RUTGERS

Understanding the Adult Learner

15:233:543

FALL 2021

Instructor: Alisa Belzer
Email:alisa.belzer@gse.rutgers.edu
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Graduate School of Education
Department of Learning and Teaching
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1183

Course Description

Understanding the Adult Learner (15:233:543) has the overall goal of guiding you through an exploration of the multiple dimensions of adult learners by immersing you in key theories, concepts related to adult learners, and practices that are appropriate for meeting the needs of this population. This course is designed to give you the opportunity to investigate the physiological, psychological, and psychosocial changes in the adult life span and the implications these changes have for adult learning.

A prerequisite for your work as an adult education professional is your understanding of the theoretical landscape that helps the discipline explain who is an adult, how adults learn, and the ways in which those learning mechanics inform the development of adult learning programs. To that end, the course will provide a setting in which you can become familiar with learning theory

and use it to explain phenomena that you have experienced in your own life, and then reflect on implications for your practice.

The nature of the course as a place for putting theory into practice requires that this be a hands-on course and necessitates that you participate in all activities. Active engagement is as important as completion of the readings, viewing the lectures, and formal assignments. You should do the assigned reading first, listen to any posted lectures second, and then complete the weekly activities. It is very important to stay on schedule, so please put aside time on the weekend to do the reading ahead of the week. There generally are multiple steps to doing the weekly activity and some depend on your classmates, so getting things done on time will be good for the whole community and being behind will create an obstacle for all. It is very important to stay on schedule, so please put aside time on the weekend to do

For many of you this will be your first semester taking a fully online class. Consequently, it is important that we do our best to make the technology work for us, but also to be patient when it doesn't. Please provide feedback and ask questions as soon as possible when there are problems so that we can engage in problem solving quickly and (hopefully) efficiently. And don't hesitate to reach out to the helpdesk if you're experiencing technical issues.

Prerequisites or other limitations: None

Mode of Instruction: Online

Credits: 3

Learning Goals

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:
- Understand the learning needs and characteristics of diverse adult learners in the varied social contexts and environments in which adult learning occurs, including non-formal, informal, and formal education
- Be able to critically analyze and reflect upon the adult education literature concerning adult learner characteristics and participation, adult development, and adult learning
- Be able to use adult learning and development theories to reflect on and analyze teaching and learning

Textbooks and Materials

- Merriam, S.B., & Bierma, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: linking theory and practice.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Other related materials and readings will be posted on the class course site.

Methods of Assessment/Course Assignments

You are expected to complete all reading assignments, watch all lectures, fully and professionally participate in the online discussions and activities, and submit assignments on or before their due dates. All assignments should be submitted through the course platform. All written work should have a cover page, be double spaced, use Times New Roman 12 pt. font, and include a properly formatted reference page using APA style. For more information about APA and guidance on formatting, visit https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/.

Assignment 1. **Online discussions/Weekly activities (15% of overall grade):**
Weekly activities are designed to help you enhance your understanding of assigned texts, draw connections between them and your current experiences, critically analyze their relevance to adult education contexts, and synthesize across topics from week to week. You are expected to participate fully in all weekly assigned discussions/activities. The rubric which can be found under "Course Essentials" details how your participation will be assessed. The learning benefits of participating in weekly activities are cumulative. Although assessment points for each individual weekly discussion/activity are few, your diligent participation adds up to your being successful in completing all assignments effectively and fully benefitting from the course. (13%)

Each week there will be some kind of wrap up lecture/discussion posted from the previous week. You are expected to view/participate as this is an important opportunity for me to synthesize, clarify, and add on to the discussion that has occurred. The topic is not "done" for the week until this has happened. Typically, there will be a one question "quiz" following the lecture that enables you to show you participated. Again, this is not worth a lot of points but has a big learning pay off. (2%)

Assignment 2. Learn something new, then teach someone what you learned (25% of overall grade)

This assignment creates an experience of being both an adult learner and an adult educator and prompts you to reflect on what you have learned as a result. It also gives you the opportunity to

learn about several digital tools that may be of use to you as an adult educator and in the rest of your coursework throughout the program.

This is a three part assignment. You will carry out Part 1 and 3 individually and Part 2 with a small group or partner (to be assigned by the instructor after the first week of class). Your small group must create a schedule (by the end of Week 3) which includes the following information: who will present on what, when, and who will be responsible for providing feedback (individual or collaboratively composed among group members). Everyone must teach one lesson to at least one student (although you can have more than one student or teach the whole group), and everyone must be a designated learner at least once (although you can be a student more than once). Lessons should be completed between Weeks 4 and 13. They can be taught synchronously or asynchronously. It is highly recommended that you plan to space them out during this period.

