Preparing the First-Generation Adult for College:

Providing Resources For Success

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Abstract

The number of first-generation, adult students over the age of 25 pursuing post-secondary education through a community college has been increasing the last several decades. Only about half of those that enroll are retained and complete a certificate or degree.

A review of the literature examines the oft-studied characteristics and challenges of the first-generation, adult student as well as the necessary component to academic success, preparedness. Preparedness is an area much researched and acted upon predominantly in the K-12 system of education. Through the lens of social capital theory this paper revisits the various challenges that prevent unprepared and capital deficient student from finishing college. To increase retention and successful completion of a college certificate or degree it is necessary to mitigate the challenges of navigating a new experiential environment. Using a model of instruction capitalizing on learning styles, a flexible preparatory workshop series and assessment is suggested.

Keywords: adult student, first-generation, preparation, social capital,

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Introduction

During the fall 2013 academic year approximately 7 million students enrolled at a 2-year institution, commonly termed a community college (IES/NCES, 2015). In Washington State student enrollment was 175,639 with over half of these over the age of 25 (State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2013). On average, over the last decade, 50% of students had neither graduated nor were enrolled in the same institution (Choy, 2002). These students are typically described as stop outs or dropouts. Few studies follow discontinuing students, determining why adult students stop attending college, and, where or if they transfer to another institution. Adult, first-generation (students whose parents never enrolled in college) students face numerous challenges that can effect persistence and influence attrition. A review of current literature will address the characteristics and challenges of the adult student and then the first-generation student in a 2-year institution. It is assumed that obstacles such as, familial constraint obligations, time management, financial ability and literacy, and academic preparedness effect persistence and influence attrition. Through the theoretical perspective of James Coleman (1988) regarding social capital in education, these same characteristics and challenges may be redefined and categorized as resources that are necessary for success in higher education. Finally an intervention to increase human capital and retention will be proposed as influenced by Kolb's (1981) learning cycle plan.

Literature Review

The study of adult learners, their needs, challenges, interactions, and retention has been discussed and studied from at least as early as 1904 with Melvil Dewey, Director of the New York Library. Melvil Dewey (1904) proposed adult education as, "Higher education for adults, at home, through life" (1904, p. 42). His statement implies and acknowledges that adults' lives are made complex by their multiple roles and responsibilities that may challenge the access and attainment of higher education and its benefits. Holden's (1969) chapter on adult education from 1900 to 1969, shows how economics, industry, and world affairs have had an impact on adult education. Evening schools were designed to provide education the youth who left public school to work. "Age [however] was never a limiting factor, and adults were usually found in attendance" (Holden, 1969, p. 312). Even then issues of time and finances were of concern to the adult learner. Holden again notes that even during the mid 19th century, work was a potential obstacle, "student being tired...many...having to work 10-12 hour days" (1969, p. 313), and; "[t]he barrier preventing adults from taking courses most frequently cited by members of the "potential audience for adult education" was financial (43%)."

The motivation to create adult education was and is influenced by industrial and economic factors. The Washington Student Achievement Council pointedly explains the reason for encouraging adult students engaging in higher education, as a way to provide local talent and skilled labor from within the state. With loft goals of 100% of adult population having a high-school diploma or equivalent, and, 70% of the adult population attaining a degree or certificate, the plan is build a solid, educated, and involved state population (2015). The need for greater skills is not lost on the student of 1904, 1969, nor 2016. Holden avers, "The present generation of adults must manage a world that is drastically different from the one into which they were born" (p. 309). In 2016, the present generation, adults considering entrance or return to higher education come with many and more complex experiences and roles than ever before. As Forest and Peterson clarify, "Unlike children, adult learners are not defined by their roles as students but rather by the various identities they must use to live their lives" (2006 p. 116).

Adult Student Characteristics

With the growing enrollment of adult students over the last several decades, came an apparent need to classify the student population by broad age categories of *traditional* and *non-traditional.* Kenner and Wienerman (2011) define adult students as those, “who are between the ages of 25 and 50, have a high school diploma or a GED, are financially independent, and have one semester or less of college-level coursework” (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Susan Choy’s study (2002) included several additional characteristics:

- Attends part time for at least part of the academic year
- Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled
- Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others)
- Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents)
- Does not have a high-school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high-school completion certificate, or did not finish high school)

Fairchild (2003a) also describes in depth, the various characteristics and roles of the adult student; “In addition to their work roles, adults are caregivers for children and aging relatives, community leaders, and volunteer workers” While the characteristics of an adult student are neither inherently negative nor positive, the conditions of the aspect may cause challenges to the success of the adult learner (Fairchild, 2003)

Adult Student Challenges

The “F-connection”. Ben-Porath defines his F-connection theory as representing family, friends, and firms (1980). While the adult’s dreams and goals to improve their financial future, quality, family, and personal life may be the impetus for higher education, their responsibilities and roles are also a catalyst to stop or drop out. Capps (2012) addresses the issues that drive students to stop their education, if only for a semester or two. Adults may discontinue not only because they encounter an obstacle or challenge to their learning, but also because there is a reason for interruption. "Non-persisters said they left college because of job loss, failing health, or broken marriages…" (Capps, 2012, p. 38). In the United Kingdom, Bowl's (2001) qualitative study outlines the challenges not necessarily academic, that adult students encounter. The progress and adversities of three women describe a lack (whether intentional or not) of support from both family and institution, financial challenges including not receiving the benefits for which they are entitled, timing of classes, time to study, and child care.

