



INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

NECESSARY ASSIMILATION OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR THE ADULT LEARNER

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ABSTRACT

Under the leadership of Governor Ivey, the residents of Alabama are getting the post-secondary education needed for in-demand careers. The Alabama Community College System is tasked with promoting WIOA Title II adult education programs, postsecondary career and technical education programs, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I adult programs. Calhoun Community College Adult Education is part of this progressive movement to raise the employability of the residents of Huntsville, Alabama, and surrounding communities. The unemployment rate in Alabama is 3.7% compared to the national average of 3.6%, so why the giant push for career readiness? The current U.S. labor pool in manufacturing reduces by 10,000 retirements each day, resulting in 6,000,000 openings every month (Sumrak, 2018) and in Alabama, there are over 50,000 employees over 55 years of age in the manufacturing industry. For Alabama to attract and retain a major manufacturing presence, our industries need trained applicants with leadership potential. This is where the necessary assimilation of leadership characteristics blended with basic technology training becomes a priority in adult education.

INTRODUCTION

As part of workforce development, Calhoun Community College in Alabama consulted the manufacturing industries that are prevalent in our area to determine the appropriate direction of our adult education course offerings. The insight given by industry leaders has enabled us to offer solutions to address their workforce deficiencies; for example, low reading and math skills, soft skills, and a lack of general knowledge of the manufacturing industry (Wolfe, D. personal communication, March 11, 2019). The need to adjust our presentation of adult education curriculum into a program that prepares students for a pathway for success is a focus in our classrooms (Gerstein & Friedman, 2016; Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). An invitation (Appendix A), interview question (Appendix B), and informed consent (Appendix C) to contribute an example of curriculum and contextual blending were sent to 10 adult education instructors with one question: How do you facilitate leadership skills in your classroom? Five instructors responded with some interesting and effective presentation techniques that promote the building of necessary leadership and social interaction skills. The activities and interactions offered in the classroom setting increase the participant's interest and

confidence in the necessary knowledge for success, contextualizing the curriculum (Kuron et al., 2015). With contextual blending, the participant can experience real-world situations in an environment of knowledge sharing.

BLENDING THE CURRICULUM

By blending workforce readiness courses, Ready To Work (RTW) and WorkKeys for a National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), with the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC), the students graduate with the training expected by the manufacturing industry. The manufacturing certification course provides instruction useful for in-demand career pathways, and the classes are conducted with exercises for building leadership skills, with the instructor facilitating student-led presentations. By the end of the course, students have conquered the unfamiliarity of leadership, and recognize opportunities to lead. The effective integration of leadership theory into practice in the classroom is evident in the rise of retention and participation. Enthusiasm and dedication to the completion of the program increased significantly, with several graduates interested in giving back to the program as instructors or mentors. Leading involves discernment to determine motivation, and always involves open and honest communication. Students want to trust what we say, with the most recent generation of adult learners skeptical of authority; only trusting with proof of worthiness. The leadership needed today is authentic, transparent, empathetic, and in service to others.

BACKGROUND

One year ago, I began a new journey, one that required my conversion from training employees in a retail environment to instructing adult learners in a classroom in the soft skills needed for employment. After 25 years in the retail industry, I had developed a training platform that successfully guided new hires to become valuable team members with a sense of what leadership meant and their responsibility to share knowledge. I have observed the motivation behind the behavior of employees and their expectations of leaders, and there has been a shift in both areas, behavior and expectations, due to generational and environmental influence. I transferred my retail environment training platform to the classroom and brought the theory of servant leadership into practice in adult learning classes for the manufacturing industry. Servant leadership is the underlying principle of leading a classroom of adult learners because it has the aspects of authenticity, transparency, empowerment, and empathy.

CONCEPT

The goal of adult education is the concept of recognizing the needs of the learner and serving them in the capacity of the principles of sharing knowledge to enable their success. Robert Greenleaf defined servant leadership as putting others' needs in front of personal ambition (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf believed a true leader has the insight and compassion to facilitate learning in others by communicating the willingness to help them reach personal goals. This behavior translates to guiding students on their chosen paths with authentic leadership, empathy, and empowerment. As a servant leader strives to impart the knowledge of leading others by serving their needs, the behavior of the follower changes from being served to serving others. The misconception of leadership being equal to management remains a struggle to be understood. Many consider the terms interchangeable, but the defining aspect is that everyone is and can be a leader, as Drew Dudley (2013) points out in his TED talk "Everyday Leadership." Not every leader has the skills for, or wants the responsibility of, management.

