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Adult Education First Meeting: From Need to Design

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Abstract

It is commonplace that the knowledge gained after some time needs enrichment and actualization. Educational actions that are addressed to adults are essential. The first meeting in adult education is crucial for the educational process. It must, therefore, be planned carefully. The aim of this study is to find the elements that make the first meeting efficient. Books and scientific journals are sought for those elements. The planning proposed is to get acquainted with the participants, to identify needs, expectations and preferred ways of learning and finally to create a learning contract. All these actions must be done with respect to the particularities of participants in a climate that is suitable for learning.

Keywords: First meeting, Adult Education, Lifelong Learning, Need, Planning

1. Introduction

The value of lifelong learning is now taken for granted. With basic education, the individual receives the necessities needed for his living. At higher education level he acquires knowledge and skills that he will use in the practice of his profession. But the profound and rapid changes in the scientific, technological, economic, social and cultural sectors make it imperative to update and continually upgrade the knowledge and skills of individuals to meet the ever-increasing personal and working demands (ECDCB, 2007). This gap is trying to fill lifelong learning. Now "education is seen as a long-term process that begins at birth and lasts a lifetime" (CEDEFOP, 1996).

1.1 Conceptual delimitation

An older Greek law defines "lifelong training," as a system aimed at "training and / or retraining human resources, which, in the context of initial vocational training, provides basic vocational knowledge and skills in specialties for integration, reintegration, occupational mobility in the labor market and the general development of human resources, and in the context of Continuing Vocational Training, complements, modernizes and / or

upgrades knowledge and skills acquired from other vocational education and training systems and / or from professional experience with a view to integration and / or reintegration into the labor market, job security, career development and personal development (Governmental Gazette, 2005).

The newer approach considers "Lifelong Learning" as all forms of lifelong learning activities aimed at acquiring or developing knowledge, skills and competences that contribute to the development of an integrated personality, career integration and development (Government Gazette, 2010).

Therefore, educational activities targeted at adults aiming at upgrading and updating their knowledge are mainly aimed at promoting their professional skills. It is therefore imperative for the trainers, the need for a well-organized educational process in order to maximize the learning benefit of trainees.

The inaugural adult education meeting or otherwise the beginning of an educational meeting is a special situation that affects the whole educational process (Tsioli, 2005). Thus, it can be said that the inaugural meeting of the trainer and the adult learners is the trainer's first in-person contact with his students.

1.2 Importance of the inaugural meeting

The importance of the launch meeting is extremely high. According to Courau (2000) "The first meeting is crucial for the continuation of the program". This meeting is considered by many to be the most important as it lays the groundwork for team collaboration, builds trust and communication channels among the participants, shapes the atmosphere in which the educational process will take place and ultimately leads to the development of the learning contract. A problematic startup meeting can have a major impact on the smooth running of the program and can lead to failure. Therefore, worth the time and effort to properly design, organize and implement it.

1.3 Theoretical framework

In order to find out the specifics of the inaugural meeting, the characteristics of adult learners will first be searched (Knowles, 1970; Abdullah, Koren, Muniapan, Parasuraman, & Rathakrishnan, 2008; Olympic Training and Consulting, 2016) (Table 1). It goes without saying that adult learners are very different from child learners. Thus, the principles, methods and techniques used in adult education are quite different from those of children (Kokkos, 1999). One of the characteristics of the adult is that it adopts many roles, which reduce the time available and the disposition and learning (Polson, 1993). Adults learn effectively when they are actively involved, experience plays an important role, and adults learn in different ways (Rogers, 1999). So, based on the basic characteristics, needs and expectations of adult learners, the policy and method that is followed in the design of training programs is determined (Tjotju, 2014).

As mentioned above, adult learners have certain characteristics that differentiate them from children (Kokkos, 2005). They first come to education with specific goals. Children go to school because this is the proper way for their age and the reasons for their participation are unclear, for example, to be educated. On the contrary, when adults choose to participate in an educational process, they do it for a purpose. The most common reasons are professional, fulfilling social roles, personal development and gaining prestige. Adults are also differentiated from minors because they have both quantitatively and qualitatively different experiences (professional, social, etc.). Consequently, adults expect the content of the training to be relevant to their experiences. Adults have also come up with preferred ways of learning. Some prefer to learn by listening, other to be actively involved, other to seek knowledge by himself. Adults, in addition, want to be actively involved in the process and prefer communication and consideration during the educational process. They are aware of their needs and may seek to tailor the curriculum accordingly. Adults face more obstacles in their quest for learning, which overcomes the process (Athanasidou, 2014; Shiakovelli, 2011). The barriers may be due to the poor organization of the process, social obligations and finally the obstacles arising from the personality of individuals. Adults, in addition, develop defense and resignation mechanisms. When the adult is confronted with internal situations, the learner may reject what the instructor proposes.

