Literature Review: (Using Technology in Adult Education, Training, and Dialog)

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Abstract

The overall goal of this literature review is to gain insights and knowledge regarding development and implementation of adult education that is inclusive of technology. Education being defined as the delivery and reception of information that enables the receiver to develop new understandings and/or to modify current understandings that improve their personal and professional lives. The process of this definition implements synchronous instruction as the primary mode for delivery, although asynchronous is included on a very limited use, as well as mentoring and other forms of one-to-one discussion activities. While great products that result in great outcomes is a goal, those efforts and outcomes need to be tempered with professional ethics, otherwise they are meaningless. The specific use of technology is focused within the following goals for information delivery: (1) Professional personal assessment feedback that is live and synchronous between the practitioner and client, (2) Training, either synchronous or asynchronous, that allows for full implementation of the concepts within the “Adult Learning Theory”, and (3) Live synchronous professional mentoring that supports the immediate and impromptu needs of the client. From an educational and/or business perspective, it is required to determine how technology can be used to maximize educational and business outcomes to support specific educational and business goals. From an educational standpoint, there should be a positive correlation between the effectiveness and quality of adult training and the inclusion of real life and personal experiences. While developing great education deliverables is paramount, it is also crucial to remember that using the best educational technology is important. In adult education, products that don’t apply the principles of the Adult Learning Theory, even with the best and ingenious efforts and products, will still have a less than desirable educational outcome.
Keywords: Adult Learning Theory, technology, andragogy, Knowles, copyright review, online differentiated instruction.

Introduction

The various technology venues that are used to support informational delivery today are many, and at times complicated to use. Competitive corporations and educational institutions are fully engaged in finding ways to support their employee and customer base in information delivery. Generally speaking, the strategic goals are somewhat similar; corporations provide various trainings and other such deliveries dedicated to improve and enlighten employees, while schools use the word students instead of employees. Today, more so than yesterday, and not as much as tomorrow, the effective use of technology will define the success of information delivery. Leadership who understand this will be in a better position for success, and if this understanding is in the corporate world, then they will be the ones on the cutting edge; those other would want to emulate.

The Adult Learning Theory

As a prerequisite to building great deliverables and incorporating the best in educational technology, it is important to first outline what the Adult Learning Theory is about. According to Malcom Knowles’ model of andragogy, which evolved between 1980 and 1988, two key concepts comes to mind when considering the development and implementation of information delivery using technology. Specifically, the two concepts are: (1) making the connection between the material and how that relates to their place in life or profession, and (2) allowing the process of information delivery to include what adults already have or know, their experiences (Woodard, 2007). Depending on the nature of the need for training/education, a few specifics may impact various areas within the six concepts of andragogy. For example, adults in the
classroom will varying in ages, educational accomplishments, and many other life things. This supposes that each person would have different levels of experience associated with the topic of learning. This variation can introduce potential problems in the continuity of training delivery. However, finding and exploiting commonalities may help students overcome their experience differences. For example, a common thread could be the “need to know why” (Cleary & Wozniak, 2013). Since each person would have this similar basic need, focusing the training from this perspective allows each student to direct their attention to this “need” while still valuing their experiences to help enhance their learning outcome. In this scenario, the instructor can use the great levels of “experience” of others to guide discussions and in other student interactions. A natural consequence of this example requires the instructor to see his role as more of a discussion facilitator; one who guides the discussion and interjecting corrective input so as to help ensure the discussion is moving towards the correct outcome.

As an expanse in helping students understand their need to know is about the strategic use of classroom discussion (Davis, 2013). The idea of the use of the word “strategic” emphasizes how intentional the development and implementation of instruction ought to be. One component of being intentional starts with having clear objectives for the student. Another component requires the instructor to really understand what the objectives are in order to be in an effective position to be intentional in using strategic discussions. Vague objectives reduces consistency and continuity and opens the door for the instructor to interpret and interpret incorrectly. Thus, the intentional instructor while developing their learning outcomes, need to be in touch with those outcomes. A couple of question to consider when developing objectives are: How will I be able to elicit effective discussion that helps clarify the subject being taught, while simultaneously enhancing their need to learn it? Will this objective allow for the students need
to relate their experiences in support of their need to learn the objective? Intentional instructors need to consider how classroom discussions should occur. Although there is value in monologic discussion, dialogic is much more edifying in the adult setting (Davis, 2013). This approach emphasizes the incorporation of student experiences as it relates to their own learning. Here again, the role of the instructor is more of a facilitator rather than a teacher. The result is strategically guiding the discussion so as to incorporate the learner’s experience, while helping them understand the significant of their experiences while completing the objectives simultaneously.