Part 1: Learn/Reflect (7%)

a. Select a digital tool (suggested list below) by Week 3 that you do not already know how to use. The tool should be something you could imagine using in your practice as an adult educator and are interested in knowing more about. Please select something that is new to you. The list below focuses mainly on presentation type tools, but you can go beyond the list. Whatever you select should be something you can learn how to use in about two hours.

b. After you have learned how to use the tool, write a reflection on why you chose to learn about this tool, how you went about learning it, how the learning process went, and what it was like to be an adult learner in this context. Overall, what can you take from this experience that has implications for your practice as an adult educator. You should make reference to theories and concepts you have learned about so far in the course (don't forget to use APA format when you cite from a published source and provide a properly formatted reference list (2-3 pages).

Part 2: Teach/Learn and Give/Get Feedback (7%)

a. ***Teach about the tool you selected***. Based on the schedule you and your group have arranged, teach members of your assigned small group about the tool you learned how to use (20-30 minute lesson). Do not simply replicate how you learned how to use it and do not try to replicate the tools training materials. Think more about introducing

the tool to another user. <u>Your lesson need not lead to tool use competency</u> (or even be a how-to), but rather it should focus on tool affordances (what it can be used for; what it's good for) and weaknesses and introduce learners to some of its key features and how they are accomplished. Your lesson should have a learning objective (what do you hope learners will know and be able to do as a result of participating in the lesson), explain what the tool is and what it can be useful for, and it should draw on adult learning principles you have learned so far. You can use any digital tools you find helpful to present your lesson, but students in the past have often used the tool about which they are teaching for their lesson. Your lesson should be interactive, not just a lecture/demonstration.   It can be completed synchronously or asynchronously.

b. *Be a learner and reflect on the experience*. Everyone in your group must be a designated learner at least once. This means participating in the teaching session and providing feedback. Or a group can decide that they will all be learners for all members' sessions and will work collaboratively to provide feedback. However, you can also participate in as many training sessions as you like (no feedback necessary beyond the one you signed up to provide feedback for). The designated learner should give written feedback (submitted within 5 days of the lesson to the student instructor and to the course instructor) which draws on adult learning theories we have learned so far. The feedback should address questions such as:

- Did the lesson meet its objective(s)
- What were strengths of this lesson?
- What challenged you as a learner?
- In what ways did the instructor make the learning experience "adult"?
- What suggestions could you give the instructor to improve instruction?

Please give both positive and "constructive" feedback so that this is a learning experience for the adult educator.

Be sure to relate your feedback to adult learning theories and/or concepts as well as your own personal reactions and experiences. . Don't forget to cite and include a reference list for published sources to which you refer. Your feedback should be sent to your educator <u>and</u> submitted as an assignment. Please make sure you note on the paper

who the feedback is for. The feedback should be at least one page. Longer is okay, but if it's shorter, you're probably not giving the task as much attention as you should.

   c. ***Share your lesson materials with the class***. By everyone exploring digital tools, there will be a nice "catalog" of information about resources that may be of interest to all. Please share links to materials you developed about "your" tool on the Assignment 3 Presentation Sharing Page. Instructions for how to do this are on the page. Please submit these as soon as you have completed your lesson. And don't forget to look at what your classmates have shared. It's a great resource!

Part 3: Synthesis/Reflection (11%)
Reflect on your teaching process based on your initial reflections, your experience teaching, and your "student's" feedback. Additionally, reflect on the overall experience of being an adult educator and an adult learner. What did you learn from this experience? What did this experience help you understand about designing instruction for adults and what implications might this have for your future adult educator efforts? **Draw on adult learning theories you have learned so far to help you understand and make meaning from the experience.** Don't forget to use in-text citations and a reference list.   (3-5 pages).

Your initial reflection, your feedback as a learner to your facilitator, and your final synthesis/reflection should all be submitted by the end of the semester. However, I encourage you to complete and submit each piece as you do hem.

Suggested Tools to Learn (these are all free or have free trial versions)

Screencastomatic
Pictochart
How to make a video
How to do a screen cast
Youtube (e.g., uploading, adding captions)
Google apps for education
Prezi
Gliffy (mind mapping)
Asana (project management)

Haiku Deck
Slides
Powtoon
Sparkol
Debategraph
Padlet
PearDeck
NearPod
FlipGrid
Kahoot
EdPuzzle

Assignment 3 (Midterm). Adult Learner Autobiography (8-10 pages or equivalent media production/30% of overall grade)

For this assignment, you will compose a "learning autobiography" that describes your experiences as an adult learner. The purpose is to consider your adult learning experiences in relationship to the theories and concepts we have covered during the first half of the semester as a way to synthesize what you have learned so far.

In deciding how to write this, consider your experience of reading autobiographies and biographies. Note that the generally have a narrative structure that tell the story of the person and illuminate particular themes through rich descriptions of events. Therefore, focus on and describe memorable and meaningful learning experiences, and explain why you consider these to be significant. Then analyze them using the topics we covered the first half of this semester to help you gain a more theoretical perspective on them. You should organize your paper in such a way that allows you to integrate and make connections between your story and these topics.

