

## **Program planning and development in adult education: Where we are at the beginning of the 21st Century**

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### Abstract

*This article briefly reviews how program planning has evolved from the behaviorist product focus to the humanist process focus. Adult educators should take the time to review models which have influenced programming like Tyler, Houle, Knowles, Sork, and Caffarella. These models may have limitations that include ignoring power relationships and social contexts. Moving from point A to point B may not be as direct as a model assumes. Today's planner needs a globally integrated model which takes into account multiple and simultaneous responsibilities, last minute decisions and adjustments, conflicting interests, and can begin or end, whenever and wherever stakeholders determine. Ultimately, program planners must determine what is to be accomplished as a result of a program and what evidence will be accepted that the program has accomplished its results. Planning models can help a planner navigate seemingly uncharted waters.*

In a review of the literature of program planning which included Caffarella (2002), Houle (1996), Jarvis (1995), Knowles (1990), Knox (1980), Kowalski (1988), Sork (2000), and Tyler (1949). I have found more task description for planners in adult education and prescription of the steps to take rather than a thorough body of research supporting either of these. I have not discovered in these readings a single, formally accepted, succinct definition of program planning in adult education. Nor have I found a source that recommends one planning model over another or even provides a classification of models according to their application. (I don't find Pennington and Greene's charts very applicable in a day-to-day program planner way of thinking.)— Pennington and Greene (1976) discovered at the outset, "Research findings on which to base decisions about the superiority of one approach to planning over any other are difficult to find" (p13). The literature is replete with guides for program planners each conceding that it is not a panacea or recipe for all programs. The literature provides suggested benefits (Kowalski), models of planning (Caffarella, Cervero and Wilson, Houle, Knowles, and Sork), a history of program planning (Nowlen), research on adult learning projects (Cross and Tough), and ways to evaluate adult education programs (Knox, Sork, and Tyler). Most agree that program planning is necessary and beneficial for all involved; however, "the limited research that has been conducted in this area has failed to produce conclusive evidence of all these suggested benefits" (Kowalski, 1988, p103).

Thomas Sork has provided an informal definition of planning via his adult education program planning theory 514 online syllabus dated for the summer session 1999:

Planning is a complex process that substantially influences and is influenced by the context in which it occurs. Planning is also a social process so it is influenced by the same social, cultural, political and economic factors that influence other human social endeavors. Planning is fundamentally about attempting to shape and control events in the future.

A number of players enter into the program planning picture. Prime among them is the planner. “. . . the planner is the person or thing [organization, business, industry] responsible for more than half of the detailed day-to-day planning and deciding in a learning project . . .” (Tough, 1979, p77). “. . . program planners . . . are practical theorists who must use their intuition to make judgments about what to do in specific contexts . . . (Cervero citing Brookfield, 1994, p19). In essence, the person or group of people who plan a program must navigate a number of issues that include personal interests, organizational expectations, facilities, budget(s), subject experts, public perceptions, societal values and beliefs, and others in order to create an understandable, accountable learning situation.

Kowalski (1988) has pointed out there are different interpretations of the scope of program planning. A program can encompass a single event like an adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation class. Or a program may mean a series of educational events over a period of time like a wellness program that is comprised of special events, classes, and activities during a semester. According to Kowalski (1988), “If one refers to all the adult education offered by an organization, one is talking about the comprehensive program. It is the sum of the various courses, experiences, and the like which are planned within the functions related to designed learning” (p88).

