EAD 861 Capstone Project

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Question 1

It is not easy to define the adult learner. Experts disagree on what age actually constitutes an adult. It is important to look at general characteristics and attributes of adulthood as well as developmental stage when determining whether an individual has reached this milestone. Each adult involved in learning is a unique individual. As such, they have different motivational needs and reasons for participating. They will all learn differently, which can make defining what adult learning actually is rather challenging. This essay seeks to answer some of these questions and in this process, includes my personal context, teaching within a community college dental hygiene program.

As stated, attaching a concrete age to what constitutes an adult learner is difficult. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) cite a study in which the adult learner is described as at least 21, married, or head of household. In the course lecture notes on definitional issues, it is noted that many federally-funded surveys have considered adult students to be at least 25 years of age. Within the lecture notes, social role is discussed as a defining factor of adulthood. For example, a 19 year old returning home from war overseas and then enrolling in college is going to be different than a 19 year old who is in his/her second year of college. Within our program, there is generally a range of students, ranging from early to middle adulthood. Within this range of ages, there is also a range of behaviors, maturity levels, and learning styles. Instead of assigning a specific age to an adult, it is perhaps more appropriate to look at known characteristics or attributes of adulthood when determining whether an individual as reached adult status.

In her article "Teaching Adults: Is It Different?," Kerka (2002) listed several characteristics that distinguish adult and child learners. Adults are considered autonomous and

independent, whereas children are dependent. Adults have prior learning experiences that they

can resource while learning, children often do not. Adults are more problem-oriented, with less

of a focus on content, while children, by design of the K-12 curriculum, are focused on specific

subject matter. Adults participate in learning voluntarily; children are mandated to participate in

schooling. Adults are intrinsically motivated and children have external motivators, such as

reward or punishment. In general, adults are thought to have more capability for critical thinking

and transformative learning. Within this same article, Kerka (2002) noted there are some

critiques of these defining attributes. For example, at some points in their lives, adults will

possess more of the child-like characteristics and children will sometimes behave according to

the adult characteristics.

Another way of viewing adulthood is through developmental theory. There were several

theories discussed in EAD 861 this semester, however it is not within the scope of this paper to

discuss them all. Instead, I chose the one I feel I can identify the most with and, to me, makes

sense when determining adulthood. This theory is Erikson's psychosocial model of development.

With Erikson's theory, I particularly like that the stages are not strictly based on a specific age.

Instead, a person progresses through these stages as they face different experiences throughout

the lifespan. Interestingly, it is possible for a person to go back to earlier stages, if a conflict

more suited to that developmental period arises or to re-resolve an earlier issue (Merriam et al,

2007, p. 306). Erikson's theory covers three periods of adulthood: early, middle, and late. The

conflicts the adult faces in each of these periods are intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. self-

aborption, and integrity vs. despair. If resolved positively, at the end of each stage, the person

will emerge with wisdom, the ability to love, and willingness to care for future generations

(Boeree, 2006). It is important to include the adolescent stage (five) within this discussion of

adulthood, because some of my younger students will fall within this stage. It is characterized by ego-identity vs. role confusion. In this stage, people struggle with finding who they are and how they fit into society. This is something that I can see in some of my students. When looking at an individual to determine whether or not they are an adult, both adult characteristics and developmental stage should be taken into account. When certain areas are lacking, such as the ability to think critically, we, as instructors, can try to help to build those skills or guide our students into the next developmental stage.

When looking at motivation factors, there are several issues that are important for me to address with my students. Once in the dental hygiene program, most students are motivated to finish. By this time, they have completed many prerequisites and have spent fifty hours observing in a dental office. They want to become dental hygienists for a variety of reasons, including financial, career, and a desire to work in the health field and to help others. As Merriam et al (2007) state, like most adults, many are there for a career transition (p. 63). I feel it is my job to motivate them to do more than simply "pick and flick." I need to help them become clinicians who think critically about patient care and treatment planning. I have to give them the tools to provide appropriate, well thought-out recommendations based on individual patient needs. I want them to understand the role of the dental hygienist in the larger picture of total health care. The challenge is to inspire this in students who often are there simply to make more money or find a different job.

