ADULT STUDENTS AND LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTION
AT A SMALL COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The nature of employment is in the midst of change as the new knowledge-based global economy affects countries around the world (Maehl, 2000). As a result of these developments, a college degree has become important for adults in the workplace. Bermuda College, a small community college of about 1000 students, has the responsibility of providing post-secondary education for Bermuda’s students. About 45% of students enrolled in credit courses are at least 25 years old. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which adult learning principles, which are consistent with the learner-centered teaching approach, are supported by Bermuda College faculty. Using Conti’s Principles of Adult learning Scale (1979) and focus group interviews, the study focused on both faculty and adult students at Bermuda College. Data derived from the faculty survey were analyzed to determine the extent of faculty support for adult learning principles. The mean total score for faculty on the PALS survey was 128.3 indicating that faculty members at Bermuda College are increasingly committed to a teacher-centered style. For Factor 1, Learner-Centered Activities, Factor 3, Relating to Experience and Factor 5, Climate Building, Bermuda College faculty members use a learner-centered approach when teaching adults. For Factor 4, Assessing Student Needs and Factor 6, Participation in the Learning Process, faculty members support the learner-centered approach, though inconsistently. Finally, for Factor 2, Personalized Instruction and Factor 7, Flexibility for Personal
Development, the learner-centered approach is not used by faculty. Data derived from student focus group interviews were analyzed to determine student perception of learner-centered instruction. Overall, students perceived that most of the faculty members that teach them are learner-centered in their approach. The study results have implications for teaching and learning at Bermuda College and in particular, professional development in adult learning.