

APPLYING ADULT LEARNING THEORY TO FOSTER PARENT TRAINING

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Abstract

This project posits that adult learning theory be applied to foster parent training programs. Understanding foster parents as adult learners is essential to designing and implementing meaningful training experiences and resources for foster parents facing unique challenges associated with the foster care system and children in care. This project begins with a summary of the challenges faced by foster parents, highlighting the need for meaningful foster parent training. Current training approaches in Alberta and Canada are presented, followed by a literature review on the effectiveness of foster parent training programs. This is followed by an emerging theory of adult learning founded on historical and contemporary conceptualizations. Based on this theory, a framework for foster parent training programs is proposed. This project concludes with a description of how this framework in action will lead to training with relevant content, meaningful delivery, and increased accessibility.

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Introduction

After much consideration, my wife and I decided to pursue becoming foster parents in Alberta in early February 2015. We attended an evening information session that outlined what it meant to be a foster parent, the types of kids foster parents might care for, and the licencing process. Shortly after this information session, in March, we began the mandatory eight, three-hour sessions of Orientation to Caregiver Training (OCT), the basic training of foster parenting in Alberta. We completed the training during four consecutive Sundays, finishing by the end of March. This was the only training required to become licensed foster parents in Alberta.

OCT was a unique experience. At times, basic information was presented, including role descriptions, training requirements, and ministry information. It also included some intimidating information and anecdotes: devastating stories about kids in care, statistics regarding the special needs of kids in care, and the desperate need for caregivers. Hearing about the profound difficulties faced by children in care and the significant stresses put on foster parents was a lot to reflect on. It made us question if we were ready and able to be foster parents. At the end of our OCT we were still unsure if foster parenting was something to which we were prepared to commit. We decided to continue the process with the knowledge that we were not required to fully commit until we were licensed.

Following OCT came hours of home-study interviews, record checks, home inspections, and medical exams. This process is meant to screen foster parents, not to train them. By mid-August we were licensed foster parents in Alberta and were immediately assigned a Family Support Worker (FSW). The role of the FSW was to support us in our care of children, find children to place in our home, and to advocate for

us. The FSW met with us in late August and immediately began discussing specific children who needed to be placed in homes. At this point, being a foster parent quickly went from a hypothetical concept to a reality. Within a few weeks of meeting with our support worker, a child was placed in our home. Since that first child was placed with us in 2015, we have never been without a foster child in our home.

The reason I began this project is due to what I perceived to be a disconnect between training, including OCT and subsequent training, and the day to day realities of being a caregiver in the foster care system. Training included a lot of good information, but there often seemed to be a lack of congruence between what I experienced everyday as a foster parent and my learning at foster parent training. Put another way, foster parent training seemed to have very little impact on my practice as a foster parent and I began to view training as something I had to 'get through.' As a foster parent, teacher, and student, this began to frustrate me because I was consistently facing huge challenges as a foster parent that the training was not helping me address.

Prior to explaining the potentially problematic nature of foster parent training, it is important to mention that it is not reasonable to expect training to provide solutions for all the challenges faced by foster parents. Likewise, it is not reasonable to expect training to be the origin of every reward experienced as a foster parent. The foster care system is constantly changing and children in care have diverse cultural backgrounds and needs; foster parent training cannot ensure every foster parent in Alberta is completely equipped to face the unique challenges and stressors I have discussed. However, shouldn't this be the goal? Shouldn't foster parent training be designed and implemented in way that leads

to meaningful learning for every foster parent? In my opinion, this is an ideal worth striving for.

Foster Parent Perspective

As a foster parent, I have experienced a wide-range of foster parent training opportunities, providing me with a unique perspective on this topic. Most of the training I have experienced is required and offered by Alberta's Ministry of Children's Services. I have also participated in many supplementary training sessions facilitated by the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association (AFKA), formerly the Alberta Foster Parent Association.

As a foster parent, I have very specific reasons for learning. I have children in my home that are counting on me for their daily needs, safety, medical care and emotional well-being. Often, I am longing for information, ideas, skills, and resources that will better equip me for what I am dealing with at that moment. For example, we were caring for a newborn who was experiencing withdrawal from prenatal exposure to methamphetamine. Doctors also thought the child was visually impaired and had cerebral palsy. During that time, I had very specific needs for training: I wanted to learn more about drug withdrawal in infants and caring for infants with visual impairment and cerebral palsy. However, the design of Alberta's foster parent training program did not allow it to be responsive to my needs.

Educator Perspective

The philosophy of foster parent training also concerns me as an educator because there appears to be little consideration of the adult learners that comprise the foster parent classroom. The current approach to training in Alberta fails to consider the diverse learners that attend these training sessions: learners with specific preferences, strengths,

challenges, and needs. Instead, the approach seems to suggest that foster parents are buckets that simply need to be filled with knowledge and information. As a teacher, I don't see my students this way. Every student comes to my classroom with different stories, assumptions, needs and skills. Much of my job involves tapping into student strengths and meaningfully addressing their needs. Learning for each student can and should be differentiated, unique and carefully planned. In addition, student learning should not be directed solely by me; I believe that I must co-create learning experiences with students, including opportunities for them to direct and lead their learning experiences.

Student Perspective

The current approach is also problematic as a student of curriculum and assessment. As a graduate student, I have experienced adult learning in a setting different than foster parent training. Interestingly, I began my graduate studies at the same time as my foster parent training and it has been thought-provoking to compare the two experiences. As a graduate student, I have worked closely with class mates and teachers to explore and discuss a variety of topics. Much of my learning has been self-directed; my interests as a learner have focused my educational experience. Conversely, my learning as a foster parent was clearly mapped, with little focus on exploration and discussion. There have also been overlaps between these two learning environments. Although it happens more often in foster parent training, both learning environments have involved a significant amount of knowledge and information transfer. In my graduate studies, this happened early on to provide a base of knowledge to support my future

learning, whatever direction it went. In foster parent training, information delivery has been consistently didactic.

