Competency-Based Education, Lifelong Learning and Adult Students: Insights from International Partnerships between East Africa, Southern Africa and USA-Based Institutions of Higher Education

Derise E. Tolliver[1], Akilah Martin[2] and Nyambura Salome[3]

Abstract

How can lessons learned in alternative degree programs for adult learners in the USA support education efforts being developed for adult learners in Africa? Can aspects of a Western educational model be "Africanized" in order to optimize the relevance of the educational enterprise as well as to adequately prepare learners to address critical issues that are facing the African continent? How can lifelong learning be incorporated as a meaningful component of competency-based education in Africa? The authors examine concepts of competence and competency, competency-based education and lifelong learning for adult learners, both generally and specifically, and consider them in the context of education on the African continent. They share reflections of their participation in two international partnerships between public and private higher education institutions in the USA, South Africa and East Africa in developing and implementing competency-based programs for adult learners at the postsecondary level. Issues related to faculty, curriculum development and access to higher education are raised. The importance of recognizing the influence of African cultural values in the lives of the adult learners with whom we work in order to support adult learners' optimal success in competency-based education programs in Africa is also discussed.

Keywords: Adult learners, competency-based education, Western educational model be "Africanized"

[1]DePaul University, USA
[2]DePaul University, USA
[3]Kenyatta University, Kenya

Introduction

Most African education systems bear the impact of colonialism, of which most of the pedagogy is either outdated and/or not relevant to needs in the context of contemporary Africa. This situation has especially been the case for adult learners who have been marginalized, historically disempowered and denied access to opportunities for higher education. While these learners often have a wealth of knowledge and wisdom that they have garnered through life and work experiences, conventional educational approaches are generally unable to accommodate the flexibility that these students need in order to pursue studies. Similarly, learning that takes place outside of the formal classroom may not be valued or may be dismissed as substandard, not "real" and/or not sufficiently intellectual. Change needs to occur, especially in light of criticism that many conventional institutions of higher learning are producing graduates who are ill-equipped to function competently in the labor market or in their communities.

Competency-based education is being touted by some as a possible transformative pedagogy that can reinvigorate higher learning with relevance, purpose and meaning for its constituencies. South Africa and Kenya are among the number of African nations that have universities and colleges working with international partners to develop their own version of competency-based programs for adult learners. An examination of these collaborations may be useful to others as they explore approaches to facilitate learning among students.

Adult learners and adult education

…most of Africa's problems are adult problems that need adult solutions (Avoseh, 2002, p.4)

We begin with definitions for "adult learners" and "adult education" in order to provide the proper context for discussion of other key concepts in this paper. *Adult learners* represent a diverse group of students. They are often defined by age, sometimes referred to as mature or non-traditional, being older than the more conventional 18-22 year old undergraduate student in higher education environment in the West. However, adult learners might also be identified based on other characterizations of "adulthood," such as self-concept, behaviors or biology (e.g. post-puberty). Traditional African practice, on the other hand, has considered adulthood to be a stage of life, marked by having successfully completed rites of passage or initiation into the adult community.

Similarly*, adult education* has various definitions. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) offer:

> Adult education is concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping people to live more successfully. Thus if there is to be an overarching function of the adult education enterprise, it is to assist adults to increase competence, or negotiate transitions, in their social roles (worker, parent, retiree etc.), to help them gain greater fulfillment in their personal lives, and to assist them in solving personal and community problems (p. 9).

We believe that adult education must be purposeful, meaningful and relevant to learners in their lives, supporting liberation from the oppression of ignorance and dependency. It should foster liberating ideas and skills, promoting personal and societal transformation.

The purpose of adult education, then, within the context of contemporary African realities, is to support "sustainable development…where cultures and ways of life are balanced with global and international pressures and demands" (Owuor, 2007, p. 21). Avoseh (2002) concurs with this expectation of adult education, given the sociopolitical and economic realities of the Continent. He calls for an integration of modernization with the strengths of traditional African values to engage adult learners to seek the solutions to Africa's problems. By reclaiming positive cultural identity, integrity, confidence, and empowerment, it is believed that adult learners can help recognize and decolonize the oppression of "western dominated school curricula" (Ouwor, 2007, p. 25). Adult education in Africa requires confrontation of systems of power, domination and control. At its best, it must be poised to challenge injustices, prepare the learner to build stronger communities, while

assisting in the healing from wounds experienced during living (Osofo Atta, personal communication, June 1, 2017).

Lifelong Learning

Never stop learning because life never stops teaching. African proverb

Lifelong learning can be seen as a basic human right, where all citizens are engaged in some form of learning to be supported regardless of age, gender, cultural background, etc. This should not be a luxury. Avoseh (2002) reports that Namibia, for example, considers lifelong learning a part of its national development priorities as important as financial indicators of national wellness.

Nafhuko, Amutabi and Otunga (2005) define *lifelong learning* as a process, not an end state, but a broad approach to knowledge that can reflect both formal education and informal learning. As such, it represents a holistic view of education that is horizontal – capturing learning between self, home, community, school and the workplace, and vertical, reflecting different formal levels, such as elementary, secondary and post-secondary instruction.

