

APPROPRIATE THEME: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS & SUCCESS.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO ADULT DISTANCE LEARNING.

According to Moore (1996:4) the South African educational system was characterized by a number of deficiencies, for instance where the teaching strategies and delivery modes were not adapted to meet the needs of the larger intakes of learners and the diversity of lifelong learners. This in essence raised the concern over environments conducive to distance learning. This paper attempts to highlight the importance of creating an environment conducive to learning for a distance learning institution like Technikon Southern Africa.

The learning environment can predictably affect adults learning – positively if designed well but negatively if attention has not been paid to the conditions under which learning best occurs. In reality its importance has been underplayed.

In the literature review leading to this study, it became apparent that no research (Nexus Search) has been done specifically in terms of the creation of conducive adult learning environments for a distance learning institution like TSA. Being a “a distance learning setting” is perhaps one of the reason for not seriously considering the learning environment as a vital determinant of the learning process. In this study the researcher, however, attempts to prove the contrary.

The research underlying this paper focussed on an interpretative study of the Programme group Police Practice of TSA to establish whether an environment conducive to learning does exist. Seeing that the study is focused on meaning rather than comparison the researcher engaged in a qualitative research study. In following a qualitative approach the researcher focussed on the use of interviews.

From the findings of this study it became evident that the central response regarding the learning environment at Police Practice was that it was not fully conducive to adult learning. From these findings various conclusions have been drawn regarding the role of the educators in creating an environment conducive to adult learning.

A number of possible guidelines regarding an environment conducive to learning have been proposed by educators of Police Practice and those emerging from this entire study, respectively. A set of criteria were subsequently developed to assist in creating an environment conducive to adult distance learning

While many avenues might be fruitfully explored in this study, several areas offer particular promise for research regarding the learning environment in distance education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1997 the White Paper on Higher Education called for an open and flexible learning system and significant change in the traditional modes of programme delivery. Flexibility of access, exit, curriculum and learning modes require the adoption of a new teaching paradigm. (Moore, 1997: 8-10)

According to Moore (1996:4) the South African educational system was characterized by a number of deficiencies, for instance where the teaching strategies and delivery modes were not adapted to meet the needs of the larger intakes of learners and the diversity of lifelong learners. This in essence raised the concern over environments conducive to distance learning. This paper attempts to highlight the importance of creating an environment conducive to learning for a distance learning institutions like TSA.

Open Learning via Distance Education is increasingly being regarded as a possible solution for some of South Africa's educational problems. The Literature, however, illustrates no concrete research that has been conducted in terms of the creation of an environment conducive to adult distance learning institutions like Technikon Southern Africa. There are perhaps numerous reasons for this, however being a 'distance learning setting' is probably one the most prominent reasons for not seriously considering the learning environment as both an essential and vital determinant governing the learning process.

This paper focuses on an interpretative study that has been done of the programme group Police Practice of Technikon Southern Africa. The purpose of the study was to establish whether an environment conducive to adult learning does in fact exist in Police Practice and to develop a set of recommendations/criteria, which could be used by this programme group of TSA.

Various critical questions stimulated this study. These questions were in turn used to generate interview questions, which were used during the interview process. A qualitative approach was followed and data was obtained by means of interviews. The subjects of the study were educators of the programme group Police Practice of Technikon Southern Africa.

2. GIVING MEANING TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF DISTANCE AND OPEN LEARNING

From the literature review it has become apparent that a number of studies on learning environment pertaining to the residential / classroom settings have been conducted. There appears to be no specific study done on conducive adult learning environment from a distance education perspective. It is in light of this that that paper focuses on the study of this particular nature.

The learning environment which is inclusive of some of the following, – lecture halls, individual study areas, libraries, instructional materials, support services and options available must not simply permit learning to occur in the educational institution. All environments should be conducive in a way so as to enhance the learning process.