When looking at ways to motivate, I found several principles that I could use. Keller's ARCS (Attention Relevance Confidence Satisfaction) Model of Motivational Design defines many of these. The Learning Theories Knowledge Base (2008) explains the ARCS model. First, it is very important to gain attention from my students. Often the material can be tedious and, at

times, difficult to understand. Using perceptual or inquiry arousal to stimulate interest and

discussion will help to get attention. It is crucial that the students see the relevance of the

material to avoid the question "why do I need to learn this?" As the students progress through the

program, I can build on their previous experiences and learning with the new material being

taught. Many students need confidence building because they are intimidated by the material and

the program. There are many areas within my courses where I can provide opportunities for

small steps of achievement and feedback. In the clinical experience, students have the

opportunity to feel satisfaction as they can begin to use their newly acquired skills.

In addition to Keller's model, Wodlowski (1999) listed several important strategies for

using a motivational framework. These strategies include establishing inclusion, developing

attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence (p. 83). In Vella's (2002) twelve

principles for teaching adults, there are several that are relevant here, including immediacy,

safety, sequence and reinforcement, and sound relationships. By providing a safe and inclusive

learning atmosphere where learners feel comfortable expressing thoughts and opinions, I can

foster critical thinking skills through discussion. I can develop a positive attitude toward learning

and the profession by providing material that has immediate value and relevance to my students.

By using simple to complex sequencing, I can help my students to achieve tasks, building

confidence and feelings of competence. And lastly, by respecting and openly communicating

with my students, I can build strong relationships. By combining Keller's, Wlodkowski's, and

Vella's theories, I feel I can address some of the motivational issues my students face.

Even when sufficiently motivated, however, there still may be barriers that can prevent

my students from completing the program. These can by grouped into two of Cross' types of

barriers: situational and dispositional. Malhotra, Sizoo, and Chorvat (1999) wrote about several

specific issues that fall within these two categories, such as home and work conflicts, questionable relevance of material, low self-confidence and personal priority, and negative attitudes. These are issues that many of my students face. Most have to work while in the program and several have children and other home responsibilities. Some have issues with ability and self-confidence. There are a few with negative attitudes about learning, in general. To help students work through these barriers, I can use some of the motivational techniques discussed above. By building confidence and providing relevance, I can begin to address self-confidence and negative attitude issues. By providing time in class to work on assignments or providing alternative types of activities, beyond writing papers and hand-outs or worksheets, I may be able to reduce some of the out of class time needed. I realize that it's impossible to accommodate everyone and students have to make some sacrifices, but I believe that I can help in alleviating at least some of the barriers my students face.

It is important to consider what it actually means for an adult to learn. This is another concept that is difficult to define. In the most generic sense, learning can be defining as gaining new knowledge. How this is accomplished, though, is viewed through many different theories. Even the location of learning can be called into question. One of the more interesting things I have taken from this class is in the types of learning that can occur. Merriam et al (2007) discuss formal, nonformal, and informal learning (p. 28). When beginning this course, I hadn't really considered adult learning as much more than what takes place in the college setting. It was interesting to read about these other types and to realize that I participate in them constantly. To answer the theory portion of this question, I turned to the traditional learning theories discussed by Merriam et al (2007). The theories that I feel hold relevance for me are behaviorism, humanism, and cognitivism. Behaviorism often underlies career and technical education

programs (p. 296). It is characterized by the shaping of behavior through reinforcement. The

instructor structures the learning environment in order to elicit desired responses (p. 280). This is

definitely a part of the dental hygiene program. We create an environment through which to

teach necessary dental hygiene skills. But we also need to create mature, autonomous clinicians.

The humanist perspective addresses this, by including both affective and cognitive aspects of

learning (p. 283). By using discussion and thought-provoking case studies, we can begin to

develop these skills. Cognitivism adds another important dimension to my field. We need to help

our students "develop the capacity and skills to learn better" (p. 295) both in the program and

afterwards, in order to stay current in the field as lifelong learners. Each of these theories views

the learning process differently. Behaviorism focuses on behavioral change, humanism looks to

personal acts to foster whole person development, and cognitivism works with information

processing to learn through insight, memory, and perception (p. 295). The inclusion of all three

theories is important in achieving the educational goals that I have discussed within this essay:

creating sound clinicians who use critical thinking when decision-making and treatment

planning.

     In summary, even though I work with a range of ages with my students, they are at

different levels of their own adulthood. As such, I need to vary my techniques and motivational

strategies to reach as many of them as possible. I have to understand that they have very real

barriers that may prevent them from progressing as I would like or even from completing the

program. As I address their individual and group needs, I need to work with the different

perspectives available to help create well-rounded clinicians.