Financial Ability. The primary concern for all students (especially those in recent decades) is the cost of higher education, potential debt load, and the ability to receive a reasonable return on investment. Of even more concern is their ability to pay back higher interest-rated loans or even to take out student loans. The Washington Financial Aid Association (Washington Financial Aid Association, n.d.) instructs counselors to liken a student's financial aid package to a jigsaw puzzle, where every student's puzzle is unique. The U.S. Federal Government offers assistance in the form of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a program that compiles incomes, demographics, school, and eligibility into a Student Aid Report that provides the student with information on eligibility for different types of aid and what, if any, Expected Family Contribution may be necessary. It is no wonder then that students feel puzzled by their own financial aid puzzle. According to Davidson (2015), the FAFSA seems to be an obvious step to receiving aid such as grants, scholarships, work study, and loans; however, providing income, tax, and demographic and citizenship information is often daunting to the applicant. Capps' (2012) research of three women attempting to enter higher education illustrated some of the difficulties in receiving financial aid. Even when the women were entitled to benefits, applying for and accessing them was a challenge, in one case, enough of a challenge to cause the student to stop out.

A joint study by Dowd and Coury (2006) found, " African-American students and those taking remedial courses were less likely to take loans, in the latter case potentially due to ineligibility, but on other status variables borrowers and non- borrowers had similar characteristics" (2006, p. 47). In the qualitative study by Ziskin, Fischer, Torres, Pellicciotti, and Player-Sanders (2014) 114 students, 25% which were over the age of 30, were interviewed to determine the students' perspectives and experiences regarding, work, financial aid and success. They found that students were generally unfamiliar with various aspects of financial aid and that this made them wary of financial aid in general, whether scholarships, loans, or gift aid. Several students quoted in the report indicated a lack of transparency on the part of the financial aid officers, not being forthcoming on available aid. One student expounded, "So it was like they want to give you what they want to give you. You've got to pay that money back. Do you understand" (2014, p. 444)? According to Ziskin et al. (2014), this wariness has a tendency to drive students to the capital resources they are most familiar with, work. Again several students in the study shared that finding work and negotiating needed study time was easier and less time consuming than negotiating the complicated forms and requirements of financial aid.

Time Management. Time management or the lack of time is also one of the primary concerns for students. For the adult student with their multiplicity of roles and responsibilities, it can be even more a challenge (Bowl, 2001; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wlodkowski, Mauldin, & Campbell, 2002; Wratcher & Jones, 1988). There are many demands on their time and energy. Some of characteristic roles of the adult as noted earlier by Fairchild (2003) could be potential obstacles and, may result in "role overload, or insufficient time to meet all demands" (p.13).

Kember (2004) studies students' perceptions of workload which includes in and outside class time where he finds that perceptions of workload are dependent upon a number of variables including, difficulty of the course, engagement in the subject matter, motivation by instructor, and the amount of work required.

The First-Generation Student

Details such as the amount of study time required to be successful in a course or courses is one detail that the first-generation college student may not be cognizant. The term *first-generation* has some ambiguity. The first-generation student (FGS) may be a recent immigrant, a racial, ethnic, an economical or social minority, an adult, or simply be the first in their immediate family to attend college (Hsiao, 1992). For the purposes of this paper the prime definition for the FGS is the first within their immediate family to enter into higher education though discussion regarding the population's characteristics and challenges will include social and cultural capital deficits.

First-Generation Characteristics

The characteristics of the first-generation student are more complex than may be initially assumed. The generally accepted definition noted above implies that the student as the first in the family to attend college and has little or no oral teachings from the family to prepare them for the complex enrollment requirements and persistence. The FGS however, has many more aspects, behaviors, and beliefs that shape their self-efficacy, success, and beliefs about themselves and the institution. According to a report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics, "Roughly 4 in 10 (43 percent) first-generation students who entered postsecondary education during this period left without a degree by 2000" (Chen & Carroll, 2005, p. iii). Statistics such as this have given rise to many rich research studies on the characteristics, challenges, and best practices regarding first generation students. The report by Chen & Carroll (2005) offers the following aspects of the FGS

- Come from a low-income household
- Be less prepared academically for college
- Demonstrate lower achievement and entrance test scores
- Be more likely to delay entry by 2 years
- Attend part time
- Enter through 2-year
- Take fewer credits in first year compared to peers
- Due to lower entrance scores, more likely to be guided to developmental courses
- Are less likely to consider a 4-year degree
- Be more likely to choose a vocational or technical degree (similar to parents)
- Be female

To add to this list, are behaviors and assumptions noted in Unverferth, Talbert-Johnson, and Bogard’s (2012) study on student’s perceived barriers in higher education. They too found that, FGS start college after the age of 22 and tend to be 2 years removed from high school” (p. 239). They also found that 61% of students in high school were planning or waiting to apply to college and revealed that the students’ desired academic level of education near perfectly mirrored their parents' attainment. The authors inferred that the students were waiting for more information (Unverferth et al., 2012).

First Generation Challenges

Much like how the characteristics of the adult student can be both an impetus and obstacle for academic success, so too the modes with which the FGS considers, enters, and persists in college. No one aspect is entirely a negative; the concern is the compounding of each element to create more and larger obstacles to success. First-generation students whether citizen, recent or not so recent immigrant have to “straddle two cultures”, says Hsaio (1992), their family and friends, and the college community.