Table 1. Characteristics of an adult learner

Adults are autonomous and self-directed. Their teachers must actively involve adult participants in the learning process.
Adult learners have gathered knowledge and experience. The trainer must retrieve and show off this wealth.
Adult learners are goal-oriented. The teacher is convinced that the program's resources are helping them achieve their goals.
For adult learners is important to identify relevance between educational subjects and their interests. Therefore, the instructor defines the goals and objectives of the program from the beginning, taking into account the learners interests.
Adult learners emphasize the aspects that are useful for their lives. The teacher makes it clear that the lesson is geared to the learner's real needs.
All trainees are treated with respect. The trainer recognizes the experiences of the trainees and enables them to them.
Adult learners seek social interaction. They want to develop social relationships and often get rid of boredom. The trainer must provide these capabilities.
Adult learners want social progress. Through the educational process, they expect an improvement of their position and progress.
The reason for participation is sometimes to meet external expectations. Many times the trainee participates want to satisfy not one's own needs or desires, but some other person, such as an employer.
Some are involved in educational processes because of cognitive interest. Some adult learners participate for the joy of knowledge.

This paper is a bibliographic review aimed at finding the optimal design of the adult education startup meeting. Specific objectives are to: (a) identify the needs of trainees at the first meeting in adult education (b) the actions that the trainer must take in order to maximize the educational benefit; and (c) the development of an indicative inaugural meeting program.

The research questions are a) under what conditions the adult learner learns best? b) What are the characteristics of successful adult education programs? and c) how does an adult educator shape the inaugural meeting in order to achieve the best possible result.

We seek theoretical knowledge in scientific books and magazines about adult learners in adult education programs, we identify the participants needs and consequently we suggest the best content of the inaugural meeting.

2. Adult learner effective learning conditions

It is a fact that the adult learner learns best when he is clearly aware and approves the curriculum. It also learns better when the goals of the program are relevant to the activities that he has an interest in. It is therefore important that the objectives of the training program are clearly stated at the beginning of the training process and modified so that they are in line with the expectations of the trainees. Therefore, it is important to identify the educational needs and the objectives of the program.

The adult learner learns best when he has an active role in the process. We learn 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear at the same time, 80% of what we say, 90% of what we say, while performing at the same time actions that require thought and in which we are actively involved (Courau, 2000). Therefore, it is important to give the learner an active role from the outset as well as to select educational methods that promote active participation (Silberman, 2006). The participatory climate, therefore, promotes the learning outcomes of the process.

The adult also learns better when he feels like a member of a group. It performs best when it coexists with other individuals who strive to achieve the same goals. Pedagogical techniques such as exercises in groups of two individuals or subgroups reinforce this dynamic. It is common in adult education to have obstacles in deciding whether to take part in or pursue an educational program. Identifying these problems and discussing them as part of an effort to resolve them is an important aspect of the process. This part reduces the stress of the trainee. One characteristic of adult learners is that they have experience and have developed their own learning process, useful elements. In addition, the adult learner performs better in a good learning environment. That means an environment where he feels his personality is acceptable and that there is mutual respect and effective communication.

3. Characteristics of successful adult education programs

As a result of the above features, adult programs are critical to satisfy the following (Polson, 1993): The educational process meets the specific needs of adult learners. The trainer is aware of the participants' level of knowledge of the subject so he can modify the process accordingly. Adults are eager to get the learning tools as soon as possible and apply them immediately. Therefore, a harmonious mix of new knowledge with the existing one is implemented. Students are not challenged in the learning process by questioning their beliefs, as this can lead to negative reactions. The time needed to digest new information is given. It is possible that the memory and reflexes of adult learners may be adversely affected by the aging process. Adults need more opportunities for success. Thus, knowledge is divided into small units and is gradually provided using a variety of techniques.

