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Adult Students in Higher Education: Classroom Experiences and Needs

Introduction

This paper explores commonly expressed classroom experiences and needs of adult students who are participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. I will identify factors that affect their classroom experiences and needs and discuss implications for supporting their development in the classroom. I will argue that adults often have different classroom experiences and needs than full-time traditional students who enroll immediately after high school and who do not have other major responsibilities and roles that compete with their studies and involvement in on-campus activities and interactions outside the classroom. I will argue that these experiences and needs are not because of a deficiency, but are often related to the nature of their on-campus experience and their career-related roles and goals.

The participation of adult students in higher education has been increasing in Canada (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), 2011, p. 24; Gorman, Tieu, & Cook, 2013; Gower, 1997; Kerr, 2011; Myers & de Broucker, 2006, pp. 33-38). Major programs and services offered by institutions to support the participation and development of adult students include continuing education (Kirby, Curran, & Hollett, 2009; McLean, 2007), online learning (Canadian Virtual University, 2012; Contact North, 2012), pathway, preparatory, and upgrading programs (Gorman, Tieu, & Cook, 2013; Kerr, 2011, pp. 13-16), advising and learning support services (e.g., University of Western Ontario, n.d., York University, n.d., University of Ottawa, n.d., OCAD University, n.d., Fanshawe College, n.d., and Seneca College, n.d.), credit for life and work experience (e.g., Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) (Conrad, 2008; Van Kleef, Amichand, Ireland, Orynik, & Potter, 2007; Wihak, 2006), academic orientation (van Rhijn, Lero, Dawczyk, de Guzman, Pericak, Fritz, Closs, and Osborne, 2015), financial aid (van Rhijn et al., 2015, pp. 34-37), and on-campus childcare (Friendly & Macdonald, 2014). In their review of support services available to mature students in Ontario, van Rhijn, Lero, Dawczyk, de Guzman, Pericak, Fritz, Closs, and Osborne (2015) observe that there is not only "variability in the level of availability, accessibility, and appropriateness of information for mature students within and between universities and colleges" (pp. 14-15), but also that "while some Ontario universities and colleges provide accessible and relevant information and important resources to support student success and a

welcoming environment, others have not yet oriented to the needs of this discrete group" (p. 22). It is frequently argued that many adults not only continue to experience barriers to participation in higher education, but that they are often underserved and marginalized on campus (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007; Chao, DeRocco, & Flynn, 2007; Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL], 2000; Fairchild, 2003; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2014; Kasworm, 2010; UNESCO, 1997).

Research has provided a better understanding of the postsecondary experiences and needs of adult students by identifying and addressing common barriers to participation (CCL, 2007; Knighton, Hujaleh, Iacampo, & Werkneh, 2009, p. 55; MacKeracher, Suart, & Potter, 2006; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002), determining factors that affect retention and persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2014; MacFadgen, 2008; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; Markle, 2015; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Sheridan, 2004; van Rhijn et al., 2015), and evaluating their academic performance (Chartrand, 1990; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Graham & Gisi, 2000; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2010; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

Research highlights that the adult student population is a diverse group with diverse needs, experiences and goals. This paper will focus on the experiences and needs of adult students who are participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. While further exploration of the implications of research for evaluating and designing support services that promote their participation and development is necessary, I will focus on how their development can be supported within the classroom in light of commonly expressed classroom experiences and needs related to having other major responsibilities and roles and career-related goals as the primary purpose of participating in higher education. My interest in this question emerged from regularly hearing adults ask whether they should participate in a course or program that consists mainly of traditionally aged students because of the perceived possibility that classroom approaches may not align with their needs and goals.

Adult Students and the Nontraditional Student Category While the nontraditional student category is often used in a specialized way to refer to underrepresented and disadvantaged students (CCL, 2007; Chan & Merrill, 2012; Hyland-Russell & Groen, 2011; Kim, 2002; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002), it is more commonly used in a general way to refer to any student who is not a traditional student. The traditional student category typically includes full-time students who enroll immediately after high school, are between 18 and 22 years old, and who do not have other major responsibilities and roles that compete with their studies (e.g., full-time employment, parenting, and community responsibilities) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The nontraditional student designation is generally applied to students who are 25 years or older who did not enroll immediately after high school, are not in their first cycle of education, attend part-time, are financially independent, have other major responsibilities and roles that compete with their studies (e.g., parenting, caregiving, employment, and community involvement), and/or lack the standard admission requirements of a program (Bean & Metzner, 1985; CAEL, 2000; Choy, 2002; Kasworm, 2003b; Kim, 2002).

