Northwest Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 6
Issue 1 *Northwest Passage: Journal of
Educational Practices*

Article 10

January 2008

The Child Within: A Case Study of Adult Learning

Albert H. Fein
Gonzaga University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/nwjte>

Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Fein, Albert H. (2008) "The Child Within: A Case Study of Adult Learning," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2008.6.1.10>

This open access Article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](#). All documents in PDXScholar should meet [accessibility standards](#). If we can make this document more accessible to you, [contact our team](#).

The Child Within: A Case Study of Adult Learning

Alber H. Fein, Ph.D.,
Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington

Perhaps the most compelling reason for providing training is to try to change people's behavior in some fashion. (Cullen & Fein, 2005, p. 13)

Introduction

After devoting 30 years to a career in K-12 education, both as a teacher and administrator, seven years ago I joined the ranks of higher education to teach adults. When I began teaching pre-service and in-service teachers, I assumed that good teaching was good teaching, whether my students were adults or children. I have learned from my experiences that I was only partially correct. Adult learners do have unique needs and perspectives that are quite distinct from young learners (Knowles, 1980).

The case described herein is the result of a class assignment in a course called Advanced Teaching Strategies, part of a Masters in Leadership and Administration program offered by Gonzaga University. My students engage in a "new learning" project as the first assignment in the course, designed to place these teachers in a learning situation out of their comfort zone with the intent of reminding them what their own students experience every day. Following their new learning efforts, these professional graduate students write a guided reflection about their new learning experience and present what

they learned to their peers. Their reflections have taught me a great deal about the nuances of adult learners.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theorist Malcolm Knowles stated in *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (1990) that despite the fact that adult education had been a human concern for centuries, little thought or research about adult learners existed. Knowles pointed out that great ancient teachers such as Cicero, Confucius, Jesus, Plato, and Socrates "perceived learning to be a process of active inquiry, not of passive reception of transmitted content. Accordingly, they invented techniques for actively engaging learners in inquiry" (p. 27). Inquiry took various forms, according to Knowles—the case or parable method used by the Chinese and Hebrews, the Socratic method favored by the Greeks, and the Romans' more confrontational method of stating and defending a position.

Monastic schools, which first appeared in the seventh century, may have been the first organized training programs for children (Knowles, 1990). Eventually *pedagogy*—a set of assumptions about teaching and learning—were

formed; a set of assumptions that dominated educational thought for centuries and formed the foundation of educational systems for both children and adults. Not until the beginning of the twentieth century did new investigations into *andragogy*—the art and science of adult learning—begin (Knowles, 1980). Early adult education researchers relied on psychology for much of their understanding and, as a result, much of the early research was “behavioristic in design, and often insights about adult learning were extrapolated from research with children or research that placed adults under the same conditions as children” (Merriam, 2001, p. 4). Although many articles outlining principles of adult education appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, Knowles (1980) points out that no attempt had been made to merge these principles into a unified theory until the 1960s when research into the “internal process of adult learning” (Knowles, 1980, p. 42) was developed.

Houle (1961) described three motivational styles in adult learners: (1) “goal-oriented” learners use education to accomplish specific personal objectives, (2) “activity-oriented” learners take part in learning experiences for social contacts, and (3) “learning-oriented” adults seek knowledge for its own sake. Tough’s (1979) research into how adults learn naturally without the aid of a teacher provided the basis for modern models of adult learning. His studies determined that 70% of adult learning occurred outside of educational institutions because adults preferred to be free of time constraints in their learning, and that assistance from non-professional helpers (family members, friends, or colleagues) occurred in about 20% of adult learners, only about 5% used professional helpers. Tough found that adult learners prefer to be self-directed, active, in control of the learning process, and engaged in learning that relates directly to their lives.

Knowles (1990) makes several assumptions about adult learners.