Some needs arise from the conditions for effective learning (Lefteriotou, 2005). Specifically, in order for adults to learn effectively, they place themselves at the heart of the educational activity, the content of the process satisfies their needs, leverages existing knowledge and takes into account preferred learning styles. It also promotes active adult participation in content shaping, media selection, and the choice of active pedagogical techniques and methods. Finally, a learning climate is created that is governed by a spirit of cooperation and trust.

In order for the adult education process to be effective, certain conditions must be met (Kokkos, 2005). Initially, participation in education must be voluntary, as the exerting of pressure as a means of encouraging participation can only have negative effects. Then the educational goals are important to be clear and specific, to be achievable and to be linked to the participants' experiences. In addition, the curriculum is characterized by high levels of organization, because trainees are likely to exhibit negative behavior when the curriculum exhibits weaknesses at various levels. The content of the educational process is important to respond to the needs of the participants and to make use of the preferred ways of learning. Adults have a crystallized view of how they learn best, so it is beneficial to be respected and valued in the learning process. In addition, it is beneficial to promote the active involvement of the learner. The trainer provides initiatives to the participants and encourages their active participation. The trainer also has to evaluate the barriers that learners face and seek ways to be resolved. Through this process, in addition to finding solutions, trainers and trainees come closer as they communicate and understand each other. Finally, it is important to develop a good educational climate, characterized by respect and effective communication.

Psychological factors are added to the needs of the inaugural meeting. The particular educational activity that trainees are invited to attend is something unknown to them, so it makes sense to feel anxious and have fear about the outcome of the forthcoming activity. The main fears of the trainee are "who is the trainer?", "what is the relationship he is trying to establish with me?", "who are the team members?". That is will I get what I expect, will the program meet my personal goals, will I have a good time or waste my time? "For how long?" and "what are we going to do?" (Noye & Piveteau, 2002; Costoglou xx). Planning the first meeting therefore takes the necessary steps to minimize these unpleasant emotions and make the activity enjoyable and creative.

Table 2. Indicative Initial Meeting Schedule

<p>Inception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome trainees. • Getting to know the trainers and the trainees: Presenting the trainer and presenting the trainees. • Exploring existing knowledge, experiences, skills of trainees as well as preferred ways of learning. <p>Program Presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the objectives, content, methodology and operation of the program. • Analyze the learners' obligations and the specific skills they are expected to acquire. • The learning material is presented. • Students comment and ask questions, and the instructor answers. <p>Group formation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of 2 to 4 member groups (3-4 member groups are preferred). • The instructor encourages teamwork. • The members of each group discuss with each other and decide on the goals of the group. • There is discussion and negotiation between the instructor and the groups about their program goals. <p>The purpose is to develop the learning contract.</p> <p>Familiarity with the working method:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach the first module that the trainees will work on. • The trainees process the material in the first module. • The instructor clarifies the topics of the assignments and sets the timetable. • Group learners discuss how they will work. • The "communication protocol," is co-decided. • Discussion and queries are resolved. • Wishes for a good start.

4. Initial Meeting Content Design

By using the data above, it is possible to define the objectives of the inaugural meeting and to plan it (Mouzakis, 2006; Papanis, 2008; Psachou, 2010) (Table 2). Based on the particularities of adult learners and the conditions that facilitate them to learn better, the objectives of the launch are primarily to reduce trainees' anxiety (to speak and express himself) and trust others, which promotes learning. Also, there is mutual understanding, that is, the instructor gets to know his students; the learners get to know the trainer, but also get to know each other. In addition, the goal is to explore the learning expectations and needs of trainees as well as the particular learning styles they prefer. Finally, the development of a learning contract through the interaction is crucial.

In particular, the planning for the first meeting is implemented, taking into account the needs of the trainees. Based on the needs described above, the topic of the inaugural meeting is modified to meet the requirements of the trainees. Initially, the trainer is introduced to the trainees and trainees. The trainer usually presents himself with some information about himself (status, studies, career, interests, etc.) And the trainees follow the same pattern. Different techniques such as self-presentation, dating, chain, features, have been suggested for the members of the group (Archontakis and Filippou, 2003; Marcellis, 2009; Nikitidis, 2019) (Table 3).

Then takes place the identification of participants educational needs, which can be done verbally or in writing by using a structured questionnaire. Each learner states what he expects from the learning process, what his goals are, what educational gaps he intends to fill and where he is going to use the knowledge gained. It is also worth discussing the learning barriers that students face and how they can be solved or addressed so that the learning process can proceed smoothly. The information provided is recorded in order to be properly utilized. Investigating educational needs is particularly important for adult education, as it affects the success of a course (Tsibukli & Phillips, 2010).