Literature Review: Foster Parent Challenges

In the following section, I will outline what the literature says about challenges faced by foster parents, much of which confirms my experiences. This review also aims to highlight the need for meaningful training opportunities to address these challenges. Following this literature review I will explain the current foster parent training program used in Alberta and describe various programs used across Canada. In doing so, I will suggest that current training programs may not be designed and implemented in a way that acknowledges foster parents as adult learners, preparing them for the unique challenges they experience.

Foster parents are essential to the success and well-being of children in care. The daily task of caring for children in the foster care system is complex, challenging, and constantly evolving. Foster parents are asked, among other things, to meet the emotional and behavioural needs of children that are placed with them with little or no notice, create cultural connections, support birth families, and work as a team with various professional service providers. It is a very challenging task that demands much of caregivers.

These challenges and barriers have been well-documented (Brown & Calder, 1999; Brown & Calder, 2000; Brown, 2008; Buehler et al., 2003; Cooley & Petren, 2011; MacGregor et al., 2006; Nash & Flynn, 2009; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Although not an exhaustive list, common challenges included working relationships with department workers (Brown & Calder, 1999; Brown & Calder, 2000; MacGregor et al., 2006), role ambiguity (Brown & Calder, 1999; Buehler et al., 2003; Cooley & Petren, 2011), caring

for children with complex needs (Brown, 2008; Nash & Flynn, 2009; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003), and accessing supports and resources (Brown & Calder, 2000; Brown, 2008; Buehler et al., 2003; Cooley & Petren, 2011; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Challenges such as these can have a significant impact on child-related outcomes, placement success, and foster parent retention. Three major challenges will be explored next: relationships with professionals, supporting children with special needs, and accessing resources and supports. Table 1 provides an overview of the research on these major challenges:

Table 1

Research on the Challenges Faced by Foster Parents

Challenge	Research
Relationships with professionals	Brown, 2008 Brown and Calder, 1999 Brown and Calder, 2000 MacGregor et al., 2006
Supporting children with special needs	Brown, 2008 Brown and Calder, 1999 Buehler et al., 2003 Sinclair and Wilson, 2003
Accessing resources and supports	Brown, 2008 Brown and Calder, 1999 Brown and Calder, 2000 Buehler et al., 2003 Cuddeback and Orme, 2002 Esaki et al., 2012 MacGregor et al., 2006

Relationships with Professionals

A first challenge facing foster parents is working with professionals in the child welfare system. Brown and Calder (1999) interviewed foster parents in Alberta and this

challenge emerged as a common theme. Brown and Calder's findings described others: unconcerned social workers, social workers who aren't knowledgeable, workers who don't explain the actions they have taken, broken promises, workers coming unannounced, intimidation by social workers, and having to train the social worker (pp. 486-488).

The challenge of working with child welfare professionals is not specific to Alberta. In an Ontario study, MacGregor et al. (2006) reiterated Brown and Calder's (1999; 2000) findings. For example, MacGregor et al. highlighted the impact of challenging relationships with child welfare staff, claiming that "[w]hen foster parents did not feel emotionally supported it was because they did not have a good relationship with their workers or the agency" (p. 359). They stated that this was because foster parents communicated that they "felt that their opinions were not respected, workers were unavailable when needed and did not return telephone calls promptly, and communication with workers was poor" (p. 359). MacGregor et al. also found that foster parents felt that trust had been breached between themselves and child welfare workers. They reported that foster parents felt agencies did not trust their abilities to care for foster children. As a result of this apparent lack of trust, foster parents claimed that workers held back important information about the children in their care (p. 359).

Foster parents have also identified working relationships with professionals as critical to foster placement success. In Manitoba, foster parents described their perceptions of factors needed for successful foster placements. Brown (2008) found that a good working relationship with agencies was identified as an important factor (p. 548). Foster parents explained their ideal relationship with child welfare workers: workers who

‘back’ them, workers who come to the home and help, respect from professionals, and involvement in planning for the children in their care (p. 486). MacGregor et al. (2006) found similar results, explaining that foster parents “reported feeling supported when they had good relationships with workers, when workers returned phone calls in a timely manner, when workers supported foster parent requests and opinions, and used open, honest communication” (p. 359).

Supporting Children with Special Needs

A second major challenge facing foster parents is caring for children with needs. Training has explained that children in foster care are often living with significant and diverse challenges that may be physical, mental, emotional, or behavioural including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Attachment Disorders, and various behavioural and conduct disorders. At foster parent training, we were told very early on that ‘there are no healthy children in foster care.’ It is no surprise that caring for this population is a challenge for foster parents. Buehler et al. (2003) suggested that “[p]arenting children with serious behavioral and emotional difficulties is the most frequently cited stressor” by foster parents in their research (p. 68).

Unique factors increase the already challenging task of caring for children with complex needs in the foster care system. One is the ease of access to information. Brown and Calder (1999) discovered that foster parents often feel that Children’s Services omits relaying critical information about children (p. 488). Brown and Calder go on to explain that this lack of information can lead to inappropriate expectations from foster parents (p. 488). In other words, foster parents may be unaware of the unique needs of the child, rendering support more difficult and confusing. Similarly, Brown (2008) found that foster

parents wanted information about children, including medical information, in order to determine if placing the child in their home was a prudent decision (p. 550). Limiting information about a child's needs may lead to placement breakdown and may frustrate foster parents and impact foster parent retention.

An additional stressor related to caring for children with special needs is how it impacts caregivers and others in their home. Behavioural needs, for example, can present a substantial challenge to caregivers. Sinclair and Wilson (2003) described some of the behaviours children in foster care might exhibit:

They might steal, lie, break things, have tantrums, refuse to eat, smear walls, wet their beds, refuse to bath, continually defy their carers, set light to their bedding, take overdoses, make sexual advances to other children, expose themselves in public, make false allegations, attack others, truant, take drugs or get into trouble with the police. (p. 875)

This is not an exhaustive list of behaviours a child in care might exhibit. It is also fair to say that children in care may not behave differently than children who are not in care. However, this list does present a picture of the challenges caregivers might face when caring for children in foster care. These behaviours can obviously challenge foster parents. Sinclair and Wilson rightly pointed out that these types of behaviours can also potentially have a negative impact on other children in the foster home (p. 875).