1. The need to know: Adult learners need to know why they are required to learn something before they undertake to learn it.
2. Learner self-concept: Adults need to be responsible for their own decisions and need to be treated as being capable of self-direction.
3. Role of the learners’ experience: Adult learners have a variety of life experiences that are rich resources.
4. Readiness to learn: Adults are ready to learn things they need to know in order to cope with life situations.
5. Orientation to learning: Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive it will help them to perform tasks they confront in their life situations. (p. 57)

Similarly, Lieb (1991) identified six factors that serve as motivation for adult learners:

1. Social relationships: To make new friends, to meet a need for associations and friendships.
2. External expectations: To comply with instructions from someone else; to fulfill the expectations or recommendations of someone with formal authority.
3. Social welfare: To improve ability to serve mankind, prepare for service to the community, and improve ability to participate in community work.
4. Personal advancement: To achieve higher status in a job, secure professional advancement, and stay abreast of competitors.
5. Escape/Stimulation: To relieve boredom, provide a break in the routine of home or work, and

provide a contrast to other exacting details of life.

6. Cognitive interest: To learn for the sake of learning, seek knowledge for its own sake, and to satisfy an inquiring mind. (p. 2)

Lieb states that adult learners have clear expectations about learning and that they are often motivated by self-interest. Therefore, according to both Lieb and Knowles, adults are often pragmatic about learning. "Adults are motivated to learn those things that will be helpful in solving problems or will provide what Knowles calls an *internal payoff*" (Cullen & Fein, 2005, p. 12).

Caudron (2000) found that the most memorable adult learning experiences came from personal experiences, from working with other adults, and from mentoring received from others they perceived to be knowledgeable and wise. Unfortunately, "over 70% of current training in organizations [is] still the talking head variety, with a trainer in front of a classroom and the trainees sitting and listening passively" (Cullen & Fein, 2005, p. 12). I hoped that the new learning assignment would in some way improve the teaching practice of my students through a self-selected learning task that was decidedly not of the "talking head" variety.

The "New Learning" Assignment

Students in Advanced Learning Strategies are asked to select a relatively complex topic to study about which they know nothing or almost nothing. They are usually given about four weeks to learn, after which they are asked to write a guided reflection and to demonstrate their mastery or progress toward their learning goals and to share their learning "journeys." Students are given complete freedom to choose any topic.

Immediately after giving the assignment and reviewing the requirements and timelines, I ask my students how they first felt upon hearing the assignment—usually on a scale of one to five. Most admit to identifying their initial reaction to the assignment on the one and two—the "oh #@*%"—end of the scale. Generally, a few raise their hands at the four and five—positive and enthusiastic—end of the scale.

Students' initial motivation for the assignment is mostly driven by external expectations. They have to comply with instructions of someone with formal authority—their professor, and the responses at the lower level of the informal response scale reflect this reaction. Graduate students enroll in such programs to fulfill personal missions—many related to social welfare or to achieve a personal advancement. Our students are mostly teachers who wish to "achieve higher status in a job, secure professional advancement" (Lieb, p. 2) as school administrators. Once they move past external expectations as a motivation, however, most of the students draw upon other motivations: social welfare ("What will the experience of being a learner teach me about being a better educator?"), escape/stimulation ("If I have to do this assignment, I might as well have fun."), or cognitive interest ("I've always wanted to know more about X topic. Now's my chance!"). Most students ultimately chose a topic based on these latter motivations (rather than to fulfill external expectations).

Discussion

I found that the students in the Advanced Learning Strategies course preferred to learn for reasons that satisfied their real needs, chose topics in part based on self-assessment of their abilities to learn, drew upon their life experiences, chose learning something that helped them cope with life situations because they were ready to do so, and were mostly motivated to learn "real" tasks.

These findings echo many of Knowles' (1980) assumptions about adult learners. Some students sought out adults mentors; others took pride in figuring things out for themselves. Despite a history of successes, many—if not most—of these adult students reported feeling vulnerable when placed in circumstances of new learning.