The autobiography may include experiences from childhood (but only if they are relevant to who you are as an adult learner) to adulthood or focus strictly on adult experiences. Although you can discuss this class as part of your autobiography, it should not be the sole focus of your narrative. Remember, this is an autobiography and should cover a broad swatch of your experiences and development as a learner, focusing in on key experiences/themes. **It should conclude with a discussion of how reflecting on your own experiences as an adult learner shapes you as a current or future adult educator.**

Your autobiography must include:

   --An introduction to you and the learning experiences you select to share
   --Well written and rich descriptions of key learning experiences (focus on key events, turning points, forks in the road, etc.)
   --Analysis of how your learning experiences and your responses to them relate to the adult learning concepts covered during the first half of the semester. You need not discuss every topic; pick those that are most relevant
   --Implications for your practice as an adult educator
   --A cover page and complete and correct reference list using APA format.

Your project can take the form of a traditional paper (8-10 pages), integrate multimedia with text, or use digital story-telling tools to present your adult learning autobiography.   Feel free to be traditional or be creative!

Due Date: October 24th, 11:59 pm.

Assignment 4 (Final project). Theory and practice integration (8-10 pages or equivalent media production/30% of overall grade)
As you'll have noticed by now, there are significant overlaps among concepts and theories related to the adult learner and adult learning (e.g., experience, development, and reflection keep popping up). While I have asked you to learn, understand, and apply the concepts covered each week and some of you will have made excellent efforts to draw connections from week to week, we have not undertaken a systematic activity to synthesize across them to understand the similarities and differences. This assignment requires that you take this task on as a way to engage in meaning and sense making. You will do so through a visual representation of the ways in which learner diversity, development, cognition, motivation and resistance to learning; the theories of andragogy, experiential learning, self-directed learning, transformational learning; digital learning, and critical reflection relate to each other. This visualization should focus on similarities and differences among concepts and theories as well as how they interact with/relate to each other (e.g., how can engagement with one theory approach contribute to another). The paper will consist of a description/discussion of this "conceptual map" and implications for practice. The task is to identify overarching themes that cut across concepts and/or important similarities and differences across themes, as well as "outlying" ideas that are important but unique to one topic. Note overarching themes.

As interesting and valuable as they may be, this is not meant to be a review of your experiences in this class (unless you use them to explain a concept you choose to discuss). You need not summarize every theory you touch on, but you should explain enough about it so as to be able to point to the elements that connect to what you are connecting it to. Organize your paper around the central concepts of your map. Try to narrow your map down to some of the major overlapping themes of the course.

Your paper must include the following components:
--An introduction which explains how your map is constructed, why you chose to construct it that way, and how to "read" it.
--Your visual map
--A discussion of the components of the map and how they relate to each other
--A conclusion which describes implications for practice given the understandings this mapping reveals to you about adult learners and adult learning.
--Citations from course readings and a reference list; both should use APA format

I suggest that you touch on this assignment all semester. As we add a new topic, make notes on how it relates to previous topics. Doing so will make completing this final project easier and quicker. I also believe you will benefit from pushing yourself to engage in synthesis all semester instead of only at the end.

Due Date: December 19th, 11:59 pm

Course Policies

Grading:

Grading Scale	
93–100	A
88–92	B+
83–87	B

RUTGERS

78–82	C+
73–77	C
72 and below	F

You are expected to complete all reading assignments, listen to all lectures, fully and professionally participate in the online discussions and other activities according to the specifications detailed in the Discussions or Activities sections of each weekly module, and submit written assignments on or before the due date. In this course, the emphasis is on self-directed participation. You will respond to specific questions or comments or will complete some type of activity related to the readings and these responses will serve as a way for you to reflect on the course content. Evaluation will be based on the number of postings you submit, but more importantly on the reflectiveness and depth of your responses and quality of interaction with your group/class mates. Please note that replies are due on specific dates.

For grading specifics, see "**Grading Rubrics**" under the "Larger Assignments and Grading Rubrics" module in the Canvas course.

Academic Integrity Policy:
Any violation of academic honesty is a serious offense and is therefore subject to an appropriate penalty. Refer to Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy for a full explanation of policies.

Web site: This course is offered through Canvas Learning Management System. Registered students will have access to the course site.

Accommodation

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus' disability

services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site.

Course Outline

For an itemized listing of module topics, activities, and due dates, see individual modules and the Course Schedule below this syllabus in the Canvas course shell.

Week	Topic/Assigned Readings
1	Introduction and Personal Reflections on Adulthood
2	Defining Adulthood and the Role of Identity
3	Culture, Context, and Diversity in Learning
4	Adult Development Theories
5	The Adult Brain and Cognitive Functioning
6	Motivation and Learning
7	The Emotions of Learning and Barriers and Resistance to Learning
8	General Learning Theories
9	Key Adult Learning Theories: Andragogy
10	Key Adult Learning Theories: Self-directed Learning
11	Key Adult Learning Theories: Transformative Learning
12	Key Adult Learning Theories: Experiential Learning
13	Adult Learning in the Digital Age
14	Critical Perspectives in Adult Learning
15	Wrap-Up Reflections