was a whole other story. Teaching a classroom of Chinese students was not something we had experienced before. In addition to cultural differences, we also faced challenges regarding classroom management and student learning styles. While we are used to interactivity and discussion-style lectures in the American classroom, the traditional classroom dynamic in China does not involve as much dialogue and students are constantly apprehensive to share their thoughts and ideas throughout the lecture (Chen, 2007; Skyrme, 2007; Zeng, 2006). As a result, early classroom interactions and teaching became challenging during the five weeks of teaching. Such Chinese learning characteristics have typically been perceived negatively by others in similar positions and described as “rote, silent, and a passive style of learning” (Sit, 2013, p. 1).

We learned that in the Chinese education system, the focus is more on the collective group, rather than the individual. Therefore, a classroom of between 30-50 students is not unusual. In the American classroom, we are likely to spend more time focusing on the individual needs of the students. Teaching oral communication, for instance, becomes a complex subject to teach in the Chinese classroom.

Ideally, an oral communication course is dynamic and would help students identify and address individual challenges; for the teaching and instruction to be effective, the course needs to have a degree of individualization. The fact that there were 50 students enrolled in the classroom made addressing individual needs and fears complicated when it came to public speaking. In adapting the course to an all-Chinese classroom, it was important to survey the students regarding the fears of public speaking and addressing those as a group to help them develop confidence to speak in front of large crowds. The American oral communication course is structured to have multiple in-class assignments that are used for students to practice public speaking and receive individualized feedback.

In contrast, having a class of 50 students made this method ineffective, time-consuming, and disengaging for the students. Instead, group activities where students were forced to speak to each other, such as team-building exercises, were implemented. Lectures also had to be modified to consider the Chinese classroom dynamics. Chinese students were uncomfortable answering questions or participating in class discussion. To address this issue, more content and step-by-step instructions on how to develop a speech were incorporated as students seemed to prefer information and specific guidelines.

Important to note, as well, are the cultural differences in the topics introduced in the class. The oral communication class is structured so that students select the topics for two of their speeches, informational and persuasive. As such, some of the topics selected (death penalty, support for euthanasia, cat suicide, smoking) were topics that challenged me culturally as they provided a different view on the issues than what is usually shared in the United States. Another element that is important to note as different is the grading system. Exams in the Chinese education

system hold a substantial weight. Students expect homework to be an extension of what was learned in the classroom rather than learning something new. Along those lines, Chinese students memorize content. Thus, in-class assignments or daily homework/exercises were not always perceived as important for the students.

These challenges, however, are not unique to the JNC International Summer School or an oral communication course. Kim (2015) identified similar challenges reported from foreign professors teaching in Chinese universities. For instance, other professors reported challenges with students not having a strong handle on college-level English; thus, the class had to move slower and consequently the lessons and projects for the semester were not being completed and students were not receiving an optimal academic experience in the classroom.

While some professional challenges were difficult to overcome for both of us, the benefits outweigh the difficulties. Similar perspectives have been found in the literature. Kim (2015) interviewed professors who had chosen to teach in China for career advancement and found that while they had mixed feelings about it, they mostly agreed that it was the best place for career mobility. These professors described China as a positive step toward furthering their careers. Interesting in this study was the fact that some of the professors in this study made sense of their time in China by emphasizing future career goals and plans. To us, this was viewed as an opportunity to broaden our teaching experience and build resilience through the personal and professional challenges. Needless to say, it was also an opportunity to become more knowledgeable about other cultures and become more adept to managing the diversity in the American classroom by addressing the needs of a different student population.

Interesting to note is the fact that returning to the United States, many times when sharing this experience, I (Dr. Garcia) was asked if I had been an English tutor in China, rather than a communication professor. This leads me to believe that there might still be some misconceptions about teaching internationally.

Recommendations

We consider that those who are exploring the possibility of teaching abroad should consider elements that will help lessen the challenges faced. As such, we have created a list that is not, by any means, all-encompassing but covers the general elements we considered to be important.

Seek Out Opportunities to Teach Internationally

Opportunities to teach abroad—long-term and short-term—might not always be obvious or heavily promoted throughout institutions. It is important that faculty who are interested in international professional development seek out opportunities to gain experience abroad. This is important since the American classroom is becoming more diverse and the ability to motivate and nurture these students is critical for their success and ultimately contribute to the prosperity of the nation. Additionally, being able to add teaching in Asia (China) to a resume or curriculum vita qualifies one as a global scholar, and it might have many advantages when seeking to advance one's career. The experience as well will make you an ideal candidate for guest presentation and to promote international learning.

Reflective Activities of the Experience

It is important that you find motivation to write a reflective essay/note or keep a journal of your experience. Journaling or taking notes helps process information and experiences. Similarly, it will help you reflect on your experience after time has passed. The effects and impact on teaching practices and personal development are crucial to improve on future travels and to measure the benefit from this opportunity.

Be a Good Guest of the Country

It is important to understand that, above all, you are a guest of the country and not a citizen, and it is your obligation to adapt and accept the views of the culture, rather than the host's country's obligation to accept your views. Governments from other countries do not subscribe to the freedoms granted to American citizens; thus, it is important to become conversant in the culture of the host country to understand the differences. The most obvious course is to appreciate and engage the host culture and customs.

Understand the Differences in the Educational System

Understanding the differences between the educational system in the host country and your country will minimize the challenges in the classroom and help support the learning process for both yourself and the students. Again, it is important to be a good host of the country and adapt to the culture rather than to expect the culture to adapt to your views. This, in turn, will help you become more flexible and adapt to the challenges of a diverse classroom in the United States.

Incorporate Cultural Immersion Activities

Incorporating cultural immersion activities such as excursions, meetings/pairing with the locals to become involved and engaged in the local culture and community. This will help minimize the feeling of isolations and will enhance the cultural experience of participant's ultimately increasing self-efficacy and accomplishments.

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Rural Working-Class Scholars' Perspectives and Experiences Seeking Postsecondary Education

Janet Kesterson Isbell, Julie C. Baker, Darek Potter, Laura Ezell

Abstract

As the economy became the driving force behind education policy in recent decades, post-secondary education planners and policymakers turned their attention to older adults. In Tennessee, the state launched its *Drive to 55* campaign to increase the number of residents earning postsecondary degrees. Along with these changes came the call for more research to inform practices and policies related to older adult learners. This study sought to understand postsecondary education experiences of adult scholars from rural, low-education counties in Tennessee. Findings demonstrated participants' determination to complete despite initial doubts, the importance of informal peer supports, and the significance of family.

Keywords: Rural Learner, Older Adult Learner, Working Class Learner, Tennessee Higher Education

As the economy became the driving force behind education policy in recent decades (Atkins, 2000), post-secondary education planners and policymakers turned their attention to older adults. In Tennessee, the state launched its *Drive to 55* campaign to increase the number of state residents earning postsecondary degrees and offered more scholarships and tuition discounts—in some instances no tuition—to encourage more rural, working-class adults to earn postsecondary degrees (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017). Along with these changes came the call for more research to “inform and improve practices and policies” (Krause, 2017, para 1) related to older adult learners.

Research Problem

Tennessee's *Drive to 55* campaign aims to increase from 39% to 55% the number of residents with postsecondary degrees, which means adding an additional 79,000 state residents to the current number attaining postsecondary degrees each year. To achieve its goal by 2025, the state must recruit residents 25 and older, more specifically rural adult learners since U.S. Census data indicate Tennessee's population is 93% rural. Less is known about postsecondary access and attainment by working-class adults living in sparsely populated regions, often far from needed services and supports: jobs are scarcer, wages are lower, and unemployment is higher than in more populous state regions. These economic and distance factors, along with the challenges created by jobs and family, make the perspectives and experiences of rural working-class scholars more complex.

Our qualitative study sought to understand experiences of rural, working-class adults in Tennessee who sought postsecondary credentials—their motivation to enter the system, their support systems, and their attitudes about completing. We developed five research questions: 1) What prompted rural adults from low-education counties in Tennessee to seek postsecondary education? 2) What complexities, challenges, and barriers did they experience? 3) What services or programs did they utilize along the way? 4) What was the role of community and family in their experiences?, and 5) What were their perspectives on their ability to complete a postsecondary education?

Background and Context

Rural adults lag behind urban counterparts in degree attainment in the South (Barkley, Henry, & Li, 2005) and in Tennessee (Rural Policy Research Institute, 2006). This gap between urban and rural adults with postsecondary degrees grew from 11% to 14% between 2000 and 2015 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). In rural areas, “low educational attainment is closely related to higher poverty and child poverty rates as well as higher unemployment” (USDA, 2017, p. 1). Lack of skills, knowledge, and experience in rural areas of the South “likely contributed to the slow growth of rural economies relative to their metropolitan counterparts” (Barkley et al., 2005, p. 1). Research has found many distinctions between rural and urban adult learners: different financial situations related to jobs and earnings, different family obligations, and different ways of progressing, such as attending part-time and seeking programs that required less time to complete (Prins, Kassab, & Campbell, 2015); thus, support systems must be different for rural adult learners.

All counties in our study’s recruitment area were identified by the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture as *low education counties*, in which “25 percent or more of residents 25–64 years old had neither a high school diploma nor GED in 2000” (as cited in Rural Policy Research Institute, 2006, p. 6). This statistic on educational attainment, along with the size of the state’s rural population, the growing gap between rural and urban education, and the threat or existence of economic hardship, demonstrates the significance of research that seeks to understand rural, working-class adult learners’ experiences with postsecondary attainment. Rural education scholars have noted a lack of “culturally contextualized inquiry” (McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010, p. 194) that examines the rural learner’s perspectives and experiences. Most research on rural learners has been quantitative, focusing on factors affecting rural learners (e.g., Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012; Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2012; Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010).

McDonough and colleagues (2010) argue that “culturally driven qualitative inquiry can help unpack how these quantified and comparative findings matter to rurality, and how rurality matters to these quantified and comparative findings in relation to educational opportunity” (pp. 194–195). Researchers have clearly demonstrated the need to hear more from this population. In rural Pennsylvania, adults had clear opinions on what was needed to improve their experiences but felt their opinions were not heeded by educational institutions (Coro, 2006). Also, Howley, Chavis, & Kester (2013) demonstrated at a southern community college that listening to rural adults’ voices could make a difference in retention. Our study added to this small but growing, body of research which aims to equip educational and institutional policymakers with information that could lead to increased understanding and better, more strategic planning for the rural, working-class adult learner.

Methods

The study focused on low-education rural counties in the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee. After IRB approval, researchers used snowball sampling to recruit six participants. All were 25 or older when they began pursuit of their first postsecondary credential. Five were still enrolled, and one had withdrawn from school.

Three researchers each conducted two individual, hour-long interviews which were transcribed by the fourth researcher, and transcripts were then shared with respective interviewees, who made no additions or revisions to the transcripts. The researchers analyzed data inductively, first through reading line by line and assigning descriptive codes to portions of the data deemed meaningful, then by combining codes into categories, and finally by developing themes. Names of participants are pseudonyms.

Common Themes Related to Pursuit of Postsecondary Education

The following discussion identifies common themes related to degree pursuit by rural working class adults in Tennessee and relates findings to research questions.

“Might as Well”

Motivations to seek postsecondary education, explored in Question 1, ranged from desire for more income and empowerment to the availability of benefits. Rose wanted more money not just for herself but also “to make life a little better for my family.” Tracy, a single mother, expressed similar thoughts: “Just my kids; I mean, that’s really the decision.” Alice wanted “something marketable—a specific occupation.”

Regardless of the motivator, availability of funds was key. Alice said her employer provided benefits: “It’s just sitting there; I might as well utilize it.” Bobby had long thought about postsecondary education, but “in my family, we went to work. . . . Around here, that’s what we did, you know. You weren’t expected to go to school. That cost money.” After his job was eliminated and he received education benefits as part of a severance package, Bobby decided to use the benefits. Derek was completing military service and had no plans for college, but once he learned about military benefits: “I thought it was like really a good thing . . . I can definitely try it.”

“Hard to Step Out”

Question 2 addressed the challenges and complexities of being an older adult seeking a postsecondary degree, and there were many. Initially, self-doubt about their ability to succeed in a postsecondary environment troubled the participants and, in some cases, delayed postsecondary education. Rose said she was encouraged by co-workers to seek teacher certification, “but I was really afraid, you know. I’d been in my little world for so long, and it was hard to step out of that little world.” Derek also experienced some uneasiness. “I’d been out of it for so long. . . . I also don’t like failing, so I was actually a little nervous about even succeeding.” Tracy feared “that it would be too hard or that I would fail or that I wouldn’t be able to make it work—for my family.” Alice feared memory loss would be a factor because of her age. Bobby said he “always worried that I wasn’t going to be smart enough.”