A blend of manager and leader results in a rare breed of professionals, and this balance of responsibility

to organizational goals and employee relationships results in sustainability. This aspect of sustainability should be a goal in every adult learning experience as we manage the flow of information and lead the students in their pursuit of knowledge. The changes in the expectation of leadership by employees can be tracked by the involvement of industrial organizations. The challenge for management 100 years ago was increasing profit by streamlining production, and leadership was synonymous with management. Following the guidelines of Frederick Taylor, the “father of the scientific method of management,” businesses flourished, and Taylorism became the basis for matching job descriptions to qualified applicants (Palla & Billy, 2018). From that point, the field of management has adapted to every change necessary for market survival, including the education of its workforce. In the past, the responsibility of preparing the workforce for job performance fell to the industry, and skills were obtained through on-the-job training specific to the organization, creating a workforce with few or no transferable skills. Individuals would remain with the same company from high school to retirement, content with a feeling of accomplishment—but sometimes at the expense of unfulfilled personal dreams. Adult education provides the opportunity to explore and prepare for the options of career pathways. The basic skills obtained through our programs are transferable and not necessarily limited to a single industry.

ASSIMILATION

With each generation, workers exhibit expectations, motivations, and dreams reflective of society’s disposition of their era and the environmental factors (depression, recession, war, family obligations) that influence the individual’s employment choices. Societal expectations in the early and mid-20th century were the stability of income and mutual dependency of organization and employee. An employee who worked under an authoritarian leadership style, a style that was expected for the era, was a “tool of the trade” and the first “expense” to be eliminated, while social structure disintegrated for the sake of industrial progress (Moyer, 1962). Not much was done to prepare the workforce beyond high school, with the exception of professionals like doctors, lawyers, or teachers, until the post-WWII GI Bill, so the term “job satisfaction” did not exist (unless it meant “satisfied to have a job”). As the need for the workforce to adapt to the industry changes, management has realized that the seasoned veterans of organizational change leadership are retiring, and the comradery is leaving with them, prompting the call for replacements with soft skills that, for some, unfortunately, come only with maturity.

The field of post-secondary education strives to provide the knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce as it is today. What we in adult education have learned from the input from the organizations is that the latest generation of workers lacks the skills that enable them to lead. The task is to teach the learner how to recognize the opportunities to lead. The main areas of consideration in an adult learning environment are how to communicate verbally and non-verbally, solve problems, and ask “how can I help?” when students see an opportunity to mentor.

As educators, we have a responsibility to prepare our students for real-world scenarios, but first, we need to learn what the real world expects. Whatever the generational differences present in the classroom, the message is based on sharing the leadership techniques used to determine needs, goals, strengths, and concerns. We are leading a class that will enter a multigenerational workforce, so we need to stress that talents and knowledge need to be shared across the generations. The commonalities of the multigenerational participants outweigh the differences in an adult education classroom. The labor market has changed and so should our curriculum presentation.

THE CLASSROOM

Like many successful teams, adult education teachers often use brainstorming and knowledge sharing to improve the presentation of the curriculum. We align our classes with our mission, “We live to make a difference,” and our vision of providing our participants with the tools they need to succeed in a pathway to employment, self-sufficiency, and social consciousness (Wolfe, D., personal communication, July 24, 2019). The main goal of education at the adult level is the ability to transfer knowledge to aspects of employability. Employers are concerned with the basic skill level of their applicants, and the individuals that do achieve employment are reported as unable to process instructions/directions, work with others, maintain dependability, communicate with co-workers/supervisors, or respect others and the workplace. Another concern of employers is the lack of potential for promotion because of these behaviors. Succession plans and sustainability of many industries are in danger because of insufficient candidacy for promotion (Gerstein & Friedman, 2016).

THE INTERVIEWS

The five responses to the interview question, *How do you facilitate leadership skills in your classroom?* were received from GED, RTW, and MSSC instructors, who discussed personal experiences of leading a classroom by serving their students. They experience classroom successes with their approach of contextual instruction and share some techniques that facilitate leadership skills. The problem of job applicants (potentially our participants) not possessing the skills of communication, workplace behavior, and problem-solving (soft skills); reading and math competency levels to navigate the workplace (WorkKeys); and the basic skills for the chosen industry, is the focus of this article.

