

Epistemology and Ontology: The Lived Experience of Non-Traditional Adult Students in Online and Study-Abroad Learning Environments

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The goal of this study was to better understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of nontraditional, adult university students enrolled in an online baccalaureate degree program, who were given an opportunity to participate in an engaged, study-abroad program. This understanding was achieved through rigorous analysis of student learning journals required as part of the course. Students were asked to journal their feelings, perceptions, experiences and learning. The purpose of the analysis was to identify and describe the various experiences and perceptions, then group these experiences and perceptions into a logically organized description of the lived experience of adult students.

INTRODUCTION

Max Van Manen (1990) posited that the preferred method for human science (as opposed to natural science) was based in description, interpretations, and self-reflective or critical analysis. In other words, we explain nature but we must come to understand human life. Since the inception of online learning, researchers have studied and investigated the differences between online (distance) education and traditional face-to-face learning. Most of the work has been done in quantitative methodologies, focusing on the similarities and differences in the cognitive achievement of students. The extant literature is replete with studies and positions claiming little or no difference between the two delivery methods. However, Chisholm, Harris, Northwood & Johrendt (2009) offer the following:

Over the past decade, the analysis of what occurs when learners are involved in ‘work’-based learning (WBL) has, at best, been superficial and simplistic, i.e. it has been accepted that individuals learn by being in a knowledge-based work-based environment. It does not follow, however, that they will acquire the knowledge they are seeking simply by being in a ‘real world’ workplace environment. What needs to be considered is how the learning processes take place in ‘work’-related environments and how, by understanding the mechanisms of learning, the work-based environment can be formalised as an authentic learning environment and thus accepted as comparable but nevertheless different from the traditional on-campus one (p. 319).

The goal of this study was to better understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of nontraditional, adult university students enrolled in an online Emergency Services baccalaureate degree program, who were then given the opportunity to participate in an engaged, study abroad program. This

understanding was achieved through rigorous analysis of student learning journals required as part of the study abroad course. Students were asked to journal their feelings, perceptions, experiences and learning. The purpose of the analysis was to identify and describe the various experiences and perceptions, then group these experiences and perceptions into a logically organized description of the lived experience of adult emergency services students.

With the creation of the Internet and increased societal emphasis on education, the adult learner has become the focus of many institutions of higher education, but it has also created a need for re-evaluating how education is best delivered.

Over the last two decades, higher education in America has witnessed an enormous shift in the demographics of students, while at the same time technology has enabled access to formal higher education. By the late 1990s, national attendance figures showed that 42 percent of the undergraduate and 59 percent of the graduate students attended part-time (UCEA, 1998). Of those part-time students, the largest segment was women thirty-five years and older. Clearly, there has been an important shift in the past twenty-five years in the profile of the average college student, which is changing the American University. In addition to putting pressure on the University for an increasingly vocational and professionally oriented curriculum, this shift is also leading to pressure for the general accommodation of the working adult student through more convenient scheduling and location of courses (Berg, 2005, p. 3).

This is reinforced by research commissioned by the United States Department of Education in the *Report of the Web-Based Education Commission to the President and the Congress of the United States* (Kerry et al., 2000, p. 4), which stated:

Large numbers of older persons, working adults, and part-time students attended college in 1999. The adult age cohort is the fastest growing segment of students in postsecondary courses. Despite rising enrollment noted above, just 16% of college students fit the traditional 18- to 22-year-old profile, attend full-time, and live on campus.

Andragogical assumptions posited by Knowles and others may yet prove to be of great value in higher education, particularly in light of the changing demographics of many, if not most universities and colleges. Adult students appear to have a different learning style requiring a targeted approach when using modern technology (Pelletier, 2005). This seems particularly true for the emergency management/services and homeland security workers. Due to the nature of their jobs, previous training, and education experiences (like most adult students) they have an expectation for immediate applicability.

Adults need to know why they should learn something. Under the standard pedagogical model, it is assumed that the student will simply learn what they are told. Adults, however, are accustomed to understanding what they do in life. They want to know the reason they will need to learn something or how it will benefit them (Fidishun, n.d., p. 2).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The extant literature is replete with quantitative data comparing and contrasting cognition between traditional face-to-face teaching methods and Internet-based, online delivery of curriculum. However, very little qualitative data are available with respect to the experiences and perceptions of online or students in hybrid learning environments, especially the nontraditional adult population. Understanding these experiences and perceptions may allow researchers and educators to design, develop, and teach courses that facilitate higher cognitive *and* affective knowledge acquisition in the fast-growing demographic of non-traditional adult students.

