

From Angst to Zest: Empowering the Non-traditional Student

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Aloha! with a traditional Hawaiian greeting, Dr. Linda Golian-Lui the 2004 LIRT Conference Program Chair, welcomed the numerous attendees and our three accomplished presentation speakers to the 2004 LIRT program held Sunday, June 27 at the Orlando Conference Center. The program was designed to address the special issues that affect the adult student and how we as librarians and teachers can play a pivotal role in their academic development and accomplishments. In addition, Gloria Meisel from the Adult Learning Committee and Stephanie Michel our LIRT President also extended a warm welcome to our attendees and speakers.

The first speaker was Dr. Phyllis Bebko, a professor in adult learning theory at Florida Atlantic University. Bebko explained various current learning theories concerning adult education and within this context explained some of the common problems and roadblocks that confront adult learners in the learning process such as jobs, families, and preconceived notions about their academic abilities. She also discussed how and why adult learners differ from their younger counterparts. Adult learners are often self directed and both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn and often have been placed in the position of pursuing higher education due to a change in a life circumstance, i.e. divorce, job loss, etc.

Due to their life experience adult students tend to desire a deeper involvement in their own learning process and prefer to have input and choices in their academic environment. Programs that encourage adult learners need to take into consideration both the increased motivation of the adult learner, but there must also be an understanding of the “Barriers to Participation” such as cost, time constraints, and lack of confidence.

The next speaker was Judi DeLisle, a librarian at Valencia Community College, and in her presentation she spoke of how she decided to examine how successfully her school was facilitating adult education. In order to gain a true understanding she interviewed eight female adult students and asked them to share their experiences for a video presentation. When first asked all of the women were hesitant, or simply too polite to share the “downside” and were highly complimentary of the library and its services. However the interviews eventually revealed that most of the students had initially experienced a great deal of frustration and anxiety.

The interviews were enlightening as they demonstrated actual results rather than the preconceived results the librarians’ had believed they were eliciting. In addition, the students offered concrete examples of problems with different modes of instruction and suggested changes that could be easily incorporated into the library program. As a result of these interviews Valencia Community College successfully changed their program to better serve the adult student population and became their “new best friend.”

The third speaker was Deborah Anderson, Assistant Professor/Librarian at Brevard Community College, Palm Bay Campus, who shared some of the programs and services that Brevard Community College and the campus libraries have to assist adult learners. In a video

presentation, librarians expressed their appreciation for non-traditional students' maturity, listening skills, and motivation, but noted that these students often lack confidence in their research skills.

Brevard Community College libraries are making students feel more comfortable with their library research skills and computers through making laptops available for checkout in their libraries. The program benefits adult learners who cannot afford a computer at home by exposing them to the technology. Additionally, the libraries provide library tours and basic searching instruction to adults reentering the workforce. The libraries have implemented an International Student Welcome Day, where international students are formally invited to attend an open house and learn more about the library, play games, and win prizes. In the future, Anderson hopes to market the libraries' services to the instructors of preparatory reading classes and send print mailings about the libraries' laptops program to students.

The speakers were well received and left the audience wanting more. All three presentations will soon be available on the ALA-LIRT web page at <http://www3.baylor.edu/LIRT/>. Thanks to everyone on the 2004 LIRT Conference Program Committee for putting together an informative program!