1. Ms. R facilitates a student-led class of young people needing remediation in reading and writing to “bridge” into a degree program at a higher level. “To promote academic competence of reading and writing, there are writing prompts, exercising the student’s problem-solving skills and increasing self-efficacy,” stated Ms. R. “I will put a prompt on the board and using teamwork the students will brainstorm the best approach to reach a consensus” commented Ms. R. These are skills that are highly sought by employers in all industries and seriously lacking in applicants. The basic skills of communication increase in subsequent education forums and in the workforce, where communication is a component of job retention. Working on a common goal also builds leadership skills through supporting one another’s ideas and encouraging input from teammates.
2. The bonus of this team-building exercise is ultimately creating group efficacy, as they find problem-solving skills when working together. As Miss M. added, “When throwing ideas around, they get comfortable speaking up” and “as a group they begin to encourage one another in their journey, celebrating successes and building up one another.” The idea of encouraging leadership is a natural outcome of facilitating an adult education class. Miss M. encourages mentorship in the classroom, supporting the importance of knowledge sharing and leading with purpose. She recommends “having the advanced students work with lower-level skilled students.” This provides a dual opportunity for learning. The advanced student learns how to teach and train, while the mentee receives tutoring and gains self-confidence.

Strong leadership comes from developing an attitude of humility. Sharing your strengths to bolster another’s weaknesses, encouraging the meek to believe in themselves, and being willing to learn from others are the antecedents of great leadership. The RTW program has many hidden opportunities to promote successful leadership; many participants do not realize they are leading others and influencing

success. A program strongly based in the realm of career pathway introduction, the RTW curriculum instructors encourage the development of skills that improve employability. Three of the RTW components, Communications, Workplace Behavior, and Problem-Solving, have commonalities to the MSSC curriculum and benefit the students that have chosen the manufacturing industry as a career pathway. The RTW students that are searching for their path are provided with the soft skills needed for employability, but, as a bonus, get technical skills found in the FDIC and Technology Basic components. The goal of the RTW instructor aligns with the vision of adult education. We want every person who seeks our help to better their lives to be given the opportunity to become a self-sufficient, employed, and contributing part of society.

3. RTW instructor Mr. R. added his approach to facilitating leadership skills in a description of critical thinking as an exercise in communication. Although critical thinking is often considered an inward analysis of one's perception and whether that perception is egocentric, Mr. R. uses the same approach when he "opens a dialogue amongst the students and encourages them to challenge and defend their positions." The debate format of his class promotes problem-solving skills and increases self- and group-efficacy. When the class arrives at consensus, they gain the skills needed to lead a team.
4. Ms. B. shares her knowledge of real-world requirements of employability in every class by encouraging her students to pursue their dreams. She takes the time to find their motivation and streamlines their paths to include the information specific to their situation. Ms. B. shared the following story. "I have a student that is a remarkable seamstress and expressed the desire to share her knowledge with others by teaching a sewing class. Her assignment for the Technology Basic component was to create a flyer for her 'class'. I surprised the student when I saw the completed and wonderfully done flyer by placing the flyer on the student information board outside the classroom." By serving her student encouragement, empowerment, and knowledge, Ms. B exposed the student's leadership skills and built a real-world situation to relate.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the MSSC curriculum facilitated by the adult education instructor is a compilation of the basic knowledge and skills needed to increase employability in the manufacturing industry. The completion of each MSSC module results in a "stand-alone" certificate that diversifies the pathways of possible careers. The first module, Safety, blends effectively with the RTW soft skills, providing the participant with a multiview of industry applications. Leadership skills are a necessary skill in manufacturing for every employee to be aware of their environment and conscious of their responsibility to one another. The MSSC classroom is a constant mix of acquired knowledge and the immediate application of the knowledge, requiring the exercise of the leadership skills of encouragement, empowerment, authenticity, and serving others. I am an MSSC Instructor, and my fellow instructor shares my philosophy.

5. In Ms. V.'s class, you can expect to be challenged to share what you have learned. Help when you see someone needs help. Talk when you have something to say. She promotes leadership skills by "encouraging the students to focus on moving toward a goal together as a team and the momentum will be unstoppable. Also, each one of them possesses different skills. Some are stronger in some areas of leadership than others. I tell them to take what they have, build on it, and lead your place of employment into a safe and successful workplace."