According to Donald (1997:xi) the learning environment should be productive rather than merely neutral. The learning environment can predictably affect adults learning – positively if designed well but negatively if attention has not been paid to the conditions under which learning best occurs. In reality its importance has been underplayed. Measurement of educational institution effectiveness tends to ignore the context of learning, focussing instead on the selection and performance of staff and learners. Educationally productive environments are structured to enable learners to concentrate on their studies, free from distracting elements. In a distance learning institution like TSA, the learning environment should facilitate access to knowledge. It is thus imperative that educators have an in-depth understanding of the impact that an environment has on the learner and the learning process as a whole.

3. DEFINITION / EXPLANATION OF CONCEPTS

3.1 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

According to Hiemstra (1991:8) a learning environment is all of the physical surroundings, psychological or emotional conditions, and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in an educational enterprise.

Fraser (1993:3) tends to follow a broader perspective in maintaining that the learning environment refers to the social, psychological and andragogical contexts in which learning occurs and which affect learner achievements and attitudes.

Donald (1997:xi) relates to a more holistic and acceptable definition of the learning environment which aligns itself more appropriately in terms of the focus of the study: “The learning environment consists of the entire setting in which learning takes place – the campus and the social milieu, the disciplines that provide the knowledge environment, the learners and the arrangements made for them, the teaching and learning process, and the assessment of learning, institution and programs.”

3.2 DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education is a concept that is made up of “distance” and “education.” According to Collins Dictionary and the Thesaurus (1989:287) the word distance is outlined as “ the state of being apart, separation or remoteness in relationship”

Holmberg (1985:9) defines distance education as “...the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but who, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization.

There exists no consensus between educators, as far as the term distance education is concerned. Garrison (1991:3) maintains that "...it is not a simple task capturing the essence of the field.”

Furthermore, the time aspect should be regarded as crucial. Learning takes place according to the learner’s programme instead of the programme of the facilitator of learning consequently the format ought to be learner-centered (Greyling, 1993:39).

For the purpose of this paper “distance education” means: a teaching method that takes place over a distance, which implies that the facilitator and the learner are separated by distance, and that the facilitation of the learning process will be achieved by means of the written word, minimum face-to face contact and multi-media technology.

3.3 FLEXIBLE / OPEN LEARNING

Simmonds (1995:25) argues that flexible learning is a generic title for open learning, distance learning and resource-based learning. The key aspect of flexible learning is the all-embracing

nature of the phrase, in that it includes not only the constituents of the open learning system, but also those learners who are already within the traditional system.

This is an approach to learning that is open to the possible use of a variety of innovative learning practices and combinations of practices. Flexible learning is not a specific methodology but provides the learner with a choice of learning strategies as well as the choice of place, pace and time in which to study (Moore, 1997:1).

Holmberg (1985:17) makes a very relevant distinction between open learning and distance education, which is perhaps pertinent for the focus of this paper.

It is claimed that open learning is a principle or philosophy while distance education is a mode of delivery – thus open learning is an end, and distance education (and contact teaching) should be regarded as a means to an end.

Moore (1996:8) in his focus regards open/flexible learning as a strategy towards a deep approach and intentional understanding of the learning content. Accordingly such a strategy should be seen as a window through which aspects of the reality become visible and more intelligible.

4. COMMON PROBLEMS IN DISTANCE FACILITATION INFLUENCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND HENCE HINDERING OPEN LEARNING

The greatest problems experienced by distance learning educators according to Smit (1994: 108); as well as Van Zyl, Steyn and Coetzee, (1993:19) is a feeling of isolation of both facilitators and learners which makes the possibility of a trusting relationship between both parties, so much a difficult one.

The desperation of engaging in conversation via distance education modes with the learner is perhaps another great frustration. It is possibly due to the fact that a majority of distance educators are “products” of a contact /residential institution:

- a) They do not possess any training and experience as far as the setting of study material is concerned.
- b) They have not experienced the frustration that a distance learner does.

