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N E W H O R I Z O N S I N A D U L T E D U C A T I O N
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The application of adult learning theories, principles, and practices to various types of distance learning, especially online courses and programs, has become an important topic for adult educators. Are there different issues to consider? Barbara Frey and Susan Webreck Alman, in their article Applying Adult Learning Theory to the Online Classroom, present the findings from focus groups of students in an online master's degree program. The results are discussed in relation to several adult learning theories and principles, based on the work of key adult education scholars. The authors argue that the need for "interaction" is an area that calls for special consideration in the design and development of online courses. Based on the results of their study, they offer useful recommendations for planning and teaching online courses.

Promoting Reflective Discourse in the Canadian Adult Literacy Community: Asynchronous Discussion Forums by Lori-Kyle Herod is an excellent example of how adult educators can and do learn important strategies and practices from those in different areas of professional practice. The need for and value of collaboration among adult education professionals has been shown over the years in various areas of our field. Herod presents a compelling case for the value of such discourse, in this case fostered by asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC). Given the geography of Canada and the distances between many adult literacy practitioners, as well as limited resources, the use of CMC is likely to contribute substantially to reflective discourse and continuing development of the adult literacy knowledge base. The ideas offered by Herod should be very useful to those in many areas of adult education practice.

Andrea Clemons and Michael Silverman provide a thoughtful review of the book Strategic Learning: Understanding and Facilitating Organizational Change by Griff Foley. They clearly show how Foley considers change and learning in organizations in a socio-political context. As an adult educator and social justice activist, Foley challenges the status quo of many contemporary organizations where equity, fairness, and empowerment are not a significant part of the organizational learning and change process. For those interested in the concept of learning organizations and organizational change, this book offers some valuable ideas for reflection.

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 24). 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 24 for details.)

N E W H O R I Z O N S I N A D U L T E D U C A T I O N
Volume 17, Number 1, Winter 2003

APPLYING ADULT LEARNING THEORY TO THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

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University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

This study measured adult learners' satisfaction with the new online Master's Degree in Library and Information Science program at the University of Pittsburgh. Student feedback gathered through focus groups is categorized into five themes: (a) general program issues, (b) course issues, (c) communication/interaction issues, (d) on-campus orientation issues, and (e) technology issues. The feedback is analyzed based on adult learning theory, and ten recommendations for future course development are suggested. Traditional adult learning theory offers valuable guidelines for online course development and teaching. However, interaction, a major theme in the focus groups, is not addressed in traditional adult learning theory.

Contrary to public opinion, distance education is not a new concept. The distance education program at the University of Pittsburgh began in 1970 with paper-based correspondence-type courses. Today, it includes primarily undergraduate courses in paper-based, Web-based, and interactive television formats. An important component to most of the University's distance education courses is an on-campus experience, which generally consists of two or three face-to-face workshops during the semester. The on-campus aspect of instruction has been shown to have a positive impact on learner satisfaction, learning, and retention. Until recently, there had not been graduate courses or a complete degree program offered via distance education.

After one year of course development and planning, the Department of Library and Information Science (LIS) at the University of Pittsburgh launched the first online degree completion program at Pitt. In May 2001, the inaugural class logged in to this FastTrack program leading to a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science (MLIS). The initiative was designed to support Pitt's emphasis on flexible course delivery to multiple audiences and to respond to the growing need for library and information science education. An important and unique component of this program and most of Pitt's distance education courses is the on-campus experience integrated into the course design.

This FastTrack program is a two-year, cohort-based curriculum consisting of 36 graduate credits. The first class of learners consisted of 35 students (5 males and 30 females) from six states and the District of Columbia. They will complete the program in two years by taking six credits per term. The average age of these adult learners is 39 years. They bring a variety of undergraduate degrees to the MLIS program – elementary education, art history, zoology, social work and many more. Most members of the cohort have some library experience. Students interact with each other, their instructors, and the course material through Blackboard, the Web-

based course management software used by the University. A strength of this program is that the same faculty who teach the MLIS face-to-face courses develop and teach the online FastTrack courses. They completed Blackboard training prior to undertaking the online course development process.

Measuring Learner Satisfaction

In this project, data on adult learner satisfaction with the new online graduate program were collected in five focus groups (n= 35). The focus groups took place during an on-campus experience. At the time of the focus groups, the learners had been in the program eight weeks. They were part of a cohort group that enrolled in two online courses – Understanding Information and Introduction to Information Technologies. Learners had been regularly communicating with each other and their professors both electronically and over the telephone.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the learners' initial satisfaction with the Master's Degree in Library and Information Science (MLIS) program based on adult learning theory and to suggest recommendations for designing future online courses. The students' feedback was reviewed based on the theories of four major authors: Malcohm Knowles (1980), Patricia Cross (1981), Howard McClusky (1963), and Jack Mezirow (1990).

