

Understanding the Adult Learner

15:233:543:90

Summer 2021

3 Credits

Instructor Name: Brian Dashew	Email address: brian.dashew@gse.rutgers.edu
Phone Number: 848-932-0780 <i>(during summer 2021, Zoom will be preferred. I am on Zoom any time I am at my computer and I am available at brian.dashew@gse.rutgers.edu)</i>	Location: N/A This is an asynchronous online course. Please see details below.
Office Hours: By appointment (see policy below)	Prerequisites or other limitations: None.
Mode of Instruction: <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar <input type="checkbox"/> Hybrid <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Other	Permission required: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Directions about where to get permission numbers:

Statement on Access and Accommodations

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: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's 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 (<https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration>).

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
- Critically analyze and reflect upon the adult education literature concerning adult learner characteristics and participation, adult development and adult learning

- Use adult learning and development theories to reflect on and analyze teaching and learning

Catalog Description

Adult social roles, psychological characteristics, and learning patterns in light of their implications for educational practice.

Full 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 constitutes 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. 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 you will need to stay on schedule.

The course is designed to be an adult learning experience. This will give you opportunities to experience and reflect on the adult learning theories in real time and think about how they relate to your experience and current or future practice. 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.

Textbooks and Materials

The following required text should be purchased right away; you will need it before week 2 of the semester.

- Merriam, S.B., & Bierma, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: linking theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

All other related materials and readings will be posted on the class website.

Grading Grading Scale

Your final grade in this course will be based on the assignments below and calculated on the following scale:

93–100 A
88–92 B+
83–87 B
78–82 C+
73–77 C
72 and below F

A few notes about grading:

- I try to provide detailed feedback within one week of major assignment submission and earlier for smaller assignments. Please do not email to ask if I received your submission or to check to make sure that you followed instructions appropriately. If I did not receive your submission I will let you know during grading.
- I have a 24-hour rule related to requests to discuss assignment grades and feedback. If you don't like a grade, please wait 24 hours before reaching out to me. If at that time you still do not understand your grade, I will be happy to discuss via Zoom, phone, or in person.
- As a matter of policy, I do not offer extra credit opportunities.
- If this is your first time using Canvas, please be aware that the Canvas gradebook can be a little difficult to interpret. If you would like to discuss your progress in the course with me during the semester, please reach out to me via email or Zoom to schedule time to speak.

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 website. 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 (20% 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 Major Assignments and Rubrics module 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.

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.

Assignment 2: Context Paper (3-5 pages; 20% of overall grade)

Adult learning takes place in many different contexts, and the needs of adults vary across these different contexts. In this project, you will conduct an interview with an adult learning professional to find out more about 1) how they understand who their learners are, 2) how they diagnose the needs of those learners, and 3) how they build programs to address those needs. The interview subject may be somebody you know in a setting with which you are familiar (the person in charge of training and development in your organization) or else you can find somebody new in a setting that is very different from your own (if you work in a corporate setting, perhaps you identify somebody who works at a nonprofit; if you were in formal education, you can find somebody who works in informal or nonformal settings). After your interview you will write a 3-5 page paper in which you address the three points above and reflect on similarities and differences between learners and learning in your own experience.

Assignment 3: Adult Learner Autobiography (7-8 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 semester as a way to synthesize what you have learned. Focus on and describe memorable and meaningful learning experiences, and explain why you consider these to be significant; and then analyze them using the topics we covered 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 the shaping factors covered in this class. The autobiography may include representations of your experiences from childhood (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 your thinking about being an adult educator. Your autobiography must include:

- An introduction to you and the learning experiences you select to share
- Well written descriptions of key learning experiences (focus on key events, turning points, forks in the road, etc.)
- Analysis of how your learning experiences and your response to them relate to the shaping factors that are discussed in this class (e.g. cognition and development, motivation, emotion, and critical thinking). You need not discuss every theory; pick those that are most relevant
- Implications for your practice as an adult educator

Your final project can take the form of a traditional paper (7-8 pages), integrate multimedia with text, or use digital story-telling tools to present your adult learning autobiography. Be creative!