Balancing work and school proved difficult for some participants, and finances were sometimes obstacles. Derek gave up his job when his employer refused to adjust his schedule. Tracy’s

employer was supportive and helped her transition from full to part time work, but “just the culmination of school and work and kids” proved “overwhelming,” she said. She also struggled to support her family, despite financial aid. The money covered school supplies, including a computer, “but it didn’t . . . supplement the time that I lost at work, going from full time to part time. So, another struggle.”

Some participants felt culpable because they were studying rather than attending to family. Rose remembered studying during her child’s ballgame: “I was having these guilt feelings. . . . Maybe I’m not being, you know, the greatest mother in the world.” Bobby talked about the sacrifice of money and time that his family made once he committed to school. “We’ve had to cut back. We’ve got an 11-year-old son that doesn’t—he still doesn’t understand.” For LS, the commute was an obstacle, “on the road back and forth . . . cutting into my study time.” Some semesters, she commuted three times a week while working part time.

Support Comes from Insiders

Question 3 asked participants about the services or supports they used for pursuing postsecondary education. Participants most often identified *insider* support as a key component in postsecondary educational attainment. Informal peer groups were especially prominent in the discussions of five participants. These groups included peer review of papers, study group meetings before tests, and texting groups to discuss questions about an assignment or about a professor’s expectations. Derek was surprised by the level of peer support: “That community was a lot different than I ever expected. . . . Everybody was actually helping each other, working together. That was the biggest plus I think I’ve ever had in college, just that aspect of it.” Bobby described “a little bit of camaraderie there that’s built with, you know, everybody’s kind of going through the same thing.”

While most participants’ stories of support were about current or former students, institutional support services did play a role, particularly for navigating admissions. Alice said her advisor recommended a “good class to start out with . . . and she was right.” Derek turned to the Veterans’ Affairs for support, and Rose recalled that admissions and financial aid office staff were helpful and encouraging. Tracy took advantage of a library tutoring session organized by the community college she attended, but unlike other participants, Tracy did not participate in informal peer support groups. “I know that there were some study groups, but a lot of that—it wouldn’t have worked with my work schedule,” she said. Instead, Tracy relied heavily on the advice of her admissions counselor. “She really helped me understand the expectations.” Tracy appreciated that the advisor kept her appointments and checked on her often. “She was really good.”

Not all stories about institutional service providers were positive. LS said her schedule made it difficult to meet with tutors, and she could not recall using any other campus academic services. “When you’re driving 45 minutes to an hour to get here, and you have classes all day . . . and then you have to go home and do homework, it doesn’t really leave a lot of free time.” She suggested a Facebook chat room would better serve students who commute: “At least you could do it at home.”

Family Matters

Question 4 dealt with the role of family and community in the participants' postsecondary education journey, and data indicated that family was significant, but community less so. Family members offered encouragement, helped at home, and provided insider knowledge. Family also was the stimulus for participants' desires to improve career and earnings. Alice said her family "took turns doing supper and things like that" and she tried to arrange her classes so she wouldn't "put anybody else out." Bobby said his spouse was his most influential supporter, encourager, and defender. "Without her, none of it would be possible," he said.

"I Can Do This"

All of the participants—even Tracy, who had withdrawn from her studies—communicated their intent to continue or complete their education, and most expressed confidence in their ability to do so, answering Question 5.

Prior to his military service, Derek said, college had "not once" been a consideration. But his mindset changed: "I think I can do it now; I feel like I can do it." Bobby said he still sometimes has doubts but is determined. "I've got to [finish]. I don't have a choice." More time in the classroom has made him more comfortable, he said, "Like it's what I should've been doing all along." Tracy said she was forced to withdraw from school because she could not balance work, school, and family, but she plans to return. She described her experience as "good, and encouraging, even though I didn't finish." School is still an option, she said, "So I think when I go back I'll have a little bit more of an advantage than the first time."

Discussion and Conclusions

Availability of funds was key in participants' decisions to seek postsecondary degrees, including employer job benefits, military benefits, and government funds. Adults who had access to benefits were finding ways to manage, sometimes through sacrifice. But the single mom, forced to reduce work to part-time status in order to attend classes, struggled to support her family. Our findings demonstrate that working-class rural adults need financial support to be successful in postsecondary education.

Participants expressed fear of failure or doubts about their abilities to succeed, then discovered once in the classroom that those feelings were unfounded. Despite initial doubts, most participants expressed confidence in or determination to complete. Sharing their stories may help other working-class rural adults find the courage and support to seek postsecondary education. Researchers should consider studies that develop narratives about the experiences of older adults' successes in postsecondary education.

The significance of family cannot be overlooked when planning programs for working-class rural adults. Family was key to motivation and support, and participants' family responsibilities sometimes were misplaced by education responsibilities, resulting in internal conflict for participants. Universities should continue to explore ways to provide more flexibility in course offerings so that degree attainment does not disrupt work and family schedules and responsibilities. The varied needs of participants determined the type of coursework they desired, but all wanted more flexibility. Counter to the trend among universities toward more online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2017), older adults in our study valued face-to-face peer interaction and, in some instances, preferred on-ground courses. More flexibility could take the form of

more blended learning options but also might include taking coursework to the job site or providing on-campus childcare so that parents can attend classes.

Insider support, particularly supports developed and cultivated by fellow classmates or campus communities, played a significant role in perseverance. With one exception, participants turned most often to fellow students in the same classes and to former students for support.

Unfortunately, the only participant who did not develop informal peer support was the only participant who had withdrawn from coursework. Postsecondary institutions may want to consider ways to encourage such informal local support units rather than establishing larger, campus-wide programs.

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Graduate's Writing, Anxiety, Self-Efficacy, and Possible Solutions

Joshua Gernatt and Patricia Coberly-Holt

Abstract

Graduate students face writing anxiety and low self-efficacy regarding writing research papers. Holladay (1981) addressed the negative characteristics of anxiety in graduate students by writing: "They are frightened by a demand for writing competency, they fear evaluation of their writing because they think they will be rated negatively, they avoid writing whenever possible, and when they are forced to write, they behave destructively" (as cited in Holmes, Waterbury, Battinich, & Davis, 2018, p. 66). This chapter identifies several situations and repeating themes associated with writing anxiety, causes of low self-efficacy in research writing, and illustrates positive results from programs offered to assist graduate students in research paper writing.

Keywords: *Graduate Students; Writing anxiety; Writing self-efficacy; Graduate Writing*

"Most graduate students come to their programs not knowing academic writing; however, most graduate programs expect them to know academic writing" (Plakhotnik & Rocco, 2016, p. 162). Writing can be a cumbersome task for students, especially when they have developed poor techniques and habits and use misguided information throughout the writing process, which generates anxiety and low self-efficacy.

Anxiety is an "emotional factor" and "can be considered a consequence of low self-efficacy," according to Stewart, Seifert, and Rolheiser (2015, p. 5). Anxiety can bring positive results by bringing about motivation and performances due to "fear of failure" as well as becoming detrimental and "debilitating" which "leads to poor grades" (Stewart et al., 2015, p. 5). Anxiety can bring about "unpleasant feelings, nervousness, and tension, as well as unproductive writing approaches like avoidance, withdrawal, and procrastination" (Stewart et al., 2015, p. 5).

Self-efficacy, an important factor that education has used to measure outcomes (Holden, Barker, Meenaghan, & Rosenberg, 1999, p. 463), involves "the extent to which students are confident about carrying out different research tasks, from library research to designing and implementing practical research projects" (Lei, 2008, p. 668). Another practical definition of research self-efficacy is "the degree to which an individual believes he or she has the ability to complete research tasks, is thought to affect the initiation and persistence of research behaviors." (Bard, Bieschke, Herbert, & Eberz, 2000, p. 48).

Graduate students are no exception to this. Graduate students "see themselves neither as competent writers nor as active participants in the scholarly exchange of their chosen field" (McMillen, Garcia, & Bolin, 2010, p. 428). The National Commission on Writing (2003) estimated that "fifty percent of freshmen make serious grammatical mistakes in their academic papers and only 30% of postgraduate students understand why their thesis should include a critique of the existing literature on a topic" (Plakhotnik & Rocco, 2016, p. 160). Research suggests that students have developed these issues and have a lack of appropriate writing

strategies from earlier childhood education that, ultimately, they bring to higher education settings. Other researchers have written about graduate students' writing anxiety.

Contemporary Issues in Graduate Studies

Holmes et al. (2018) wrote that a few common themes emerged throughout their study including: "lack of confidence in scholarly writing ability, lack of time to dedicate to writing tasks, lack of skills in identifying and utilizing scholarly resources, and institutions sharing the responsibility for improving graduate student writing" (p. 68). An article by the University of Texas Writing Center "identified several situations" that generate anxiety in graduate students including: "adapting to a new style of writing, thinking about criticism received on writing in the past, tight deadlines for the submission of the writing assignment, and not clearly and completely understanding the writing assignment" (n.d.).

Methods to Lessen Anxiety and Increase Self-Efficacy

Many methods have been explored for improving graduate students' scholarly writing, although few have been researched. Approaches have included stand-alone writing courses, embedding writing into early courses, writing buddies, and providing writing handouts, among others.

Students come to graduate school with preexisting emotions and opinions regarding writing and their abilities. According to Stewart et al. (2015), reducing anxiety and increasing anxiety has a "statistical significant association with students' perceptions of using metacognitive writing strategies" (p. 4). The writing approaches brought out by metacognition in graduate school, allows students to acquire "new and more effective strategies" (Stewart et al., 2015, p. 3).

Bair and Mader (2013) postulated that "we cannot leave the development of graduate writing to chance ... it needs to be infused into the curriculum, introduced early and revisited in more complex ways" (p. 10). With lack of time as a contributing factor to writing anxiety in graduate students, they have intertwined academic writing in an already established curriculum throughout a program, which is a great opportunity for students to build self-efficacy over time. Bair and Mader strongly advise students to take core courses early in the degree and expand the timespan for the capstone thesis from one to two semesters, as well as exploring ways to embed theory, research and academic-writing skills throughout each course in the emphasis area.

Some universities, such as Kansas University, have developed in-depth programs. Sundstrom (2014) compared the different offerings such as interdisciplinary courses offered to only international students, handbooks on graduate writing, and offering graduate writing courses. Sundstrom stated, "These offerings by other institutions testify to the need for graduate writing instruction that is anything but remedial" (p. 2). The program offered at Kansas University instructs students to research their genre-specific field, while the students are going about doing the research as well as give feedback to the students (Sundstrom, 2014, p. 2).

Plakhotnik and Rocco (2016) created a series of workshops based on the Vopat's writing circles for children, which help students learn how to write, edit, and publish on a variety of topics (2016). In this study, researchers concluded that "a learning practice that works for children is

not always easy to translate into adult learning environments(s)” (p. 165). Holmes et al. (2018) provided focus groups of students an opportunity to give suggestions to strategies for institutions to strengthen graduate writing. Their suggestions included: “providing more one-on-one writing interaction with instructors focused on writing, having writing resources readily available outside of the formal classroom, providing research tools for graduate students early in program studies, and requiring a writing orientation for graduate students upon entry into graduate study” (p. 69).

A series of workshops can be an opportunity to provide research tools, encourage peer review and feedback, provide mentorship from facilitators, as well as instill a positive direction to creating stronger scholarly writers. The idea of workshops does not address the lack of time. Therefore, the facilitators would have to take into consideration the appropriate amount of time and frequency, media devices, as well as the students’ needs and preferences. Before taking research courses, students come with preexisting emotions and opinions on research writing. Simon Lei (2008) stated that these negative attitudes toward research impact the amount of effort the students will put into their research (p. 668).

Summary

The implications of improper writing strategies, misconceptions from previous education, anxiety, and low self-efficacy can be detrimental to graduate students, and baggage brought from earlier experiences and doing research writing can be a daunting challenge. Institutions can help alleviate and resolve some of these issues graduate students are facing by carefully observing curriculum design and implementing changes to foster strong scholarly practices for graduate students. The results are an increase in graduate students’ self-efficacy and reduced writing anxiety. Some of the most notable factors are facilitators’ beliefs in graduate writing, facilitators’ professional weaknesses, the institution’s culture and mission, as well as already practiced curriculum.

Whether the issue has been generated by poorly developed techniques and habits over time, misinterpreted information, writing anxiety, or low self-efficacy, graduate students should be given the opportunity to build upon their writing skills through structured environments provided by their respective graduate programs or colleges. As with most teaching methods, there is no single fix for every learner. Whether writing workshops, a stand-alone writing course, infusing writing instruction into one or more content courses, the use of rubrics provided prior to the writing assignment, writing circles, helpful handouts, or any other method, with a little help, students can reduce their stress, increase their overall self-efficacy, and ignite an interest in scholarly writing. As Stewart et al. (2015) highlighted: “Care must be taken to assess writing approaches across a variety of contexts rather than extending the conclusions drawn from a single context to an entire institution or collection of institutions” (p. 3).