However, traditional pedagogies may not be effective with the non-traditional adult student population. Finding a good method of allowing these students to immediately apply knowledge, while

still being able to take responsibility for their own learning, could help create an appealing and effective delivery model. Adult students need to be moved from old habits and into new methods of learning where they become self-directed, take responsibility for their own learning (Fidishun, n.d.).

There also seems to be little data respective to the affective domain of nontraditional adult students and online and/or blended (hybrid) education. Krathwhol, Bloom, and Masia (1964), in their seminal work on educational taxonomies, asserted the need to explore the human reaction or response to educational content. This included a range of human responses, including knowing about something, problem solving, evincing an interest in human experiences, having an attitude toward some object or concept, and/or expressing one's feelings and opinions on a variety of subjects. These principles of learning, especially for adults need to be explored further as the technological advances are or appear to be altering the educational schemas and deliveries at many universities. Therefore, the following question guided our research: How do adult students experience and or perceive the nexus between what is known and what is experienced in an asynchronous online environment and a face-to-face study abroad learning opportunity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ontology and Epistemology

Adult learners want and need to use their lived experience and incorporate reflection into their learning schemas. Maxfield (2008) in his research on non-traditional adult students and asynchronous online learning shared the following:

Barab, Thomas, and Merrill (2001) noted a concern for the human or social dimension of online learning environments. They addressed the fact that much is often discussed about the technical components of distance education, but less often discussed is the human or social dimension of these environments. They found that online instruction might foster a reflective and social environment (Merrill, DiSilvestro, & Young, 2003). A need exists to find a way to transform experience(s) into learning.

Adults usually bring a plethora of real-life experiences with them to the classroom, experiences that need to be recognized and integrated into the learning process (Knowles, 1984). Key points of andragogy or adult learning include consideration of the learner's experiences, the importance of the learning environment, the learner's readiness to learn, and the teacher as a facilitator (Brown, 2001). Kolb (1984) proposed a four-stage cycle: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization (theory building) and, (d) active experimentation or application (p. 8).

Krathwohl and colleagues (1964) identified divisions within the objectives of education. They presented them as:

1. *Cognitive*: Objectives that emphasize remembering, recalling or reproducing something that has been believed to be learned.

2. *Affective*: Objectives that emphasize a feeling, an emotion, or acceptance or rejection of material. They further identified these objectives as interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets or biases.

3. *Psychomotor*: Objectives that emphasize motor skills (muscular), manipulation of materials and objects, or some act that requires a neuromuscular coordination.

When contrasting the cognitive domain with the affective domain, some important distinctions are apparent. The cognitive domain posits the assumption that the student should be able to do a task when requested. The affective domain is more concerned that the student does a task when it is appropriate, after understanding or recognizing that he/she can do it (Krathwohl et al., 1964). Put into simpler terms, the cognitive domain is "can do" while the affective domain is "does do." However, compartmentalizing these behaviors into cognition and affect is not as easy as it may appear. Rarely is curricula developed with the intention that one is independent of the other. There is research that shows that cognition cannot be completely separated from affect. A more interesting idea is the possibility that one is the effect of the

other. There may even be a deeper relationship or effect between cognitive and affective domains (Maxfield, 2008).

The theoretical construct used for this study was social constructivism. Constructivism posits that learning is a process of “constructing” meaning from one’s experience (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Well-known constructivists like Piaget and Vygotsky had different perspectives, yet based their works on the premise that experience had a major role in learning. Piaget theorized two types of constructivism: personal (cognitive) and social. Personal constructivism draws heavily upon an individual’s adaptation to his/her environment. The social constructivist view posits that knowledge is constructed through conversations, activities or in socially sharing (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Epistemology (what is known) has been the educational foundation for centuries. Basically, cognition portion of the taxonomy identified by Krathwhol, Bloom and Masia (1964) is centered on the ability to remember, recall, or reproduce something learned, or in other words, recall what is known.