The consequent result of the above is that the distance educators have very little sympathy with the learners (Adey, Kampman and Heese, 1990: 15 – 20). Boredom and routine of the task to be performed by learners is perhaps another serious problem, which leads to frustration of both learners and educators (Fraser, 1985:8).

Ways in which to overcome this problem could perhaps be by:

1. Developing effective / efficient communication channels.
2. Acknowledge that learners have different learning styles and accept them as they are.
3. Maximize the use of learning material and written feedback with an eye to promote a trustworthy relationship with the learners.
4. Ensure that the tutors are fully supported with their task of “taking the distance” out of distance education.

Keegan (1986:87) finds distance education in open learning as unnatural; it breaks the process of communication, artificial mechanical substitutes for inter personal communication are provided. This changes the teaching behaviour and learning behaviour. This is a definite propensity to alienation.

5. OVERVIEW OF TECHNIKON SA AND POLICE PRACTICE

Technikon RSA was established as an autonomous tertiary education institution in 1980 under the House of Assembly, prior to which it had functioned as the external studies facility of the Technikon Witwatersrand. It came into existence as a result of the report of a committee appointed by the minister of National Education to investigate the need for, and desirability of a Technikon for distance education. In 1993 the institution changed its name to Technikon SA (standing for ‘Southern Africa’) to reflect a commitment to playing a key role in the educational upliftment of the entire subcontinent. From a total of 5039 students, Technikon SA has grown in size to a total of 85039 students in 1996. Having in place the three registration cycle period, the numbers are approximately 62000 in 2001.

Considering the fact that the study focussed particularly on the programme group Police Practice some attention will be paid to the existence of the programme group within the context of TSA.

This programme group is one of the largest at Technikon SA and what follows is a brief overview regarding its very existence at TSA.

The Programme Group: Police Practice has been involved in the presentation of the policing diploma since 1986. At present the programme group offers a National Diploma: Policing, which is a three-year programme, and a National Higher Diploma: Policing, which is a one-year programme. The main focuses are Investigation of Crime, Management, Community Policing and Law. The curriculum was developed in collaboration with members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to ensure that their education, training and development needs were addressed.

The Programme group has 3 managers, 33 lecturing staff and 9 administrative staff members. In the course of 1999, 340 tutors have been appointed nation-wide to supply learner support by way of telephone tutoring, contact sessions and the marking of assignments, portfolios or projects.

6. PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The research focussed on an interpretative study of the Programme group Police Practice to establish whether an environment conducive to learning does exist. The purpose of this study would be to address the issues surrounding a conducive environment for adult learning and to develop a set of criteria which could be used by Police Practice or other distance learning institutions as a whole.

7. RESEARCH GOAL

In this study the researcher attempted to establish whether the Programme group Police Practice and its complement of staff function in an environment conducive to adult learning.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

8.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND TECHNIQUE

Seeing that the study is focused on meaning rather than comparison the researcher engaged in a qualitative research study. Creswell (1994:45) maintains this approach in explaining how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world. According to Merriam and Simpson, (1995:107) Ethnography can also be regarded as an account that interprets the data within a socio-cultural framework. In following a qualitative approach the researcher focussed specifically on the use of interviews.

A set of critical questions of this research has been formulated into a group of semi-structured interview questions in an effort to investigate the "conduciveness" of the environment. These questions have been scrutinized and reviewed by all lecturers of the Subject Group Management Leadership: Policing. In using such an approach these critical questions as well as the Integrated Learner Centered Distance Education (ILCDE) Model served as the criteria against which the "conduciveness" at Police Practice was assessed.

The researcher followed a qualitative approach with a combination of exploratory and descriptive strategies. The researcher obtained information from lecturers / adult educators of Police Practice at Technikon SA. As mentioned earlier a qualitative approach has been followed and the study was both descriptive and explorative in nature.