The next and final phase aims at making the learning contract. The term "contract" is used to indicate the commitment of both parties (trainers and trainees) to the compliance of the rules. It describes how to organize the learning process. On one hand, it reflects the trainer's willingness to organize the process in a certain way and on the other hand the acceptance of the learners (Rogers, 1999). The learning contract involves diagnosing

learners' needs and expectations, defining the goals of the program, clarifying the rules of group functioning and evaluating individual and group development (Tsibuckle & Phillips, 2008). The information drawn from the first two stages of the process is used to develop the learning contract.

Table 3. Acquaintance techniques

<p>Self-presentation In this technique, the trainer presents himself or herself by providing information about his or her educational and professional development as well as personal information and experiences in order to create intimacy. It provides an opportunity to ask questions.</p> <p>Getting to know couples The animator invites participants to form pairs. Then ask everyone to interview the other member of the couple. Then each person in the group introduces the other person to the couple. The information requested is educational, professional and reasons for participating in the educational process.</p> <p>Chain It is recommended that the first trainee say his name. The second one is followed by the first one's name, followed by the others. Each one gives their name, after the names of all the preceding ones. The animator takes over.</p> <p>Characteristics Each participant writes on a paper certain characteristics such as their favorite movie or their favorite food. Then people with common characteristics are sought and found. After discussing for a few minutes, they announce to the group what the common feature is and why they have this particular preference.</p> <p>The ball The participants form a circle. The first trainee tosses the ball to someone else by saying his name. The one who receives the ball does the same and continues the process until everyone receives the ball. In the second stage, the participants change position in the cycle and the process is repeated.</p> <p>The recommendations Trainees are invited to walk around the area at random. When they meet another person, they recommend saying their name. This allows the learners to get to know each other quickly.</p> <p>The box with the name The participants form a circle. Each one with his or her own hands forms a fantastic box. Everyone opens the box and takes its name from inside, announcing it to the rest.</p> <p>Say it with gesture The participants form a circle. One of the participants enters the center of the circle and says his name by making a move. The others observe the movement and try to repeat it as faithfully as possible. The one in the circle observes the imitation and selects the one who has best implemented it to enter the circle and continue playing. Because this technique uses the body, some may be hesitant. So it is a good practice for the animator to start first by making excessive movement.</p> <p>I know that ... I imagine that ... A participant picks someone who doesn't know him well and states what he knows about him and then what he imagines about that person. The person to whom it refers may in the end correct any mistakes that may have been made. Then he selects the next player until everyone has participated.</p> <p>My initials On a sheet of paper, everyone draws his initials. Then he makes a painting by using that initials. The painting is presented in the group. This is useful when painting activities are included in the meeting curriculum.</p> <p>I carry the message Each trainee takes a piece of paper and writes his name while he moves. When he meets a fellow student, he gives him the paper with the name and provides three pieces of information about himself and the other student does the same. Then he meets someone else, shows him the paper with his name and tells him the provided information. The procedure is repeated a lot of times.</p> <p>Names Stories The trainees are divided into pairs. Everyone speaks briefly about his first name, e.g. the reason it was given to him, if he likes it, etc. Eventually the other person of the pair informs to the group about what he has heard.</p>
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It is essential the trainer allow the trainees to have an active role and to express themselves freely by devoting sufficient time to it. It is also appropriate to answer all their queries about the goals, as well as the structure and functioning of the learning process (active role of learner). It is crucial to clarify that there is a clear plan with goals that are being implemented and activities that incorporate goals (a well-organized element), but that they are flexible in any modification the learners' needs require (flexibility to adapt to learners' needs). During the first meeting teams are formed, and that is particularly important for the development and improvement of the educational process. Techniques such as working in pairs or groups promote group formation.

5. Conclusions

The inaugural adult education meeting is a key role in laying the foundations for good cooperation, leading to effective learning. The trainer must be aware of the specific characteristics of adult learners as well as their educational needs and have a well-organized and structured action plan. However, this can be modified according to the needs of the participants. The learning barriers that learners may face are discussed and taken every initiative to be overcome. The whole process is implemented in a climate of safety and trust, which promotes active participation and consequently effective learning. In short, the inaugural adult education meeting is crucial to for the success of the learning process.

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