In light of the increasing diversity of student populations, maintaining two primary student designations is becoming increasingly problematic. It is frequently observed that there is an increasing number of students within the traditional student age range who also have nontraditional characteristics (e.g., they have dependents or are employed full-time). Smith (2008) describes these students as "young mature

learners" (p. 2). Chao, DeRocco, and Flynn (2007) similarly observe that "not all non-traditional students are adults" (p. 8). It is also frequently noted that there are "delayed traditional students." These students are "in their 20s who are similar to 18 year olds in terms of their interests and commitments" (Osborne, Marks, & Turner, 2004, p. 296). In light of this increasing diversity, Bean and Metzner (1985) observe that "traditional and nontraditional students cannot be easily classified into simple dichotomous categories" (p. 488). Kasworm (1990) argues that "although the usage of ' discrete age-related categories' may have utility in exploratory research, these categorizations appear to confound and mislead the more specialized and sensitive probing for variations, patterns, and categories of actions across the spectrum of undergraduate population" (p. 364). Donaldson and Townsend (2007) maintain that it is necessary to "move beyond old labels (like traditional and nontraditional) to create a new language to reflect the complex reality of today' s undergraduate student body" (p. 46, emphasis in original). Kim (2002) proposes that "research on nontraditional students should be more accurately labelled as research on adult learners, reentry students, educationally disadvantaged students, first-generation students, or minority students" (p. 86). The mature student and adult student labels are commonly used to refer to "nontraditional" students who are participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. However, because the meaning of mature student and adult student often vary in research and between institutions, common definitions will be discussed and related to the focus of this paper.

Mature Students.The definition of a mature student often varies in research and between institutions (Kerr, 2011; van Rhijn et al., 2015). In Ontario colleges, students are generally considered mature students if they are 19 years of age or older, have been out of secondary school for at least one year, and either do not have an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or equivalent or the required OSSD credits (Popovic, 2014; van Rhijn et al., 2015). In Ontario universities, students are generally considered mature students if they are 21 years of age or older and have been away from formal schooling for a certain period of time, ranging from one to five years (Minniti, 2012; Kerr, 2011; van Rhijn et al., 2015).

Other definitions of mature students closely correspond to the definition of nontraditional students. For example, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) identifies six major categories of mature students that reflects the common definition of nontraditional students: (1) "delayed traditional students;" (2) "late bloomers, who have experienced a substantial life altering event;" (3) single parents; (4) "individuals seeking to improve their credentialing for their current occupation;" (5) "individuals seeking to change occupations;" and (6) "people seeking personal growth and development" (Minniti, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, MacFadgen (2008) defines a mature student as "25 years of age or older with life roles and circumstances that typically include financial obligations, family responsibilities, work and community commitments, flexible enrolment status, and varied educational goals and intentions" (p. 15). Unlike the definition of mature students in many Ontario colleges, in this common definition lacking the standard admission requirements of a program is not a necessary characteristic of mature students.

Adult Students. The definition of an adult student also varies in research and between institutions. The adult student category is commonly defined as a subset of the nontraditional student category to refer to nontraditionally aged students who are participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. Chao, DeRocco, and Flynn (2007) define adult students as 24 years old and older who are financially independent and "must juggle many responsibilities with school," such as employment and parenting (p. 2). In their definition, "although not

all non-traditional students are adults [□] all adult college students are by definition non-traditional" (p. 8, parenthetical added).

Others do not include adult students in the nontraditional student category. For example, Compton, Cox, and Laanan (2006) argue that "adult students have particular characteristics that set them apart from nontraditional students" and these characteristics "deserve our attention and the recognition that these students are a distinct group" (pp. 73-74). In their definition, adult students are 25 years old and over who are "more likely to be pursuing a program leading to a vocational certificate or degree," "have focused goals for their education, typically to gain or enhance work skills," and "consider themselves primarily workers and not students" (p. 74).

While there are different definitions of nontraditional students, mature students, and adult students, all three are commonly used to refer to "nontraditionally aged" students who are participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. In the following discussion, when I draw from research that refers to nontraditional students, mature students, or adult students, it is being used in that particular context to include adults who are participating in higher education for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles.