Lifelong learning also addresses modern economic, social needs, with requirements for people to be adaptive and creative. As conceptualized within the two partnerships to be discussed later in the paper, lifelong learning becomes a life praxis that enriches one's personal life and becomes a knowledge base for critical thinking and informed decision making.

While some might situate the theorizing of this concept within a Western paradigm, many African scholars note that it is very much grounded in the African worldview and life experience. Omolewa (2007) notes that lifelong learning has been part of a "systematic, coordinated …theory and practice" (p. 13) on the Continent. Traditional education reflected in rites of passage age groups, apprenticeship systems, formal and informal community instruction all speak to the recognition of ongoing learning processes that were interwoven into various aspects of people's lives, including spiritual, political, economic and educational. It "emphasized relevance, responsiveness, respect for the dignity and integrity of all" (Omolewa, 2007, p.14).

Preece (2014) notes that lifelong learning in Africa has generally been rooted in the collective, reflecting one of the central tenets of traditional African culture as compared to the individualistic focus in Western thought. Avoseh (2007) states that traditional African cultural values, which influence lifelong learning experiences, provide motivation for engagement and then ownership for learning activities, particularly for adults. This latter point is critical to consider for designing educational approaches, such as competency-based education (CBE), in Africa.

Lekoko and Modise (2011) concur with Omolewa (2002), advocating that lifelong learning be conceptualized within an indigenous African knowledge system, incorporating self-learning, experiential learning, and application of learning. They suggest that lifelong learning takes place "…within a specific context in which acquisition of relevant skills never stops" (p. 10). Their description of women weavers in Botswana who participate in compensatory education programmes in order to validate and credential themselves for the knowledge, skills and abilities

they have attained and grown outside of formal education systems speaks to the African tradition and understanding of lifelong learning, a concept that is not associated with Africa nearly enough in the scholarly literature.

Probably the most notable proponent of lifelong learning in Africa was Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania after independence from British rule (Major and Mulvihill, 2009). His educational philosophy was firmly grounded in the faith that lifelong learning could effectively counteract the colonialist assumptions and practices of the dominant formal means of education system. He also believed it was necessary for the liberation of all African nations. Nyerere championed adult education, lifelong learning and learning for liberation. More recent scholars, such as Oketch (2012) share his vision of lifelong learning playing a critical role in the reclamation, revitalization and re-ascension of Africa.

Competence, Competency and Competency-Based Education (CBE)

While often described as a "new" paradigm for higher learning, competency-based education actually has a long history as an educational philosophy (Jones and Olswang, 2017). It is based on the concept of *competence,* which Mulder, Gulikers, Biemans and Wesselink (2009) define as:

> …a series of integrated capabilities consisting of clusters of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessarily conditional for task performance and problem solving and for being able to function effectively in a certain profession, organization, job, role and situation (p. 757).

This definition suggests that while the concept of competence is often associated with job readiness and performance, it can also be related to how learners are prepared to function in their lives and communities beyond their work persona (Cleary et. al., 2017). Nyambura, Kombo and Anzoyo (2011) describe competence more succinctly as a "statement of learning outcomes for a skill or a body of knowledge (p. 157)." Competence suggests knowing and the ability to do (Kouwenhoven, 2010).

Competence and competency are terms that are often used interchangeably, yet they are generally considered to be two distinct concepts. Whereas, competence refers to the knowledge, skills and abilities that the learner possesses, a *competency* describes how things have to be done and at what level. According to Mulder et al. (2009), competency is an element of competence, only becoming meaningful in a particular situation or context (e.g. the nature of communication competency is different in public speaking situations compared to when effective persuasive writing is necessary). Gilbert , cited in Teodorescu (2006), defines competency as the "ability to consistently produce the results (the worthy outcomes of behavior) that are required for the most efficient and effective achievement of the larger organizational goals (p. 30)." Noting the distinctiveness between the two concepts can influence assessment and facilitate efforts to develop and implement more effective, successful competency-based education programs for adult learners.

Competency-based education is probably considered to be "new" because it differs from more conventional and familiar approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. These are often instructor-centered, privileging classroom seat-time and focused on transfer of knowledge through rote memory and assessment of banked knowledge through testing and examination.

Spady's (1977) comprehensive definition of *competency-based education* analyzes it as:

"…a data-based, adaptive, performance-oriented set of integrated processes that facilitate, measure, record and certify within the context of flexible time parameters that demonstration of known, explicitly stated and agreed upon learning outcomes that reflect successful functioning in life roles" (p.10).

CBE, as we have embraced it, is a learner-centered approach where the adult student has agency and is an active participant in their learning. The environment of learning is designed to maximize the likelihood that adult learners will successfully meet life goals. At its best, it incorporates knowledge from the scholarship on adult education and lifelong learning in its design with the purpose to enhance successful learning and mastery. The diversity of definitions stated above, rather than being problematic, may actually catalyze a way forward to customize and implement CBE programs that can better meet the needs of the adult learners. Competency-based education lends itself to a journey of open mindedness and lifelong learning.

