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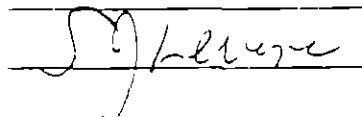East Lansing, Michigan

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PREPARING NON-EXPERIENCED TEACHERS
OF ADULTS: RESEARCH ISSUES

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ABSTRACT:

The expansive growth of adult and continuing education has brought with it many
teachers who have subject matter expertise, but have no background, training
or experience in teaching adults. While there are many of these people who are
naturally successful in teaching adults, others may need assistance in becoming
equipped for effective teaching in an adult learning setting. Attention is
given to some adult education literature which implies, without directly stating,
that research on the value of the training needs to emerge out of the model of
practice. This research issue paper sets forth a new five-step theoretical
model of training practice which could be implemented for preparing non-
experienced teachers of adults. The model includes: beliefs and notions
about adult learners; perceptions concerning qualities of effective teachers;
phases and sequences of the learning process; teaching tips and learning
techniques; and, implementing the prepared plan. It is proposed that this
model of training practice be a grounding source for generating needs for
research on the relative effectiveness of training and preparing non-experienced
teachers of adults. The foregoing would obviously help create a bridge or
at least help clarify how one bridge could be built between theory and practice
of teaching adults. In addition, it may provide a closer link between some
of the researchers and practitioners in the whole enterprise of helping adults
learn.

PREPARING NON-EXPERIENCED TEACHERS OF ADULTS: RESEARCH ISSUES

Literature and popular belief in adult, continuing and community education suggest that competance in subject matter has traditionally served as a sufficient qualification for individuals who teach adults. For most educators and trainers in programs for adults, neither adult teaching experience nor formal preparation for teaching the adult learner is a requirement for obtaining a position – temporary or permanent.

Need for Formal Preparation Questioned

It is assumed by some that if one knows the content or subject matter, competance in teaching it to other adults is automatically included in that knowing. While others would disagree with this automatic inclusion they would say that the potential to teach is something one is born with. Thus, they suggest that those faced with the responsibility of teaching the content they know to other adults, will approach this task as would any intelligent adult chosen at random – on the basis of some opinion and reading, some hunches and some kind of knowledge coupled with the experience of living. Training for them is not, in their estimation, necessary. Much less, research which reflects the opposite is most usually considered by them as an artificial "ivory-tower" roadblock, quite irrelevent and unnecessary to their purpose, concocted by an academic person's imagination, not rooted in the practical, and most certainly a time waster.

Need Recognized by Some

There is some recognition of need for training necessary in preparing teachers of adults who have no experience. Much of the recognition comes from those placed in a position of teaching without having prior experience. They know they need help but are not sure where to turn. Professional adult educators publish some video, audio, graphic and print materials highlighting the need for such preparation. But the major impact is limited to those who already know where and from whom it may be available. Furthermore, such materials are ustally targeted toward those teachers who have some understanding of the need rather than to those who have only an unclear understanding of their need for help. In addition, many administrators who could and should encourage this kind of preparation for their staff, do not know of its necessity or availability.

Little Systematic Preparation Happening

Whether the attitude toward preparing non-experienced teachers of adults derives from its being perceived as unnecessary if not detrimental, or from a lack of understanding the benefits arising from preparation, the net result is about the same. Very little systematic preparation is happening in either case. Some may declare that the issue needs to be ignored. Thus it will take care of itself. In other situations it is argued that the subject matter specialists will not spend the time a preparatory training session would take. There are those subject matter specialists who succeed quite well teaching others their craft without special training and preparation. Although this is true, it is far too crucial a matter to depend upon its happening in every case.