Ontology (what is lived) is based on what is experienced or experimented with through social or emotional reflection and/or activity. This has not been as extensively studied, yet based on the constructivist foundations this appears to be where learning is completed. In other words, when one has knowledge through cognition and/or muscular manipulation (psychomotor), and it is combined with reflection and experimentation, then a person can be said to have learned (known) and been educated (lived) in a particular area of learning. Greeno (1997) stated it this way:

In these practices, students develop patterns of participation that contribute to their identities as learners, which include the ways in which they take initiative and responsibility for their learning and function actively in the formulation of goals and criteria for their success (p. 9).

Social Interactions

Social interaction with the instructor, other students, and other communities of learning is particularly important when delivering courses via the Internet (Ryan, Carlton, & Ali, 2004). One problem that may have surfaced with the introduction of online learning is that curriculum developers have concentrated more on the technology and less upon the content and methodology of their instruction. The danger in the rapid introduction of electronic delivery is that the focus may be on the mechanism of delivery, rather than on the quality of the learning experience (O’Keefe & McGrath, 2000). Research has generally focused on technological aspects, with relatively few academic studies or articles written on the human and social aspects of teaching and online learning. Recent research indicates that quality of learning depends on the design of instruction and that learning transfer and retention are most strongly impacted by the frequency and quality of learner-centered practice activities, socialization and instructor feedback. Therefore, the instructional design process has the biggest effect on final course/program quality—not the use of technology itself (Barclay, 2001). Therefore, creating opportunities for ontological learning have become of increasing importance for the non-traditional adult learner.

Metacognition

One method of enhancing learning with the adult learner is to incorporate metacognitive practices into pedagogies. Metacognition has been simply defined as “thinking about thinking.” It is not that simple, but this gives a simpler view into the process of metacognition.

Cognition as presented above is the gaining of knowledge. For example, if a student is taught that $2 + 2 = 4$, then he or she has learned the answer to the problem and will be able to get it correct the next time. Metacognition, however, is the thought process (usually reflective) on how the learning took place. If the student were to think about how he/she became cognizant of the answer, he/she may realize that a mental picture of two objects being added to two other objects was used, thereby learning that visualization is a metacognitive activity (Maxfield, 2008).

By providing activities that allow the adult to think about, plan, implement and succeed, metacognitive awareness assists the student in learning. In other words, knowing how one thinks about and processes information can assist in the learning process for other problems or issues that arise. One way of incorporating metacognition into a learning experience is by having the student keep a journal of

how he/she went about solving problems. Journaling promotes growth in learners and is a way to develop thinking and reflection skills (Mizerow, 1990).

Another method for which journaling can be a great assistance is self-questioning. Livingston (1997) gave the following insight:

Metacognitive experiences involve the use of metacognitive strategies or metacognitive regulation (Brown, 1987). Metacognitive strategies are sequential processes that one uses to control cognitive activities, and to ensure that a cognitive goal (e.g., understanding a text) has been met. These processes help to regulate and oversee learning, and consist of planning and monitoring cognitive activities, as well as checking the outcomes of those activities. For example, after reading a paragraph in a text a learner may question herself about the concepts discussed in the paragraph. Her cognitive goal is to understand the text. Self-questioning is a common metacognitive comprehension monitoring strategy. If she finds that she cannot answer her own questions, or that she does not understand the material discussed, she must then determine what needs to be done to ensure that she meets the cognitive goal of understanding the text. She may decide to go back and re-read the paragraph with the goal of being able to answer the questions she had generated. If, after re-reading through the text she can now answer the questions, she may determine that she understands the material. Thus, the metacognitive strategy of self-questioning is used to ensure that the cognitive goal of comprehension is met (pp. 1-2).

Metacognition is important to the adult learner. After reflecting on his/her vast reservoir of experience, the adult student if given the right instructions and tools, can understand his/her unique learning processes. Metacognition enhances learning and further gives the adult learner a tool(s) to use in further life-long learning (epistemology) and being (ontology).

Reflective Practice

Reflection and the learning process has been studied extensively and found to have particular importance to the adult learner. Maxfield (2008) also shared the following:

Researchers and educators have been exploring reflective practice for a long time. Thinking about one's cognition can be traced back to the times of Plato and Aristotle. In more recent times there has been extensive work in reflective practice by some noted researchers.

