

Actes du Congrès
COLLÈGES CÉLÉBRATIONS 92
Conference Proceedings



MONTRÉAL MAY 24 25 26 27 MAI 1992

**International Internship :
From the Learner's Perspective**

par

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International Internship: From the Learners' Perspective

by Eileen M. Bragg

The presentation was a report of a six-month training program designed to provide a professional development experience in the field of international development for a Newfoundland community college employee. The speaker was the candidate selected to participate in the training program. She demonstrated her development of competencies as a self-directed learner and stressed the importance of understanding the learning process rather than the acquisition of specific knowledge of international affairs. Strategies for helping her learn how to take more responsibility for her own learning and reflections of the usefulness of this approach were presented in an informal interactive way to allow participants in the presentation to have input and share their own understanding and experiences in the field of international development.

Prologue

In January 1991, I was given the opportunity of participating in a six-month professional development program at the Canadian Centre for International Fisheries Training and Development (CCIFTD) in St. John's, Newfoundland. The program provided informal, job-shadowing experience which was both novel and challenging. In this presentation, I am going to examine *what* I learned about international development through an analysis of *how* I learned the principles and practices of international development. This examination and thus this presentation is really about self-directed learning.

Introduction

Malcolm Knowles (1975) argues "that most of us only know how to be taught; we haven't learned how to learn" (p.14). Brundage & MacKeracher (1980) agree and stress that in education learning activities can focus on content to be learned or processes to be used. Pike & Selby (1988) raise the issue that trainers and educators in North American educational systems have historically tended to concern themselves with designing relevant content for the acquisition of knowledge while overlooking the need for development of *process* skills.

While the designers of the six-month training session had compiled a three-tier learning program which included knowledge, experience and task-related elements, I was also encouraged to explore community college issues and to be an independent learner in order to make the experience as valuable as possible (Bragg, 1991). As I was deeply immersed in graduate studies on adult education at that time, it was an ideal opportunity to validate research on self-directed learning.

My Experience

I use the term *self-directed learning* to describe a "process in which individuals take the initiative...in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Self-directed learning usually takes place in association with the help of resource people or mentors. In my case, I was fortunate to have two mentors, a male and a female model who offered interesting yet differing perspectives into the field of international development.

With their help and collaboration, I became very enthusiastic about international development. This led me to keeping a diary of events and observations during my learning period. I decided early in the program to write monthly summary reports to the President of the College in order to inform him of the progress and value

of the training. Upon completion of the program, I reflected on my experiences as a participant in the program. The diary, monthly reports and reflection exercises were the resources used for an analysis of my learning. I used the findings from the analysis as the basis for the presentation at ACCC.

Presentation at ACCC

I briefly discussed the assumptions associated with teacher-directed vs. self-directed learning and outlined the differences between pedagogy and andragogy. An invitation was then extended to the audience to cooperate in a series of simulation exercises to demonstrate the elements of an andragogical model of learning. I wanted to challenge and involve the participants in an experiential-style workshop. Participants were grouped into dyads and assumed roles of mentor/learner similar to my experience at CCIFTD.

Five elements of an andragogical process design were explored and participants completed a series of exercises to help clarify each element:

Element #1: Climate setting

Participants introduced themselves and completed an exercise to help them begin to experience other learners as collaborators and to begin to identify the resources each learner can provide to the other learner for mutual learning.

Element #2: Diagnosing needs for learning

As the field of international development was a new field of inquiry, a review of the literature was needed in order to acquire a philosophical basis for my understanding of the field and to determine what needed to be learned. Participants were given a series of acronyms to explore. Their meanings and foundations were mutually discussed amongst participants.

Element #3: Learning goals

I explained that to have clear direction for learning, I set monthly goals that were measurable and meaningful. These were reported in monthly summaries to the President. I advised participants that if they were truly interested in fully understanding the field of international development that they too must reflect upon what, why and how of their own learning and to set their own goals.

Element #4: Engaging in learning activities

An exercise in using human resources proactively was conducted. Participants formulated two questions that they wanted to get answers from their partners. Participants reflected on the experience. I described an overseas experience that took place during my training that brought together all the elements of the proposed program. I suggested that to fully understand the field, one must definitely spend some time working in another country.

Element #5: Evaluate learning

The series of reports written during the training program were described with stress on the importance of reflection as a form of evaluation. Participants were encouraged to assess the presentation and their participation by completing a one-word evaluation form.

My intention in presenting at the conference was to examine self-directed learning by comparing it to my experience in a professional development training program at CCIFTD. Gardner (1963) states that the "ultimate goal of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education" (p.11). I support that statement and encouraged the audience to develop an awareness of the importance of the process of learning and the skills required to excel in self-directed study.

A comprehensiveness, easy-to-follow book for developing competence as self-directed inquirers, Knowles' *Self-directed Learning Guide for Learners and Teachers*, was suggested as a resource for designing strategies for students in the post-secondary system.

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