PHI 800-12: Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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**The Principles of Adult Education Theory and Their Application in OGS**

Adult education distinguishes itself from traditional methods through its emphasis on self-directed learning, experiential engagement, and practical applicability. Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy highlights the importance of tailoring education to meet the needs and motivations of adult learners (Knowles, 1988). Omega Graduate School (OGS) applies these principles by fostering reflective, interdisciplinary, and practical education that equips students to address personal and societal challenges. This paper explores the core principles of adult education theory, assesses OGS’s alignment with these principles, and evaluates their transformative and integrative impact on learners.

**Fundamental Principles of Adult Education Theory**

**Self-Directed Learning**

Knowles (1988) argued that adult learners are self-directed and thrive when actively participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating their educational journey. This autonomy is evident in OGS’s curriculum, which allows students to define their research questions and shape their dissertations according to their professional interests and societal needs. OGS encourages students to take ownership of their education and outcomes by fostering independence.

**Experiential Learning**

Merriam and Bierema (2014) emphasized that adult learners bring a wealth of prior experiences, which enhance their ability to contextualize new knowledge. Kolb (1984) added that experiential learning is cyclical, involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. At OGS, collaborative research initiatives embody these principles by integrating students' professional experiences into their academic work, allowing them to apply theory to practice effectively.

**Practical Application of Learning**

Knowles (1988) highlighted the importance of learning that addresses real-world challenges, a concept central to OGS’s design. Programs like social leadership provide students with tools to solve societal issues, such as housing or education inequities, ensuring that education has immediate relevance and tangible outcomes. This practical focus aligns with the needs and expectations of adult learners.

**Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory**

Jack Mezirow (1991) described transformative learning as a process where adults critically reassess their assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews. This transformation often begins with a disorienting dilemma, challenging learners to develop new perspectives through critical reflection and discourse.

**Critical Reflection at OGS**

Critical reflection is at the heart of OGS’s transformative approach. Students are encouraged to analyze their assumptions and explore alternative viewpoints as they develop their dissertations. This process fosters intellectual growth and equips learners to address complex problems. For example, in ethics and leadership courses, students evaluate diverse case studies to refine their understanding of moral decision-making (Taylor, 2008).

**Social and Personal Growth**

OGS extends transformative learning by integrating faith-based and ethical dimensions, encouraging students to reflect on how their research can influence societal change. By aligning with Mezirow’s model, OGS prepares students to engage in broader social impact initiatives, such as creating frameworks for equitable resource distribution or ethical organizational practices.

**Jane Vella’s Twelve Principles and Quantum Thinking**

Jane Vella (2008) articulated twelve principles for effective adult learning, emphasizing respect for learners, dialogue-based methods, and relevance. These principles complement OGS’s philosophy by fostering participatory and collaborative learning.

**Dialogue and Participation at OGS**

Dialogue, a cornerstone of Vella’s principles, is integral to OGS’s seminars and group discussions. These participatory methods ensure that students are actively engaged in their learning processes, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect. Vella (2008) asserted that adult learning is most effective when it incorporates active learner participation, a value evident in OGS’s commitment to student-driven research.

**Promoting Holistic Thinking**

Quantum thinking, an extension of Vella’s principles, emphasizes holistic, integrated, and interdisciplinary approaches. OGS promotes this by encouraging students to integrate spiritual, emotional, and ethical dimensions into their research. For example, multidisciplinary coursework blends theology, sociology, and leadership, fostering a comprehensive approach to addressing complex societal problems. Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences theory further supports this holistic perspective, emphasizing that education should address varied cognitive and emotional dimensions.

**Conclusion**

The principles of adult education, as articulated by scholars like Knowles, Mezirow, and Vella, provide a robust framework for understanding and enhancing adult learning. OGS exemplifies these principles by prioritizing self-direction, experiential engagement, and practical application. Furthermore, its transformative and holistic approaches empower students to transcend personal barriers and contribute to meaningful societal change. By integrating quantum thinking and interdisciplinary methods, OGS sets a benchmark for effective adult education that is both personally transformative and socially impactful.

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