Descriptive Research

A study is descriptive when it intends to describe a phenomenon accurately within its specific context, and when it is based on collected data. The emphasis is on an in-depth description of an individual, group, situation or organization (Mouton, 1996:44). Merriam (1998:7) sustains that descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation of a phenomenon are needed and not a prediction based on cause and effect. It is in this light that the researcher attempted to establish the structures of Police Practice that promotes an environment conducive to adult learning.

Explorative Research:

Mouton and Marais (1990:43) state that exploratory research aims to acquire new insights into a phenomenon rather than to collect and replicate data; to explicate the central concepts; to determine priorities for further research and to develop new hypotheses about existing phenomenon. The research design of an exploratory study tends to be open and flexible. It is in this regard that the researcher attempted to explore the aspects of Police Practice that are associated with an environment conducive to adult learning.

The research had no interest in comparing or predicting because of the qualitative nature of the study. This study therefore dealt with questions of an explorative and descriptive nature.

8.2 SAMPLING METHOD

According to Merriam and Simpson (1995:57) a sample is a strategically and systematically identified group of people or events that meets the criterion or representativeness for a particular study. Mouton (1996:134) describes a research population as a collection or set of elements of various kinds. These populations can include populations of, individual human beings; organizations; institutions; collectives; social activities or events; cultural objectives and interventions

More specifically, for the purpose of the study the subjects under study were individual beings i.e. educators of the Programme Group: Police Practice presently serving as lecturers of the mentioned division.

The study was carried out on the premises of TSA itself. The sample involves the entire compliment of adult academic staff at Police Practice available at the present point of the research. The study was based primarily from an Adult Educators (Lecturers) perspective regarding the learning environment. The researcher acknowledges that the environment is dependent on the views of others as well. This has been identified as one of the limitations to the study. This study thus involved lecturers comprising of **10 males and 10 females** of diverse age groups, race and cultural backgrounds.

8.3 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher adopted the method of interviewing in this research. Interviews were conducted in the programme group Police Practice of TSA. The interviews were conducted on the premises of TSA.

Interviews

According to Merriam and Simpson, (1995:164) an interview is a conversation with purpose and it can be used for assessment of facts, attitudes and opinions from research participants.

Merriam and Simpson (1995:106) goes on further to maintain that the ability to tap into the experiences of others in their own natural setting, while utilizing their value and belief framework is virtually impossible without face to face and verbal interaction with them.

Creswell (1994:150) distinguishes between two types of interviewing method viz.

- ◆ Structured instructional, open ended, face to face, one-on-one, in-person interview, and
- ◆ Semi-structured, open-ended, face to face, one-on-one, in person interview with the key informant people.

In this study all of these interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, face to face, one-on-one, in-person interviews with educators from the programme Police Practice of TSA.

8.4 DELIMITATION AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

8.4.1 Delimitation: The study is confined to the programme group Police Practice of TSA.

8.4.2 Limitations: The limitation of this entire study needs to be recognized because the study will be confined to one programme group. The results could thus be subjective. This could consequently be seen as a limitation to its general relevance. Having being associated with TSA for approximately five years, the researcher makes the following deductions / observations:

- ◆ A large number of educators are subject specialists with very little or no experience in adult education. Those who possess some experience in the education field – have been primarily involved in child education (pedagogics).
- ◆ This study is based primarily on the views of the Adult Educators (lecturers) regarding the learning environment. The “conduciveness” of the learning environment is obviously dependent on the views of many other stakeholders.
- ◆ Police Practice is only one amongst the 12 programme groups of TSA.
- ◆ The majority of the learners of the programme group are primarily from the South African Police Services. The fact that this is just one organization with its own inherent culture and sub-cultures could perhaps be another limitation of this study.

8.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of qualitative data is a creative process, which is managed differently by different researchers, and because of this, it is impossible to provide a “recipe” for analyzing data (Yin,

1991:11). Creswell (1994:153) also mentions that data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. It also requires that the researcher be open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanations for the findings. The researcher also took a voluminous amount of information and reduced it to certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interprets this information (Creswell, 1994:154). Tesch (1990:97) calls this process *decontextualisation and re-contextualisation*. Much work in the analysis process consists of “taking apart” (into smaller pieces), while the final goal is the emergence of a larger, consolidated picture. Mouton (1996:111) concurs by viewing data analysis and interpretation as identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing certain conclusions from them.