Family and Friends. The same F-connection issue described above by Ben Porath (1980) of family, friends, and firms may not provide the resources, the social capital the student needs. This lack of support is echoed in a number of studies and reports on the FGS (Chao & Good, 2004; Hsiao, 1992; London, 1989; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Unverferth et al., 2012). Because the immediate family has little or no experience with attending college and is essentially self-supported they may not consider college a necessity. Hsiao (1992) comments that the family may not only be unsupportive but may be “obstructionist” (p. 2) and may require negotiation of roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

Paying for college. The trend is for first generation students to work outside the campus to pay for college (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). The authors also remind the reader that being a FGS is not indicative of a low SES and neither is the reverse. Moschetti & Hudley (2015) continue that the social capital of the family is largely a determining factor of matriculation and success. An area for research is whether the choice to work outside campus versus accessing financial aid is influenced by the near 2-year delay in enrolling. Unverferth et al. (2012) reports that a high percentage of students were most concerned about their financial ability to attend college, yet only 2-10% of these students reported receiving information about financial aid. The authors again inferred that the students may not have been comfortable asking questions, or, knew what questions to ask.

Time management. There is little research discussing the first-generation student and issues of time management. Collier's (2007) study on attaining role mastery in higher education and the expectations and organization required to make success happen. Faculty in Collier's study reported teaching and reminding students of the amount of time required to complete coursework and that the student needs to view their education as a full-time job. From the student perspective, Collier reports, "According to both groups of students, their time commitments inevitably reflected the time they had available, and not faculty members' expectations that they should think in terms of the effort needed to master the course material" (2007, p. 435).

Adults and First-Generation Students: Common Characteristics and Challenges

Adults and FGS students have thus far been discussed separately yet this report and its intervention seeks to draw the two populations together and provide a potential best practice in providing information and connections to prepare the *adult, first-generation student* for college. Except for Kohler-Giancola, Munz, & Trares (2008) who observes the same, there is insufficient literature discussing this population. As we have seen thus far, the two populations have much in common regarding characteristics and challenges; therefore the balance of this paper will address the populations as one. I strongly suggest continued research especially in the areas of student preparedness, retention, and perceptions of success.

Preparedness. Two areas of study are beginning to receive attention, preparedness for the system and rigor of college, and unmet or unrealistic expectations as noted by such researchers as Kohler-Giancola et al. (2008) and Reder (2002). "Adult students experience their own apprehension as they return to school and worry that they do not have the skills, time, and information necessary to succeed" (Kohler-Giancola et al., 2008, p. 225). Wang (2013) expounds on how expectations of the college experience can be a factor of student success or failure by acknowledging the influences upon expectation: institution type, initial expectations, preparedness, measured ability (placement testing), and academic achievement. In the complex system of higher education, there are a great many policies and procedures, departments and practices that challenge the student. Capps (2012) explains, “Because students generally do not read policy documents and may interact with only a handful of faculty or staff, they may not see patterns of behavior or connect those patterns to an institutional agenda” (p. 42). Sherwin (2012) broadens the scope of characteristics of the unprepared student, "Unprepared students are considered low achievers, students who have poor school attendance, students who attend unaccredited school districts, students from disadvantaged homes, and adult returning learners” (p. 29). Community and technical colleges become the entry point to higher education and with that the responsibility and onus to catch students up to college level classes.

Why they attend. For administrators and faculty, the increasing enrollment of adult students is not a surprise. Relatively recent economic challenges, the ever-widening wage and opportunity gaps, and the current federal government administration all, encourage adults of all ages to consider some version of higher education to attain or regain a more comfortable standard of living. CNN Money reported in January 2009 the total job losses to be approximately, “2.6 million or the highest level in more than six decades” (Goldman 2015). Many of those who were downsized have found that their skills are no longer enough to attain gainful employment. The position they once worked towards and attained now require, not only their experience but a higher education degree to *prove* their ability to think critically, and problem solve and perform any number of tasks that may be applicable to the new position. In a report by Burning Glass Technologies, Matt Sigelman, Chief Executive Officer of Burning Glass

Technologies, recounted to several news media organizations that,“65% of postings for Executive Secretaries and Executive Assistants now call for a bachelor’s degree. Only 19% of those currently employed in these roles have a B.A.” (Burning Glass Technologies, 2014). Sigelman goes on say that some firms are using the increase in credentials to narrow the applicant field. Unfortunately many of these adults have little or no experience in entering the higher education environment to receive the very certificates and degrees that are now required. Many individuals of the downsized workforce have neither resources, nor connections to assist them in navigating higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Related Theories

Individual departure lens. Many theoretical frameworks can be used to address the concerns and characteristics described thus far. Tinto’s (1993) theory of departure speaks of the longitudinal transitions students experience, from separation from old and current environments and experiences to a transition into the new environment and traditions, and finally an incorporation into the new culture of academe. This resonates with Hsiao’s observation of FGS who occupy more than on cultural and social environment. Adult and first-generation students may experience the same stages of integration and incorporation even though Tinto’s theory predominately addresses the Caucasian, middle and upper class student that attends a 4-year institution, and resides on campus.

The community college lens. According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) most adult, first-generation, new-entry students enter through a 2-year or community college institution, work full or part time and reside off campus, may or may not be of a minority status, and generally have lower incomes than non-first-generation students.

Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, and Hirschy's (2014) chapter, "Student Persistence in Commuter Colleges and Universities" addresses a preponderance of the issues thus far discussed and six components of a theoretical framework regarding departure in the commuter college, "the external environment, the campus environment, student academic and intellectual development, subsequent institutional commitment, and student persistence…"(p. 110). Student entry characteristics go beyond age, purpose and motivation to attend college as discussed previously. Braxton, et al. adds, "[an]other student characteristics, such as …need for control, their sense of self-efficacy, their empathy, their need for social affiliation, their parents' educational level, and their engagement in anticipatory socialization prior to college entrance…" (p. 110).

