Enriching the Adult Learners Experience in Higher Education

48th Annual Conference

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Held Online and In-Person

Editors: Kemi Elufiede and Patricia Coberly-Holt

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 the 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 the Proceedings of the 48th annual conference of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance (AHEA), held online and in person in March 2024. This year's conference theme, "Enriching the Adult Learner's Experience in Higher Education," reflects our ongoing commitment to advancing the field. We extend special thanks to the AHEA Board of Directors, members, and contributors. Without their support, this publication would not be possible.

As always, the AHEA Board of Directors provided continuous support for the mission of AHEA through their outreach, service, and perseverance. To the members of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance, we do what we do because of you. 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 expanding our collective knowledge. Through your research, theory, and practice, 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. Thank you.

AHEA is always looking for ways to contribute to our shared endeavor of educating adults. Please share your feedback; we look forward to hearing from you. Enjoy your reading of the variety of engaging topics related to Adult and Higher Education.

Thank you,

Kemi and Patricia

Welcome from the AHEA President

On behalf of the Adult Higher Education Alliance, I extend a warm welcome to the proceedings of the 48th AHEA Annual Conference. The conference theme, inspired by the book Enriching the Adult Learner's Experience in Higher Education, edited by Patricia Holt, delves into innovative strategies, best practices, and research findings to enhance the educational journey of adult learners in universities and colleges. This conference, which recognizes the unique needs and challenges of adult students, is a platform for educators, administrators, policymakers, and researchers to share insights and discuss practical solutions. As in previous years, this conversation is essential for us, as adult educators, to engage in. It is an honor to serve as the president of the AHEA and to work alongside colleagues on the AHEA Board of Directors. Together, we are part of a community dedicated to enhancing the adult learner's experience in higher education. Thank you for your attendance and, if applicable, for your contributions to these proceedings.

Jane B. Northup, Ph.D. President, AHEA (2023-25)

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Creating a More Humanized Online Learning Experience

Janet Grayson Chappell

Abstract

After the pandemic, there were many challenges left to address within the educational system—challenges that affect the student experience and overall educational pursuit. These challenges include, but are not limited to, teaching and learning opportunities, engagement, and accommodations. Therefore, identifying and addressing practical best practices became the focus, presenting practices to help create more learning opportunities, engagement, and accommodations. In order to address the best practices, we must identify the feedback from students who experienced the identified challenges. According to the collected data, students reported that communication, direction, and support were needed to aid in creating a more humanized learning experience. Using these recommendations, ten practical practices are presented for a more infused humanized online experience.

Keywords: online, humanized, learning experience, engagement, accommodations

The pandemic created new possibilities for educators to reimagine humanizing the learning experience (Abdi et al., 2020). The pressing question after the pandemic, pertaining to education, was, How has the pandemic changed education? According to Selingo (2022), COVID forced institutions and faculty to reevaluate processes and basic classroom instruction to become more innovative and competitive in the changed market. Institutions and faculty struggled with adjusting to the shift that took place within education, from engagement to meeting many student needs and accommodations. Reynaud, Reynaud, and Kilgour (2017) draw a link between humanizing the transition of teachers and humanizing the experience for students. Creating a humanized online learning experience can be based on several practices associated with a conducive student experience, including opportunities to learn, participate in active engagement, and meet accommodating needs for successful completion infused with human concepts. After the pandemic era, the higher education system, institutions, and faculty had to question several concerns to continue providing education. This reaffirmed the value of formal education and emphasized the need for more engaged and accommodating actions for students (Selingo, 2022).

So where do we go from here? How do we create this type of student experience? And what role do the institutions and faculty play in the process? Let us start by identifying with humanization and understanding the concept of what is needed to infuse the online teaching and learning experience. As the understanding is identified and explained, the content explores how the evolution of online learning and teaching and further addresses how various challenges affected the success of the student experience. Three points of action will serve as the basis of identifying with student expressed concerns with what is missing via the online teaching and learning experience. In the end, 10 takeaways will be shared in how to effectively create and administer an infused humanized online experience.

Humanizing

Humanization is defined as concepts of humanness: race, age, sexual orientation, religion, and disability, which is used to induce humanization (Martin & Mason, 2022). In the world of online learning and teaching, humanization is key to overall success within higher education. According to Ignatovitch (2016), treating a human being as the highest value of social existence in teaching and learning contributes to heighten identification and development. Collective interaction and engagement foster opportunities for humanization to be applied. According to Pancansku-Brock, Smedshammer, & Vincent-Layton (2020), successful humanized online teaching is through instructor-student relationships and community, fostering opportunities for connection and empathy to drive engagement and rigor. With online learning, and paired relationships can help to reduce isolation and build motivation and satisfaction among students (Hogan & Davi, 2019).

Viability of Teaching & Learning

For online teaching and learning in higher education to be viable, centered equity must be present (Felix & Nienhusser, 2023). This includes involving all parties in creating equity in online teaching and learning. Institutional practices, policies, and procedures present inclusion in all actions, protocol, and behaviors is important in humanizing the online process of teaching and learning. Including the institution, faculty, staff, students, and/or any other third parties can aid in creating a more conducive teaching and learning online environment and experiences. In improving student learning and online outcomes, institutions must be willing to research equity and explore the need for equity within the educational processes and students' experiences. With online teaching and learning, the two can contribute to facilitating student development with needed connections and empathy, which can lead to healthier teaching and learning experiences within the various institutions (Fernandez, 2021). According to Adbi (2020), with the loss of physicality (not being in the same space) can lead to teaching & learning where content and no humaneness becomes central.

> **"It is the institution's, instructor's, and professor's responsibility to create meaningful and supportive relationships with the student body, fostering a sense of community and belongingness, where students feel engaged, motivated, and valued in the process of humanizing online education."**

In humanization, the online learning experience in higher education requires an assessment of the adequacies of learning opportunities, engagement, and accommodations within the student online learning experience. After the pandemic, there were challenges to explore and address the effects on student online learning and teaching experiences. In assessing the effectiveness, areas were identified as points of action to foster a more effective learning and teaching experience via the online modality. The points of action include *Learning Opportunities*: technology, availability/accessibility, and usage, *Engagemen*t: isolation, motivation, and distractions, and *Accommodations*: health services, curriculum inclusion, and evaluations. It is the institution's, instructor's, and professor's responsibility to create meaningful and supportive relationships with the student body, fostering a sense of community and belongingness, where students feel engaged, motivated, and valued in the process of humanizing online education (Adbi, 2020). Creating the relationship can help reduce student isolation and increase satisfaction, motivation, skills, & scholarship (Hogan & Davi, 2019). According to Hebert (2019), there is a positive correlation between faculty morale and student learning outcomes.

Humanized online instruction can be presented in forms of (Li, Banvelos, & Xu, 2022):

- Promoting social and academic presence
- Proactively guiding communications
- Fostering consistent interaction & learning strategies
- Instructor & peer presence

Therefore, there is a need to account for creating more learning opportunities, points of engagement, and accommodations as needed for a more successful online student experience. Feedback was collected, identifying student challenges and overall experiences to foster a more effective educational process. From the feedback collected, students identified support, communication, and direction as needed to foster a more humanized online learning experience. In addressing, online learning must mirror the desired engagement to further the online learning experience with human aspects appropriately applied.

Online Learning

After the pandemic, online education took a turn that changed the way education is facilitated (Adbi, 2020). Before the pandemic, online education was gaining traction but still carried some hesitation and wavering with effectiveness and credibility. During the pandemic, online education became the main modality that fostered online learning experiences. There were and still are individuals new to the method and others very well-seasoned in this form of education, making it the topic of research and exploration for effectiveness and efficiency. During the pandemic, there was an extreme demand for remote, online functionalities to continue the regular order of business for so many in various industries. With the remote and online functionalities, the education industry was able to adjust and continue to provide the needed education through remote online learning. Of course, there were adjustments and pivots needed for a more effective humanized online learning experience. For example, adjustments and pivots in humanizing availability, user friendly navigations, technology, and accommodations.

Humanizing availability, navigations, technology, and accommodations can include being flexible within the classroom setting with assignments, due dates, and having a valued presence in the course environment. In addition, it is important to accommodate and modify how assignments are instructed, completed, and especially if technology is used. This concern can be easily addressed with guided communications, engaged presence, consistent learning strategies and concepts, and well-developed academic rigor.

> In the learning process, it is important for the students to feel safe, empowered, and guided to foster the opportunity to take content to application, develop skills, and identify potential (Ignatovitch, 2016).

In the learning process, it is important for the students to feel safe, empowered, and guided to foster the opportunity to take content to application, develop skills, and identify potential (Ignatovitch, 2016). Online learning provides the mode of learning for the non-traditional student to complete his/her education with various learning opportunities, consistent engagements, and provided accommodations. Therefore, the learning process must be crafted in a way to humanize online learning. As previously identified, the humanized opportunities lie within the points of action. According to Hogan & Devi (2019), enhanced interactions between students & teachers bring about increased student satisfaction, motivation, skills, and scholarship. The learning processes can be crafted with faculty creating a caring, flexible, conducive learning environment with motivating and encouraging words and actions; providing cognitive enhancements per the curriculum. This can include more collaboration, group projects and/or team-based learning to encourage deeper dives into the material fostering the student peer presence and relationship.

Online Teaching

As instructors and professors prepare to conduct traditional classroom instruction, he/she prepares to provide face to face instruction involving active engagement with technology, varied activities, and applied student accommodations, if needed. In past instances, this style of instruction was viewed as the main method of providing education compared to during and post pandemic era, where online learning and teaching was the sole method in providing an education. Online learning has brought about great opportunities, advantages, and access in educating outside of the normal environments and perimeters. This form of education affords a wider reach with advanced technology, equipment, and service platforms (Unser, 2017). However, there can be some shortcomings when utilizing the online modality for teaching and learning purposes, which involves the presence of human concepts; humanness

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Online teaching paired with technology has both positive and negative implications for online learning experiences (Unser, 2017). During and post pandemic, there was an accelerated increase in the demand for more remote access, provided via advanced technology. The dependency for reliable internet connectivity and access to devices impacted how students learned, it boils down to availability and accessibility. Therefore, it is important for institutions, faculty, and staff to discuss how to enhance and accomplish a more desired online experience with human concepts being a part of the solution(s). Creating online experiences can be based on several practices associated with a conducive online learning environment that includes an opportunity to learn, participate in active engagement, and meeting the needs of the students for successful completion (Chappell, 2021). Some recommended best practices include facilitating several types of discussion with peer review to support. Other recommendations are discussed via the following sections: online learning opportunities, engagement, and accommodations.

