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Informal Learning Report

Themes of how adults learn outside of school

Adults engage in diverse learning experiences outside of traditional school settings, each shaped by their unique personal, professional, and social contexts. Our analysis of ten interviews with adults discussing their informal learning experiences revealed three overarching themes: the varied sources of informal learning. These diverse motivations drive this form of learning, as well as the preferred learning styles and interests.

Coding Method

The coding method approach that best suited our qualitative data analysis was guided by constructivist grounded theory, utilized during Shamburg's qualitative analysis of Podcast Listening and Informal Learning (2023). Constructivist grounded theory can be described as avoiding starting with any fixed ideas or theories and instead letting the information naturally come from the data collected. As with Shamburg's research (2023), questions were opened, allowing interviewees to display their relationship with informal learning as in-depth as needed.

Initially, we planned to use preset-determined codes to make the process easier and more direct to the information we sought. Upon discussion after briefly scanning the interviews, we determined that it would be efficient to separately open code and then come together to discuss our findings. With this approach, we decided to code the data individually and allow the themes to emerge as they come. Once we collaborated on our codes, we found similar recurring codes, such as **Hands-on Experience, Self-paced Learning, and self-directed learning.**

Codes

Sources of Learning

Informal learning can come from various sources, including social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok, which influence and shape people's learning through short, engaging

videos. Video learning on YouTube provides access to countless tutorials and webinars, offering knowledge on almost any topic imaginable. Hands-on experiences enhance learning by allowing individuals to apply what they have learned in practical settings. Additionally, community building and collaborative learning play crucial roles as people connect with others to share knowledge, skills, and insights, fostering a supportive environment for continuous learning and growth. From the interviews we coded, recurring themes included **Social Media Influences, Hands-on Experience, Community Building, and Collaborative Learning**.

Motivation to Learn

Based on the interviews, several vital factors often motivate adult learners. Self-paced and self-directed learning provides the flexibility to study at their convenience, allowing them to balance education with other responsibilities. Websites and apps offer structured learning experiences that can be accessed at the learner's convenience. The potential for career opportunities and advancement is a significant motivator, as gaining new skills and knowledge can lead to better job prospects and professional growth. Additionally, the desire to enhance problem-solving abilities drives adult learners to engage in educational activities that challenge their thinking and equip them to handle real-world situations more effectively. Codes that recurred for this theme were **Self-paced Learning** and **self-directed learning** with subcategories such as **Career Opportunity/Advancement** and **Job requirement. Problem-Solving.**

Adults often have specific preferences for how they like to learn, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic methods. For example, some prefer learning through reading and watching videos, while others benefit more from hands-on activities. Sensory learners benefit from engaging multiple senses in the learning process. This can include visual aids, auditory materials, and tactile activities. Learning through direct, hands-on experiences allows adults

to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. Collaborative learning or learning from peers through group discussions, team projects, and problem-solving is also a way that adults learn informally.

Conclusion

Understanding the emerging themes helps us recognize the diverse ways adults engage with learning throughout their lives. Different sources of learning provide learners with greater autonomy in accessing and managing information. Many adults engage in learning driven by personal interests, hobbies, or a desire for self-improvement. Informal learning provides opportunities for lifelong learning that help adults adapt to changes in their personal and professional lives, fostering resilience and flexibility.

References

Shamburg, C., O'Neill, V., Jimenez, R., Rodriguez, J., & Harb, K. (2023). Podcast Listening and Informal Learning. *The Qualitative Report*, *28*(7), 2033-2057. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.5862