Focus Group Feedback

An instructional designer from the University's Center for Instructional Development and Distance Education facilitated the five focus groups. A second instructional designer assisted with note taking. The instructional designers were not involved in the development or teaching of the program. Each focus group consisted of about seven learners. The topic presented to the learners was as follows: "Please discuss your overall satisfaction with the FastTrack program." The instructional designers did not know the learners' names and assured them of confidentiality.

The learner responses from the focus groups broke down into the following five themes: (a) General program issues, (b) Course issues, (c) Communication/interaction issues, (d) On-campus orientation issues, and (e) Technology.

1. **General Program Issues**

   Strengths:
   - The format and schedule are convenient and flexible.
   - Both Pitt and LIS department have strong reputations.
   - The program is well-organized and structured.
   - The program has ALA accreditation.
   - The program teaches time management skills.
   - The courses are well thought out.
   - The program provides a degree previously unavailable.
   - Overall satisfaction with the program has been extremely positive.
   - Face-to-face contact has been key to program approval by employers.

   Suggestions:
   - Designate faculty office hours.

- Post policies and schedule in advance.
- Provide instructions on how to form to support groups.
- Develop a uniform course format.
- Provide receptionist with information regarding FastTrack program so she/he can be more helpful in directing phone calls.
- Emphasize prerequisite technology skills prior to the start of the program.

2. Course Issues

Strengths:

- The course provides current, up-to-date, pertinent information.
- The course expectations are clear.
- Every reading is valuable (there is much reading, but it's all important – none should be eliminated).
- The online format allows learners to focus on information that meets their needs (and to skim over information already known).

Suggestions:

- Provide more specific, tangible feedback from instructors.
- Reduce heavy course workload.
- Provide assurance from professors that postings are being read.
- Establish specific times when the instructor will check course emails and discussions.
- Provide feedback with every assignment.
- Provide consistent feedback in the form of a grade.
- Coordinate consistent grading criteria among instructors.
- Require fewer than 3 postings per week.
- Provide course pack with readings.
- Provide practical application (examples) for theory.
- Eliminate Internet sites that have been provided to support text.
- Provide more structure (e.g., handouts) in LIS 2600

3. Interaction/Communication Issues

Strengths:

- The instructors are responsive and involved.
- Face-to-face contact is beneficial to learning relationships.
- Tremendous support exists from other cohort learners and instructors.
- There are equal opportunities for all learners to participate.
- Small discussion groups in LIS 2000 promote learning and generate fewer postings to read.
- Active learner involvement is required (learners can't depend on a few talkers to carry the class).
- A sense of community grows through more challenging assignments.
- On-site interaction is extremely valuable.
- The instructors are very responsive.
- The learners got to know fellow students better than in traditional courses.

- The instructors do not interject too much in online discussions allowing students to discover concepts on their own.

Suggestions:

- Date everything that is posted (especially announcements).
- Use specific subject line in postings.
- Encourage more professor interaction/comments in discussions.
- Encourage learners to stick to topic in postings.

4. Orientation Issues

Strengths:

- Dr. Rubin’s presentation was very enlightening; he is excellent speaker.
- Learners were treated very well during the week (felt welcomed, encouraged, supported, and appreciated).
- David’s 1-hr presentation on the computer was both helpful and enjoyable.
- The course work prior to orientation allowed focus to be on content and not technology.

Suggestions:

- Hold the orientation at the beginning of the semester.
- Teach computer skills at the beginning of the program.
- Shorten the orientation from 7 to 5 days.
- Eliminate activities not related to course work.
- Eliminate activities that could have been accomplished online.
- Offer an optional workshop on the required technology skills prior to beginning the program.
- Provide “time off” from the on-campus orientation program to work alone or in teams.
- Provide information from the on-campus orientation earlier in the program.

5. Technology Issues

Strengths:

- Applying technology provides not only a change, but also something enjoyable.
- The Bb software is easy to learn and use.

Suggestions:

- Standardize the way Bb areas are used (e.g., one course has assignments in “Assignments” and the other has them in “Course Information”).
- Create a forum in the discussion board for questions that other students may be able to answer (answers may help others with the same problems).
- Modify pdf files with 2 columns because they are especially difficult to read.
- Provide clear instructions for accessing email through telnet.
- Develop consistent use of Bb buttons.
- Provide access to Pitt library resources.
- Create an FastTrack listserv.
- Identify technology experts within the class for possible resources.
- Provide MS software earlier in the semester.
- Provide access to Bb prior to the beginning of the class (for practice).