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School Leader Skill Development on the Job: Synopsis of Research and Major Findings

Nicole Lyons

Summary of Study

According to Leithwood et al. (2004), leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Wallace Foundation, 2008, 2013). Yet according to multiple studies, principal preparatory programs are often insufficient to prepare school leaders (SLs) for the demands of the job, and professional development for SLs is sporadic at best (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Chapman, 2005; Gray et al., 2007). Moreover, a common finding across studies of principal retention is that schools with a high percentage of poor students, minority students, and/or low-performing students, experience more principal turnover than their counterparts (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Lai Horng, 2009; as cited in Burkhauser et al., 2013). The job of a principal can often be daunting and therefore, principals need support and professional development in order to build their leadership skills to be effective.

In this study, the researcher wanted to answer the following research question: How do K-12 assistant principals and principals develop their leadership skills and practices on the job after their pre-service programs in various school contexts? The researcher used purposive sampling, gathering participants from a state association of school principals in New England. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant and used the Dreyfus & Dreyfus Five Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition (The Model) results as well as documents to support the participants' perceived skill level. Inductive analysis was used to analyze the interviews, The Model, and document examination. Then, a cross-case analysis was conducted to reveal practices school leaders have developed on the job in order to be effective leaders in their school contexts. In order to address issues of trustworthiness, researcher utilized member checking, triangulation (interviews, skill model, and document examination), coding strategy, peer review, and thick description to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Findings

The analysis revealed that having a mentor and utilizing other leaders within their school district assisted in participants' skill development. Further, the cross-case analysis revealed that leaders of all skill levels spoke to developing similar practices to be effective in their school contexts. There were no noteworthy differences between those skills and practices utilized by school leaders in different contexts. All participants approached their leadership and used similar skills and practices despite their school context. There was a distinction between knowing yourself as a leader, as defined as Self, and knowing how to manage others, defined as Others (see Figure 1).

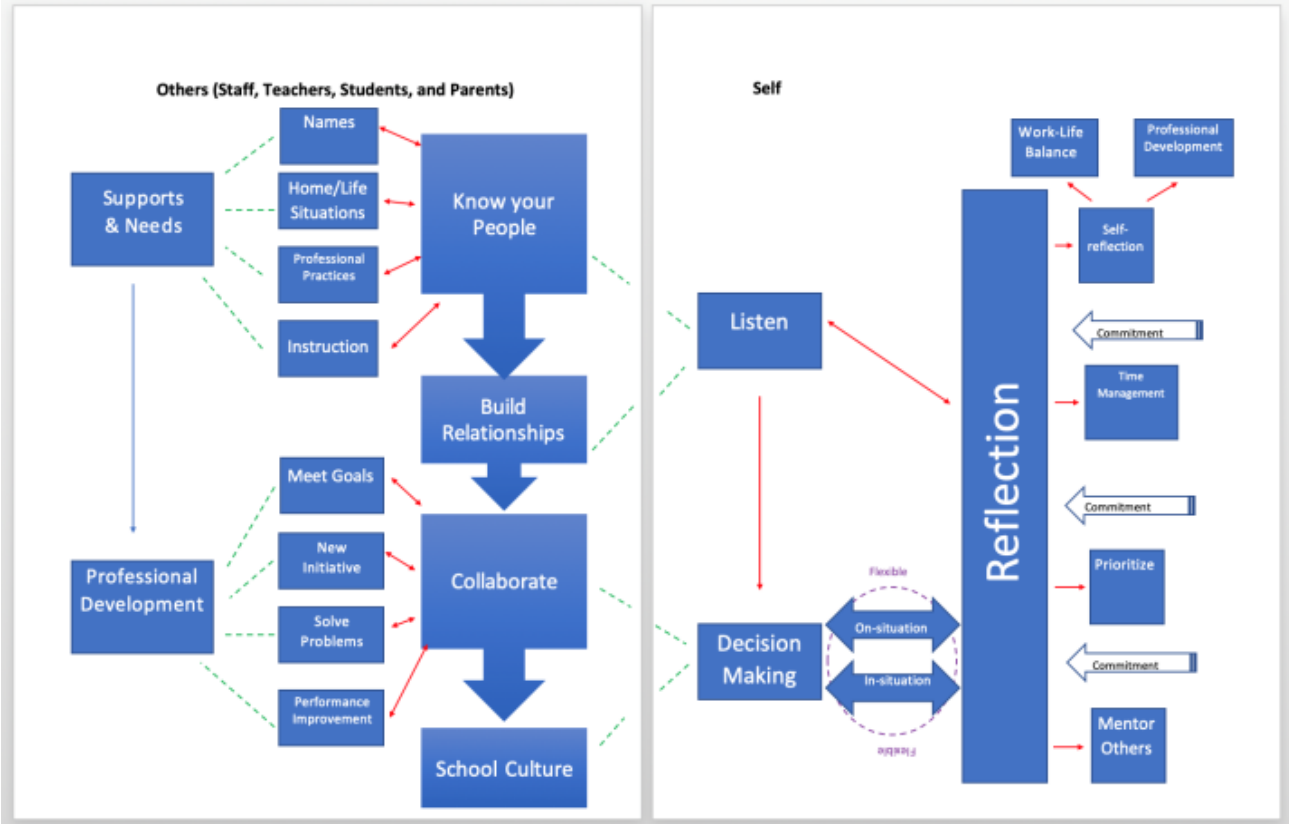


Figure 3. Knowing Self and Others

In Figure 1, “Others” refers to the people SLs organize, other than themselves, in order to meet the goals of the school. The others are students, teachers, staff, parents, school board members, constituents, and so on. When asked what leadership skills and practices the SLs used at their schools to be effective, participants often spoke of organizational management. Often, participants spoke to how they get “their people,” as if they were chess pawns, strategically placed in the unseen fabric that forms the school culture. Further, SLs spoke about the thought process and practices they use in order to manage the many issues and obstacles they have to face. Participants reported the need to have an understanding of themselves as leaders in order to manage others (staff, teachers, students, and parents) efficiently in working toward building a positive school culture. Participants reported seeing themselves as learners within their context in order to be effective and improve their skills as a leader. Participants reported using their context as a basis for reflection and developing their skills.

Richard Elmore (2006) would argue that the findings in Figure 1 show that participants practice through an inspirational view, meaning that the organization speaks to providing teachers with autonomy and accommodates them within the school context (Elmore, 1996). What is interesting about this is that participants highlighted being in a constant adaptive state, one of the challenges to their skill development. While the inspirational view often leads to high levels of parent satisfaction and helping schools rationalize reforms, participants reported this constant state of change was a challenge to their skill development (Elmore, 1996). This supports the finding that being in an adaptive state is a challenge for school leaders.

Further, the evidence signifies that having a mentor and developmental network of support assisted in the development of SLs (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; New York Leadership Academy, 2015). Having an official or self-proclaimed mentor helped participants understand a problem globally and see all sides of the problem before coming to a decision. In turn, mentors assisted school leaders in developing their decision-making skills. Drago-Severson (2009) said, “Leadership is doing the right thing: management is doing things right” (p. 32). Having a mentor to talk through issues with helped SLs essentially think like a leader (New York Leadership Academy, 2015; Peno & Mangiante, 2012). Furthermore, participants reported having a supportive network of people to turn to whenever they needed to access support or knowledge. This network was composed of fellow assistant principals and principals in and out of district, the superintendent in the district, and teachers within the district. Having access to mentors and a developmental network assisted SLs in making mindful decisions and showed them the importance of reflection in order to develop their skills further.

The results also indicate that school leaders utilize their own professional development to develop their knowledge and understanding of their leadership skills. All participants reported seeing organizational management in the way presented in Figure 1. The findings in Figure 1 also support the notion that SLs are more focused on organizational leadership than instruction and professional practice. This finding suggests that SLs may not have been prepared effectively to deal with organizational management as well as issues of instruction and student achievement in their pre-service programs or that a lack of mentoring to navigate all aspects of a SL’s role was detrimental. This is supported by Brazer and Bower (2012) and Wallace Foundation (2013) who found that few principal preparatory programs focus more on instruction than on organizational leadership. An understanding of effective instruction and how to support teachers, as well as organizational management, has to be present in order for the SL to be effective in their role.

Further, school leaders felt inclined to seek a leadership position and pursue professional development when they felt a sense of commitment to their school and work. Five participants in particular were former teachers and grew while new programs were being developed at their schools. Growing with their districts and feeling a sense of belonging gave them confidence to lead and grow with their schools. Using collaboration as a way to support and insure commitment from all constituents within the school was supported in the findings (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Wallace Foundation, 2008, 2013). It is clear that participants utilized shared leadership models that put collaboration at the fore to increase their capacity as a SL. Therefore, the researcher suggests there is a need to find SLs that are a good fit for the school district and vice versa.

Reflection was another finding that assisted with decision making as well as work-life balance. All participants reported some challenge with finding the ideal work-life balance. In the article titled “Principal Under Pressure” in *Education Week*, one principal reports, “I have seen way too many people get burned out...there needs to be a balance between [our] professional and personal lives, and that we are much more effective in each when it’s in balance” (Mitchell, 2018, p. 11). One participant reported missing out on his child’s preschool graduation because of work. Another participant left the principal job for two years and then returned as an assistant principal at another school because his work-life balance was askew. To have a strong work-life balance, participants reported constantly reflecting on time management, mentoring others, and

prioritizing their to-do lists, but also reflecting on self and how the work was affecting them personally. This struggle among school leaders was reported at various levels of skill development. This finding shows that SLs not only struggle with building efficiency in organizational management, but also managing conflicting responsibilities. Reflecting on self and viewing themselves as a learner within their school context assisted the SLs in understanding where to draw the line between ending their work for the day or week and going to enjoy some time to themselves (Drago-Severson, 2009; Kaser, 1982).

In terms of developing leadership practices to build school culture, participants reported that their practices involved others. Getting all to be committed to the school culture is knowing your people. Knowing the people who work within the school context helps a school leader understand what supports and needs they have and how to navigate relationships for collaboration and professional development needs. To some, emotional intelligence (EQ) is more important than intelligence (IQ) in attaining success in a profession today because professions depend on our ability to read other people's signals and react appropriately to them (Bressert, 2018). Participants said that during their first years on the job, they focused on getting to know their people in and out of school and building relationships to assist with how they would utilize them within the greater organization to meet school goals.

Having relationships and understanding people's lives (i.e., names, home/life situations, professional practice, and instruction) assisted them in moving the mission and vision of the school forward. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested when people and organizations fit, both benefit: "individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed" (p. 135). Building relationships between people and supporting them in the work of the mission and vision of school, can build a positive school culture (Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018).

In all, the research found that there are on-going supports after pre-service programs for school leaders to improve their skill development across the state. However, the urban and charter schools seem to be utilizing these supports more often. This finding aligns with the higher levels of need that may exist within these districts; however, some of these supports are grant funded, and the researcher cannot speak to how the grants are awarded. It is important for a school leader to have a mentor, formal or informal, to help them develop their decision-making abilities. It is also important for a school leader to understand and define their developmental network of support available to them in a time of need. SLs should always seek their own learning opportunities to become a leader. Finally, possessing and developing a reflective mindset was a crucial skill and practice SLs possessed in order to be effective in their jobs.

Implications

The job of the school leader is more than managing people on a daily basis (See Figure 2). A school leader's job has shifted from being a manager to an instructional leader (Brazer & Bower, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Johnson, 1996). Changes in the principalship have been occurring as a result of large-scale reforms at the policy level, resulting from the determination to ensure the provision of quality schooling (Chapman,

2005; Elmore, 1996). The role of a SL now focuses on ensuring all students receive high quality instruction as well as the organizational management within the context of the school (Brazer & Bower, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2012).