Accessing Resources and Supports

A last challenge is accessibility of supports and resources for foster parents. Supports and resources are broad, sometimes vague categories, but research consistently highlights their importance to foster parents. When foster parents have difficulty

accessing supports and resources it can have a profound impact on foster placement success. Brown (2008) highlighted the correlation between access to resources and placement success, noting that placements were more resistant to breakdown if foster parents had support for the special needs they were supporting, financial resources, and training opportunities (p. 540). MacGregor et al. (2006) further pointed out that “[m]any foster parents decide to quit fostering because of perceived deficits in support for themselves and their foster children” (p. 353).

Studies of Canadian foster parents have identified several resources and supports that are challenging for foster parents to access. Foster parents identify both intrinsic and extrinsic supports as challenging to access. An intrinsic support that presents a challenge for foster parents has been previously discussed: “open communication and rapport between foster parents and agency workers” (MacGregor et al., 2006, p. 353). MacGregor et al. go on to note that foster parents craved the support that comes from an open and honest relationship with workers (p. 364).

Extrinsic supports and resources can also be challenging for foster parents to access. MacGregor et al. (2006) listed extrinsic supports that can be challenging to access: respite, housekeeping services, baby-sitting, weekend breaks, and summer programming (p. 360). MacGregor et al. explained that foster parents found it difficult to obtain relief care and would use other foster parents for respite, causing ‘burn out’ among foster parents (p. 361). In their study, MacGregor et al. also identified foster parents’ perception that they were not receiving adequate compensation for their role (p. 360). Other extrinsic supports and resources listed by foster parents as challenging to access were crisis intervention, counselling services, educational services, support with the court

process, and support navigating the politics associated with children in care with Indigenous heritage (Brown & Calder, 1999; Brown & Calder, 2000; MacGregor et al., 2006; Buehler et al., 2003).

A final support and resource that is challenging for foster parents to access and one that is the focus this project is foster parent training. Foster parent training is crucial for the well-being of children in care, foster parents and families, and agencies. Cuddeback and Orme (2002) claimed that, if adequate training cannot be accessed by foster parents, the result can be “failed placements, difficulty parenting foster children, and dropout of qualified and much needed foster families” (p. 883). Esaki et al. (2012) explained the converse: “[w]hen foster parents receive quality training, they are more likely to retain their licenses, have greater placement lengths and provide more favorable ratings of their experiences as foster parents” (p. 690). Clearly foster parent training is a resource that is highly valued by foster parents and can have positive impacts on everyone involved in the foster care system. On the contrary, being unable to access meaningful training can be a significant barrier to success for the children in care, foster families, and agencies.

Review of Current Foster Parent Training Programs

Clearly foster parents face unique and significant challenges. This begs the question: what is the best way to train foster parents? What follows is a description of the current method of foster parent training in Alberta and various provinces and territories in Canada. I will begin by describing the mandatory training offered by Alberta’s Ministry of Children Services. This training is required for licensing and level-designation purposes. Following the description of mandatory training, optional foster parent training

opportunities in Alberta will be discussed. I will conclude with a short discussion of foster parent training programs in other parts of Canada, outlined in Table 2. A literature review on the effectiveness of these programs will follow.

Table 2

Foster Parent Training in Canada

Province or Territory	Training Program
Alberta	Provincially developed program
British Columbia	Provincially developed program
Manitoba	Provincially developed program
New Brunswick	PRIDE
Newfoundland & Labrador	PRIDE
Northwest Territories	PRIDE and Foster Parent College
Nova Scotia	PRIDE
Nunavut	No information available
Ontario	PRIDE
Prince Edward Island	No information available
Quebec	No information available
Saskatchewan	PRIDE
Yukon	Local training in Yellowknife

Foster Parent Training in Alberta

Prior to becoming licensed in Alberta, foster parents are required to complete Orientation to Caregiver Training (OCT). OCT consists of eight, three-hour sessions of

classroom training. It is offered throughout the year, and potential foster parents can choose from a variety of schedules to complete this training. According to the Government of Alberta (2015), this “training explores the applicant’s motivation for fostering and covers topics such as: child development, special needs of children in care, duties and responsibilities of foster parents, and supports provided to foster parents” (Support for Foster and Kinship Caregivers section). OCT is the only training required to be licensed as foster parents in Alberta.

Once a potential foster parent has completed their OCT they become licensed, ‘Level 1’ foster parents in Alberta. Level 1 foster parents are permitted to have up to two children placed in their home. The Government of Alberta (2015) explains that after being licensed, all Level 1 foster parents are required to complete a minimum of nine hours of core training each year. The Government of Alberta describes core training in this way:

31, three-hour modules which are grouped into eight categories: Working with Legislation, Policies and Procedures; Facilitating Transitions; Identifying Influences on Child Development; Guiding Behaviour of Children and Youth; Managing the Environment of Children; Maintaining a Child’s Culture; Working with the Child’s Birth Family and Significant Others; and Managing the Fostering Experience. (Support for Foster and Kinship Caregivers section)

Level 1 foster parents are required to complete all 31 training modules within four years of becoming licensed. Additionally, once licensed, foster parents are required to complete first aid training which is coordinated by Children Services but delivered by an outside agency. There are other specific training requirements, depending on the children in your

care. For example, foster parents must complete ‘Safe Babies’ training in order to have children under the age of three placed in their home. This training is two consecutive days and addresses symptoms of prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol, newborn safety, and other topics relevant to children under the age of three.