Issues Vital to Both Practitioners and Researchers

This issue is of vital importance to the practice side of adult and continuing education in a variety of institutions. Some are moving into this arena of providing educational programs beyond K-12 and 18-22 year old college students for the first time. Others are continuing their lengthy history in these activities. In either situation subject matter experts who have no preparation are being pressed into teaching service. At best, they are experiencing a mixture of success and failure. Many institutions involved in this are having a drop-out rate up to thirty-five percent of those who enroll. Some obviously are not that dramatic. However, they have no source of help to turn to either for explaining and understanding the mixed results, much less for turning the failures around.

This issue is also vital to the researchers. Many times they will spend much time pondering what elements in the field of adult education need to be researched. Many will generate knowledge on the teaching and learning process. Their findings will be psycho-logically, sociologically, theoretically, intellectually and scientifically sound. Some will seek to affirm that their findings on how children learn automatically hold for how adults learn. Additionally, they may pursue some other line of research that they consider

important to them or will be published in a journal read only by their peers. Then they wonder why the practitioners ignore their research findings. The researchers also become stressed concerning the fact that they missed the target the practitioner is concerned about - that their findings on the teaching and learning process did not answer the question on how to stem-the-tide of drop-outs.

Source to Generate Research Needs

Where is the most appropriate source to turn to for generating research needs relating to systematic preparation of non-experienced teachers of adults? Some of the adult education literature implies an answer to this question even though it does not directly state a position.

Norton (1986) suggests that the six module series on teaching adults is for teaching-in-training. Further indication states that the modules are based on fifty competencies unique and important to teachers of adults. These findings were identified and verified by a process of research rooted in the practice of instructing adults.

Mocker (1987) a known practitioner and researcher in speaking on the topic of selecting adult basic education teachers and staff, identifies five critical characteristics which obviously confirm his indication that they are based on his experience and research.

Malcolm S. Knowles (1950,1980,1987) throughout his lengthy adult education career grounded his research on recruiting adult education teachers, teacher's process plan, and competencies necessary for adult educators in the needs that were indicated from his practice.

Collins (1987) expresses concern for not being taken in by the advocates of competency-based education, who he says are for the most part behaviorists. He indicates that by doing philosophy and not just talking about philosophy, both practice and research in adult education may be enriched. Once again, this new perspective emphasizes the total human dimension, and makes sure the trap is avoided of dividing the activity of the adult education professional into bits and pieces.

Renner (1983) depicts his material as a survival kit for instructors. He originally designed these as handouts for people attending his train-the-trainer workshops. This was produced out of his own practice as an adult educator. Later it was compiled into a book form. It is intended to be used by teachers to help keep their head above water the first few sessions they teach. It is not about adult education theories but a practical how-to handbook. A clear statement emphasizes that it will not be useful sitting on a dusty shelf. To be useful it must be used in practice by a human being, an adult educator. Practice is an important part of instruction. It seems obvious that accompanying research needs to be generated which will establish the relative value of the instructional processes suggested.

Merriam (1984) for instance suggests that there are several techniques available to intensify an adult's movement toward self-direction. Furthermore, adult's daily experience in decision-making imply their capability of being involved in planning and implementing their own learning. They are also able to assess the value of a learning experience. Thus, since adults are more or less self-directed, they should participate in planning, conducting and evaluating their own learning. It would be hard to imagine this happening only in theory and not in actuality if the value of it were to be researched. And it would require a teacher who is willing in practice to take the risks necessary to foster self-direction in the students: a model, abstraction, resource and colleague rather than authority figure, transmitter of information and judge.

In focusing on training the human spirit, Hagin (1978) believes or assumes that one's spirit can be educated just as one's mind can be educated. He asserts that the human spirit (or "heart" as Bellah and associates (1985) would label it) is the means by which the Lord enlightens the person with his message. He further suggests that the four rules to be followed in that training process are: meditating in the message, doing or practicing message, giving the message first place in one's life, and by instantly obeying the voice of one's spirit. Whether or not one agrees with this is beside the point. The issue is that each of the aforementioned rules is anchored in the practice and experience of the learner. If this training or educating the human spirit is the substance of what

a teacher is seeking to engage learners in, it is also anchored in human experience or practice. Thus the question of whether this learning can be validated is to be answered through research arising out of practice.