Question 3

As adults age, as can be expected, they go through various changes. These changes can be grouped as biological, intellectual, cognitive, and psychosocial. These can all have an effect on the adult learning processes. The brain, as part of the central nervous system, can affect the learning process. Different types of intelligence peak at different times in the life cycle. Cognitive thinking patterns go through different stages and adults progress through psychosocial development as they age. In this essay, each of these areas will be discussed, as well as specific ways in which they affect adult learning.

Merriam et al (2007) defined biological changes as "the physical and biological changes that occur over the lifespan" (p. 300). One area in particular that can have an effect on learning is the central nervous system, comprised of the brain and spinal cord. This system is thought to be the primary biological basis for learning (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 304). In the past, it was assumed that central nervous system function declined over time. Merriam et al (2007) noted that there has been a shift in thinking, however, and it is now thought that aging is a "complex phenomenon characterized by reorganization, optimization, and enduring functional plasticity that can enable the maintenance of a productive—and happy—life" (p. 304). They further discuss some of the changes that actually occur within brain cells. It has been determined that the actual number of cells does decrease over time; however, the connections between them can increase. And deficits in one area of the brain can be made up for by increases in other areas. The brain is a plastic structure, which allows it to retain most of its function (p. 304).

Clemons (2005) discussed the brain in further detail in her research on brain-based learning. She described learning as taking place when two neurons communicate. As they gather new information, the neurons grow dendrites, which change the structure and function of the

brain. As new information and skills are gained over time, the brain will arrange them in its own

meaningful pattern. As a result, all learners learn in different ways based on their unique

experiences, perceptions, and prior knowledge (Introduction, para 3). This summary shows how

important the brain is in the learning process. In fact, it is where learning occurs and this

learning, in turn, makes up the structure of the brain. This information reinforces what is

discussed by Merriam et al (2007) in the plastic nature of the brain. It seems that by continuing

to learn, adults can maintain function in the brain as they age.

Knowing that it is possible to maintain brain function, it is important to look at

intelligence on its own. It would seem that if we are able to continue to "feed" our brain with

new learning, we could increase, or at least maintain, intelligence as we age. Horn and Cattell

were also among the first to discuss intelligence as being composed of multiple factors. They

defined two types of intelligence: fluid and crystallized (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 364). Fluid

intelligence is composed of problem-solving skills, is more abstract, and depends less on formal

education. In contrast, crystallized intelligence is dependent on schooling and is associated with

the acquired knowledge learned. These ideas were further discussed in the lecture PowerPoint on

age-related changes presented in EAD 861. Fluid intelligence emphasizes reasoning ability,

adaptability, and flexibility during problem-solving. Crystallized intelligence emphasizes

comprehension and problem-solving that is based on facts and stimuli learned in school or

through cultural experiences. According to Merriam et al (2007), both of these can be nurtured

throughout age. In the lecture, however, it is noted that fluid intelligence is more likely to peak

during childhood or early adulthood and then to decline in middle adulthood or even earlier.

Crystallized intelligence continues to increase, levels off, but only declines very late in life.

When reading through this material, it makes sense. As people age, they often get set in their

ways and are less likely to be willing to learn new thought patterns. As with the brain, however,

it seems that with effort it is possible to maintain or increase intelligence.

In EAD 861, we were given the opportunity to exercise our fluid intelligence skills. We

were given several problem-based learning scenarios and were asked to work in small groups to

determine potential solutions. The scenarios did not have easy answers and required the

reasoning ability and flexibility of fluid intelligence. After looking at the cases individually, we

then had to work together in our groups. Everyone brought different perspectives and this

required adaptability as we had to listen to each other's opinions and find a way to decide upon a

course of action that, for the most part, reflected everyone's ideas. We were given discussion

prompts throughout the semester that required the use of fluid intelligence as we answered them.

The questions didn't have simple answers based on content, they had to be reasoned through and

required reflection upon our own experiences.

The third way adults change through aging is in cognitive development. Cognitive

development is defined as "how thinking patterns change over time" (Merriam et al, 2007, p.