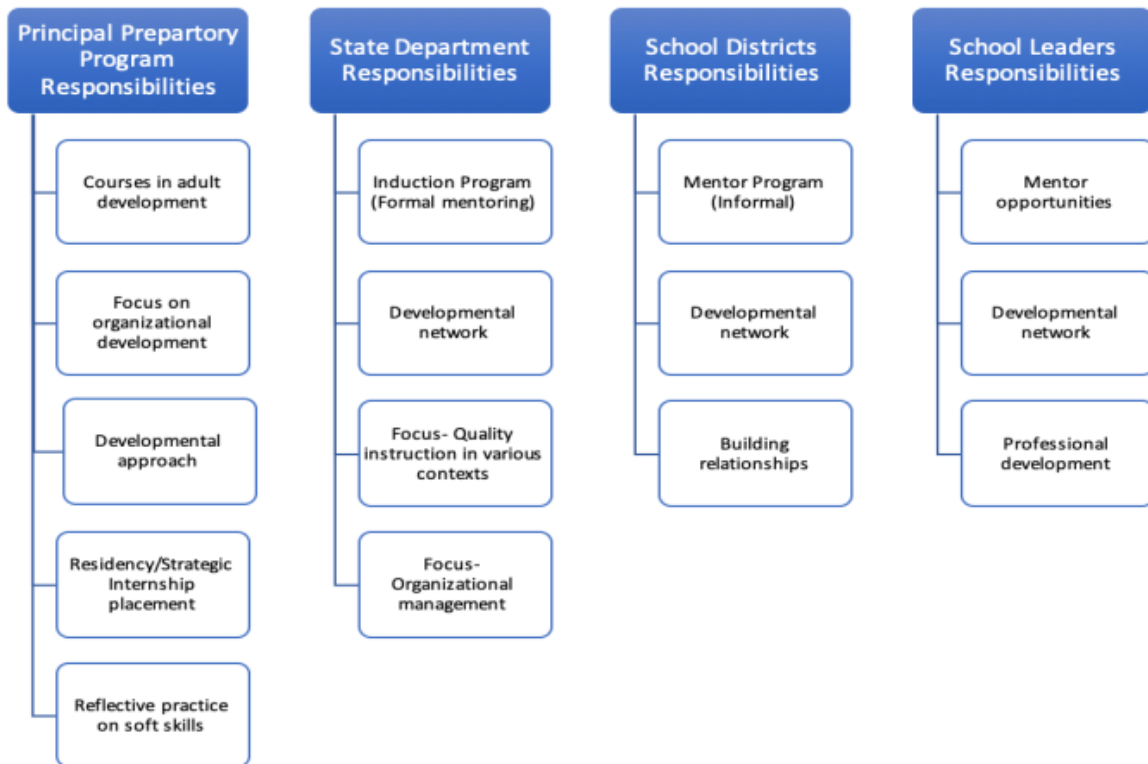


Figure 4. Division of Responsibilities

There needs to be a call for principal preparation programs to focus on instructional leadership, as well as organizational development to assist SLs in being more prepared to balance the multiple roles of the job (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Neumerski, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2013). If changes in the job have occurred for the principal, then the changes need to be identified and carried out in principal preparation programs, state policy, and school districts. Further, SLs need to see themselves as a learner within this adaptive process.

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Higher Education for Working-class Adults—Together, We Can Make it Work

Angelo Marade

Abstract

This literature review demonstrates that many working-class adult-learners continue to face challenges during their quest for new meaning in their lives. Many adults in workplace settings find themselves in environments with very little support. Consequently, adult learners rely on the academic community as their main source of emotional and academic support. Currently, many colleges do not offer adult learners effective student services and support. Research suggests a coming together of authentic college leadership is needed to meet adult learners' needs and career-oriented goals. Taken together, the availability of more college co-op programs with offerings of incremental academic and workplace achievement could effectively address adult learners' needs and concurrently contribute to the successful achievement of their academic goals.

Keywords: *Working-class Adults, Imposter Syndrome*

Background

Marade and Brinthaupt (2018) found that individuals of varying ages reported experiences of conflict while making decisions regarding their academic careers. This is a matter of great importance considering the fact that educational choices are rated highest above all for many adults when it comes to regrets. In fact, during the early 2000s, Roese and Summerville (2005) revealed that the biggest regret for adults is their educational choices. Several years later, Choi and Jun (2009) found similar results. Choi and Jun's respondents reported the following feelings of regret: "they wished they could have or felt that they should have continued their education or finished school" (p. 218). It is quite understandable that choices involving education could be the most regrettable because during the past several decades, many of life's outcomes of higher potential have become more and more dependent upon educational achievements.

Life outcomes dependent upon educational achievements can include employment status, financial status, and consequently, personal fulfillment and the quality of family life. The challenge to achieve academic advancement and related preferred life outcomes affects millions of people. In fact, there are currently 31 million adult learners who are multiple-term college enrollees with less than two years of achieved college credits (ACE, 2017). One explanation for this dilemma is that it can be a major challenge for some adult learners to maintain a college career. For many adult learners, attending college, studying, working, and raising a family requires a balancing act between being a worker and a student. This can be best described as having limited time and unlimited commitments.

Seventy-six percent of adult learners feel that their lives are not balanced (bncollege, 2017). Prompted by this and other relevant findings, this study set out to examine some of the challenges that working-class adult learners experience and explain how achieving progress in increments can be a valuable process in helping them to achieve their academic and career goals. This literature review begins with a discussion about working-class adult learners feeling unbalanced.

An alarming fact about individuals feeling unbalanced is that it can create perceptions of failure (Craig, Brown, & Baum, 1995). Therefore feeling unbalanced can be problematic for an individual, and it should be addressed as a part of the adult learner discussion. One may ask, how can feeling unbalanced lead to a self-perception of failure? This is best answered with an explanation from a cognitive perspective.

From a cognitive perspective, information pertaining to the self is more vigorous in memory recall compared to information not related to the self (Lieberman, Jarcho, & Satpute, 2004). Consequently, if an individual is experiencing moments of a negative state of thought this reinforcing negative perception of the self has the potential of being instigated prior to any other thought. In relating these thought patterns to the self and academics, Xu, Solanki, McPartlan, and Sato (2018) pointed out the following: When gauging elements that contribute to an individual's academic success, there is much more to be considered than solely the academic component of education. The researchers explained that the consideration of the social-psychological component of academic success and its effects on students is of great importance.

The social-psychological component of academic success (Xu et al., 2018) involves perceptions of the self and the self as it is compared to others. For example, a student's perception that they are the only one in a class experiencing a particular issue or a student's lack of a sense of belonging each have the potential to interfere with their academic success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Building upon Craig et al. (1995) and Lieberman et al. (2004), it becomes easier to understand how feeling unbalanced can lead to a student's lack of a sense of belonging, and ultimately, perceptions of failure. Eventually, it evolves into a status of one feeling like an imposter and being in a place that they don't belong.

The Imposter

In discussing the imposter syndrome, Murray-Johnson (2018) eloquently stated that the feeling of being an imposter is "widely characterized by a strong sense of personal inauthenticity and the general sense of feeling like a fraud." (p. 2). Murray-Johnson put forth a noteworthy account of the view of Brookfield (1991). In fact, Brookfield (2015), in reiterating his original point, stated that in experiencing impostership, many students perceive a lack of talent to such a degree that they don't even feel that they belong in college.

In discussing working-class learners taking leaps of faith, through her own personal narrative, Vickie Claflin (2018) opened a window that revealed, first-hand, some of a working class adult learner's perceptions. In doing so, she provided an inside look at this issue that is affecting many adult learners today—feeling out of place. Claflin described her first concern: her perception of being older than most freshmen who begin college. She also described her first class/professor interaction. The interaction was not inspiring. To the contrary, rather than being a welcoming interaction, it was a dialogue from a professor that basically consisted of a warning to members of the class to take a good look at each classmate now while you have a chance, because two out of each three will not make it through the entire academic journey.

It is unsettling to know that this type of message could be communicated to students at such a critical time in their lives, the beginning of their academic journey. However, that was indeed their reality at the time. Claflin felt as if the professor was talking directly to her, making her feel as if she were undoubtedly an imposter in that college classroom. Olson's (2018) description of a

working class learner's dilemma is equally valuable. She described it as a feeling of in-betweenness (p. 8) and a "struggle between what was and what is" (p. 7). Olson's perspective is of great value to the adult learner discussion, because her descriptions help demonstrate that there can be many variations in adult learners' self-perceptions based on the individual and the situation at hand.

In actuality, the spectrum can be quite extensive when it comes to reasons that college students perceive that they are out of place in an academic setting. It can range from a low self-perception of academic knowledge to a low self-perception of socio-economic status as compared to others, as well as numerous other issues regarding the self. In either case, the most important thing to keep in mind is that it does not necessarily have to be permanent. The narrative of Laura Lee Douglas (2018) conveyed this overall message to working class adult learners. Douglas stated that in the end, it is a process of making others' place our place.

Altogether, Claflin, Olson, and Douglas address the heart of the issue for adult learners. Adult learners are taking leaps of faith in an effort to make more meaning of their lives (Lindeman, 1926) by attempting to make a more fulfilling place, their place. In doing so, there are periods of impostership stemming from feeling out of place. Hence, they experience feelings of being somewhere between their past and their potential future. Olson (2018) stated that her past and future coexist. She noted that in her carrying bag, one would find a pair of business casual shoes and an outfit—always ready when needed. Olson's coexistence seems very similar to that of the waitress, the laborer, or the custodian, who would need a change of clothes handily ready and waiting in order to attend a college course after work. In many cases, the working-class adult learner's life is in a constant state of coexistence. This is because working-class adult learners do not have the luxury of time to plan out a full long-term four-year plan. Many adult learners are learning in the moment and have to approach their education in increments—one piece at a time. This method can indeed take longer to accomplish a goal; nonetheless, it can be quite effective. To that point, in an earlier study pertaining to creative outcomes, Marade, Gibbons, and Brinthaup (2011) demonstrated that a "progress in increments" strategy is an effective way of accomplishing goals and maintaining motivation to continue achieving success.

Progress in Increments

Internships and co-op programs are designed to provide incremental achievements can be beneficial to working-class adult learners because they would fit adult learners' needs and concurrently, on their timeframe. For example, many working-class adult learners are results-oriented learners and their needs are more of a current nature as opposed to many long-term goals of traditional-age students. In fact, a study by Styers, Dye, Peery, Cosby, and Haden (2017) demonstrated that incremental progress can be effective.

The Styers et al. (2017) study found that students working toward certification through a six-month college co-op program achieved academic success, gained employment, increased their income, and demonstrated increased positive perceptions of their academic potential to the point of continuing beyond certification and earning their college degree. In due course, via working toward certification and simultaneously achieving incremental academic and workplace success, the students of the Styers et al. study effectively developed a sense of belonging and made each of those places—the academic environment, and the workplace—feel like places of their own.

It follows that incremental achievements via internships or co-ops can be positive results that can lead to an increased sense of belonging, increased positive motivation, and additional accomplishments. Moreover, if the pay earned through the internship or co-op were to be more than an adult learner may have been currently earning, the increase in pay could lead to less hours of work and more hours of study and academic activities, which in turn could lead to even more accomplishments (see Figure 1).

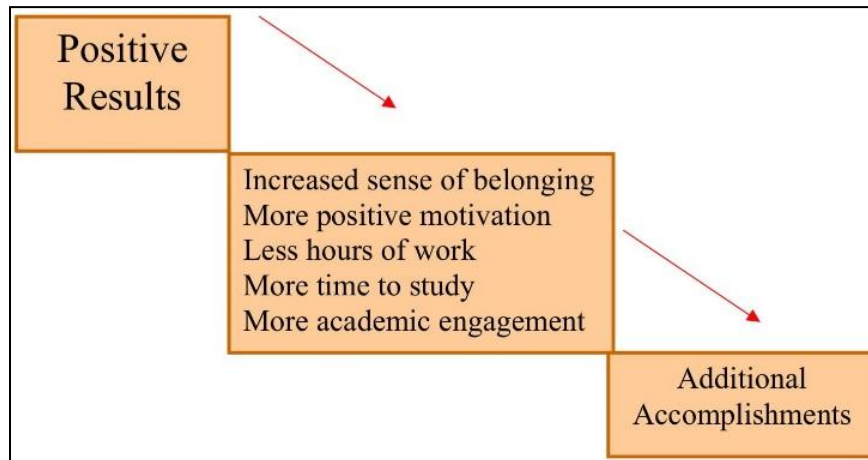


Figure 5. Progress in Increments (© 2019 Angelo Marade)

The relevance of this discussion at the current time is that research indicates that many adult learners’ needs and concerns have not been properly addressed. In fact, at one point, 42% of community colleges offered no student services or special programs at all for adult learners (NASPA, 2014). Numerous calls are being made for more effective student services (ACE, 2017; Blumenstyk, 2018; Jackson, 2019).

Concerns related to adult learners’ ability to maintain college careers has risen to such a high level, suggestions are being openly made in regards to how to improve. One organization straightforwardly emphasized: leaders and policy makers “need to be willing to adopt policies and practices that meet the needs of post-traditional learners” (ACE, 2017, p. 16). Additional comments conveyed similar messages. For example, it has been stated that attention should be given not only to the services being considered, but also the value of the services as they pertain to adult learners’ needs (Blumenstyk, 2018; Jackson, 2019).

Jackson (2019) stated it bluntly: It is time to put an end to symbolic college programs and implement useful and effective student service programs. Fortunately, many colleges are currently re-examining their strategies as they pertain to adult learners’ needs. It would be most fortunate for the academic community as a whole to see more college programs designed to more specifically serve working class learners.

