

STRATEGIES FOR PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION⁷ FOR ADULT LEARNERS

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Abstract

The strategies for participatory education for adult learners are the innovative ways of getting the teacher and the adult learner to cooperatively plan and implement learning activities. These strategies involve the selection of what to teach and how teaching should take place. Novel ways of making instruction easy and beneficial are planned, implemented and cooperatively evaluated.

Introduction

Strategies for participatory education for adult learners is an attempt to bring together innovative practices that involve adult learners and educator determining what to teach and how teaching should be done for the purpose of achieving the objectives of instruction. This involves novel ways of learning to make the job of instruction and learning easy and beneficial. These are, in other words, steps in making adult teaching and learning progressive. Opportunities which will give learners the chance to make progress towards stated objectives are used to make learning challenging. This follows the thought of Nicholls and Nicholls (1976) that pupils' progress towards the objectives is the main criterion for determining the success of a learning activity. Offorma (1994) notes that involvement of learners in planning their learning makes their learning meaningful and interesting and enhances their retention of materials as they make their own association. Strategies for participatory education will ensure that the interests, aspirations, needs, abilities, attitudes, aptitudes, etc. of adult learners are adequately met.

Novel Strategies for Participatory Education

The strategies for participatory education for adult learners include the following:

- (i) Involving adult learners in planning the curriculum,
- (ii) Use of methods that ensure adult learner participation.
 - ii) Adult learner involvement in selecting instructional materials.
 - iv) Involvement of adult learners in productive learning activities and in sharing benefits from such activities.
- (v) Use of textbooks with local background/use of local materials for instruction.
- (vi) Involvement of adult learners in evaluation of learning activities.

Involving Adult Learner in Planning the Curriculum

Co-operative planning involves both the teacher and the learner in planning learning activities. **Co-operation** is important at the various stages of curriculum planning starting with the selection of objectives and ending with curriculum evaluation (Offorma, 1994). Adult learners can be involved in the selection of objectives if they are to be asked to say what they would want to learn from the topic (Nwana, 1977; Offorma, 1990, m Offorma, 1994).

In the words of Obibuaku (1983) while discussing the need for adult learners participation in planning extension education, extension programmes are developed for the benefit of the people. Ideally, the involvement of local people becomes an indispensable aspect of a programme and the best programmes are those determined by the local people and extension staff working together. People appreciate a programme better and are more likely to lend it support if they participated in planning it.

If the agency engineering a development programme learns to identify and work with local leaders, their success is enhanced (Obibuaku, 1983).

The task of participatory education involves participatory planning. The task involves all who are concerned with adult learner education. From the adult learner, through the instructor to the society of which the adult learner is member and within which he functions.

Adult learners can be involved in planning or selecting learning experiences or activities. They can suggest the activities they would like to engage in. In so doing the teacher identifies their areas of interest and plans teaching and learning activities to suit them.

At the evaluation level, the teacher as well as the adult learners are participant in evaluating. Each adult's work is compared together with the works of others for grading and scoring or for determining the level of achievement reached. Involvement of adult learners in planning their own learning helps to make learning meaningful and interesting.

Using Methods that Allow Adult Learner Participatory Education

In this regard, Obibuaku (1983) cited Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP) which rested in the application of participatory education in farmer education as well as in all activities of the NORCAP. He noted that this principle was used in 1964 by Shell Uboma to secure the confidence of the local people. Both the NORCAP and the Shell Uboma not only planned with the farmers but also executed the planned activities with the farmers so that finally the confidence and rapport built up facilitated the finishing up of dams, roads, wells, etc. Meetings were held where the projects were discussed and responsibilities assigned.

Those methods that will ensure appreciable learner participation in adult learning programmes include conference method, individualized increased attention span, high-level motivation and interest of learners to engage in education processes.

Involving Adult Learners in Selecting Instructional Materials

In selecting instructional materials, the learners can also be co-opted to participate in making available the necessary teaching materials, especially, if the materials are available in their community (Offorma, 1994).

Adult learners, in the words of Nicholls and Nicholis (1976), may indirectly bring about changes in what is learnt due to their previous experiences. These experiences could be brought to bear in selecting learning experiences and in the selection of instructional materials. Adult learners can identify the weaknesses and strengths of the existing curriculum and could select learning experiences and/or instructional materials that will best serve the purpose of achievement of objectives.

When adult learners are involved in the selection of these materials, there is greater willingness on their part to effectively participate in what is going on during the process of learning.

This tendency brings about achievement of objectives of instruction, new information for family and community improvement. Therefore, their participation at the level of selection and organizing materials for instruction will nevertheless provide great opportunity of enriching what is learnt as well as facilitating the process of learning and instruction.

Involvement of Adult Learners in Productive Activities and in Sharing the Benefits of the Activities

Adult learners exhibit high morale when they participate in enjoying the rewards of an activity which processes they were involved in. In agriculture, gain yielding learning activities such as poultry raising, arable or plantation crop production, should have their gains co-operatively shared by learners and instructors. The process ensures that adult learners appreciate the essence of such activities as well as freely showing up to participate in future activities. In this way, learning is effectively enhanced.

Obibuaku (1983) notes that adults, in learning innovations and new techniques in farming would more likely have interest and settle down if incentives were offered them. Programme participants have come to accept modern farming due to the increased benefit they enjoyed (Obibuaku, 1983).

Use of Textbooks with Local Background/Use of Local Materials for Instruction

Onwuka (1994) defined education as the transmission of culture from one generation to another. He added that curriculum must be a reflection of what people in the society feel, believe, and do. Citing Wheeler (1978), Onwuka (1994) stated that as students advance into adulthood, education should develop their capacities for thought, judgment, enjoyment and curiosity, sense of responsibilities towards their work and towards other people and some understanding of the physical world and the human society in which they grow up. In effect, the content of general education would include those forms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which will motivate and control

conduct in the society.

Textbooks and materials for instruction that depict the ideals emphasized in the culture are included for the purpose of getting adult learners interested in what is learnt as well as making their learning of immediate benefit to them and their society. Teaching methods as well should be conditioned by the norms of the society and in order to help learners to see meaning and to cultivate understanding of what is learned.

Involvement of Adult Learners in Evaluating Learning Activities

According to Mkpa (1987), evaluation is complex and should involve all staff in the school. Offorma (1994) puts it that cooperative evaluation affords opportunity for greater efficiency of evaluation because two good heads are better than one. Olaitan (1985) notes that when the learners are given the opportunity to evaluate themselves or compare what they have done with a finished product, learners are induced to strive for perfection in the skills through enhanced individual or group practice.

Offorma (1994) stated that involvement of learners in learning activities-help to make their learning meaningful and interesting. And involvement of adult learners in evaluation of their learning activities enhances their retention of the materials since they can -make their own association by relating what they learn to their personal experiences as well as utilizing from their experiences in making evaluative judgements.

Conclusion

Adult learners have distinct characteristics and for their effective participation in education, learning and instruction must model towards these patterns. Adults would naturally want to see meaning in what is presented to them in order to understand and appreciate its worthwhileness. Adult learning is targeted towards societal challenges and this ensures their willingness to participate in the programme.

The best approach in participatory education for adult learning is to present a wholistic view of a concept. Adult learners want to see through what is taught up to the results and possible benefits of such results. Strategies for participatory education for adult learners will include innovative and creative approaches.

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