Assignment 4. Theory presentation (10% of overall grade) and reflection (20% of overall grade)

As you will learn in this class, our field contains no single definition “adult learning theory.” Even within the large families of theory (andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning) there exists a great deal of variation in definitions and approaches. To help you highlight this, you will develop a presentation in which you describe one theoretical approach to adult learning. Then, you will develop a reflection of how the various theories can help you to better understand the adult learner.

Part I: Presentation

At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned to a theorist; each theory will represent a single perspective/selected article from one of the theoretical families we will discuss in this class. With your group, you will read the article and develop a single brief (3-5 minute) presentation. Your presentation should provide a clear theoretical explanation to the rest of the class. At a minimum, you should include:

1. A description of the theory and its defining characteristics
2. What questions it addresses (e.g. adult learning as a process, as a quality, how motivation works, etc.)
3. What areas of professional practice you think the theory would be helpful in addressing
4. What remaining questions, concerns, or criticisms you have about the theory

The theorists that will be assigned are listed below. All assignments will be random draw after the add/drop period is over. Each theory group presentation will be due on the FRIDAY before the week in which the theory is discussed. Please note that this early submission is only so that the presentation can be posted before students are assigned to study the theory. This is not intended as a first draft submission.

Self-Directed Learning

- Tough
- Garrison
- Grow
- Deci and Ryan

Learning from Experience

- Schon
- Boud, et al.
- Kolb
- Heron and Reson

Transformative Learning

- Mezirow
- Clark and Wilson
- Dirkx

- Tisdell

Part II: Reflection

Each week, I will post the presentations that are associated with a given theory. You will watch the presentations and author a brief (approx. 2 pg) reflection about each group. How are the theories similar or different? How do they help you to better understand the larger theory family? And how do they help you to better understand the adult learner? In the end, you will author an additional summative reflection on your experiences with the theory, recalling what you learned in your other assignments to demonstrate your understanding of teaching and learning in adulthood. This reflection should be 3-4 pages, for a total paper length of approximately 10 pages.

Policies

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.

TurnItIn: Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com (directly or via learning management system, i.e. Sakai, Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle) for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Students who do not agree should contact the course instructor immediately.

Instructor communication: If you are having any difficulties in this class (understanding content, assignments, etc.) please feel free to reach out to me to set up a time to speak. I try to respond within 24 hours on weekdays or 48 hours on weekends. If you do not hear from me in this window, I encourage you to reach out again. If you have questions about an assignment, please be sure to ask them far enough in advance of the assignment due date that I can conform to this response policy. In other words, if your assignment is due on Sunday at 11:59 pm, you should be sure to email me early in the day on Friday because it may take me 48 hours to respond.

While I am happy to speak with you and offer feedback on your work, I am not able to “pre-grade” your assignments. If you ask me to look at assignment drafts before they are due, I will only be able to spot check to make sure that major elements are present.

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

Late work and resubmission: The policy for late work and resubmissions is determined based on the type of assignment.

Assignment 1 Discussions/participation: As noted in this syllabus, class participation is critical to your learning. The value is in the interaction and discussion that takes place through Canvas. As such, late participation assignments will not be graded (automatic 0 for the week).

Assignments 2 and 3: All assignments are due on the date listed in the syllabus. All assignments should be submitted via Canvas (NOT to my email address). For these assignments, a 10% deduction is automatically assigned for late work. Note that you will not be able to earn back any points lost because of a late submission penalty; in other words, the highest grade you will be able to earn on a late assignment is a 90%.

Assignment 4: Your presentations are needed in order to foster a fruitful dialogue and reflection for the rest of the class. Therefore, late presentations are not accepted for grade. If you are unable to submit on a given deadline because of a planned outage, I expect that you will figure out how to get the assignment in early. That said, this assignment is required for completing the class, so even though it will not be graded, it **MUST** be submitted in order to pass the class. If there is an emergency, please communicate with me as soon as possible.

PLEASE NOTE: all Rutgers students are able to download Microsoft Office products for free. Please visit getoffice.rutgers.edu to download these products.

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

Please be aware that only major assignments are listed in the table below. There will also be weekly participation assignments or reflections on a weekly basis. 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.