- Provide handbook for how to use Bb.
- Eliminate features of Bb that are empty or not used.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory helps faculty to understand their students and to design more meaningful learning experiences for them. There is not one adult learning theory that successfully applies to all adult learning environments. The majority of theories were developed twenty years ago for adults learning in traditional settings. A wide variety of theories (Cross, 1981; Freire, 1970; Houle, 1972; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1980; Knox, 1980; McClusky, 1963; Jarvis, 1987) are available and most have something to offer educators in the development and teaching of online courses. The following four theorists are especially relevant for the online learning environment: Knowles (1980), Cross (1981), McClusky (1963), and Mezirow (1990). The applicability of their theories is discussed based on the data from the MLIS focus groups.

Malcohm Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy is the best known of the adult learning theories. As opposed to pedagogy, which is the "art and science of teaching children," andragogy is defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 61). His theory provides the following six learner-centered guidelines for the education of adults:

1. Adults must recognize the necessity of learning something before undertaking to learn it.
2. Adults recognize the responsible for their own decisions - their own lives.
3. Adults enter an educational experience with more and different experience than youths.
4. Adults are more eager to learn things they must know and apply in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
5. Adults are life centered (or task centered or problem centered) in their orientation to learning.
6. While adults are responsive to some external motivators (i.e., better jobs, higher salaries, promotions), the most potent motivators are internal pressures (i.e., the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life).

The applicability of Knowles' theory is shown through the learners' desire for control, flexibility, and feedback. The adults who participated in the focus groups valued the "convenient and flexible format and schedule." The role of learners was secondary to their other life roles, such as parents, siblings, caretakers, and employees. They wanted course expectations to be clear and pertinent course content to be up-to-date.

Cross (1981) provides a framework for considering how adults learn though her Characteristics of the Adult Learners (CAL) model. Her model identifies two classes of variables: personal characteristics and situational characteristics. The personal characteristics include aging, life stages, and developmental stages. The situational characteristics include part-time/full-time learning and voluntary/compulsory learning. Throughout their lives, adults have varying degrees of readiness and ability for learning. Like andragogy, Cross's model reflects the learners' need for flexibility and control.

The MLIS adult students are highly motivated and want to succeed. All focus group participants were voluntary, part-time learners. The learners who were the most anxious about learning had been out of school for many years. In particular, their anxiety was associated with the evaluation process. Therefore, students requested regular, "tangible feedback" from the instructor. In other words, these students wanted grades for their assignments. This was the most frequent request from the focus group participants.

McClusky's (1963) theory of margin is simple, yet still relevant for adult learners: M=L/P. His formula states that the learner's Margin for learning is determined by his/her Load (demands of living) in relationship to his/her Power (or resources). As a psychologist, McClusky recognized that learning is impacted by the adult's life roles and situations. Learning fits into the Margins after the Loads are satisfied. There are both internal and external factors that can decrease the learner's Load and/or increase his/her Power.

In the focus groups, participants clearly valued the reputation of the University of Pittsburgh and the American Library Association accreditation. In 1999, U.S. News & World Report ranked Pitt's MLIS program third in the country (Best Graduate Schools: Library Sciences, 1999). The prestige of being accepted into the program seemed to enhance the self-image and enthusiasm of some learners. This positive enhancement may have increased their internal Power for learning.

Mezirow (1990) developed the theory of perspective transformation as a process of critical reflection. "Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (p. 14). In general, transformational learning theory is about change within the learner.

The MLIS students had to master the technology before they could address the learning content. In the focus groups, there was a sense of empowerment that came with mastering this technology. They used the words "new and fun" to describe their satisfaction with the learning technology. However, they did request "technology experts in class for possible resources," a "handbook for how to use Blackboard," and "access to Blackboard prior to the beginning of the class." This is evidence of their self-directed nature.

Limitations

These theories offer a great deal of advice to adult educators, but there is one additional adult learning issue that needs to be considered in the development of online courses – interaction. The interaction between the students and instructor, and the interaction among students are vital components of a successful adult learning experience. The MLIS focus group participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of online communication. The theories of Knowles, Cross, Knox, and Mezirow did not address the concept of interaction in adult education. Perhaps because the theories were based on more traditional classroom settings, interaction was taken for granted. The focus group participants strongly valued online interaction with their instructors and with other learners. The cohort design of the program may have further enhanced their sense of community. They valued the "equal opportunities for all

learners to participate" and the "active learner involvement." When comparing the online experience to her traditional learning experiences, one student stated she "got to know fellow students better than in traditional courses."

This study was limited by a small number of participants (n= 35) in the five MLIS focus groups. Their retention and satisfaction with the program will be monitored throughout the two-year experience. Interestingly, none of the student feedback in the initial focus group related to the discipline of library and information science.