Once a foster parent in Alberta has completed their OCT, become licensed, and completed the 31 additional core training sessions, they become ‘Level 2’ foster parents. Level 2 foster parents can have up to four children placed in their home. According to the Government of Alberta (2015), “Level 2 foster parents care for children or youth with higher needs, such as disabilities or behavioural challenges” (Support for Foster and Kinship Caregivers section). In other words, certain children living with high needs would likely only be placed in a Level 2 foster home. The training offered by Alberta’s Ministry of Children Services was developed by the ministry and is internally updated.

Foster parents in Alberta also have access to training opportunities outside of the mandatory training offered by the Ministry of Children Services. For example, the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association (AFKA) offers training and learning opportunities throughout the year. These training opportunities are offered around the province and foster parents can find out about them through the AFKA’s website, e-newsletter, and social media. The AFKA also offers a yearly conference that foster parents can attend. The conference offers a variety of training experiences led by experts from around the province and country. Foster parents can participate in four, three-hour sessions during the weekend retreat. Special needs experts, policy-makers, and Indigenous leaders are among specialists who lead training sessions.

Foster Parent Training in Canada

Alberta is not alone in developing and delivering their own foster care training program. According to B.C.'s Foster Parent Support Services Society (no date), the B.C. Ministry of Children and Family Development has also developed their own "standardized education program designed to build on the skills and experience caregivers bring to their role, as well as knowledge to support their ongoing training and development" (Education section, para. 1). The Government of Manitoba's (2017) Child Protection Branch also develops and delivers their own training program for foster parents (Foster Care section). Although I see the value in developing a program that is specific to an area or place, the idea of every province and territory creating their own training makes me wonder if vast amounts of time, money, and resources are being spent in different provinces to create programs that may often overlap in content, delivery, and accessibility.

Other areas of Canada have different approaches to foster parent training. According to the Yukon Health and Social Services website (2018), their training is offered by Health and Social Services staff along with experienced foster parents regularly in Whitehorse and as needed in surrounding areas (Foster Care section).

According to their governments and foster parent associations, the Northwest Territories (no date), Saskatchewan (no date), Ontario (2017), New Brunswick (2018), and Nova Scotia (no date) all use a training program called PRIDE, or 'Parent resources for information, development, and education.' According to the Child Welfare League of America (2016), PRIDE is used across the United States and in more than 25 countries

around the world. The Child Welfare League of America explains the benefits of the PRIDE model this way:

Implementing the *PRIDE Model of Practice* provides your agency with the opportunity to ensure that your staff and resource families commit to your agency's vision, mission, and values; have complementary competency-based roles; use strengths-based language; implement culturally responsive best practices; and work to achieve outcomes that support safety, well-being, and permanency for the children in your care. (Training and Events section)

PRIDE is more than just a training program; the PRIDE model asks agencies to restructure according to their model. Using the PRIDE model, agencies can take foster and adoptive parents from the recruitment stage to licensing and into specialized training opportunities. According to Governor State University's PRIDE website (no date), PRIDE is a fourteen-step process that begins with agencies adjusting and clarifying roles in order to implement PRIDE, pre-service training for potential foster and adoptive parents, followed by more specialized core training for foster parents (About Us section). Put another way, PRIDE is a model for recruiting, licensing, training, and supporting foster and adoptive parents, not just a training program. Governor State University PRIDE website also explains that many of the PRIDE training modules are now available online for foster and adoptive parents who have difficulty participating in classroom setting due to distance, for example (Home section).

Some provinces are moving toward a more online-based approach. For example, the Northwest Territories recommend foster parents take online courses, for a fee, using the Foster Parent College website (2018). According to Foster Parent College, they offer

ten pre-service trainings and a variety of in-service courses relating to advanced parenting, behavioral management, and parenting strategies. The website claims that the training is developed by professionals based on feedback from foster parents about the challenges and needs they are facing (FPC Home section). In my experience, trainers in Alberta have mentioned transitioning to a more blended in-person and online format, but currently Alberta's Children Services does not offer online training for foster parents in Alberta.

Literature Review: Effectiveness of Foster Parent Training Programs

I believe that there is no way to comprehensively prepare someone for being a foster parent. As I mentioned before, the complex and evolving nature of the foster care system and the diverse needs of children in care cannot be entirely captured in a classroom or any amount of training sessions. However, I find myself concerned with what I perceive as a lack of meaningful training experiences. As I continue to experience foster parent training, I find myself coming back to same question over and over: what is the best way to train foster parents? What follows is a literature review of foster parent training effectiveness.

Foster parent training, a support consistently identified as being challenging to access, is considered a vital resource that leads to foster parent competency (Cooley & Petren, 2011, p. 1968). Access to training is also considered essential to placement success and the well-being of children in care. Cuddeback and Orme (2002) put it this way:

Caregivers fostered children with significant problems but received inadequate information and preparation before licensure, limited training after licensure, and

fewer services than needed. This situation could ultimately jeopardize the welfare of the children placed in family foster care, place an undue burden on the families who care for these children, and present numerous difficulties for the workers and agencies charged with the care of these vulnerable children. (pp. 902-903)

Dorsey et al. (2008) pointed out that research is on a positive trajectory, beginning to focus on training as a mechanism for improved outcomes for children in care (p. 1413).

In addition to exploring foster parent training as a mechanism for improved placement outcomes, research has also explored the ‘missing pieces’ of current foster parent training. MacGregor et al. (2006) suggested there is a lack of realistic training and training geared to special needs, such as autism and abuse (p. 361). Cooley and Petren (2011) suggested that current training may give foster parents a basic understanding of how to care for children, but it doesn’t provide the support or confidence needed for the day to day task of foster parenting (p. 1969). They also argued training does not adequately prepare foster parents for navigating a complex child welfare system (p. 1969). In a similar vein, Dorsey et al. (2008) argued that foster parent training programs currently used in the United States may orient foster parents to their job and its requirements, but they are insufficient “for meeting the often-loftier goal of foster parent training – that foster parents have the necessary skills to effectively care for and maintain the children residing in their home” (p. 1413). So, although foster parent training has been identified as a valuable resource and support, research suggests there are considerable limitations to current programs and practices.

