Where Universal Design for Learning, The Internet, and Adults Meet:
Exploring the Intersectionality of Equitable Access to Ongoing Learning

Wendy L. Kraglund-Gauthier, Ph.D.

Today's conversation ...

An exploration of the intersectionality that impacts adult learner success in online spaces and of the design and assessment elements that contribute to that success.

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"Only 2 in 5 adults (40%) on average participate in job-related formal or non-formal training. Participation was often highest among individuals who faced low barriers to participation and reap high individual returns, but whose participation yields lower social returns. …

Adults with lower levels of education are much less likely than their more highly educated peers to participate in adult learning. …

Those who do not participate tend to be from socio-economically more disadvantaged groups, have few educational qualifications or who come from households with few educational qualifications, as well as mature individuals. "

OECD. (2021). *OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for life*
https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-outlook-2021_0ae365b4-en

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Constraints

- Inadequate infrastructure

- Financial barriers

- The relevance and quality of the training provided

- Inaccessible learning

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Watershed moment?

Take your pick!

"The effect of the pandemic on jobs is likely going to interact with existing structural changes such as digitalisation and population ageing, reshaping the demand for digital skills and occupations in the healthcare sector.

...Planned investments in green technologies and renewable energy are likely to increase the demand for specialists in those areas, potentially creating skill gaps that lifelong learning systems will be called to fill"(OECD, 2021).

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What is driving engagement?

Improved technology

Increased access

Learner preference

Need for up-skilling

Job transformation

Automation

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eLearning Ecologies

The emergence of participatory technologies into the learning environment has forced educators to think about the learning environment, about who the authorities of knowledge are in the educational environment, and about the ways of collaboration that might enhance education.

The educational institution is no longer the only authority of knowledge as learners might find knowledgeable others and information by themselves online. The traditional bricks-and-mortar spaces of learning and research are giving way to digital spaces in which collaboration and discovery can either thrive or be hindered.

"When institutions at any level become disengaged from the populations they serve, the possibility increases to become self-serving."

(Kieran & Anderson, 2019, p. 1208)

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What does it what it means to create learning resources and learning experiences: Sociotechnical perspectives

Several take a design-based research approach, considering the visual and aesthetics in the learning experience. Others are specifically focused on instructional design, or the design requirements for particular target groups, such as learners with neurodivergence.

- What are the most important components for the design and development of learning experiences?
- What are the invisible issues influencing this development process?
- Who are required to produce the learning activities?
- How might the designed activity be most effectively supported by an instructor?
- How can the effectiveness of the activity be evaluated?
- How can iterative cycles of development, evaluation, and updating be established to create quality enhancement in the learning and development cycles of the learning resource?

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Open educational resources and open teaching

OER disrupts the notion that learning should be controlled by educators and educational institutions, simply because information and "knowledgeable others" are readily available through the click of a button for anyone interested in expanding their horizons.

An open Web helps to ensure all resources are accessible to all, but also leverages the traces that people leave behind when accessing resources that can be freely used by anyone to curate information.

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Ubiquitous Learning, Critical Literacies

Adult learning tends to be self-directed/autonomous, rooted in knowledge and life experiences, goal-oriented, relevancy-oriented, focused on practicality, and collaborative (Knowles, 1988).

People have become digital creators and curators of content, and many can access learning resources online from practically anywhere, at any time. As people can now access educational resources outside the classroom and the formal institution, the need for self-directed learning strategies becomes apparent.

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Applying adult learning theory to the design of online spaces

Pappas (2014) recommended five considerations:

- **Self-concept:** Create learning experiences that offer minimum instruction and maximum autonomy.

- **Adult Learner Experience:** Include a wide range of instructional design models and theories to appeal to varied experience levels and backgrounds.

- **Readiness to Learn:** Utilize social media and online collaboration tools to tie learning to social development.

- **Orientation to Learning:** Emphasize how the subject matter is going to solve problems that an adult learner regularly encounters.

- **Motivation to Learn:** There must be a valid reason behind every eLearning course, module, or educational activity.

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Intersections of UDL and CRT

"Eliminating course and institutional barriers for marginalized students helps to create pathways for additional students with a wider range of "fit" issues. ...When we go beyond accommodations, we create paths that help and support many learners, not just those who need or want accommodations."

(Collier, 2020, p. 17)

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Seeing UDL Through an Equity Lens: Aligned to Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (Tucker-Smith, 2020)

Engagement EQUITY MINDSET	Representation DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES	Action and Expression POWER AND VOICE
Recruiting Interest with Equity Considerations • Cultivating a welcoming environment • Including culturally relevant connections • Confronting microaggressions	**Perception from Diverse Points of View** • Cultural responsiveness in curriculum • Diverse representation in classroom décor • Cultures reflected in learning experiences	**Physical Action in Equitable Spaces** • School and classroom cultural dynamics • Diverse assessment formats • Equitable learner participation
Sustaining Effort & Persistence w/Equity in Mind • Building empathy • Understanding human interconnectedness • Examining privilege	**Language for Cultural Competence** • Share language of cultural proficiency • Routines to facilitate learner discourse • Equal status for diverse language needs	**Expression & Communication for Equitable Voice** • Active student voice and agency • Anti-bias learning environments • Explicit expectations and protocols
Self Regulation as an Equity Practice • Integrating reflective practices • Disrupting implicit bias • Promoting ownership over learning	**Comprehension to Embrace Intellective Capacity** • Attending to information processing • Scaffolding to build intellective capacity • Commitment to higher order thinking	**Executive Functions for Empowerment** • Data from diverse perspectives • Equitable opportunities for rigour • Assessment feedback to foster self-efficacy

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It's about the pedagogical approach to learning ...

The delivery mode for the course or lesson will not change course learning outcomes, but can change how those outcomes are achieved.

Educators who focus on constructivist pedagogical activities can efficiently maximize learner engagement and motivation, and, in turn, their learners feel a sense of connection with educators and classmates.

 The social constructivist educator can create opportunities whereby learners are encouraged to share experiences, and activities are designed to enable students to make meaning based on prior knowledge, experience, and interactions with peers.

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"Resilient societies that maximize human potential require a broad distribution of capabilities and a diversity of talents. ...The global pandemic has made visible the central role of adult education and lifelong learning, as people of all ages now need to learn to create new ways of (re)organizing social, economic and political life."

(UNESCO, 2020, p. 10)

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