Point of Action I: Online Learning Opportunities

The classroom must yield an environment conducive to creating a student-focused equitable online learning experience. In the online learning experience, there are some areas that can cause the experience to falter, leading to a non-successful student experience. The faltering areas can include affordability, increased drop rate, low enrollment, and a decrease in grades. After the pandemic, institutions and faculty experienced a decrease in grades, increased drop rates, and low enrollment. This here alone led institutions to address the teaching and learning processes for the online modality. After institutions took the initiative to research and explore changes to the online learning process. It was found, according to Suspiano (2023), grades increased due to paying more attention to student mental health, needed accommodations, and overall greater attention to the student experience and engagement.

Post pandemic, opportunities to help transition with successful online learning included the new digital age, digital skills, and accommodating the new learning environment so many were thrusted into due to the pandemic (Adbi, 2020). Therefore, the online modality functionalities and activities must change to humanize the process, to meet more of the identified needs of the online student learner. Institutions and faculty must be able to incorporate more effective and efficient humanized best practices to foster an opportunity to learn via the online process. One recommended best practice is flexibility. Students must take great responsibility in managing their time, staying motivated during life, and successfully complete their education. With that being stated, being flexible paired with student self-discipline, management skills, and organizational skills can foster the opportunity to put humanness into the online learning process. Therefore, institutions, faculty, and staff must recognize the importance of fostering a caring, flexible, and conducive learning environment. According to Hogan & Davi (2019), when personal bonds are developed between faculty and students, student isolation decreases. This environment promotes a more self-directed learning experience, where students can explore independent research, resources, and engaging self-learning as admirably adapting to the online learning experience, creating individual engagement and interaction. Creating flexibility facilitates new opportunities to learn via accelerated, innovative, and accommodating approaches, while discovering and understanding online education.

Another recommendation for enhanced online learning opportunities to help with humanizing the experience includes the use of technology with more aided availability, accessibility, and usage as the focal points. Collaborative approaches can bridge the gap within online learning creating the needed availability and access with proper supported usage, which garnishes the opportunity for supported technology paired with human engagement. According to Baston (2021), with the increase in accessibility, it develops a pipeline of opportunity between institutions and other entities for more student success.

Point of Action II: Online Engagement

In the research, engagement was one of the three concerns identified with direct relation to online student learning experiences. The lack of engagement and socialization can affect student's social and emotional wellbeing, which reduces student teacher and student peer presence and engagement (Suspiano, 2023). In research, there was a report that students need instructors and professors to support the successful completion of a student's educational pursuit with support, direction, and communication (Chappell, 2021). According to Hogan & Devi (2019), there is a need not only to increase completion rates but to reduce the time to graduate. The results are all part of creating a caring environment that fosters the opportunity for students to complete his/her degree. By providing engagement and interaction, faculty are providing opportunities to motivate and encourage students. The opportunities to motivate and encourage can increase the engagement and bond between the students and faculty; reducing isolation (Hogan & Devi, 2019). With online learning and teaching, faculty and students communicate more through technology supported methods i.e., direct message, email, phone calls, virtual/remote calls/videos/conferences (Zoom) versus the traditional face to face classroom interaction and engagement. This is why it is paramount for technologically supported communications to be utilized, to incorporate humanness into the online learning and teaching efforts.

The pandemic exposed the lack of availability, access, and basic usage of technologically supported equipment in teaching and learning. It brought about the demand for more virtual remote access to meet the accommodations and meet the specific needs of the online students. With the provided access, students can experience services normally only provided via face-to-face interactions i.e., classroom engagement, student teacher interaction, student peer interaction, institutional departments, and other services i.e., counseling, health, and wellness. In having online access and being able to engage and interact as normal met the human need in conducting classroom instruction, faculty student engagement, and student peer engagement; creating the needed humanized presence. Fostering a sense of community and engagement allows institutions and faculty the ability to facilitate within virtual communities, utilizing discussion forums, chat platforms, video conferencing, and other collaborating efforts creating a more humanized experience online.

Point of Action III: Online Accommodations

As well all know, it is important for institutions and faculty to meet all needed demands of the student population. This can be handled in so many different methods. However, the focus is going to be directed more to conducive learning opportunities and environment needs to forge a more successful online student learning experience. Student needs and accommodations are a case-by-case account with direct application applied to remedy the concerns. According to Baston (2021), it is the institutions and faculty responsibility to determine how to support the student body online experience. Fostering more engagement and interaction can create the desired inclusive equitable humanized learning experience and environment with online instruction and teaching.

It is time for institutions and faculty to change the cycle of communication and offer a more gentle and safe space to communicate with students (Bora, 2023). Offer a safe space for students to successfully matriculate his/her online program. The student's learning experience became infused with student centered learning with self-directed learning, which is related to online learning and teaching. With online learning and teaching, students can become demotivated, distracted, and experience isolation from the online experience leading to health and wellness concerns. However, with institutions being well supported and connected with technological supported equipment, institutions can easily provide the needed counseling services, mental health initiatives, and faculty can incorporate well-being checks and activities within the curriculum. Overall, institutions and faculty play a crucial role in supporting students with adapting to online teaching and learning processes for the best student experience and outcome, with a created foundation for more inclusion and transparency. According to Baston (2021), the best practices are what is expected from students, due to the expressed care and concern desired. Therefore, institutions and faculty must communicate effectively with inclusion, transparency, and enforcing equitable standards and actions to foster humanized online learning experience.

As faculty and institutions continue to provide educational services to the many students enrolled, is it imperative for conducive learning experiences, environments, and the opportunity is available to create the balance and foster successful online learning and teaching with equity and humanness. Per Friel (n.d.), educational experiences must include the five basic components of learning: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. Therefore, the three points of action explore humanization in online learning opportunities, online engagement, and online accommodations, presenting recommended best practices with humanizing the online learning and teaching process.

Conclusion

Overall, learning opportunities, engagement, and accommodations are the key demands from students on how to foster a conducive more humanized learning experience. These demands were addressed offering solutions to foster innovation, availability, accessibility, and meeting needs as well as a more competitive advantage for all parties involved from the students to the faculty and the institution. The educational system was altered due to the pandemic, which prompted a shift and reassemble institutions and faculty to create a more humanized learning and teaching experience; from traditional to non-traditional education using online remote capabilities. Each student should be able to experience a more student-centered, self-directed learning experience, adding more human concepts to the process; creating more personable engagement and communications. Per Bora (2023), professors must be able to recognize the feelings of their students and assist with navigating the challenging times and experiences with more humanized approaches and concepts.

As previously discussed, recommended best practices to humanize online learning and teaching must consist of actions and behaviors that support online learning opportunities, online engagement, and online accommodations. This can include but is not limited to the following:

Online Learning Opportunities

- Allow self-directing, managing, and organizing
- Create student teacher engagement and guidance
- Create student peer engagement
- Humanize availability, user friendly navigations, technology, and accommodations

Online Engagement

- Encourage value and motivation
- Foster connection and empathy
- Foster meaningful and support relationships and community

Online Accommodations

- Foster belongingness and inclusion
- Create an equitable space
- Create a safe space and empowerment

These are the takeaways to help guide institutions and faculty as online learning and teaching are created for a more humanized experience, which were derived from the three points of action.

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College Teaching as Scholarship: An Imperative for Today

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Abstract

We note the continued low status of teaching in higher education and, thus far, the inability of the recent focus upon the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) to address this problem. We suggest that the failure of SoTL to rescue teaching may be due to current teaching objectives unsuited for a modern democratic society and a misunderstood role of student learning in defining the scholarship of teaching. We then offer a view of a scholarly teacher who seeks to expand a student's capacity for further inquiry and growth without reference to specific preset learning outcomes.

Keywords: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, SoTL, John Dewey, Ernest Boyer, Learning Outcomes

In 1990, Earnest Boyer, then Chancellor of the State University of New York (SUNY), published a book in which he urged the field of higher education to regard teaching as a potential form of scholarship – as valuable in the knowledge world as the search for new disciplinary insights. That call galvanized academics who already felt somewhat uneasy about the low status of even excellent college teachers. It also led to the establishment of a new field of study called the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (or more familiarly, SoTL) along with a number of new journals devoted to issues and concerns related to university-level teaching.

Unfortunately, even after more than 30 years, the needle today has still not moved very much in higher education. Researchers, particularly in the STEM fields, remain the super stars of universities; the number of publications deemed important additions to a faculty member's discipline remain a primary requirement for tenure; and despite long-established good teacher awards, such recognition has not been enough to eliminate the old adage – those who can't do, teach. Moreover, SoTL journal articles (see, e.g., Case, 1915, Godbold et al, 2024) still struggle to define this new discipline in ways that distinguish it from research carried out by education scholars or experimental psychologists who specialize in learning.

As long-time supporters of John Dewey, whom we view as a quintessential scholar of teaching, we were somewhat surprised to read about SoTL's apparent identity crisis. Dewey who championed scientific thinking – after all it was Dewey who promoted hypothesis-testing as an essential form of critical thinking (1910) – based his writings about education (e.g., 1916, 1938) upon careful observations of student responses to varied methods of presenting content (see e.g., Mayhew & Edwards, 2007). For him, this content (in whatever field) had to be capable of arousing student curiosity and engagement and stimulating further student inquiry. Dewey met regularly with teachers in his school and various additional subject matter experts to discuss what actually took

[1] Examples of such journals include: *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (IJ-SoTL)*; *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (JoSoTL)*; *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal.*

place in the classroom. These collective discussions produced new insights not only about effective teaching practices but about the ever-widening scope of application relevant to each of their disciplines. In addition to constant adjustments in the nature, manner, and order of course content, these discussions also resulted in research articles too numerous to cite here.
It was the rather large gap between Dewey's form of scholarship and what we encountered in the SoTL definition-seeking articles that set us out on a slow journey of investigation. We started by fully embracing SoTL, then moved on to question SoTL's definitional link between teaching and learning, and finally ended up re-envisioning what we've come to believe it really means to be what we call a "scholarly teacher."

Without doubt, SoTL represents a serious attempt to rescue the teaching profession by seeking not only to put good teaching at the same level of scholarship as good research, but also to encourage deeper, more reflective, and more critical examinations of scholarship applied to teaching. So why then has this movement so far failed to make a significant difference in the status of a university teacher? We propose three possible reasons: improper teaching objectives, misunderstood role of student learning, and insufficient attention paid to what scholarly college teaching actually encompasses.

Teaching Objectives: their current limitations

For Dewey in Democracy and Education (1916) the goal of education – and one assumes the teacher's objective – is to expand each student's capacity for growth. Thus, for him, student growth was stimulated by what he called educative content defined as that which encourages a "reconstruction or reorganization of experience…which [as a result] increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p. 78). In other words, in order to promote growth and development, students need to be introduced to content materials that capture their interest and stimulate them to make further inquiries dictated by their individual interests, needs, or purposes. Biesta (2017) describes this process as an "invitation" requiring a student-initiated act of acceptance. As the students make the content relevant to their own interests, they are given the freedom to initiate further questions on their own. In Dewey's view, this process enabled students to practice and strengthen the kinds of thinking skills that are necessary and appropriate in a democratic society. The opening up of a student's mind to further inquiry was for him not only the kind of freedom that democracy promises, but on which it also depends. As he put it in Experience and Education (1938), "the only freedom of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile" (p. 61).