Fifty-six percent of adult learners are considered to be workers who study in an effort to enhance their careers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Sixty percent of students attend college to earn more income (Erisman & Steele, 2015). Eighty-eight percent of students attend colleges with jobs being their main goal (Busteed, 2019). That said, research suggests the need for change in the way many colleges are operating. Research highlights what needs to be examined. For example, “too many students are either not completing degrees or are completing

programs that are not valued by employers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 2). Many employers validated that point. In fact, only 11% of business leaders surveyed strongly agreed that people are ready for jobs and careers (Busteed, 2017).

We are currently at a crossroads where adult learners are becoming the majority of students enrolling in our colleges (ACE, 2017). Even more, Murchison (2017) suggested that there would be a 21% increase in the number of adult learners by 2022. If adult learners concerns are not addressed, these problems are likely to become worse. All told, co-op programs with incremental academic and workplace achievements should be more of a focal point and a destination to reach by colleges who intend to be of authentic service to working class learners.

Conclusion

Thirty-one million adult learners are currently repeatedly taking leaps of faith in an effort to achieve new meaning in their lives by attending college. These working-class learners need more support and student services in place to help them achieve their goals. A coming together of college leadership, policy makers, and department heads is needed to address adult learners’ true concerns. The concerns that affect adult learners most are career- and work-oriented. It follows that the availability of more co-op programs with offerings of incremental academic and workplace achievement could effectively address adult learners’ true concerns and enhance their academic success. This could also help adult learners meet today’s employers’ preferences for career readiness.

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Foreign Language Policies, Consequences, and Recommendations

Shawna Rambur

Abstract

The U.S. job market increasingly seeks culturally responsive, multilingual employees a goal poorly aligned with U.S. higher education policies. This paper reviews recent K-16 enrollment in foreign language courses, with a focus on higher education. The individual and societal case for foreign language immersion throughout the educational pipeline in the will be detailed and compared to efforts abroad. Current policies and practice pitfalls as well as potential solutions will be discussed, including a shift from a language-literature approach to a proficiency approach fostered by context-rich dual degree programs. These recommendations aim to shape educational policies to encourage foreign language proficiency with an overall goal of creating agile, highly sought graduates who thrive in a continuously more competitive job market.

Keywords: U.S. job market, foreign language proficiency, dual degree programs, foreign language enrollment, higher education foreign language policies

Current Trends: What is the Problem?

U.S. employers increasingly seek employees who are culturally responsive and multilingual. As such, it is important for U.S. postsecondary education to have policies in place that encourage students to gain these skills before they go on the job market. The U.S. demand for bilingual workers increased more than 250% in five years, from 240,000 in 2010 to 630,000 in 2015. This demand was not only for speakers of Spanish but for any language because of the increased opportunity for the employer to serve a wider range of customers (New American Economy, 2017). These data reveal that while it is possible and even common for graduates to gain employment without being multilingual, being multilingual significantly increases opportunities for meaningful employment. In addition to the benefit bilingualism brings to workers seeking employment, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) stated that there are also many cognitive benefits as well, including enhanced problem-solving skills, memory function, creative thinking ability, and improved attitude toward the target language and culture (Benefits Language Learning, n.d.).

Despite these employment and cognitive benefits, U.S. higher education institutions have had a steady decrease in students enrolled in language courses. Starting in 1998 there was steady increase in foreign language enrollment, until 2013 where overall enrollments dropped by 6.7%. This trend continued, and between 2013 and 2019 enrollments dropped another 9.2% (Looney & Lusin, 2018). Although these data illustrate the reversal in the proportion of students enrolled in languages in postsecondary education, they compared to earlier years. However, these data obscure more disconcerting trends. Specifically, when the overall educational trajectory is viewed it suggested that only a small proportion of K-12 students study foreign language and even fewer persist. In 2017, for example, 20% of K-12 students reported studying a foreign language (Devlin, 2018) and in 2016 the percentage of students at postsecondary institutions enrolled in a foreign language was 7.5% (Looney et al., 2018). In contrast to international statistics, a median of 92% of European students are studying a foreign language in elementary

and post-secondary schools, with some countries such as Luxembourg, Malta, and Liechtenstein having an average of 100% (Devlin, 2018). Devlin also notes that learning two foreign languages is a requirement in more than 20 European countries, thus it is evident that these high rates are not solely due to English being the lingua franca.

Given that only 7.5% of American college students are studying a foreign language, it is advisable to review the policies that may influence this outcome (Looney et al., 2018). Of the universities in the United States that require students to study languages as a graduation requirement, many only require beginner levels (one to two semesters). This trend has been persistent over the past decade; in 2009, 2013, and 2016 there was a 5:1 ratio of students in introductory to advanced language courses (Looney et al., 2018). Most students will obtain an introduction to a language but will not participate in advanced language study and, are not likely to gain significant proficiency. The consequence of this is that language students frequently leave college with no—or only introductory—foreign language abilities.

If the nation continues on this trajectory, U.S. graduates and employees will be unable to communicate with companies, institutions, or businesses outside of the United States and other English-speaking countries. They would also be increasingly more reliant on non-American interpreters, unable to compete in the job market, and largely unprepared for a world requiring global citizenship, communication, diplomacy, and multicultural understanding.

Solutions

Research suggests there are multiple approaches that could be taken to help solve this issue. A solution that increases foreign language enrollment and also makes languages directly applicable to students' future careers is dual-degree programs. This has been a modern trend that is having a great impact on increasing enrollment (Redden, 2017). In these programs, students major in the field of their choice (e.g., engineering or business) along with a foreign language. Such programs allow students to study abroad or have internships abroad, where they gain interdisciplinary skills in their field in another country. This is a shift from the traditional model of foreign language programs called *language-literature*, which offer introductory grammar courses followed by literature courses (Redden, 2017). Dual-degree programs instead offer deep, relevant immersion promoting the overt intention to create a global citizen.

A 2007 report from the Modern Language Association warned universities of foreign languages' waning relevance and called for a complete restructuring of language programs (Redden, 2017). They urged departments to restructure away from a language-literature program and adopt interdisciplinary and dual-degree programs that prepared students for a wide range of careers in which they could apply their language knowledge. Based on a 2017 survey, only 39% of faculty and administrators worked to change their curriculum to fit this model, suggesting that universities are largely still providing students with outdated language instruction (Redden, 2017).

A dual-degree program is, indeed, a commitment. There are, however, other solutions to help increase students' foreign language skills. Currently higher education institutions tend to require a range of zero to three semesters of a foreign language, depending on the major and institution.

Given that students are taking a small portion of what is required for language and cultural proficiency, it is to be expected that they graduate without the ability to apply for jobs requiring multilingual and multicultural employees, opportunities that have been increasing exponentially (New American Economy, 2017). One solution is to replace semester, credit-hour requirements with proficiency-based requirements. Specifically, requiring a certain level of mastery of the language as opposed to number of courses completed.

Using semesters as a measurement bypasses what is really important. If a graduate needs to participate in a meeting with Spanish speakers, it is irrelevant how many courses he or she enrolled in; the proficiency level he or she gained during that time will measure success. If language requirements were to shift away from a semester model and towards a proficiency model, this would advantage heritage speakers by giving them credit for their abilities. It would also encourage non-heritage students to not skim through the required courses, but would instead require them to delve into the language and culture and apply it to their field of study in meaningful and applicable ways.

Many universities use the phrase “proficiency” but still link it to amount of courses taken (Neuman, 2017). Proficiency can instead be, and optimally is, defined as what students can do with the language (ACTFL, 2012). A proficiency level that a university requires could be one within the ACTFL proficiency range, which has four categories of *Novice*, *Intermediate*, *Advanced*, and *Superior*, which three sub-categories of *Low*, *Mid*, and *High* in each of these (except *Superior*). Depending on the institution or major, for example, a university may choose to replace the two-semester requirement with a *Novice High* or *Intermediate Low* requirement. This model would shift the priority to a certain proficiency level, then provide students with examples of how this may be obtained. These may include being a heritage speaker, participating in study-abroad immersion, taking as many courses as a student needs to reach that proficiency goal or some other creative approach.

Other policy solutions may include increasing bilingual education at the elementary and secondary education levels to allow higher education to build on those language skills in more complex settings, such as in conjunction with another major, such as business, fashion, art or engineering. As previously stated, current rates of elementary students studying foreign language is only 20% (Devlin, 2018). As with students at the postsecondary level, this can be compared to the amount of K-12 students in Europe who are learning *two or more* foreign languages at 60.2% and those learning one foreign language is 92% (Key data, 2012; Devlin, 2018).

Increasing the foreign language programs and/or immersion schools for children would help create bilingual speakers early in their education. This would also require an increase in instructors who are able to run immersion schools and foreign language programs. Therefore, an increase at the higher education level would create an educational climate in which it is easier to raise children to be multilingual.

Conclusion

Requiring bilingual elementary education coupled with meaningful language proficient dual-degree programs in the United States may seem implausible but a similar conclusion has been reached in many European countries. The European Association for International Education (EAIE), for example, reported that the number of English-taught bachelor's programs increased from 55 in 2009 to nearly 3,000 in 2017 (EAIE, 2017). It could be argued that this is simply because English has become the dominant global language. Instead, the interaction is more subtle. These European educational policies and practices are directed by job markets and that English is the default language of business interactions (Michaud, 2012). Looking at American job market trends now, a similar pattern is following in the United States (New American Economy, 2017). With the amount of American jobs requiring skills in a foreign language nearly tripling within a five-year period (New American Economy, 2017), we are at a pivotal point in history in which the future job market informs K-16 priorities regarding the wisdom of language immersion in the K-16 curriculum.

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Innovation in Prior Learning Assessment: Program, Course, Model, and Best Practices

Todd Sherron, Catherine A. Cherrstrom, Carrie Boden, and Lindsey Wilson

Abstract

Prior learning assessment (PLA) supports student persistence, shortens time-to-degree, and boosts degree completion, particularly for post-traditional (adult or non-traditional) students and underserved populations. This proceeding examines an innovative approach to PLA using block credit. Administered within the award-winning Department of Occupational, Workforce, and Leadership Studies at Texas State University, the current PLA competency model integrates components from an original model, Bloom's revised taxonomy, and the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET Online) measures. We discuss PLA innovation, including course and students, competency model and portfolio evaluation, best practices for stakeholders, and implications for research and practice.

Keywords: *Prior Learning Assessment, PLA, Best Practices, Model, Post-Traditional Students*

Background

As the economy shifts and technology evolves, jobs and careers increasingly require advanced credentials, thus increasing the need for and significance of a college degree (Cherrstrom & Boden, 2018). Earning a degree, however, requires resources such as time and money. Prior learning assessment (PLA) evaluates learning gained outside a traditional academic environment (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013; McKay, Cohn, & Kuang, 2016), bridging the gap between experiential non-collegiate learning and collegiate credit. Stated another way, PLA captures the college-level learning and knowledge students acquire while living their lives—working, participating in employer training programs, serving in the military, independently studying, volunteering or doing community service, and studying open-source courseware. PLA supports student persistence, shortens time-to-degree, and boosts degree completion, particularly for post-traditional (adult or non-traditional) students and underserved populations (Klein-Collins & Hudson, 2018; McKay, Cohn, & Kuang, 2016), offering benefits to students, higher education institutions, and ultimately, employers.

After World War II, PLA emerged as a process of evaluating training for college-level learning, as veterans on the G.I. Bill earned college credits for military training (Travers, 2012a, 2012b). Partially in response to Vietnam veterans returning home, Texas State University created what is now known as the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) degree program (Springer, Kakas, & Gottschall, 2015). Since inception, the program has expanded to include a variety of students with prior learning in a variety of contexts. Although on the cutting edge when designed, PLA remained largely untouched for almost 40 years. Updating presented a major challenge and predicament: making one change to PLA would have a domino effect across the BAAS program, including administration, the degree plan, the advising structure, and the course housing PLA. In 2012, faculty, consultants, administrative assistants, graduate assistants, instructional designers, the advising center, and the registrar's office collaborated to overhaul and redesign the entire BAAS program, including PLA.

Administered within the award-winning Department of Occupational, Workforce, and Leadership Studies at Texas State University, PLA plays a critical role in primarily post-

traditional students completing their college degrees, specifically earning a BAAS (Cherrstrom & Boden, 2018; Springer, Kakas, & Gottschall, 2015). The new and improved PLA aligns with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2019) standards and obtained approvals at the department, college, university, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board levels. The purpose of this proceeding is to examine this innovative approach to PLA using block credit. We will discuss the PLA course and students, competency model and portfolio evaluation, best practices for stakeholders, and implications for research and practice.

PLA Course and Students

PLA involves documenting an individual's outside learning through competency portfolios or assessment testing to receive academic credit (Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). Using the portfolio-based assessment approach, Texas State University offers a PLA course to facilitate student learning and portfolio creation. During the overhaul and redesign, the required 16-week, three semester credit hour (SCH) course, offered through traditional face-to-face or hybrid formats, evolved into an optional 8-week, one SCH course, offered online through extended programs. Students not seeking PLA no longer take the previously required course, and students with multiple occupations can repeat the course to apply for credit related to each additional occupation. This approach saves money for non-PLA seeking students and lowers the cost for students seeking PLA by two-thirds less a small fee.