CONCLUSION

I realized while writing this article that we all have the potential of leadership, just as Drew Dudley pointed out in his TED talk, but my question is whether you are a leader that sparks a desire to emulate. Do you overhear your students repeating your words of encouragement to a fellow classmate? Miss M. shared

in her interview: “Continually remind them of how far they have come, and you will soon hear them telling others the same thing in times of discouragement.” We should all aspire to the level of emulation. Leading our students by serving them with encouragement, empathy, empowerment, and knowledge-sharing will instill the recognition of an opportunity to help others to find their inner leader. ✂

Phyllis J. Atwood is currently employed with Calhoun Community College in the Adult Education Department. Her appointment as a Program Coordinator is rewarding with the opportunity to help adults find a new career or update credentials for promotion. There are great opportunities for her to counsel and encourage those entering, re-entering, or wanting to advance in the workforce by building on their strengths and helping them gain new skills.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Governor Kay Ivey: <https://governor.alabama.gov/>
- Alabama Ready to Work: <https://alabamareadytowork.org/>
- Manufacturing Skill Standards Council: <https://www.msscusa.org/>

APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO INTERVIEW

I am submitting an article to COABE about how we, the Alabama Community College System, have been tasked with preparing individuals with the basic academic, soft skills, leadership skills, and technical knowledge needed for the industries in the state of Alabama. I included a segment on how the needs of the industries and generational differences have influenced how we present curriculum in the classroom to promote leadership skills (role-playing, student-led presentation of material, etc.). I would like to include your thoughts and experience in the article and although I have talked at length with each of you at some time in the last year, I would like to interview you.

I realize that some of you are GED, Bridge, etc. and not directly involved in the topic of the article, but I value your insight. Calhoun Community College Adult Education teachers are tasked with leading our classrooms with a connection between the coursework and real-world expectations. We facilitate the classroom activities so the participants can experience and practice skills that are necessary for job placement and retention.

As with any research, anonymity is provided, unless you give me permission (See attached Informed Consent Memo). There is only one question to this interview, so it will not take long, and you can respond by return e-mail (See attached Interview Question Memo) I need your response by Tuesday, June 24, 2019, so I can finish the article, and submit. I will send you a copy before I submit, for feedback or clarification on Wednesday. I do apologize for the short notice, the deadline snuck up on me, so I will be finalizing the article for submission on Friday. Please print out the release forms, sign them, and put them in an envelope, and put them in my mailbox. I will collect them from Decatur/Huntsville.

Hope you can help,

Phyllis

APPENDIX B: NECESSARY ASSIMILATION OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR THE ADULT LEARNER**Interview Question**

Employers are concerned with the basic skill level of their applicants. The hiring managers are strained to identify qualified candidates to interview. The individuals that do achieve employment are reported as unable to: process instructions/directions, work with others, maintain dependability, communicate with co-workers/supervisory, respect others or workplace. The biggest concern is the lack of potential for promotion because of these behaviors.

My question to you is:

RQ. How do you facilitate leadership skills in your classroom?

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT**TITLE OF STUDY**

_Necessary Assimilation of Leadership Skills for the Adult Learner

PRIMARY RESEARCHER

Name - _Phyllis Atwood

Department - _Adult Education

Address –

Phone –

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PURPOSE OF STUDY _The purpose of this study was to collect insight from experienced teachers to the methods employed to transfer the knowledge of how to lead, and how to share knowledge. _____

PROCEDURES I used purposive selection of seven instructors in the Adult Education Department of Calhoun Community College. I sent an invitation to interview, informed consent memo, and one research question to solicit a narrative response.

RISKS None **BENEFITS** At the most, the benefit of the results if published is an impact on other instructors as they navigate the new requirements of basic skills for employment. At the least, this research will be shared campus-wide to share classroom skills and community goals. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Please do not write any identifying information.

Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents

Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Researcher directly by telephone at _____ or at the following email address __phyllis.atwood@calhoun.edu_.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Note: Please delineate the “Consent” section of the Informed Consent Form by drawing a line across the page (like this - Example). This delineation is important because the consent form grammar shifts from second person to first person, as shown in the example.

CONSENT I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant’s Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher’s Signature _____ Date _____