8.5.1 CONTENT ANALYSIS

Audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim into a written format by the researcher. Recordings were retained for reference purposes. The data from the interviews, were *content analyzed*.

8.5.2 ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

Responses of interviews were then analyzed using the following eight steps which Tesch in Creswell (1994:155) consider when analysing textual data:

1. Read through all documents/ transcriptions and get a sense of the whole.
2. Select one document and read through, concentrating on the underlying meaning. Record thoughts in the margin.
3. List the topics and cluster similar topics together.
4. Select codes for the different topics and record these next to the topics in the documents.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and relate to each other.
6. Decide on the final codes for each category.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, re-code your existing data.

TABLE 1: A LIST OF THE STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

QUESTION NO.	STRUCTURE OF QUESTION
1.	What is your view on the importance of the Adult Learning principles in your daily responsibilities as an Adult Educator?
2.	What aspects in your own opinion constitute an environment conducive to adult learning?
3.	Do you think there is that responsibility for adult educators of a distance learning institution like Technikon SA to concern themselves over the issue of creating conducive learning environments? Explain
4.	From your experience at Police Practice (TSA) do you feel that the environment is conducive to adult learning? Substantiate
5.	In terms of delivery, what are your views pertaining to a) the use of technology in distance learning? b) “personalising” of learning material?
6.	Could you briefly explain any attempts that your subject group recently made with regards to creating an environment conducive to adult learning?
7.	Could you briefly explain your view on the introduction of in-service training/ staff development programmes (for you as the adult educator) with regards to environments conducive to learning?
8.	What possible guidelines or recommendations could you propose in working towards a more conducive learning environment?

9. PROMINENT FINDINGS: SHIFTING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION TOWARDS OPEN LEARNING.

From the findings it became evident that the central response regarding the learning environment at Police Practice was that it was not really conducive to adult learning. Various reasons were given by educators to support the statement.

An important point that emerges from the literature review is that, if you want learners to succeed, you need to be certain that they are placed in an educational environment that capitalizes on the way they learn best. The methods of distance education are becoming increasingly more essential to both adult education and an understanding of the adult learner. This is essential for the successful design and implementation of many distance educational programmes. There are numerous problems with distance learning, which needs to be interpreted as challenges with the necessary exploration of interventions in order for the learning environment to be addressed.

In order to support the learners in a distance education milieu, it is imperative that the distance educator possess not only *skills in facilitating*, but also skills and experience in facilitating the learning process through the creation of an environment conducive to adult learning.

Communication is an essential determinant in the distance learning mode. The use of flexible learning contracts in distance education could promote a stimulating relationship between learner and educator and consequently enhance the attempts at creating an environment more conducive to adult learning.

It appears as if the need for a *mentorship programme* in distance education is seen as an imperative component for an environment to be conducive to adult learning.

A number of the respondents viewed knowledge of *adult learning principles* as being fundamentally essential to their daily function as adult educators. All education processes need to be carefully guided by these principles. Educators felt they are not being assisted sufficiently by TSA in this regard. Educators tend to envisage a strong relationship between different forms of support in distance education and the "conduciveness" of the learning environment.

A safe, flexible and accommodating environment emerged as important aspects. Most educators see it as their responsibility to create an environment conducive to learning but are however reluctant to accept sole responsibility due to the complexity and large number of stakeholders involved in a distance education institution like TSA.

With regards to the *use of technology*, there were mixed views. On the one hand it was strongly supported in terms of globalization and moving into a technological future, while on the other hand there was a fear of depersonalizing the mode of delivery and instilling fear and anxiety amongst learners.