Adult Student Participation in Higher Education in Canada The participation of adult students in higher education has been increasing in Canada. Gower (1997) reports that between 1976 and 1996 the number of Canadians aged 25 to 64 who were full-time students more than tripled (107,000 to 344,000). Gower observes that "this increase vastly outpaced the rate of growth in the adult population itself. As a consequence, the percentage of Canadian adults attending school full time more than doubled, from 1.0% to 2.1%" (p. 32). In addition, a high proportion of part-time undergraduate students are over the age of 25. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) (2011) reported that in 2010 "approximately 24 percent of undergraduate students were studying part-time, and 60 percent of part-time students were over the age of 25, compared to 13 percent of full-time students" (AUCC, 2011, p. 7). The Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS) reported that in 2002 36 percent of adult students between the ages of 25 and 54 were pursuing a college diploma, 29 percent a university degree, 28 percent a trades or vocational certificate, and 7 percent a registered apprenticeship (Myers & de Broucker, 2006, p. 34). The 2005 Canadian College Student Survey reported that almost 27 percent of the college population across Canada were over 25 (Myers & de Broucker, 2006, p. 34).

At Ontario universities, approximately 12 percent of students enrolled at the bachelor' s degree level in 2008-2009 were 25 years old or older (Kerr, 2011, p. 9). In 2013, 11.1 percent of applicants and 6.6 percent of registered applicants who applied to an Ontario university not directly from an Ontario secondary school through the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) were 25 years old or older (Council of Ontario Universities (COU), 2015, p. 27). The percentage of full-time students 25 years or older in Ontario universities ranged from two percent (Wilfrid Laurier University) to 21 percent (Algoma University) (van Rhijn et al., 2015, p. 27). The percentage of part-time students 25 years or older ranged from 24 percent (Wilfrid Laurier University) to 78 percent (Laurentian University) (van Rhijn et al., 2015, p. 29).

In Ontario colleges, the College Student Satisfaction Survey reported that in 2009 23 percent of first-year students were 26 years old or older. Between 1999 and 2009, first-year students aged 26 and older increased from approximately 15,000 to 28,000 (Kerr, 2011, p. 11). In 2014-2015, Colleges Ontario (2015) reported that the average age of Ontario college applicants was 23.4 years and the average age

of non-direct applicants was 25.4 years (Colleges Ontario (CO), 2015, p. 14). Of those who registered, 67 percent did not enter directly from secondary school (p. 16). The percentage of full-time students 25 years and older in Ontario colleges ranged from 17 percent (Durham College) to 43 percent (Northern College) (van Rhijn et al., 2015, p. 28).

Many adults who participate in higher education report having other major responsibilities and roles (e.g., full-time employment, parenting, and community responsibilities) (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Bristow, 2014; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Fairchild, 2003; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; van Rhijn et al., 2015). In the 2013 Ontario Postsecondary Student Survey, six percent of university undergraduate students reported caring for a dependent child or having "caring responsibilities for adults in their life (i.e.: an adult child with disabilities; an elderly parent)" (Bristow, 2014, para. 3). While only seven percent of students surveyed were mature students (defined as 26 or older), slightly over one in three (35 percent) of students with dependents were 26 or older (Bristow, 2014, para. 4).

In the 2008 Access and Support to Education and Training Survey (ASETS), reasons given for not being able to pursue further education and training differed substantially between respondents aged 18 to 24 and those aged 25 to 64. It was reported that between July 2007 and June 2008 almost twice as many adults (28 percent) than youth (17 percent) indicated that family responsibilities was a reason for not being able to participate in learning activities. 17 percent of respondents aged 25 to 64, as opposed to 11 percent aged 18 to 24, indicated that family responsibilities was the main reason for not pursuing learning activities. Another common reason given by adults was "needed to work" (25 percent) (Knighton et al., 2009, p. 55).

Adult Students in Higher Education for Career-Related Reasons A substantial and increasing number of adults are pursuing higher education to obtain, maintain, or advance their career, meet the postsecondary education requirements of a job, and to increase their income (Bean & Metzner 1985; Gower, 1997; Kinser & Deitchman, 2007; Myers & de Broucker, 2006; Palameta & Zhang, 2006).

The AETS and ASETS highlight that many adults participate in higher education for career-related reasons. Gower (1997) notes that in the AETS for 1994 "regardless of their age or employment status, the bulk of adults' studies were related to work rather than personal interest (by a ratio of 5:3)" (p. 33). The AETS for 2002 reported that 53 percent of adult students in Canada aged between 25 and 54 indicated that their reason for participating in higher education was "to find or change jobs." Other reasons that scored high were "to do job better" (48 percent) and to "increase income" (43 percent) (Myers & de Broucker, 2006, pp. 38-39).

