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Skills and Innovation for Adult Social Care

LEADERSHIP IN WORK-BASED LEARNING
DIGITAL LEARNING PROGRAMME FOR
SOCIAL CARE MANAGERS AND
COMMISSIONERS

PEDAGOGY DEVELOPMENT

LAPIS RESEARCH PROJECT
LEARNING FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE INNOVATIONS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT
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Background:

Pedagogical content knowledge is a type of knowledge unique to teachers, it is the way in which teachers relate what they know about teaching to their subject matter knowledge, underpinning the reasons behind choices of strategy and explanations. Pedagogical content knowledge was originally posited by Shulman (1986). This idea revolutionised teaching theory, giving a broader perspective of our understanding of teaching and learning.

According to Shulman (1986, p.9) pedagogical content knowledge:

“...embodies the aspects of content most germane to its teachability. Within the category of pedagogical content knowledge, I include... the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations - in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others . . . [It] also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific concepts easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning.”

With a pedagogical approach, the teacher defines learning objectives, and structures the pedagogy in order to achieve these objectives. In teacher-led learning model, the teacher uses their pedagogical content knowledge to transfer the knowledge they have to their students (Shulman, 1986). Silberman (1996) critiqued this approach, claiming for learning to occur learners must play an active role in the learning process. Bloom (1956) suggested by generating situations where knowledge can be built upon, created, and evaluated, critical thinking skills can be developed. Knowles (1978) introduced the theory of andragogy, in which the teacher establishes some structure and sets suitable tasks for the students, and learners find their own solutions to the tasks. There is a lot to link pedagogy and andragogy, because the latter cannot happen without some prior knowledge from the teacher in the form of pedagogy. Heutagogy was first defined by Hase and Kenyon (2000) as a form of self-determined learning emphasising the development of autonomy. Green (2008) suggests informal learning allows learners to take ownership of their education, with Jenkins (2011) building on this to argue informal learning is the ideal way to learn, as it compels students to make decisions in real-life contexts, additionally, an informal approach puts the student at

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the centre of the learning process, learners determine their learning goals and pathways, rather than the teacher or the curriculum (Blaschke, 2012). Harris (2019) found engagement has a positive impact on retention and motivation. Duek (2014), concluded, without offering a compelling answer to “why do I need to know this?” then students may lack the motivation they need in order to learn, as adult learners prefer flexibility, but with structure and purpose, educational experiences that are isolated and unrelated to the “now” can be irrelevant for these learners.

Research by Willis (2007) has shown by making learning relevant and connecting learning to prior knowledge, teachers can help students to build neural connections, adults also need to be able to reflect on the activity and on the content, and then relate it to what they already know and do. From a constructivist perspective Phillips (1995) found learners need a foundation of knowledge on which to build, finding education is an active process; understanding cannot be achieved without making meaningful connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge. However, Fox (2001) argues that knowledge is also personal, from one lesson, each learner may leave with different knowledge, because their interpretations are different. The best ways to help students to find, analyse, evaluate, and apply knowledge are constantly shifting and growing. Reflection is an inherent part of teaching, encouraging professional development and allowing the identification of weaknesses, it also forms a vital part of the learning process.

The use of reflective pedagogies has long been considered critical to facilitating meaningful learning through experientially based curricula; however, the use of such methods has not been extensively explored as implemented in virtual environments. Instructional approaches which facilitate reflective, critical dialogue provide students with opportunities to make meaning from experiential based learning. When facilitated via Internet, curricula emphasising such pedagogies hold the potential to guide and encourage a diverse range of students as they make meaning from learning situated in experiences.

Introduction:

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Virtual learning environments (VLE's) have become increasingly popular in recent years as a means of delivering training and education to adult learners. The development of a VLE requires careful consideration of pedagogical decisions and the rationale behind the design of the environment. Pedagogy is the science and art of teaching and learning. The development of a VLE requires careful consideration of pedagogical decisions to ensure that the environment is effective and meets the needs of adult learners. Some of the key pedagogical decisions that need to be made include:

- **Learning Objectives:** The learning objectives must be clear and specific. They should be aligned with the needs of the adult learners and should be designed to meet their learning needs.
- **Content Design:** The content must be designed in a way that is engaging and interactive. It should be presented in a way that is easy to understand and should be relevant to the needs of adult learners.
- **Learning Activities:** The learning activities must be designed to encourage participation and engagement. They should be relevant to the learning objectives and should be designed to meet the needs of adult learners.
- **Feedback:** Feedback is an essential part of the learning process. The VLE should provide opportunities for adult learners to receive feedback on their performance and progress towards meeting the learning objectives.
- **Assessment:** Assessment is necessary to measure the effectiveness of the learning environment. It should be designed in a way that is fair and relevant to the learning objectives.