British researcher and educator, Peter Jarvis, developed a theory about the process of learning through social experience and reflectivity. The premise of Jarvis' learning process model is based on the assumption that all adults have experiences; some are good, some bad. Many experiences, however, may be so rote or routine that a person gains nothing from them. The learning process then calls for an experience out of the "norm," which elicits a response at a different level than would be typically done. In other words, the experience requires some reflective action. Reflection is the heart of Jarvis' model (pp. 28-29).

Merriam and Cafferella (1999) present that Jarvis posited from an experience, there are nine different routes or responses a person can make:

1. Presumption—mechanical response or a presumption that what has previously worked will work again.
2. Nonconsideration—too preoccupied with something else to even consider the experience.
3. Rejection—a conscious choice to reject the opportunity to learn.
4. Preconscious—a person unconsciously internalizes something.
5. Practice—practice a new skill until it is learned.
6. Memorization—acquire information with which they have been presented and learn it so it can be reproduced at a later time.
7. Contemplation—thinking about what is being learned.
8. Reflective practice—similar to problem solving.
9. Experimental learning—actually experimenting on one's environment (p. 284).

The first three responses (presumption, nonconsideration, and rejection) are choices in which no learning takes place. In the second group of three, preconscious, practice, and memorization (which Jarvis considers nonreflective) a small amount of learning will occur. The final group of three, contemplation, reflective practice, and experimental learning are considered choices of reflective learning. Jarvis later shared how he developed an interest in reflective practice and credits the work of Donald Schön.

Reflective practice found its way into the educational vocabulary with the publication of Schön's *Reflective Practitioner* (1983), a book that has changed the way many people think about their practice and has led to many innovations in teaching and research. At the same time, my own very early experience with long evaluative reports written by the students about their own practice was the time in my own academic career when I began to question the traditional relationship between practice and theory. This eventually led to my writing *The Practitioner Researcher* (Jarvis, 1999), in which I tried to work out something more about this relationship—but this happened only after I had begun to get students to use learning journals in their own doctoral research (Jarvis, 2001, p. 80).

As Jarvis pointed out, Donald Schön added to, or as some would assert, created this field of study with his book, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). His notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are central to the concept. In fact, he related directly to teacher reflection in a presentation at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association (1997).

These explanations give the teacher the knowledge of the greatest possible number of methods, the ability of inventing new methods and, above all, not a blind adherence to ONE method but the conviction that all methods are one-sided, and that the best method would be the one that would answer best to all the possible difficulties incurred by a pupil. That is, not a method, but an art and a talent. And this is teaching in the form of reflection-in-action. It involves a surprise, a response to surprise by thought turning back on itself, thinking what we're doing as we do it, setting the problem of the situation anew, conducting an action experiment on the spot by which we seek to solve the new problems we've set, an experiment in which we test both our new way of seeing the situation, and also try to change that situation for the better (Schön, 1997).

Schön (1983) also asserted that there is a sense of artistry in the function of a reflective practitioner.

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation (p. 68).

Experiential Education/Learning

Experiential learning foundations can be traced to the philosophies of social constructivists like Vygotsky and Piaget. Experiential education places importance on constructing individual meaning, prior experience and social values. In a general sense, experiential education frequently uses reflection as a tool to develop and understand further meaning, especially through social interaction (Furman & Sibthorp, 2013).

Common strategies exist for utilizing the effects of experiential learning. Furman & Sibthorp (2013) have identified these strategies as: 1) Problem-based learning; 2) Project-based learning; 3) Cooperative learning; 4) Service learning; and 5) Reflective learning. These strategies represent the types of methodologies of instruction that teachers may develop their pedagogies around.

One of the benefits of these strategies is the ability to connect the abstract with the concrete. The traditional model of pedagogy where the teacher leads the learning model does not allow for the self-directedness and individual experimentation that is characteristic to the adult learner and a natural extension of the lived experience (Challis, 1996). This is also supported by Kolb's learning cycle. Kolb

(1984) proposed a four-stage cycle: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization (theory building) and, (d) active experimentation or application.

Cantor (1997) presents five objectives for the demands society and academia. They are: 1) Increase understanding of learning theories and cognitive development; 2) Use of varied learning modalities for the nontraditional learner; 3) Create team players; 4) Interface more with business and/or the community; and 5) Critique extant methods of cognitive evaluation. This is relevant in that it is no longer enough for students to master epistemologies and logic in the academic sense; they must be able apply knowledge and experience outside of the academy.