The idea of including “real life” into adult training supports Malcolm Knowles third (readiness to learn), fifth (motivation), and sixth (adults need to know why) concepts of andragogy. Real life is defined as: concepts that are not hypothetical, supposed, or what ifs. These can be used to reinforce, but not as the primary training point. For example, the subject for training is progressive discipline. The primary training point could be a guided discussion covering appropriately redacted “real life” situations of a conduct issue. The follow up could be hypotheticals to reinforce the already learned concept. Since adults are in training for very specific life goals they require real life scenarios (Cleary & Wozniak, 2013).

Another aspect of teaching that supports adult learners is centered on authenticity or authentic discussion. It should be noted that the typical adult learner has much in the way of life experience. If we are to incorporate the concepts of andragogy of using the experiences of the student, then this form of discussion is a must. Authentic discussion may be defined as; “an exchange where multiple points of view are openly expressed in a way that leads to new understandings and co-constructed forms of knowledge” (McDougall, 2015). It should also be noted that, this form of student engagement and participation is helpful in an online setting. I
would also need to add that, in order to have the highest level of effectiveness, participants need to feel safe in their interaction. If used properly, authenticity supports the model of andragogy in many of the Malcolm Knowles six concepts (McDougall, 2015).

**Bias: The Human Condition**

The human condition allows for each person to either intentionally or unintentionally stereotype other people; resulting in bias for or against the stereotype. From this supposed premise, the instructor may stereotype their students based on many areas of criteria such as: age, race, and disability. Since institutions are made of a variety of people, institutions are then people driven. As a result of this, institutions as a whole can stereotype people (Cleary & Wozniak, 2013). Although this is a natural consequence of being human, it would be important to understand how that can influence the development of training and how it is delivered. When considering the virtual world where the instructor and student is separated in time and space, there is limited ability to observe inappropriate behaviors arising from bias (Anitha & Harsha, 2013). As another example, it may be assumed that older students would have a greater experience in a given training topic than the younger ones (wisdom is supposed to come with age). This assumption may be incorrect, holding the reality that both are similar or vice-versa. This lesson underscores the importance of understanding your audience before training is developed.

From either corporate or the traditional educational institution perspective, the audience represents the customer base. The laws of discrimination as well as simple business sense requires equal opportunity for all. The classroom, whether school or corporate, is populated with a diverse audience. The deliverer needs to have knowledge of this diversity for the sake of the learning needs within the audience (Fletcher, E., et al., 2012). This concept does not necessarily
require people to not have biases; this would be an impossible expectation. Rather, educators need to be acutely aware of them, be willing to accept that they have them, and take steps to control them. The intentional instructor recognizes their weaknesses and takes appropriate efforts to control them when developing and implementing courses. Human bias is a specific reason as to why clear and specific learning objectives are important. Having clear objectives would help to maintain instructor objectivity.

**Use of Technology**

The advent of technology is concerning to those who have experienced and prefer the traditional form of learning. The reality of the corporate and formal education audiences are still populated with those who fear technology. This barrier can affect those developing training and those receiving it. This makes gaining and maintaining participant interest that much more difficult and that much more important. To help reduce the effects of this barrier, corporate educators must be willing be flexible in the development of their trainings (Cook & Sonnenberg, 2014). This includes being able to incorporate existing technologies such as smart phones, iPads, etc., as well as technologies in the horizon.

When considering what technology is on the horizon, one needs to think about Moore’s Law (1965). Although Moore’s Law describes the doubling of the use of transistors occurring every two years, this concept provides some sort of guide as to how technology will expand. Since we have seen how this expansion and the advent of “disruptive” technologies changed the way corporations do their business (Cook & Sonnenberg, 2014). The idea of “disruptive” being defined as the technology that has disrupted the way business was done. It would be logical to assume that there will be new disruptive technologies in the future. Thus, the question corporations need to ask is, how will new technology change what we are doing today? The fact
that things will change reiterates the steadfast acceptance that flexibility will be a desirable asset in corporate leadership and in those who will implement the changes new technology demands. In order to keep up with the competition, there will be no options here.