Need

Several students chose topics that met the assignment requirements and also addressed other needs. One student chose to learn chess “because it was a way to spend time with my fourteen-year-old son” (#4, p. 1) and also because he wanted his children “to see that learning doesn't always involve an older person teaching a younger person” (#4, p. 1). A student “wanted to find an interest that I can share with my 73 year-old grandmother (#18, p. 1). Professional goals guided many of the topic choices: “I had to learn how to use Excel so that I could teach it to my students” (#6, p. 1). Most students gave multiple reasons for their choices of new learning topics. One hoped to enhance her relationship with her daughter while meeting the nine-year-old's real need for assistance, and also hoped to resolve her own long-time fear of horses:

I have always feared horses, although as a girl I longed to ride one, and I have felt rather helpless and useless as my daughter's instructor takes her through her paces each week. Recently, I decided to get more involved but my reserve with horses has kept me from doing much. Therefore, when the opportunity to challenge myself to learn something new arose, I decided almost immediately that learning to independently tack a horse—while my daughter is still too small to do it herself—would be something of benefit to both of us. (#3, p. 1)

Perhaps one of the most compelling examples of satisfying a practical need while meeting the requirements of the “new learning” assignment was shared by a student who wrote:

When I left class last month, I was very excited about our “New Learning” project and had several ideas about what I might take on as my project. These plans dissolved . . . when my doctor . . . informed me that complications in my pregnancy had developed. My son was born a short time later—happy, healthy, and hungry. . . . It occurred to me that I had been working on a new learning project. I selected the topic (or it selected me) “feeding a newborn baby” out of necessity. It has been the only new learning in my life during the last months. There has been absolutely no room for anything else! (#24, p. 1)

Learner Self-Concept

Bandura's (1962) theory of Social Learning explains how a human's sense of efficacy about a skill or knowledge area directly impacts the willingness to learn a new task or, in the face of difficulty, to persist. One student's readiness to learn how to use a serger reflected her strong sense of efficacy in sewing, but low efficacy about using serger due to her lack of experience:

I have had a serger [a sewing machine that overcasts the raw edges of a fabric with a V-shaped stitch] for nearly four years and I have been afraid to use it. While I am a fairly confident sewer, I have avoided using my serger since it is something I do not know how to use. (#2, p. 1)

Students often selected topic areas to overcome

what they considered personal weaknesses. One chose cooking “because I have never been a good cook. I would like to be a better cook. I have avoided learning about cooking because I find it frustrating, disappointing, expensive, and time consuming” (#16, p. 1). Another selected a topic—creating a Ukrainian egg—in her words, as a “leap of faith for me because I consider myself to have little artistic ability, and second, because my friend is an expert in this field” (#8, p. 1). Despite her low sense of efficacy as an artist, her “leap of faith” was buoyed by the knowledge that she had a mentor. Another student, also plagued by low self-efficacy as an artist, also chose a new learning target outside of her comfort zone. She wrote:

I have always believed that I completely lack the natural ability to create anything artistic. I have heard some art teachers claim that *anyone* can draw once they learn a few simple skills, and I have always been intrigued by this idea. . . . My lack of ability and confidence in art results in a poor art program in my grade four class. This year I have some very artistic students (and a few like myself who claim to hate art and say they can't draw). I would love to be able to bring the keen artists along in their art skills, as well as motivate and encourage a love of art and drawing in those students who don't believe they can do it. I think the first step in this process is building my own skills, changing my own attitudes, and creating confidence in my own ability to create and teach art. (#10, p. 1)

Although this teacher's sense of efficacy as an artist was quite low, her willingness to take a risk and to serve as a model for her students—especially those like herself—suggests a high self-efficacy as a teacher. Her “I can do this” attitude allowed her to select what was, for her, a risky topic.

Self-image or family norms may have influenced one student's choice to learn to garden. After purchasing her grandparent's home, the garden fell into disrepair. She wrote, “Our yard began to look worse and worse. I felt like I was disgracing the memory of my grandpa and his house” (#20, p. 1). The self-concept also influences adults during the learning process. One student wrote, “The first major challenge was the little voice inside me that kept telling me this was not a good idea” (#10, p. 5).