Emanating from the study is that various attempts have been made in creating an environment more conducive to learning at Police Practice. These initiatives have however been implemented as isolated attempts and have consequently not made significant impact regarding the learning environment.

The overall response regarding *in-service training / staff development programmes* were very positive. Respondents criticized the present development programmes as being either insufficient

or ineffective in addressing crucial elements of the distance learning environment. Various innovative ideas were sighted by educators as proposed guidelines / recommendations in addressing the learning environment. Many of these have been used in establishing a checklist regarding an environment conducive to adult distance learning.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY: ELIMINATING BARRIERS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN STRIVING TOWARDS OPEN LEARNING.

Based on the purpose of the study and the subsequent findings, it can be concluded that Police Practice have not adequately created an environment conducive to adult learning. Although numerous efforts have been made in the direction the overall practice of the programme group needs to adopt a wide range of initiatives. Educators very often become catalysts and as such are crucial in enabling learners to liberate their understanding. Educators are very special in their role in creating an environment where learners are equipped with confidence to explore new ideas.

Various conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of the educators in creating an environment conducive to adult learning and subsequently striving towards open/flexible learning.

- ◆ Adult educators will need to employ a *wide variety of methods in programme design* in order to accommodate as many learning styles as possible.
- ◆ In order to address the broad spectrum of learning needs of an increasingly diverse adult clientele, it will be imperative for *different formats of delivery modes* to be used.
- ◆ Furthermore, methods that emphasize *co-operative learning* as well as those that *individualize* instruction will be equally important.
- ◆ More focus needs to be placed on methods that stress *problem solving, and critical and reflective thinking*.
- ◆ There is a tendency emerging in higher (particularly distance learning) education towards institutional *self-evaluation*. If staff members in their respective departments or units could engage in *peer evaluation* or in any form of self-evaluation, it could possibly help to determine whether their services do indeed reach and benefit their clients. Although certain groupings at TSA do engage in similar activities, it needs to become both a compulsory and a consistent component of all subject groups.

- ◆ *Group work* will need to become an important vehicle for co-operative learning due to changes in the workplace. Adult educators will be able to help individuals become better group members by assisting them to develop group process skills (e.g. teamwork, leadership, participation, and group member skills e.g. active listening, staying on task, giving and receiving feedback).
- ◆ Adult educators will need to develop methods designed to help *adults evaluate available information sources*. The use of exercises or discussions in which individuals *critique a resource* they have actually used reflect on its accuracy, reliability and contemporaneousness and evaluate its overall usefulness will be one way to achieve this goal.
- ◆ Another conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that *institutional policy* and the *role of management* is crucial if not a necessity in the establishment of an environment conducive to adult learning.
- ◆ A conclusion regarding *adult learning principles* can be drawn from the study is that the educators tend to view the knowledge of adult principles as being crucial to their daily responsibilities.
- ◆ It is also evident that there is an urgent *training and development* need for educators at Police Practice regarding learning environments and the role that educators can and should fulfill.
- ◆ As evident from the findings of this study many of the respondents agree that a strong concern in distance learning is the aspect of the “loneliness” or “isolation” experienced by the learner. It is for this reason the environment needs to be as *supportive and non-judgmental* as possible.

The journey to more effective learning begins with adult education practitioners at Police Practice making personal improvements in their understanding and practice. This may require changes that will be difficult to achieve. More than often perspective transformation, paradigm shifts and reassessment of personal philosophy are needed.

10.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Various recommendations were generated from both the conclusions and the literature study of this research. Some of the most prominent of them were as follows:

- ◆ An open learning approach should be used.
- ◆ The implications of adult learning principles should be carefully considered.
- ◆ Personalising learning through the use of the text should be implemented.

- ◆ Appropriate in-service training for educators should be made available.
- ◆ A challenging environment should be created.

The recommendations pertaining to the study have been formulated into a possible checklist proposed for the creation of an environment more conducive to adult learning (distance education).

