

Capstone Project Final Examination

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Question 1

In this question I will first address who the adult learner is. Next, I will examine the motivation of adult learners. Finally, I will discuss what it means to learn. A number of other relevant questions will also be addressed that will help to illuminate the main three.

Who Is The Adult Learner?

Asking this question to start my capstone project feels like the most appropriate way possible. When we started the course, I printed the syllabus and made the following notes at the top of the first page: What makes an adult? I imagine there is a debate, but do we consider eighteen years old or post-undergraduate degree or older/non-traditional students in undergraduate programs? Looking back on these notes, I realize how far I have come in my understanding of adult learners. I am excited to reflect on my learning in the rest of this question.

There are three different ways to define an adult learner: policy, social role, and developmental stage (Dirkx, 2009c). Policy based definitions of the adult learner focus on things like minimum age to qualify for a GED program (Dirkx, 2009c). Social role based definitions of the adult learner focus on whether a person is socially considered an adult. People may be considered an adult if they are married, have children, or have a full-time job. Based on the social role definition, all the members of my group in EAD 861 are adult learners. All of us have full time jobs, a few are married and a few have children. Developmental stage based definitions of the adult learner focus on what developmental stage a person is at psychologically or physically. While the social role and developmental stage definitions are the most researched, we cannot ignore the practical usage of the policy definition.

When considering how to help adults learn, it is important to understand the special

characteristics and attributes of adults. Three categories of the special characteristics of adult learners are biological, psychological, and sociocultural (Imel, 2001). Special biological characteristics of the adult learners might include visual or auditory difficulties. Psychological issues that are specific to adult learners revolve around intellectual functioning and are focused on “the internal experiences of the individual” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 305). There are two main traditions within the theory on intellectual functioning: incrementalist or psychometric and cognitive-structuralist (Dirkx, 2009a). The incrementalist or psychometric tradition purports that change in intellectual functioning happens over time and is incremental (Dirkx, 2009a). The cognitive-structuralist tradition believes that the change in intellectual functioning “occur within the cognitive structures of the mind” (Dirkx, 2009a, slide 8). Sociocultural characteristics that are specific to adult learners include “race, gender, class, and sexual orientation” (Imel, 2001, p. 1). Issues of “social roles and the timing of life events” are also important sociocultural issues for adult learners (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 312).

It is essential that both adult learners and educators of adult learners to understand the ways in which adult learners are different from children learners. The aforementioned special characteristics of adult learners-biological, psychological and sociocultural-are three major ways that adult learners are different that children learners. Although his ideas are debated, the popular work of Malcolm Knowles cannot be ignored. Knowles produced the “concept of andragogy, which he originally termed a theory of adult learning” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 79). Knowles believed that adults were more self-directed in their learning than children, use experience in their learning more than children do, focus more on the learning for use rather than just learning a subject, are internally motivated while children are externally motivated (Merriam et al., 2007). Adults also want to know why it is necessary to learn something (Merriam et al.,

2007). Finally, Knowles believed that “the readiness of an adult learner to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 84). While Knowles’s ideas on andragogy are contested by many educational theorists today, his ideas resonate strongly with me and aptly describe myself as an adult learner.

Adult Learner Motivation

In recruiting adults to participate in educational programs in my area, I first need to clarify what my area is. I work as the Admissions Counselor at the Honors College (HC) at Michigan State University (MSU). MSU as a whole does not focus much on recruiting adult learners for the undergraduate programs. If MSU were to recruit more adult learners for the undergraduate program (which is the program where the HC is relevant), there are a number of key issues that I would need to address. First, promotional materials must be tailored to the needs of the adult learner (Wonacott, 2001). Second, we must market the programs for adult learners carefully and consciously (Wonacott, 2001). Third, we must provide strong follow-up when adult learners demonstrate interest (Wonacott, 2001). Underlying all three of these actions is that MSU must have programs that work for adult learners. To overcome two important barriers to adult learning, “lack of time and lack of money”, MSU must ensure convenient class times and types of classes (possibly online) as well as keep costs affordable (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 65). MSU can also pay attention to sociocultural factors that may affect adult learners (Merriam et al., 2007).

