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NEW HORIZONS IN ADULT EDUCATION
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Adult educators often have argued that grades do not necessarily measure learning and that there are other more effective ways to determine that learning has occurred. In his article, *For What Purpose? Some Thoughts about Grading*, James Alexander presents a sound argument against the prevalent practice in higher education of using grades to determine learning. He offers an alternative means of assessment, a mastery learning model. Although he does not specifically refer to adult learners, many adults considering entering or returning to higher education find testing and measurement by grades to present a major threat. In my own experience working with adults in higher education for more than 20 years, I have found a number who were extremely anxious about how they would be evaluated as they began their studies. Often memories of negative experiences with grading and competitive assessment in school remained after many years. Alexander provides a convincing and well-supported discussion of the problems associated with traditional approaches to grading and assessment. The positive outcomes described using a mastery learning model should encourage many to explore and try out these alternatives to grading.

The second article also focuses on a positive approach to helping adults learn, called appreciative learning. In their article *Using Appreciative Learning in Executive Education*, Robert Preziosi and Doreen Gooden provide a well-developed description of this approach, as well as its origins and philosophical underpinnings. The use of appreciative learning in executive education is contrasted with the dominant philosophy used by Organizational Development (OD) theoreticians for several decades, that the authors describe as a negative approach. In addition, they report how appreciative learning is being used in a leadership development program and the positive results described by the learners.

Readers are invited to make these articles “interactive” by responding on AEDNET and sharing their comments. (Directions to guide this discussion are given in this issue on page 17). Readers also are encouraged to submit an article for consideration by the editorial board of New Horizons on a related topic or other topic relevant to adult education philosophy, research, and practice. (See Call for Manuscripts on page 17 for details.)

**FOR WHAT PURPOSE?
SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT GRADING**

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Abstract

Grading in higher education has been based on a competitive/ranking model. As students become more vocation driven in their decision to attend college and as specific vocational domains become more performance centered, a new form of assessment is needed. This change has already taken place in departments of teacher education. A mastery learning, mastery orientation model is recommended as the model for assessment to be used in all areas of higher education.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, and primarily, some general guidelines and thoughts concerning grading at the college level will be offered. Second, this paper hopefully will help explain why departments of teacher education often give higher grades than other departments in the undergraduate programs of many colleges. In this second endeavor, no claim is made to speak for all education faculties at all colleges. However, I do believe that the view presented here is in keeping with the philosophy of many teacher educators, as well as state and national standards that these educators are bound to uphold.

I will begin with a story. When I was a student in my doctoral program, I took many statistics courses. One of my professors taught a course designed to help us plan our dissertation study and create the framework for our proposals. This professor was quite a character. He had a specially made rubber stamp that looked very much like the seal of a notary public. In the center of the stamp were the words, "For What Purpose," followed by a large question mark. As he received our draft proposals, he went over them carefully, adding many helpful comments. There was, however, one comment that all of us had to face somewhere along the way. It was a dreaded comment, stamped on our papers. It meant that we were going to have some explaining to do. When we saw "For What Purpose?" on our proposal we knew he was playfully chiding us for presenting him a study proposal for which he could see no use. It meant "back to the drawing board" for us, as we had to find meaning in what we were doing.

We are reminded by the principles of the Total Quality Management movement that quality is not achieved in an end-of-line inspection. Quality comes from regular inspections and adjustments along the way. I propose that we are about quality in higher education. Most of us went into our respective disciplines because of interest in the content. The liberal arts ideal of educating the whole person is certainly a noble one that has not outlived its time. We certainly hope that our students emerge from college more informed, well rounded, and inquisitive than when they first came to us.

However, it must be said that the major reason that students come to college is *vocational* in nature. They are interested in employment. This reality must be faced head on. In any domain of employment, there exist standards of performance that are expected to be demonstrated. The thrust of this paper is that grades are not as important as competence and that competence is not really measured by grades. We are not talking here about minimum standards for a field or profession. The proposal is to hold all students to high domain specific standards of competence.

One problem all educators face is student motivation. In a drive theory of motivation, Glasser (1986) describes five basic needs that drive and motivate behavior: survival, belongingness and love, gaining power, freedom, and fun. When it comes to grading, several of these needs are often frustrated, especially the need for power. Students are motivated to feel powerful and successful. Yet, since traditional grading involves winners, it must also involve losers. Powerlessness leads to frustration and anger undermining motivation.