The Western model – School for New Learning, DePaul University, Chicago IL USA

DePaul University is a private, Catholic university whose mission is based on the values of St. Vincent DePaul, rooted in human dignity and social responsibility, committed to providing access to higher education for the marginalized and underrepresented masses. School for New Learning (SNL) was established in 1972 to address the needs and accommodate the lives of working adults who wanted to complete their undergraduate degrees. The SNL curriculum consists of 50 competences. The competency framework is grounded in a liberal arts foundation, informed by the scholarship on adult learning, adult education and competence. It is this competency-based education (CBE) and learning structure that has provided the model for the partnerships with institutions in Southern and East Africa. The SNL CBE program is learner-centered, with flexible class schedules (e.g. evenings and weekends) to accommodate the realities of working adults' lives. Teaching activities and methods are developed to address a variety of learning styles while assessment of college-level learning outcomes developed inside and/or outside of the classroom can result in the awarding of college credit. Courses are interdisciplinary in nature, providing a rich and stimulating learning environment that strengthens integrative, analytical and synthetic skills. The program is writing intensive and individualized in terms of the students' chosen focus area and how they fulfill the 50 competences. However, collaborative learning is also a prominent modality utilized in courses. Active engagement in learning is expected and required. Learners participate in class discussions, simulations, internships, collaborative projects, among other approaches. Lectures are not privileged as part of the pedagogy in this competency-based program. Students receive

strong support for their learning through an academic committee structure that includes a faculty and professional advisor, with an academic advisor available to them.

The Partnerships

University of Free State (UFS) and School for New Learning (SNL), DePaul University
The partnership between these two institutions of higher learning, the former public and based in S. Africa, the latter Catholic and private and based in the USA, began with a consultancy sponsored by the Ford Foundation in 1993. The purpose was to assist the post-apartheid S. Africa government in its attempt to address a national "legacy of exclusion and inequality" (Walters, 1999, p.577) in higher education. It was believed that a paradigm shift was necessary to meet the needs of the evolving South African democracy by embracing marginalized and disenfranchised populations that had been most directly and negatively impacted by the oppression of apartheid.

The S. African government and public academic institutions, such as UFS, sought out programs that might provide guidance to help address the need for effective educational reform and the realities of increasing workforce needs. SNL's competence-based curriculum framework provided a model for a successful outcomes-based effort at UFS, promoted to develop "…an integrated approach to education and training responsive to the needs of the individual and the labour market (Holton & Tolliver, 1998)."

After a number of visits between DePaul University and UFS administrators and academic staff, David Justice, Vice President for Lifelong Learning and Suburban Campuses, at DePaul, identified two members of the resident faculty at SNL, to further develop the relationship between the two institutions. The SNL faculty who facilitated the faculty development workshop, women of African descent, were strategically chosen for the task, as their collective experiences in and commitment to African affairs uniquely positioned them to address curricular issues as well as the issues of racism, sexism, ageism and cultural oppression, all of which were part of the context of the educational reform movement at that time (Holton and Tolliver, 2009).

They organized and implemented a four-day faculty development workshop that would result in specific competence statements, a structure for the curriculum framework and module outlines, and evaluation of the consultation activities (Holton and Tolliver, 1998).

While the stated focus of the consultation was development of the competence-based curriculum, it became apparent that a most important focus of paradigm shift for UFS would be to examine the level of values and perspectives about culture, gender and power relationships. These did, and would continue, to influence programmatic decisions made regarding the implementation of the newly developed Bachelor in Management Leadership degree program. Incorporating and responding to these contextual realities was and is consistent with consideration of the whole person of the adult learner who is being engaged in competency-based education efforts. It is also compatible with the SNL program's "commitment to ensuring social justice, empowering adults

through learning and helping adults develop competence in a changing world" (Holton and Tolliver, 2009, 38).

With 13 participants who represented various stakeholders- UFS faculty and administrators, community residents, corporate sponsors, workplace and government representatives- and through interdisciplinary collaboration, the SNL consultants were able to successfully facilitate development of an operational competence framework. The majority of the participants (10 out of 13) reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the process and the outcomes of the workshop.

The resulting degree, the Bachelor of Management Leadership (BML), was unique in the S. African context and the first to be developed exclusively for working adults. It was approved by the South African Matriculations Exemption Board and the South African Qualifications Authority, with the first cohort of approximately 40 learners beginning the program in February 1999. Within three years, there were 160 students in a number of semester groups. The BML program continues to be an active and important offering in the UFS School of Management to this day.

Some of the hallmarks of the program, similar to what exists in the SNL competency-based program, are the recognition and assessment of prior learning for college credit, flexibility in delivery modalities, including on-campus, off-campus site and online offerings. The program is grounded in adult learning theory, pedagogy and best practices. Collaborative group work is essential with experiential learning providing the theory for program modules. Students can seek certificate, diploma or degree exit levels, all of which cover three learning areas: environment, leadership and management. The learning areas are comprised of numerous competencies addressed through learning modules. Examples of modules include ethical leadership, project management, and Africa within the new global order.

The degree serves to develop and support creative and critical thinkers who will be successful leaders in the workplace and engaged citizens in society. The language may be different between the two programs which reflect UFS making the CBE format and structure its own. However, the hearts of the programs are consistent: to provide access to adult learners through a competency-based framework that deals with the whole person by honoring lifelong and experiential learning as well as classroom-based learning in the service of a more competent, happy and whole person.