In the 2008 ASETS, which "addresses issues relating to antecedents and determinants to access to Post Secondary Education (PSE), including the role of student financing and participation in adult education and training" (Statistics Canada, 2009), 8.1 percent of Canadians aged 25 to 64 reported participating in job-related training. 16 percent were aged 25 to 34 (Knighton et al., 2009, p. 47). In the context of this survey, "education consists of formal modes of learning and is defined as structured learning activities that lead to a credential, specifically programs that combine multiple courses toward the completion of a diploma, degree, certificate or license" (Knighton et al., 2009, p. 7).

While adults also pursue higher education for other reasons (e.g., personal development, personal fulfillment, or personal interest), the majority report participating for career-related reasons. Palameta and Zhang (2006) observe that because of the demands of the knowledge-based economy and highly

skilled labour market, "the notion that formal education is something one completes before entering the labour market has become increasingly outdated" (p. 5).

The Postsecondary Classroom Experiences and Needs of Adult Students While the classroom experiences and needs of adults are diverse, research indicates that there are commonly expressed classroom experiences and needs of adult students participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. I will review this research and identify two major factors that often affect their experiences and needs. Following this, I will explore implications for supporting their development in the classroom.

I will argue that, contrary to Chandler and Galerstein's (1982) positions that "it appears that while adult students may require counseling and other ancillary services, no attention need be paid to providing special academic experiences [in the classroom] for mature students" (pp. 44-45), and "provided students know what to expect, and what is expected of them, why they attend class is irrelevant [□] colleges seeking to recruit adult students do not need to find out why students might want to return to college; rather, they simply make clear what opportunities students will find at the college should they choose to attend" (p. 48), adult students not only commonly express different classroom experiences and needs, but knowing the reasons why they participate in higher education is important for evaluating and designing classroom approaches. I will argue that two factors--their on-campus experience and their career-related goals--commonly affect their classroom experiences and needs.

On-Campus Experience. The first major factor that commonly affects adult students' classroom experiences and needs is their limited involvement in on-campus activities and interactions outside the classroom (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Fairchild, 2003; Graham & Donaldson, 1999; van Rhijn et al., 2015). Because of other major responsibilities and roles, for many adults the student-institution interaction occurs primarily, and sometimes only, in the classroom. As a result, the classroom becomes the focus of adult students' on-campus experience and development (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm & Blowers, 1994; Kasworm, 2003). Broschard (2005) found that "while traditional students may need a more rounded college experience that includes more social and cocurricular experiences, nontraditional students use the classroom as their stage for learning" (p. vii). In addition, Broschard reports that "involvements that seem to be geared towards the classroom such as academic and faculty involvement were rated higher by nontraditional students [for intellectual, personal, social, and career development]" (p. 110). Donaldson and Graham (1999) observe that "due to the adults' lifestyles, they engage the classroom and their student peers in novel ways to accommodate for their lack of time on campus and in traditional out-of-class activities" (p. 25). Fairchild (2003) notes that "rather than being a life-encompassing, identity-building experience, such as the one we hope to provide for traditional-aged students, higher education for adults is one activity among many in which adults can participate to meet other specific needs" (p. 12). In Kasworm' s (2003) research, the classroom was consistently considered by adults "the main stage for the creation and negotiation of the meanings of collegiate learning, of being a student, and for defining the collegiate experience and its impact" (p. 84).

The academic performance of adult students is generally not negatively affected by few or no on-campus interactions and involvement outside the classroom (Graham & Gisi, 2000; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Lundberg, 2003; Metzner & Bean, 1987). Broschard (2005) found that even though many adult students have substantially lower levels of on-campus interactions and activities outside the classroom than traditional students, "both traditional and nontraditional [students] rate college contribution toward intellectual, personal, social, and career development similarly" (p. 115, parenthetical added). Adult

students generally perform at comparable rates as full-time traditional students who are involved in on-campus social interactions and activities outside of classroom and who do not have other major responsibilities and roles (Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm & Pike, 1994). Graham and Gisi' s (2000) research, which measured gains in intellectual development, problem solving, scientific reasoning, and career development of approximately 19,000 students, reported that adult students "did as well or slightly better than traditional-age students across the four measures of intellectual and academic outcomes" (p. 113).

In summary, research indicates that because the student-institution interaction often occurs primarily, and sometimes only, in the classroom for adults who have other major responsibilities and roles, the classroom often has a central role in their on-campus experience and development.

