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Model Building in Planning Programs: Blending Theory and Practice1

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the two major sources upon which one of program planning models used in our field, the Interactive Model of Program Planning, is grounded. These two sources include: the approaches or ways of thinking about program planning and the voices of practitioners.

Models of program planning for adult learning abound in the literature. What is not always clear, however, are the sources of these models, including the theoretical base and practical knowledge used in their development. The purpose of this paper is to explore the sources upon which one of the models used in our field, the Interactive Model of Program Planning was developed. This model has been re-conceptualized three different times over the past 20 years, with the most current re-thinking of the model completed during this past year (Caffarella, 1994, 2002; Caffarella and Daffron (Forthcoming). The Interactive Model of program planning, consisting of ten components and corresponding tasks, is a guide, and not a set of specific steps to follow. Therefore, the model represents a way of thinking about program planning that is interactive in nature, versus a linear process. A sampling of the components include discerning the context, identifying ideas and needs, designing instructional plans, devising transfer-of-learning plans, and taking care of details. The Interactive Model has no real beginning or end point, but rather program planners choose those components that are needed for each planning situation. In addition, with education and training programs being global in nature, the interactive nature of this model allows planners to take into consideration the differences among cultures in the way programs are planned and conducted. In essence, the key to using the Interactive Model is flexibility, which allows planners to respond to the issues and circumstances of both where they find themselves and the people with whom they are working. Explored in this paper are the two sources

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[1]This paper is primarily excerpted from chapter one of the third edition of Planning Programs for Adult Learners, forthcoming from Jossey-Bass.

on which the model is grounded: a) the approaches or the ways of thinking about program planning by different scholars, and b) the voices of the practitioners.

Approaches to Program Planning

The first source researches use in building the models and theory on program planning is captured in three approaches to planning: a) the conventional or traditional; b) the pragmatic; and c) the radical planning approach. Represented in each category are models and theories of planning that fit primarily in each of the approaches (for example, Green & Kreuter, 2005) Knowles, 1980). In addition, there are models and theories that contain elements of two or more of these approaches (for example, Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Forester, 2009).

The Conventional or Traditional Approach

The conventional or traditional approach as described by Sork (2010) "labels those ways of thinking about planning that are still largely grounded in the technical rational tradition" (p. 7), which in essence means planning programs primarily in a step-wise progression, where you move logically through the planning process. The majority of writers, at least in education, and related fields, have constructed their frameworks for planning within this conventional approach. Major voices have developed models using this approach and include the seminal work of Tyler (1949), Houle, (1972), and Knowles, (1980) are a few of the best know early writers. Other models framed primarily in the conventional approach have been developed in a number of fields and settings, such as health care (Green and Kreuter, 2005), human resource development (Allen & Rubin, 2006), residential wilderness programs (Day and Patrick, 2006), and adult education (Boone, Safrit, and Jones, 2002).

Planners who act out of this approach assume for the most part that the best way to get a program done right is to follow a systematic path from needs assessment through evaluation. Once the program is planned there is little if any change in how it is carried out, the program objectives should match how the program is carried through, which in turn should match the program outcomes. In addition, others should be able to use the same program in similar settings, with few modifications, no matter whether they are in the United States, Nigeria, or Australia. The Integrative Models of Program Planning, presented in editions one and two of this book have primarily been categorized as conventional models, although these authors would argue that they have never viewed the model as a step-wise-progression, but rather one that planners could be entered at any point in the model, and in the second edition also included other approaches to program planning, as we note later in this section. However most of the components of these models, except for transfer-of-learning, are included in the majority of conventional models, and many authors from this approach have informed our work.

Pragmatic or Practical Approach

The pragmatic or practical approach, or adopting planning to what Friedman (2008) has termed "real world constraints", takes into consideration the continuing changing conditions and the complexity of practice. Rather planning in a step-wide fashion, which assumes you can end up with the results you initially state up-front, this approach recognizes that changes will be made throughout the process, and at times planner may not even be sure where they are going as they run into novel or surprising situations. In more recent years, a number of scholars and

practitioners have worked hard at making their colleagues believe the situations in which planners find themselves do have a major influence in how we respond to the many voices clamoring to be heard. Among those who have made a difference in merging the reality of the specific and wider contexts in which planners find themselves with the process of planning are Cervero and Wilson (1994, 2006,) and Forester (1999, 2009). We find the issues they raise, through the "telling of stories" by practitioners and theoretical and conceptual frames, very helpful, perplexing, and challenging. In addition, within the practical approach, two additional sources have addressed other aspects that speak to the everyday experiences of practitioners. Sork (2010) has again reminded planners of the "artistic nature of planning". He uses the image of improvisational theatre where as "the story unfolds the characters come and go, the best and worst of human nature is on display, surprises occur, dilemmas arise, decisions are made, and relationships are forced and strained (p. 19). Gboku and Lekoko (2007) have brought to the forefront planning in different parts of the world. More specifically, they have developed a program planning model from an African perspective that even though it consists of many of the same components as displayed in conventional models, is to be interpreted through different lens, that of African knowledge and experience. Gboku and Lekoko ask us to adhere to a set of critical practices, a sampling of which includes: appreciation and understanding of African indigenous knowledge and experience and have the capacity to integrate the two into program development…; content must be geared to integrating the individuals into their communities and the wider African society…; and stakeholder commitment to ensure African solutions to meeting the needs of adult learners (p. 45). These authors encourage us to think differently about practicing in nations other than our own, and to explore how the realities of these countries make a major difference in our practice as planners.