Callahan (1985) lists fifteen general guidelines and recommendations for creating good learning environments. Without exception these guidelines are anchored in the practice side of the adult education enterprise. One illustration would be that participants require encouragement and support for the total time of a learning experience. In addition, that group support and emotional encouragement can give assurance/confidence. Recommendations that follow would include: help learners set attainable multiple goals; attend needs expressed by participants; and, to minimize failure let them work at their own speed. When these are designed into the conduct of the learning experience, it is only one more step to design the research that will support or nullify the hypothesis.

The ASTD reprint series on competency/competency development for HRD practitioners (1985) cites an example of one company being immobilized when faced with major technological change. They engaged a consultant to help them disengage and begin moving forward. He shared with them theoretical research which dealt with that issue. It was not until he transformed the theory into a self-learning system on planned change rooted in that organization (an example of practice) that they were released and mobilized to move into the future. A case example such as this is certainly supportive of research that grows out of practice.

Brookfield (1986) in his extensive analysis on <u>Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning</u> emphasizes four prominent themes in developing adult learning programs if they are to be successful. First, focus on learner characteristics and needs, not organizational needs. Second, contextual factors alter plans of programs and make them less than perfect; and practitioners need not despair because of this. Third, professional performance needs to include "playing hunches," "using intuition," and improvising. Fourth, recognize the appropriate use of a multiplicity of methods and techniques. A final note suggests that theories-in-use by practitioners in the actual program setting is a very evident research need.

Ingalls (1973) seeks to implement the process of andragogy into an organization as a means for training and educating adults in improved management and administration. There are various points in the process where permission is sought and granted for proceeding, as well as reports made on results. Assuredly research developed out of this practice would indicate the relative usefulness of this venture.

Pike (1981) assures the reader of the fact that if followed there are seventeen practices which will insure getting more out of one's training. One logical step toward research of these practices would answer the question to what extent there is real substance to the assertion.

Custer (1984) guides his readers through twenty-five steps in four phases to assure a successful training program. While he does not say much about the personal contribution of the educator, research on the results derived from the above steps and phases of practice would indicate whether they are or are not a waste.

Goad (1982) and Margolis & Bell (1986) both have crisp models for conducting training including an evaluation step to measure happiness of participants. Certainly research designed out of these processes would tell whether or not there were any results from the instruction or the training was delivered effectively.

Knox (1986) cites fifteen procedures which characterize one's teaching style on helping adults learn, such as: active learning, meanings, variety, interpersonal relations, past and future, self-direction for learners, and others. Research could be appropriately designed which would answer such practice questions as: Does the variety of methods used fit the requirements of the objectives and content while also preventing boredom for participants? and, Does the attention given help the participants learn how to learn, explore and assume responsibility for direction of their learning activities? Most if not all of the above references underscore and alude to,if not outright declare,that research needs to grow out of practice in the preparation of adult educators – and especailly non-experienced ones.

The most pronounced illustration, however, of the need for research growing out of practice comes from Schon (1987). He suggests the need for a new epistemology of practice, reflection-in-action (a professional thinking what he or she is doing while doing it, research arising out of practice). Instead, he claims that contemporary research universities give privileged status to systematic, preferably scientific, knowledge. The school's prevailing epistemology of practice, technical rationality, separates research from practice. This leaves no room for reflection-in-action, and thereby creates a dilemma of rigor or relevance.

If there is one thing non-experienced teachers of adults need in preparation for the job, it is relevance mixed with some rigor. The rigor alone is likely to solidify their already unspoken notion that all they need is knowledge of their subject-matter, and they can teach it to others. On the other hand, a major question still remains: What are the conditions under which one learns to learn and what educational ingredients encourage learning to learn in adults?