Before a planner begins to plan s/he brings with him/her a personal orientation that will include basic beliefs about the process of education. Houle (1996) called this set of beliefs credos. Houle’s (1996) six credos included the belief that men and women were mature enough to know what they need and that educators must find this out and tailor teaching methods and content to the learners (pp6-7). Houle (1996) supports more of a learner-centered or humanistic approach to education. In some situations such as skills training, adults are expected to learn a specific method or way to perform. An organization, business, or industry has a certain expectation of its workers with regard to skills training. This establishes a slightly different orientation; one that is behavior-based. Behaviorists have influenced program planners to have objectives that are precise, measurable, and observable. Jarvis (1995) calls these two approaches classic and romantic. Essentially, the classic or behaviorist approach focuses on skills, instruction, and relay of information. The educator would expect obedience, conformity, and discipline of his/her students. The usual means to relay this information is lecture, tasks, and quantitative examination. The romantic or humanistic approach is learner-centered. It takes into account the learner’s experience and emphasizes creativity, discovery, and originality. Androgogy falls into the humanistic orientation. The method of evaluation used is self-assessment (Jarvis, 1995, p197). Of course there are other theories such as cognitivist, social learning, and constructivist on which planning could be based; however, the models in print (Tyler, Houle, Knowles, Sork, and Caffarella) seem to have elements of behaviorism, humanism or both. Planners should beware of the model they

wish to use. Very few, Buskey and Sork (1986) found in their analysis of program planning models, have theoretical explanation (p92). A model without a theory, may also be a model that has not been tested and proven which could set the uncritical planner up for failure.

The practice of adult education is an art based on science . . . Effective practice as an art because it encompasses responsiveness, interpersonal relations, and values. Effective practice is based on science because it draws upon tested knowledge from various scholarly disciplines” (Knox, 1980, p2).

If a planner is engaged in the process of planning, s/he will have to be able to slip between micro and macro views of planning. A micro view is what a planner would do if s/he focused on a specific educational program for a specific audience. The planner would mainly focus on establishing goals and objectives around a targeted group of learners or an individual in a specific time frame in a specific context like a class. Springer (1995) has outlined an explanation of the confusing mass of program planning models. “[The] integrated nonlinear planning models are really macro-models and integrated linear models are really micro-models . . . They are not separate models, but in fact, the integrated linear model is a subset of the higher level integrated nonlinear model” (p51). Linear models such as Tyler’s describe steps a planner is to complete in order to create a plan. Linear models insinuate that step B cannot be begun until step A is complete. For example, a program schedule cannot be finished until location, instructor(s), and topic have been chosen. Linear model critics fear that “simplicity and efficiency increase the likelihood that institutional objectives will dominate programming decisions” (Kowalski, 1988, p100). [The classical view of planning] “does not account for the dimensions and variability of planning contexts, the nature of practical judgments, or the values that influence how judgments are made . . . (Cervero, 1994, p17). “Nonlinear models attempt to provide greater flexibility in terms of time and resource allocation. They avoid presenting lockstep avenues to creating educational experiences” (Kowalski, 1988, p96). Nonlinear models try to take into account the context in which planners make decisions. For example, planners must consider political situations within an organization and must be aware of the influence of the learners and educator(s) in relation to socio economic status, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. Commonalities among planning models are identified by Caffarella (2002) as

. . . the needs and ideas of learners, organizations, and/or communities as central to the program planning process; the importance of context in the planning process; and identifiable components and practical tasks that are important to the planning process (p20).

One framework that is popular and contains all but one of the commonalities is Houle’s (1996) Design of Education. Houle’s (1996) framework consists of two segments: categorizing the educational program and moving through tasks in the framework. Houle’s (1996) situational categories include individualized learning, group learning, creation of an institutional learning design, and mass public education design. Of his framework Houle (1996) says, “. . . one may begin with any component and proceed to the others in any order . . .” (p60). Houle (1996) tries to accomplish a systemic framework that breaks free of the linear models. While Houle’s (1996) system seems comprehensive, Jarvis (1995) critiques, “it does adopt the perspective of the adult educator who is able to design an educational programme [sic] free from external constraint, which may not actually reflect the reality of what happens during the process”

(p204). The issue of context and power seems to hinder the practical application in some instances of Houle's (1996) model.

Cervero and Wilson (1994) address external constraints in the form of power. ". . . planning . . . is accomplished in a world of power relationships, some constraining and some enabling, that define the terrain in which planners must act . . . power relationships define planning situations" (p118). Cervero and Wilson (1994) place planning in a social context and use critical theory as its basis.

By framing planning in this way, they effectively exclude other equally plausible and more complete explanations of what is happening. And if there are other processes occurring beyond negotiation, then their assertions about what skills and knowledge are needed to plan responsibly are at best incomplete and at worst misleading" (Sork, 2000, p179).