With regard to this specific partnership between UFS and DePaul, Zyl and Massyn (2000) report that BML students are positive about their capstone experience in the program and that the support provided by supervisors, advisors and mentors to students served a critical function in students' learning process. They concluded that the capstone, as an integrated assessment tool, adds to students' learning experiences.

Impact. Not only has BML program increased access to higher education for adult learners within S. Africa, it has also reached outside of the country to extend educational access throughout the Continent. We are aware of the BML program in collaboration with the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology, supporting eLearning students with online course offerings (Mgonja and Mwasaga, 2005). In this way, the development and expansion of the BML continues the spirit of competency-

based education and learning, engaging adults as lifelong learners to become more prepared and more informed to function optimally in their day-to-day and work lives. ***Tangaza University College and SNL, DePaul University***

Nearly ten years following the landmark work done between UFS and DePaul University, a first cohort of Kenya-based adult learners were awarded a DePaul University undergraduate degree with a focus in leadership and management, having successfully gone through a degree completion program that was modeled after the SNL competency-based curriculum. This innovative collaboration emerged out of exploratory discussions between a faculty member at SNL and the director of an educational institute at then Tangaza College, both of whom saw alignment in each institution's mission and commitment to provide access to higher education for underrepresented groups. Specifically, African women religious were targeted to engage in the theories, knowledge and actions of leadership and management and to find their voice through higher education. We asked that they, along with their Kenya-based faculty, be nimble in adapting the SNL curriculum to their social and cultural values. This was an effort of co-creation as we all worked together to modify and Africanize the curriculum which had originally been designed for a Western environment. What transpired was the development of an intellectual community of learners and scholars. In Catholic traditions, women aren't usually the leaders who are considered to be competent and legitimate authority, so this innovative joint venture was pioneering.

Receiving funding from the Conrad Hilton Foundation to provide operational expenses and scholarships, this program has supported religious women, religious men and lay adult learners who might not have otherwise been afforded higher education opportunities. It has adapted the SNL competency-based framework to the Kenyan cultural context, incorporating African-centered practices and values, in co-creation between Kenyan-based faculty and USA-based faculty consultants, considering feedback from students. For example, because there are health issues that are of particular concern in the East African region, one of the courses that was included in the competency framework for the degree completion program is Public Health in Africa. Another course in this program is Creativity and Leadership. Neither of these courses is offered in the USA, although the competency which they fulfill is part of the USA competency framework. These are examples of taking the model of the USA-based program and modifying so that it is relevant, meaningful and responsive to the cultural needs and realities of the learners in Kenya.

It is important to note here that the goal of the partnership was not to establish an autonomous university in Kenya but rather, to provide an opportunity for women and men religious, as well as lay persons, to obtain a BA degree in a way that could optimally accommodate their learning needs and realities of their lives. SNL/DePaul was, however, intentional from the beginning of the partnership to address the need for self-sufficiency so that in the future, the program would become a Kenyan degree program where Tangaza University College would own the degree and continue to shape it based on their cultural and traditional values. The goal was to retain integrity as a program delivered in Africa largely by and for Africans.

Members of African descent who were part of the Chicago team were particularly adamant that we did not want this partnership to develop into a "master-induced program" (Avoseh, 2002) that would replicate colonial, postcolonial and patriarchal structures that would reinforce hierarchical relationships of perceived superiority and inferiority. We have had our experiences of these kinds of non-affirming systems in our lives in the USA and did not want to be agents of hegemony in the work we did with Tangaza.

Concerns about borrowing and recreating Western educational and philosophical approaches that would not be in service of a Kenyan and African agenda were articulated by both partners and addressed early on in the relationship. Thus, the curriculum and administrative processes and procedures were intentionally designed with the goal of the eventual shift from offering a USA-based to offering a Kenyan degree. Efforts to move toward self-sustainability occurred in anticipation of the time when external funding, particularly from the more financially-resourced USA-based partner, came to an end. After several years of collaborative work between SNL/DePaul and Tangaza to develop a proposal for a sustainable and autonomous Kenya degree, the Kenyan Higher Learning Commission approved the application for this change. The BA degree completion program recruited its first cohort to seek the Kenyan degree in 2016.

Instruction is provided by Kenya-based faculty who have received program development opportunities to strengthen their own level of knowledge and competence in working with the competency-based framework. During the first 8 years of the partnership, students were awarded a DePaul University undergraduate degree, with Chicago-based SNL faculty providing academic and administrative oversight of the program. The Chicago Program Director and faculty functioned primarily in consultative roles, assisting the Kenyan Program Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator and faculty as they developed their own level of familiarity and competence in delivery of the educational system. The collaborative and collegial relationship between Chicago- and Nairobi-based program leadership, faculty and staff reflected the value of shared governance and power between partners. They also supported and encouraged students as they navigated their way around and through this new and novel-to-them pedagogical approach.