Role Of The Learners' Experience

Adults often draw on their life experiences when learning something new. Past experiences influenced one student's choice of new learning topic:

I decided to learn how to play the guitar because it something I have always wanted to do. As a child I learned to play the piano, but hated every minute of it. I wish I had learned to appreciate music when I was a child because now I would love to be able to play an instrument. (#5, p. 1)

Interestingly, this same student—physically adept especially in sports—discovered that his physical ability did not easily transfer to the guitar. He commented, “I never imagined that it would be so difficult to play the guitar. Getting my fingers to go to specific locations and to play the strings on command was difficult” (#5, p. 3). In many ways his past successes created an expectation of easy success on the guitar; that the new skill was difficult was very disconcerting to him.

Knowles' (1990) point on this characteristic goes beyond how past experience influence our attitude toward new learning. He states, “Adult learners have a variety of life experiences that are a rich resource” (p. 57)—in contrast to children

or young adults; adult learners want their experiences to be acknowledged and respected. Adults possess a larger storehouse of experiences than do young learners, which according to Gagné (1985) makes knowledge acquisition easier for adults because there are more ways to create relationships and meaning.

Past experiences also served as a gateway to new learning. Two students who chose to learn to quilt had already acquired many of the basic skills they needed because they were already competent sewers. Similarly, learning about perennial gardening was enhanced by previous knowledge: "I have done a lot of gardening using annuals and have a good knowledge of how to plant and care for containers of annual flowering plants" (#22, p. 1). Experience also contributed to the process of learning. Adult learners coped with challenges because they had done so in the past. One student stated:

I have done this type of learning many times, and previous experience has taught me that if I don't understand something right away to leave it and come back to it later. Often the question answers itself later on as I spend more time with the material. (#6, p. 4)

The student who wrote, "Previous knowledge can accelerate learning" (#18, p. 11) unknowingly acknowledged the advantage adults have over children in new learning.

Readiness to Learn

Students selected topics that were relevant to real life problems, echoing Knowles' (1990) suggestion that adults learn "in order to cope with life situations" (p. 57). For example, over the years that I have given this assignment, many students have chosen to learn Power Point. This topic is often selected because it will be useful to the student in the master's program

and beyond. Several students decided to learn something that they had intended to learn, but had delayed learning for some reason. For example, one student decided to learn how to use a digital camera "we were given for Christmas two years ago" (#7, p. 1). One could argue that all the students represented here were "ready" to learn about their chosen topics or they would not have selected the topics.

Orientation to Learning

Adult learners prefer learning that is practical and usable. This observation was borne out by many students who selected topics they deemed practical. One student described just such a reason for his selection of a new learning topic:

Recently, I became more directly involved in teaching on-line courses. Because of this, and because I administer my district's on-line programs, it made sense for me to learn how to use Virtual Class software which enhances synchronous on-line learning. The new learning assignment provided me with an opportunity to simultaneously satisfy a professional and a master's degree goal. (#13, p. 1)

Students frequently commented on the utility of their learning: "I will definitely use what I have learned" (#2, p. 6). Being required to share his new learning with his peers motivated one student: "Knowing I needed to demonstrate my learning to others was in itself a resource. It provided motivation and purpose to what I was doing" (#13, p. 2).

Mentors and Guides

Caudron (2000) found that working with other adults or being mentored by people they perceived to be knowledgeable and wise was

an important way adults learn. My students often looked to other adults for their learning; however, many also chose to rely on their own resources.

When I asked students to describe the process of learning—what sources they considered, and rejected or actually used—many sought other adults. However, some felt reluctant to ask for help either because they thought they should be able to learn on their own, or perhaps because norms of reciprocity created an unwanted feeling of debt. One student said, “I don’t mind calling on colleagues for a quick question, but I don’t like to ask for anything too time demanding. . . I don’t like to feel indebted to people” (#6, p. 2). Another stated, “I didn’t want to feel like a nuisance” (#1, p. 4). One student, who did choose to learn from adult mentor in a class setting said, “I felt like a demanding (and incompetent) student. I actually stopped asking questions because I felt like I was being a burden” (#8, p. 5). Another stated, “I feel badly when asking others to assist me” (#12, p. 4).