[2] Most of these articles can be found in the 15 volumes of Dewey's *Middle Works*, which cover the period of 1899-1924. They are also listed and mentioned briefly in Axtelle & Burnett's review of Dewey's writings about education and schooling in Boydston's *Guide to the Works of John Dewey* (1970).

It is worth emphasizing that these are the goals of education in a democracy. Note the sharp contrast between Dewey's goals and the kind of indoctrinary teaching embedded in the concept of education as a form of "information delivery." In the latter case, the main goal of teaching is to make sure students acquire a singular and accurate representation and appropriate discipline of thought in the subject areas being taught. For Dewey, however, this goal represents a form of thought restriction. That we are also now facing in the United States the fraying and possible dissolution of our democratic institutions, we have to ask whether this current state of affairs is connected to our wide-spread embrace of pre-determined – and quite non-Deweyan – learning objectives.

It could also be argued that these carefully articulated and vetted objectives have served, perhaps inadvertently, to reduce the value of knowledgeable and engaged college instructors. Certainly, in online courses, the content, and how it is presented, is increasingly under the control of course designers. Moreover, programmers (now assisted by generative AI) are actively seeking ways for course platform systems to automatically monitor and control student discussions as well as evaluate student written assignments, an ostensible efficiency that even further diminishes the instructor role. Not surprisingly then, college teachers today often suspect that the main goal of these trends is to eliminate live human input entirely.

If indeed teachers are being regarded as potentially unnecessary, is it possible that SoTL is having so much difficulty in defining itself because we've lost sight of teaching objectives that require human scholarship and presence? Have we now become entirely numb to the value of nurturing student variability and to the importance of strengthening student ability to deal with the unknown changes they will face in the future?

Student Learning: its misunderstood role

As we pondered the objectives of SoTL we wondered why teaching scholarship came to be so inextricably linked to student learning. As Nodding (2015, p. 8) once asked, do we judge the excellence of lawyers by the outcome of their cases? Or physicians on whether their patients get better or not? Why then, we ask, is teaching today deemed scholarly only when it is defined as measurable forms of "interventions" designed to increase student performance on various tests of required knowledge? A good example of that approach is evident in the title of a recent book that showcases research from the University of Indiana's SoTL program entitled: Overcoming Student Learning Bottlenecks: Decode the Critical Thinking of Your Discipline (Middendorf & Shopkow 2017). A reviewer who otherwise likes the book's content (Fogo, 2018), sees as its major shortcoming, the authors' failure to know and then build upon existing findings from educational research – the very field from which the SoTL is trying to separate itself! Understandably, teachers across many different disciplines resist this call for them to become experts in some field other than their own. And this contradictory situation is made especially apparent when educational research, as well as research on the psychology of learning, is compared to the Dewey-like scholarly research we so admire.

What would happen, we wondered, if instead of worrying about how to more correctly define SoTL, we would simply ask ourselves what it means to be a good teacher – or a good scholarly teacher without any reference to student learning. In other words, what does a good teacher actually do? In Biesta's recent book, The Rediscovery of Teaching (2017), he asserted that a teacher's work encompasses three basic components: content, relationships, and purpose (p. 28). In his view, these three components underly the many critical teaching tasks outlined by Fenstermacher many years ago (1986): namely: explaining the basic requirements of being a good student; selecting the appropriate content to be learned; locating resources most likely to arouse curiosity; organizing and

presenting the information so that it is appropriate to the level and interests of each student; monitoring student progress; revising and updating resources when necessary; and serving as a prime source of information for the students.

Note that in these descriptions of teaching tasks, there is no mention of student learning. Note too that instead, good teachers are fully engaged in the current state of their particular discipline (Biesta's "content") while also being continually attentive to the particular skills and needs of their students (Biesta's "relationships"). In other words, the scholarship of Biesta's teachers consists of a deep knowledge of their discipline exhaustive enough that engaged teachers know, recognize, or can find, resources from their fields that resonate well with their own particular students' individual needs, interests, talents, and goals. Moreover, in shaping the disciplinary content so as to capture a student's attention and inspire further inquiry, the teacher also enables the student to acquire and practice what Dewey considered to be the practical skills of inquiry necessary for intellectual development. As described in his earlier text, *How We Think*, (1910), these skills include the ability to ask questions, to know how to find answers that in turn raises new questions, to articulate clearly what they do (and don't) know, to willingly and skillfully listen to (and actual hear) other voices, and to value (rather than reject) multiple points of view. Put another way, an "interventionist" teacher -- one who seeks only to increase a student's capacity to respond correctly to test questions that assume a fixed body of knowledge – does not exemplify the kind of living scholarship that good progressive teachers practice. When they offer Dewey's "educative" experiences, they inspire students to want, not the elimination of questions, but to find and ask even more.

When teachers focus on their discipline in relation to student talents, interests, and needs, they also find it easier to appreciate, and even adopt, a less rigid view of the need for specific learning outcomes. Moreover, when the teacher does arouse enough interest (or curiosity) that each student wants to know more, no matter what route the students take, the teacher has successfully achieved the goal of engaging them with the content. It is this engagement that is so critical. And isn't this engagement also an expression of Biesta's third component of teacher work – its purpose?

Higher education's current focus upon pre-established learning outcomes not only hobbles the creativity of the teacher, but limits almost to the point of nonexistence, the ability of students to think for themselves. They learn not to be active participants in the acquisition of knowledge, but passive recipients where there is always a right answer available if they can only find it. This learning model has gained such weight today that far too many students now graduate from college more comfortable in an autocratic than a democratic setting. If we want our college students to become active and contributing members of their communities, appreciative of the complex nature of human society, then in school, they need practice in thinking for themselves, dealing with contradiction, and accepting uncertain outcomes. Indeed, they need teachers who know how to effectively introduce them to their disciplines such that they willingly explore it in their own way together with other students, sometimes experiencing blind alleys, but learning how to back out and try again, and sometimes discovering or even creating new frontiers, always also appreciating how much more there is yet to learn.

Scholarly Teaching: a portrait

We are not arguing that teachers pay no attention to what a student actually learns. Indeed, student performance is critically important to teachers in judging the success of their efforts to engage their students in the subject matter. Equally important, they must be alert to common comprehension errors as well as irrelevant or unhelpful directions in their thinking. They not only use such outcomes to guide students toward more fruitful pathways, but to also review their own choice of content or activities, always on the lookout for new and even more effective ways of stimulating student interest.

In other words, we see scholarly teachers not as promoting standardized (i.e., measurable) performance outcomes, but as helping to expand their students' own abilities to inquire, discuss, evaluate, and rethink important, but novel, content. An excellent example of such teaching could be seen at this (AHEA) conference in Smith & Norman's successful search for a way of promoting deep engagement with issues of social justice (2024). Another excellent example is Cohen's detailed description as to how she was able to deepen student interactions in online discussion forums (2017). Models from outside the social sciences that take the Deweyan approach for granted include well-known teachers of budding musicians. They are astonishingly literate about the famous performers of their instrument, the vast library of compositions for that instrument, and the multiple ways by which that literature can be interpreted in performance. They attend carefully to the particular skills, dispositions, and perspectives of their individual students, and they continually make visible multiple possible directions their individual students can choose to take as they grow and develop their own musicianship.

Without question, we need more information from a wider range of disciplines than are currently exploring the possibilities of SoTL. We also need more discussion about whether and how such scholarship ought to be made public. In terms of expanding the academic knowledge base, clearly scholarly teachers need to communicate their experiences, observations, and conclusions in writing. However, for lifting their status and granting them recognition in the university, other means may also be effective. (In the music world, or perhaps in all the arts, word of mouth or earlier fame as a practicing artist seems to work well). But for changing policies, wider knowledge of teaching as scholarship may require publications, TED talks, or other means of publicizing the knowledge and skills of good teachers. Just as teachers never stop studying their discipline or their students state of academic skill, so too must those of us interested in the scholarship of teaching continue to investigate the meaning, purpose, and nature of scholarly teaching. Hopefully in so doing, even if progress is slow, Boyer would be pleased.

[3] Biesta (2017) actually posits three different "domains" of education, or purposes (pp. 28-29), of which we have only focused on one in this paper – what he called *subjectification* or making students their own agents of learning (i.e., "subjects" rather than "objects"). It remains to be argued whether the other two domains he identifies – *socialization* and *qualifications* – demand the kind of scholarship we have argued here underlies subjectification.

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A Phenomenological Study of Factors Related to Persistence in Online Doctoral Programs: Preliminary Findings

Don Finn

Abstract

As early as the fall of 2019, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 76% of students enrolled in graduate-level courses in the U.S. were 25 years old or older and that 52% of post-baccalaureate students (1.6 of 3.1 million) took exclusively online courses (NCES, 2022a). With the surge in the popularity of online learning for adults, this study examined doctoral candidates across multiple disciplines who were enrolled in 100% online programs at one private institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. to determine preliminary programmatic and personal factors related to persistence. This phenomenological study also aimed to determine the factors that facilitated learners' transition from andragogy to heutagogy.

***Keywords*:** Online Doctoral Programs, Student Persistence, Online Adult Learners, Heutagogy

The doctorate represents the pinnacle of an academic degree one can earn in a discipline. "[T]he majority of students who enroll in a doctoral program have the academic ability to successfully complete the requirements of the degree" (Studebaker & Curtis 2021, p. 16), and adult degree-seekers are often attracted to the convenience of online degrees. In the fall semester of 2019, the National Center of Education Statistics noted that 76% of students enrolled in graduate-level courses in the United States were aged 25 or over (NCES, 2022a). In the fall of 2022, 52% of post-baccalaureate students (1.6 of 3.1 million) took exclusively online courses (NCES, 2022a). However, attrition rates can be high. Studebaker and Curtis (2021) noted that approximately 50% of those who begin never complete their program, confirming that online attrition rates are estimated to be 30% higher than in traditional settings. For adult learners, their multiple roles and responsibilities frequently present time management challenges because "a doctoral degree is an enormous undertaking that demands significant time, energy, financial, and emotional commitments" (Hill & Conceição, 2020, p. 36), and many adults terminate their programs and never realize their educational goals. Student attrition's negative impact on programs, institutions, and other learners can also be significant.