Challenges

In full transparency, there have been challenges in our collaborations, more with Tangaza than UFS, which is more richly resourced. With both UFS and Tangaza, some educators and students were skeptical about the structure of the degree and the different pedagogy, and the intense reflection and writing process that SNL covets. Being accustomed to exams, our partners had to shift their thinking about standards and how learning could be assessed. Students who were candidates to enter the BML program were at companies that were set to pay their tuition, while Tangaza students' financial situations were more tenuous, so issues of sustainability were much more prominent for the Tangaza program. We also hit a few road blocks where many of the faculty were part-time/adjunct faculty from other universities which caused scheduling issues, notwithstanding that the time-zone difference created a few blocks for faculty to collaborate. Many CBE programs

are partially or completely online so while technology may increase access to learning; it may also present barriers for example, in the face of slow and spotty internet signals and outdated computers. Nowadays, technology has taken on a life of its own and there are several other ways to "talk" with international partners without being physically present.

Other barriers experienced within the partnership were often cultural in nature, sometimes manifesting in misunderstandings, miscommunication, micro-aggressions and unexpressed expectations. While these were perhaps the most uncomfortable personally (while the ones mentioned above were annoying), these were best addressed through open discussion and dialogue. Active and intentional professional development and routine planning meetings helped to address these kinds of concerns and challenges, both when anticipated and after the fact.

Program Impact

Leading with our core values and a passion for enhancing quality of life for communities in Africa has had positive outcomes with these international partnerships. The continuation of the UFS BML program for almost 20 years, the free standing institute that houses the BA degree completion program offering the Kenya degree, an almost 100% graduation rate among the students in the Kenya program, access to higher education for African populations that have been historically excluded from these opportunities, student successes in the workforce and in their communities, successful scholarship collaborations (such as this one), all are evidence of the positive impact of the CBE partnerships between UFS and Tangaza University College and SNL/DePaul University.

Reflections on Our Practice

What follows are reflections from each author about their experiences and learning as participants in these partnerships. These reflections are framed through lenses of bridge-building and telling stories. Each author is identified by their boldfaced initials.

ARM. At SNL, we are poised to build bridges, both suspension and truss bridges. In this instance of the Tangaza-DePaul collaboration, we built a mixture of both the truss and suspension bridges. A suspension bridge suspends the roadway (i.e. BA degree path) by cables, ropes, or chains from two towers (i.e. Tangaza University College and DePaul University). The towers support and anchor the learners on their academic path by creating learning spaces that encourage self-awareness and leadership development. The truss bridge is a structure of connected elements that form triangular units (i.e. academic committee that is composed of the learner, the faculty mentor and the professional advisor). The bridge we built was completed through collaboration of faculty, administrators, and community figures. This connection could not have been made without a steadfast and enduring vision to provide educational pursuits for women religious in East Africa. Our mission with this program is to ensure that the adult learners who earn their degree will be able to positively contribute to further enhancing quality of life on the continent of Africa.

At the School for New Learning, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, USA, we have discovered a multitude of methods to support adult learners. Mentoring and advising are the cornerstone of adult

learners' mobility, motivation and ability to succeed academically. By far, the mentoring program seems to be the most essential portion of the adult learners' pathway forward.

As instructors we are tasked and challenged with making our content "relevant." This may not appear difficult, but some subjects do not automatically lend themselves to immediate applicability, not without reflection and drawing connections. This reflection is catalyzed through the mentoring component of the program. We require the learner to choose a faculty mentor, a professional advisor, and a peer mentor. The mentor serves as the gateway to the evolving political, economic, and academic worlds. The mentor assists the learner in identifying learning goals, challenging the mentee to apply knowledge gained in their communities, developing oral and written skills, creating accountability measures and developing self-care practices.

It was crucial that the mentoring relationship had deep roots and a solid foundation. According to Schaller (1996), the "transformation of the protégé is the most significant outcome of this relationship. In the local congregation, mentors who offer encouragement, support, affirmation, and friendship could be a great help to women who are in the process of finding their true identity connected to their creation in the image of God and of discovering a sense of self-worth that goes along with this emerging understanding of self."

In the US, the adult learners very rarely chose a peer mentor. However, the Tangaza University College students all chose a peer mentor who was very influential and impactful for their academic journey. We observed how powerful and motivating a peer mentor could be in encouraging excellence and accountability.

Although the faculty mentor and professional advisor were just as effective, their roles were a bit different. The faculty mentor's role involved academic preparedness, career path identification, and course selection. The professional advisor's role encompassed connecting the student to their career interests and developing competence in leadership and management. The professional advisor is the penultimate figure in the learner's academic path. As the African proverb states: "If you want to go quickly/fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." The professional adviser provides guidance, challenges the learners, encourages and pushes the learners beyond their imagined limits academically and professionally. Whether in Africa or the West, the professional advisor is essential to the learner's network of mentors who assist in building connections for sponsorship and wellness support.

The adult learners that we encountered in Kenya were eager and excited for mentorship. The faculty who were involved in facilitating learning in the degree program were also interested in mentorship. Faculty from SNL traveled to Tangaza University College three times per year to facilitate professional development for Kenya-based faculty as well as provide mentorship for the adult learners in the program. The professional development activities involved discussions regarding competence, curricular ideas, mentoring, and student evidence of learning, insuring a diverse array of sources for student development.