Each semester, 40 to 60 students take the PLA course, ranging in age from 20 to 60 years with an average age of 36 years. Based on the most recent student demographics, 64% of PLA students were women, a higher percentage compared to 53% in the department and 58% at the university (Texas State University, 2018). African-American students comprised 11% of PLA students, a lower percentage compared to 14% in the department and 12% at the university. White students comprised 47% of PLA students, compared to 50% in the department and 45% at the university; Hispanic students comprised 38% of PLA students, compared to 33% in the department and 39% at the university.

The fully online course includes four modules in a compressed eight-week term. In the first module, students learn about PLA and use the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET Online, 2019.) to examine one prior or current occupation. In the second module, students conduct a job task analysis (JTA), using one O*NET occupation code and title, and verify prior experience. Students have analyzed a wide variety of occupations, representing the breadth of prior learning (see Figure 1).

In the third module, students learn how to write a competency statement and how assessors will evaluate each statement using a proprietary competency model. Each competency statement includes three components—a skill statement, knowledge and cognitive process dimensions, and tools and technology. At the beginning of the competency statement, students address one skill from the JTA, including quantitative and qualitative descriptions, in the skill statement. In the next step, students use knowledge and cognitive process dimensions from Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) revised Bloom's (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956) taxonomy as a framework. The knowledge dimension types range from the concrete to abstract and comprise factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognition.

The cognitive process dimension categories range from lower- to higher-order thinking and comprise remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. At the end of the competency statement, students discuss tools and technology along with supplies and physical space. In the final course module, students create a competency portfolio including an application for work life experience, position description, the JTA, up to 25 competency statements (one for each job task), and work verification letter(s). The competency portfolio, the course’s major output, becomes the input for portfolio evaluation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising Sales Agents • Barbers • Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks • Budget Analysts • Business Intelligence Analysts • Career/Technician Education Teachers, Secondary School • Cashiers • Certified Nursing Assistant • Clergy • Clinical Research Coordinators • Coaches and Scouts • Customer Service Representatives • Database Administrators • Dental Assistants • Dental Hygienists • Desktop Publishers • Dietitians and Nutritionists • Directors, Religious Activities and Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-Line Supervisors of Police and Detectives • First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers • First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers • Office Clerks, General • Patient Representatives • Personal Care Aids • Personal Financial Advisors • Pharmacy Technicians • Photographer • Police Patrol Officers • Police, Fire and Ambulance Dispatchers • Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education • Procurement Clerks • Property, Real Estate and Community Association Managers • Psychiatric Technicians • Sales Associate
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Figure 1. O*NET occupations analyzed by students for prior learning assessment (PLA).

Competency Model and Portfolio Evaluation

Texas State University’s overhaul and redesign of PLA included redesigning a proprietary competency model and improving portfolio evaluation. Pierson (2002) created the original model used from 1973 to 2014, based on the U.S. Department of Labor’s (1991) *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*. No longer in print and deemed obsolete, *DOT* was eventually replaced by O*NET Online (Mariani, 1999). The current PLA competency model integrates components from the original model, Bloom’s revised taxonomy (Andersen & Krathwohl, 2001), and O*NET Online (2019) measures, specifically occupation number and title, job zone, and specific vocational preparation (SVP).

O*NET Online (2019) includes information for more than 950 occupations. A job zone is “a group of occupations similar in how much education people need to do the work, how much related experience people need to do the work, and how much on-the-job training people need to do the work” (O*NET Online, Help, Job Zones, para. 1). The five job zones span occupations needing no or little preparation to those needing extensive preparation. The SVP measures “the amount of lapsed time required by a typical worker to learn the techniques, acquire the information, and develop the facility needed for average performance in a specific job-worker situation” (O*NET Online, Help, SVP, para. 2). The nine SVP levels of time span from short duration to over 10 years.

To create a summative competency measure, assessors rate four domains using a 100-point scale—skill, knowledge dimension, cognitive process dimension, and tools and technology. To create a performance indicator score, three external measures are added to the total competency score—course grade and O*NET Online (2019) job zone and SVP. The performance indicator score correlates to the total award, ranging from zero to 30 SCH, and currently averaging 13 SCH. Each semester, the PLA administrator applies a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the PLA competency model for construct validity. The most recent CFA model indicated construct validation ($\chi^2 = 2.72$, $p = .10$; Sherron, 2019).

For portfolio evaluation, the redesigned process expanded from one to two assessors for each portfolio, and the two scores are averaged to yield the semester credit award. Using two assessors increases validity to ensure students receive fair and equitable review of their portfolios for credit. If the assessor scores differ by 9 SCHs or more, the PLA coordinator reviews the portfolio to reconcile the difference. To facilitate a common frame of reference and to increase inter-rater reliability, assessor training expanded from a one-time training upon hire to training every semester for all assessors. Rater reliability has ranged from $r = 0.65$ to 0.81 , implying rater consistency (Sherron, 2019).

Additional improvements included changing the course’s fee and payment structure, so PLA portfolio evaluation shifted from a required and unpaid service activity to optional and paid work. The latter accommodates faculty members’ capacity to assess, or not, in any given semester. To support PLA administration, the revised process now includes a part-time graduate assistant to manage administrative tasks, maintain a database, and support research activities. Last, students originally could not review the scoring rubric for their competency portfolios. In the updated transparent feedback process, students may request anonymous assessor feedback to better understand the rationale for the credit award. Collectively, these competency model and portfolio evaluation improvements enhance the robustness of PLA and align with best-practices promoted by national organizations to best serve students.

Best Practices for Stakeholders

The Educational Opportunity Association (2018) defines best education practices as “the wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes” (para. 3). In that spirit, we offer best practices for PLA students, instructors, assessors, and administrators.

For students, time management is an essential best practice. For example, instructors carefully scaffold the learning content and assignments in the PLA course, so students master skills for each portfolio section before progressing to the next section. In addition to mastery, staying on schedule enables students to maximize vicarious learning (Kozar, Lum, & Benson, 2015) from reading sections of peers' portfolios and to integrate instructor and peer feedback on their own writing. Repeating each step of the writing process—prewriting, research, drafting, revising, proofreading, and polishing—while composing each portfolio section produces the strongest product. The higher the levels of knowledge types and cognitive process categories and writing clarity in the portfolio, the higher the likelihood students will earn more credits for college-level learning outside of traditional academic environments.

For instructors, best practices include creating a collaborative and cooperative environment to support learning. From the first moment a student enters the course, the instructor can teach, model, and emphasize this course ethos. We recommend instructors confirm students use the best O*NET code and occupation title to maximize the PLA experience. Instructors can give students many opportunities to practice new skills, starting with low- and progressing to high-stakes assignments. When instructors promptly return work (within 24-48 hours when possible), students can integrate feedback. Microsoft Word's comments and track changes functions provide effective tools for written and audio comments to assist students in improving their work. To confirm original work, require students to submit each portfolio to Turnitin.com or another plagiarism detection tool. As a final instructor best practice, celebrate mastery and success to enhance student efficacy and motivation.

For assessors, best practices include allowing sufficient time to evaluate, as each portfolio requires 45 to 90 minutes. Similar to grading course assignments, stronger portfolios are easier and quicker to assess and weaker ones more challenging and time consuming. To stay on pace and for greater consistency, we recommend three tables available from the Center for Teaching Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Iowa State University (2019). The first table lists Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) knowledge dimension types across the top and cognitive process dimension categories down the side, including descriptions and examples for each intersection. The second and third tables respectively provide definitions for each knowledge type and example verbs for each cognitive process category. Using these tools while evaluating portfolios keeps the focus on skill statement verbs, dimensions, and prior learning.

For administrators, best practices span the PLA process and have an impact on leaders, students, instructor, and assessors. As leaders, administrators can stay current on course, department, university, and accreditation publications to certify PLA remains in line with policies, rules, and standards. Like instructors, the administrator can confirm students have identified the best O*NET occupation code and title. When students repeat the course, administrators can verify students are using a different O*NET code and occupation title for each submitted portfolio. At the end of the process, administrator can communicate credit awards to students in a timely manner, ideally prior to registration opening for the next semester.

In addition, administrators can provide instructors and assessors with the tools they need to deliver the course and evaluate portfolios. Each semester, for example, administrators can provide an updated course shell to instructors in the university's learning management system (LMS). We recommend administrators have access to all course sections in the LMS to ensure

consistency between sections and a meaningful student experience. For assessors, administrators can schedule convenient online or in-person training sessions to prepare for evaluation and afford ample time for assessors to accurately evaluate portfolios. We recommend administrators have access to all assessor sites to monitor portfolio evaluations in real-time. Last, data administrators can compile, aggregate, segregate, and analyze portfolio evaluation data to identify historical patterns, strengths, and needed improvements for PLA. We share these best practices and offer possible implications.

Implications for Research and Practice

This proceeding examined an innovative approach to PLA and offers implications for research and practice. For research, the proceeding documents the redesign and overhaul of a PLA program, including an underlying course, student demographics, competency model, portfolio evaluation, and best practices. For practice, the course scaffolds student progression from learning about PLA, to analyzing a prior or current occupation, to writing competency statements, to creating a competency portfolio. The tuition and fee structure provides student affordability, paying for one SCH to earn, on average, 13 SCHs, while funding a graduate assistant and compensating instructors and assessors. The PLA model and portfolio evaluation benchmark a unique, fair, and equitable block credit approach to awarding credit hours. Best practices offer implications for stakeholders, including how students and instructors can maximize the PLA award through learning and teaching activities, how assessors can fairly and equitably evaluate PLA in a timely manner, and how administrators can establish, evolve, and grow a robust PLA program.

As future research, we continue to test the PLA competency model to ensure consistency across students, independent of age, gender, and race/ethnicity as well as in measuring skills, knowledge types, cognitive process categories, and tools and technology. For future practice, we anticipate ongoing curricular updates and professional development. As the workplace and workforce increasingly demand a college degree, higher education must innovate to bridge the gap between traditional practices and contemporary student needs. An innovative and robust PLA program serves the needs of diverse, 21st century, post-traditional students.

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Bridging the Skill Gap: Helping Non-Traditional Students Develop Research Skills When They Need It Most

Christina C. Wray and Renee C. Montgomery

Abstract

Many of the research skills needed to succeed in higher education are never explicitly taught. Most students learn through experience and exposure. However, working-class students don't always grow up in academic environments that provide the same exposure to these skills. This paper will explore ways to help working-class and non-traditional students develop fundamental research skills while respecting their busy schedules. The University of Central Florida Library's "Research Tips Tuesdays" webinar series will be used as a model to help instructors identify skill gaps, design scaffolded skill building programs, and brainstorm potential campus partners.

Keywords: *Information literacy, hidden curriculum, library instruction, scaffolded instruction*

Background

There is a growing population of non-traditional and working-class students participating in higher education. Research has shown that these students often have very different learning styles and needs than traditional students. While there is a lack of consensus in the literature on how to define non-traditional students, most research defines them by age. Other studies define them in terms of their adult life responsibilities. Regardless of how non-traditional is defined, it is clear from the research that many students coming back to college feel they do not know as much as their traditional counterparts, and they may not be aware of library resources and services offered. Further, these students often have increased anxiety about working with new technology.

Academic libraries are well placed to help non-traditional students develop the skills and confidence they need to successfully engage in the scholarly community. As researchers have noted, "There is an extremely compatible, yet often overlooked, relationship between the disciplines of adult education and librarianship. If libraries and adult educators can learn more about one another and forge closer and more frequent relationships and collaborations, the adult learner will be better served and truly empowered to succeed in their academic endeavors" (Cooke, 2010, p. 208). However, these students frequently suffer from "library anxiety" and are unlikely to seek out help at the library.

Andrea Tieman and Megan Black (2017) stated, "There are arguments that instruction is the gateway to curbing library anxiety and ultimately the tool to get nontraditional students into the library and to ask for help" (p. 200). The question remains: How can libraries help students overcome their library anxiety, while recognizing that coming to the library for instruction is a significant hurdle for these students? The library at the University of Central Florida (UCF) identified a gap in instruction programming focused on helping working-class students develop the research skills they need to be successful. This paper describes the development and marketing of a series of online workshops designed to meet the perceived needs of students, while integrating foundational research skills and providing a low-stakes introduction to library services for students who may be hesitant to come to the library.

Transfer Students at the University of Central Florida

The number of transfer students at UCF continues to grow each year. “As of fall 2015, there are 14,023 first-generation undergraduate students enrolled at UCF and 61% of those students are transfer students” (UCF Race and Gender Demographics 2016 Report). Spring 2019 enrollment at UCF was 65,467. As shown in Figure 1, the undergraduate population consisted of 56,074 students; 29,941 were transfer students. In the latest report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, it was found that transfer students were more likely to be over age 24 and slightly less likely to have enrolled fulltime (Shapiro et al., 2017).