Adult Learning Principles

Discussions about adult learners' unique characteristics and needs gained momentum in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, Malcolm Knowles introduced andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" to distinguish adult learning from pedagogy or the art and science of helping children learn (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 118). The earliest writings about andragogy and its basic principles date to the German educator Alexander Kapp in 1833. A primary premise driving andragogy involves a teacher or "facilitator" who works with the learner to frame learning experiences, including the learning goals, objectives, and materials. The andragogical approach centers on five assumptions of adult learners: 1) Adults are problem-centered, 2) The prior experiences of adults serve as a resource for the learner, 3) Adults are motivated to learn, 4) Adults want to apply their learning immediately, and 5) Adults are self-directed (Merriam, 2001). Understanding the assumptions of adult learners is helpful for programs and professors to craft learning opportunities for adult doctoral students, particularly those in doctoral coursework. Depending on the subject matter's complexity and the adult learner's sophistication, the level of faculty direction and engagement often happens along a continuum. Ultimately, programs designed for adult learners should foster learner self-directedness and autonomy.

Heutagogy

Often termed "self-determined learning," heutagogy goes beyond andragogy in having "a central focus on learner agency…[that] encourages [the] development of skills of autonomy and exploration, reflection and critical thinking, and innovation and entrepreneurship" (Blaschke, 2021, p. 1630). Learner agency is central to heutagogy as it gives learners autonomy to decide their learning path, including defining what and how they learn and the criteria for evaluating the learning (Blaschke, 2021). As such, heutagogy is the logical next step in the doctoral journey as candidates direct the topics, criteria, and parameters of their dissertation research studies. Doctoral candidates should draw from their exposure to ideas and concepts and relevant literature, ideas, and theoretical frameworks on which to determine a gap in the knowledge for pursuit through a dissertation study. This self-determined learning (heutagogical) transition results in a "role shift" for the faculty from an "instructor" or "facilitator" to one of a "coach" or "consultant" whose goal is to assist the candidate in navigating the dissertation.

Study Parameters and Purpose

In January 2024, with the assistance of five schools offering online doctoral programs at our university, we deployed a brief demographic questionnaire to students that included an invitation to participate in a focus group to discuss their online doctoral experience. Email invitations to students classified as doctoral candidates, those who have completed coursework and required qualifying activities, such as a candidacy or comprehensive exam, were sent either from the school or the researchers. The research team sent emails to those who noted an interest in participating in a focus group on the initial questionnaire, inviting them to participate in a 45 to 55-minute-long focus group meeting held via teleconference.

One hundred twenty-five valid questionnaires were completed, and 82 participated in one of 24 focus groups held over two weeks. The participants were adults over 25, 62 (75%) females and 20 (24%) males. Thirteen (16%) were enrolled in the School of Communications, 24 (29%) were from the School of Business and Leadership, 5 (0.6%) were from the School of Divinity, 26 (32%) were in the School of Education, and 4 (0.5%) were enrolled in the School of Psychology and Counseling. When asked about how many semesters they have been enrolled in their program's dissertation or candidacy portion (post-coursework), 13 (16%) were in their first semester, and 9 (11%) were in their second. Seven (8.5%) reported being in semester 3 or 4, 21 (25.5%) were in semester 5 or 6, and 32 (39%) reported being in their seventh or more semesters of candidacy.

Preliminary Findings

Focus groups were held via teleconference and hosted by the researchers. They were recorded and transcribed through the teleconference platform. The questions were developed from literature focusing on the persistence and retention of adult students in higher education and organized according to six categories: 1) Program-related, 2) Persistence and Completion, 3) Relationships, 4) Community, 5) Christian Faith, and 6) Other Factors. After an initial transcript analysis, it was noted that many of the themes and key terms shared by participants to the questions in the "Relationships," "Community," and "Christian Faith" sections shared many commonalities, so these were combined into a single category.

Program-Related

Participants were asked to share features of the coursework portion of their program that promoted community engagement. The most referenced features were discussion boards, small group assignments facilitated through video conferences, Facebook groups, many of which were organized by the students, dedicated live teleconference meetings with the professors designed to ask questions, or organized for specific course-related discussions. A fifth noted program-related feature was a residency experience in person or online. Participants who experienced a residency, particularly in person, found it helpful for building community and engagement.

When asked about their needs for the dissertation phase that differed from the coursework phase, four specific ideas were prevalent in the interview responses. The development of timelines and mutually agreed upon goals with the professor was noted because many felt they needed more time to spend on the components of the dissertation. Another popular idea was a list of candidates in the same phase or similar time in the program to develop community and support. Groups on social networking platforms were noted as examples in a number of the focus groups as positive sources of communication and encouragement. Examples of groups started by the programs or students were shared and the connections they provided for the members were deemed beneficial. Finally, having group meetings of candidates with their dissertation chair to ask questions and seek group guidance was another idea the candidates had to assist them.

Persistence and Completion

Questions about the needs of candidates to help foster persistence and completion were divided into three categories. The first category related to the needs and support they had from their chair or committee members. Amongst these needs was being sure of the availability and approachability of the faculty for communication and brainstorming ideas. Additionally, regular communication, such as phone or text message or email check-ins, was desired, as was timely and focused feedback on drafts. The second category centered on family or peer support. Notably, having support at home to handle responsibilities and support and encouragement from family members were commonly noted. Participants also expressed the need for peer study and accountability groups from their programs/schools. The third category focused on the balance between the dissertation and daily life. Ideas included learning to set boundaries and having family and employers who understand the need for flexibility to support their dissertation endeavor.

Relationships/Community/Christian Faith

Noting the importance of relationships, two themes that stood out regarding essential relationships were interactions with other doctoral candidates. For many, interactions with other doctoral candidates were deemed highly beneficial and noted as happening via social media or, in some instances, face-to-face. Many participants mentioned they had the support of a mentor. Most mentoring relationships were informal with colleagues at work or through other non-academic channels. Some noted that their schools provided a formal mentoring program with mentors paired by the school. Regardless of type, those with mentors expressed their value in helping to facilitate encouragement, accountability, and resource sharing. Unsurprisingly, many mentioned having the support and encouragement of their church family and pastoral staff. Many noted being motivated by a “calling” to study at the university and their area of study and their faith helped them persevere because of the strength and grounding it provided.

Other Factors

Understanding that the preselected questions may not have covered all the factors that helped the learners with their persistence in their doctoral program, participants were asked to provide any other helpful factors. Accountability with their professor and other students was essential for them to continue. Many noted that their professors also had the potential to serve as academic role models regarding writing and research and that they valued having the faculty and staff support as Christian academics.

Conclusions and Further Analysis

While a considerable amount of data analysis still needs to be conducted, the initial analysis finds that online adult doctoral students require attention and relationships to help them persevere in their research and writing. The role of relationships as a source of encouragement and modeling was prevalent throughout the discussions. These students must also be better prepared to transition from professor-organized coursework, assignments, and deadlines exemplifying andragogy to becoming self-determined according to heutagogy to handle the responsibilities for planning the reading, writing, and research needed to complete a dissertation study successfully.

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Reshaping Practices: Digital Feedback for Adults

Larisa Olesova, Renee Mercer, Kim Copeland, and Swapna Kumar

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the ways adults learn in colleges and universities (Dikhtyar et al., 2021; Pelletier et al., 2022). With technological developments, such as artificial intelligence (AI), the types of digital feedback have changed as well. Research has examined the effectiveness of different types of digital feedback for adult education. However, literature on how digital feedback can be implemented for effective learning is still limited.

This paper is an attempt to fill this gap by providing an overview of how digital feedback has been perceived by instructors and students with the focus on feedback literacy for adult learning. Specifically, this paper overviews barriers and factors and what tools can help instructors deliver digital feedback.

Keywords: Digital feedback, Feedback literacy, Synchronous feedback, Asynchronous feedback

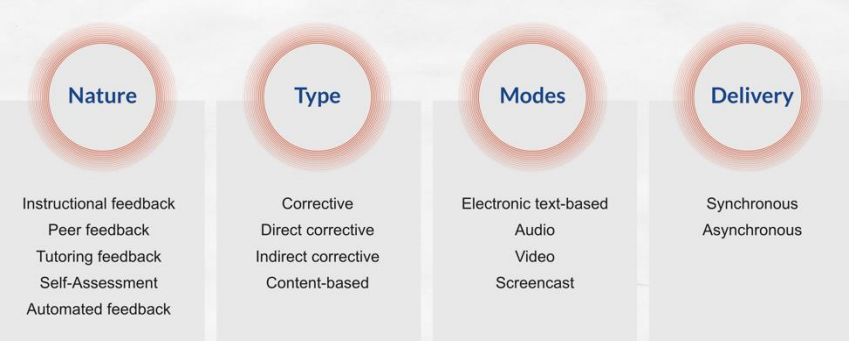
Background

Literature provides several definitions of feedback: (1) a learning mechanism to measure own learning towards standards and objectives (Rourke, 2013); (2) the information regarding aspects of one's performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007); and (3) an instructional principle in encouraging and consolidating the learning process (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The goal of any type of feedback is to inform learners where they stand on the scale of a course's expectations and objectives. Feedback plays a key role in improving student achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) by reducing the gap between a learner's current and a learner's desired level of knowledge (Shute, 2008).

It is also important to understand how the literature defines digital feedback. Our search found that authors interpret digital feedback from various technological perspectives (Mertens et al., 2022; Peters, 2003; Williams et al., 2012). For example, in the 2000-s digital feedback was defined as the media that required personal computer, digital learning environment, networks, offline and online CD-ROMs and databases, seminars, and computer-supported cooperative learning and working (Peters, 2003). Later, in the 2010-s with the rise of Web 2.0 technologies, digital feedback was defined as undertaken in Web 2.0 settings via digital applications, such as ePortfolios, mobile learning, internet video conferencing, Facebook, wikis/blogs, and student response systems, i.e., clickers (Williams et al., 2012). Currently, the definition of digital feedback has changed and includes automation due to the availability of AI-assisted technologies. It is defined as computer-based feedback (e.g., automated, individual feedback) to support learners, correct errors and improve their learning performance and improve their learning performance by providing specific and individual task related feedback (Mertens et al., 2022).

Based on our analysis of different types of feedback, we suggest the following figure to understand what categories of digital feedback have been examined in the literature.

Figure 1
The Categories of Digital Feedback



Feedback Perceptions

The literature suggests that instructors and students have differing perceptions of digital feedback. Overall, both perceived feedback as individual, but the similarities did not overlap much beyond that. Instructors held that digital feedback should be supportive, consistent, and timely. Whereas students would prefer to receive feedback as early as possible and improve based on it; they also noted that digital feedback made their instructors seem more accessible (Quinton & Smallbone, 2010).

Synchronous Feedback Perceptions

Synchronous feedback, provided through real-time voice, video, and/or chat communication most closely resembles the classroom and face-to-face environment that educators and students are more familiar with (Wolfe & Griffin, 2012). Studies found that students tended to be satisfied with synchronous feedback, and many preferred it over face-to-face feedback because it was less intimidating and they improved their writing from synchronous feedback sessions (Bell et al, 2022; Muranova et al., 2023). Students surveyed agreed that synchronous feedback on their writing assisted them in improving and that they were conscious of clearly communicating when in synchronous sessions (Andersen & Molloy, 2022).