Recommendations in Program Planning

Based on principles of adult learning theory and the feedback from MLIS students, the following recommendations are offered for the development and teaching of online courses:

1. State clear expectations:
   - Provide detailed syllabus with schedule, grading criteria, assignments, number of postings per week, deadlines, office hours.
   - Avoid changing aspects of the course once it begins.
   - State contingency plans for when the technology fails.
2. Incorporate multiple forms of feedback into course:
   - Use specific, consistent feedback from both learners and instructor.
   - Grade assignments with specific, stated criteria.
   - Provide both general and specific feedback to individuals, teams, and the whole class.
3. Provide regular communication to individual learners and the group:
   - Respond to email within 24 hours.
   - Personalize the class setting.
   - Use friendly, informal writing style.
   - Make weekly announcements or updates.
   - Establish weekly online office hours.
   - Assure learners that discussion board postings are being read.
   - Provide information for telephone, fax, and U.S. post mail.
   - Limit class size to allow for effective management.
   - Consider using TA to monitor discussion board or team discussions.
   - Be clear and succinct.
   - Prepare students for working in small groups or team by providing objectives, assigning roles.
   - Require regular participation for credit.
   - Encourage students to respond as well as post.
4. Provide learner flexibility and control:
   - Use asynchronous email and discussion board for anytime/anyplace participation.
   - Chunk learning into small manageable units or subunits that can be completed in relatively short amounts of time (learners will constantly be coming and going into the course - they need logical stopping/ starting points).
   - Allow learner choice of assignments, projects, or research topics (consider learning contract).

- Incorporate text "signals" such as "this is a long unit," "this is a very important concept", "proceed to Lesson 6."
- Allow students early access to the course and mail the syllabus several weeks before the course begins.

5. Incorporate motivational strategies to encourage students:
   - Tell why topic or link is important.
   - Provide practical info with examples.
   - Link new topics to what has already been discussed or read.
6. Offer a variety of forms of learner support:
   - Consider a cohort group that completes program as a group.
   - Provide technical support.
   - Provide learning skills support.
   - Provide cohort support.
   - Provide departmental support.
7. Maintain the focus of content within units:
   - Provide objectives and an outline at the beginning of each unit.
   - Limit hyperlinks to only a few of the very best.
   - Place additional links at the end of units for enrichment.
   - Summarize key points of units and discussions for closure – debrief, then re-focus on next topic.
8. Provide consistency among courses:
   - Maintain same format throughout program (i.e., all assignments found under the same course heading).
   - Create pdf printable files for long articles.
   - Use the same headings throughout units (perhaps objectives, introduction, content or lecture notes, readings, activities, optional resources, conclusion).
9. Consider limitations of adults:
   - Maintain large, easy to read fonts.
   - Use clear, bold colors.
   - Use a variety of graphics, images, tables.
   - Consider different learning styles.
   - Be aware of ADA compliance guidelines.
10. Respect learner roles and life experiences:
    - Assume role of facilitator more than "expert."
    - Recognize diverse backgrounds of adults.
    - Apply concepts to tasks or problems.
    - Use a friendly, first person style of writing.
    - Ask for introductions that include professional background and some personal information (also provide this type of introduction).

Conclusion

Adult learning theory is alive and well in the online classroom. Most of the adult learning theories were developed for traditional classroom education over twenty years ago, but the basic principles effectively transfer to the online learning environment. One area that is not sufficiently addressed for the online classroom is the concept of student/instructor and

student/student interaction. The feedback from MLIS adult learners reflected a strong positive satisfaction with the active discussion board and email in their classes. They valued these tools for the contribution they made in the learning process.

This project successfully achieved the purpose of analyzing the learners' initial satisfaction with the MLIS program and suggesting recommendations for designing future courses. Ten recommendations for online course design are presented. The recommendations are applicable to all disciplines. Included in the recommendations are guidelines for successful online interaction that enhances learning. Although it is not addressed in traditional adult learning theory, interaction was a major theme in the focus group dialogue. It appears to be an aspect of course design that must be considered early in the planning stage.

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PROMOTING REFLECTIVE DISCOURSE IN THE CANADIAN ADULT LITERACY COMMUNITY: ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION FORUMS

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential benefits of online discussion forums with regard to promoting reflective discourse in the Canadian adult literacy community. Given the geographical disparity of practitioners and a historical scarcity of resources, there has been very little opportunity for stakeholders to engage in collaborative activities until recently. Computer-mediated communication now provides a cost-effective alternative to face-to-face discussions or video/audio-conferencing. Moreover, in comparison to other methods dialogue via asynchronous forums evolves over time. This will, in all likelihood, contribute greatly to the development of practitioners and the expansion of the knowledge base of the field.