This highlights what I discussed earlier, a disconnect between training and the day-to-day life of a foster parent. Although much of the training I experience includes

valuable information, it often does not relate to caring for the children in our home. Additionally, although it is a difficult task, training does not often develop skills. There have been many times when I have experienced training and appreciated some of the information I learned, but I would leave wondering how it applies to my day-to-day task or how I was going to apply that knowledge in real life situations.

In addition to identifying missing pieces in current foster parent training, research is also beginning to explore the effectiveness of the training foster parents currently have access to. Nash and Flynn (2008) argued that “foster-parent training cannot simply be assumed to be effective. Rather, it requires much greater research attention than it has received to date if it is to justify the considerable resources expended on it in many countries” (p. 133). Determining the effectiveness of foster parent training is difficult, however, because of the complex nature of foster care and children in the foster care system. Because of this, Dorsey et al. (2008) cautioned against the idea of linking child outcomes to foster parent training, and therefore labelling the training as effective (p. 1414). So, when researching foster parent training, it is important to acknowledge foster care’s complexity. It may not be reasonable to draw correlations between child outcomes and foster parent training.

Despite this caution, researchers have claimed that a lack of empirical basis for current training programs calls their effectiveness into question. Dorsey et al. (2008) argued that the two widely used foster parent training programs in the U.S., Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) and Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP), which are also used in several Canadian provinces as well, lack an empirical foundation:

This lack of an empirical foundation, coupled with concerns about the quality of care for youth in out-of-home placements, and strongly held beliefs about the importance of foster parent training (from advocates, policy makers, and providers), have come together to encourage a range of current activities to advance knowledge about effective training for foster and treatment foster parents. (p. 1413)

Based on the limited data available regarding the effectiveness of current training programs, Dorsey et al. suggested that the hours of MAPP/PRIDE training that foster parents are required to complete could be lessened, with more time spent on skills-based training once a child has been placed in a foster home (p. 1414). Although this lack of empirical support for foster training programs does not confirm ineffectiveness, I believe it warrants further research regarding the effectiveness of current foster parent training programs, including Alberta's.

The effectiveness of current foster parent training programs has also been questioned based on their approaches to teaching and learning. Dorsey et al. (2008) argued that widely used foster parent training programs provide didactic training but pay little attention to contemporary views of effective adult learning approaches, such as problem-based learning and interactive presentations (p. 1414). Dorsey et al. suggested that content, timing, and delivery are three areas of foster parent training that require more research to advance the field and they acknowledge that conducting scientific investigations in this area is difficult and advancing effectiveness research will not come quickly or easily (p. 1414).

Several things are clear based on this brief review of foster parent training literature. First, foster parents have communicated that they want and need effective

training in order to best support the children in their care. Second, foster parents have identified foster parent training as a resource that can be difficult to access. Third, research is questioning the effectiveness of current foster parent training programs based on their lack of empirical basis. Finally, it is clear that more research is needed in the area of foster parent training, including the content, timing, and delivery of this training.

It is worth stressing that discussing the ‘effectiveness’ of foster parent training is complex. If a child is doing well in a placement, it may not be reasonable to attribute that success to the training the foster parents have experienced. Likewise, if a child is not experiencing success or a placement breaks down, it may not be reasonable to identify a lack of training or ineffective training as the cause. However, in my opinion, it is reasonable to question the effectiveness of foster parent training based on adult learning theory: is foster parent training recognizing foster parents as adult learners? This project proposes that adult learning theory can provide a more effective framework for foster parent training and lead to training experiences that are more meaningful and powerful for foster parents in Alberta, Canada, and around the world.

By examining adult learning theory and developing a better understanding of how adults learn, foster parent training programs can be designed and implemented to reflect these understandings. This does not necessarily mean that current training experiences need to be discarded or ignored; much of the training I have experienced would be valuable in a training program that recognizes foster parents as adult learners. However, in my opinion, it is not enough to simply update training every so often. Instead, the entire design of foster parent training programs needs to be examined and adjusted to reflect understanding foster parents as adult learners.

Adult Learning Theory

What follows is an overview of traditional adult learning theories and more recent directions in adult learning research. Based on this overview, I will present my theory of adult learning and discuss how it can be applied to foster parent training in Alberta, leading to more meaningful training experiences for foster parents.

As long as theories of adult learning have existed, they have been critiqued, challenged and advanced. New ways of thinking about adult learning continue to emerge. It is argued that traditional theories of adult learning focus too much on the individual learner and their ownership and direction of the learning experience. More recently, intrapersonal and ecological factors, among others, have received much attention. Learners are being understood as people with emotions, relationships, and stories. Additionally, Western ways of understanding learning are being challenged and other ways of being and knowing are being discussed, such as Indigenous storytelling. It is clear that adult learning is a developing and sometimes convoluted field that continues to work toward a more holistic understanding of the factors that impact how adults learn. The following section will outline the major traditional theories of adult learning and argue that intrapersonal and ecological factors must be considered in order to move toward a more holistic understanding of adult learning.

Andragogy

My discussion of traditional theories of adult learning will be limited to what Kawalilak and Groen (2014) refer to as the ‘big four’ adult learning theories. These theories and their assumptions are summarized in Table 3. The first of the big four theories of adult learning is andragogy. Malcolm Knowles was a pioneer of andragogy. In

a revised version of Knowles' earlier work, Knowles et al. (2012) outlined six unique traits of adult learners: (1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn (p. 34).

The learner's need to know refers to the idea that adult learners need to know *why* they need to learn something (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 64). In other words, adult learners need to know the benefits of learning something and the drawback of not learning it. *Self-concept of the learner* refers to the psychology of the adult learner. Adult learners, according to Knowles et al., see themselves as capable of self-direction and resist education or training that implies dependency (p. 65). The third trait of *prior experience of the learner* assumes that because of their age and life experience, there will be a wider range of differences in a group of adult learners compared to youth (p. 66). A natural result of this, according to Knowles et al., is that adult education should have more individualization of teaching and learning strategies (p. 66).