Asynchronous Feedback Perceptions

Asynchronous feedback does not require the student and instructor to meet; the student submits a question or draft, and the instructor returns feedback on the assignment later, using any combination of written or recorded audio feedback (Neaderhiser & Wolfe, 2009). Students tended to report positive experiences with asynchronous feedback (Bell et al., 2022). In addition to not needing to leave the house or being able to fit meetings into busy schedules, students reported that they opted for asynchronous modalities because they could refer to the feedback as often as they needed; a few also mentioned that they reviewed previous feedback when working on future assignments (Severino & Prim, 2016). Students felt that the asynchronous feedback was more critical and more helpful; one explained, “I think it's easier to give more critical feedback when not face to face with someone” (Bell et al., 2022, p. 2). Students also discussed their engagement with feedback and commented on best practices; for example, one student

noted that they appreciated when an error was highlighted once or twice and then left them to locate similar instances (Severino & Prim, 2016).

Akin to the students who thought they received more critical feedback asynchronously, instructors expressed they were more likely to offer suggestions they might not have in person, and sometimes it was easier to provide feedback because they did not have an eager student right there awaiting a response (Bell et al., 2022). Once instructors were familiar with asynchronous feedback, they overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with it and felt they helped students just as much as they would have in person. Although, after dedicating time to feedback, some expressed disappointment that they rarely heard back from the student and did not know if their feedback was helpful or not (Rambiritch & Carstens, 2022).

Feedback Literacy

Instructor Feedback Literacy

Winstone (2020) defines instructor feedback literacy as "the knowledge, expertise, and dispositions to design feedback processes in ways which enable student uptake of feedback and seed the development of feedback literacy" (p. 5). The instructor's role within general feedback processes is indisputable. They are frequently looked to as a preferred source of feedback, the designer of the feedback experience, and the intermediary, and if necessary, the arbiter of feedback encounters (Zhou et al., 2020). Yet the discussion of instructor feedback literacy seems to be eclipsed by research's focus on a student's role in that process (Boud & Dawson, 2021). Literature does indicate that students must be feedback literate to fully capitalize on feedback uptake (Wood, 2021), but research has also revealed that instructors must be feedback literate to foster feedback literate students (Boud & Dawson, 2021). To clarify the feedback practices instructors must employ to create optimal feedback experiences, Boud and Dawson (2021) conducted an inductive analysis of 62 university faculty who had experience providing, considering, and designing feedback opportunities in higher education leading to 19 competencies required of feedback literate instructors, which they then stratified into three non-exclusive levels: (1) *macro,* (2) *meso,* and (3) *micro.* Though these competencies were developed for feedback literacy in general, we can still use them as lenses into technology that helps facilitate these practices. For example, technologies that aid in *macro* competencies are those that ultimately help develop a culture of feedback within the learning community. *Meso* technologies aid in the design and development of course-level feedback opportunities while *micro* technologies focus more on personalization and differentiation of feedback for individual students on specific assignments. Technologies can aid in all these practices to varying degrees. Some are more effective than others and ultimately feed back into the macro-level competency to create a feedback literate culture, which seems to be the ultimate goal of feedback literacy research.

Student Feedback Literacy

Molloy et al. (2020) refined a student feedback literacy framework that grouped the following habits into seven categories: (1) commits to feedback as improvement, (2) appreciates feedback as an active process, (3) elicits information to improve learning, (4) processes feedback information, (5) acknowledges and works with emotions, (6) acknowledges feedback as a reciprocal process, and (7) enacts outcomes of processing of feedback information (p. 529). A student who habitually engages in these practices could be classified as a feedback literate student, and one who has developed the capacity for leveraging digital tools to engage in these practices would be a student who has achieved digital feedback literacy.

Barriers and Factors

Feedback and its processes can be hindered by several factors, including students' learning differences, students' familiarity with their LMS, digital literacy, technological access, cultural and emotional barriers, and even institutional practices (Nieminen & Carless, 2023). However, the most critical barrier is the misaligned perceptions of the roles participants play in the feedback process: Instructors believe that students should take a more active role in the feedback process but also tend to dominate feedback experiences by not providing enough opportunities for students to receive feedback from other sources, and students believe they have no active role to play but must simply receive the information and not necessarily do anything with that information (Wolstencroft & de Main, 2021). Research suggests that if students and instructors aligned their perceptions of their roles by approaching feedback as an active dialogical process, feedback participants would not only become more aware of the barriers but develop more ways to dissolve them (Wood, 2021). Thus, technology that facilitates this adjustment brings us closer toward our goal of a more feedback literate learning community.

In addition to barriers, we must also consider factors that affect participants' perceptions and thus, students' uptake of feedback. Those factors include participants' expectations and previous feedback experience, including the design of the feedback encounter and the convenience of the tools used to mediate that feedback (Zhou et al., 2020). Control of these factors can help mitigate barriers to improve outcomes related to a feedback encounter and thus improve feedback literacy.

Best Practices, Challenges and Opportunities

Synchronous Feedback

The benefits of synchronous feedback include time efficiency for students; reaching students who would not otherwise be able to come to campus; accessibility and flexibility for those who prefer or need to meet online; and to reach and assist more students (Andersen & Molloy, 2022). In fact, Muranova et al. (2023) argue that because of the ability of the latest form of synchronous feedback to be multimodal, participants can talk or text, screen share, and make changes to the text in real-time. These types of feedback offer a more conducive and active atmosphere than other types of feedback. Immediacy and avoidance techniques are used naturally in all conversations, but an instructor's awareness and mindful employment of immediacy practices (the use of words like "we," complementing the student's work, and showing a willingness to assist) becomes paramount in a synchronous text-based consultation (Raign, 2013). Students who worked with instructors who practiced using immediacy communication were more likely to rate their sessions successful, and the higher the immediacy score, the higher the satisfaction rating (Raign, 2013). Similarly, another communication strategy that is important in text based synchronous online feedback conferencing is that of direct and indirect language. Preliminary research showed that students were more likely to revise their writing when feedback was direct and the instructor waited for students to respond before continuing the conversation (Muranova et al., 2023). When an instructor gave too much information, was indirect, or provided overlapping suggestions, students were more likely to become confused and not make changes (Muranova et al., 2023).

Early challenges of synchronous feedback were overcome with improved internet speed, updated tools, and better training; however, there were some challenges that persisted. Many perceived challenges of synchronous feedback come from misconceptions of the medium. Several views in the literature, both positive and negative, may have more to do with our attitudes toward technology - our unexamined fears and enthusiasms - than they do with technology itself (Kimball, 1997).

Asynchronous Feedback

For asynchronous feedback, concern over students appropriating instructor text is a consistent discussion in the literature. One feature that students appreciated about asynchronous feedback was the permanence of textual feedback, yet this is one of the main points early researchers lamented (Harris & Pemberton, 1995; Spooner, 1994); they feared students would take suggestions in feedback as their own. These concerns can be addressed by training to provide formative feedback in the form of questions, suggestions, and resources that do not as easily lend to misappropriation (Rambiritch & Carstens, 2022).

Research on asynchronous feedback practices revealed that direct comments are most effective and that instructors should also include links to primary sources for students to read further or practice the skill (Hewett & Thonus, 2019). Finally, scaffolding feedback was productive when instructors provided a summary of what the student did well, focused on revisions, and provided marginal comments to address specific portions of the draft (Rambiritch & Carstens, 2022). When these strategies were implemented, research demonstrated positive success rates, defined as student uptake of feedback and improved writing skills.

Digital Feedback Tools

There are several tools, such as Google Docs (https://www.google.com/docs), Grammarly (https://www.grammarly.com/), or Khanmigo (https://www.khanmigo.ai/) that educators can employ for digital feedback. For example, Google Docs provides instructional, tutoring, peer, and self-assessment options for different types of feedback, i.e., corrective and content feedback. Instructors can use Google Docs features such as comments and highlights to provide feedback and the built-in grammar check offers students real-time feedback on their syntax. Grammarly offers students self-assessment and automated, corrective feedback. While students can use the free version of Grammarly independently, the paid subscription also offers feedback on tone, clarity, engagement, and delivery. Grammarly also offers students explanations and grammar rules that go along with the suggestions it makes. Khanmigo requires a paid subscription, and has fully automated, AI generated corrective and content-based feedback for students. Unlike other tools that are used to review assignment drafts, students can use Khanmigo to brainstorm and ask direct questions about their work in addition to reviewing drafts.

With the rise of AI, we have examined what literature reported about digital feedback in the era of AI. According to Lee (2023), AI-based feedback can be assistive and generative. It has several advantages for learners and practitioners including the following: (a) it is timely, (b) it helps students' personal growth, (c) it provides adaptive instructions, (d) instructors can customize feedback, (e) it requires minimal or no human interference, (f) it supports assessment, and (g) it alleviates instructional load (Lee, 2023). Following Lee (2023)'s approach to AI-based feedback, we identified the AI in the tools that are available for educators to provide feedback (Table 1).

Table 1
The Types of AI per Feedback Tools

Tools	Assistive AI	Generative AI	Benefits
Google Docs	Yes	No	Students' personal growth
Grammarly	Yes	Yes	Timely
Khanmigo	No	Yes	Minimal or no human interference

Conclusion

Based on the literature overview, we concluded that digital feedback practices have been reshaped. Currently, digital feedback is a web-based delivered media in synchronous or asynchronous modes. It requires high speed internet connection availability for both instructors and learners. To benefit from digital feedback, both instructors and students should have digital literacy competencies. However, digital feedback still presents some barriers, such as emotional reactions or self-efficacy. In addition, the quality of feedback relies on each tool's capabilities, including its integration of AI that are used to provide feedback (check Table 1).

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Bridging the Gap: Veteran Offices Supporting the Transition into Higher Education

Cliff McAfee, Jr. and Brad Wojtiuk

Abstract

The transition from military service to higher education can be challenging for student veterans who often struggle with adapting to a new culture and identity in higher education. This paper highlights the challenges faced by student veterans, which include a lack of cultural competency among faculty and staff, microaggressions faced in the classrooms, and the student veterans feeling a low sense of belonging on campuses. This paper shows the need for student veteran-supporting offices to combat the challenges that student veterans may encounter while being in higher education. The paper proposes the MORE model (Matriculation, Opportunities, Readiness, Empathy) as a framework for supporting student veterans in higher education.