There are some ideas which have been used in practice-the practice of teaching adults-which can be used as a starting point. But the starting point of research-in-practice needs to be more than a random selection of a small bit from here and a piece from over there. There needs to be a coherent model to guide the preparation of non-experienced teachers of adults. Then the research can be anchored in the model of practice. Thus, those practices found by research to meet the objectives of adequate preparation will be reinforced. Those practices found by research to fail to meet the intended objectives could be replaced with new ones which would be tested and thoroughly researched.

A Model for Non-Experienced Teachers of Adults

This model proposes that there are five building blocks for beginning the task of preparing non-experienced teachers of adults:
- Beliefs and notions about adult learners;
- Perceptions concerning qualities of effective teachers;
- Phases and sequences of the learning process;
- Teaching tips and learning techniques; and,
- Implementing the prepared plan.

The model suggests that the best results would be attained by teachers making improvements on each building block as it applies to a specific teaching situation in which one is involved. Each building block then needs to be thoroughly researched as to its contribution or lack of the same to improve teaching and learning.

However, the model is structured so that all steps need not be undertaken to make some improvement. Each step taken will lead to some improvement. Although, the more steps that are taken, the more improvement will result. Following is clarification of the five steps in the model.

I. Beliefs and Notions About Adult Learners.

First, the adult learner has a potential and desire for self-directiveness which is interdependent and not in isolation. Second, as an adult learns and grows, he or she builds an increasing reservoir of experience to draw on for helping others to learn as well as advancing her or his own learning. Thus, learning experiences need to be structured to take advantage of the above.

II. Perceptions Concerning Qualities of Effective Teachers.

These qualities for effective teachers include: showing interest in the student and subject, able to communicate well, good knowledge of the subject, prepared to teach the lesson, enthusiastic, desire to instruct, sense of humor, being flexible, tact, patience, ing a variety of teaching techniques, sensitivity and courtesy. Implementing these qualities in practice would be followed by appropriate research.

III. Phases and Sequences of the Learning Process.

This could be to provide that which will help the learner's yearn, learn, earn and return. Or, this could be portrayed as determining the content and the learning techniques,

and organizing, developing, and delivering the training presentation. Research to test the effectiveness would follow.

IV. Teaching Tips and Learning Techniques.

The multiplicity of teaching techniques and tips which will breathe life into a learning experience for participants include: lecture, listening groups, buzz groups, motion picture, slides, reading, audio cassettes, demonstration, group discussion, huddle groups, case study, simulation, role play, teaching/learning teams. Varying types of learning activities would be: general sessions, small groups of various sizes for various purposes, individual consultation and directed study, reading, recreation, workshop and meditation, and, preparatory activity. Accompanying research would also be conducted.

V. Implementing the Prepared Plan.

This cannot be directly taught. It is an attitude that is of utmost importance: attitude toward one's self, toward the great potential of adults as learners, the opportunity of being involved in turning the lights on in their eyes; an attitude of being open to ideas that are different from those in the design; an attitude of caring and showing it; like hitting the groove, like zoning in tennis, like suddenly crossing the threshold and being able to ride the bicycle. Research would then provide extent of validation.

Summary.

The expansive growth of adult and continuing education has brought with it many teachers who have subject matter expertise, but have no background, training or experience in teaching adults. While there are many of these people who are naturally successful in teaching adults, others may need assistance in becoming equipped for effective teaching in an adult learning setting. Attention is given to some adult education literature which implies, without directly stating, that research on the value of the training needs emerge out of the model of practice. This research issue paper sets forth a new five-step theoretical model of training practice which could be implemented for preparing non-experienced teachers of adults. It is proposed that this model of training practice be a grounding source for generating needs for research on the relative effectiveness of training and preparing non-experienced teachers of adults. The foregoing would obviously help create a bridge or at least help clarify how one bridge could be built between theory and practice of teaching adults. In addition, it may provide a closer link between some of the researchers and practitioners in the whole enterprise of helping adults learn.

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