Braxton et al.'s (2014) framework points to the many external responsibilities that take place in the extra-campus environment. Those places and onus' include many and possibly the greatest influences upon a student's decision to stop out. Work and family are generally the largest consumers of time and energy and may express negative actions and lack of support (Braxton et al., 2014; Kasworm, 2003; Terenzini et al., 1994).

The on-campus environment includes both the physical space, such as parking, location, campus location, and the perceived environment. Organizational characteristics (Braxton et al., 2014) are addressed abstractly as how the student perceives the institution's, "Commitment of the institution to student welfare and institutional integrity…" (p. 114). Positive impressions of the institution in these areas are postulated to influence the student's academic and intellectual development. Development of social capital beyond those relationships made on campus, includes significant others and/or family and most importantly, information. Here again, while Braxton et al. and Terenzini et al. (2014; 1994), emphasize the importance of the support of family and friends their models speak little about other resources.

Theory Adopted

The characteristics, challenges, environment, motivation, and resources point to Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman's theories of human, social, and cultural capital. The intent of this paper is not to present a comprehensive analysis of how these capital theories work. Bourdieu's (2002) discussion on human capital, which is most often associated with finance, and economics is part of the larger more fitting theoretical model of social capital. James Coleman provides an explanation of how the various forms of social capital are intertwined and reciprocal; "Social capital allows taking such resources and showing the way they can be combined with other resources to produce different system-level behavior or, in other cases, different outcomes for individuals" (1988, p. 101).

Up to this point we have seen that family and friends with or without higher education experience may be both an asset and a challenge to the new-entry, adult student. Though sometimes unrecognized, the immediate social network of the individual may have many untapped resources. From a strictly human capitalistic point of view, who you know may be a source of untapped information, financial assistance and networking that may create greater financial resources. Coleman (1988) describes this as the obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures, where "actor A does for actor *B* and trusts *B* to reciprocate in future. This creates an obligation or debt to be paid to actor *A*. This credit or obligation can then be called into at a later date and becomes an asset or resource/capital. This is where we depart the economist's focus of human capital and delve into the weavings of social capital. Human capital while it is important to recognize its value in attaining success, it neither, according to

Coleman, addresses the internal “springs of action”, nor recognizes the influence of networks, systems, and norms to increase preparedness, success, and mobility (p. 95).

It is assumed that financial capital is important to the new-entry, first-generation student, but information is even more impactful. Again Coleman explains, "Information is important in providing a basis for action" … but is “costly”, and “requires attention (1988, p. 104). This is where we find the first-generation, new-entry, adult student, in need of preparatory information and but often without direction on where to find it.

Proposed Intervention

The Workshop Overview

The proposed intervention, a workshop known as *Know Before You Go, s*erves to aid adult students by providing resources and information about getting into college. The flexible workshop may be delivered in an intense 3 hours or may be spread out over several weeks with each weekly session occupying 1 ½ - 2 hours. The content is designed to address three concerns of aspiring students: determining a course of study, how to pay for college, and time management. The workshop also provides an opportunity for the adult to use their practical knowledge and prior experiences through listening, interacting, and empowering them to know that college is possible and attainable.

Anticipated Attendees: The workshop is designed to speak to the *non-traditional* and *first-generation*, adult student. For the purposes of this proposal the attendees will be referred to in the manner adopted by Kenner and Wienerman (2011), *entry-level adult learners* (ELL) and are defined as those, “who are between the ages of 25 and 50, have a high school diploma or a GED, are financially independent, and have one semester or less of college-level coursework.” It is expected that a majority of attendees will be working adults with children or parental care responsibilities and may receive information about this workshop program through several avenues such as employers, the local college or university and other outlets.

Experiential learning theory. As this workshop is designed to help ELLs determine their course of action, it is inappropriate to assume the learning style of any of the attendees. Entry-level learners may be of any preferred learning style and so it is reasonable to include activities and experiences that touch upon each learning and processing phase of David A. Kolb's "Learning Cycle Plan" (1981).

Kolb's learning theory begins with cyclical model of concrete experience (CE) to observations and reflections (RO) on to formation of abstract concepts and generalizations (AC) and coming around to the test of concepts in new situations (AE). The diagram below shows how the process of learning may begin and end at any point and how each quadrant the other affects. The fittingness of this model is draws on the experiences of the adult, first-generation student whom we assume has delayed entry and has many roles and responsibilities that have created a myriad of experiences.