At the beginning of the BA program, faculty from both institutions were paired based on similar courses taught in Kenya and the USA. The intention of this pairing was to provide space and opportunity for faculty at Tangaza to discuss any ideas, concerns, changes etc. with their course. The belief was consistent in using a diverse set of authors for course materials. This theme carried through the entire program. We wanted the program to be culturally sound and have a foundation in Kenyan roots.

Through a course entitled "Externship (experiential learning)," adult learners were able to work in a community of their choosing. This learning experience provided the hallmark of the program. The learners were encouraged to reflect, relate, and readjust learning goals and future impact in their communities. During our visits to Tangaza, we would visit externship sites with the students to assess their learning and to see how they were received by the community. Many of the learners were so inspired by their Externship that they wrote books and research papers, built schools, developed related community programs, prospered in their careers, etc. This experience can be attributed to the mentoring relationships that the learners developed with their faculty, students, and the community.

The most powerful lesson we learned was that the learners didn't need our "aid" they needed encouragement and empowerment. The most powerful lesson that the learners learned was not to underestimate each other or their own ability as a leader. The faculty learned that our competence curriculum was an influential tool to engage learners in taking ownership of their learning and apply their knowledge in their everyday lives. As a whole, the School for New Learning-DePaul University positively impacted and influenced students in East Africa in the direction of gender equality and making change in their communities. We witnessed their empowerment to come into their own leadership.

The future is bright and promising for Tangaza University-College. Although the degree has now transitioned to a Kenyan degree and is no longer a DePaul University degree, the program remains flourishing. The collaboration does not stop here; we are continuing to exchange ideas and visit with each other throughout the academic year.

NS. The DePaul & Tangaza programme was ingenious in that the two teams did not simply utilize the competencies in use at DePaul University. They adopted them, or rather contextualized them, thus making them relevant to Africa, and giving them a strong philosophical underpinning because they were researched and developed from a rich academic background. Thus, the content was rich and relevant. However, who were the faculty? In an effort to bridge these two programs and make them relevant in all ways, one thing that emerged was that there were some African faculty who were not rooted in their Africanness. And there were some DePaul faculty who may not have been African born, but were deeply African, while of course, there were those who were not African but among the Tangaza faculty, and those who were not 'cultural' in any way, but were kind of bureaucrats, whose interest and focus would be the delivery of this programme. The interplay of these personalities in the collaboration and delivery of the programme, which was dubbed

'African,' would sometimes be subtle but sometimes it would flare up. As a result, the Tangaza faculty would propose to the DePaul faculty the need to attend some African courses at the African Institute in order to induct them to understand the African way of giving meaning to social reality. But the truth was always lost amongst these partners, or went unsaid, because indeed, there were some African faculty in the Tangaza faculty who also actually deserved to take up these induction courses. The question that emerges, therefore, is in partnerships that deliver such programs, how should interpretation and understanding of social realities be determined, especially where in some cases the sensitivities are hidden in the faces of those who deliver the programme and sometimes coloured by the sensibilities of culture, race, education, social economic status or religion?

One of the aspects that made the partnership both popular and controversial was its focus on lifelong learners. Unlike any other programme in Kenya, this programme could give competencies on experiential learning, thus opening a way for many interested learners who had been locked out of the mainstream education. I remember at one point, a 65-year old former accountant who was interested in joining the programme because we could fit in his diploma learning into our competency model and further recognize his years of professional expertise. Indeed, several retired learners came calling once they learnt about the programme. This CBE gateway, however, was also controversial, because given the traditional closed model of education that had been in practice, several critics felt that this was watering down the quality of education. These critics were so blind to the many elderly learners who having retired and raised their children, were willing to achieve their long neglected dreams of self-actualization by acquiring a degree.

These particular groups of learners became re-energized and full of vigour. Sometimes they were more enthusiastic than the younger learners. Their engagement also enriched the unit, because of their experiential knowledge, and more often than not, they, too, would get transformed. A case in point was a retired lady who had a very bad handwriting. During my teaching of College Writing, I would request the students to write their first essay by hand, which would be easier for the older learners, but difficult for the younger ones. The discovery of this bad handwriting led me to engage with the old lady, who confessed that she had always received this comment from people. The question then emerged, why had she never made the effort to better the handwriting? This brought in a lot of sharing of how this had not been a priority, as she got older though she was always embarrassed by it. In the discussion that ensued, the lady realized that the power was in her hands– thus linking the discussion to the essence of transformation.

Private institutions of higher learning are famously known in Kenya to be the precincts of the rich in society. Whether or not they have a religious inclination, their fees are always astronomical for low income learners. As a result, they have ended up being elitists, in spite of their quest to portray themselves as caring about the poor. One of the efforts by the Kenya Higher Education Loans Board in the past year has been to provide loans for students who want to register in these institutions. However, this has met challenges in that the accommodations and living in these private institutions are costly since, the campuses are usually located in the most affluent regions, where there is rarely public transport because most of the students will have their own cars.

The DePaul-Tangaza programme has, however, been a realization of what should have been the ethos of the religious institutions of higher learning: providing scholarships for a population that sacrifices so much as is their charisma, yet is rarely recognized due to the patriarchal machinations in society. The women religious dedicate their lives to working with the very marginalized, oftentimes putting their own lives at risk. Since a majority join after high school, the chances and opportunities for further education get dimmed as they get engaged with the local communities where they work. And in retrospect, for DePaul University to provide the degree programme in Kenya, and in a college that was founded by largely male congregations, was also insightful since it would inadvertently elevate the presence of the religious women and their struggles through the academic arena.