METHODOLOGY

The review of the literature led to the research question: How do adult students experience and or perceive the nexus between what is known and what is experienced in an asynchronous online environment and a study abroad learning experience? A qualitative study is most appropriate to explore this question. Qualitative research is an inquiry process that explores a human or social problem.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology used to explore and interpret deep human experiences. “[A] phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Since this study explored the lived experiences of nontraditional, adult emergency services students and how the experiences fit into adult learning, a phenomenological design seemed most appropriate. “Doing phenomenology means to start with lived experience, with how something appears or gives itself to us” (van Manen, 2014, p.32).

Data were gathered from student-submitted learning journals. As part of the requirements of a study abroad experience, students were required to keep a learning journal of their feelings, perceptions and knowledge acquisition throughout the course. They were required to submit journal entries to the instructor on a weekly basis throughout the semester.

Data analysis began as soon as the first journal entries were submitted and was ongoing throughout the duration of the study. A constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data. Because qualitative research is an emerging process, the data were dynamic and based upon the responses and feedback of the participants. Revisions occurred throughout data collection and/or analysis of this study (Creswell, 2002).

The next step in the analysis was to look at the actual data gathered from the students and begin the process of grouping. We found statements in the students’ journals about how the participants were experiencing the study abroad class and its comparisons to the asynchronous, online work. We then grouped these statements into meaning units. Care was taken to ensure that the original intent of each statement had not been compromised by the meaning(s) derived. The aggregate meanings were then coded (grouped or clustered by theme). Several codes or themes were identified or differentiated. This process led to the need of further clarification or more detailed information, and then more grouping or coding until saturation had been achieved. To validate the themes, they were compared to the original statements to ensure that something significant in the original statements had not been left out in the groupings or that the coding created something not in the original statements.

Using a structural description, we sought to identify all possible meanings and perspectives to construct a description of how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants. After the data were coded and analyzed, a rich descriptive narrative was written, detailing the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 1998).

RESULTS

This study strives to give a fuller, richer understanding of what it means to be a nontraditional adult student in the world of asynchronous, online instruction and then placed in a multi-cultural engaged learning environment. We have attempted to discover and present the ways in which the adult student can experience this unique environment.

This research provides a vivid look at the experiences of an asynchronous, online undergraduate course which was highlighted by a study-abroad, engaged learning environment. We believed it essential to understand how this segment of a population of students experienced online and engaged learning because of the growing number of nontraditional students enrolling in degree programs and because of the newness of the online delivery systems. This understanding will enlighten administrators, faculty, course designers and curriculum specialists. Understanding the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the online students who have an opportunity to apply learning in a real-life, engaged manner may open the door to thousands, if not millions of potential students, who may not be able to pursue education in the traditional manner. Furthermore, since our world has become more global in perspective, understanding how students experience the asynchronous, online learning and culturally diverse laboratory environment may have large impacts in teaching and developing tomorrow's world leaders.

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis. The first was the emotional impact of witnessing and participating in an actual post-disaster environment. The second theme was the awareness of the cognitive (epistemological) and affective experience of becoming or being an emergency management specialist (ontological) gained through reflection.

The emotional impact of witnessing and processing the cognitive learning was rich and pervasive in the student learning journals. One student reported the following:

Today my emotions were all over the place! At 9 a.m., we boarded a charter bus and when to downtown Christchurch to see a couple of memorials and what the locals call the Cardboard Cathedral. If you go and look at the disaster photos you will see one with a picture of 185 chairs. Those chairs represent the 185 people who lost their lives in the Feb 2011 quake. I felt the same feeling of loss and reverence when I saw this display as I did when I saw the display of flags Sandy City [Utah] does on 9/11. Fortunately, that is all there were [fatalities] with so much damage and destruction around [bracketed comments added].

Another student shared:

The first week in New Zealand has been a rollercoaster of emotions.... As we got into town we headed over to the Christchurch Cathedral and witnessed the sheer destruction that happened to that building. It makes me sad to see how much of the city's identity was lost or altered. The skyline of the city will never be the same. I can only hope that they make it better. The people of this great city deserve it.

