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Developing Profoundabilities: A New Model for Adult Educators

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Abstract

The Profoundabilities Model of human potentiality highlights the development of remarkable abilities in all learners. It emphasizes well-being and flourishing through a strength-based approach to adult education.

Keywords: profoundabilities, disability, strengths-based, flourishing

By offering a contrast that highlights the possibilities for developing remarkable abilities in all learners, the Profoundabilities Model addresses a theoretical void in adult education. It counters the view of disability as a deficit which is prevalent in many adult education settings. The model also communicates approaches that will fill the practical void regarding adult educators' responses to disabled learners. The development of a Profoundabilities Model in education originated from a discussion of a Google search for Profound Learning which overwhelmingly delivered entries on profound learning disability. While Profound Learning (Carr-Chellman & Kroth, 2019), a lifelong process of deepening knowledge and pursuing more complex understanding, is positive, the connotation of the term profound learning disability is negative, focusing on how an individual is deeply flawed. Adult education scholarship frequently reveals a deficit lens regarding disability that is prevalent in adult education practice which seeks to accommodate disabilities rather than to design educational experiences based on student strengths.

Profoundabilities and Adult Education

The Profoundabilities Model of human potentiality is visualized as a starburst and shifts the lens from one of responding to inability to one of expanding capability. The variety of human abilities visible in the profoundabilities starburst can move adult education toward teaching for well-being and flourishing rather than merely teaching for information acquisition. The foundation of the Profoundabilities Model was developed based on our personal lived experiences, events in the lives of family members, and lessons learned from teaching students with disabilities. Our study of disability, profound learning, human flourishing, and the capabilities approach have formed the basis for the model's development.

In earlier work, we have conceptualized lifelong learning within a formation framework (Kroth et al., 2022). The nature of formation is that of a continuous cycle of forming, deforming, and reforming. This flow is a process, suggesting that learning is never ending and always changing. Over a lifetime, individuals develop knowledge, skills, and abilities which, cumulatively, we call capabilities. Each person is endowed with a genetic baseline, or potentialities, which, as they are enabled or constrained by the environment, intentionality, and practice, develop into a wide range of capabilities. Capabilities are what individuals can do. We note that every human being has potentialities which develop into capabilities.

The Profoundabilities Model

The starburst model represents all the potentialities a person has as well as the capabilities they have developed. Each beam is wider or thinner, each is longer or shorter, each has a different tint or color. Width here represents the breadth of a particular capability. Length

represents depth of the capability. The tint, or color, suggests the relationship of the capability to the particular identity, personality, and experience of the individual. Each individual has the potential to develop capabilities in any number of areas (Rogers-Shaw et al., 2022).

This model is more representative of the wide range of individual potentiality; it is a growth model instead of a deficit model; and it recognizes that every person has developed some of these capabilities to a greater extent and some to a lesser extent. In the particular context of people who have been labeled “disabled”, the starburst model visually demonstrates that each person has the potential to develop abilities which often are unrecognized or under-recognized as valuable, and which are therefore underemphasized, underdeveloped, and marginalized. Looking at lifelong learning as formation (Kroth et al., 2022) and assuming that every individual has potentialities is a foundation for holistic education, training, and development approaches.

Human flourishing through the capabilities approach is a key lens through which profound learning and profoundabilities are interpreted. The role of self-determination and treating each person as an end-in-themselves is foundational. The significant adult education literature on self-directed learning and transformative learning will benefit from a deeper engagement with the concept of human flourishing (Carr-Chellman et al., 2020), especially as it forces the issue of what counts as self-determination and how we can best guarantee every sentient creature opportunities to actualize their capabilities. Three characteristics of self-directed learning delineated by Brookfield (1994) include critically reflecting on one’s learning and finding personal meaning, investigating alternatives, and changing one’s personal and social situations. This depends on the capabilities we develop. Self-determination requires acknowledging not only one’s strengths and weaknesses, but also having a true sense of one’s own worth (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2010); an examination of an individual’s profoundabilities contributes to this scholarship.

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