Some teachers will use grades as a means of motivating students and believe that they are successful for this purpose. Never mind the powerlessness produced by not achieving students' desired level of accomplishment. Some believe that the competition will spur students on to try harder. This is actually not the case.

Meece (1994) and Dweck (1999) present a case for mastery orientation where a student is motivated by the desire to master content for the sake of personal satisfaction, goal attainment, or simply curiosity. This orientation is intrinsic. At the opposite end of the spectrum is performance orientation. It has been associated with memorization, teaching isolated bits of information, little self-direction, and a teacher emphasis on grades and grading.

In contrast, high levels of mastery orientation have been associated with meaningful learning, application, and active student involvement. Here, teachers place little emphasis on extrinsic motivation (rewards), especially grades. It has been observed that extrinsic motivation actually undermines intrinsic motivation (Reeve, 2001). In short, you really cannot have it both ways. As orientation shifts towards performance, it moves away from mastery. Student focus is not on learning as much as on passing the test.

Ames and Archer (1988) have associated a mastery orientation with improvement, progress, effort, and learning. Teachers teaching from this perspective are

oriented towards how students are learning and view mistakes as a natural part of learning. On the other hand, performance orientation causes students to define success in terms of grades and doing better than others. Teachers encouraging this orientation are inclined to equate performance on tests with learning. For students in this environment, mistakes become anxiety-producing events instead of a part of the learning process.

Certainly, some may argue that grades are a good judge and predictor of competence in a given domain. Marzano (2000) points out that we know this is an inherently flawed notion. When educators are asked if they ever received grades that were totally inaccurate representations of what they learned in a course, they will usually respond affirmatively. Take two students majoring in social work, for example. Does the fact that student A has a GPA of 3.75 and student B 2.75 mean that student A will be a better social worker? Or does it mean that student A is a better test-taker?

We also must raise the issue of what kind of test, and who is doing the grading. I have many students who will almost plead to be tested on a lengthy essay test. They know that, at least with me, they will fair better on a subjective assessment. Yet, I have a few who do not like the ambiguity of essay exams and will attempt to make a case for a multiple-choice test. I reflect on my first few years in college. I was a music major. Once at juries, two of the evaluators noted that my performance and interpretation were quite inadequate. The other two praised my originality and technical expertise! Many of us have experienced the same situations when submitting articles to peer-reviewed journals. What kind of test works best for a student and what grades are received are very much subject to the teacher and the student.

Anderson (1985) and Bloom (1980) propose a different way to go about things than tests and grades: one based on performance, and performance at high levels (usually at least an 80 percent success expectation). This method of teaching/assessing is usually termed mastery learning. It is made up of five components: clearly stated learning objectives; clearly stated evaluation criteria; frequent criterion-referenced assessments; a preset mastery level; reteaching as necessary; and reassessment as necessary. Grabe (1985) points out that even students struggling in a subject area can do well in a mastery learning environment

This environment calls for a different philosophy of assessment. There is growing consensus among educators that conventional paper and pencil tests do not measure competence. Most states have turned to performance/outcomes-based models for public schools and many (such as Kentucky) have provided specific outcomes-based expectations for pre-service teachers (a fact often not understood by our non-education faculty colleagues). These approaches involve the performance of various tasks or demonstrations of competencies. McTighe (1996/1997) has provided six important components of a performance/outcomes-based model. First, clear criteria must be established to define successful performance. Second, the performance must be authentic. It is more important for a pre-service teacher to actually design a unit than pass a multiple-choice test about unit design. Third, students must be provided the criteria for assessment prior to work on the product; there should be no surprises. Fourth,

models of the work to be completed should be provided. Fifth, teaching of strategies is more important than teaching of facts. Lastly, ongoing assessment should be used for feedback and adjustment.

It is easy to see how a performance-based model of assessment fits into a mastery learning environment. Assessment is much less dependent on paper and pencil tests than on examination of performance and artifacts (Sparapani, 1996).

Glasser (1992) discusses the notion of teacher as boss, as opposed to teacher as leader. The boss teacher sets the standards for what the students will do. The leader teacher discusses the quality of the work to be done with students, asking for input, and attempting to fit the task to the needs of the students. The boss tells the students how to do the work. The leader demonstrates so that expectations are clear. S/he asks students for suggestions on how the work might be performed in a better way. The boss inspects the work and does not involve the students in the evaluation. The leader teacher cooperates with students in inspecting the quality of the work and lets them improve their performance.