Practitioners in the pragmatic approach are willing to confront issues of whose voices are considered valued and legitimate, argumentative meetings, power and control over recourses, conflict as normal, and questionable ethics. They adopt strategies such as negotiation, listening, willingness to learn, respecting differences, dialogue, and debate to address these types of issues. In addition they ask us to think of the planning process in different images as well as though different ways of knowing, thinking, and acting in the reality of the everyday life of those with whom we plan. Although the experiences of practitioners were included as part of the sources used to develop the original Integrated Models of Program Planning, the model has taken more fully into account what we consider to be this important approach to planning programs.

Radical Planning

The radical approach to program planning, with its focus on social activism and transformation, has a long history, dating back to the 18th century (Beard, 2003). Many social movements come to mind when thinking of the radical approach to planning--Gandi's commitment to peaceful societal reform; the worker's and civil rights movements, and children and mothers' health in low-income countries. Although not often discussed in the adult education literature in these terms, societal change, whether social, economic and/or political, as a goal of programs we plan has had many advocates over the years (Alinsky, 1969; Friere, 1970; Newman, 2006; Beard, 2003; Cervero and Wilson, 2006; Forester, 2009; Holst, 2009). There are

very few "models" of program planning that have emanated from this approach. Rather, concepts and ideas about important aspects to consider in working within this framework are the major contributions from these practitioners and scholars like power, conflict, negotiation, democratic ideals, cooperative and participatory planning, and social learning.

The image of the planning table, as explored by Cervero and Wilson (2006), is especially potent from this approach when asking questions about: Who is allowed at the table?, Who is being listened to and who is being ignored?, and Which voices constantly get in the way of the planning process? There is some overlap between the pragmatic and radical approach as viewed through the lens of both approaches. However the major difference between these two approaches is the willingness of those from the radical approach to confront and work through pressing social, economic, and political issues, like environmental concerns, repressive leaders of communities and nations, and abject poverty. In addition, a hallmark of this approach is the participation of those most affected by these issues from the initial design of the program plan though evaluation and transfer-of-learning.

Practitioners using the radical approach spend quite a bit of time up-front in gaining a clear understanding of the nature of the problems they will address. They listen well to those most affected by the issues and conflicts presented by these problems. A major portion of this up-front time is spent building relationships with potential program participants, which requires them to welcome new ways of thinking and being in the world. This entry process often requires them to either modify plans they had in mind or abandon them completely and start from scratch so there is even a chance of making any kind of lasting change related to the ways the current social, political, and/or economic systems work. They also are very aware of the factor of time as part of the process, as are those who plan primarily through the pragmatic approach. They embrace the fact that these kinds of community or societal level changes can take many years, and therefore must focus on program capacity building and sustainability, developed in partnerships with local leadership (Caffarella, 2009). We also have incorporated major ideas from this approach in constructing the re-designed of the Integrated Model of Program Planning.

Experiences of Those Immersed in Planning Programs

The second source used in building the models and theory on which program planning is grounded is the practical experiences of program planners. Two resources are the most common: researchers who use the voices of practitioners as informants and practitioners themselves. The former is described earlier in the paper in the exploration of the pragmatic approach to planning. The experiences that practitioners themselves bring to the planning table were also used in the initial development and in the re-conceptualizing of the Integrated Model. These experiences include stories gathered through conversations and emails with program planners, interactions among students in classes, observations of planners in action, and our experiences in this arena.

Our colleagues and students are always ready to share their experiences, both formally in class, and informally over coffee or lunch. For example, the authors have heard accounts of colleagues working internationally in countries very different their own, and how these colleagues became very aware of the importance of culture and language and how they needed to think and differently in their roles as planners. In a second situation, one of the authors had the pleasure serving as a mentor for primarily novice planners for a major research conference.

These conference planners had worked long hours, and paid close attention to what we might call "the big picture", such as matching the theme of the conference to the call for papers and keeping the budgets in order. In addition, they considered all of the detail work that can make or break a conference, such as travel arrangements among different physical spaces where conference activities were housed, special meals that met the diverse needs of conference participants, and ensuring the venue included a taste and a view of the beautiful site where the meeting was held.

We have both lived through many a harried planning process, and observed others in these roles as well as have gathered stories over the years from our students and colleagues. Both authors also have and continue to learn about what works and doesn't work in our role as program planners, but also as program participants. We have "fond memoirs" of workshops and conferences where the planners and facilitators did an excellent job. And we are in awe of models of program planning through technical efforts such as Wael Ghonim, Head of Marketing for Google in the Middle East and North Africa. Ghonim is credited for energizing the protest and pro democracy demonstration in Egypt in January 2011 that lead to the revolution in Egypt that is still not at rest. He created one of the most visited websites in the Arab World and brought Egyptians together for the revolution through Blogs, Twitter, Facebook and Linkedin – a model of program planning with social networks. His social network model has spread throughout the world and is credited with uprising in many more countries.

In essence, we have learned through our years of experience, as both scholars and practitioners of program planning, that in building models of this practice we need to understand the theory and research on which program planning is based, but also the reality of what it takes to plan an effective and workable program. We strongly believe there is no one "right way" to plan programs for adults. Rather, program planning is a continuous journey consisting of twists and turns, wide expansive views, and an ever changing landscape, meaning that what has worked today may or may not work tomorrow.

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