One emotion that was shared throughout the journals was the amazement at how open the people of Christchurch were in sharing their experiences, feelings and lessons learned. The students had many opportunities to speak with the people of Christchurch. This included first-responders, emergency managers, attorneys, university professors, and citizens at large. This seemed to have an emotional impact on the students. For example, a student wrote the following in one of the journal entries:

This morning the Canterbury emergency manager came and spoke with us. I really liked that he was open with us in where they feel they did well and where they lacked. He spoke of several areas where I think we can bring home additional information that could be helpful.

This afternoon's first lecturer was one of the founders of the Student Volunteer Army. That is an organization that began after the Feb 2011 quake that was a grassroots organization of Canterbury University students. The university wasn't nearly as effected as the city just a few kilometers to the east and the school administrators shut all classes down for three weeks. With so much free time one student thought to use social media to organize students to go help out in the community. The amazing thing was they had no training, no tools, and really not much organization, just a willingness to help. On the first day there was about 100 people that showed up but as the really got some traction they had hundreds of students out in the community. They used social media as a way for people who needed help to let them know and then they just asked students who wanted to go. At one point, they had thousands of requests for help with students all over the city.

Attitudes, perspectives, and perceptions were definitely changed by the experience. With all discipline-specific courses taken in an asynchronous, online environment the theoretical or epistemological aspect of learning was not only utilized, but enhanced by the clinical or lab experience. This feeling was pervasive among the students and represented well in the following journal entry.

I have been here for two days already. On the first day, I walked into town and I was kind of taken back by how messy the town seemed to be. On the way into town, if someone did not realize that there had been an earthquake, one would think that it is a poorly maintained area. There are derelict buildings and graffiti all over the place. Yet, knowing that such a disaster had struck, you kind of view it from a different angle. You look at it as a bigger picture. You still see the devastation but you also look to see the restoration that has been accomplished. I can't even imagine where to start with such devastation. When I finally got to the center and stood at the cathedral, my heart broke a little bit. So much history destroyed. I think that because I have traveled before and have had the opportunity to be in cathedrals and seen their beauty, this made seeing the destruction that much worse. Today, when we went there again, it hit me even harder because I had seen a post card of the way it used to be. Such beauty just gone.

The second grouping or theme that emerged in the data analysis was the awareness of the cognitive (epistemological) and affective experience of becoming or being an emergency management specialist (ontological) gained through reflection. Students began to reflect and apply things learned in the online courses to the situations they were experiencing. Examples of this were frequently interspersed throughout the journal entries and provided a dynamic learning opportunity. One student shared this through her reflection after spending the day touring the destruction and reconstruction of the city.

This week has been quite the learning experience for me in so many ways. As a class, we have learned about the disaster that Christchurch suffered when they were hit with the earthquake of 2011. We have learned about the preparations they had made and where they failed in those preparations. We learned about the response efforts from the local authorities as well as the efforts by the community. I especially was intrigued by the students of UC and how they band together to form the Student Volunteer Army. It truly is amazing what individuals will do in the event that they, as a whole, are threatened by disaster.

We also learned about the ways and plans the city is taking to recover from these earthquakes. I think the thing that intrigues me the most is how long it is going to take to complete the recovery phase. It is not as easy as you would think it to be. If I remember correctly, the gentlemen that visited us from CERA stated that it will take roughly 20-25 years before they have completely rebuilt the city of Christchurch. The thing that would scare me the most about that is, "what if another devastating earthquake happens again within that time frame?" It would definitely disrupt their plans for rebuilding and intensify the magnitude of their current situation.

The other aspect of the recovery phase is seeing the intense efforts of those involved in re-establishing this city and how dedicated they are to being absolutely prepared for the next disaster. It is amazing to see so many individuals put so much of their life into ensuring the development and advancement of their Emergency Management so that they are prepared for anything in the future that displaces them in anyway.

I was truly engaged and touched by the experiences of all the people that shared their thoughts with us. We hear and read about disasters all the time around the world. I am sure everyone is the same as me when they think how terrible a situation is for those involved but the reality of being a part of a disaster is unreal. When you physically engage with someone who was part of such a hazard, your feelings are just different. You can actually feel their same feelings that they felt on that day; and that is something that I will always remember and take with me. Being able to actually feel pain and frustration with these individuals and what they went through was very touching and unforgettable to me. I was also quite touched on their new-found love and appreciation for each other and their entire

community. It makes me think that I barely know the individuals that live within close proximity to me, and if we would be as resilient as the people in Christchurch when a disaster comes to our area.