What planners need is a globally integrated model of planning which takes into account the multiple and often simultaneous responsibilities, last minute decisions and adjustments, and conflicting interests. Such a model may be embodied in Caffarella's (2002) interactive model.

Caffarella's (2002) model "has no real beginnings or endings" (p21). It is cyclical. Caffarella's (2002) model is, in my opinion, what Springer (1995) is imagining as he discusses the issue of cycle and sequence.

". . . program planning is without question, a cyclical process, but possesses an inherent sequentiality. The inherent sequentiality is at the micro-level and must be adhered to by each of the subactivities, while the cyclical outer process is what provides us with the macro-view we call nonlinear program planning. The outer/macro process provides the framework which allows for the cycling to take place" (pp52—53).

Caffarella (2002) has thoroughly reviewed the program planning models from the past and taken the criticisms of practicing program planners into account to design the interactive model. Like Houle (1996), Caffarella (2002) provides her credo in the form of assumptions. Her principles and practices echo of Knowles (1990) and her inclusion of navigating ethical decisions and conflicting values and beliefs follows Cervero and Wilson's (1994) sentiments. It is difficult to criticize a work that appears to be so thorough in both research and presentation. I did, however, find an area that I thought was minimally treated: dissolving partnerships. Her model is the first that I have encountered to mention this aspect of programming; however, a few lines and no examples of dissolution simply do not help the programmer who finds himself/herself in the position of dissolution. I have found that dissolutions can be aided through evaluation data. If a planner has gathered both formative and summative data about a program, s/he can make a clear determination based on evidence of whether or not a program should be dissolved. However, if no such data exist, the planner puts himself/herself in the position of being personally blamed for the outcome of a dissolution. This is not always desirable.

Tyler (1949) has determined that program evaluation should determine whether or not the program has changed student behavior. The evaluations, Tyler (1949) says, should occur somewhere toward the beginning of the program, one toward the end of the program, and one at some time period after completion of the program (pp106-107). Houle (1996) warns against evaluation becoming an end in and of itself and that a programmer should not ignore determining changes in values and beliefs of learners (p233). Houle's (1996) belief stems from the changes according to Knowles (1990) that

occurred in the late 1970s when programmers realized that evaluation “requires getting inside the skulls of the participants—and inside the social systems in which they are performing—and finding out what is happening in their way of thinking, feeling, and doing” (p139). The issues that have come to light over the years regarding program evaluation involve whether to take quantitative or qualitative evidence or both and whether to perform formative or summative or both kinds of assessments. Kowalski (1988) cites Scriven (1967) in defining summative evaluation “as a process designed to determine if a program should survive” (p151). Groteleuschen (1980) says that “most evaluations for accountability are done on activities or programs that have been completed” (p70). Most summative evaluations occur because an external source (state or federal) has initiated the request. Summative evaluations are goals driven, that is, the primary intent of the evaluation is to see if the program achieved its goals (Brown, 1984, p31). Formative evaluations, on the other hand, are evaluations that occur while the program is running with the purpose of gathering information about what to improve and how to improve the program (Deshler 1984, p7). Internal personnel conduct formative evaluations. According to Deshler (1984) “Formative evaluation is most likely to be appropriate when a program is in its early stages. Summative evaluation is most helpful for a fully developed program” (p11). Ultimately, if evaluation is conducted systematically and integrated into the planning process, the program planner has a greater chance at gaining evidence for the purposes intended. Caffarella (2002) states, “There is no one acceptable systematic process for conducting a program evaluation” (p230). Program planners must keep in mind a number of issues when deciding on evaluation. The task of evaluation can be as complicated as the entire plan itself or as uncomplicated as a paper and pencil summative evaluation.

Program planners have a wealth of models and evaluation literature from which to choose. Planning has moved from the realm of the educator working in a vacuum of sorts isolated from external factors to change a learner’s behavior into the realization that many factors influence the educator, learner, and sponsoring organization and that while all negotiate toward intended outcomes there are also unintended outcomes which must be acknowledged in the process. Program planning has evolved from product focus to process focused.

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