Introduction

There are approximately 200,000 students that transition from the military to higher education each year (Perkins, et, al, 2019). Of the 200,000 veterans that leave the military, approximately 115,000 students transition into higher education using their G.I. Bill benefits. Student veterans are highly successful in the classroom. Student Veterans on average are more successful than their non-veteran peers in the classroom with slightly above graduation and GPAs. Many of the veterans who transition into higher education are first-generation students. As the empirical research demonstrates that student veterans are successful in the classroom, they struggle with transitioning into the higher education space. It is important to know that student veterans are like actual snowflakes, not to be confused with the political term, but meaning they share the same exact experience with another veteran (VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, 2018).

Veteran students often find themselves struggling with transitioning from their military identity to their newly founded identity of becoming a student veteran. Student affairs professionals should be aware of the multiple transitions that student veterans experience on campus. The transitions student veterans go through from the military to higher education can often create barriers in adapting to higher education culture which creates challenges for student affairs professionals in assisting them in becoming successful in higher education.

Transitioning into Higher Education

Student veterans find challenges and often struggle when transitioning into higher education Oberweis, T. & Bradford, M. (2017). Most student veterans do not have a degree (Ryan et al., 2011). Schlossberg's Transition Model expresses the struggle of student veterans transitioning into higher education. Schlossberg's four Ss of her transition model are situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1981). Focusing on the "Self" of transition, student veterans can face multiple transitions as they enter realm of higher education. A contributing factor to the struggle for student veterans in higher education could be the lack of cultural competencies when it pertains to the veteran culture (Planning, 2010). Fifty-seven percent (Planning, 2010) of higher education institutions do not offer training for faculty or staff regarding student veteran transitional assistance. However, only 22% provide transitional assistance specific to student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009). The number of veterans who served after September 11, 2001, skyrocketed after the creation of the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (commonly referred to as the Post 9/11 G. I. Bill[1]) (Student Veterans of America, 2020).

Graduation and Retention

Student Veterans want to possess a sense of belonging on their campus. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. The relationship between service members and their sense of belonging is significant since 42% report a low sense of belonging on campuses (Barry et al., 2019). Student veterans have multiple identities that include being non-traditional students, dis/ability status, LGTBQI+, race, class, and marital status, which can influence benefits for the veteran. This information can be helpful to [1] for student affairs professionals to build a rapport when working with student veterans because they seek ways to enhance their socioeconomic status. Most people enlist in the military for socioeconomic opportunities (KleyKamp, 2006; Dalton, 2010).

Student veterans suffer from microaggressions and are portrayed as deviant or troublemakers. Zoli, Maury & Fay (2017), study identified biases from faculty that people join the military because they are uneducated or unintelligent. Civilian peers see student veterans as broken because of the stigma surrounding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (Dalton, 2010). The Department of Veterans Affairs shows that 7 out of every 100 (or 7%) veterans are diagnosed with PTSD. Faculty and staff affect student veteran retention rates. Relationships with faculty are instrumental in retention rates. Veteran Studies literature shares how faculty and staff possess the most influence on retention and graduate rates (Vacchi 2012, Vacchi, 2020). Veterans have served our country, and it's important to support them as they transition into the world of higher education.

MORE Model

What is the MORE model? How does the MORE model fit the narrative of the research plan? The MORE (Matriculation, Opportunities, Readiness, Empathy) model was created by Cliff McAfee and Brad Wojtiuk for a conference presentation we presented at the Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) conference about the need for a student veteran supporting office at all institutions that accept VA education benefits called “BRIDGING THE GAP: VETERAN OFFICES SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION.” The MORE model was developed off the CARES (Community, Awareness, Recognition, Encouragement, Support) model. The MORE model was created to be the child of the CARES model that is presented in the veteran cultural competency training called “Got your 6” which focuses on understanding veteran culture for higher education professionals. Hart and Thompson (2013) add that most training sessions about student veterans fail to understand the experiences and give a one-dimensional view of what it means to be a veteran. The two models go together and can be put together in various ways like “CARES MORE” or “MORE CARES.” The MORE model was established to describe why student veterans of newer generations have been entering College, and what they seek to gain from coming to higher education.

The “M” in the More model stands for Matriculation. Student veterans on average have higher GPA’s than their civilian peers in the classroom, so it becomes a unique opportunity when they discover they may be eligible for graduate school. Most of the research focuses on student veterans who are undergraduates, but when developing this model, we wanted to include graduate students. Vacchi (2012) shows that most research about student veterans focuses on student veterans who have undergraduate degrees. Many student veterans do not aim toward graduate degrees until being presented with another VA benefit. As many student veterans support their families while in graduate school, the VA’s process of delinquent or slower payments can cause unnecessary stress on the student veterans while in graduate school (Philips, 2016).

The “O” in the MORE model stands for opportunities. Student veterans want to go to college because they know more opportunities are available with a college degree. Student Veterans wish to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom (Oberweis Bradford, 2017). Student veterans want to feel like they can participate and feel included in the classroom (Oberweis Bradford, 2017). The “R” in the MORE model stands for readiness. Student Veterans are choosing to go to college to be ready for the job market. There is a huge portion of veterans who do not get assistance in the job market (Aronson et al., 2019). Veterans who are considered junior enlisted who did not serve their counterparts were less likely to use job databases and resume writing assistance programs after service (Aronson et al., 2019). The military service a student veteran has alongside having a college degree makes them a strong candidate in their desired field of choice after graduating college. During the time I have been working with student veterans in higher education, every single one of them is in higher education to better their position in civilian society and to be more marketable after graduation. This is the experience Cliff and I have had that relates to empirical research that was presented in our presentation, that student veterans are in college and want the support to have more opportunities after college. The “E” in the MORE model stands for empathy. Higher education professionals need to enact empathetic strategies when working with student veterans. Empathetic strategies can fall underneath Schlossberg’s Transition Theory in developing methods to connect to the student veteran community. Weissman (2023) states that Appreciative Advising is a practitioner theory that can be used to ask open-ended questions that are positive, individualized, and supportive when it comes to working with the student veteran community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, transitioning from military to higher education can be challenging and complex for student veterans. Despite being highly successful in the classroom, student veterans need help adapting to the higher education culture. Lack of cultural competencies and biases from faculty and staff can create barriers for student veterans, affecting their sense of belonging and retention rates. The MORE model, which stands for Matriculation, Opportunities, Readiness, and Empathy, can guide higher education professionals to support student veterans in their transition into higher education. Institutions must provide transitional assistance and training for faculty and staff to help student veterans achieve their goals and enhance their socioeconomic status. Student veterans have served our country, and it is our turn to serve them in their pursuit of higher education.

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Providing a Professional Learning Opportunity Via Workshop for Pharmacy Faculty Regarding Entrustable Professional Activities in Student Assessment

Richard Silvia and Kathy Peno

Abstract

While skill development is not a new concept in healthcare fields, the ways of thinking about the development of competency is changing. In pharmacy education in particular, educators of pharmacy students are being tasked with the understanding and use of entrustable professional activities (EPAs) in their assessment of student competency. To assist pharmacy faculty to understand and use EPAs effectively, a professional learning opportunity in form of a workshop was developed and delivered, and evaluation of the workshop was performed to determine the impact of the program.

Keywords: skill development, assessment, pharmacy education, entrustable professional activities

Introduction

The exploration of skill development in healthcare fields is not new, however, the methods in which competency levels are determined has changed in medical education and, more recently, in pharmacy education as well. In pharmacy education, these changes, which are explored in depth here, result in the need to provide professional development to faculty in pharmacy education programs so they may provide their students with the highest level of developmental support and appropriate assessment methods. This paper explores the newly adopted measures for competency assessment as well as the development of a professional learning opportunity for pharmacy educators.

Entrustable Professional Activities

The concept of entrustable professional activities (EPAs) as a basis for competency-based training was introduced to medical education in 2005 (ten Cate, 2005), and EPAs were incorporated as a formal component of medical education and residency training in 2014 (AAMC, 2014). EPAs were developed as a means of describing tangible professional skills in a manner that was applicable to the professional environment. Rather than determining a learner's level of skill attainment using traditional methods, EPAs determine their ability to perform the skill in a real-world professional environment under various levels of supervision. While the learner's ability to perform a given skill is certainly of importance within their education, EPAs measure competency to perform that skill alongside the requisite knowledge and attitudes within a professional environment under the supervision of an instructor. Depending upon the overall competency the learner demonstrates to the instructor, decreasing need for supervision is awarded to the learner as they are able to function more independently.

Like other healthcare educational programs, pharmacy education also moved to incorporate EPAs as a component of their educational standards. The American Academy of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), the national organization of pharmacy faculty, administration, and schools/colleges of pharmacy, charged the 2015-16 Academic Affairs Committee to develop a list of EPAs for pharmacy (Haines, et al., 2016; Haines, et al., 2017). Since the development of the pharmacy EPAs, they have been reviewed and further refined for formal adoption into pharmacy education standards (Medina, et al., 2023). Similar to the medical EPAs, pharmacy EPAs are also based upon the learner's competency to perform professional skills under varying degrees of supervision.

Five degrees of supervision are described and provided below:

Table 1. Levels of Entrustability

Level	Description
I. Observe Only	Learner is permitted to observe only. Even with direct supervision, learner is not entrusted to perform the activity or task.
II. Direct Supervision	Learner is entrusted to perform the activity or task with direct and proactive supervision. Learner must be observed performing task in order to provide immediate feedback.
III. Reactive Supervision	Learner is entrusted to perform the activity or task with indirect and reactive supervision. Learner can perform task without direct supervision but may request assistance. Supervising pharmacist is quickly available on site. Feedback is provided immediately after completion of activity or task.
IV. Intermittent Supervision	Learner is entrusted to perform the activity or task with supervision at a distance. Learner can independently perform task. Learner meets with supervising pharmacist at periodic intervals. Feedback is provided regarding overall performance based on sample of work.
V. General Direction	Learner is entrusted to independently decide what activities and tasks need to be performed. Learner entrusted to direct and supervise the activities of others. Learner meets with supervising pharmacist at periodic intervals. Feedback is provided regarding overall performance based on broad professional expectations and organizational goals.

(adapted from Haines, et al., 2016)

As pharmacy education moves forward with the incorporation of EPAs as curricular standards, pharmacy educators must be both aware of their meaning and how to utilize them in assessing student competencies. This will involve the assessment of not only the students' abilities to perform the skills embedded within these competencies, but also the foundational knowledge they have learned as well as the appropriate professional attitudes needed for the EPAs. For example, whereas current pharmacy curricular standards list over 15 domains and sub-domains of required skills, knowledge, and attributes with dozens of learning objectives (Medina et al., 2013), the EPAs were initially published as a list of 15 competencies (Haines et al., 2017), which has recently been pared down to a shorter list of 13 competencies that also incorporates the previous curricular domains (Medina et al., 2022, Medina et al., 2023). This will require a significant revision of how pharmacy competencies are assessed, and faculty training to perform appropriate student assessment will be needed. A recent publication in the pharmacy education literature also proposed a potential means of EPA assessment using a series of retrospective and prospective questions regarding student performance and aligned to the 5-point EPA scale provided above (Jarrett et al., 2021). This assessment method was based on previously published works from the medical literature on EPAs, including the Chen Entrustability Scale (Chen et al., 2015) and the Ottawa Clinic Assessment Tool (Rekman et al., 2016).

