Filling the Need for Adult Education Skills and Competencies:  
A Web-based Professional Development Initiative for Extension Educators

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As the world's largest nonformal adult education organization (Boone, 1985), it could be reasonably assumed that Extensionists possess the knowledge and skills needed to anticipate and recognize adult needs and to direct learning activities that adequately address those needs. It has been argued, however, that in many situations, extension professionals have been hired to work in extension primarily because of efficacy in a particular subject area rather than experience or skills as educators (Seevers, 1995). Further, although extension agents are often well grounded in their respective subject areas, they may not have had much training in educating adults (Cornell, 1999).

In the past decade, distance learning technologies used to deliver academic programs have been having a major influence on academic institutions around the world. Agricultural institutions have a vital role in this issue, as they find better methods to deliver formal and non-formal education to their constituencies (Irani & Telg, 2001).

Purpose

Based on the above, it was concluded that there was a need for a formal, planned, and structured professional development program in adult education for extension educators. The purpose and objectives of this project were therefore to develop a series of web based modules focusing on adult learning that would become part of an existing set of Extension Faculty Orientation Web Modules to meet the need of introducing new and existing faculty to adult learning theories, concepts and competencies.

Major Points

The modules that were developed as a result of this project consisted of self-run/viewer-controlled narrated Microsoft® PowerPoint®, RealPlayer® presentations, outlining detailed information on the needs expressed by the agents. Other elements included: printable slide notes pages, links to current and relevant adult education Web sites and email correspondence links.

Educational Importance

It’s been said that adult learning is greatest when it maximizes available resources (Knowles, 1990). Also, research contends that the more senses involved in the learning process, the better the presented information will be understood and learned by the adult student. The educational importance of this project, then, rests on its innovative attempt to utilize current technologies, and a mix of andragogy and pedagogy and deductive and inductive teaching approaches, to effectively train extensionists in the important area of adult learning theory, concepts and competencies.