Once students have enrolled in the undergraduate programs, it is important not to forget about them. Attention must be paid to their motivation and retention. These efforts at retention can begin with a thorough and purposeful orientation program (Wonacott, 2001). Then the focus can shift on instructional methods to capitalize on and sustain motivation. Instructors, advisors,

and even other staff members like me, can utilize the ARCS Model of Motivational Design in our work with adult learners. Keller identifies four strategies for motivational instruction in the ARCS Model:

[A]ttention strategies for arousing and sustaining curiosity and interest; [R]elevance strategies that link to learners' needs, interests and motives; [C]onfidence strategies that help students develop a positive expectation for successful achievement; and [S]atisfaction strategies that provide extrinsic and intrinsic reinforcement for effort. (as cited in Small, 1997, p. 1)

Adult Learner Learning

Part of understanding what it means to learn is acknowledging the different types and forms of learning. First, there are formal learning settings like institutions of higher education. Second, there are nonformal learning opportunities outside the formal learning settings. Examples of nonformal learning are museum exhibits and religion classes (Merriam et al., 2007). Third, learning can happen through community-based learning, such as a community center class on urban farming (Merriam et al., 2007). Next, another form of learning is indigenous learning which recognized knowledge passed down through cultural groups (Merriam et al., 2007). Finally, Coombs describes informal learning as the type of learning that occurs in a “spontaneous” and “unstructured” way (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 35).

Another part of understanding what it means to learn is recognizing that there are many different answers to the question. Vella (2002) might say that learning is coming to an understanding of how to do something or a personal transformation. “A common definition of learning, emanating from psychologists who investigate the phenomenon until the 1950s, is that learning is a change in behavior” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 276). Based on the ideas of Illeris and Ormrod, Merriam et al. (2007) do not agree with that definition and instead propose that

“Learning is a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring, enhancing, or making changes in one’s knowledge, skills, values, and worldviews (p.277).

Merriam et al. (2007) provide a very helpful guide to understanding adult learning theories by categorizing the major theories on adult learning into five orientations. While I believe it is important to recognize the value of all five orientations in order to have a full understanding of all the facets of adult learning, the behaviorist, humanist and constructivist orientations resonate most strongly for me. The behaviorist orientation includes the theories of Watson, Thorndike and Skinner (Merriam et al., 2007). From Grippin & Peters, the tenets of behaviorism are that “learning is manifested by a change in behavior”, “what one learns is determined by the elements in the environment, not by the individual learner”, and “the principles of contiguity [...] and reinforcement [...] are central to explaining the learning process” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 278). Behaviorism describes the change in action I might take when working with the parents of prospective MSU HC students based on the ideas I learned through EAD 861. The humanist orientation includes the theories of Maslow and Rogers (Merriam et al., 2007). The humanist orientation views the learning process as “a personal act to fulfill development” and the purpose of learning is “to become self-actualized, mature, autonomous” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 295). Motivation of the adult learner significantly influences the nature of this learning process, which consists of much personal reflection. The humanist orientation aptly describes many of the reasons I chose to enroll in a post-graduate program. Finally, the constructivist orientation on adult learning includes the theories of Piaget and Dewey (Merriam et al., 2007). The constructivist orientation views the learning process as “construction of meaning from experience” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 295). The types and

diversity of experience significantly shape the nature of this learning process. The constructivist orientation describes the learning that occurred through the problem-based learning units and group work of EAD 861. In conclusion, while the behaviorist orientation is very different from the humanist and constructivist orientations, I believe there are many purposes for and processes of adult learning. Moreover, I believe that the examples I provided of the three different orientations at play in my own learning experiences demonstrate that the orientations are not mutually exclusive.

In conclusion, I am extremely pleased to be able to leave this class with an answer, or really multiple answers, to the question of who is an adult learner. Additionally, better understanding the motivation of adult learners will help me in my future practice with adult learners and ever in understanding myself as a lifelong learner and perhaps a potential future doctoral degree student.

Question 2

In this question I will first define individual differences in adult learning through the categories of cognitive, personality, gender, and cultural differences. Second, I will provide one conceptual framework or model that has been used to study differences in each of these four categories. Third, I will provide examples from each category that emerged from my learning experiences in EAD 861. Finally, I will contemplate how each of these categories of individual differences can inform my practice with adult learners.