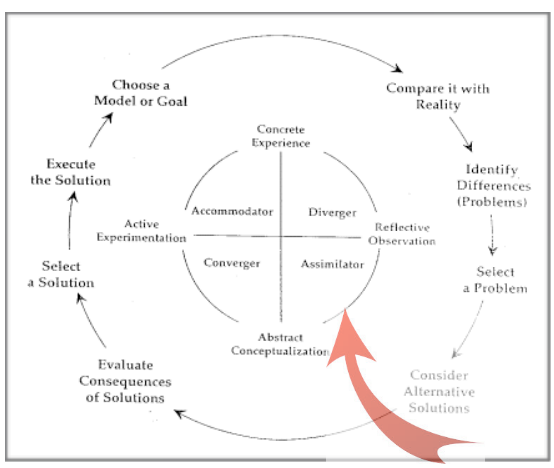

Figure 1: Solving Problems

Learning cycle entry points: Presupposing the primary audience is composed of adults aged 25-50 years old, it is assumed that the ELL attendee will have already acquired a plethora of *concrete experiences (CE)* both positive and negative and that some of those experiences have led them to *observe and reflect (RO)* upon their needs for more education or alternatives to their current situation. These adults may have discovered a problem and are now considering alternative abstract solutions and models. This is the assumed point of entry of the attendee. The potential student is beginning to dream of or, visualize an academic and professional world that is different from the present. They have taken the first step in planning for this future. Given the complexity of their experiences with work in non-academia, they may project an equal or greater complexity in entering and attending college. They may see numerous obstacles and recognize the need more information and resources. This is the entry point. They are, "analyzing ideas logically, planning systematically, and acting on an intellectual understanding of a situation" (Kolb 2007).

The Four Modules of "Know Before You Go to College"

The following section will address the learning styles in each module, how it supports and challenges the learner, what resistance may be experienced, and why the particular module is placed at its point in the sequence.

1. Preparing The Way to College - Planning, Placement Testing, and Experience
2. Paying for College - Financial Aid, Work, and Scholarships
3. Choosing your Path & Place - Degree/Career Goals, Where to go, and Orientation
4. Success IN College - Learning Styles, Resources, Studying, and Time Management

Module 1 - Welcome and Preparing The Way to College. It may seem obvious that a *welcome* comes at the beginning of a workshop or course, less obvious is the reasoning behind an introduction that talks about being lost. As stated earlier, the higher-education institution is complex, often spread out over blocks or areas of land, and enough rules, processes, and procedures to intimidate the administrative staff let alone the ELL student. It is no wonder that a student of any age can become overwhelmed and, well, lost in the jungle of college. In this opening module, the facilitator's and students' stories serve to demonstrate that the sense of feeling lost is a recognition of being in unfamiliar territory and not of abandonment or hopelessness (Wheatley 2013). The few moments that the facilitator shares their story engages the concrete experiential (CE), allows the reflective observer (RO) to see different perspectives, provides information for analysis for the abstract conceptualist (AC), and well, the active experimenter (AE), well, she is waiting for something to do. She doesn't have long to wait long. In a Hopes & Challenges activity, attendees are asked to write on one side of a 3x5 card, 2 challenges or fears about college. On the other side they are to identify 1 possible career or area of interest. In thinking of the area of interest they are to assume time, cost, and support are all of no objection. After, all students will be asked to get up, mill about, and find someone to share their answers (Kolb 1984).

The identifying and sharing of hopes and fears, brings thoughts into words, and can help the student envision their hopes as reality and realize that they are not alone in their concerns. This exercise may be both beneficial and challenging for various learners. At the forefront, attendees may be leery to dream without constraints but will be reassured that the success starts with a plan, connections, and information. While the CEs and ROs are happy to think and share (to a degree), the ACs and AEs may start to become concerned that workshop will be all about caring and sharing. The ROs, though happy to share in an intimate setting with time to reflect, may be concerned that they'll have to have something to say all the time, that the facilitator may ask them to share in the large group. They really just want to absorb everything then think about it. The savvy facilitator will have already anticipated these concerns and has explained the agenda and the varied ways everyone can engage. In essence this first module is establishing trust which is essential to building social capital (cite).

Module 2 - Paying for College. The content of this module is much more detailed as it deals with the financial demand of education. As was revealed in the literature, paying for college is one of the greatest areas of concern for students of all ages, but perhaps even more concerning for the adult between the ages of 25-70. The late-entering or returning prospective student often has multiple roles and financial responsibilities. They may rent or own a dwelling, are caregivers for children and parents, already working, have various financial obligations and demands on their time. Veterans may have the added benefit or concern of using military education benefits wisely. The concern or challenge having the benefits may be centered upon responsible allocation or spending of those benefits.

Resistance for all potential students may be in considering loans as an option to cover any portion of their cost of attendance. Education is expensive, more so now than some of the older adults may have been experienced. Regardless of age, the recent economic downturn has many adults much more cautious about taking out loans. The challenge for the facilitator is to present both the positives of the loan (an investment that can't be taken away) and the responsibilities while neither influencing nor deterring students in considering their decision.

The students who will most likely feel the most comfortable with the presentation of this module will be ACs and AEs. AC's will revel in the facts and the AEs will enjoy putting together their own funding puzzle. ROs may find the semi-structured puzzle intriguing and well the CEs will just have fun. A "homework" packet will be given out at the end of the workshop. The packet includes additional activities that will ask attendees to create an action plan, reflect on what they want to do and where to go, and explore a whole page full of resource links.

Again, there is a lot of information in this module. Its place near the beginning of the workshop is strategic in capitalizing on the interest and energy of the audience. It is also one of the topics with the most questions and concerns. It is inappropriate to not address the learners chief concerns as quickly as possible and provides necessary terminology and information to help the prospective student in filling out the FAFSA and how to communicate with financial aid advisers. The sooner these worries can be addressed the better able learners are to consider other important considerations. A break is provided at the end of the FAFSA training and before scholarship training. A mental and physical break is necessary and allows attendees to refuel and refresh. They then walk back into finding out about gift aid or free money. This area is assumed to be unavailable to adults but many opportunities are available to the adult. The resistance to scholarship however may be the work that is involved in researching, writing, and following up on applications. Fortunately for Washington State students, an online program makes searching and filing simple and uncomplicated.