The degree programme became popular amongst religious women, and even with religious men, who found their way into the programme. Simply teaching a class of these religious women coming from all parts of Africa, and from both local and international congregations was enriching given their experiential learning, their quest for learning and actualization of their personal dreams of education, which would at times conflict with their congregations. These conflicts would sometimes push the religious woman to take leave of her community as she pursued the degree or sometimes, they would beg us (the administration) to reassure them of the opportunity whenever they would get permission, while others begged us to lobby their superiors to give them a chance. The hunger for education was real, from both the young and elderly religious women. Their research projects are critical works of study because they provided an academic perspective for them to delve deeply into issues that perturbed them within their own congregations or within the local community where they worked. One of the first interesting projects was by a middle aged religious woman who researched mid-life crisis in religious women. Her academic work was also therapeutic and edifying to her own self-esteem as she navigated through the challenges of this crisis herself.

The uniqueness of the programme also attracted those from the wealthy communities who could pay up for the programme. However, because the majority of those in the programme were the needy, a culture of care, warmth and communality was established not only amongst the students but also with both the Tangaza and the DePaul faculty. An exchange of hugs, gifts, lunches and dinners was common practice and this has continued to flourish amongst the alumni. Indeed, the essence of being private and having a religious orientation should also be exemplified by providing opportunities for not only the less privileged but also those who have been locked out of traditional models of education.

DET. Avoseh (2002) laments that "the stories of African adult education have barely begun to be told" (p. 3). Yet, one of the joys I experienced, both as a consultant to the UFS BML program and as former Chicago Program Director, then team member of the SNL-Tangaza program, was the opportunity to experience the stories of our adult learners. In many ways, the CBE collaborations between my institution and our international partners provided a forum for storytelling, and we know that storytelling is a traditional African lifelong learning "technology." One of the first requests we made with the adult learners and the consultees with whom we worked with was to ask

them to tell us their story. Who are you? Where are you from? Who are your people? How have your people, your community and your culture shaped you as a learner? They start telling stories from day one. And for some learners, this may have been the first time reflecting upon their own lives as part of their education, recalling, remembering, learning from and making meaning of their lives. Thus, telling their story begins a process of being open to valuing self, their individual stories, and their lives with all of their strengths and challenges. And within the community of learners, by sharing stories, they could reflect and receive feedback that may have helped them "see" themselves better. They engaged a reflection of themselves because of the learner-centric nature of CBE and adult education.

This engagement in storytelling is even more important for the population of adult learners with whom we work. The academy often urges the learner to start with "external" scholarship as the foundation of knowledge and competence, privileging the words of others designated as experts, while dismissing our own words and experiences, and those of our mothers, our family and community wisdom keepers, our *Jegnas*. This can often lead to mistrust in ourselves as being competent and holding legitimate knowledge, rendering us susceptible to unquestioningly embracing information that may not be in our best interests. Starting with what I refer to as "internal" scholarship – one's own story and authentic lived experiences – can be affirming and empowering and provide motivation for continued learning.

A culturally grounded CBE effort, which we endeavored to develop, can support belief and trust of one's Africanness as a foundation of becoming and being competent in the world, unashamedly, unabashedly and unapologetically. This was the message given at one of the graduation ceremonies for Tangaza learners. And students embraced it.

Encouraging students to tell their stories, to listen to the wisdom of their Africanness, the stories emerging from their local communities and from the Continent was important to me in my role as Program Director and facilitator of learning with students at Tangaza. Given the focus on leadership and management in this degree program, I early on ecstatically anticipated students sharing stories of African thinkers and leaders as models for their leadership development. Instead, I was dismayed when the names presented as leaders were all Western-born European-descent men. No Nkrumah, no Mandela, no Sirleaf Johnson, no Wangari Maathai! The learners seemed to need overt permission to honor Africans as leaders!

Leadership team members of African descent first responded by discussing the issue with the learners. I proposed, then encouraged, implementation of a policy that required at least 75% of scholarly references for senior thesis be from indigenous African scholars. Learners were also then required to include in their literature review discussion of how African values and worldview informed their understanding of their topic. Research has shown that effective learning occurs when the context of knowledge creation is based on ones' own experiences. In this program, we were committed to encouraging learners to embrace their cultural selves in order to support their learning

process. Similarly, we encouraged our UFS colleagues to incorporate cultural content into their CBE curriculum for the same reason, and they did.

In engaging adult learners and Kenya-based faculty and staff in the Tangaza program, I was a co-creator, with them, of our learning experiences, developing mutual stories together. I facilitated learning as well as experienced lifelong learning myself. I challenged others as I was challenged by them. I was an individual in community, interconnected with others, operating collaboratively, recognizing Spirit and spirit-ness moving through our work. I was a model and the outcome, concurrently, as were they. I became more competent as a leader and learner. Both/and, diunital functioning in action, reflecting major tenets of traditional African values and worldview.