Students who did use other adults in their new learning often did so because of the ease of access to information and assistance: “I found I greatly preferred having a person beside me” (#14, p. 4). The ability to get direct feedback was an important factor in the learning process. Sometimes feedback came from a tutor or mentor and sometimes through practice. One student wrote, “The computer . . . allowed me to . . . replay moves in order to learn from my mistakes” (#4, p. 4). Another student, however, found a tutor more helpful than a computer tutorial because it “seemed to take it for granted that I had more know-how than I did” (#7, p. 5). This student preferred “an hour session with my brother-in-law” (#7, p. 2).

Mentors not only provided correction, they also encouraged. One student appreciated

receiving praise: “I noticed I liked a lot of positive reinforcement and that I actually looked forward to it” (#5, p. 5). Adults also need a certain degree of grace from their mentors. One stated, “I was allowed to make mistakes (albeit small ones) and not feel like a failure. This really encouraged me to keep going and not lose hope or confidence” (#9, p. 7). However, adults are sensitive to criticism. One adult student wrote, “A small criticism may seem small to a teacher, but it may be huge for the student. Also a small word or note of praise (especially when specific) can motivate and improve self-esteem of the student” (#14, p. 7). Mentors also sometimes spurred learners to do more than the learners expected or helped them to realistically adjust their expectations.

One student was reminded by her new learning experience that “simply saying *try again* is not sufficient; students need specific feedback about how to improve”[italics original] (#7, p. 8). Students described feeling trust and confidence in their mentors, yet even when working without mentors, students often relied on others when they encountered problems. One student wrote, “When [written] instructions were unclear, I asked my mom or my aunt, [both of whom] have more experience than I do” (#16, p. 3).

Lieb (1991) identified social contact as a motivation for adult learning. Although that was not the initial reason for choosing to learn how to play the guitar, it became an important factor for one student. He wrote:

I found that the lessons were successful because they were fun, and the three of us enjoyed our time together. We have even named it “Boys Night” so the wives are aware it is something we want to continue to do on a regular basis. (#5, p. 2)

Certainly, learning with a mentor has a social

aspect. Many students, however, preferred learning on their own.

Learning Alone

Adults are often self-reliant in their approaches to learning. One wrote, “I learn best when I control my known learning, when I set the pace, determine my needs, and make my own judgments about what to work on or when to move to the next level of difficulty” (#4, p. 10). Another wrote, “I like independent learning, figuring things out for myself, taking time to learn the things that I think will be useful” (#6, p. 2). Learning alone also protects adults from exposing their vulnerabilities. A student said, “I preferred to work alone on this new learning venture so that I didn’t experience the performance anxiety that certainly would have been present had I had a live teacher” (#10, p. 3). Some students may have had brief contact with another adult but preferred learning independently. For example, one student relied on a manual and “the Internet to provide basic information” (#2, p. 2), and spoke to another “teacher at the middle school for some pointers” (#2, p. 2). Control and ease of getting information were also important factors in adult learning. In attempting to learn chess, one student rejected family members as teachers because they wanted to play more briskly and were reluctant to share their strategies. The student found using the computer enabled her to “sit for as long as I needed to figure out all the possibilities and then make my move” (#4, p. 4).

The Child Within: Adult Vulnerability

Although I found that students’ reflections on the new learning experience validated many of Knowles’ (1990) propositions about adult learners, I also found a vulnerability in adult learners not addressed by Knowles. The adult learners in this case study addressed four issues: 1) time, 2) fear, 3) expectations, and 4)

distance (in time) from school.