Introduction

Historically in the Canadian adult literacy community, there has been only limited engagement in the type of reflective discourse that would enrich and advance the knowledge base in this field. The main reason for this is a lack of opportunity; that is, programs are widely dispersed geographically speaking. As such, only a moderate amount of face-to-face meetings are possible due to the costs involved. Telephonic- and/or video-conferencing are well beyond reach for the same reason. Computer-mediated communication (CMC), however, presents a cost-effective and viable means by which practitioners and other stakeholders in the field may collaborate more extensively. This paper discusses the use of asynchronous CMC to promote and sustain reflective dialogue, the goal of which is to further the development of individual practitioners and the field as a whole.

Background

Quigley (1999) writes that, "Given how geographically dispersed adult basic and literacy practitioners are--teaching in cities, towns, villages, and farms using virtually any workable facility--it becomes extremely difficult to reach practitioners" (p. 256). In addition to being geographically disparate, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that programs are only loosely linked by regional organizations and receive minimal resources and support from provincial governments. As such, the cost to collaborate in terms of time, effort and finances has been prohibitive. Recently, however, a proliferation of CMC technology has resulted in a cost-

effective and viable means by which to do so. As a needs assessment by Consulting and Audit Canada in 1996 recommended:

> A Canada-wide [electronic] infrastructure would offer significant benefits in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency.... Practitioners serving particular groups would be more effective if they could communicate with their peers across the country and if they had ready access to information of mutual interest. On the efficiency side, a Canada-wide infrastructure would reduce duplication of effort among the provinces, while the costs of developing and maintaining the system would be shared more widely. (Section 7)

The federal government did not act on this recommendation, perhaps as Shohet (2001) suggests because the jurisdictional right of provinces over adult literacy is "jealously guarded" and such a federal initiative would not be accepted. The field, however, is availing itself of electronic networking independently. For example, in Ontario a system has been adopted called *AlphaCom*, an online discussion forum operated by *AlphaPlus,* a non-profit literacy organization in Ontario. In western Canada, the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy has initiated a four-province wide online discussion forum using the *First Class* system. In Manitoba, the office of Adult Learning and Literacy has plans to implement an online discussion forum to support several CMC practitioner-training courses it offers. If these examples are anything to go by, it is quite feasible to suggest that the field has both the means and the desire to use CMC as a means of connecting on a more regular basis, the value of which would be what Quigley (1999) describes as "critical networks of dialogue and communities of support" (p. 256).

Professional Development

Hargreaves (2000) proposes several criteria for designating a profession including a specialized knowledge base, shared standards of practice, ethical standards, a monopoly on service, high degrees of autonomy, and long periods of training. Whether or not adult literacy is a profession proper is a matter of some debate. However, in that a lengthy discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, for the purposes of this paper it will be accepted that adult literacy is a profession, albeit a much less formalized or institutionalized one than for example, public school education.

Integral to the nature and purpose of a profession is the ongoing development of both the individual practitioner and the field as a whole. Hargreaves (2000) identifies four typical phases of professional development, which although inspired by public school educators provides some valuable insights with respect to adult literacy practitioners. The following sections will discuss the first three phases, while the fourth ***post-professional phase*** will be discussed briefly in the final section of this paper.

The first or ***pre-professional phase*** involves "hands-up" or transmission teaching (e.g., the teacher delivers material to groups of students). In this phase, professional development typically involves learning the technical aspects of teaching; that is, how to develop and utilize a limited number of teaching strategies, assessment and evaluation techniques, managerial skills such as report writing, classroom management, and so on. Once these technical skills have been learned and refined, professional development is thought to be virtually complete. The

philosophy underlying the pre-professional phase is termed "technical rationality" or "positivism." This philosophy proposes that there are ultimate truths that can be determined by applying a scientific methodology (Schon, 1982). It is a "facts and figures" approach, so to speak.

The emphasis on technical skills in this stage is evident in adult literacy programs, particularly those with a mandate of academic upgrading in which specific subject-oriented material must be learned. Overall, however, the pre-professional phase is much less evident in the adult literacy community than in K-12 education. A major reason for this is the fact that the needs of adult literacy learners are very diverse in comparison. There are many different types of literacy programs, which can be loosely grouped into two categories--general and specialized programs. General programs are open to anyone and focus on improving literacy skills. In contrast, specialized programs are directed at a particular group and have a specific focus. Basic or core literacy skills are taught, but are framed against some other set of skills and knowledge. One example of a specialized program is family literacy. In these programs literacy instruction is offered together with parenting education and training. Other examples include workplace literacy, Adult Basic Education (academic upgrading), and life skills programs.