Skill Development

The educational theory most directly applicable to EPAs is the work on skill development by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (Dreyfus, 2004). Their model also has five steps but is more directly applicable to skill development specifically, as opposed to competency assessment. Nonetheless, overall skill is still a base requirement for any professional competency, as described in the EPA literature above. Unlike the assessment of EPAs and professional competency, the assessment of student skills is more established and familiar within pharmacy education. For decades, student skills have been assessed by instructors within academic and clinical environments, but using a methodology quite dissimilar to EPAs. For example, skills currently are assessed as individual items, rather than the more aggregated professional competencies and functions contained within EPAs.

Table 1. Five Stages of Skill Acquisition

Skill Level	Components	Perspective	Decision	Commitment
1. Novice	Context free	None	Analytic	Detached
2. Advanced beginner	Context free and situational	None	Analytic	Detached
3. Competent	Context free and situational	Chosen	Analytic	Detached understanding and deciding; involved outcome
4. Proficient	Context free and situational	Experienced	Analytic	Involved understanding; detached deciding
5. Expert	Context free and situational	Experienced	Intuitive	Involved

Note: Components: This refers to the elements of the situation that the learner is able to perceive. These can be context free and pertaining to general aspects of the skill or situational, which only relate to the specific situation that the learner is meeting. Perspective: As the learner begins to be able to recognize almost innumerable components, he or she must choose which one to focus on. He or she is then taking a perspective. Decision: The learner is making a decision on how to act in the situation he or she is in. This can be based on analytic reasoning or an intuitive decision based on experience and holistic discrimination of the particular situation. Commitment: This describes the degree to which the learner is immersed in the learning situation when it comes to understanding, deciding, and the outcome of the situation—action pairing.

(adapted from Dreyfus, 2004)

By starting from an educational model that faculty are more familiar with such as the Dreyfus model of skill development, faculty may be able to move from their past use of student skill assessment to the new EPA system. Therefore, the Dreyfus Model of Skill Development (Dreyfus, 2004) was foundational in the development of a professional learning program for pharmacy education faculty.

Development of a Professional Learning Workshop

To learn how to best develop and deliver a workshop for fellow educators, the work of Sork (1984, 1997) was instrumental. His publications on workshop development describe appropriate methodology to deliver the most effective workshop possible utilizing adult learning principles. He provides a series of core characteristics of workshops that differentiate them from other educational methods. In particular, he states that workshop participants need to interact with each other and share information and experiences with each other to maximize the education impact (Sork, 1984). This can be accomplished by having participants work in small groups to identify problems and propose solutions to affect change.

The Workshop

The workshop was offered to all Department of Pharmacy Practice faculty within the School of Pharmacy-Boston of the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (MCPHS) during a regularly scheduled department faculty meeting on Thursday, October 12, 2023. These faculty were selected for participation as they are the primary faculty involved in the skills assessment of Doctor of Pharmacy students. This potentially could have included up to 44 faculty, and 25 attended the workshop (with an additional three faculty serving as facilitators, including myself). With a workshop of this size, planning was of great importance.

The primary goal of the workshop was to develop the skills, abilities, and comfort of the participants in utilizing an EPA-based skill assessment methodology with pharmacy students. As they will need to use this methodology in the future, there was a clear need to train them in how to do so. Additional goals included the presentation of any existing EPA-based assessment tools to the participants (see below) and providing the participants with an opportunity to share their experiences on student skill assessment with each other. Each of these workshop goals served to meet the overall need of the various stakeholders involved in the program.

One of the first steps was to ascertain the participants' current level of understanding of the EPAs and how they compared to the existing system of skill assessment. This was accomplished by surveying the participants approximately one month prior to the workshop with a series of questions on their perceptions and understanding, as well as their comfort level of EPA-based competency assessment. This survey served as a means of the participants of providing input into the workshop as a primary stakeholder in the workshop.

The workshop was planned during a regularly scheduled online (Zoom) monthly department faculty meeting in October, 2023 to maximize faculty availability to attend. A pre-workshop handout was sent to all department faculty several days prior to the workshop to provide basic information about EPAs and their use as a reference guide. The department meeting was 90 minutes in length, so the length and schedule of the program was based upon this timing. There was a short didactic presentation of core EPA-related principles (even with the pre-workshop handout being sent to participants) at the beginning of the workshop, making the establishment of an effective schedule for the workshop a vital requirement. Most of the workshop time was spent in small groups where participants were able to discuss the topic amongst themselves and utilize a proposed EPA-based assessment tool in several mock scenarios within their groups. These mock scenarios were designed to replicate the types of student assessments the faculty will be expected to perform using EPAs in the future. These small group discussions were scheduled to last at least 15-20 minutes to allow all participants in each group an opportunity to participate and share their ideas and experiences. Then a whole group discussion was planned to last at least 20-30 minutes to allow all groups and participants to share their views for their assigned scenarios. as well as the scenarios of the other groups. The final segment of the workshop was a wrap-up session, where participants could share any remaining questions or concerns about the EPA-based assessment tools or how student assessment via EPAs might work. Finally, post-workshop surveys were utilized to assess the educational impact of the workshop. Specific questions related to faculty knowledge regarding EPAs were repeated on both the pre- and post-surveys to assess any change in faculty knowledge from the workshop. Additional questions regarding faculty comfort in applying EPAs and entrustability-based assessments were also repeated to assess change over time.

Results

The pre- and post-workshop surveys indicated that the workshop did have an impact on faculty knowledge and comfort with EPA-based assessments. While faculty responses did not indicate any changes in the perception of their knowledge in this area, significant improvements were observed from pre- to post-workshop on a knowledge assessment question. Faculty perception of their comfort with EPA-based assessments also improved slightly, and the assessment question also showed significant improvements. Faculty agreement with using EPA-based assessments also increased after the workshop.

Curiously, while faculty perceived their knowledge of EPA-based assessments did not change and their comfort with them increased after the workshop, faculty rated the effectiveness of the workshop higher for improving their understanding than their comfort. This could indicate that they would like more opportunities to work with these assessments to develop more utility with them as opposed to more direct knowledge of EPAs and how to assess them. This is also supported by the higher usefulness ratings for the opening informational component and small group breakouts of the workshop as compared to the large group discussion, which was cut short due to time constraints. Faculty likely appreciated the brief informational refresher (after receiving the pre-workshop informational handout previously) and the subsequent opportunity to use the information in a mock student assessment scenario.

Conclusion/Future Directions

As with any new initiative, a period of uncertainty will precede true change. In the case of the adoption of EPAs by pharmacy educators, early results show that professional learning opportunities are valued and provided positive results both in understanding the EPAs in terms of competency development and their value to the field of pharmacy education. Additionally, more opportunities to apply the EPAs are welcome by the faculty who engaged in the professional learning opportunity. As a result of these encouraging findings, the authors are planning new professional learning opportunities that include a mentoring program for faculty in pharmacy education.

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Navigating the Third Space: Military Veterans in Higher Education

Wayne N. Taylor and Reneé Amboy

Abstract

"Navigating the Third Space: Military Veterans in Higher Education" explores the transition of veterans from military service to academia, employing border theory to understand their experiences. While it is difficult to generalize the experiences of all student veterans, the aim is to provide a fundamental understanding of the experiences of some veterans in higher education. These veterans negotiate identities amidst conflicting power structures, linguistic barriers, and institutional norms, fostering resilience and transformation. The study reveals a transformative journey marked by adaptation, critical engagement, and personal growth. Linguistic challenges and identity negotiation play central roles, addressed through tailored support services and peer networks. The study emphasizes the importance of inclusive environments and resilience-building in facilitating veterans' success within higher education.

Introduction

Transitioning military veterans into higher education represents a complex and multifaceted journey with many challenges and opportunities. As veterans navigate this transition from their structured roles within the military to the dynamic landscape of academia, they encounter distinct experiences shaped by intersecting power structures, linguistic barriers, and institutional norms. Understanding the nuances of this transition is paramount for institutions seeking to create inclusive and supportive environments that facilitate veterans' academic success and personal growth.

Drawing upon border theory, as elucidated by Anzaldúa (1987), this study explores the third space occupied by military veterans within higher education. Border theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the liminal realm where veterans negotiate and redefine their identities amidst the intersecting dynamics of military and academic cultures. Within this third space, veterans are tasked with reconciling their past experiences and identities with the novel demands and expectations of academic life, fostering narratives of adaptation, resilience, and transformation.

This introduction sets the stage for a fundamental examination of the transformative journey undertaken by military veterans within higher education. By delving into the complexities of this transition, we aim to shed light on the challenges veterans face and the strategies and support systems that facilitate their integration into academic communities. Through this exploration, we seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of veterans' experiences within higher education and inform efforts to create more inclusive and supportive environments for this unique population.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of the third space, as elucidated by border theory (Anzaldúa, 1987), emerges as a poignant metaphor encapsulating the transitional space occupied by veterans. In this liminal realm, veterans find themselves situated at the nexus of divergent power structures, linguistic paradigms, and institutional systems. This dynamic intersection compels them to constantly negotiate and redefine their identities and roles amidst the multifaceted terrain of higher education. Here, the journey of veterans unfolds as a compelling narrative of adaptation, resilience, and transformation, as they navigate the intricate complexities of their academic pursuits. Within the context of border theory, the third space symbolizes more than just a physical or temporal transition; it embodies a profound psychological and existential shift for

veterans. It is a realm where the hierarchical structures and rigid norms of military life collide with the decentralized and fluid dynamics of academia. In this liminal space, veterans are compelled to reconcile their past experiences and identities with the novel demands and expectations of academic life. This process of negotiation is fraught with challenges, yet it also presents myriad opportunities for personal growth, intellectual exploration, and self-discovery.

The metaphorical landscape of the third space is characterized by its fluidity and ambiguity, mirroring the transitional nature of veterans' experiences. Here, veterans traverse a terrain marked by uncertainty, ambiguity, and paradox, where the boundaries between past and present, self and other, familiarity and novelty, blur and overlap. It is within this dynamic interplay of contradictions and tensions that veterans grapple with the complexities of their dual identities, oscillating between the familiarity of their military past and the promise of their academic future.

As veterans navigate the third space, they are confronted with a myriad of intersecting challenges and opportunities that shape their academic journey. The conflicting power structures inherent in military and academic institutions necessitate a delicate balancing act, wherein veterans must negotiate their positions within hierarchies of authority and expertise (Carter et al., 2023). Similarly, the linguistic diversity of military and academic discourses presents veterans with the daunting task of mastering new vocabularies, languages, and modes of communication. Amidst these challenges, veterans must also contend with the socio-cultural dynamics of higher education, forging new social networks, identities, and affiliations within the academic community.