TABLE 2: POSSIBLE CHECKLIST FOR THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENT MORE CONDUCTIVE TO ADULT LEARNING IN DISTANCE AND OPEN LEARNING

ITEM	YES	NO
APPROACH USED		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Do educators employ a wide variety of approaches and innovations in promoting “deep learning”? ◆ Are learner /industry needs considered in the design of courses and outcomes? ◆ Do methods of instruction follow different formats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do the methods of instruction emphasize collaborative learning? ▪ Do the methods of instruction emphasize individualized instruction? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is technology used and permitted as a vehicle in promoting the learning process? 		
◆ Do the methods promote the idea of learners taking ownership of their own learning process?		
◆ Do methods encourage critical and reflective thinking?		
◆ Does the approach focus on problem solving /inquiry?		
◆ Is there provision for experiential learning / simulations / role-plays		
◆ Does the approach /learning material encourage and allow for active dialogue between lecturer /tutor and learner?		
◆ Are there opportunities for the learner to evaluate themselves at various points in their learning process?		
◆ Are methods of overcoming the language barriers being implemented?		

ITEM	YES	NO
SOCIAL/ CULTURAL CONCERNS		
◆ Overt or subtle gender discrimination existing?		
◆ Overt or subtle age discrimination existing?		
◆ Overt or subtle racial discrimination existing?		
◆ Women learners disempowered or devalued in any way?		
PSYCHOLOGICAL / EMOTIONAL CONCERNS		
◆ Learners helped and encouraged to become acquainted with each other?		
◆ Learners helped to feel at ease and relaxed with the distance mode of learning?		
◆ Special attention given to the first means of communication with learners?		
◆ Barriers learners may face addressed by administrators?		
◆ Barriers that learners may face identified and addressed by educators /practitioners?		
◆ Learners helped to take more control of their own learning?		
◆ Have all educators achieved some form of practical experience in the particular field in which they specialize?		
◆ Educators / facilitators trained in adult teaching techniques and theory?		
◆ Facilitators/ educators trained in ways of addressing the adult learning environment in distance education?		
◆ All staff members trained in diversity /diversity management?		
SUPPORT SERVICES		
◆ Is there an RPL system in the implementation phase?		
◆ Is there an orientation program for all first year learners concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distance learning as a mode of learning? ▪ Subject specific support? 		
◆ Is there sufficient tutoring services/ options available for the learner?		
◆ Is there adequate counseling services available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prior and upon registration. During studies ▪ Upon completion 		
◆ Is adequate provision being made for study loans / bursaries?		

11. CONCLUSION

Continued research on adult learning in distance education is clearly essential in order to address many unanswered questions concerning the learning environment.

While many avenues might be fruitfully explored in this study, several areas offer particular promise for research regarding the learning environment in distance education.

The challenge is to ensure that the learning environment in Distance Education is sufficiently addressed in striving towards open/flexible learning.

As a part of the concluding remarks the researcher wishes to share the following “futuristic” thought for Police Practice.

Within the framework of *open learning* and the *ILCDE* model, TSA should aim at being the best functioning distance learning provider in SA, Africa and subsequently the world. According to Swift (1994:2) such a provider’s main task is to “design and manage successful learning, while understanding that its product “is to service the learner”

We must consciously and actively develop and maintain approaches, which enable learners to have their voices heard, and for educators of Police Practice and TSA itself to be able to listen and understand the practical implications of what is being said.

In designing the learning environment, the researcher wishes to encourage the education providers to choose appropriate combinations of methods for particular learning contexts.

It is important to note that the recommendations / suggestions that the researcher proposes for Police Practice are certainly not the last answers to learning environment concerns in distance adult learning scenario. Nor do they necessarily provide optimal advice pertaining to components within the learning environment. They are however made in an earnest effort to firstly sensitize educators of the importance of their role in learning environments in distance learning and more importantly to stimulate thought, dialogue, and future research in open / flexible learning.

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