Online Learning and Adult Basic Education: A Review of the Literature

by

G. Andrew Page
University of Georgia
College of Education
Department of Adult Education

Abstract

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in the delivery of adult education. As early as 1984, Bates suggested that new technologies promised "a wider range of teaching functions and a higher quality of learning, lower costs, greater student control, more interaction and feedback for students" (p. 223). This paradigm shift has ramifications in all areas of society from the major metropolitan areas to the rural communities. “Technology has contributed to, if not caused, the shift to an information society, which is creating dramatic changes in the workforce…Adult education both reflects and responds to the forces prevalent in the sociocultural context”(Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.23). That shift and the associated complexity is evident in distance learning technology as it is providing some adults with a new and exciting avenue to learn. It is also broadening the gap both educationally and economically between those that have access to computer technology and those that do not. This study looks at the cross disciplinary aspects within fields of instructional technology and adult education. Conceptually, what does current research say about adult learners and their perception to computer mediated communication and distributed learning? Is online learning a means by which systemic problems can be addressed? Does distance learning provide the instructional design, curriculum and support for the rural adult learner? While there has been much research on college students and other populations of learners in metropolitan areas, there is a considerable gap in the literature about the experiences of adults in rural America and their perceptions of online learning.

This study adds to the knowledge base of adult education and instructional technology because it provides conceptual research about the “digital divide” and how that chasm is being addressed. We are currently living in the Age of Information and whether we embrace the diffusion of technology or not it is affecting our lives directly and indirectly. Information is power. This research also helps bridge the gap between our knowledge of how adults learn in new electronic educational setting and the factors that play a crucial role in this domain.

Andy’s Perceived Logical Flow

1. Background of online learning
2. Statistics of online learning
3. Technology Community centers and their problems
4. Digital divide
5. Online learning for everyone? Has the instructional technology advanced to the point that adult basic education learners can be benefited? I think we sometimes forget that Instructional Technology is about the Technology of Instruction, not about media, or computers or delivery systems per se, and that there is
6. Technology and methodology: Research and theory that covers the practical application of the science of instruction and how it is changing to meet the learners need.
7. Systemic Problem with staffing community centers and finding relevant content for adult learners addressed through distance learning. Has the time has arrived?
Comments: I am pondering an analysis of the system dynamics of online learning for low-middle income rural Adults at community centers.

A subset of those dynamics is the emotions, perceptions, and factors contributing to or inhibiting education via online learning. Only the adult learner can tell us if online learning and the interactivity from the technology is effective or not.

Regarding the theoretical framework/perspective, you could say it is post-Critical Theory. We are living in an information age so we’d better learn to adapt to the changes with technology.