Career-Related Goals. The second major factor that often affects adults' classroom experiences and needs is their career-related roles and goals (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 2003; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). Many adult students evaluate their classroom experience based on the extent to which their career-related roles and goals are supported. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2015) found that many adult students are "life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning." They are "motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations" (p. 66). Donaldson and Graham (1999) observe that "both the instructor and the instructional strategies employed create or fail to create the climate in which in-class and out-of-class learning and knowledge structures (both prior and concurrent) can become connected" (p. 31).

In Kasworm' s (2003) interviews of adult students, the classroom experience was consistently evaluated based on "beliefs about the relationship of college to their life worlds" (p. 84). Kasworm identified five "belief structures" or "knowledge voices" of the value and relationship between "academic knowledge" and "real-world knowledge" (pp. 84-85). Academic knowledge "focused on theory, concepts, and rote memorization, of book learning" (pp. 84-85) while real-world knowledge "directly focused on the adult' s daily actions in the world, knowledge that had immediate application and life relevance, of learning from doing" (p. 85). Kasworm found that perceptions of the value of, and the relationship between, academic knowledge and real-world knowledge commonly affects how the classroom experience is evaluated and the classroom approaches that are considered effective.

Adult students with the first knowledge voice, the "entry voice," focus on being a successful student by learning academic knowledge, memorizing course content, and getting good grades. Adult students with this knowledge voice consider academic knowledge and real-world knowledge "two different worlds with fundamentally different ways of knowing and understanding" (p. 90). Because of their view of the disconnect between academic knowledge and real-world knowledge and their understanding that being a student primarily involves learning academic knowledge, these adult students often do not readily connect their classroom learning to their career-related roles and goals. Adult students with the "entry voice" often value instructors who clearly organize and present knowledge for memorization and who evaluate through tests and essays (p. 87).

Adult students with the second knowledge voice, the "outside voice," focus on learning real-world knowledge. For these students, "college was characterized as a culturally unique place with only fragmentary connection and meaning to their world of adult life and work" (p. 90). While they "did not believe it was appropriate to learn classroom content that was irrelevant to their adult worlds" (p. 91), they engaged in it as part of the "academic game" to earn good grades and a credential. Classroom

approaches commonly valued by these students include "in-classroom discussions, small-group applications, case studies, projects, and other types of activities that connected the students' adult lives (and most often their work lives) with the classroom knowledge" (p. 91).

Adult students with the third knowledge voice, the "cynical voice," react negatively to classroom learning because in their experience it is disconnected from the real-world. They remain students, however, to get "the ' societal ticket' to preferred jobs or validation of their expertise for promotions or job security or to resolve social pressures coming from either work or family settings to get a degree" (p. 92). Knowledge that is valued can be related to their real-world needs. Kasworm reports that "on rare occasions, direct intervention and helpful assistance from a faculty member helped such students locate relevant knowledge that met their real-world needs" (p. 92).

Adult students with the fourth knowledge voice, the "straddling voice," value both academic knowledge and real-world knowledge. They proactively focus on learning and connecting both knowledge types for not only applying knowledge to their real-world involvements, but for also "enhancing their conceptual worldviews" (p. 93). These adult students commonly appreciate "active, collaborative, and applied instructional strategies across both of these knowledge worlds" (p. 94).

Adult students with the fifth knowledge voice, the "inclusion voice," "actively sought intellectual in-depth immersion in the academic world" (p. 95). They value and integrate "thought and action across their life roles outside the academy and their academic world" (p. 95). Adult students with this knowledge voice "did not speak about types of knowledge; rather they talked about layers, meanings, and contexts of knowledge; understanding; and application across their adult lives and their intellectual pursuits" (p. 95). They value instructors who are "mentors and colleagues in the intellectual knowledge sharing and creation effort" (p. 88).

In conclusion, research indicates that adult students not only often have different experiences and needs in the classroom, but also that two factors--their on-campus experience and their career-related goals--commonly affect which classroom approaches are effective for supporting their development. Despite the different views of adults on the relationship between, and the value of, academic knowledge and real-world knowledge, Kasworm (2003) reported that adults consistently expressed that "meaning making was enhanced by instructors who integrated adult-identified prior knowledge into the course content either by classroom interpersonal engagements or by active or applied learning activities such as case study projects" (p. 85).