As the students reflected on their experience, they began to explore how this information could be utilized in their own lives and/or situations. One area where a lot of discussion took place was the experience and perspectives of the first response communities (fire, police, and emergency medical services). One student response that seems to present this well is the following:

This last week has been a real eye-opener for me. What struck me the most was Steve's presentation and the relationship he had as a police officer with the public. I have always lamented that communities today don't view law enforcement officers with the same attitude as they did in *The Andy Griffith Show* and the realization that there is a growing trend of mistrust on both the side of the public and law enforcement agencies. Though I have always felt that law enforcement agencies could contribute so much to the well-being and growth of a community outside of upholding the law, I also always felt it would be impossible to change the attitudes of the public to would view police more favorably. Steve's presentation, the interaction he demonstrated with the community, and the ideas he put forth proved that such a change in attitudes was possible.

But how is this accomplished? Something that was mentioned is that the community has to feel the police are not around just to monitor their actions and act as big brother. There has to be a feeling of genuine trust and a sense that the police really care. When this happens, I believe the community is more willing to open up and share their concerns. There is a form of collaboration that allows the public to look beyond the blue uniform and view the person.

Along with collaborating with the public, law enforcement agencies should collaborate with other departments to ensure the safety of communities. Today, Mike and Ian spoke a little more about the responsibilities that police and fire personnel can have in working together to ensure the overall safety of a community. When it comes to community safety and understanding vulnerability and risks, there are several pieces of the puzzle and every agency may be holding key pieces. It is important to stress collaboration among agencies to bring these pieces together to have a clear idea of the whole picture. Only when a whole picture is formed can informed decision be made.

Overall, the experience of being or becoming an emergency manager through a clinical/lab experience is summed up best by the following student's reflection.

So, for me, this was extremely useful to see how it plays out in theory and with real world examples from another agency/person's perspective. As you see these common theories and concepts repeated in different ways, it helps to understand fully the subject matter's importance and relevance.

DISCUSSION

This study provided rich and poignant data regarding the non-traditional, adult student and the use of online education enhanced by a cultural and clinical experience. It seemed to reinforce some of the extant literature and educational theories.

One area that seemed to be reinforced by this study is the learning impact of the affective domain of Bloom's taxonomy.

David Krathwohl, a peer and coresearcher of Benjamin Bloom, has made some notable contributions regarding affective learning to the field of educational psychology. Krathwohl is a co-author of *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goal: Handbook I* (Krathwohl et al., 1964), which introduced the widely recognized "Bloom's Taxonomy."

Krathwohl's affective domain taxonomy is a highly recognized and cited source of the affective taxonomies. The affective domain deals in the realm of behaviors and attitudes or personal acceptance of something to the point of making it a part of the person. "The taxonomy is ordered according to the

principle of internalization. Internalization refers to the process whereby a person's affect toward an object passes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is 'internalized' and consistently guides or controls the person's behavior" (Seels & Glasgow, 1990, p. 28). Affective learning is demonstrated by the behaviors or behavior modification of learners (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This is shown by demonstration of attitudes of awareness, interest, concern, attention, responsibility, the ability to listen and respond appropriately, and the ability to demonstrate characteristics of appropriate values. Hence, Krathwohl and colleagues asserted an ordered taxonomy for the affective domain,

1. Receiving—being aware of or sensitive to the existence of ideas, material, or phenomena and being willing to tolerate them.
2. Responding—committed in some small measure to the ideas, materials, or phenomena by actively responding to them.
3. Valuing—willing to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas, materials, or phenomena.
4. Organization—relating the value to those already held and bringing it into a harmonious and internally consistent philosophy.
5. Characterization by value or value set—acting consistently in accordance with the values he or she has internalized (p. 37) (Maxfield, 2008, p.32).