This range of programs is one reason the majority of adult literacy programs and practitioners operate very independently from one another in what Huberman (1995) would term a "lone wolf scenario," or what Hargreaves (2000) describes as the ***autonomous professional phase***. In this phase, individual practitioners begin to try and move beyond the purely technical skills of teaching to more reflective practice. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) propose that the transition to this phase in public education is being propelled by a "powerful idea" --namely "constructivism" (p. 9), which differs sharply from the positivist philosophy traditionally held by many in this area of education. In the constructivist approach, knowledge is not viewed as a collection of truths or absolutes that can be identified and then passed to students by the teacher, but as something that is socially constructed, relative, and contextual. While learning in this perspective is viewed as a much more collaborative affair, at the same time it is also more individualistic, in that the personal experiences, needs, and perspectives of each student are considered both valuable and necessary to the process.

Although constructivism represents a major paradigm shift in other areas of education, this is not so much the case in adult literacy. Since learners are adult, a much different approach has been adopted and utilized within the field; that is adult learning theory or andragogy. This philosophy differs markedly from pedagogical positivism, but is similar to constructivism in many key respects (for example, learner - versus teacher-centeredness, facilitation of learning versus transmittal of knowledge, and emphasis on critical thinking skills versus rote learning) (Barer-Stein & Draper, 1993; Costa, Lipton & Wellman, 1997; MacKeracher, 1996; Wood & Thompson, 1993).

As Sparks and Hirsh suggest, "the path to becoming a constructivist teacher is not easy" (p.10). Unlike Hargreaves' pre-professional stage, in which the aim is to learn and refine a limited set of technical skills, the development of skills and knowledge in a constructivist teaching environment is a much more complicated affair. As Costa et al. (1997) suggest, "This level of professional ability requires contextually based, systematic experimentation, and

reflection. Without reflection, progress is uninformed, and change to practice is haphazard (p.96). As such, the "lone wolf scenario" typical of the autonomous professional phase only results in minimal gains in terms of individual or collective professional development because reflection is individual versus collaborative.

Movement into the third or ***collegial professional phase*** requires the development of what Hargreaves' (2000) calls "cultures of collaboration" (p. 164). By this he means that reflective discourse must be collective and embedded in the daily practice of practitioners. The problem in public education, however, is that while a constructivist philosophy is slowly being integrated, technical rationality is still entrenched in the system (Ross & Hannay, 1986; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). The dichotomy between technical rationality and constructivism creates tension in the public education systems, ensuring that the development of cultures of reflective practice will not be a simple or quick process. As Sparks and Hirsh (1997) and others (Fullan, 1995; Kemmis, 1987; Wood & Thompson, 1993) propose, change must be systemic. That is, it must take place throughout the entire organization and by those employed within it. Fortunately, adult literacy is much better positioned to move into this third phase since the field embraces an andragogical philosophy that is very much in keeping with reflective practice.

Reflective Practice

The purpose of moving away from autonomous practice to collegiality according to Hargreaves (2000) is to promote and sustain reflective dialogue among practitioners. The goal of reflective dialogue is to develop both the organization as a whole and the individual professional (Costa et al, 1997; Christensen & Fessler, 1992; Huberman, 1995; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wood & Thompson, 1993). According to Hannay (1994), an effective reflective process is characterized by dialogue that focuses on real world versus theoretical problems, involves problem framing rather than simply problem solving, questions past practices, develops alternatives and attempts to identify consequences. Embodied in the notion of reflective practice in a constructivist environment is a view of teaching and learning as a contextual, dynamic and fluid endeavour. As such, practitioner and organizational development must necessarily be an ongoing affair (Fullan, 1995; Guskey, 1995; Hannay, 1994; Wood & Thompson, 1993).

The nature of reflective practice as Hargreaves and other educators envision it, involves thinking critically about a wider range of issues than mere technical matters. As Kemmis (1987) writes,

> Practice is not merely an intentionally structured pattern of individual action, but an expression of values which have been publicly formed and critically developed through a tradition. Practices, in this sense, are inherently social -- they are socially constructed, expressing and realizing an idea of the good for humankind through the interactions of the practitioner and others in a particular situation. Practices may thus be distinguished from merely technical (instrumental) action. (p. 77)

Similarly, Fullan (1995) suggests that education is a "moral enterprise" (p. 253), and Hannay (1994) proposes that reflective practice involves the moral questions of "should" and "ought." Louden (1992) also identifies a moral or ethical component to reflection. He proposes

that there are four general interests in reflection, the first of which is ***technical reflection*** such as that found in the pre-professional phase in the focus is on teaching skills and strategies. A second type category is ***personal reflection***, which involves individual introspection about one's practice. While it increases one's personal understanding, it is limited and contributes little to the field as a whole. A third type is ***problematic reflection,*** in which practitioners begin to dialogue collectively about problems that fall outside the technical aspects of the profession. For example, in adult literacy this might involve a discussion forum among practitioners about the proliferation of computers in society and whether or not this should affect the form and function of the field.