The fourth trait of adult learners assumes their *readiness to learn*. The assumption is that “[a]dults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 67). *Orientation to learning* refers to adults wanting to learn about things that will help them cope with real life situations, as opposed to youth's subject-centered orientation to learning in school (p. 67). The sixth unique trait of adult learners is *motivation to learn*. According to Knowles et al., adults, unlike children and youth, are motivated by increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life (p. 68). Knowles et al. claimed that “adults are motivated to keep growing and developing, but this motivation is

frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning” (p. 68).

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning (SDL) is the second of the big four adult learning theories. SDL has overlaps with andragogy but differs in its assumptions. SDL varies from andragogy in that it assumes adult learners are individuals who must understand themselves before being able to meaningfully participate in adult learning. It suggests that adult learners must understand their readiness and personal characteristics before learning should take place. Merriam (2001) explained that therefore, this theory proposes the role of adult educators is to enhance adult learners’ ability to function as self-directed learners (p. 9). It should be noted that SDL, according to Kawalilak and Groen (2014), can refer to a ‘process’ of learning where the learner directs his or her learning, or it can be the end goal of learning: to create a self-directed learner (p. 146).

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning, based on the work of Kolb (2014), is a third traditional adult learning theory worth mentioning. According to Kawalilak and Groen (2014), experiential learning refers to a learner experiencing something, reflecting on it, coming to new understandings, and having those understandings impact their future decisions (p. 152). It is argued that one can design experiences that will cultivate this type of learning. “Typical examples would include participatory activities, reflective activities, action-oriented approaches, challenge-based or adventure-based activities, and approaches that

are holistic in nature, which draw on our emotions, feelings, physical sensations, and spiritual connections” (Kawalilak & Groen, 2014, p. 152).

Transformative Learning

The final big four traditional adult learning theory is transformative learning. Kawalilak and Groen (2014) described this theory, saying “[t]ransformative learning theory then is focused on understanding the learning process that we undergo as we construct and appropriate new and revised interpretations of meaning regarding our experiences in the world” (p. 154). Transformative learning begins with a disorienting dilemma causing a learner to engage in critical thinking about the dilemma, learn from this process, and make life changes based on this critical thinking and reflection around the disorienting dilemma (pp. 154-155).

Table 3

Traditional Adult Learning Theories

Theory	Assumptions
Andragogy	Learner’s need to know <i>I want to know why this is worth it</i> Self-concept of the learner <i>I am capable of self-direction</i> Prior experience of the learner <i>I have unique life experiences</i> Readiness to learn <i>I am ready for relevant learning</i> Orientation to learning <i>I want learning to help my life</i> Motivation to learn <i>I want job satisfaction and quality of life</i>
Self-directed Learning (SDL)	Learners must understand themselves <i>Am I ready to learn?</i> <i>What are my personal characteristics?</i> Educator’s role is to help learners function as self-directed learners

Theory	Assumptions
Experiential Learning	Learner experiences something Learner reflects on it Learner comes to new understandings Learner's life is impacted by new understandings Learning experiences can be designed for this: <i>Participatory activities</i> <i>Reflection activities</i> <i>Action-oriented approaches</i> <i>Challenge-based approaches</i> <i>Adventure-based approaches</i>
Transformative Learning	Learner has disorienting dilemma Learner thinks critically about dilemma Learner learns from this process Learner makes life changes

Recent Directions in Adult Learning Theory

These big four traditional adult learning theories, although largely agreed to be foundational and valuable, have been and continue to be critiqued and challenged. The big four traditional adult learning theories have been criticized for their focus on the learner and for failing to acknowledge the learner's story and context. Kawalilak and Groen (2014) explained that many, including post-modernists, are challenging traditional assumptions about adult learning including self-motivation and independence (p. 89). Likewise, post-structuralism and feminism are focused on challenging current structures of learning and questioning who is responsible for constructing knowledge (p. 92). Much of the focus of recent research on adult learning theory appears to focus on the intrapersonal and ecological factors associated with adult learning. For example, the role of relationships and dialogue, and how the learner's physical body and emotions impact learning. Adult learners are no longer assumed to be self-motivated autonomous beings.

Rather, adult learners are being understood to be part of intermingled stories in a particular location and context.

Many new understandings about adult learning have challenged and enhanced the more traditional theories of adult learning. I will limit my discussion of these understandings to the intrapersonal and ecological factors outlined by Kawalilak and Groen (2014).

A first factor Kawalilak and Groen (2014) discussed is the learner's body. They discuss the terms *embodiment* and *embodied learning*, which refer to the experience of learning in the moment (p. 164). They discussed how some feel there is too much emphasis put on the reflection of learning and not on the learning experience itself:

We are too quick to set aside the actual embodied experience in the learning process, placing too much emphasis on the reflective process that occurs after the embedded physical experience in which the complexity of sociocultural conditions actually produce the knowledge. (p. 165)

Kawalilak and Groen suggested that by paying attention to embodiment, learners can access their emotions (p. 165).

A second factor that impacts adult learning is emotions. In their discussion of emotions and learning, Kawalilak and Groen (2014) explained that emotions are an integral part of the process of adult learning and by acknowledging and including emotions, more holistic learning can take place (p. 166). These emotions can be positive or negative, and each can lead to meaningful learning. "Important to our learning process is recognizing, naming, and accepting our negative emotions, especially since they can lead us to important learning and change" (p. 167). Kawalilak and Groen explained that

rather than stifling emotion or ignoring it, emotions can play an important role in our learning. “In turn then, we should not push those emotions down but, as in embodied learning, recognize them as a valuable source of knowledge about the process of learning and about ourselves” (p. 167).

