



ENGAGE

Enhance Non-Governmental Actors
and Grassroots Engagement



Re: Literature Review on Adult Learning and Impact on Civic Engagement

Date: July 2018

The USAID/ENGAGE program seeks to develop and utilize effective programming with the goal of *increasing citizen awareness of and engagement in civic activities at the national, regional and local levels*. USAID/ENGAGE's recent programming, through its civic education activity, has focused on trainings and educational events. These events are largely targeted towards adult audiences. In this setting, it is useful to review and understand the theories of adult learning.

To help analyze the results and effectiveness of past and future educational events, below is a short guide to literature on adult education that covers basic theories of adult learning and evidence and frameworks for long-term behavior changes for adults through an educational/intervention process.

Takeaway: The USAID/ENGAGE program has can pursue innovative research that analyzes its educational/outreach events for civil society development and advocacy purposes. A thorough analysis of USAID/ENGAGE's impact on adult behavior and learning – although difficult to execute – would provide a significant contribution to the international development community for civil society growth and advocacy promotion.

Contents of Literature Review

Section 1) Theories of Adult Learning

- 1.1 Adult Learning Concepts – Malcom Knowles*
- 1.2 Experiential Learning in Adult Education – David Kolb*
- 1.3 Characteristics of Effective Adult Learning Programs -Billington*

Section 2) Long Term Behavior Change

- 2.1 Theories of Change*
- 2.2 Evidence from Behavior Change in Health Care*

Section 3) USAID Behavior Change Framework

- 3.1 USAID Behavior Change Framework for Health*

1.1 Adult Learning Concepts – Malcom Knowles¹

The most relevant scholar in the field of adult education is Malcom Knowles. In his research, Knowles presupposes that adults are in different stages of their development than children. Adults tend to have different motivations for learning new information than children. Thus, different methods of instruction are required to better orient the content for adult learners and make the education process more effective in adult classrooms and education environments.² The literature emphasizes general rules regarding adult learning.

- 1) Adults learn best when the content is relevant to their lives.
- 2) Adults retain information better if they are involved in the process of discovery, rather than being the recipient of information.
- 3) Adults learn best when they actively apply what they learned to a scenario and everyday life.
- 4) Learner-centered classrooms are the most effective for adult learners.

1.2 Experiential Learning in Adult Education – David Kolb³

Kolb argues that adults learn best through the process of experiential learning. For instance, successful learning will occur when current tasks are linked to past experiences. Hands-on tasks, case studies, role playing, internships, etc. all provide learning in an experiential context.⁴ In this context, experiential learning also coincides with theories of active learning. Active learning is defined as the use of one or more interactive approaches to education and training for the purpose of engaging students in their work to acquire and understand knowledge. The active learning classroom is one that de-emphasizes lecture and other teacher-centered forms of instruction in favor of engaged class environments that are learner centered.⁵

Kolb breaks down the effective experiential learning in a four-stage process:

- 1) Concrete Experience (kinesthetic responses)
- 2) Reflective observation (analyzing, observing, watching)
- 3) Abstract Conceptualization (critical thinking)
- 4) Active Experimentation (action and movement with new information)

¹ 2 Expanding on his earlier work, *Informal Adult Education* (1950), Malcolm Knowles published *The Modern Practice of Adult Education – Andragogy versus Pedagogy* (1970)

² Adult Learning Theories. Author: Mary Ann Corley

https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/11_%20TEAL_Adult_Learning_Theory.pdf

³ Kolb, David. (1983). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Indianapolis, IN. FT Press

⁴ <http://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/teachingLibrary/Learning%20Theory/adultlearning.pdf>

⁵ <http://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/teachingLibrary/Learning%20Theory/adultlearning.pdf>

1.3 Characteristics of Effective Adult Learning Programs -Billington⁶

Billington's research focuses on characteristics of adult learning environments that enable them to be more successful. Over course much, if not most of the success of education depends on the student, Billington identified a number of characteristics that are useful and should be taken into consideration for USAID/ENGAGE's projects:

- Safe and supportive environment
- Encouragement of experimentation and creativity
- Treatment of adult learners as respected peers
- Self-directed learning
- Optimal pacing (challenging just beyond current abilities)
- Active learning, interaction, and dialogue
- Regular student-to-faculty feedback mechanism

2.2 Behavior Change in Health Care

Changing group or individual behavior is easier said than done. This is particularly the case with adults and their attempts at changing their own behaviors. Behavior change practitioners who work in the health care field often cite how real behavior change is difficult to achieve, expensive, with the impact often being short lived.⁷

Furthermore, direct interventions and campaigns show little promise for long-term behavior change in health. The average public health campaign is able to impact the behavior of roughly 5% of a population.⁸

3.1 USAID Behavior Change Framework for Health

The health sector has produced a wide array of literature pertaining to behavior change interventions. Even in the realm of international development, interventions in health for long-term behavior changes have been documented and the research well organized.

Notably in 2015, USAID produced [a] *Behavior Change Framework* for impacting health related changes in 24 priority countries.⁹ The framework for behavior change however can be applied

⁶ Billington, D. (2007). Seven characteristics of adult education/adult learning. <http://meetingsnet.com/adult-learning/seven-characteristics-adult-education>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4307817/>

⁸ nyder *LBJ Nutr Educ Behav*. 2007 Mar-Apr; 39(2 Suppl):S32-40.

⁹ <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/The-Behavior-Change-Framework.pdf>

towards influencing engagement in civil society and is thus useful for USAID/ENGAGE. The framework for identifying and targeting health related behavior produced by USAID is outlined below:

- Identify behaviors with the highest potential for impact on goal/target
- Establish indicators for these behaviors that can be monitored and evaluated
- Implement program for behaviors with evidence-based tools and interventions

Additional considerations within the framework for targeting behavior include:

- A behavior that may influence one or more other behaviors that are direct or underlying causes of the main issue (lack of civic engagement etc.)
- A behavior that could be cross cutting or integrated across multiple technical areas

A behavior that is measurable and feasible to track over time (note: if there are no relevant data currently available, than an actionable plan for data collection should be developed)

2.1 Theories of Change for International Development in Governance Field

In the field of international development, Theories of Change are useful for understanding and assessing in complex programs and hard to measure areas such as governance, capacity development, and institutional development.¹⁰ A Theory of Change, in short is the thinking behind how interventions will bring about a certain result.

USAID's Learning Lab identifies several characteristics of effective theories of change: 1) casual linkages in an intervention 2) linkages to short, medium, and long term 3) outcomes focused.

The steps to create a Theory of Change¹¹:

1. Identify a long-term goal.
2. Conduct "backwards mapping" to identify the preconditions necessary to achieve that goal.
3. Identify the interventions that the initiative will perform to create these preconditions (outcomes). In other words, this is completing the Outcomes Framework.
4. Develop indicators for each precondition (outcome) that will be used to assess the performance of the interventions.
5. Write a narrative that can be used to summarize the various moving parts in the TOC.

General Features of a Theory of Change:

- Gives the big picture, including issues related to the environment or context that you can't control.
- Shows all the different pathways that might lead to change, even if those pathways are not related to your program.

¹⁰ <https://usaidelearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-thing-called-theory-change>

¹¹ <https://usaidelearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-thing-called-theory-change>

- Describes *how* and *why* you think change happens.
- Could be used to complete the sentence "if we do X, then Y will change *because...*"
- Is presented as a diagram with narrative text.
- The diagram is flexible and doesn't have a particular format—it can include cyclical processes, feedback loops, one box could lead to multiple other boxes, different shapes could be used, etc.
- Describes why you think one box will lead to another box (e.g., if you think increased knowledge will lead to behavior change, is that an assumption or do you have evidence to show it is the case?)