Concluding Remarks

Because of this program, I fell in love with Africa again. SNL/Tangaza alumna

Lifelong learning and competency-based education can effectively support adult learners in Africa to address modern economic and social needs as they become more adaptive, creative and equipped to make a difference in the modern world. As evidenced within the two USA-African higher education partnerships discussed above, these learning processes become a life practice that enrich the personal lives of adult learners. A CBE approach may not be the panacea for the educational needs of the Continent, especially if historical and contemporary issues of power, domination and equity are not intentionally addressed in partnerships. However, when CBE is "Africanized," by inviting learners to embrace their values and world view in the learning process, it can greatly enhance their pursuit of learning, knowledge and success in life.

This is a mission that requires commitment, dedication and work. So why do this work? With bridges being built and stories being told which may result in revitalization and a renewed love for Africa, why would we not?

References

Avoseh, M. B. M. (2002). Investigating The World Of Adult Education In Africa, Adult Education Research Conference. Http://Newprairiepressorg/Aerc/2002/Papers/2.

Cleary, M. N., Wozniak, K., Marienau, C., Wilbur, G., Tolliver, D. E., & Meyer, P. (2017). Learning, Adults, And Competency-Based Education. In Handbook Of Research On Competency-Based Education In University Settings (Pp. 210-231). IGI Global.

Darkenwald, G. G., & Merriam, S. B. (1982). Adult Education: Foundations Of Practice. Ty Crowell Co.

Derrico, C. M., Tharp, J. L., & Schreiner, L. A. (2015). Called To Make A Difference: The Experiences Of Students Who Thrive On Faith-Based Campuses. Christian Higher Education, 14(5), 298-321. Doi:10.1080/15363759.2015.1079750

Holton, D.W. & Tolliver, D.E. (2009). Africa Initiatives At The School For New Learning. CAEL Forum And News, P. 35-39.

Holton, D. W. & Tolliver, D. E. (1998). From Courses To Competences--Consulting With A South African University, In Distance And Diversity: Adult Learners In The Next Millennium, Proceedings Of The 18th Annual Alliance/ACE Conference (Pp.191-199). San Diego, CA.

Jones, K. A., & Olswang, S. G. (2017). Building Competence: A Historical Perspective Of Competency-Based Education. In Handbook Of Research On Competency-Based Education In University Settings (Pp. 28-40). IGI Global.

Kouwenhoven, W. (2010). Competence-Based Curriculum Development In Higher Education: Some African Experiences. Access & Expansion: Challenges Or Higher Education Improvement In Developing Countries, 125-146.

Lekoko, R., & Modise, O. (2011). An Insight Into An African Perspective On Lifelong Learning: Towards Promoting Functional Compensatory Programmes. International Journal Of Lifelong Education, 30(1), 5-17.

Major, T. & Mulvihill, T. (2009). Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), An African Philosopher, Re-Envisions Teacher Education To Escape Colonialism, New Proposals: Journal Of Marxism And Interdisciplinary Inquiry, 3(1) P. 15-22

Mgonja, C. T., & Mwasaga, N. M. (2005). The Learning Management Systems At Dar Es Salaam Institute Of Technology. E-Learning And Distance Learning, P. 87-97.

Mulder, M., Gulikers, J., Biemans, H., & Wesselink, R. (2009). The New Competence Concept In Higher Education: Error Or Enrichment?. Journal Of European Industrial Training, 33(8/9), 755-770.

Nafukho, F., Amutabi, M. N., & Otunga, R. N. (2005). Foundations Of Adult Education In Africa. Pearson South Africa.

Nyambura, S., Kombo, K., & Anzoyo, A. (2011). Re-Engineering African Higher Education To Competence Based Education. Quality Education For Societal Transformation Nairobi, Kenya July 20-22, 2011, 20, 153-169.

Oketch, M. O. (2012). Perspectives On Lifelong Learning In Africa. In Second International Handbook Of Lifelong Learning (Pp. 375-397). Springer Netherlands.

Omolewa, M. (2007). Traditional African Modes Of Education: Their Relevance In The Modern World. International Review Of Education, 53(5-6), 593-612.

Owuor, J. (2008). Integrating African Indigenous Knowledge In Kenya's Formal Education System: The Potential For Sustainable Development. Journal Of Contemporary Issues In Education, 2(2).

Preece, J. (2014). Lifelong Learning In Africa: A Contribution To Development. Andragogical Studies, 2, 69-76.

Schaller, J. (1996). Mentoring Of Women: Transformation In Adult Religious Education. Religious Education, 91(2), 160-171.

Spady, W. G. (1977). Competency Based Education: A Bandwagon In Search Of A Definition 1. Educational Researcher, 6(1), 9-14.

Teodorescu, T. (2006). Competence Versus Competency: What Is The Difference?. Performance Improvement, 45(10), 27-30.

Walters, S. (1999). Lifelong Learning Within Higher Education In South Africa: Emancipatory Potential? International Review Of Education, 45 (5/6), 575-587.

Van Zyl, H., & Massyn, L. (2011). Integrated Assessment: A Learning Adventure And Growth Opportunity For Adult Learners. American Journal Of Business Education (AJBE), 1(2), 95-104.