
Investigation into “how mature students learn” and the ways to work effectively with adult learners (a Business School perspective)

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Abstract

Lifelong learning, workforce competence/skills and widening participating agendas are some of the wider transformation that the higher education sector in the United Kingdom has witnessed over the past 40 years and underpinned by the Robbins principle (1963)-that higher education courses should be available to all those who are qualified and wish to study. One aspect of these wider transformation has also involved the expansion of mature students in higher education.

A mature or adult learner (sometimes also called adult student, returning adult, adult returner, and student) are loosely identified with a larger group characterised as “non-traditional”, Smith (2008) mentioned in Evidence Net-Higher Education Academy resource, that the mature students are usually defined by the age they enter higher education (HE). For statistical purposes the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) defines the category 'as those who are aged 21 or over, at 30 September of the academic year in which they are recorded as entering the institution'.

The reasons most mature students enter any learning experience is to create change. This could encompass a change in (a) their skills, (b) behaviour, (c) knowledge level, or (d) even their attitudes about things (Adult Education Centre, 2005). Andragogy (adult learning) is a theory that holds a set of assumptions about how adults learn. It was developed by Malcolm Knowles an American practitioner and theorist of adult education, who defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Zmeyov 1998; Fidishun 2000). Knowles published his first article (1968) about his understanding of andragogy with the provocative title 'Andragogy (Learner centred or directed), Not Pedagogy (Teacher-centred or directive).

This presentation/paper will look at the key principles behind adult learning and discuss various teaching and learning strategies a business school could use to to improve adult learning experience.