Rationale for Development of a VLE for Adults:

The rationale for the development of a VLE for adults is based on a number of factors. These include:

- **Flexibility:** A VLE provides adult learners with the flexibility to learn at their own pace and at a time that is convenient for them. This is particularly important for adult learners who may have work or family commitments.

- **Accessibility:** A VLE provides adult learners with access to training and education regardless of their location. This is particularly important for learners who may live in remote areas or have mobility issues.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** A VLE is often more cost-effective than traditional classroom-based training. This is because it eliminates the need for travel and accommodation expenses.
- **Engagement:** A VLE provides adult learners with an engaging and interactive learning environment. This is important for adult learners who may be more motivated by interactive learning experiences.

Our approach:

The development of a VLE for adults necessitates meticulous contemplation of pedagogical decisions and the rationale behind the design of the environment. The pedagogical choices should be intended to meet the requirements of adult learners, and the environment should be developed with the rationale of providing flexibility, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and engagement. By considering these factors, effective VLE's that meet the needs of adult learners and provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their chosen careers can be developed. Transformations in society, student expectations, and technology have driven changes around pedagogy and teaching methods, with technology shifting the way we teach and learn, with a positive outcome from the Covid 19 pandemic being the development of a new pedagogy for online learning. Lifelong learning and development of the skills needed to manage one's own learning throughout life is imperative, with demonstrable skills becoming the key to securing and retaining work as the nature of work changes due to technological advancements, therefore, the LAPIS team have planned and developed content that supports learners in their academic; skills; career; and personal development endeavours, delivering quality resources openly available for learning.

In recent years, virtual learning environments (VLEs) have become increasingly popular in education. The use of VLEs has many benefits, including the ability to offer flexible learning opportunities, support collaborative learning, and provide access to a wide range of learning

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resources. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is a useful framework for designing learning activities in a VLE. The cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. This cycle represents the process of learning through experience, reflection, and application. The use of a learning cycle in a VLE has several benefits. Firstly, it encourages active and reflective learning, which is essential for deepening understanding and developing higher-order thinking skills. Secondly, it supports a constructivist approach to learning, where learners are actively engaged in the learning process and can construct their own knowledge. Finally, it provides a structure for designing learning activities that support different learning styles and preferences.

Experiential learning is a teaching and learning methodology that emphasises the importance of personal experience and reflection in the learning process. It involves actively engaging learners in activities that allow them to apply and test their knowledge and skills in real-world situations. When designing learning activities in a VLE that support a learning cycle, it is essential to consider the needs and preferences of the learners. The activities should be designed to support the different stages of the learning cycle and encourage active and reflective learning. The goal is to create an immersive learning experience that allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and apply what they have learned to real-world scenarios. This pedagogy is based on the idea that learners are more likely to retain information and develop new skills when they are actively engaged in the learning process. Experiential learning as developed by educational psychologist David Kolb (1984) typically follows a cyclical process that involves four stages:

- **Concrete experience:** Learners are introduced to a new experience or situation that they can engage with in a meaningful way. Learning activities that support this stage could include simulations, case studies, and interactive videos. These activities should be designed to provide a rich and immersive experience that engages learners and encourages them to explore and experiment.
- **Reflective observation:** Learners reflect on their experiences and identify patterns and connections to their prior knowledge and experiences. Learning activities that support this stage could include online discussions, reflective journals, and self-

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assessment tools. These activities should be designed to encourage learners to think critically about their experiences and identify areas for further exploration.

- **Abstract conceptualisation:** Learners develop new ideas or concepts based on their experiences and reflection. Learning activities that support this stage could include reading assignments, online lectures, and concept mapping tools. These activities should be designed to encourage learners to synthesise their observations and develop a deeper understanding of the concepts and theories underlying the experience.
- **Active experimentation:** Learners apply their new ideas or concepts in new situations and test their understanding. Learning activities that support this stage could include problem-solving activities, case studies, and project-based assignments. These activities should be designed to encourage learners to apply their knowledge and skills in new and challenging contexts.