**Ethics: Doing what is Right…. All the time**

The concept of ethics is not a new one. This use of ethics is especially valid if the organization purports to be a Christian one. No matter what a person endeavors to do, there are always the dos and don’ts that instills the ethical principles in doing it. Of course, this starts with leadership and is exemplified to those who are subordinate. Ethics is not just a great thing to talk about because much can be lost if a corporation fails to integrate active ethics in their business. Just as Christ condemned the Pharisees of talking a great talk but not walking the talk, ethics is something to be done in support of the talk.

Although there are many topics in the area of ethics, businesses engaged in some sort of educational structure have a high degree of litigation exposure when it comes to copyright violations. Unless the corporation actually creates their own resources, they must be using the work of others. Complication and convolution is unfortunate reality when trying to understand the copyright laws. Additionally, much clarity can be obtained if one could take the time and review precedent setting case law. However, a complication with this is knowing where to look and how to assimilate the reading. Sometimes, violations in copyright laws are not malicious and is still a very serious actuality in the world of technology (Brooks, 2008). It isn’t uncommon that people don’t think of copyrighted material, it is not on the forefront of their mind. We get caught up in routines and work deadlines we just don’t think. An example is: “I bought this book, therefore it is mine. I use it daily at home, so…. I can make some copies of the activity and use it in my class.” As with any violation of law, ignorance of it is not an excuse.
Leadership ethics and solid corporate practices can help people avoid oversights in copyright laws and other legal requirements.

What makes ethics difficult for sinful man is the fact that ethics is about doing the right thing, especially when no one is looking; the accountability factor. A compounding factor resides in the human characteristic of bias. For whatever the reason, implementing active ethics is not without challenges. As mentioned earlier, ethics must start with leadership, if the organization is to have active ethics. There must be repercussions for bad choices and rewards for good choices to help instill the value of ethics. Leadership must be able to stir up the intrinsic desire of themselves and of each person so that ethics is a natural reflex. A strategy to consider is have reasonable goals. People tend to cut corners if a project that should take one week to complete is to be completed in one day. Another strategy is to have the resources available to complete tasks. Having a dedicated staff to research the laws governing intellectual property would be a great resource. Another strategy is to be standardized and have very specific processes and procedures that provide templates and/or instructions on the “what” and the “how” to complete tasks. When having staff meetings or other similar activity, have an “Ethics Moment” as part of the agenda. This allows attendees opportunity to discuss their thoughts in regards to ethics. Making ethics part of the business culture can take time and cost money, but the rewards are well worth the investment of both.

**Conclusion/Summary**

Corporate goals in information delivery are contextually the same as those for an educational institution. The main difference exists within the target audiences. From the corporate perspective, one question that requires an answer is: can technology support, truly support, the educational goal(s), particularly in the application of the “Adult Learning Theory”? 
Success in the corporate world requires one to stay ahead of their competition: Be the cutting edge if you will. Part of this is to leverage technology, but also in understanding that technology is what the future will demand. To highlight this trend, as of the fall of 2001 approximately 99 percent of all schools had internet access (Kemp, et. al., 2014). What makes the prospect of using technology effective without compromise promising is that the concepts of Knowles are supported by technology (Ghost Bear, 2012). To this end, the real goal is to make their products fit, without compromising the product, when using technology. The last point to make is the caution of thinking that technology is the all there is. Like any other tool or resource, technology should be managed to enhance and make learning more efficient and effective (Kemp, et. al., 2014). Technology alone will not make an educational program. The human element of bias is something that exists in all people. Since most people are not necessarily malicious in their bias, simple awareness of their bias can mitigate its effects. Organizational leadership can influence, either positively or negatively, how business is run. The active practice of ethics will result in the best product, control of bias, and positive integration of technology. Many pitfalls are just waiting for your footstep. If an organization is focused on doing what is right all the time, then this mind set becomes a reflex rather than a concerted effort. Ethics always starts with leadership, continues with accountability, and ends with an automatic and intrinsic implementation by all.

References