Module 3 - Choosing Your Path. This module takes the intensity of content down a bit but increases the process challenge. Concrete experientials and active experimenters will enjoy the "acting out" while reflective and abstracts will be challenged by the spontaneous exposure of their feelings. The plan is to elicit playfulness by showing a picture of Calvin, of the cartoon Calvin & Hobbes® as drawn by William Boyd, "Bill," Waterston, with an ugly, scrunched-up face and ask the attendees to come up with their own version. The activity, "Please don't make me…," asks learners to consider an alternative perspective of what they do want to study. An example once presented to me explains that I may be able to do an exceptional job at cleaning my bathroom, but that doesn't mean I want to do it for a living.

The module continues with information on colleges and universities (in Washington State), their differences and the advantages and costs of attending. Learners learn that there are many types of colleges and that each has a mission, climate, and focus. The area of potential push-back could be about private and for-profit institutions. Many students dismiss private institutions because of their cost. What they don't know is that there is often much more financial aid available for low SES students. For-profit colleges appear to be a good investment, if you watch the commercials on television, but if the student stops out, the cost may be greater than if they attended a community college.

The location of this module at this point in the program is more informational, less intense in its content, and works well with the probable energy level of the class. It's important information and though near the end of the workshop, learners are most likely still in attendance (little attrition).

Module 4 - Success IN College. This, the final module addresses concerns students have about being successful in college. The module addresses motivation, note-taking skills, time management and resources. The very thing that attending students go to academic coaches for advice. The content is not challenging and the process is varied with another video that addresses being the leader of your own life. Students can benefit from the seeing a few options in how to take notes, be reminded that there will be nay-sayers but the student must turn from them to their support circle. They'll be encouraged to complete a worksheet on "Where Does Your Time Go?" (Humbolt State University 2015). The greatest resistance I anticipate is answering the question, "What will be the first thing on your action plan?". This question could be easy or hard depending on the learner. If the RO has been thinking about it, they may be ready to answer. All learners may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information and not sure what to say. They may answer in accordance with what they think the teacher wants them to say. They may not answer at all. It's not a difficult question but it is at the end of the course, an 8-hour course. While all the mini lessons in this module are important this segment is here because its content and process is not as challenging. This is the time to start wrapping up and praising them for making the first step and plan for their future.

Motivation to Build Capital

Embedded in the training modules is a motivational instructional plan for this workshop as proposed by Raymond J. Wlodkowski and is predicated by Malcolm Knowles' theory of "andragogy, adult learning as it differs from how children and adolescents learn" (1999 p.s. 97, 383-5). Entry-level learners may approach a college or university with many concerns, fears, and misconceptions. They are also often without human capital, informational, and support resources, however; they rich in experiences, knowledge, and skills that, though they may be unaware, are critical to their success in the new-to-them discipline of academia. Therefore the conditions of *inclusion, attitude,* and *meaning* are highly represented in the above course design. Even before the attendee enters the room, it is imperative to establish a climate of appreciation, respect, and connection in a safe environment. Trust is essential. These potential students are exposing their hopes and fears not only to the facilitator but each other. I believe they want for someone to encourage and validate those dreams. As stated previously, these students often hold multiple roles as parent, caregiver, worker, soccer mom, manager, and more. The time they are devoting to this workshop is carefully carved out of a busy schedule. Respect for this daylong workshop must be consistently in mind in both the planning and delivery. It is important to lay out the agenda and tie the theory to their experience and gently expose them to the epistemology, their own ways of learning and others'. As a facilitator of such a program that seeks to inform the potential student, the responsibility could seem heavy; the instructor is potentially laying the foundation for future experiences in many areas of higher education.

Building a positive attitude is also important. It is not the facilitator's duty to change a student's values or beliefs but to correct misinformation, "erroneous beliefs, expectation, and assumptions that may underlie a negative learner attitude" (Wlodkowski 1999 p. 382). This is the predominant goal of this workshop, to provide direction, information, and resources that will make matriculation, retention, and graduation possible. New students of all ages are anxious and worry if they are able to enter and persist. Reminding them that they are not lost but simply in a new place and there are skills that can help them navigate can dispel the stress that can interrupt or stall the student.

A challenge the facilitator may encounter is presenting information and suggestions of actions that unknowingly may cause anxiety in areas such as financial aid, taking tests, and writing informative class, notes are typically the greatest apprehension. It is important that attendees learn that resources and support are available and that it is not expected that they know everything immediately. It is important to state the benefits of paying for education, for asking for help with test material or anxiety, for researching various methods of taking notes to find the one that works for them. The teacher must find ways to make the responsibility a joy. Education is a trip, a journey; it takes preparation and persistence to arrive at the final destination.

Mixed in with attitude is *meaning, m*aking the responsibilities and challenges meaningful and relevant and accessible to the student. The various activities and videos and pictures presented in the workshop are designed to engage various learners. Music at breaks such as "Another Brick in the Wall" by Pink Floyd, presented half way through the financial aid module shows a skeleton at a computer with headphones and says, "We don't need no education". The slide says only a few more lessons to go. Adults of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and even Y laugh at the familiarity and the irony. A video by Greg Bell, author of the book, *Water the Bamboo* and owner of the center for leadership of the same name, covers persistence, nay-sayers, goals, struggle and being chased by lions (2009, 2010).