Individual Difference in Adult Learning

In EAD 861, we studied multiple forms of individual difference in adult learning, including cognitive, personality, gender and cultural differences. In this section, I will define what is meant by each of these categories of difference. To begin, Joughin (1992) and Merriam et al. (2007) explain that cognitive differences “are reflected in ‘how individuals typically receive and process information’ and encompass the ways people see and make sense of their world and attend to different parts of their environment (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 406). A helpful way of understanding cognitive differences is that “some people tend to look at problems from a global perspective, while others are more interested in taking in the detail” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 406). Moreover, Demedt and Valcke explain that “the recurrent features of the concept seem to be stability, pervasiveness, bipolarity and a strong interdependence with personality” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 407).

Closely connected with cognitive differences are personality differences (Merriam et al., 2007). Personality differences affect adult learning in a number of ways (Dirkx, 2009e). For instance, people that are more extroverted or introverted may learn better or prefer to learn in different ways (Brightman, 2007).

Next, gender differences are another important form of individual difference in adult learning (Dirkx, 2009e). While the idea is contested, men and women may differ in the ways they best learn or prefer to learn (Dirkx, 2009e). Socialization may have an effect on these differences (Nyikos, 1990).

Finally, cultural differences are another important form of individual difference in adult learning (Dirkx, 2009e). Again, the idea of cultural differences is somewhat contested (Dirkx, 2009e). Examples of cultural difference are preferences for holistic, communal, interdependent, and informal learning valued by many non-Western cultures (Merriam et al., 2007). Another example is “the Euro-American style as primarily field-independent, analytic, and nonaffective” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 408).

Conceptual Frameworks and Models for Categories of Individual Difference

One model of cognitive difference is the concept of field dependence/independence (Dirkx, 2009e). This model was proposed by Witkins, Ottman, Raskin and Karp in 1971 (Dirkx, 2009e). This conceptual framework is the “measure of ability to perform perceptual analytic tasks” (Dirkx, 2009e, slide 6). Neither field dependence or field independence is a better cognitive style but each has its strengths in different situations (Dirkx, 2009e). The field dependent cognitive style looks more at the whole than at the separate parts (Dirkx, 2009e). Additionally, people who are more field dependent in their cognitive style prefer to learn in a social setting and are influenced more by the social context (Dirkx, 2009e). People who are more field independent in their cognitive style see the parts separately than the whole and prefer to learn more independently (Dirkx, 2009e).

A model of personality difference is the popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Dirkx, 2009e). In some respects the actual test is a component of the model, but the ideas

supporting the test are the model and conceptual framework. The MBTI distinguishes four sets of personality preferences: extroversion versus introversion, sensing versus intuition, thinking versus feeling, and judging versus perceptive (Brightman, 2007). These four sets of preferences measure “attitudes of consciousness”, “the ways in which you perceive stimuli from the outer world”, “the ways in which you [...] make decisions about the world” and the “ways you deal with [the] outer world” (Dirkx, 2009e, slide 12). Additionally, these four sets of preferences “result in sixteen different learning styles, or types” (Brightman, 2007, p. 1). The majority of these ideas results from the conceptual framework of Jung (Dirkx, 2009e).

A conceptual framework for gender differences is feminist pedagogy. Feminist pedagogy studies difference among adult learners along gender lines. Feminist pedagogy describes the different learning experiences women may face due to power structures, especially in the educational setting (Merriam et al., 2007). This conceptual framework emphasizes the necessity of placing value on women’s voices and experiences in learning settings (Merriam et al., 2007).

A conceptual framework for cultural differences is the non-Western ways of knowing framework. Non-Western ways of knowing describe many cultural differences and their relation to learning styles (Merriam et al., 2007). This is an important conceptual framework, because, as Anderson describes “in our country [the United States] the Euro-American style is projected by most institutions as the one which is most valued (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 408).

EAD 861 Examples of Individual Differences

My interactions with my classmates and groupmates have provided many relevant examples of individual differences in the categories of cognitive, personality, gender, and cultural differences. One example of cognitive difference I found in EAD 861 was my personal work in my group. I believe I am a field independent learner. I often struggle to work in group

situations and prefer to learn more autonomously. When I was the facilitator for the problem-based unit in Lesson 3, I relished the time I spent working by myself on the text for the powerpoint. All of the group members had contributed ideas and we had discussed our group choices, but I was able to frame those choices in the powerpoint and then present them back to the group.

