Challenges Faced by Adult Learners

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D298 Task 1

Introduction

Adult learners are different in that they are interested in "learning by doing, solving complex, real-world problems, and completing life-relevant tasks" (Jennings, 2021). Adult learners will devise solutions based on their life experiences (p.219) and will use real-life scenarios to achieve success.

Studies show that when students receive "minimal guidance and feedback in discovery or exploration-based curricula, they experience feelings of loss and frustration, which often lead to misconceptions" (Colange et al. (2018). For knowledge retention to take place, a deeper learning needs to take place (p.27).

This presents a challenge for designers, as adult learning theory tackles how adults retain knowledge, how they perceive learning, and even how they are involved in their community of learners. This presentation seeks to address some of these issues.

Topics Covered

Here is a quick summary of the challenges addressed in this presentation:

- Adults need to be actively involved in the learning process.

- Recognizing Different Cognitive Abilities

- Adults are problem-centered.

- Adults need to test their learning.

- Adult learning requires a climate that is collaborative, respectful, mutual, and informal

I will also provide a few solutions to these challenges. Enjoy the presentation.

Adults need to be actively involved in the learning process.

One challenge faced by learners today is **Adults want to be actively involved in the learning process**. Without a clear and defined purpose, the learner is less likely to motivated to become a self-directed learner. I will expound what the definition of self-directed learner below.

Self-directed Learning is a process defined by Malcom Knowles in 1975, "in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes."

Challenge   **Adults need to be actively involved in the learning process.**

By recognizing these skills (Lombardozzi, 2021), we can develop a plan to put them into action by using the following solutions (p.49):

1. Defining the employee learning and development goals.

   Allow the employees to have control of learning goals, resources, and creating a learning plan, with supervisors signing off on the final learning plan. (p.48)

2. Researching and organizing company learning resources.

   Management needs to provide essential learning resources. These can be based on the employees' specific team and department. (p.48)

3. Deliberately execute a learning and development strategy.

   Allocate time for learning such a study or library day or built-in project scheduling (49)

More details about self-assessing learning and learners wanting to find others to help along the way will be covered in later challenges.

Recognizing Different Cognitive Abilities

Rothwell (2020) advises to "not assume that all adults have the same characteristics". This presents a challenge when planning instruction for adults. For example, younger adults may be highly skilled at online learning, while older adults may be less willing to engage in online learning experiences due to them needing more face-to-face interactions. For this we need to consider the abilities of all adult learners.

Transfer of memory is a very real challenge when it comes to adult retaining what they have learned, also known as transfer of learning (p.53). Reasons behind this challenge include short-term memory loss. Adults tend of forget 80% of they learn within 48 hours. Another issue is that employees and managers rarely take the same trainings or attend the same meetings. This deficit presents an issue because often managers do not support the employees training goals. These challenges present a huge problem for us to address.

But fear not, here are some proposed solutions (p.54):

- Creating memorable learning experiences (such as stories and relating theories to practice)

- Utilizing the learners own senses (sights, touch, smell)

- Help employees identify problems faced on the job and strive to help address those problems.

Adults are problem-centered learners

Jennings (2021) teaches that "adults are interested in learning by doing, solving. complex, real-world problems, and completing life-relevant tasks." Adult learners will devise solutions based on their life experiences (p.219) and will use real-life scenarios to achieve success.

For us as a company that means figuring out what our learners are focused on. **What is important to them? They are focused? on relevance in learning and the how of the learning. How will the learning help them?** Skill and knowledge building is key to adult learning (p.221).

As a solution, this can be demonstrated by providing various learning resources and activities.

For example, we can build checkpoints into our assessments that leverage feedback and company relevance to the employee. By using feedback, learners are provided with opportunities to self-assess their learning and adjust along the way.

Learners also enjoy freedom of choice in their learning activities. This includes the learning tools, learning resources used, and even selecting the learning strategy. One solution we can provide to our employees is flexibility. This includes kind of courses we offer to our learners. And how do they interact with the learners work and career goals. Also, flexibility means letting learners take courses and assessments at their own pace and on their time (p.222).

