

Comparative Analysis of the Discussion and Constructivism

Methods of Teaching Adult Learners in Adult Education

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Abstract

Adult learners unlike the child learners, possesses several characteristics that makes them unique and leave their instructor with no choice than to treat adult learners as objects rather than subjects. Consequently, there is the need for democratic methods of teaching adults. This paper examined the rationale for the use of the discussion and constructivism methods as democratic teaching methods; description effects of the methods when used and suggestions for the improved usage of these methods for adult learners in adult education. The paper concludes that the discussion and constructivism methods of teaching adults in adult education programmes are some of the methods of teaching adults that when properly utilized could give adult learners a sense of belonging. Moreover, it could promote learners confidence and participation in the adult learning programme. It suggests that adult education practitioners involved with teaching adults to adopt these democratic methods so as to promote a conducive learning environment that would sustain and promote learning outcomes evident in adult learners in adult education programmes globally.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis, Constructivism, Discussion, Teaching, Adult Learners, Adult Education

Introduction

One of the frequent issues raised in adult education is the method of teaching adults in literacy classes. Two schools of thought are evident in this matter. These are the school of thought that believe methods used for teaching children (pedagogy) could be used and those that oppose the use of pedagogy to teach adults. Hence, they propose the use of andragogy to teach adults. Their position is based on the belief that, in adult literacy classes, adult learners are characterized by a fully developed self-concept as a result of successful performance of social task and perform quite well in recalling materials from long-term memory (Enesco, 1967). Moreover, adults are highly independent. They tend to perceive social events in the light of their effects. They also go through mental and psychological trauma that sometimes adversely affects their ego. In addition, they require external motivation to buy and remain in educational programmes. And they meaningfully apply what is learnt in the classroom, outside the classroom as well as adult learners have

attained a reasonable age to be regarded as adults by the society or community they live in (Biao, 1997).

Recalling therefore, that adult education stands to cater for all the socially disadvantaged population in the society, there is the need for teaching methods to involve respect for the instructor's person as well as the adult learners experience and views in all forms of education geared towards the adult hither to refer to as adult education. This will in no small measure help to promote retention of the learners, promote friendly teaching and learning atmosphere and attract more adults intending to participate in adult learning.

1.1.1 Description of the Discussion and Constructivism Methods of Teaching

According to Diane (1997), the discussion method is a reliable way to draw the adult learners into interaction with the subject, instructor and the other adult learners. Thus, the teacher's / instructor's role in discussion as a method of teaching adult learners is to control the questions and not the answers. Those questions shape the class session and focus the discussion. Hence, the instructor must be willing to allow adult learners reset the agenda if they discover a point that is more important than the original ones chosen for the day. The discussion method works best if the instructor is flexible in response to the adult learners concern as it affects the teaching learning process.

The most common pitfalls in discussion teaching method are all exacerbated by lack of organization and clearly defined goals, overly long digressions, pointless arguments or no real discussions at all. When these pitfalls are avoided, through good planning and carefully execution, it becomes a reliable method as it can be used as an effective means of changing behaviour or attitudes. Consequently, they occur frequently in instructional situations in which the goal is to develop problem solving or critical thinking skills. It could be said that because material is transmitted more slowly through discussion than through lecture, discussion sessions are most suited to low consensus field such as in adult education.

Price (2002), views constructivism method of teaching adults as a method which gives adult learners an opportunity to comprehend information by forming meaningful, concrete concept and long lasting understandings of reality through active experience and analytical reflection. Constructivist method of teaching (adult learners) existed since the time of Plato who introduced the Socratic method of teaching (Price 2002).

Under the Socratic method of teaching, Plato defined an abstract concept by posing questions and queries in a logical sequence to students who would realize the concept based on their own experience. At the end of this thought provoking dialogue, the students were able to construct new ideas and meaning based on the re-evaluation and analysis of prior knowledge and experience, which in this case is a good attribute of adult learners' in adult education principles and practice of andragogy.

1.1.2 Implementing the Discussion Teaching Method for Adult Learners

An informal class setting for a discussion teaching class is very essential for a greater relaxed atmosphere for adult learners. Generally, a class setting with round table arrangement where all the participants (instructor and adult learners) sit to conform to the round table format is necessary to psychologically reduce the trauma of seeing the instructor as an emporium of knowledge and thus promote the discussion.

The discussion teaching method should encapsulate in its implementation not just a co-operative activity involving respect, but also promote justice and human flourishing.

1.1.3 Implementing the constructivism teaching method for adult learners

In implementing the constructivism teaching method for adult learners, a great deal of encouragement / motivation of the adult learners to develop their own meaning to concepts learnt should be highly encouraged. Meaning in adult learners own words expressed rightly should be marked correct and the right scores accorded to the adult learners. This would help reduce or eliminate rote memorization and promote independent learning of the adult learners.

1.1.4 Effects of the Methods when used for Teaching Adult Learners

The authors of this paper are of the opinion that the following constitutes the effects of both the discussion and constructivism methods when used for teaching and learning of adult learners in adult education.

- a) Both methods predispose adult learners' to long-term memory.
- b) Both methods suit adult learners' characteristics that would hither to hinder them from successfully achieving in adult education.
- c) When adult learners are carried along, in the teaching methods used, it motivates them and hence reduce dropout rate in literacy classes.

Thus, when materials/learning experiences relevant to the adult learners are presented alongside these two teaching methods (Discussion and constructivism), it could lead to the success of the programme as a whole. It could also reduce wastages of the education programme. This in summary would mean having a high adult education programme efficiency rate.

1.1.5 Suggestions for improved usage of these methods of teaching

1. To ensure a harmonious discussion, call adult learners not just by names but including their titles e. g Hajiya Zainab, Alhaji, Musa, Mal. Isa, Mr. Gabriel.
2. Considering that adult learners come to the class full of experience, some of their meaningful ideas that are very interesting in the discussion or constructivism (for post- literary only) could be used to generate simple reading materials (primers). These primers could be collected and used to establish a rural library for the local community's continuous usage.
3. Both methods should highly involve respect, personal integrity and worth.
4. Both methods should seek to develop the self-concept of the learners so as develop a more positive self-concept about himself and his community.
5. Both methods should as much as possible imbibe democratic ideals.

1.1.6 Conclusion

This paper looks at the use of discussion and constructivism to teach adult learners in adult education. It views the methods as favourable for adult learners because, considering that adult learners in most adult education programmes come with various backgrounds, experiences and have responsibilities, it would be wise to ensure that methods used for their teaching and learning should be democratic and friendly. This would to some extent, promote their likeness for the programme and may help to promote retention of the

adult learners. The authors of this paper are therefore using this medium to call on adult education practitioners involved with teaching to adopt these democratic methods.

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