Time was a major concern expressed by my adult student learners—scarcity of time being the major issue. One student’s comment was typical: “The biggest challenge I had was time!” (#14, p. 4). Deadlines—students were asked to learn as much as they could in a few weeks—created pressure for some: “I learned that feeling time pressure and stress makes it harder to learn” (#14, p. 6). Time factors increase stress and anxiety about learning because today’s adults are usually overbooked. Self-awareness about how to budget learning time contributed to one student’s success: “I didn’t want to spend too much time at the initial stage. I knew it was important for my motivation level to just ‘dig in’ and get started” (#10, p. 2). Adults are results-oriented and action-oriented. Too much time spent on prerequisites may interfere with new learning; too little time on basics can also lead to frustrations for adult learners.

Fear played a role for many students both in their choices of topic or when fearful feelings arose during the learning. Students often decided to tackle topics about which they felt fearful, and students often chose to learn the skills specifically to overcome fear. One chose to learn to tack a horse “because I was *afraid* [italics original]” (#3, p. 5). Another learned to ride a Hobie [A type of one-person water craft] “because I felt intimidated by the wind and the waves and because I have had a couple of frightening experiences in a smaller Hobie” (#15, p. 1). Fear (or anxiety) also stemmed from performance anxiety—fear of failure: “I did not realize how important it was for me to do a good job” (#2, p. 7). One student described how anticipating the presentation of his new learning increased his anxiety.

I felt a little overwhelmed, as if I didn’t have the energy left to go the last mile of a long run. At the time I write this,

I am still feeling a little anxious about whether . . . I will be able to demonstrate my learning with the level of expertise I ordinarily expect. (#13, pp. 4-5)

One student astutely acknowledged her fear of failure might interfere with her learning. She wrote, "My first challenge was in getting over my anxiety" (#21, p. 2).

Adults believe they will be successful learners because they have many past experiences of learning successfully. They may also misjudge the difficulty or complexity of learning a new concept or task—and in fact, most of my students seemed surprised when they did not achieve "virtuoso" status. When adults expect new learning to be easier than the reality they confront, the dissonance is often more severe than for individuals who do not hold similar expectations. Adult tolerance for failure—in the face of a history of competence—seems to be low. One student's comment is representative of this response: "I am usually hard on myself. Most of my frustrations were from me feeling slow and dense" (#14, p. 6). Adults often feel performance anxiety even when they are alone: "There is always an audience, even if it is just one in your head" (#3, p. 10).

When adults underestimated the difficulty or complexity of new learning, they often felt overwhelmed and deflated. They either quit in defeat, or adjusted their expectations to a new reality:

I can honestly say that I did have a vision of becoming a great guitarist who could sit around the campfire and play songs all night while my family and friends enjoyed the music. Is this possible? Well, not right now, but I am working on it. (#5, p. 5)

Sometimes making this adjustment is quite

emotionally painful, sometimes physically so. For example, one student wrote: "Initially, I felt a huge amount of frustration. . . . I put myself under a lot of pressure. . . . I had a difficult time convincing myself that I did not need to master Photoshop in five weeks" (#7, p. 6). The physical demands of knitting became apparent to one student who chose that for her new learning: "I became discouraged with my [lack of] progress. After hours of knitting, my hands and fingers killed! . . . I was hoping to make scarves for my friends for Christmas. Yeah, right!" (#21, pp. 3-4). The feeling of failure may be increasingly acute when others of "lesser abilities" seem to demonstrate the new skill with ease.

I was constantly checking to see if I was doing it right and that my creation was "up to par" with everyone else. I thought mine looked like a preschooler had done it, which lessened my desire to continue to completion. I was frustrated by the fact that even my own children produced a better product than me! (#8, p. 4)

Often, only after learning about a topic do adults begin to understand its complexity. One student wrote, after some initial learning, "I felt sometimes overwhelmed by the enormous capabilities of the program" (#1, p. 2). Others stated, "I was a little too ambitious" (#2, p. 4). "I found the amount of information needed in order to begin playing the game was a bit overwhelming" (#4, p. 6). Students often expressed surprise by the complexity of the learning. A new learning task as seemingly simple as painting a kitchen elicited this discovery: "I never thought there would be so much work to be done *before* I even got to start painting [*italics original*]" (#9, p. 4). The more self-awareness adults seemed to have, the better they could adjust their expectations:

I usually limit myself to activities [at] which I am fairly sure I can succeed. .