Activities such as the "Your Funding Puzzle" can easily engage attendees in a multi-style learning activity. The discussion starts with learning the various ways of paying for college. Everyone's method is different, a puzzle; we talk about how everyone's situation is different. A slide shows financial aid as a puzzle. The activity is an actual puzzle where all the pieces fit together but the attendee decides initially what pieces they can connect, then learns there are many more pieces that they may be able to add to their puzzle. Filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Washington Application for Student Aid (WAFSA) now becomes a resource gateway to paying for the attendee's dreams, it's relevant, a benefit, and worth the time in filling out the form!

It's activities such as the puzzle game that help students transfer information presented in various formats into "opportunities to construct relevant insights and connections". This is about *engendering competence in transfer"*(Wlodkowski 1999 p. 385). Assessment, communication and rewards should be present through out the workshop. The facilitator is paying attention to the verbal and oral language, to questions and responses; they are answering questions, encouraging dialogue, and offering sincere praise and, where necessary critical response. Not having a concrete answer or directive is an opportunity to encourage deeper critical thinking and collaboration that may be one of three areas of resistance, 1) the need to be *fed* information, 2) the financial realities and possibilities, and 3) placement testing.

Potential Resistance & Adjustments

Adult students may have experienced education in the form of feeder-receiver. The instructor fed them the information and there was only one way to receive it. Many higher educations institutions have and are adopting a critical thinking, problem solving method of teaching. It is with hope that this workshop provides enough concrete and abstract learning opportunities to provide a taste of future course content and context. One of the final slides presents a meta learning outcome. This slide brings the attendees' attention to the agenda that is formatted like a college syllabus. The workshop itself is modeled after a college course. Critical thinking questions are posed and students are encouraged to speak up and engage to their ability.

The financial aid portion of the workshop may cause some concern and logically so. Higher education is expensive and an individual entering college must decide if the dream is worth the price, if **they** are worth it. Grants and scholarships are indeed available but if that is not enough to cover expenses will the student look for alternative means such as working part-time, or loans, or house sharing? Or, will they see that they are worth the investment that cannot be taken away. You cannot reverse knowledge. It is not for me to persuade them but to provide information and resources and directions to resources and information. In the end the attendees won't know that I've taken them through Kolb's learning cycle. They won't know that I've touched on every learning style, (though I may put another assignment in the follow-up packet that asks them to explore it) to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to learn in their best way.

The other area of resistance I anticipate concerns assessment testing. It is the rare person who enjoys taking tests. Adults may be self-conscious that they will do poorly even though I emphasize the point of assessment is to learn where you are (not lost).

Needed Adaptations: The first thing I have noticed is that I will need to be conscious of the amount of information I am trying to provide in the allotted time. This workshop in its ideal format is a series over 4 or more weeks, each week with a theme and plenty of time to not only provide information but allow for discussion. I was requested to condense the workshop into 3 hours and even after removing all the activities I realized that I needed to remove some of the lesser concerns such as note-taking, exploration of learning styles and, successful group work. These other topics will require either another workshop or the longer series. Another option may be to provide the information in the take home packet, or keeping the information in reserve.

Assessment

Ideally the process of assessment would start with a needs assessment, in this case the need has been identified by the literature, a small qualitative study of 4, adult, first-generation students within the Education, Leadership, and Policy program at Portland State University, and by personal experience. From personal experience, the biggest challenge of entering higher education was being told, “You’re not asking the right questions”. What questions was I supposed to ask!? With reflection I realize two important assessment needs; 1) you must have a goal or desired outcome, and 2) you must have help, connections, capital. In the intervention portion of the proposal (see “Workshop Overview”) the intended outcome is communicated as providing social capital through information and network connections. The individual modules provide learning outcomes and from these goals, the facilitator can assess the engagement, relevancy and information uptake of the attendees.

In course assessments. At the beginning of the workshop an assessment activity will ask attendees to write on a 3x5 card their top 2-3 concerns regarding entering college. On the other side they will identify have a dream job. At the end of each module the reader will notice (see Appendix B) the final *assignment* is a “Minute Paper”. The “Minute Paper” serves several functions; attendance, self-reporting engagement value (1-3 points) and, an opportunity for the student to reflect on their learning. The papers are also valuable to the facilitator as an opportunity to assess what information is most relevant to the student, what information is being received or confused, and finally, an opportunity for the facilitator to address questions to either the individual or group. As workshops continue, evaluative surveys will be distributed at the end of all workshops to ascertain relevance, importance, and content. In addition the survey asks the prospective student the probability of: taking placement tests to determine start point, enroll in college courses or degree, and attend another similar workshop. It is anticipated that as more information is received both during the workshops and via survey that assessment/evaluation questions may need to be amended.

Program assessment. First it must be understood that the propose workshop program will need to gather stakeholders from within the sponsoring institution, confirm the objectives and outcomes, and recruit and construct an oversight committee. This committee will address such issues as budget, marketing, and logistics. The committee may request consultation and assessment as to best times and places to hold the workshop so as to elicit the greatest response in attendance. In addition, an assessment and evaluation plan, possibly similar to that offered in the appendix, will begin data collection of the viability of the program and its continuation.

Suggested Longitudinal Research. It is strongly suggested to address early within the assessment process best practices for acquiring ongoing follow up with attendees for research to ascertain the effectiveness of the program and confirm or refute the theory that adult, first-generation students lack social capital to matriculate, persist, and attain a certificate or degree. As data regarding first-generation adult students' preparedness and persistence significantly lacking, periodic surveys and interviews will add to the understanding of working with this population.

