

Dewey Personal Reflection Paper

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The Assignment

When I first read through the section of the syllabus on the Dewey Personal Reflection paper at the beginning of this semester, it made absolutely no sense to me. I read the Dewey book nearer the beginning of the semester and have since reread sections to refresh my memory. It has only been in the last few weeks that I have experienced a bit of an “a-ha” moment in bringing it all together. I am already entrenched in adult education. I lead a team of facilitators and instructional designers at a finance corporation. This course (actually, this Master’s program as a whole) has forced me to step out of my day to day role, and reassess the way I do things. I want to look at some processes with fresh eyes – I do not necessarily think that means things need to change, but I think I am gaining a better understanding of the *why* behind concepts I have always just accepted. Back to the syllabus...it mentioned that this paper should combine elements of lessons learned during the course, experiences from personal/professional life, and of course reflection on the Dewey book. I could write an extensive research paper if I combined all those elements, so I have decided to focus on three: my reflections from the Dewey book as they relate to my experiences in the course conversations/text, agency visit, and a project I have been working on in my professional life.

Motivation and/or Purpose

I recall at the beginning of this semester having several discussions in class about what makes adult education different. Many of us agreed that it comes down to motivation. Adults are not generally forced to learn. Adult learners are *motivated* to learn. As students in this course, most of us agreed this applied to us. This also could not have been truer than when I

visited the refugee outreach center. The students at the school are motivated to come to class because they want to learn English to better their lives in a variety of ways. Adult learners' motivation can range from the desire to get a better job or learn a new skill as a hobby to finding a place where they can socialize and be a part of a community. If you want to be a successful adult educator or be part of a successful adult education program, you must take motivation into consideration. Dewey recognized that education must have a purpose for the student. The student must understand how the purpose is valuable to them as well as society. When they sense this value, they want to learn. We describe this in my professional life as WIIFM (what's in it for me). In every course that is developed, at some point the instructor (or eContent) will provide details of how the course will make the participant's job easier, more efficient, more productive, etc. Once the participant understands this, they feel motivated to engage – because it benefits them.

Experience

The majority of Dewey's book focuses on individual experiences and how they relate to education. Adult Education is unique in that adult learning is influenced by past and even present situations. It is important to recognize this and utilize these experiences for the betterment of their education. It is also important to understand that their learning is not taking place in a vacuum and each individual will garner something *different* from a "lesson" based on things from their *specific* pasts or present situations. In many conversations in class this semester, we discussed the importance of knowledge share in adult education. In several historical topic reviews (including my own of Myles Horton and Highlander Folk School), past

pioneers in adult education recognized the importance of gathering people together to share ideas, have discussions, and give advice. This is an effective way of accepting and learning from multiple past experiences.

In my professional environment, I have recently been responsible for rolling out a new coaching program at my company. It is a “Coaching Clinic” that helps leaders in our company recognize the importance and significance of coaching their employees to improve performance. One of the core coaching practices of this program encourages leaders to create a healthy learning environment for their employees. This is because most learning does not take place in a classroom, it takes place informally, on the job, in day-to-day experiences. This, again, recognizes the importance of *experience* in learning and how greatly it affects the adult learner.

Reflection in Learning

The last observation I’d like to make about the book, class, and assignments that stood out for me was the importance of reflection. Dewey speaks of organizing subject matter and not moving on to new experiences before understanding past experiences. In class, our instructor would often ask us to give final thoughts on assignments or projects. When I visited the refugee outreach center, a student goes through an exit interview after class and they are asked questions about their experience in the course to assess whether they are ready to move up to the next level. The content for the coaching course at my company reiterates several times that learning is a cycle of action and reflection. We do something, and then, in order to consolidate the learning, we need to spend time thinking about the experience and

incorporating relevant lessons into subsequent actions. Understanding what went well and what could be done differently after any type of experience creates learning. Aspects of the experience that went well can continue, and aspects that need to improve can change. This reflection is necessary to ensure that experiences are viewed as positive learning instances.

Conclusion

As I come to the end of this course (which included reading the Dewey book and all the other assignments), what I have discovered is that successful adult education is dependent on the three areas discussed above. The adult learner must understand their motivation – this can be discovered on their own or with the assistance of an instructor in a more formal course. Life experiences (both personal and professional) provide the greatest amount of knowledge for adults. Learning doesn't happen in a classroom most of the time, it happens during day to day life experiences. And I believe one of the most important parts of those experiences is reflecting on them. Reflection allows a person to organize their thoughts on what happened. It allows them to decide what to keep from the experience and what to modify in the future. I realize I am not the first person to have these observations because I bet it is not a coincidence that our last assignment in an adult education class is a reflection paper on an *Education and Experience* book.