One example of personality difference in EAD 861 was found in my groupmates. As we became more comfortable with each other and developed trust in each other, my groupmates and I had conversations about how well our group worked together. We remarked that we were nervous going in to the groupwork because of some negative previous group experiences. We also noted that even with our different personalities, Flo being more extroverted, Dave, Kara and I being more introverted, we were able to successfully work together. I believe this was due, in no small part, to our understanding of the value of individual, specifically personality, differences.

An example of gender differences in EAD 861 is not as easily apparent. This may be because there were not glaring gender differences among the small set of people I came to know well in the course. For example, in my group, there were three women and one man. The male student did take on the task of technology, finding an alternate website to ANGEL for us to use and made constant updates to the structure of the website. I cannot say if this was a gender based difference or one of personality. Some studies (Barrett & Lally, 1999, and Sullivan, 2001) have found gender based differences in online learning. These differences were related to how men and women placed different value in the online learning environment, and also in the types and usage of communication in the online learning environment. I cannot say that my groupmates made statements based on gender lines about the value they placed on online learning as

everyone seemed to value its convenience. Additionally, I do not believe I detected a difference in the types and usages of communication by my groupmates along gender lines.

One example of cultural differences or the lack thereof, comes again from my EAD 861 group. From conversations with my groupmates, we all come from the Euro-American tradition of learning. We tend to value independence and therefore were nervous about the extensive groupwork involved in EAD 861. By the end of the class, we came to value more non-Western ways of knowing, including interdependence and community-based learning. We realized we could learn more if we learned from and with each other.

Addressing Individual Differences in My Practice with Adult Learners

My practice with adult learners consists of trying to educate parents of prospective Michigan State University (MSU) students (particularly Honors College (HC) eligible students) about MSU, the HC, and the more general college-search, college decision-making, and college financing processes. I can use ideas about cognitive differences, particularly field dependence/interdependence, to understand that some parents may see the whole while others may see the parts. Also, some parents might appreciate learning in group settings, while other parents may prefer to work more autonomously. I need to provide options for these different learning environments.

When working with the parents of prospective MSU and HC students I can utilize the ideas of personality differences to help the parents learn. If I recognize that a parent is more extroverted or introverted, deals with the outer world, perceives stimuli from the outer world, or makes decisions about the world in a certain way, I can tailor my teaching style to fit the personality differences of that particular parent. More specifically, I can use the ideas on different teaching styles put forth by Brightman (2007).

Ideas on gender difference can also be useful in my practice of helping adults learn. Based on feminist pedagogy, I can work to ensure that I create a learning space for prospective students and their parents “where life experiences are valued, where a woman can come to have a voice, and hence, an identity” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 263). I can make sure that any gender differences that exist regarding learning style, such as comfort with online learning environments (in my case referring parents to websites) or online communication (in my case emails), work well for the individual parent involved.

Finally, acknowledging and understanding cultural differences can be helpful in my current practice of teaching adults. Now I understand that prospective students and their parents who come from non-Western backgrounds may not put as much value in a college degree for the purpose of independence. Additionally, some prospective students and parents who come from non-Western backgrounds may put more value and emphasis on holistic, communal and informal learning that MSU and the HC do not necessarily place a great emphasis on. I will not be able to change what MSU and the HC are offering, but I will be more familiar with these non-Western learning emphases if a family asks about them. Merriam et al. (2007) also describe how many Asian students are reticent to speak up in Western learning settings. When I meet individually with a prospective student and their family, I expect the families to ask questions. Becoming more familiar with non-Western ways of knowing has helped me to see that this is not a fair expectation for all families in all situations.

In conclusion, understanding individual differences in adult learning, especially in the categories of cognitive, personality, gender and cultural differences, aids in my understanding of myself, classmates, and the adults I work with. I look forward to utilizing this newfound knowledge and understanding in the rest of my personal, educational and professional life.

Question 5

In this question I will first define the concepts of non-Western ways of knowing and the feminist perspective which are emerging theoretical perspectives in adult learning. Second, I will address the central challenges that each of these theoretical perspectives makes to more mainstream ideas in the field of adult learning. Third, I will discuss the consistencies and inconsistencies between the alternative theoretical perspectives and transformative learning theory. Finally, I will provide ways that I can utilize the ideas of non-Western ways of knowing and the feminist perspective in my practice with adult learners.

