

Information for Faculty Members

2010 Version

Teachers in higher education need to break from their traditional methods of instruction to accommodate and encourage the integration of mature students. If they do not, then faculty members could risk creating a “ghettoized” education system that privileges traditional students and alienates mature students (Hartley, 2009). Adjusting teaching styles, in order to facilitate deep learning, includes revisiting teaching and assessment methods that foster active and long-term engagement, encouraging personal commitment and enthusiasm, providing clearly stated expectations, engaging with students at their level of understanding, demonstrating interest in the material taught, valuing one’s own and students’ previous experiences, and providing good and prompt feedback (Ramsden, 2003). Adult education’s history with organizing professional agendas which relate to material and economic aspects of education can be helpful towards facilitating a better experience for mature students (Hunt, 2007).

Key Points from the Literature

- Lecturers need to recognize that mature students who enter undergraduate studies via adult education produce a disjuncture with the curriculum and sharing knowledge. Within this context, it is recommended to approach experiences of mature students with a “self-reflective and person-centred” perspective (Hunt, 2007; Morris 2009).
- Through recognizing prior knowledge, the mature student is given more freedom to adapt and interpret material in their individual understandings, and therefore, increasing the likelihood of successful learning practices (Toynton, 2005).
- Interdisciplinarity in teaching is essential, just as much as prior knowledge centralized on building mature student confidence can also distort further learning. However, both ways of learning need ‘validation and self-correction’ (Toynton, 2005).
- Lecturers must balance the need to evaluate students’ work with “a concern to protect vulnerable students” (Young, 2000).
- Stories of professional lives of teachers, administrators in the public education system, and curriculum builders that serve as “personal practical knowledge” in honing teaching skills is useful and poignant (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).
- Lecturers reported saying they liked the dedication adult learners bring to the classroom (Hyland & Merrill, 2003).
- Professional development needs to be positioned as a useful tool to re-educate faculty on the learning needs of mature students. From this standpoint, the mutually-beneficial relationship between faculty, mature students, and traditional students would produce far better results in learning and teaching experiences (King & Lawler, 2003).
- An exploratory study suggested that a “transactional” (focus more on tasks and the textbook) leadership style and a “transformative” (charismatic, encouraging, visionary) leadership style generally posed no more of a difference to mature students than to traditional students (Hood et al, 2009). Although, another study suggested that mature students prefer their professors to provide a “real world” context to the curriculum so that they hold a certain degree of mastery in the field (Strage, 2008).

Recommendations

- Revise courses, formal curriculum, and working relationships that are inadequate for mature students (Barton Pernal, 2009; Knight & Yorke, 2003; Langton, 2006; Morris, 2009; O’Brien et al, 2009).
- The use of tutors helps provide the pedagogic support and enhances the students’ social and academic experiences (Maguire, 2001).

- Faculty members provide close, supportive contact, conduct formative assessments, encourage skills development and reinforce existing knowledges among their students (MacFadgen, 2007; Maguire, 2001; Morris, 2009).
- Help mature students develop a sense of belonging; recognize that mature students might not be adequately prepared; treat every student equally; seek out the appropriate campus department for advice and support; be aware of dynamics between younger and older students; incorporate group work into instruction and be participatory when teaching (Gross Davis, 2001; Amaral & Magalhães, 2009).
- Recognize that writing and study skills tutorials might need to be integrated into the course curriculum given that there might have been a substantial amount of time since the mature student was previously in an academic setting (Pitts, 2007; Tarrant, Dodgson & Law, 2008).
- Be inclusive in teaching practices and value the life experiences that mature students bring to the classroom (Morris, 2009; Ritenburg, 2006).
- Provide positive feedback and encouragement as a way to foster self-confidence among mature students (Barton Pernal, 2009).
- Create an award wherein faculty members and students nominate a mature student for her/his service to university/college life while maintaining a high academic average (Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation, 2005).

Suggested Readings

- Barer-Stein, T. & Kompf, M. (Eds.). (2001). *The craft of teaching adults* (3rd ed.). Toronto: Irwin.
- Brookfield, S. (1990). *The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gross Davis, B. (2001). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MacKeracher, D. (2004). *Making sense of adult learning* (2nd ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to teach in higher education* (2nd ed.). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

References

- Amaral, A. & Magalhães, A. (2009). Between institutional competition and the search for equality of opportunities: Access of mature students. *Higher Education Policy*, 22, 505-521.
- Barton Pernal, N. (2009). *Reentry women students who are seniors: An important university subpopulation*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.
- Connelly, M. F. & Clandinin, J. D. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice* (Eds.). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Georgian College Institute of Applied Research and Innovation (2005). *Students with dependants: Common practices in post-secondary education institutions in Canada and the United States*. Montreal, QC: The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.
- Gross Davis, B. (2001). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hartley, T. (2009). Achieving all of our ambitions. *Adults Learning*, 20(6), 23.
- Hood, J., Poulson, R., Mason, S., Walker, T., & Dixon, J. (2009). An examination of traditional and nontraditional students' evaluations of professional leadership styles: Transformational versus transactional approach. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 1-12.
- Hunt, C. (2007). Diversity and pedagogic practice: Reflections on the role of an adult educator in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(5), 765-779.
- Hyland, T. & Merrill, B. (2003). *The changing face of further education: Lifelong learning, inclusion and community values in further education*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- King, K. P. & Lawler, P. A. (Eds.). (2003). *New perspectives on designing and implementing professional development of teachers of adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Knight, P. & Yorke, M. (2003). Employability and good learning in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1), 3-16.
- Langton, S. (2006). *A case study of non-traditional students re-entry into college physics and engineering*.

- Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
- MacFadgen, S. L. (2007). *Mature students in the persistence puzzle: An exploration of the factors that contribute to adult learners' quality of life and retention in post-secondary education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.
- Maguire, S. (2001). Teaching geography to non-traditional students: Inducting, nurturing and retaining them. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 25(2), 233-240.
- Morris, A. (2009). The stretched academy: The learning experience of mature students from under-represented groups. In L. Bell, H. Stevenson & M. Neary (Eds.), *The future of higher education: Policy, pedagogy and the student experience*. (pp. 99-111). London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- O'Brien, F., Keogh, B., & Neenan, K. (2009). Mature students' experiences of undergraduate nurse education programmes: The Irish experience. *Nurse Education Today*, 29, 635-640.
- Pitts, N. (2007). *Mature students at Waterside University-College*. Unpublished master's thesis, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- Ritenburg, M. (2006). *A good place to be: An arts-based exploration of my experience as a mature student in the arts education program at the University of Regina*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.
- Strage, A. (2008). Traditional and non-traditional college students' descriptions of the "ideal" professor and the "ideal" course and perceived strengths and limitations. *College Student Journal*, 225-231.
- Tarrant, M., Dodgson, J. & Law, B. (2008). A curricular approach to improve the information literacy and academic writing skills of part-time post-registration nursing students in Hong Kong. *Nurse Education Today*, 28, 458-468.
- Toynton, R. (2005). Degrees of disciplinarity in equipping mature students in higher education for engagement and success in lifelong learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6(2), 106-117.
- Young, P. (2000). 'I might as well give up': Self-esteem and mature students' feelings about feedback on assignments. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 24(3), 409-418

- Compiled by Robert Mizzi & Arpi Panossian (2008)
- Updated by Robert Mizzi (2010)