Marzano (2000) deals directly with the issue of grading as it relates to assessment and evaluation. As he points out, 7,822 studies have uncovered the two main assumptions that underlie grading. First, the most important purpose of grading is to provide information or feedback to students. Second, the best criteria for grading are content-specific learning goals. Notice that this does not describe our current performance oriented, competitive, sometimes punitive method of assigning grades. Instead, at its best, grading is for informational purposes resting on full disclosure of expectations, and implies opportunities for improvement.

There are many problems associated with grading such as grade inflation and deflation and trying to compare grading practices across historical periods without recognizing the multivariate nature of grading (Brookhart, 1999). As Marzano (2000, pp. 1-3) points out, after about a hundred years of common usage, changing the system strikes many with the fear of diminishing “real school.” Yet there are many problems associated with grading; not the least being the vocabulary of grading. What constitutes a “B” in one setting may not constitute a “B” in another.

Three inherent problems plague the notion of grading. Different teachers, at their own discretion, include many non-achievement factors in the assignment of grades. Teachers weight assessment information differentially. And, finally, different types of knowledge and skill are mixed together to provide a unitary grade. Marzano (2000) concludes that there is little or no research that supports the continuation of grading as it is commonly practiced.

Empirical studies of assessment in higher education have demonstrated the importance of clarity in assessment tools and clear descriptions of target standards and goals and how they will be assessed. Assessments should reflect the importance of goals in a particular course (Brookhart, 1999).

I started by mentioning the twofold purpose of this paper. I will address the second purpose first. Education is a very product driven profession. States, accrediting agencies, and school districts are interested in teachers being able to produce desired outcomes. To do this, standards have been set, and new teachers are expected to meet these standards. Teacher educators are more concerned with authentic performance than repeated bits of knowledge. Often, mastery systems are used where all students are expected to perform at high levels. Teacher educators tend to demonstrate, provide guided practice, and discuss a great deal before requiring independent performance. Feedback from that performance is corrective and advisory. Students are often given the opportunity to improve performance. Since performance standards are not designed to be minimal “C” standards, when teacher educators are forced to give grades, most students will have performed at a higher standard. Of course, some students are not willing to improve performance and most schools have procedures for removing such students from the program.

As to the main objective, I return to an earlier thought. Although we would certainly like students to come to college eager to expand their horizons and become holistic thinkers, and many certainly do, we cannot ignore the fact that for most, college is about employment. For various reasons, many enumerated above and many not discussed, grading in the traditional sense has many problems. Some might even argue that the inconsistency from teacher to teacher alone makes it suspect. What we need is a massive reorganization to address the issue of competence in a domain specific way. This change must start with an enumeration of standards and carefully designed ways to assess them. The emphasis should be on cooperation as opposed to competition and learning as opposed to ranking. A mastery orientation must be fostered and a performance orientation avoided. Our main task is not to compare students, making winners or losers out of them. Our task is to teach them.

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USING APPRECIATIVE LEARNING IN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper reports the use of appreciative learning in a non-credit executive education program during a five-day intensive Leadership Impact Lab™ (LIL™). Appreciative learning is explained as a positive instructional method that is based upon appreciative inquiry, an Organizational Development (OD) methodology. The entire program is described as context for the use of appreciative learning with upper middle and senior level managers. The specific use of the method is described and discussed. Learner reaction is presented. Future use and alternative applications are suggested.

Introduction

The dominant philosophy among Organizational Development (OD) theoreticians and practitioners for decades has been a negative one. No one would dispute the improvements that individuals, groups, and organizations have experienced through the use of a variety of OD techniques. However, it is based upon the traditional problem-solving model, which seeks out negative opportunities. The search usually begins when the ultimate target of the intervention experiences some degree of pain. This inaugurates a long process of data collection and analysis, program design and implementation, and evaluation. This model is very logical, but negative.

Appreciative inquiry was first written about in the literature at the end of the 1970s. It is the opposite in philosophy of the traditional OD models and techniques that Kurt Lewin grand fathered. It seeks out those things that the organization or group or individual is doing well. Once that has been accomplished, strategies are sought and implemented that have a multiplier effect, thus, taking advantage of human consciousness and capacity of foresight as keys for learning in organizations (Pascole, Milleman and Gioja, 2000). This approach is the one taken in best practices, except that best practices

are brought in from an outside agency and mimicked. It is not always successful because of problems with cultural transfer between organizations.