More information self-assessing will be covered in a later challenge during this presentation.

With online learning comes various methods of delivering the message (Openo and Conrad, 2018). Adults thrive in environments learning where they learn their own way and they learn when they are ready to learn (p.29-30).

Adult learners want to be recognized for their accomplishments. They also want equity and fairness in their learning. One way of measuring that learning so that an equitable outcome is reached by all is through assessments. Assessments come and many forms and offer meaning and choice for todays adult learner (p.32).

Recognizing time constraints in learning is important as well. It is important to remember that for the self-directed learner, they want their choice to have meaning. Meaning that the assessment and learning must have some significance to their life and in this context, work environment. Using this constructivist approach lends itself well into the idea of adults taking charge of their learning p.33). The learner constructs their own meaning of the learning.

Challenge   Adults need to test their learning as they go along

So, how can use this to our advantage you ask? By providing choice of assessment types in our learning courses.

One solution is a portfolio. For example, maybe one of your employees is seeking promotion. Have them out together a sample of their authentic work experiences. This gives them a chance to reflect on their learning, while proving their competence for the job.

Another example is reflection journals. This would help the employee reflect on what they have learned and how it relates to their job. This is more focused on the learner's job and career and not individual issues The manager or supervisor must be aware of this issue when using reflection journals. For example, a reflection question might ask, "What aspect of your course learning will you take forward as you continue your career?" (p.80).

Both portfolios and reflection journals offer us the opportunity to help our employees self-assess their learning. We must remember that for the learner, learning is a journey of sorts. They make connections to the outside world and construct their own meanings (p.82-83).

Challenge   Adult learning requires a climate that is collaborative, respectful, mutual, and informal

As we have discussed other challenges in this presentation, we come to one final issue among all the issues that I consider to be above the rest, Collaborative Learning. This is not a new theory, but recently has made great progress in how community plays into adult learning theory.

Garrison et al. (1999), proposed The Community of Inquiry model. Using this model, both learners and instructors are equal participants in the learning community. It is proposed that learning occurs through the interaction of cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence (p.51). When all three presences meet, the learning experience is present. First, cognitive presence means engaging with information and ideas, second, teaching presence means the instructor and course design engages with learners, and last, social presence means that learners are engaging with fellow learners.

Adult learning requires a climate that is collaborative, respectful, mutual, and informal

But how do we create an effective Community of Inquiry (CoI) you ask?

Fiock (2020) helps us to understand how a community can be created. She proposes a format called the Seven Principles of Good Practice". I have outlined these below:

1. **Focus on student and teacher interaction.**
   An example could be addressing the student by name in online discussions.

2. **Encourage cooperation among students.**
   An example could be incorporating chat features, whiteboards, and text messaging.

3. **Encourage active learning.**
   An example of this could be to incorporate video, case studies, games, and simulations into courses.

4. **Give prompt feedback.**
   An example of this could be providing all feedback and acknowledging that the task or assessment was submitted.

5. **Time on task, helping learners with time management skills.**
   An example could be promptly responding to email and students concerns.

6. **Communicate expectations so that learners know what to expect.**
   An example could be using clear and concise language. Also provide redundancy to all expectations.

7. **Implement strategies that respect and address diversity and inclusion.**
   An example could be allowing to students to share their personal experiences in a discussion board format.

While these solutions are not all inclusive, they do represent some ways to start a community of inquiry within the company. Remember that cognitive presence means engaging with information and ideas; teaching presence means the instructor and course design engages with learners, and social presence means that learners are engaging with fellow learners. This topic is expansive and could be covered on its own too. It's up to the learner and instructor to develop the community.

Summary

While these challenges only represent a small fraction of the total challenges that could exist, they do provide a baseline for our company to start addressing.

Here is a quick summary of the challenges addressed in this presentation:

- Adults need to be actively involved in the learning process.

- Recognizing Different Cognitive Abilities

- Adults are problem-centered.

- Adults need to test their learning as they go along,

- Adult learning requires a climate that is collaborative, respectful, mutual, and informal.

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