Engaging the Adult Learner: From Theory to Reality

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Considering the demands placed on teachers and practitioners, it's not surprising that we don't have time to carefully reflect on our experiences working online, nor do we always have time to analyze ways to engage our learners in a virtual environment. This hands-on workshop was designed to do just that. The goals in the workshop were as follows:

1. To reflect on past (or current) experiences

2. To understand what motivates adult learners

3. To discuss some concepts about learning and teaching online

4. To improve the future of our teaching and learning experiences

Goal #1

Participants were able to reflect on experiences working online by writing down one word that represented their feelings about how motivated they felt teaching online and then discussing how motivated their learners' were. Results were mixed, with some feeling that they did not have a positive experience teaching online and others that teaching online wasn't as challenging recently as it has been in the past.

Goal #2

Next, participants discussed the general concept of andragogy as "the art and science of adult learning" and discussed 5 principles of adult learning developed by Malcolm Knowles. Participants used the principles to reflect on their own teaching practices and consider whether these techniques and methods used in the F2F classroom translate well in the online environment.

Goal #3

In this part of the workshop, the discussion turned to the online learning environment exclusively, and participants reflected on their own beliefs about online learning and teaching. These beliefs were related to concepts extracted from the Community of Inquiry Framework, a theoretical model used to provide understanding on teaching and learning in an online environment. The model explores three intersecting concepts that work together to enhance the learning experience: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence. Participants used these three concepts to reflect on techniques they have been using in the online environment and consider ways they can improve in each area.

Goal #4

In order to improve the future of our teaching and learning experiences, it's important to consider the real-world constraints within our own frameworks and our organizations that may prevent us from moving forward. Participants reflected on the techniques discussed in Goal #3 and on the constraints they were faced with that had an impact on implementing the techniques. After individual reflections, participants collaborated on potential solutions to the constraints and discussed overall take-aways.