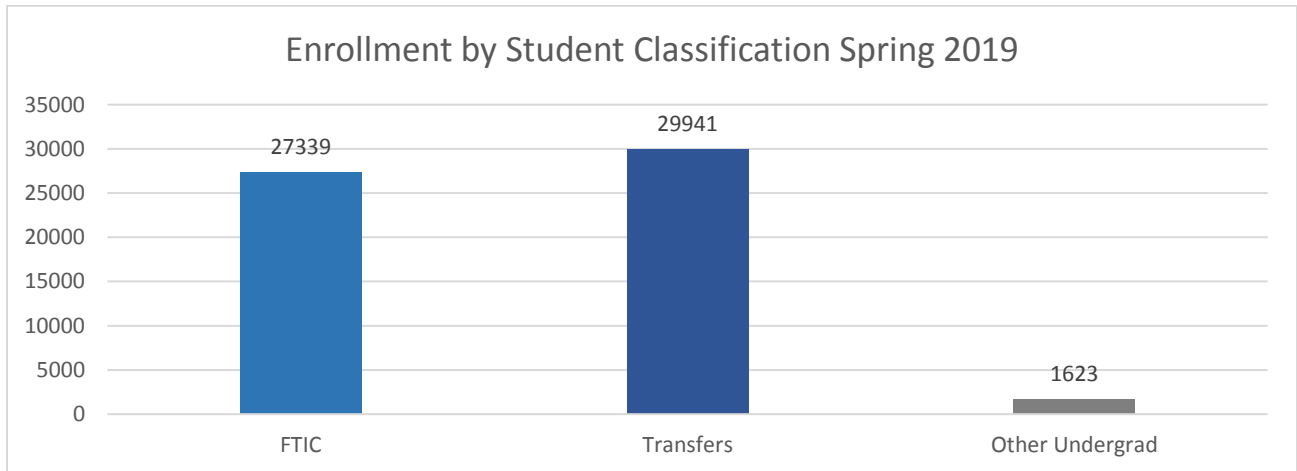


Figure 1. UCF Student Enrollment Headcount by Student Classification: Spring 2019
(From UCF Institutional Knowledge Management Interactive Facts 2018-2019)

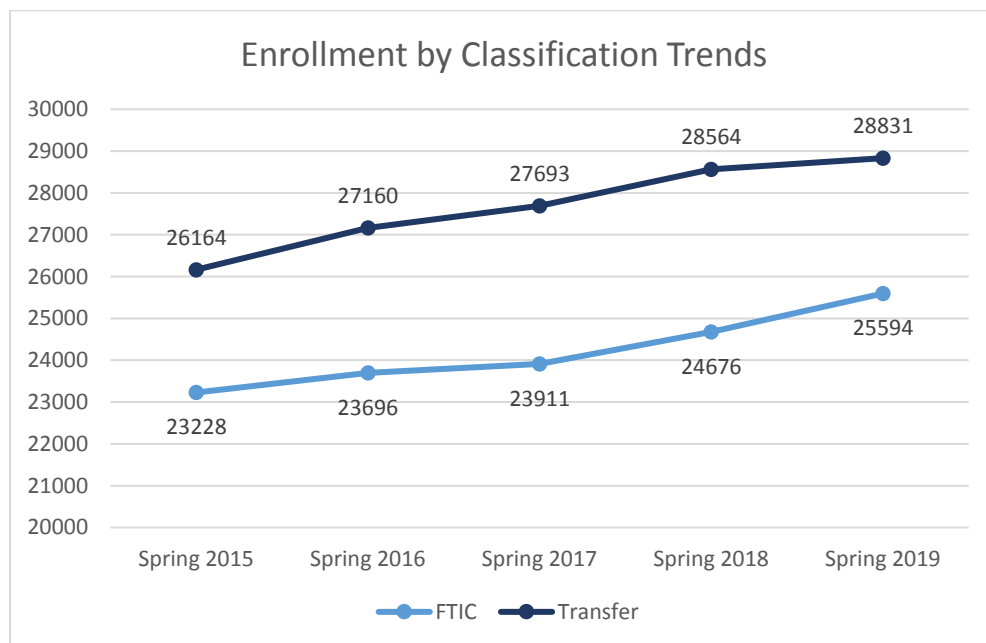


Figure 2. UCF Student Enrollment Trends by Student Classification: Spring 2019
(From UCF Institutional Knowledge Management: Interactive Facts 2018-2019)

Therefore, transfer students are more likely to be defined as non-tradition students than typical first time in college students (FTIC). Over the last five years, there has been a steady upward trend of the number of transfer students attending UCF (see Figure 2). As this population continues to grow, the UCF Libraries have continued to develop new instructional and engagement programming designed to help students learn the academic skills that often become part of the hidden curriculum in postsecondary educational settings.

What is the Hidden Curriculum?

The hidden curriculum is defined by Sambell and McDowell (1998) as “what is implicit and embedded in educational experiences in contrast with the formal statements about curricula and the surface features of educational interaction” (pp. 391-392). In other words, it is the skills and experiences that are never explicitly taught yet greatly influence student success in traditional higher education settings. There are many aspects to the hidden curriculum in higher education that, when missing, can negatively impact working class students, particularly first-generation and transfer students. One of the most prominent intersections between libraries and the hidden curriculum is information literacy. These skills are necessary to actively participate in the scholarly community, yet by the time students reach college it is often assumed that they have already developed these skills so it is presumed no longer necessary to explicitly teach them.

Library research has demonstrated this to be untrue for most students entering college, not just working class or non-traditional students (Gross & Latham, 2012). In a recent survey conducted by Library Journal, librarians estimated that “less than a third of first-year students (28%) are prepared for college-level research” (Dixon, 2017, para. 3). Further, researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago found that first-generation freshman often lacked fundamental skills such as how to locate library books on the shelf, evaluate information, and they viewed research as a single-step event (Pickard & Logan, 2013). Without these skills, students struggle to find the information they need, spend more time searching for resources and often choose poor resources for their needs.

Student Struggles

Observation and assessment data from library instruction sessions reveal that the students at UCF conform to the results found in library research. They often struggle with fundamental information literacy skills. However, they don’t always recognize that they are lacking these skills. Library research has long shown a gap between student perception of skills and their actual skills (Gross & Latham, 2007; Mahmood, 2016). This, coupled with libraries providing informal learning opportunities in formal learning environments, makes it difficult to attract student participation in library workshops. In the summer of 2018, students at UCF (n=211) were surveyed to identify what academic skills they perceived to struggle with the most. Respondents felt that stress and time management were their biggest struggles. They often didn’t know how to start research projects and were confused when searching for sources. This made it difficult to keep up with readings, complete homework on time, and study for exams. Further, they felt they lacked the skills to effectively deliver class presentations.

The librarians at UCF decided to frame information literacy instruction as time-saving and stress-reducing skills to draw student attention. Workshops were also framed to help students gain a broader understanding of how these skills could positively impact their own well-being in

addition to improving their research skills. This resulted in a webinar series titled *Research Tips Tuesdays*. Each webinar was designed with discrete information literacy skill-based learning objectives that could be delivered in 40 minutes or less, followed by an open question and answer session lasting approximately 20 minutes.

Information Literacy Framework

The learning objectives for the *Research Tips Tuesdays* webinar series were guided by the Association for College and Research Libraries' *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). This framework is divided into six frames: authority is constructed and contextual; information creation as a process; information has value; research as inquiry; scholarship as conversation; searching as strategic exploration. Each frame represents an essential concept to academic research and identifies learner knowledge practices and dispositions. Knowing these characteristics can help develop scalable learning opportunities that are designed to allow learners to deepen their understanding of fundamental concepts.

Constructing Scaffolded Skill-Building Paths

Using the student survey results, librarians developed a series of topics that would address student concerns, while also addressing known information literacy skill gaps. For the initial series of webinars, seven topics were identified that fell into three broad categories:

- Effectively engaging with scholarly writing
 - Reading academic articles as evidence
 - Note taking
- Research skills
 - Developing effective search strategies
- Becoming part of the scholarly conversation
 - Presentation skills
 - Planning writing projects
 - Citing sources as evidence

For each topic, discrete learning objectives were identified and aligned with the frames of the ACRL Information Literacy Framework. This allowed the program designers to focus on specific learning outcomes, while maintaining realistic expectations on how much content could be provided in a 40-minute session. The program designers scheduled topics so that the skills learned in each session would reinforce and build upon those learned in previous sessions, as well as align with the flow of academic work across a semester.

One of the central challenges was to design scaffolded skills throughout the sessions yet allow each session to stand alone. Working-class students are often pressed for time and might not be able to commit to a series of synchronous workshops. The webinars were recorded and made publicly available on the library's website (<https://guides.ucf.edu/rtt/archive>) so that students who were not able to attend during the live session could access the content when it was most convenient. Any student who registered for the webinar was sent a notice as soon as the recording was available online. Further, to make the webinars as accessible as possible each

session was designed so that even if participants hadn't watched or attended the previous webinars, they could still understand and engage with the content, though perhaps not as deeply as those who had attended multiple sessions.

Even when students recognize gaps in their knowledge—and accommodation have been made to make the sessions openly available—it can be difficult to find time to incorporate informal learning opportunities into their already demanding schedules. The Teaching & Engagement librarians at UCF have had the most success increasing participation when students are encouraged to attend by faculty or other academic mentors. This led the program designers to develop strategic campus and community partnerships to increase participation.

Engaging Campus and Community Partnerships

A key aspect to the success of any new program is promotion and buy-in. Utilizing campus and community partnerships helped promote the online sessions and make them accessible to more students. UCF has a partnership with six local state colleges through the DirectConnect program. This program guarantees students admission to UCF once they have completed an Associate degree from one of the partner colleges (DirectConnect to UCF). UCF Connect Librarians located at these partner colleges helped promote our “Research Tips Tuesdays” to UCF students as well as potential transfer students currently attending partner colleges by live streaming our sessions in their libraries. This gave the program designers an opportunity to provide an early introduction to the types of resources and services that transfer students could expect at UCF.

The library also collaborated with the First Year Experience LINK (Learning and Interacting with New Knights) Program, “an education and involvement-based program to help students new to UCF get involved on campus” (LINK Program, n.d.). LINK helped promote our workshops by including them in the list of available programs that students can attend to earn LINK points. At the end of each year, students can redeem their LINK points for prizes. Finding campus and community partners can significantly increase campus awareness of library programs and show students direct connections between the library and academic coursework.

Conclusion

Adult learners are a special demographic of students that continues to expand and warrants special attention (Cooke, 2010, p. 209). The *Research Tips Tuesdays* webinar series provides non-traditional students an opportunity to improve their research skills by participating in short sessions, framed to address student perceptions of their own needs, with a focus on making their research and study time more efficient and effective. By identifying the pathways working-class students use to attend UCF, the program designers were able to cultivate partnerships to increase awareness and participation of programming.

In the future, the UCF Libraries plan to engage more faculty to support attendance and use of the webinar archive by integrating them into their online course spaces through the learning management system. Further, the program designers hope to make the webinars accessible to a wider audience by developing more campus partners such as Housing & Residence Life who can live-stream the webinars to students living on campus and in UCF Living Learning Communities. By developing programming that is accessible, focused and scaffolded, libraries

can provide working-class students the opportunity to develop skills that are traditionally part of the hidden curriculum, while also easing library anxiety. Through campus partnerships and targeted promotion, academic libraries are well placed to provide the ongoing support many non-traditional students need to succeed.

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**Empowerment Agents in the Development
of Adult, Working-Class, and Black Female Scholars**
Amanda Wilkerson and Shalander Samuels

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to enhance understanding of how Black female working class adult scholars cultivated support and advancement in the academy with the goal of entering the professoriate. In this critical ethnography, the authors elaborate on the concept of empowerment agent to detail how professionals within the academy created pathways to the professoriate for marginalized doctoral students. Drawing from the work of Pendakur's empowerment agent to respond to the troubling data indicating a decrease in faculty diversification, the authors propose approaches that college and university faculty, staff, and administrators can utilize to act as empowerment agents in support of marginalized adult learners.

Keywords: *Autoethnography, Black Female, Empowerment Agent*

Introduction

The National Science Foundation (2017) reports that more than 50,000 students were recipients of doctoral degrees. While the aforementioned collected data shows an increasing rate at which terminal degrees are granted in the United States, a greater challenge exists. The fundamental concern is whether or not minoritized doctoral degree holders have access to diversifying the academy by becoming members of the faculty. By several accounts, the concern is serious—the reality is that the percentage of faculty diversification is static (NCES, 2018). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) confirmed underrepresentation among African American, Latino, Asian Pacific, and Native Americans, who in total account for fewer than 12% of the entire professoriate population serving at degree granting postsecondary institutions. This data point illustrates that parity is seemingly challenged with respect to the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. Such grave conditions have many different contributing factors that also pose as possible opportunities to change or challenge the damning diversity reality. Nevertheless, there are endemic threats.