Louden (1992) terms a fourth and final type, ***critical reflection***, in which practitioners question the underlying assumptions of their profession and investigate moral and ethical issues. For example, governmental pressure is continually being brought to bear on adult literacy to focus on employment related goals. These outcomes are easy to evaluate in terms of cost-benefit, justify in terms of resource allocations, and rationalize to the public. At the same time, they inevitably raise both moral and ethical questions for the field, in that to adopt such a narrow focus would marginalize many adult learners. Thus, reflection of the sort that Quigley (1999) refers to as "a counterhegemony of critical analysis" (p. 256) is undertaken by practitioners in an effort to investigate and resolve social justice concerns. An important aspect of critical reflection is action; in this case bringing counterpressure to bear on governments to support the inclusive nature of the field.

The need for increased critical discourse within the Canadian adult literacy community is widely recognized:

> If adult literacy practitioners are to engage seriously in a clearer articulation of their own reality, and in critical discourse concerning their own field, improved ways need to be found to create and distribute critical knowledge to guide this field. (Quigley, 1999, p. 254)

Until recently, however, while the will existed, the means was absent. As will be discussed in the next section, asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides the field with a cost-effective and viable means.

Research on professional education indicates that the capacity to support collaboration, reflection, and professional development, as well as to over come barriers of time and place, makes the use of on-line forums a potentially useful and cost effective innovation. (Anderson & Kanuka, 1997, p. 2)

Reflective Discourse via Asynchronous Computer-mediated Communication

Early research often compared CMC to face-to-face communication (McGrath, 1990). By the mid-1990's, however, most researchers agreed that to do so is a bit like comparing apples and oranges (Chenault, 1997; Dewar, 1996; Rheingold, 1993; Walther, 1997). Although both are means of communicating, the similarities end there. Both have relative advantages and disadvantages based on the context in which they are used.

One of the main advantages of asynchronous online forums is that CMC fosters deeper discussion as Wegerif (1998) points out:

> The benefits of taking part in collaborative learning [via CMC] were derived from taking part in a developing conversation where many of the replies were much more considered than might have been the case had the same people met and talked together over several hours. (p. 13)

In addition to the fact that text-based online forums take place over a greater period of time, discussions are preserved that contribute to dialogue of greater depth. They provide an accurate record of what has been said so that participants can re-read a discussion rather than rely on their memories. This provides participants with the opportunity to review and reflect on what has been said and make more considered responses. An interrelated result of time-delayed dialogue is that knowledge is built layer by layer in what Bereiter (1994) terms as "progressive discourse." Scardamalia and Bereiter (1999) describe this as "sustained versus single pass knowledge creation" in which a problem or issue is revisited many times versus discussed in a time-limited setting such as a class. Costa et al (1997) refer to this as "feedback spirals," which they suggest, "provide potent processes of continuous growth and learning" (p. 102).

The goal in the *collegial professional phase* is the creation of "professional discourse communities" (Fullan, 1995) in which knowledge evolves through reflective, progressive spirals of discussion by practitioners. Hargreaves (2000) would suggest that professional development does not end with this phase though.

Hargreaves' Post-professional Phase

The need for collaborative (versus individual) reflection according to Fullan (1995) is simply that there is a ceiling on how much we can learn on our own. Thus, it can be said that the perspectives of many individuals inform effective reflective practice. In most of professional development literature, reflective dialogue takes place among practitioners, such as in the collegial professional phase. Hargreaves final or ***post-professional phase***, however, extends the notion of professional development to include input from peripheral parties. That is, groups that have a "stake" in the conduct and outcomes of education such as learners, community and/or government representatives, and researchers are included in ongoing reflective dialogue in order to more fully inform practice. Other educators support the notion of involving stakeholders as the next step in the evolution of the profession (Brandon, 1999; Cronbach, 1983; Kemmis, 1987; Roby, 1985; Schwab, 1973, Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

The ability to easily and inexpensively involve multiple stakeholders in online forums makes this prospect quite achievable for the adult literacy community. Beyond being *achievable*, the notion of pluralistic collaboration is also *desirable* within the field. As the proceedings from *Literacy for Tomorrow: Ensuring Universal Rights to Literacy and Basic Education* note, "Progress toward a more literate nation should be made through a collaborative strategy involving individuals, communities, social and cultural agencies, employers and governments at all levels" (1999, p. 14).

