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Kalpana Muetz

University of Wyoming-Laramie, USA

Kristi Frush

University of Wyoming-Laramie, USA

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Are Accelerated Learning Formats the Answer to Meeting the Demand for Increased Adult Programs?

Kalpana Muetz and Kristi Frush
University of Wyoming-Laramie, USA

Abstract: Accelerated learning formats allow adult learners to balance their personal and professional responsibilities with their role as a learner. The roundtable discussion will provide an opportunity to discuss the positive and negative implications of these learning formats and the quality of education that is being delivered.

Trends in Higher Education

The profile of higher education is changing as the number of adults enrolled in colleges and universities increase. Advances in technology and options for course delivery have also contributed to this profile change. While higher education continues to transform, adult learners are challenged to balance responsibilities in their personal, professional, and academic lives. The commonality of adult learners is that they seek flexible programs that allow them to balance their life roles (Apps, 1992). Educational institutions have responded to the demand for flexible programs by offering courses through non-traditional learning formats, such as online, blended, and accelerated learning. Wlodkowski and Kasworm (2003) suggest that accelerated learning formats may provide the link for adult learners to be successful in their academic lives while still balancing their other responsibilities.

An Accelerated Learning Model

Accelerated learning has been in existence for decades and is growing rapidly among colleges and universities that offer adult education programs. While the term may still be ambiguous for many, accelerated learning is not referred to as a term for speeding up the learning process (McKeon, 1995). Wlodkowski (2003), an adult educator, has described accelerated learning formats as taking less time than the traditional number of instructional contact hours.

Accelerated learning was introduced in the United States in the 1970s. It followed a model of teaching developed by Dr. Georgi Lozanov in the 1960s. The Bulgarian professor and psychotherapist believed that his model, which he termed Suggestopedia, allowed students to stretch their abilities and capacity to learn (International Alliance for Learning, 2004). The premise of the method was the influence of suggestion from facilitation and that the quality of the learning environment was created by the facilitator. Lozanov's model offers supporting evidence that accelerated learning formats can be successful. He incorporated many instructional strategies tailored for the adult learner, such as the use of experiential learning and reflection. These strategies take into consideration learners' goals and motivations and lead to learner-responsive instruction. As a result, this type of instruction helps create an environment where meaningful learning can occur despite the number of contact hours.

According to Scott (2003), much of the research conducted in accelerated learning has compared and contrasted students' perspectives on quality of learning between accelerated and traditional formats and findings indicate that students value accelerated formats and find them as rewarding learning experiences. These programs respond to the diverse needs of adult learners

while meeting the increased demand for adult education in the new millennium. “In 1995, approximately 36% of all four-year institutions offered undergraduate accelerated learning programs (Kasworm, 1995). By 2011, Wlodkowski, Mauldin, and Gahn (2003) predict that 25% of all students in the United States will be enrolled in accelerated programs” (Campbell, 2005). Accelerated learning is an area that will experience continued growth in higher education and is an area for future research, such as looking into factors that impede or support adult learning in this format.

Roundtable Focus: Benefits and Challenges in Accelerated Formats

When using an accelerated learning model, there will be challenges along the way. Strategies toward using learner-responsive instruction may not be welcomed by those who teach in accelerated learning formats or may require more training and time to develop these skills. The idea of a shorter time span to cover content may sometimes overshadow the ability to incorporate strategies tailored to the adult learner. Opponents to accelerated learning formats have criticized these programs for stressing convenience over substance and rigor (Scott, 2003). In addition, critics claim that the dependence of part-time instructors and institutions delivering degrees at a rapid pace leads to the commercialization of learning. Therefore, the questions that will be addressed in this session will include:

- What are the misperceptions of accelerated learning formats?
- Is the quality of education being sacrificed when accelerated learning formats are used?
- What are the issues/concerns of facilitators that inhibit the use of learner-responsive instructional strategies?

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