Non-Western Ways of Knowing and the Feminist Perspective

In the last decade, alternative ways of knowing and learning have emerged and gained more attention in the adult learning community (Merriam et al., 2007). These alternative ways of knowing include spiritual, embodied, narrative, non-Western, feminist, critical and postmodernist perspectives (Merriam et al., 2007). In this question, I will focus on non-Western ways of knowing and the feminist perspective.

Most of the adult learning literature we read for EAD 861, including *Learning in Adulthood* by Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), is focused on Western ways of knowing. Indeed, most of the educational experiences I have encountered in my life have been focused on Western ways of knowing. I appreciate the new chapter in *Learning in Adulthood* for providing an alternative viewpoint: non-Western ways of knowing. “The purpose of examining other systems is not to replace the Western tradition but rather to *expand* our understanding of learning and knowing” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 219).

There are a number of perspectives within the category of non-Western ways of knowing, including Confucian, Hinduism, Maori, Islamic, African indigenous, and Native American

(Merriam et al., 2007). It is not within the scope of this assignment to detail the major tenets of each of these non-Western ways of knowing, but there are some common themes across many of them (Merriam et al., 2007). “The four themes of interdependent, communal, holistic, and informal learning highlight different *emphases* in learning, rather than suggesting an either/or stance” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 237). Western ways of knowing place great emphasis on learning as a means to independence (Merriam et al., 2007). Non-Western ways of knowing put a greater emphasis on learning that comes from and produces more interdependence (Merriam et al., 2007). Second, Western ways of knowing emphasize the role of teacher as a profession for a few specific people while non-Western ways of knowing put more emphasis on the communal nature of learning (Merriam et al., 2007). In these communal non-Western learning traditions, many and perhaps all of the people in the community are seen as educators. Third, while Western ways of knowing focus on the cognitive element of learning, non-Western ways of knowing put more emphasis on holistic learning, including elements of “spirit, mind, body, and emotion[s]” (Merriam et al., p. 238). Fourth, the Western tradition tends to put more emphasis on formal learning while the non-Western ways of knowing place more emphasis on informal learning (Merriam et al., 2007).

Another theoretical line of scholarship that has emerged in the last decade is the feminist perspective. Some scholars believe that the feminist perspective is a category within the larger theoretical line of scholarship known as critical perspectives (Dirkx, 2009d). No matter where the feminist perspective is situated, “critical, feminist, and postmodern theories challenge the taken-for-grantedness of many of our theories and concepts in adult learning” (Dirkx, 2009b). Defining the entire feminist perspective is outside the scope of this paper, but I will briefly describe the central claims of the perspective as they relate to adult learning.

As defined by Lee & Johnson- Bailey, “feminist pedagogy is ‘a method of teaching and learning employing a political framework that involves consciousness-raising, activism, and a caring and safe environment’” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 263). Within feminist pedagogy, there are many threads and they have been categorized as either liberatory models or gender models (Merriam et al., 2007). The liberatory models of feminist pedagogy focus on the gendered power structures within society, particularly in the education system, that serve to oppress women (Merriam et al., 2007). To counteract this oppression, the liberatory model attempts to “recover women’s voices, experiences, and viewpoints and use these to make systems of privilege, power and oppression visible” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 263). The gender model of feminist pedagogy examines “how female identity has been socially constructed to be one of nurturer and how the individual woman can find her voice, becoming emancipated in the personal psychological sense” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 263). Some newer scholarship, including the work of Tisdell, attempts to merge these two models (Merriam et al., 2007). Feminist pedagogy also provides much guidance on how to utilize its models and ideas in teaching and learning.

Central Challenges to Mainstream Theories in Adult Learning

At the onset of describing some of the central challenges made by non-Western ways of knowing and the feminist perspective to more mainstream theories in adult learning, it is important to remember that non-Western ways of knowing and the feminist perspective are not in direct disagreement with the more mainstream theories, but rather emphasize different ideas (Merriam et al., 2007). Non-Western ways of knowing have a major disagreement in emphasis with andragogy and self-directed learning on the point of self-direction. A thorough definition of andragogy was provided in Question 1 on pp. 3-4. Self-directed learning is “learning on one’s

own” and is both a process of learning as well as an attribute of a learner (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 128). Where more mainstream theories emphasize the power of learning that one can accomplish by oneself, non-Western ways of knowing believe that stronger learning experiences come through communal and interdependent forms. “For example, in a study of self-directed learning in the Korean context, most of the Western values were rejected” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 218). The non-Western way of knowing may have some commonality with andragogy as both believe that adult learners want to learn useful information (Merriam et al., 2007). Non-Western ways of knowing and the more mainstream theory of reflective learning may agree that experience and reflection play a large role in learning (Merriam et al., 2007). To “engage in reflective learning” is to “plan, monitor, and reflect on our experiences” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 164). But non-Western ways of knowing may diverge from reflective learning if the experiences reflected on are from one individual and not the collective community and also if the reflection is done independently from the greater knowledge of the community.