325). There are several theories within this realm of development, but the one I will focus on is

Perry's Developmental Scheme. Like Erikson, Perry does not give specified time periods when

defining his positions of cognitive development. He described how adults move from simplistic

ways of thinking to more complex thought patterns. In the assigned chapter "Perry's Intellectual

Schemes," the author described Perry's nine positions of cognitive development, as the person

progresses from dualism to an eventual commitment to relativism. In dualism, the learner is

capable of basic right or wrong, good or bad thought patterns. In multiplicity, the idea that there

may be more than one right answer is considered. Relativism follows, where the learner begins

to adopt a way of "understanding, analyzing, and evaluating that requires a radical reperception

of all knowledge and values as contextual and relativistic" (p. 12). Lastly, the learner commits to

relativism, which will impact the way he or she lives. All decisions and understanding of the

world are now based on relativistic thinking. Later in the chapter, the author determines that

most students enter college at stage 2 or 3 and leave somewhere between stages 3 and 5.

Merriam et al (2007) discussed how these cognitive positions can frame how students see

instructors. At the lower positions, students are likely to see teachers as authority figures and

their own role as students is simply to learn what is "right" from what they are being taught. In

the higher positions, students recognize instructors as guides as they see knowledge as contextual

and relativistic (p. 331). Aging comes into play with cognitive development, beyond moving

through the stages. Hood and Deopere found that relativism tends to decrease with age (Merriam

et al, 2007, p. 332). It is thought that this may be from the set ways of thinking adults form over

time, as discussed in the section on intelligence.

     The problem-based learning used in this class reflected relativistic thinking. For each

case, there was more than one right answer. This could be seen in both the small groups and the

overall class when the presentations were presented. The instructors acted as guides throughout

the course. There wasn't a time when the "right" answer to a question or line of thinking was

presented. Instead, we were given material on different theories and ideas and given the

opportunity to form our own opinions, based on the material we read and interacted with. In

addition to following Perry's relativistic thinking, this is also in line with Vella's (2002)

principles of sound relationships and respecting learners as decision makers. Vella discussed the

importance of creating mutual respect by allowing open dialogue and concepts the learner can

work with (p. 92). She emphasized how important it is for learners to be subjects of their own

learning (p. 130). By presenting material that is neither right or wrong and allowing reflection on

the connections between what is learned with our own experiences, I feel that these principles have been manifest in this course.

The last age-related change discussed here is psychosocial development. This idea combines the individual internal process of development with the influence of society (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 305) In Erikson's psychosocial developmental model, eight stages of development are posited. The first four represent childhood and will not be discussed. The last four cover adolescence through late adulthood. In each stage, a crisis or issue challenges the person and will result in either a positive or negative outcome. According to Boeree (2006), there should be at least part of the maladaptive tendency for some of the stages because too much of the positive outcome can turn into a negative. In stage five, the crisis is ego identity vs. role confusion. On the positive side, the individual will discover themselves and how they fit into the bigger picture of society. Role confusion, though, results into uncertainty where one fits into the world and can create an identity crisis. The next stage is intimacy vs. isolation. Here, the person should develop the ability to be close to and commit to another and find love. Isolation results in the splitting of relationships and can result in promiscuity or exclusion. In stage 7, the middle aged adult must resolve the conflict between generativity or stagnation. If they achieve generativity, they will have concern and care for future generations. Stagnation is caring for no one, and can lead to rejectivity. Without balance between these two, though, overextension can occur and individuals no longer have time for themselves. The last stage, stage eight, features ego integrity vs. despair. Ego integrity is coming to terms with one's life and approaching death without anxiety. Despair is a preoccupation with the mistakes and failures of one's life.

Although these stages are grouped by periods of time—adolescence and early, middle, and late adulthood, there is flexibility among them. There are adults who are still seeking ego

identity and younger adults who may be in a stage of generativity, based on accelerated life events. The stages and conflicts that learners are dealing with will shape their attitudes and beliefs about learning and affect motivation and participation. They will also determine individual priorities for learning, such as the amount of time to be devoted to course work. Learning about these stages in this class stimulated me to think about my own stage of development and those of my students. As I observe my students and their interactions with each other, I can see some of Erikson's theory at work. It is not as clear cut as the descriptions provide, but I can draw and apply generalizations about them.

Age-related changes have a significant effect on learning. Physically, adults need to continue to nurture their brains as they age through learning. Intellectually, the different types of intelligence, particularly fluid intelligence, have to be practiced in order to continue to grow. Cognitively, adults need to participate in activities that use relativistic thinking in order to avoid more basic, dualistic patterns. And psychosocially, efforts need to be made throughout life to resolve Erikson's conflicts positively to avoid maladaption. As instructors, we have to take all of these differences into account when teaching. We should provide the types of activities that stimulate brain activity and intelligence. We should allow for discussion that shows different perspectives and ways of problem-solving. And we should understand that the adults in our classes may be facing different conflicts and will accordingly have different priorities.