Conclusion

The adult, first-generation college student long has been described as non-traditional but the term non-traditional appears to no longer apply. According to Choy (2002, p. 1), only 27% of undergraduates fit the term *traditional* or financially dependent on parents, holder of a high-school diploma, and enrolls full time, immediately following high school; that leaves 73% of students not fitting the traditional definition.

Students of all ages require some social capital for matriculation, persistence, and attainment of a higher education certificate or degree. Reder (2007) often touches upon the lack of adult preparedness and social capital in his policy brief. An increasing number of articles describe the characteristics and challenges of the adult student but data is significantly insufficient in recording where and why adult students drop or stop out.

Hard data regarding the attrition rates of adults in a 2-year institution nearly impossible to locate; peer reviewed journals offer a vague and un-cited approximation of 50%. In one case I contacted one state agency for community and technical colleges to specifically request help in acquiring attrition rates. The representative indicated that the data would have to be calculated; it wasn't part of their ready information. The proposed intervention above hopes to incorporate data collection as part of the program assessment. It is necessary to learn the student perspective on departure, especially at a 2-year institution. That can only happen if *we ask the right questions* of the students and keep asking.

This paper has, confirmed that preparation through the continued growth of social capital is a key component of success in higher education. Much of that social capital comes in the form of information and networks of individuals to support the entry-level-learner. One way to increase the social capital of first-generation, adult students is to provide a pre-enrollment workshop that addresses the greatest concerns as indicated by the literature: time management, financial literacy and capital, career and academic planning, and study skills. Each year hundreds of programs are funded and facilitated to assist the K-12 student in preparing for college. However, as the literature has also indicated, approximately 33% of the enrolling students are over the age of 25; where are the bridge programs for them?

Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counselors (2016)

The proposed intervention was recently presented in a session, at the Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counselors 2016 Conference (McReynolds & Weiss, 2016). Sarah Weiss of the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) opened the presentation where she presented the state's education goals (2015). The State of Washington recognizes the need for workers with greater education and skills. They have set a goal of 100% of Washington's population to have a high-school diploma or equivalent. They have also set a goal for 70% of Washington's adults to attain a higher-education certification or degree. As noted in the 2015 Roadmap Report, "We cannot wait until students' last years of high school to promote postsecondary enrollment, nor an we wait for the next cyclical surge in nontraditional enrollment" (2015, p. 3). The report goes on to say that one of the "areas needing particular attention [is]…[p]ostsecondary recruitment, retention, and completion for working-age adults" (2015, p. 3). Presented as one option for assisting in attainment of this goal, I was invited to share the above-proposed intervention.

After the lecture portions of the session by Ms. Weiss and myself, attendees were asked to provide opinions and suggestions on the following questions. Attendees were asked to write one answer per sticky note and then rank the answers from 1-3 where 1 is the most favored answer.

1. What is needed to implement this program into your institution?
2. What are the strengths and challenges of this program?
3. What partnerships or opportunities can be used to capture potential students? Consider in and outside your institution & community.
4. What funding sources would be beneficial to the implementation and maintenance of this program?

Implementation needs. Attendees shared informational needs regarding:

- Number of facilitators who would be teaching the course
- Costs and materials
- Location where workshops would be held

Strengths, challenges, and engagement. In general attendees found the subject and workshop idea innovative, clear and concise, and addressed many of the questions and concerns they experienced as admissions counselors. Several attendees commented that a workshop such as this would make their jobs easier through the student arriving with a sense of what they want to accomplish and some basic ideas of how they can succeed. The primary challenge found in the intervention was not the course itself but how to capture the student *before* enrollment. Some discussion led to engaging local employers as stakeholders, local employment offices, community-based organizations, and other community service offices. Ironically no-one mentioned their own database of interested students. One other challenge was noted, that of engaging facilitators willing to work nights and weekends when adults are most available. The room laughed and agreed that after working a full day/week they were not thrilled about teaching a 2-3 hour course.

Funding. Time ran out on our session to discuss this question however, several people suggested searching for grants and engaging in national and state college success programs as a partner. Attendees also suggested that several schools and community-based organizations within a community could work together to increase resources and reduce expenses to any one entity. Ironically no one mentioned state funding, though Ms. Weiss was present to facilitate the discussion and, again, we were not able to address this question.

Final Thoughts

Like the students discussed in this paper, I am a first-generation, adult, college student. My parents did not attend college so they neither had the experience, finances, nor connections to help me; it was understood that they could not afford to send me to college. In addition, my local high school did not encourage me to go to college. Perhaps they knew my family's financial situation; perhaps counselors didn't see the *necessary drive* in me to attend, or, because of all the above, I was *cooled out* as described by Clark (1960), gently yet persistently steered away from the university. However, directly out of high school, I attended a local community college and took courses to attain the secretarial skills necessary to get a job. I completed that certificate and was working within a month. Ten years later, craving knowledge I decided to attend Portland State University. I was nearly stalled when looking for information on choosing a major I was told, "You're not asking the right questions." How was I to know what the right questions were?! I was stubborn however and enrolled anyway and fumbled my way along. I made it 1 year before having to stop out. My employer went out of business. I didn't know then that there were financial options to help me persist. 20 years later, the economy is in distress

(2008) and I have again lost a job. This time however I decided to complete an associate's degree. I had *some* knowledge of higher education, and, I knew how to ask questions and be tenacious! It was after meeting with an admissions advisor at Washington State University, Vancouver that I learned the name of the field I wanted to pursue, student services. A year later I learned that I wanted to help all students, and specifically adult and first generation students to have a smoother transition into college; that was 2012.

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