Appreciative learning is a logical outgrowth of appreciative inquiry. It is the opposite of problem-centered learning. It requires the individual learner to identify positive performance episodes that serve as a basis for feed forward learning and performance. It is a natural response to the mostly negative approaches of the past. It is also an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments, an important skill for the new age of e-business (Kanter, 2001). Also, appreciative learning energizes the spirit, which leads to high performance (Moxley, 2000), a goal sought by many individuals and organizations.

Program Development

The Leadership Impact Lab™ is a five day leadership development program that addresses such skills as aligning values, building credibility, risk-taking, developing others, leading change, high performance teaming, coaching, customer focus systems/strategies, and sustainability. The program consists of sixteen modules delivered by faculty with advanced degrees (mostly doctorates) who have been corporate executives earlier in their careers. The content grew out of a series of focus groups with successful executives, senior HR and HRD executives, as well as a review of the last twelve years of leadership literature.

The target audience includes managers with leadership potential, directors with management skills, executives who lead single or multiple work units, and entrepreneurs who own businesses with a large customer base and workforce. The instructional/learning approach relies heavily on data collection and analysis, as well as critical thinking and reflection. Experiential and accelerated learning techniques are dominant. One highly successful technique is appreciative learning. Appreciative pedagogy facilitates the exploration and creation of positive realities in the classroom on a daily basis (Yballe and O'Connor, 2000).

In delivering the program, a main focus is on learning transfer for participants in order that they may learn new skills and gain competencies. An important consideration is the fact the participants in the program will be coming to the classroom with positive experiences of working in organizations where teamwork, building of relationships and the whole impact of learning organizations are paramount. The program should, therefore, be geared toward allowing participants to transfer some of those positive work and prior classroom experiences into the current and future learning and working environments. Thus, participants will be able to use some of the positive energies and responses gained from previous successes to enhance the learning experience. In Yballe and O'Conner's (2000) work, they stated that individuals with positive images, have been described by Cooperrider, the founder of Appreciative Inquiry, as having a "heliotropic effect" of energizing and orienting human behavior toward achieving success.

Program Goals

The goals of appreciative learning are to provide participants with the tools for acquiring new skills, competencies and knowledge, by creating a learning environment whereby participants can identify with prior successful learning experiences and use those energies and self-fulfilling feelings to achieve success in the current program and future work performance. It is a process through which information is gathered about successes, how they were achieved and what facilitated the success. Yballe and O'Connor (2000) found that it was easier to guide students to develop their competencies because of the tight connection with their personal experiences. The process is facilitated by using a series of positively phrased questions based on actual successes. Participants identifying with these successes will be more inclined to engage in future successes. Where appreciative learning is alive and diverse cultures of inquiry are connected to another through an opportunity frame, relationships grow and metaculture expands (Kaczmarek and Cooperrider 1999). The result is a positive impact on personal and organization performance because it is more energizing. It opens the door for consideration of 18 different types of leadership energizing acts (Preziosi, 2001).

Learner Population

Upper middle and senior level executives with double digit years of management experience composed the learner population. The only drawback was the low number of participants, which was seven. However, given the group dynamics of this kind of learning activity it would seem like a group of no more than 8 to 10 would really be able to sustain their learning energies because of the depth of the discussion. The discussions are very intense, positively so.

The specific learner population in this study was composed of individuals from health care and government. It included two males and five females each with over twelve years of management experience. They were participants in the Nova Southeastern University Hudson Institute's Leadership Impact Lab. All were chosen by their organizations' top management to attend the five-day learning program.

Instructional Methods

The instructional method used in this study is basically a small group discussion. Certain methods, such as the discussion among students that is part of cooperative learning exercises, may help motivate students (Cottell and Millis, 1993) and may be more effective for certain learning styles. While it is certainly facilitator-directed, the kinds of, and the amounts of questions that can be asked by the learners require that the learning facilitator be more of a guide than a director. The small group discussion begins with one person presenting and discussing their "leadership moment." Students' oral presentations have been an integral part of university education for decades and have been a way of promoting active learning in the classroom by encouraging students to share their views and reflect on their peers' varied perspectives on an issue (Meyers and Jones, 1993). The presentation discussion is driven by the responses that the learners

made to a predetermined list of questions developed by the facilitator. These questions focus on different aspects of the “leadership moment.” Cpineda (1999) suggests that a successful question and answer session following a student’s presentation can provide opportunity for the student presenters to respond to their peers’ questions and views on the subject matter of the presentation.