Module/Topic	Reading	Assignments
Part I: Who we mean when we say “adult learner”		
1. Course Introduction: What is Adulthood? (6/1 – 6/6)	Merriam and Caffarella, Chapter 3, Adult Learners: Who participates and Why Lee, The Moment I Knew I was an Adult Hansman, C.A. and Mott, V.M. Adult Learners. From <i>The Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education</i>	

	<p>OPTIONAL (for those who have not yet taken Intro). Boucouvalas, M., and Lawrence, R.L. <i>Adult Learning from The Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education</i>.</p>	
<p>2. Learners and Learner Diversity (6/7 – 6/13)</p>	<p>Merriam & Bierema Ch. 12, p. 238-247</p> <p>Sheared, V. (1994). Giving voice: An inclusive model of instruction—a womanist perspective. <i>New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education</i>, 1994(61): 27-37.</p> <p>Harper, L. (2001). Be My Own Eyes: A Story of Learning and Culture. In Sheared, V. and Sissel P.A. (Eds). <i>Making Space: Merging Theory and Practice in Adult Education</i>.</p>	
<p>Part II: Factors that shape how we approach adult learners</p>		
<p>3. Cognition and the Adult Brain (6/14 – 6/20)</p>	<p>Merriam and Bierema, Chapter 9: The Brain and Cognitive Functioning</p> <p>Taylor, K. and Marienau, C. (2016). The Learning, Changing Brain. <i>In Facilitating Learning with the Adult Brain in Mind : A Conceptual and Practical Guide</i>, John Wiley & Sons.</p>	<p>Assignment 1: Context Paper Due 6/20</p>
<p>4. Motivation and Learning (6/21 – 6/27)</p>	<p>Merriam and Bierema, Chapter 8: Motivation and Learning</p> <p>Kaplan, A. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation"</p> <p>Pink [video]: The Puzzle of Motivation</p>	

<p>5. Barriers and Resistance to Learning (6/28 – 7/4)</p>	<p>Brookfield, S.D. (1990). <i>The skillful teacher: On technique, trust, and responsiveness in the classroom</i>. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ch 4 - Ch 11 <p>Dirkx, J.M. (2008). The meaning and roles of emotion in adult learning. <i>New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education</i>, 2008(120), pp 7-18.</p>	
<p>6. The Value of Critical Thinking (7/5 – 7/11)</p>	<p>Merriam and Bierema, Chapter 11: Critical thinking and critical perspectives</p> <p>Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In <i>Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education</i>, pp. 137-146.</p>	<p>Assignment 2: Adult Learner Autobiography DUE 7/11</p>
Part III: Theories and approaches of learning in adulthood		
<p>7. Andragogy (7/12 – 7/18)</p>	<p>Merriam & Bierema, Chapter 3: Andragogy</p> <p>Chan, S. (2010). Applications of andragogy in multi-disciplined teaching and learning</p> <p>St. Clair, R. (2002). Andragogy Revisited: Theory for the 21st Century?</p>	
<p>8. Self Directed Learning (7/19 – 7/25)</p>	<p>Merriam & Bierema, Chapter 4: Self-directed learning</p>	<p>Assignment 3a: Theory Presentations (SDL)</p>
<p>9. Learning from Experience (7/26 – 8/1)</p>	<p>Merriam and Bierma, Chapter 6: Experience and Learning</p> <p>Dewey, Experience and Education. In <i>Selected Writings and Philosophies on Adult Education</i>, pp. 27-30.</p>	<p>Assignment 3b: Theory Presentations (LFE)</p>

<p>10. Transformative Learning (8/2 – 8/8)</p>	<p>Merriam and Bierema, Chapter 5: Transformative Learning</p> <p>Baumgartner, Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning from 1975 to Present. In <i>The Handbook of Transformative Learning</i>, pp. 99-115.</p>	<p>Assignment 3c: Theory Presentations (TL)</p>
<p>11. Adult Developmental Theories (8/9 – 8/15)</p>	<p>Merriam, S.B., Caffarella, R.S., and Baumgartner, L. M., Chapter 12</p> <p>Drago-Severson, E. (2009). Leading Adult Learning. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive Development Theory: An Introduction (pp. 36-54) 	
<p>Part IV: Conclusions</p>		
<p>12. Course Reflections (8/16 – 8/18)</p>		<p>Assignment 4: Theory Reflection Paper</p> <p>DUE 8/18</p>