For instance, scholars of color are considerably underrepresented within the academy as faculty. Some might argue that recruitment practices as well as wholesale adoptions of diversity and inclusion, clarify the problem, yet these programs have yet to influence a change in the diversification of faculty (Roberson, 2006). A meta-analysis of literature examining diversity hiring in the academy points to various factors that contribute to the aforementioned condition. Among the documented consequences are work culture and conditions (Thompson & Louque, 2005), diminished disregard (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001), and academic hierarchy (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000). However, there is a context by which such dehumanizing data can be contrasted. In particular, while certain literature critically examines empirical scholarship that applies to system faculty diversification concerns, this study identifies individual pathways and processes towards the professoriate as well as a critical framework that will undoubtedly provoke an awareness of alternative support, particularly of adult working class scholars' road to the professoriate. Our aim is to provide an analysis that highlights our collective

journeys. We will do so by first discussing Empowerment Agent Theory, the lens through which we analyze our narratives. Then we briefly highlight the tenets of autoethnography as the methodological framework utilized for this paper. Finally, we will conclude the discussion of our narratives by sharing opportunities and challenges future working class scholars of color might consider as they pursue pathways to the professoriate. The research question that drove our explanatory work was this: How has mentoring impacted Black working-class women's role in diversifying higher education faculty after pursuing doctoral degrees?

Empowerment

Empowerment Agent Theory is grounded in a critical asset-based framework that considers how one empowers individuals whose social and or cultural capital are diabolically under accumulated (Bourdieu, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The theoretical conditions for this frame was developed by Morrow (1999), who as a trained psychologist sought to understand the sociological aspects of minority children's development. Many scholars have advanced Morrow's seminal work to explore the concept of empowerment agent within the prism of education research, ethnic studies, and social work (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Further work in education has been done to understand the perpetuation of systemic inequalities. For instance, Stanton Salazar (2001) has documented which discourses hinder or help students. He developed a scale to characterize pivotal aspects—help and or hindrance—ranging from gatekeeper agent to social agent, institutional agent, and empowerment agent.

Among the four scales, we use empowerment agent theory to conceptualize and structure our experiences as working-class, adult scholars navigating pathways to the professoriate. In particular we utilized Pendakur's (2016) frame as an exemplar to trace the role of empowerment agents within our narratives. Pendakur contended empowerment agent theory as an intersecting critical identity-conscious discourse that denounces inequalities while simultaneously challenging the system's current state of affairs. It is a process for which an embodiment of two actions occurs: First, there is an empowering act to build and bridge knowledge from the agent to marginalized student. In the series of building and bridging knowledge and/or support, social and cultural capital are concurrently constructed. Secondly, the empowerment agent challenges the systems status quo to change the persistence of inequalities for future students.

For this study, we will adopt the empowerment agent frame in order to discuss how social and cultural capital empowers the subjects of this study. Furthermore, we sharply critique the system in order to provide recommendations that highlight opportunities for change to more broadly assist working-class scholars of color who might pursue entering the professoriate. As such, the empowerment agent theoretical frame will allow us to actively consider the status of our own narratives and how aspects of those experiences might be codified to assist and empower similar populations.

Method

To provide an answer to the question previously articulated, we co-constructed a reflexive autoethnography—a research design that is autobiographical in nature and one we contend allows users to introspectively look at a phenomenon through the lens of personal experience

(Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Borchers, 2000). Autoethnography allows authors to share narratives layered with the realities of their experience. The utility of this type of research design is its incorporation of multiple academic disciplines, including education, anthropology, and sociology (Skyles, 2014). An autoethnography can be shared as poetry, essay, narrative, or pictorial rendering (Hayano, 1982). As a part of the process for grasping information for this study, each participant individually situated meaningful experiences in written narrative form. The significance of the autoethnographic approach lies within its ability to transform both the researcher and the reader through work that is interconnected with human experience and its meaning (Ellis & Borchers, 2000). Our experiences, once described autoethnographically, will then be analyzed through cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003).

Amanda's Story

I didn't realize that I wanted to be a faculty member until it was time to complete my dissertation. I began my doctoral journey with the idea that I would become a university administrator. Moreover, I spent the better part of my postgraduate studies grappling with how I would make the logical leap from student to administrator. I had not conceptualized what path I would take to lead me to a career as a faculty member. In this narrative, I will share my pathway to the professoriate by discussing my transition from student to scholar, including the steps to and through that journey. As such, parts of my story will discuss my postdoctoral position and the process of socialization I underwent to gain the confidence to apply for academic positions. Furthermore, I will detail the intense mentoring I received throughout these processes. Finally, this section will conclude with key beliefs and values that were adopted as result of the collective experiences detailed in both narratives.

Credentialed with no career

I was in my mid-thirties when I graduated with a terminal degree in education. I distinctly remember walking across the stage to be hooded. I was torn between many emotions. First, I was excited to have completed my degree. I was joined that day by my parents—two working-class professionals—as well as my grandparents—retired shift service workers—and my sisters; I knew I had made my family proud, and I also had a feeling of relief. Graduation day was the first time since the beginning of my first year in the doctoral program that I did not have to spend weekends deeply engrossed in academic work. However, I felt enormously guilty: I did not have a job, nor did I have a road map for my next steps. I did not know how I would transition from being a recipient of knowledge to being a facilitator of learning. I was credentialed, but I had no career plans. I began the next year not as a faculty member, but as a full-time postdoctoral associate.

Postgraduate mentoring

Through my work as a postdoctoral associate, I gained an opportunity to work closely with the Dean of Urban Education at my college—a petite, energetic woman with the strength of a titan and the wisdom of a philosopher. I tried my best to hide from her my insecurities surrounding my writing. I never knew if she sensed my fear, and I wondered if she realized that this “hood girl” from Miami had a bad case of imposter syndrome. Did she know that the seemingly shy

woman who would show up in her office was really a know-it-all and practical joker? I felt like I did not belong in academia, but her support cut through my fear. “You want to write together?” She sent those words as an email subject line. The enthusiasm that prompted my initial reaction— “YES!” —slowly devolved into self-doubt. I wondered if she would find out that she hired a subpar writer with lousy research skills. My fears tried to get the best of me, yet Dean Carroll’s expectations challenged me to push through self-inflicted doubt. She taught me, through her actions, that writing is a process.

As I read her work in our shared writing documents, I noticed a few things and learned from her actions. Her writing approach showed me that perfection was not instantaneous—it was a process. My vulnerabilities were gradually eroded by this tailored learning exchange. Her guidance made me feel capable. With practice, along with her patience, I was socialized to scholarly work. As a budding academic, I learned much under the tutelage of this wise woman; her support was particularly helpful regarding producing and disseminating publications. She worked with me to develop ideas of interest into areas of empirical inquiry, and she encouraged me to practice ways of finding my voice through sharpening my writing. I did not have to develop these skills alone, though. She would block out time from her schedule to assist me. Over time, she would reverse our roles, and I would take the lead on writing projects.

Shelly’s Story

I am a Black woman, and I am strong. Women are often estimated to be inferior, yet without us, this world would be chaos and unrecognizable (Palmer, Cadet, LeNiles, & Hughes (2019). In this coming-of-age story of my transformation from a first generation college graduate to an educator, some experiences threatened to deter me but I persevered. The imposter syndrome was real for me as a doctoral candidate; I often doubted that I belonged in higher education (Bowman & Palmer, 2017). I recalled a professor in my first year saying that I was not going to be successful because I couldn’t write. In theory she was supposed to be nurturing and caring, as good teachers are (Croninger & Lee, 2001), yet this individual who seemed to lack any sense of equity and social justice. For example, she quite frequently stated to the class that she felt it was her responsibility to “weed out the bad apples,” those who in her eyes who were unfit for the program. What she invoked in us was utter fear—fear of being banished from the program, fear of being less-than. As a result, throughout my educational tenure I worked harder, studied more, and was more dedicated; I had to persevere no matter the obstacles.

Credentialed with an alternate career

After graduation from receiving my terminal degree I pursued an atypical path. While fellow colleagues were busy applying for faculty jobs in higher education, I prepared to re-enter the K-12 classroom system. My approach was deliberately different: I supplemented my knowledge with the support of a merit-based program. During my doctoral journey I was inducted into Holmes Scholars, an organization for students of color pursuing doctoral degrees in education. My involvement in Holmes Scholars helped me to navigate the unfamiliar process of pursuing the doctoral degree. However, when many of my doctoral counterparts transitioned into higher education jobs after graduation, I began to question my decision to return to the K-12 classroom. I considered the impact that path could have on my career once I decided to transition

to a full-time role in higher education from that of an adjunct professor, which I'd undertaken while continuing to work in a K-12 setting full time. Ultimately, I chose the alternate career path. I went where I thought my expertise was most needed.

An amplifying the voice in my own narrative

Among my key beliefs is the idea that all students can succeed if given the opportunity to do so. This means higher education needs to talk less about social justice and equity and do more about them. Throughout my journey, I needed consistent mentorship and guidance in establishing myself as a scholar, as well as direction on standard processes to complete the program. My experience led me to the realization that universities should consider assigning a mentor upon the initial acceptance of the student into a doctoral program; as I later learned, it is the cornerstone of the student success (Cooper & Wheeler, 2010). Moreover, I found that communication was lacking with the administration—they could consider specific liaisons for working scholars. Additionally, the departments in the college need to be more cohesive, organized, communicative and aligned with one another. In contrast, I found that some departments were very well-organized, and that they mentored their students, exposed them to research and to writing for top-tiered journals and conference presentations in the first year. Upon graduation, those students were more equipped and prepared for the workforce compared to other programs. As I continue my journey as a high school teacher and adjunct college professor, I often lament about the mixed career success I have had but refuse to allow my failures to determine my future.

Implications for Adult Educators

These shared narratives discuss how we both were in need of mentoring to help propel us to the next steps in our career. We might add that mentoring remains a salient ingredient for seeing the fruition of our professional goals. As evidenced by our stories, mentoring took on formal and informal roles. Examples of formal mentoring included research discussions focused on achievement (research dissemination) and collaboration. Whereas examples of informal mentoring focused on all aspects of our lives and not just our scholarly side.

What we know:

- Achievement is affected by a variety of social, psychological and environmental factors.
- As such, it would behoove mentors to provide working class scholars with support that is coordinated in a manner to counter effects of imposter syndrome.
- Moreover, changing outcomes for working class scholar imposter syndrome means a focus on the needs of the whole person.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic study's findings suggest that working-class status is not a delimiting factor for access or success within the academy. It is critical to focus on the notion that each person has an individualized pathway. Within this paper we shared information that indicated similarities and differences in our stories. What has made the difference is having a base of support, through mentoring whereby our strengths were recognized and developed; our

assessment is that college and university administration, faculty, and staff must recognize and act upon the strengths, needs, and narratives of marginalized, working-class scholars; their ability to do so might empower both the student and the system.

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Save the Date—AHEA Conference 2020

Make plans now to join us next year. We'll be in the same location, but our focus will shift. The next installment in the AHEA Book Series is titled *Unfinished Business: Compelling Stories of Persistence*, and this will be the theme of the 2020 conference.

For more than 100 years, nearly half of all students who enroll in American colleges and universities do not persist to graduation. Their stories are extensive and explain the reasoning for students giving up on their goal of obtaining a college degree. Yet, hundreds of thousands of college students stop out or drop out entirely from all types of universities across the world each and every year. While the factors are wide-ranging and complicated, one fact remains for these individuals. They are connected to nearly 38 million other Americans that have some college but no degree.

This subject is taboo among friends, coworkers, and family members. Not finishing a degree is often a closely held secret that plagues their self-efficacy as they discuss, engage, and compete in a challenging workforce of the 21st century. Many have excelled despite their lack of a college credential. Some weren't ready at 18 for the focus and commitment of academic studies. Other non-completers found opportunities that created income, which matched familial needs. Nonetheless, they bear this burden of being completely competent and high performing without the standard credential that many of their fellow leaders have to fall back upon in times of transition.

This book cuts right to the heart of what matters in education. The personal value that students hold for their education is paramount to the learning exchange in the academic setting. The self-direction and commitment demonstrated by these adults is not only compelling, it is truly inspiring. While the vignettes in this book are only a glimpse into the perspective of these incredible adult learners, they provide a beautiful snapshot that will hopefully resonate with readers and academic leaders.

Begin thinking now about how your ideas might add to this discussion. The call for presentation proposals and details regarding the conference dates and location will be sent early in the fall.