Conclusion

The attention accorded the field of Canadian adult literacy by governments has historically been scant and cursory. Add to this geographical isolation of programs from local to national levels and severely limited resources, and it is not difficult to understand that there has been very little in the way of collaboration by the field to date. The proliferation of computer technology, however, is exerting pressure on the field to adapt and evolve. As Ginsburg (1999) suggests, it behoves the field to recognize the tremendous benefits to utilizing technologies such as asynchronous CMC:

> We all acknowledge that the information age has had a profound impact on the world around us; thus it is not unreasonable to posit that the information age should also affect the form and function of adult education. (p. 6)

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Book Review

STRATEGIC LEARNING: UNDERSTANDING AND FACILITATING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

by Griff Foley.
Sydney: Centre for Popular Education. 239 pp. ISBN 1-8636 58270

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According to Griff Foley in *Strategic Learning*, learning in the workplace should be strategic, that is the adult educators, consultants or facilitators must first emancipate themselves, so that they may then empower all actors in the organization. Counterproductively, this change is increasingly stifled by capitalisms' exclusive focus on profits and the bottom line. Foley's most recent book explores this struggle for "change and learning" (p. 12) in the workplace, as well as in the larger community and society. *Strategic Learning* is written for adult educators and organizational change agents, "who are committed to emancipatory values and thoughtful democratic practices" (p. 15).

Foley brings to this book decades of experience and scholarship as a worker, an adult educator, and an advocate of social justice. This experience has molded Foley's interest in informal and incidental learning in popular struggles. This text can be seen as an evolution of Foley's focus from broader socio-political liberatory and emancipatory struggles to empowerment and equal participation struggles in the workplace. The author's evolved perspective includes a psychoanalysis component. In previous texts, Foley has argued that adult educators' understanding of the political economy is a prerequisite to understanding collective learning. Similarly in *Strategic Learning*, Foley suggests that an understanding of psychoanalysis is a requisite tool that gets beneath an individual's explicit learning, so that adult educators can be critical of the fears, anxieties and related emotions that impact incidental learning.

The book is politically radical in its approach to the adult educator's role in organizational change, presenting the challenges of more equitable and ethical work environments in terms of the struggle between an anti-humanistic capitalist system and a "space within it in which to do life-enhancing work" (p. 13). To guide adult educators in the building of such spaces, the author sets out a framework for organizational change grounded in (a) critical analysis of organizational life and learning, (b) strategies to change ineffective organizational dynamics, and (c) skills for facilitators of organizational change and learning. Each chapter asserts the main tenets of Foley's argument that organizations are "complex, contextual and contested" (p. 13) arenas in which people learn experientially and informally, productively or unproductively. Within the chapters, Foley uses empirical case evidence of organizations and

individuals to illustrate the complexity of experiential learning environments and how strategies have been employed to create change in these environments.

The first part of the book combines macro- and micro-analyses of the learning or "non-learning" taking place in changing organizations. For instance, chapter 3 analyzes workplace change and learning in capitalist society, in which learners learn to resist exploitative labor processes. Macro-politics are connected to micro-politics through Foley's critical study of previously published cases of workers' experiential learning in a U.S. electronics plant, an English telephone center (chapter 4), and NASA (chapter 5). The concrete case of NASA's Challenger disaster is a convincing demonstration of "non-learning or "distorted learning" in the "infallible organizational ideal" of NASA and the larger U.S. society. The inflexibility of this organizational disposition blocked NASA's top management from addressing risks to the launch raised by engineers.

The subsequent chapters link strong analysis to change-making strategies and skills. One fine example is chapter 6 that introduces the reader to the history and case of gender culture within a local British government authority. We see the multi-faceted nature of the disadvantages faced by women in the organization and the contradictory interpretations organizational actors have of it. The analysis, for instance, reveals many factors contributing to inequitable circumstances in the organizational culture of the authority: the expectation of long work hours that are incompatible with women's domestic work, women's lack of encouragement, and an insensitive male-dominated hierarchy. With this understanding of the organization's specific and various "learning dimensions," Foley argues for the "democratic, explicit and flexible" change strategies needed in this case.

Finally, in chapters 7 through 12 the author discusses the learnable skills vital to implementing the above strategies. These skills include action research (chapter 7), ethnographic research (chapter 8), and strategies for facilitators of organizational change, including consultancy, political mapping and facilitating group processes (chapter 11). The book concludes with a set of propositions intended to encourage us to get to the root of what is really being learned within an organization and to teach us how to act with this information, to guide emancipatory change — strategic learning. Yet in contrast to its popular education leanings and emphasis on participatory learning, the book does not address how workers themselves might use this critical approach to transform organizational and social situations without the intervention of a consultant or facilitator.

Strategic Learning's attempt to influence adult educators at work in organizations and communities to be critical participants—to re-energize them is sound and worthy of consideration. Foley urges adult educators to apply such experiential and participatory strategies so that they may critically learn about the workplace and promote effective change. The depth, if not the breadth, of the cases presented and their connection to popular and adult education traditions of Eagleton, Friere, Rogers and Mezirow reiterate a challenge to adult educators to understand the macro and micro-forces working for and against learning in organizations and to systematically act on that understanding toward responsible and emancipatory organizational change.

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