Spirituality and learning is another factor related to adult learning that is being explored. Like emotions, Kawalilak and Groen (2014) pointed out that there is potential for spirituality to play an important role in adult learning and it is a topic that has received a lot of attention in recent literature. According to Kawalilak and Groen, there are many ways that spirituality can be a part of meaningful learning. “Meditation and contemplation, journaling, storytelling, and bodywork through a practice such as yoga are both individual pathways to cultivate spirituality and potential approaches for incorporating spiritual dimensions within a more formal classroom setting” (p. 169).

Relationships are also a consistent theme in contemporary discussions of adult learning theory. Kawalilak and Groen (2014) described the central role of relationships in this way: “As we each live out our ongoing and shifting narrative in a particular time, place, and space in history and within a particular social and cultural context, this all occurs within a web of relationships” (p. 170). Relational learning then is something that is worth engaging in. “Having acknowledged the challenges, we can engage in or facilitate intentional processes, both formally and informally, to navigate the challenges and deepen the benefits derived from relational learning” (p. 172). Kawalilak and Groen discussed specific ways to engage in relational learning, focusing on dialogue. Dialogue, as opposed to conversation, is aimed at listening and speaking to understand and grow, not merely to convince someone of a point or opinion (p. 173). It is worth pointing out

that the big four traditional adult learning theories discussed earlier acknowledge and incorporate relational learning to varying degrees.

Kawalilak and Groen (2014) suggested that arts-based activities can lead to meaningful learning experiences for adults.

While our daily lives are infused with images, music, dance, and drama, we often view these as forms of entertainment that can only be created by the ‘experts.’

Rarely do we see ourselves within the actual process of creation; not only can we critically engage in what is offered to us, we can also create images, music, dance, and drama ourselves. Arts-based activities connect us with our minds, our souls, our bodies, and our emotions.

(p. 176)

Kawalilak and Groen claimed that aesthetic approaches to learning can be an effective entry point into some of the big four theories. “In addition, they offer a powerful entryway into experiential learning, providing an alternative and powerful concrete experience that in turn bridges into reflection and response” (p. 176).

In a discussion about ‘other ways of being and learning,’ Kawalilak and Groen (2014) explored non-western ideas about learning. They spent a considerable amount of time on Indigenous ways of being and learning. “Indigenous epistemology and perspectives are a powerful example of ‘exploring more deeply’ in another direction, in recognition of other ways of knowing, being, and doing” (p. 179). They also mentioned the prevalence of storytelling as a way of learning in Indigenous cultures (p. 180).

Kawalilak and Groen finished their discussion on this topic with a statement about learners that captures a worldview that is common among Indigenous cultures: “they

[learners] are intimately interconnected with the storied lives of those who have come before us and to the unwritten stories we have yet to experience, individually and collectively” (p. 181).

It is clear that a better understanding of the intrapersonal and ecological factors discussed by Kawalilak and Groen (2014) and others will lead to a more holistic understanding of adult learning. Although the big four traditional adult learning theories have much to offer, the ecological and intrapersonal factors discussed here are crucial to reaching a richer understanding of adult learning. They can also enable adult learning experts to better design adult learning experiences. Not all adult learners are the same and not all adult learners have the same story. Every adult learner, like early learners, enters a learning situation with different histories, different assumptions, and different needs. Simply viewing them as internally motivated individuals does them a disservice. Understanding their story and connectedness to their world, although a complex and challenging concept, will lead to meaningful adult learning experiences.

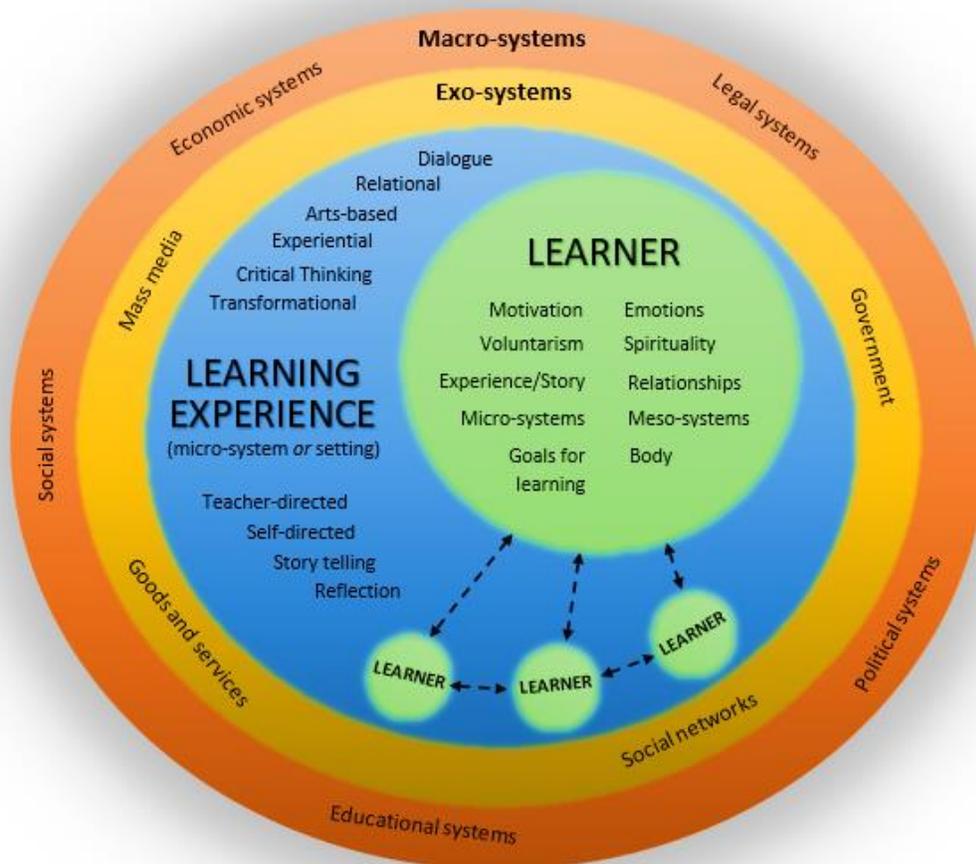


Figure 1. Ecological Theory of Adult Learning.