Implications for Supporting the Development of Adult Students in the Classroom Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) note that college impact research has "assumed a general homogeneity in the educational process" and that "this assumption is reflected in beliefs and practices relating to effective instructional methods (lecturing, for example, has been the overwhelming method of choice for teaching students)" (p. 161). They (2005) observe that the lecture-based approach, which is characterized by students taking a largely passive role in the classroom and by the use of the lecture as the main method of instruction, is "still by far the modal instructional approach most often used in postsecondary education" (p. 101). CAEL (2000) includes the lecture-based approach in the "traditions and practices that prove ill-suited for adults" (p. 4) and identifies it as one of the "facile assumptions" of higher education (p. 6). CAEL argues that adult students are best served when faculty do "not limit themselves to the traditional role of lecturer in the classroom" (p. 6).

In research by Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1998), 24 percent of adult students in a traditional university thought that "lectures are geared toward younger students" and 49 percent thought that "professors design their classes for younger students" (p. 225). In earlier research, they (1992) reported that while "younger students are more tolerant of impractical examples," "seem more content in a passive mode," and "lecturing is more often their preferred teaching technique," adult students often instead express preference for interactive and "hands-on" learning activities in the classroom (p. 116).

In Kasworm and Blowers' (1994) research, many adults indicated that it is "not sufficient for a faculty member to lecture on course content" and that "effective teaching and learning meant working with the students in developing their understandings and making meaningful connections with the content knowledge" (p. 104). They found that "many adult students valued active instructional strategies beyond the class lecture" (p. 85). Moreover, they report that "adult students who were in work environments reported that varied instructional strategies aided them in making knowledge connections and understandings," such as "varied formats of presentation, class involvement, and solicitation of students for constructive feedback" (p. 85). Ross-Gordon (2003) notes that "because adults typically enter a learning situation after they experience a need in their life, they are presumed to bring a task- or problem-centered orientation to learning. This is in contrast to the subject-centered approach associated with traditional, pedagogical approaches to education" (p. 44). Chao, DeRocco, and Flynn (2007) observe that "traditional teaching methods,"--which are characterized by "' chalk and talk' lectures and textbooks that assume the student to be passive, with little experience or expertise to bring to the learning relationship"--"can not only demean and infantilize them, but they do not acknowledge the real-life experiences and knowledge that the students bring to class" (p. 17).

Brookfield (1986) stated that the lecture-focused approach is often ineffective for many adult students because "there is no opportunity for discussion, no time for questions, no chance for collaborative exploration of differing viewpoints, and no attempt to make some links between the learners' experiences and the topic under discussion" (p. 9). Adult learning is instead best supported when "praxis" is a focus of "teaching-learning transactions" and "instructional design activities" (p. 9). Brookfield (1986) defines "praxis" as being "involved in a continual process of activity, reflection upon activity, collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection and collaborative analysis, and so on" (p. 10).

In summary, while there is not a one-size-fits-all classroom approach that supports the diverse classroom experiences and needs of adult students who are participating in higher education for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles, research indicates that the development of a substantial portion of these adult students is best supported when classroom learning is related to their career-related roles and goals and when active, collaborative, and interactive classroom approaches are employed.

Conclusion

This paper explored commonly expressed classroom experiences and needs of adults participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles. As noted, my interest in this question emerged from regularly hearing adults ask whether they should participate in a course or program that consists mainly of traditionally aged students because of the perceived possibility that classroom approaches may not align with their needs and goals. I argued that contrary to Chandler and Galerstein' s (1982) positions that "it appears that, while adult students may require counseling and other ancillary services, no attention need be paid to providing special academic

experiences [in the classroom] for mature students" (pp. 44-45), and "provided students know what to expect, and what is expected of them, why they attend class is irrelevant [...] colleges seeking to recruit adult students do not need to find out why students might want to return to college; rather, they simply make clear what opportunities students will find at the college should they choose to attend" (p. 48), research indicates that adult students not only commonly express different classroom experiences and needs, but knowing the reasons why they participate in higher education is important for evaluating and designing classroom approaches. I argued that these experiences and needs are not because of a deficiency, but are often related to the nature of their on-campus experience and their career-related roles and goals.

In light of both the career-related goals of many adult students and their limited involvement in on-campus activities and interactions outside the classroom, I discussed implications for creating a classroom experience that promotes their development. I argued that while there is not a one-size-fits-all classroom approach that supports the diverse needs and experiences of adult students who are participating in higher education for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles, research consistently indicates that the development of many adult students is best supported when classroom learning is connected to their career-related roles and goals and when active, collaborative, and interactive classroom approaches are employed.

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