Question 4

Several important concepts of adult learning were discussed in this class. The theories of self-directed learning, reflection, and experience based learning are unique to adulthood and important when understanding how adults learn. Self-direction isn't something that all adult learners are necessarily capable of, but can be a valuable learning experience. Reflection is a crucial part of the learning process, especially when using experience based learning. Learning from experience can help adults see the value and relevance of the material being taught. All three of these concepts are part of the theory of transformational learning. Transformational learning results in a change in beliefs, values, and attitudes and can be a culminating educational experience. This essay discusses each of these ideas and how they were utilized with EAD 861 this semester.

Self-directed learning can be difficult to define, but Merriam et al (2007) described it as learners being able to "plan, carry out, and evaluate their own learning" (p. 107). The authors list three goals of self-directed learning: to enhance the ability to self direct one's own learning, to foster transformational learning, and to promote emancipator learning (p. 107). There are several models for applying and creating self-directed learning. This essay will cover Grow's Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL). I found this to be an important way to conceptualize self-directed learning because it helps the learner to see how it is an attribute that can be nurtured and grown. Grow's models consists of four stages: dependent learner, interested learner, involved learner, and self-directed learner (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 117). Dependent learners have a low level of self-direction and need instructors to tell them what to do. Interested learners have more self-direction and motivation, but do not know much about the subject matter. An involved learner has an intermediate level of self-direction and has the skills and knowledge to work

through subject matter. Involved learners can work with an instructor guide, as opposed to a more authoritative teacher. In the final stage, self-directed learners have achieved Merriam et al's (2007) definition of self-directed learning: the ability to plan, execute, and evaluate their own learner. They can work with or without an instructor.

Grow (1996) discussed self-direction as a quality that can be learned and taught. Interestingly, he also makes mention of the contextual nature of self-direction. Some learners are capable of self-direction in some situations, but not in others. Self-directed learners have the attributes of autonomy, learner control, and autodidaxy. Grow (1996) defines autodidaxy as the ability to learn outside of formal eduction. In addition, self-direction is thought of as both a personal attribute and a situational response, which is line with many of the other theories and models of self-direction.

Another important part of adult learning is reflection. Mezirow defined three types of reflection: content, process, and premise (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 145). In content reflection, the learner thinks about the experience that took place, either recently or in the past. During process reflection, he or she begins to think about ways to handle the situation and develops problem-solving strategies. If the learner progresses to premise reflection, he or she will begin to reflect on his or belief systems, based on socially constructed norms and values, and how they affect the experience. Reflection is a critical piece of both experience-based and transformational learning. One could not learn from experiences or find new ways to problem solve without some form of reflection. In fact, Merriam et al (2007) stated that "effective learning does not follow from a positive experience but from effective reflection" (p. 145).

Vella's (2002) principle of praxis is defined as action with reflection. After the learner participates in the action of problem-solving, he or she then reflects on the situation to draw

conclusions and theory about those actions (p. 118). The process is about learning to work

creatively through a problem based on the perceptions of the different learners. The reflective

process is focused on more than just different solutions; the learners should also reflect on the

potential of the situation (p. 119). In looking at both Mezirow and Vella's theories, it is critical

that reflection is included in the learning process. We have had many experiences throughout

EAD 861 to reflect on our past and current experiences and how what we were learning fit it

with them. I found this to be one of the most valuable aspects of the class.

Reflection is one component of experience based learning. Experience based learning can

take on different forms, including direct experience in the moment, learning from simulated

experiences, reflection on past experiences, collaborative experiences, or introspective

experiences (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 159). I feel it is important to discuss several of the

experience based learning theories within this essay, including those of Kolb, Boud and Walker,

and Dirkx. Kolb created a model of experiential learning based on four elements: concrete

experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Smith,

2001). Kolb suggests that the learner must be open to try the experience, reflect on it, analyze

ideas or concepts from it, and use the skills learned in new experiences. Boud and Walker

discussed the importance of situated learning (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 165). In their theory, the

learner should return to and replay the experience, attend to the feelings provoked by the

experience, and finally re-evaluate it in preparation to use it in a new situation. Both of these

theories add important dimensions to experience-based learning.