The feminist perspective on adult learning, known as feminist pedagogy, also has some commonalities and differences with the more mainstream theories of adult learning. The feminist perspective “problematizes the power and authority of the teacher” in andragogy’s overarching focus on the teacher’s role in the educational experience (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 265). Andragogy seems to be a set of guidelines for a teacher working with adults. The feminist perspective would say that the power of the teacher to design and run educational experiences is problematic, if it does not take into account many of the ideas of feminist theory (Merriam et al., 2007). The feminist perspective may also disagree with the ideas of self-directed learning. The gender model of feminist pedagogy values connectedness, support and community in helping women to find and value the importance of their experiences (Merriam et al., 2007). The

emphasis that andragogy and self-directed learning place on independence may not work well with the connectedness of the feminist perspective. The feminist perspective and the more mainstream adult learning concept of reflective learning may have more in common. Both place a high value on utilizing experience for learning and growth.

Consistencies and Inconsistencies with Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory is another major theory in the field of adult learning. It is defined as “change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 130). Non-Western ways of knowing are very inconsistent with the individualistic conceptualizations of transformative learning theory. “The literature on transformational learning” that “position[s] self-direction, independence, rational discourse, and reflective thought as the pinnacles of adult learning theory” is the most inconsistent with non-Western ways of knowing (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 218).

The feminist perspective on adult learning has many consistencies with the socio-cultural approach to transformative learning proposed by Friere. Both focus on emancipating people that are oppressed by society (Merriam et al., 2007). Both seek “personal empowerment and social transformation” (Merriam et al., 2007). A critical difference is that Friere did not address the oppression through a gendered lens, but instead focused on poverty, illiteracy and class distinctions (Merriam et al., 2007).

Putting Non-Western Ways of Knowing the Feminist Perspective into Practice

My current work with adults is limited: I try to educate parents of prospective Michigan State University (MSU) students (particularly Honors College (HC) eligible students) about MSU, the HC, and the more general college-search, college decision-making, and college financing processes. In this section, I will reflect on how I might use non-Western ways of

knowing and the feminist perspective in my practice of helping adults learn.

One way non-Western ways of knowing can be helpful in my current practice of helping adults learn is the increased knowledge I have about other worldviews. Now I better understand that prospective students and their parents who come from non-Western backgrounds may not put as much value in a college degree for the purpose of independence. Additionally, some prospective students and parents who come from non-Western backgrounds may put more value and emphasis on holistic, communal and informal learning that MSU and the HC do not necessarily place a great emphasis on. I will not be able to change what MSU and the HC are offering, but I will be more familiar with non-Western learning emphases if a family asks about them. Merriam et al. (2007) also describe how many Asian students are reticent to speak up in Western learning settings. When I meet individually with a prospective student and their family, I expect the families to ask questions. Becoming more familiar with non-Western ways of knowing has helped me to see that this is not a fair expectation for all families in all situations.

The feminist perspective can also be useful in my practice of helping adults learn. I can work to ensure that I create a learning space for prospective students and their parents “where life experiences are valued, where a woman can come to have a voice, and hence, an identity” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 263). Even though the feminist perspective focuses on how the power structure subjugates the voice of women, I can take lessons from this theory and apply them to all people. For example, I can create a space for prospective students and parents who have traditionally been outside of the higher education power structure (i.e. first generation college students and their non-college educated parents) where their life experiences are valued and they are given a voice.

Overall, I appreciate the opportunity EAD 861 has provided for me to learn about

perspectives outside of the mainstream in the field of adult learning. It is only through understanding some of the more mainstream ideas and theories that I have a basis for understanding perspectives like the non-Western ways of knowing and feminist theory. For all of these learning experiences, I am grateful.

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