One example of a list of questions that was used with the study population is as follows:

- Describe your best leadership moment.
- What was the issue?
- Who were the people involved?
- What did you say/do?
- How did you feel/how did others feel?
- How were you “rewarded”?
- How can you insure more leadership moments like this for yourself?
- How can more moments like this be made to occur in your organization?

The tone of these questions obviously leads to knowing one’s self better. Self-knowledge is an essential skill because it helps leaders know strengths/weaknesses, reflect on intent and re-energize themselves (Dotlick and Noel, 1998). Another important aspect of the process is that it uses learner experiences as content that Preziosi and Preziosi (2001) have identified as important to optimize adult learning.

The approach used in this study with this specific learner population was consistent with the general methods described above. On the fifth morning of the Leadership Impact Lab the learning facilitator formed a circle with all participants. Using the list of questions above, each participant discussed their leadership moment. The learning facilitator led the discussion among the participants following each participant’s presentation. An open general discussion followed.

Assessment

The population used in this study was a sample of convenience. However, this does not lessen the need to assess the experience for that population. Admittedly what is reported by way of the assessment is only a Level 2 evaluation under Kirkpatrick’s model, which is known to everyone. However, the data are still worth reporting.

The self-reporting scores on the appreciative learning exercise averaged 5.0 on a 5-point Likert scale where 5 is the best rating possible. Participants reported comments such as these: (a) “great interaction,” (b) “practical and useful interchange,” (c) “I learned and had fun,” and (d) “this was the highlight of the week”. Another important assessment perspective was that for a follow-up day of training, they all wanted to include another leadership moment discussion using appreciative learning. This is a very strong statement about the value-adding nature of this learning method.

Observations

Anecdotal evidence is also important in a study such as this. Careful observation of the study population can provide insightful and useful information. This was certainly the case in this study.

There were a number of observations made by the instructor, a co-author of this paper. The energy level was positive and without anxiety. There was comfort with discussing deep issues and perspectives, and there was a high level of openness. Thus, participants spoke with ease about their experiences and participated in discussions. There were intellectual statements with high emotional impact suggesting that this kind of learning would lead to increased use of the kind of positive behaviors that were discussed. This is consistent with the widely held belief that executive education needs to be more reflective for the learners.

Application

In this section of the paper the authors offer a few suggestions on other applications of appreciative inquiry. The purpose of this is to broaden the list of potential applications to other learning events.

The process of appreciative learning grew out of appreciative inquiry, an OD technique. As such, the application of appreciative learning is appropriate in any organizational function or activity at any level in the organization keeping in mind that the focus is on creating a multiplier effect of positive experiences. This approach has no bounds other than the willingness of a learning facilitator to use this method. For example, if a professor were teaching a course in sales management, the instructor could design a series of questions based upon something called “the sales management moment.” This would be a description/presentation and discussion much like the “leadership moment.” Another example from the field of Human Resource Development could revolve around a peak training experience in which the learners (trainers) presented and discussed a moment in a corporate training room, which they felt was their “training moment.”

It should be noted that this learning method, which we are calling appreciative learning, has greater applicability with adult students who have work experience than it would with undergraduate or MBA students who had no professional or managerial experience. This is not to say it would be impossible to use with 17 to 23 year-olds. It is just that the instructional design considerations would be very different because of the limited work life experience. The moments would have to be based upon a different set of life experiences.

Recommendations

This paper has reported a limited experience in leadership education that suggests the learning methodology is promising. The idea of appreciative learning is an attractive

learning methodology because of its positive nature. The idea is not totally foreign to educators and people working in organizations as noted by the widespread use of benchmarking and best practices. Recommendations for the future include the following:

1. Increased sample size
2. More qualitative measures
3. Studies of longer term impact of the learning
4. Research to determine if this learning methodology could be used in other types of soft skill executive education
5. Also, it would seem that other content areas should be exposed to this learning methodology for example – Professors of HRD and Sales Management courses could use this instructional/learning methodology to determine its impact on individual and organizational learning.

Finally, the authors of this paper will use this learning methodology again and again to determine just how much learning and, therefore, organizational performance is enhanced.

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