The next model, the FOURthought model, is the one I chose to tie everything together

under this theory. I particularly like this model, because it includes elements from several

theories and includes a holistic view of learning. In this model, there are four components: trial

and error, rationality/reflection, creative expression, and discernment (Dirkx and Lavin, 2005).

Trial and error is a spontaneous, unplanned form of learning in which experience is used to come

to know the world in random ways. After the experience, rationality and reflection are used to

step back and reflect on the experience from a rational approach. Creative expression is a "way

for deeper part of the psychological self to communicate with the outer world." The learner

expresses him/herself creatively through narrative to understand his/her relation to the world.

Creative expression is more symbolic than rational. In discernment, the learner understands the

symbolic meaning that the outer world events hold to their inner self. As with creative

expression, there is less focus on rationality. While using the process of discernment, the learner

listens "quietly and passively to a deeper source of knowledge within one's self." This model

emphasizes the importance of the emotional or affective domain of learning. Vella's (2002)

principle of learning with ideas, feelings, and actions emphasizes this point, as well. She

discussed Kurt Lewin's findings: "effective learning will affect the learner's cognitive structures,

attitudes and values, and perceptions and behavioral patterns (p. 150). The FOURthought model

of experience based learning encompasses these principles of effective learning.

In considering each of the ideas of self-directed learning, reflection, and experience-

based learning, a discussion on transformative learning is sure to follow, as it includes all of

these aspects. Merriam et al (2007) describe transformational learning as a "dramatic,

fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live" (p. 130). There

are two approaches to transformational learning: individual and social emancipatory.

Individually based transformative learning includes the work of Mezirow, Daloz, and Boyd. The

four components of Mezirow's theory include experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse,

and action (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 134). Experience and reflection are obviously featured here,

and in order to pursue action based on the transformation, a learner should be self-directed.

Mezirow's approach has been considered very rational, while Daloz and Boyd take a more

rational approach (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 138). Merriam et al (2007) described Daloz's theory

as a "lifelong personal development" (p. 138). Instructors act as facilitators as students make

meaning of experiences. Education itself is a transformational journey. Boyd sees transformative

learning as an inner journey of "individuation" (p. 139). Dirkx (2000) described individuation as

becoming aware of the multiple selves that compose each of us, within our psyche.

Transformative learning "fosters the natural processes of individuation through imaginative

engagement with these different dimensions of one's unconscious life" (Dirkx, 2000). Boyd's

transformative learning occurs when a personal dilemma results in a fundamental personality

change. He uses dialogue to uncover the images that make up the psyche (Merriam et al, 2007, p.

139). Both of these approaches use experience and require self-direction and reflection in order

to be successful.

      In contrast to the individual approach, Freire looked at transformative learning from a

sociocultural perspective with his social-emancipatory philosophy (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 140).

He saw transformative as arising from dire circumstances, such as poverty or oppression, that

require social change. Within his theory is the idea of conscientization. Conscientization is "an

ongoing process where the learner becomes increasingly aware of the various oppressive forces

in his or her life and eventually becomes part of the process of social change" (Merriam et al,

2007, p. 140). Dialogue and discussion are important to Freire's theory because they allow

oppressive issues to come up. The end goal of social-emancipatory theory is praxis, "the action

and reflection of men and women upon there world in order to transform it" (Merriam et al,

2007, p. 141). Critical reflection is an essential component of this theory. Experience and self-direction are needed for reflection and action.

I feel that my experiences in EAD 861 have encompassed all three parts of transformative learning discussed. The course required elements of self-directed learning. The material was provided, but it was up to us to interact with and apply it. Through problem-solving scenarios, our group needed to be self-directed in order to decide how to approach each issue. It was up to us to decide which theories and models were appropriate to each situation. Reflection was a major component of this course. During each lesson, individual reflection was required at different points throughout the material. These gave me the opportunity to think about my own lives and experiences and how what I was learning was relevant. It gave me the chance to take all of the material, articles, and chapter and tie them together in a way that made sense to me personally. Experiences were utilized beyond the reflection component of the course, as well. During the problem-based learning scenarios, each of my group members would lend their perspective to the situation based on our own experiences. Our collective contributions were based off experiences teaching in a community college, a GED prison program, and a for-profit college. It was really interesting and enlightening to hear what everyone thought about the different aspects of the cases. I would say this class is the beginning of a transformative experience for me. I have learned so much and have been able to apply some of it to what I do. I hope that by furthering my studies in this field, I will continue to grow and transform and that I will make an impact on the students I work with.

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