. . . I have to admit that when I started this project, I had pretty high hopes of what I might achieve. . . . I was quick to want to give up when this task did not come easily. . . . It didn't take me long to realize that I would have to be satisfied with small signs of improvement rather than mastery. (#10, pp. 9-10).

Even teachers who work with children in schools for years forget what it is like to be a student. The more removed adults are from their own experiences of school, the more they overlook some of the nuances of the experiences. One of the main purposes for giving the new learning assignment is to give teachers the opportunity to viscerally revisit the experience of being a learner. The degree of success in achieving this goal is directly related to the students' willingness to place themselves out of their comfort zones. The greater the personal risk, the more the new learning assignment serves its intended purpose. What follows are some of the insights teachers expressed as a result of their new learning experiences.

Many of my students wrote that the new learning assignment made them more aware of the importance of "accommodating the needs of my students and to allow them more choice in certain projects" (#19, p. 4). "I learned how vulnerable I can be" (#24, p. 8). "It is easy to forget how much time is required to assimilate new information" (#17, p. 10). "I learned that learning something new, while it can be exciting, is also very tiring" (#2, p. 7). "I was reminded of the need to focus education on the needs of the individual and to respect their individual learning style" (#3, p. 10). A teacher of "special needs" students wrote: "I learned how traumatizing learning can be. If what I experienced in one afternoon was something I had to experience daily, I'd give up too" (#8, p. 8).

Although teachers understand that mastery requires multiple exposures, my

adult students sometimes expected more of themselves: "I was sometimes discouraged with my own regression of learning. I would often forget things I thought I knew well" (#4, p. 8). One teacher was reminded by her new learning experience that "sometimes allowing students to "fail" or not instantly master a skill may give them time to fully understand the skill. I have become more patient and less ready to jump in and help when a student is stuck" (#16, p. 5). Another wrote: "I will definitely stop saying how easy a concept is, rather, I will let my students experience success for themselves" (#19, p. 8).

Just because I think the task is simple or achievable does not necessarily mean that the student feels that way about it. It may very well be that the task needs to be made smaller, the vision needs to be articulated or adjusted, or the actual goal needs to be changed in order to help the students feel that they can do the thing that the learning requires. On the other hand, it is achievement that builds self-confidence. (#15, p. 6)

One student wrote about the new learning assignment, "I thought of this activity as a journey. I am happy with the outcome, but I really did not know what to expect" (#12, p. 6). Although adults are often results-oriented, one student wrote, "I learned that the journey is often more important than the destination" (#8, p. 9).

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1962). *Social Learning through Imitation*. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE.
- Caudron, S. (2000). "Learners speak out." *Training and Development*, 54(4), 52-57.
- Cullen, Elaine T., Fein, Albert H. (2005) *Tell me*

- a story: Why stories are essential to effective safety training.* (Report of Investigation 9664 Publication No. 2005-152). Cincinnati, OH: DHHS (NIOSH).
- Gagne', E. D. (1985). *The cognitive psychology of school learning*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Houle, C. (1961). *The inquiring mind*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Knowles, M. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge Books.
- Knowles, M. (1990). *The adult learner: A neglected species* (rev. ed.) Huston, Texas: Gulf Publishing.
- Lieb, S. (1991). *Principles of adult learning*. Retrieved July 2003, from <http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committee/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2htm>.
- Merriam, S. (2001). Androgogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (San Francisco), 89, 3-13.
- Rogers, C. (1969). *Freedom to learn*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Tough, A. (1979). *The adult's learning projects*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.