

Experience is a Good Teacher: Preparing the Adult Urban Unemployed for Employment

Presented by: Porscha Jackson

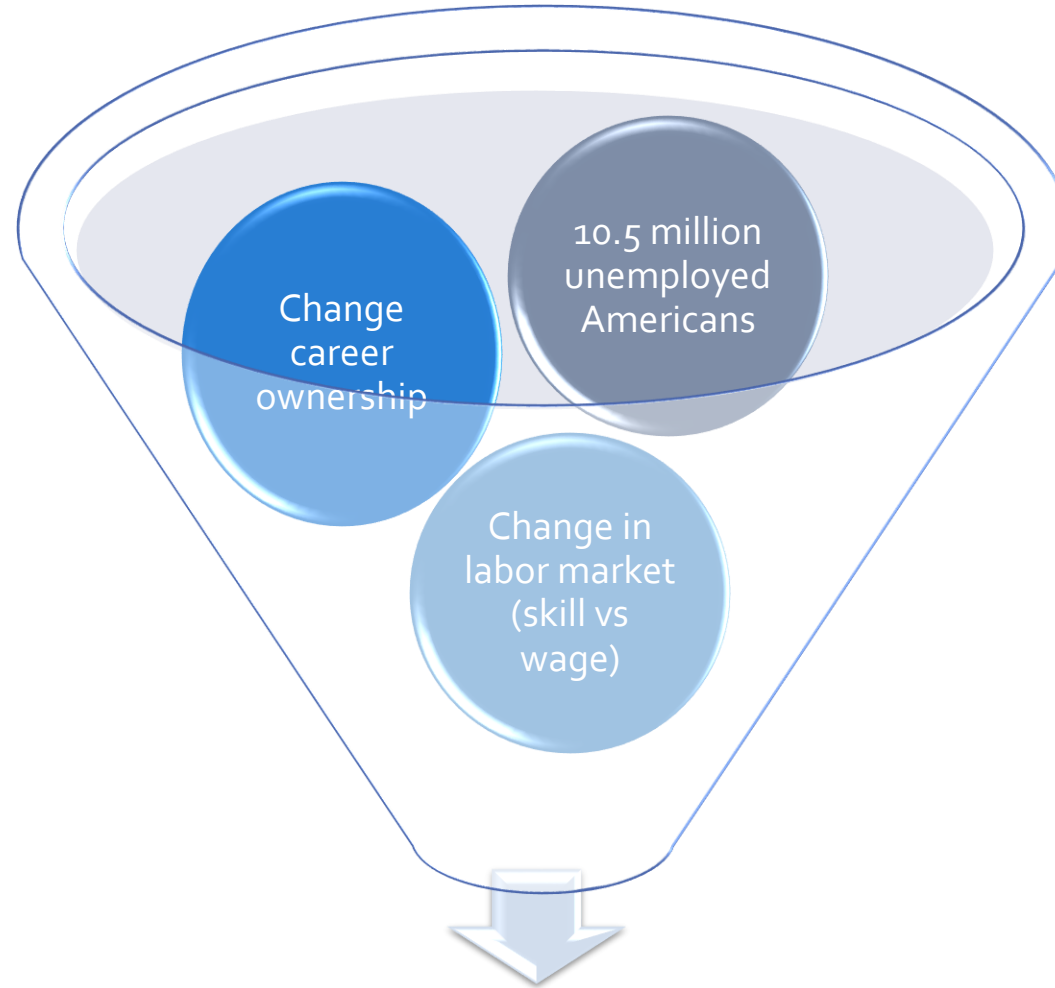
Texas A&M University

International Conference on Urban Education

Montego Bay, Jamaica

November 6, 2014

Purpose



Examine career development services offered by unemployment offices to understand employment preparation through learning

Theoretical Framework

- **Experiential Learning**
 - Draw of experiences to help adult learners make meaning
 - Reflection on previous experiences to learn about self, actions, & behaviors (Castelli, 2011)
 - Construct of meanings from experiences to build learning (Merriam Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007)
- **Mezirow's Transformative Learning**
 - Importance of several past experiences on path to develop new perspective (Mezirow, 1981)
 - Basis for creating a learning environment & facilitation of training sessions
 - Instructor serves a guide to utilize stories to help in personal development in a disorienting dilemma (unemployment) (Merriam et al., 2007)

Methodology

- **Three-week observational study**
 - 9 resume assistance & interviewing workshops
 - Urban unemployment office locations
 - 2 instructors
 - Instructor Jamie-African American, male, mid-to-late 30's
 - Instructor Ms. Raquel-Hispanic, female, early 40's
 - Workshop participants of diverse cultures, ages, experiences, and professional and educational backgrounds
- **Researcher field notes**

Findings

- Instructors used experiential learning and transformative learning
- Participant narratives of their own experiences was significant to their overall learning
 - Instructor's approach to facilitate learning
 - Making meaning through stories of experiential learning
 - Experiences led to transformative learning

Findings: Instructor Approach

Instructor 1- Jaime (aka “The Expert”)

- Humanistic
- Personal introduction
- Gave facts and statistics
- Provided material for participants to make better decisions
- Was energetic & relatable-slang, humor
- Provided real-life experiences
- Stressed importance & reason of information
- Engaged through questioning, repetition, advice

Instructor 2- Ms. Raquel (aka “The Facilitator”)

- Constructivist
- Provided learning objectives and outcomes
- Sat at table with participants
- Instructed step-by-step from workbook
- Was nurturing & personable-professional, formal
- Encouraged participants to learn from each other
- Stressed networking
- Engaged through activities, questioning, reading, & probing

Findings: Making Meaning of Experiences

- Used stories as examples for course material and explained validity (Jaime)
- Encouraged reflection of positive & negative experiences (Jaime)
 - “HR”-acknowledged past experience as an HR professional as she provided advice to other participants
- Engaged participants in physical activity followed by discussion of personal experiences (Ms. Raquel)
 - “Financial Analyst”-incorporated identity as financial analyst and financial analyst experiences in all of his responses

Findings: Transformative Learning Experiences

- Participants acknowledged mistakes, warned others of consequences, and offered suggestions to avoid certain situations (Ms. Raquel)
 - “Now I understand why I messed up...I know now not to reveal all my weaknesses but to show how my weakness as an actual strength.”
- Participants no longer viewed themselves as employees but a brand (Jaime)
 - Participants learned what was inappropriate to wear to an interview from a story Jaime shared about how he helped a former participant work on his appearance to get a particular job

Conclusion

- Narratives contained experiences, feelings, and identities but also provided connections to others
- Listening to the various narratives helped them to understand how they made sense of their past experiences and themselves
- Study provides information on how adults make meaning of work experiences and how instructors facilitate learning activities to better prepare for employment opportunities
- Elements of training and development through adult learning theories were used by the instructors to facilitate learning and cognitive processing of participants' past experiences to encourage them, identify problem areas, and provide solutions for their career development