Another area mentioned earlier in the review of literature is reflective learning. The Jarvis model of reflection was an area verified by this study. When applied to this model the results indicated that some deep learning took place with these students. Throughout the study, the students reported their use of reflective practice. Through reflections they claimed to have had a deeper, and potentially better learning experience. While it is difficult to determine if they reached the experimentation stage of the Jarvis model (it was reported by the students, however, that they were applying some of the learned principles to their work situations), it is apparent that they were reflective and contemplative in their approach to this clinical experience. Based on their experiences and perceptions, the students claimed they had internalized significant amounts of knowledge and/or skills from this study abroad and post-disaster interaction. We believe, and the study results seem to demonstrate this occurred through reflective practice, which is the basis of Jarvis' theory.

Jarvis believed that there are three possible ways a person is affected or changed through the learning process: a) the person is changed through the acquisition of knowledge mentally and emotionally, b) the person places new meaning on the world and events by incidental or purposeful learning, and c) the person is changed and able to cope or deal with similar situation which may occur due to the learning that has taken place (Merriam et al., 2007). When comparing the results experienced by the students in this study to Jarvis' model, these students changed and will now be able to cope or to handle similar situations better because of their experience with this course. This supports Jarvis' theory.

A third area mentioned that seem to be reinforced was social constructivism. One could argue that these experiences supported both Piaget's developmental learning theory and Vygotsky's social development theory at the same time. Piaget's theory suggests that the key to growth and maturity of the student is through a twofold process of accommodation of existing cognitive structures and assimilation or interpretation of environmental events based on existing cognitive structures. The students of this study were basically allowed to construct their own learning through some semi-guided instructional activities and through dialog with other students the instructor(s), and/or community members of Christchurch, New Zealand. They were not given specific structures to follow and were allowed to assimilate and use what they constructed in their written, reflective journals.

Vygotsky's social development theory suggests that all learning takes place in a social environment and that the learner is gaining knowledge through the social structure or interaction with the social environment. Social constructivist theory has promulgated the idea with some, that distance education is inferior because effective learning needs to be situated in activity, context, and culture or a community of practice.

In some of his later works, Vygotsky developed the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential

development, through problem solving, under guidance of an instructor or more capable peer (Marsh, 2005). Basically, Vygotsky asserts that learning is a social function and can be enhanced when a mentor, whether a teacher or a more knowledgeable and/or skillful peer provides some explanatory instruction. The students of this study experienced social learning through peer discussions, interaction and communication with survivors of the major earthquakes of Christchurch, and instructor(s) guided feedback. There was much evidence in the journal entries that social learning was facilitated through the student-to-student interactions, interactions with instructors, interactions with responders and interactions with the citizens of the community. Therefore, learning was enhanced through social interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, we believe that asynchronous, online learning environments (epistemological) combined with experiential learning (ontological) have the potential to be an important and effective method of educating students, particularly with respect to the increasing use of the Internet and online programs. We believe this to be especially true for the nontraditional adult student, a growing demographic in higher education. However, the experiences of these students were somewhat narrow (within the confines of one class of an entire program). There is no way of knowing if the students had experienced different teachers, different peers, different course design or a different locale that the results would be the same. This is one of the limitations of this (or for that matter, much other) research. That being said, the experiences of these nontraditional adult students, in an online learning environment and clinical situation, gave a view in time, a particular slice of the human experience to enrich our understanding. For this reason, the study had relevance.

We believe that more care and concern for the design and use of pedagogies and/or adult learning models can enhance the experiences and learning of the adult online student. This may require the instructors and designers of curricula to be more aware of the experiences and perceptions of the students. This belief is based on our research and the results of this study regarding affective learning. As Krathwhol and colleagues (1964) asserted, the affective domain can be very effective in helping achieve the desired outcomes of the cognitive domain. If students are having an untoward time in their learning experience, they may do what is necessary to pass the course, but has learning in its truest sense been accomplished? We will leave this to the opinions and conclusions of the reader. However, the definition of learning we feel relevant is best described by, “a persisting change in human performance or performance potential. This means that learners are capable of actions they could not perform before learning occurred and this is true whether or not they actually have an opportunity to exhibit the newly acquired performance” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 9).

This study provided a deeper look at the experiences and perceptions of an important demographic of higher education, the non-traditional adult student. Understanding the lived experiences of non-traditional adult students provides us with a unique and important look at humanity. By using this experience as a means of understanding and learning, current and future students may be able to develop individual and useful learning schemas. Curricula designers and instructors may also be able to use these experiences to develop methodologies to better facilitate learning, which enlightens and adds to the unique experience of being human.

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