Using a learning cycle such as Kolb's experiential learning cycle in a VLE can provide a useful framework for designing learning activities that support active and reflective learning. The development of learning activities that support each stage of the learning cycle can help to engage learners, encourage deep learning, and support the development of higher order thinking skills. By designing learning activities that support a learning cycle, educators can create a more engaging and effective learning environment for their learners. By following this cyclical process, learners can deepen their understanding of the subject matter and develop new skills and competencies. Experiential learning can also help learners to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills, which are essential in today's rapidly changing and complex world. Experiential learning pedagogy provides learners with a more engaging and meaningful learning experience, leading to greater retention of knowledge and skills and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Whilst the LAPIS project is unable to provide a platform for active experimentation due to the online nature of the resource platform, it is assumed that learners engaging with these materials are employed in relevant roles within adult social care, which will give them the opportunity to apply their new knowledge in context and test their understanding, leading to a further reflection on this experience and continuing the cycle of learning.

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Technology drives innovation in teaching and learning, allowing us to teach differently and to meet new needs as well as old ones. Learners can now access digital content; mobile delivery; new forms of assessment; and take active roles in sharing their knowledge and shaping their learning. There is an increased emphasis on applying knowledge to meet the demands of modern society, using skills such as critical thinking; independent learning; and using relevant technology, software, and data within a discipline. The development of such skills requires active learning in rich and complex environments, with plenty of opportunity to develop, apply, assess, and practice such skills, our decisions as instructors are equally important in this learner development process. Therefore, we have considered our pedagogy from both an information processing perspective, and an embodied cognition perspective, as there is robust evidence to support each of these ideas within pedagogy for effective teaching. The design of our courses reflects the concept of learning as a lifelong journey, where adults have a wealth of experiences on which to draw. We have focussed our design on providing task-centred; practical activities with immediate application to the learner's work, taking into account the self-directedness of adults who can usually identify their learning needs and most often pace themselves.

Barriers to learning:

More learners are merging work and study, consequently there is an increased need for flexible learning options. Continued advances in digital technology, social media, and mobile devices, give learners far more control over access to, and the creation and sharing of knowledge. With the youngest generations growing up utilising technology as an inherent part of their environment, there is an expectation for technology to be used whenever appropriate to help with mastering the fluency necessary in every domain. However, not all learners are confident in their use of technology for learning and assessment, the accessibility of such learning compared with traditional classroom learning presents its own challenges to each generation. Our vision is to break down barriers to education by reaching learners through high quality open educational resources, the main barriers to learning are access, cost, and lack of confidence. The resources created by the LAPIS project work to

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remove these barriers, building on formats and platforms that are available both offline and online, improving our discoverability and access.

While a minority of learners may be proficient at managing their own education and have a long history of self-directed study and informal learning, the development of an open educational resource hosted on a virtual learning environment affords more prospective learners the support and inspiration for self-directed education, enabling large numbers of learners access to instant knowledge without the necessity for meeting arbitrary admission requirements, following a set course, or having a formally assigned tutor.

There is an increasing need for modules that fit an instantaneous learning need, recent advances and improvements in flexible, competency-based learning and assessment are giving impetus to online learning and work-related skill expansion. In the evolving domain of mobile, anytime, learning, we have explored our content options, such as quizzes and multimedia resources, whilst considering the limitations of data packages on mobile devices. As a result, we have developed 'any size' learning in the creation of smaller modules that can be used as stand-alone resources, these smaller modules fit the needs of many full-time working learners, as well as those needing greater flexibility or additional help with their learning. We eliminate other associated learning costs by including all the resources needed to complete our modules within the downloadable content, rather than requiring learners to purchase textbooks or reading list items. This helps to make the course more accessible, suggested further reading via academic journals is sometimes advocated, but we are unable to provide free access to these resources, all required reading is available to all learners.

Course materials are available for learners to study at any time of day or night, giving access to all materials needed at times that suit the learner. Each of our courses are split into several activities, breaking everything down into small steps that can be done at a time and pace that best suits the learner to learn wherever they are. Any extended reading is managed through directed activities related to the text, to help learners focus on key points within, we have also included exercises designed to let learners put into practice some of

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the things they have learned. These bitesize learning experiences are designed to fit easily into daily life, allowing learners to explore new topics to build their personal knowledge through user-friendly resources that cater for a range of learning styles, solidifying the journey between informal and formal learning. There is no requirement in the design of these resources for learners or educators to be online at the same time as one another, this acts to empower the learner, whilst enhancing student control to increase motivation and engagement in the resources. We have removed any requirement to speak in front of peers, or concerns about being judged by a tutor through our online delivery method. Our short modules are filled with mini quizzes intended to help the learning process, designed to aid the learner in measuring their learning, both these things improve learner esteem and self-confidence by aiding understanding when mistakes are made, by providing explanations about the answers at the end of quizzes.

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