Transformative Journey

A pivotal revelation emerging from this in-depth analysis lies in the transformative odyssey embarked upon by military veterans as they transition from their structured military roles to the more fluid realm of academia (Carter et al., 2023; DiRamio et al., 2008; Giampaolo et al., 2020; Vacchi et al., 2020). The stark dichotomy between the rigid hierarchical framework of the military and the decentralized structure of academia presents veterans with a profound challenge: the need to recalibrate their understanding of authority and adjust from an andragogical learning environment to a pedagogical learning environment (Blaauw-Hara, 2017). This transformative journey encompasses not only a shift in institutional dynamics but also a profound reevaluation of personal values, beliefs, and modes of interaction.

The clash between the authoritative hierarchy of the military and the collaborative ethos of academia prompts veterans to confront and navigate conflicting power structures within the third space. In this liminal realm, veterans find themselves at the nexus of divergent paradigms of authority, tasked with reconciling their ingrained deference to hierarchical command with the imperative of self-advocacy and critical engagement (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). This necessitates a delicate balancing act, wherein veterans must negotiate their roles and identities within a complex matrix of institutional norms and expectations.

As veterans navigate the terrain of the third space, they are compelled to confront not only external structures of authority but also internalized assumptions and biases. The transition from a culture of obedience and conformity to one of autonomy and intellectual inquiry requires veterans to undergo a profound process of self-reflection and adaptation. This transformative journey encompasses not only the acquisition of new knowledge and skills but also the cultivation of critical consciousness and self-awareness.

Moreover, the participatory nature of the academic environment challenges veterans to embrace a more active and engaged mode of learning. Unlike the passive recipient role often assumed within the military hierarchy, veterans are encouraged to actively question, critique, and contribute to academic discourse. This transition from a culture of compliance to one of inquiry necessitates a fundamental reorientation of cognitive and behavioral patterns, as veterans learn to navigate the complexities of academic debate and intellectual exchange.

In essence, the transformative journey undertaken by veterans within the third space transcends mere institutional adaptation; it represents a profound process of personal and intellectual growth. By navigating the contrasting power structures of the military and academia, veterans develop not only the skills and knowledge necessary for academic success but also the resilience, adaptability, and critical consciousness essential for meaningful engagement with the world. Thus, the transformative journey of veterans within the third space emerges as a testament to the enduring spirit of resilience, courage, and adaptability that defines their lived experiences.

Linguistic Hurdles & Inclusivity

Moreover, the veteran experiences of the intricate linguistic hurdles that reside within the third space. The specialized lexicon and jargon entrenched within the military culture stand in stark contrast to the nuanced terminologies prevalent across various academic disciplines (Saber, 2018). This stark disparity not only erects barriers to effective communication but also amplifies the sense of isolation experienced by veterans navigating academic environments. The linguistic divide, rooted in distinct cultural contexts, poses a formidable challenge to veterans seeking to articulate their experiences, insights, and aspirations within the academic discourse.

Addressing this linguistic chasm emerges as a paramount priority for institutions committed to fostering inclusive and supportive environments for veterans. Recognizing the profound impact of language on social integration and academic success, institutions must undertake concerted efforts to equip veterans with the tools and resources necessary to navigate the intricacies of academic language. This entails not merely the provision of glossaries or translation guides but rather comprehensive language acquisition programs tailored to the unique needs and experiences of veterans.

Effective intervention strategies may encompass a multifaceted approach, encompassing linguistic training, cross-cultural communication workshops, and peer mentoring initiatives. By fostering a supportive learning environment wherein veterans feel empowered to engage with and decode academic language, institutions can facilitate a smoother transition into academia. Moreover, initiatives aimed at promoting linguistic diversity and inclusivity within academic discourse can serve to enrich the educational experience for all students, fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

In addition to institutional interventions, collaborative partnerships with veteran support organizations, linguistic experts, and community stakeholders can further enhance the efficacy and impact of linguistic integration initiatives. By harnessing the collective expertise and resources of diverse stakeholders, institutions can develop innovative and sustainable solutions to address the linguistic challenges encountered by veterans within the third space.

Ultimately, the imperative to bridge the linguistic gap within the third space transcends mere academic considerations; it embodies a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice. By dismantling linguistic barriers and fostering a culture of linguistic pluralism, institutions can create more accessible and empowering learning environments wherein veterans are valued as

active contributors and agents of change. In doing so, they not only honor the diverse linguistic heritage of veterans but also harness their unique perspectives and insights to enrich the fabric of academic discourse and scholarship.

Identity Negotiation & Belonging

Identity negotiation and the pursuit of belonging emerge as central and poignant themes within the broader discourse of veterans' transition into higher education. This transition is not merely a change in academic environment but a profound shift in self-perception and social identity. As veterans navigate the transition from the structured identity hierarchy of the military to the more fluid and diverse landscape of civilian roles, they are confronted with a myriad of challenges and complexities.

One of the primary challenges veterans face is the renegotiation of their self-identity in the absence of the familiar structures and norms of military life. The transition to civilian roles often necessitates a reevaluation of personal values, beliefs, and aspirations, veterans endeavors to reconcile their past experiences with their present circumstances. This process of identity negotiation is further complicated by societal stereotypes and stigmas that often portray veterans as either heroic saviors or traumatized individuals, thereby limiting the range of identities available to them within the academic community (Osborne, 2014; Vaccaro, 2015).

In response to these challenges, veterans often seek out and cultivate close-knit communities on campus, establishing peer support networks and mentorship programs as a means of fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). These communities provide a safe and supportive space wherein veterans can share their experiences, articulate their concerns, and seek guidance from peers who have walked a similar path. By facilitating peer-to-peer connections and mentorship opportunities, these support systems play a pivotal role in helping veterans navigate the complexities of identity negotiation and forge meaningful connections within the academic community.

Furthermore, these communities serve as a counterbalance to the isolation and alienation that veterans may experience as they transition into civilian life. By creating a sense of solidarity and mutual support, these networks empower veterans to confront societal stereotypes and reclaim agency over their own narratives. In doing so, they not only foster a greater sense of belonging and inclusion but also contribute to the broader goal of promoting diversity, equity, and social justice within higher education. Ultimately, the cultivation of supportive communities and networks represents a crucial aspect of veterans' successful integration into higher education. By providing a sense of belonging and social support, these communities empower veterans to navigate the complexities of identity negotiation, confront societal stereotypes, and cultivate a sense of agency and self-determination. In doing so, they play a vital role in facilitating veterans' academic success, personal growth, and overall well-being within the academic community.

Resilience Building & Support Services

In addition to the individual experiences, there is an array of strategies that veterans employ to navigate the intricate challenges presented by the third space. Central to these strategies is the cultivation of resilience—a dynamic process through which individuals harness their strengths, resources, and support networks to effectively cope with adversity and thrive in the face of adversity.

Resilience-building emerges as a cornerstone of veterans' transition into higher education, providing a framework through which they can confront and navigate the multifaceted challenges inherent in the third space. At its core, resilience-building entails the acknowledgment and addressing of past traumas and adversities, allowing veterans to confront and process the emotional and psychological wounds incurred during their military service. By fostering an environment that encourages open dialogue and destigmatizes discussions of mental health, institutions can empower veterans to seek the support and resources they need to address trauma and promote healing.

Moreover, resilience-building extends beyond the individual level to encompass a broader ethos of inclusivity and diversity within the academic community. By embracing the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of veterans, institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment wherein all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. This inclusive approach not only enhances veterans' sense of belonging and well-being but also enriches the academic community by fostering a culture of collaboration, innovation, and mutual respect.

Central to the resilience-building process is the provision of tailored support services designed to meet the unique needs and challenges of veterans. Recognizing the complex interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors shaping veterans' experiences, support services must be sensitive to the distinct traumas and stressors faced by this population. This may include specialized support modalities tailored to veterans' specific needs and preferences (academics, wellness, career, etc.).

The significance of resilience-building and tailored support services in supporting veterans' transition into higher education cannot be overstated. By fostering a culture of resilience and inclusivity, institutions can empower veterans to confront and overcome the challenges of the third space, ultimately enabling them to thrive academically, personally, and professionally. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to holistic support, institutions can create an environment wherein veterans feel valued, supported, and empowered to realize their full potential within the academic community and beyond.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper illuminates the intricate journey undertaken by veterans as they transition from their roles in the military to the academic realm. Guided by border theory and the metaphor of the third space, this exploration reveals the complexities, challenges, and opportunities inherent in this transformative process. This framework offers valuable insights into the nuanced experiences of veterans within the academic landscape. It highlights the liminal space where veterans negotiate their identities and roles amidst divergent power structures and institutional systems. This framework underscores the transformative nature of veterans' journey as they navigate the dynamic interplay of contradictions and tensions between their military past and academic future.

The transformative journey of veterans within the third space transcends mere institutional adaptation; it represents a profound process of personal and intellectual growth. This journey entails a shift in institutional dynamics and a profound reevaluation of personal values, beliefs, and modes of interaction. Veterans develop resilience, adaptability, and critical consciousness, which are essential for meaningful engagement with the world. Furthermore, examining linguistic hurdles underscores the importance of inclusive language practices in fostering a supportive environment for veterans. By addressing linguistic barriers and promoting linguistic diversity, institutions can create more accessible and empowering learning environments where veterans feel valued as active contributors.

Identity negotiation and the pursuit of belonging are central themes in veterans' transition into higher education. Peer support networks and mentorship programs are pivotal in helping veterans navigate the complexities of identity negotiation and forge meaningful connections within the academic community.Resilience-building and tailored support services are essential in supporting veterans' transition into higher education. By fostering a culture of resilience and inclusivity, institutions can empower veterans to confront and overcome the challenges of the third space, ultimately enabling them to thrive academically, personally, and professionally.

In conclusion, "Navigating the Third Space: Military Veterans in Higher Education" offers a fundamental understanding of veterans' multifaceted journey within the academic landscape. By embracing the transformative potential of this journey and providing tailored support, institutions can create an environment where veterans can fully realize their academic aspirations and contribute meaningfully to the academic community and beyond.

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Make plans now to join us next year.

The theme of the 2025 conference is based on the book "Military Veterans Transitioning to Higher Education and the Civilian Workforce: Challenges, Opportunities, Supports, and Resources" edited by Yvonne Hunter-Johnson, Timothy J. Ross and Mary V. Alfred.

This year the Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) will be hybrid, with virtual presentations being held on Wednesday, February 26th. In-person sessions will be presented on March 12-14, in Tampa, Florida at the University of South Florida. The call for presentation proposals and details regarding the conference will be sent out early in the fall.

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Begin thinking now about how your ideas might add to this discussion.