Ecological Theory of Adult Learning

Figure 1 depicts my developing theory of adult learning based on my reading of relevant literature. This theory will provide a basis for a proposed framework for foster parent training programs. Figure 1 depicts a number of learners involved in a learning experience. One *Learner* is expanded to reveal factors that impact individual learners. These include *motivation, voluntarism, emotions, experience/story, spirituality, goals for learning, relationships, body, micro-systems, and meso-systems*. Figure 1 also displays the *Learning Experience* which is a microsystem or setting, discussed later. The learning

experience can be designed to include any of the approaches listed inside. These approaches include *dialogue, relational, arts-based, transformational, teacher-directed, self-directed, experiential, story telling, reflection, and critical thinking*. Figure 1 also contains several arrows connecting the learners in the learning experience, symbolizing learners' connectedness.

It is useful to point out that Figure 1 does not include a 'teacher' or 'educator.' This is intentional: teachers, educators, facilitators, or however you label the person or persons responsible for guiding the adult learning experience, are learners too. I am suggesting that adult educators are impacted by the same factors as a learner from Figure 1. In other words, adult educators are also impacted by motivation, emotions, voluntarism, experience/story, spirituality, goals for learning, relationships, body, and micro-systems. Additionally, adult educators are also connected to and have relationships with the other learners in the learning environment (arrows).

This theory of adult learning takes Kawalilak and Groen's (2014) big four traditional theories of adult learning and places their general understandings and assumptions regarding the individual learner into the broader context of the learning experience. As discussed earlier, critics of the big four adult learning theories agree that although they are foundational and valuable, they are too focused on the learner and do not acknowledge the learner's story or the context of the learning environment enough. Merriam (2008) stated that "the spotlight has definitely shifted from understanding adult learning from the individual learner's perspective to the learner in context" (p. 93). My theory of adult learning considers the learner in the context of a learning experience. The circles around the learner, learning experience, exo-systems, and macro-systems are

intentionally blurred. This symbolizes the fluid nature of learning and that contextual variables constantly impact learners and learning experiences.

Ecological Structure of the Educational Environment

Micro-systems, settings, meso-systems, exo-systems and *macro-systems* are part of Bronfenbrenner's (1976) 'ecological structure of the educational environment.'

According to Bronfenbrenner, learners are impacted by various factors in these systems.

A micro-system is a setting that includes the learner, such as an adult learning classroom.

The meso-system is the interrelation among settings that the learner is in, including

family, school, work, etc. The *exo-system* is the social structures, formal and informal,

that impact and determine the settings containing the learner. These include, but are not

limited to, *mass media, government, goods and services, and social networks*. The

macro-systems are the institutions of a culture, such as the *economic, social, educational,*

legal, and political systems (pp. 11-13). All these settings and systems, according to

Bronfenbrenner, impact the learner and the learning environment.

These settings and systems undoubtedly impact foster parent learning experiences. Every foster parent participating in a learning experience is impacted by the

other settings in their life. Their families, jobs, and other settings will impact their

readiness to learn, motivation to learn, and their bodies and emotions, for example.

Aspects of the *exo-system* also impact foster parent learners. The current government

responsible for legislation and policy-making, for example, will affect the learning

environment. Issues in the media will also have an impact, heightening sensitive political

issues for example. Additionally, facets of the *macro-system* will also impact foster

parent learning. Economic systems may positively or negatively affect foster parents and their emotions and motivation to learn, for example.

Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological structure of the educational environment is not a static conceptualization either; all the settings and systems that impact foster parent learners are dynamic and fluid. Some aspects may change and shift slowly over time, possibly those at the exo and macro-system level, while others can transform in a moment, such as settings like family and work. Learners and the learning experience, both at the centre of this theory, are not surrounded by rigid systems. Rather, they are embedded in fluid and complex systems that must continually be recognized and accounted for.

Humanagogy

It should be noted that it may not be accurate to refer to my developing theory as an 'adult' learning theory. Some scholars question whether there should be a distinction between adult and early learning. In other words, pedagogy and andragogy, among other learning theories, may not necessarily be distinct from each other. For example, scholars suggest that andragogy may simply be a set of techniques that can be likened to progressive pedagogy, not its own theory of learning for adults. An alternative to the pedagogy versus andragogy debate is what Holmes and Abington (2000) described as 'humanagogy.'

Humanagogy might be likened to a 'holistic' approach to adult education because it does not throw away what adult educators already know about the way children learn and what they know about the way adults learn; rather, it takes this knowledge and puts it in perspective. (p. 51)

Put another way, it is suggested there is only one theory of educating humans, and concepts like pedagogy and andragogy provide valuable techniques and models for educators to consider based on the individuals and groups involved in a learning experience.

Complexity Theory

I believe my developing theory can be applied to adult and early learning experiences. My theory incorporates facets of various traditional and contemporary ideas about adult learning and there is no reason it cannot be applied to various early learning experiences as well. In this way, my theory can be considered a complexity theory. Complexity theories suggest that all theories of adult learning must be considered when designing and implementing a learning experience. They also suggest that during learning things can shift and change so there needs to be fluid consideration of various educational theories.

Building upon the idea that such separations [between adult learning theories] are artificial, complexity thinking recognizes that the multi-level dynamics at play in any learning situation can shift; in other words, there is an ever-changing emphasis on different domains of the learning process, depending on the learner, the situation being experienced, and the broader context. (Kawalilak & Groen, 2014, p. 134)

My developing theory allows the designers and facilitators of adult education to tailor the learning experience based on their philosophical orientation, goals for learning, and the individuals and groups involved in the learning experience.

Suggested Practices

Educators can draw on key practices that will enhance adult learning, including providing opportunities for reflection, critical thinking and dialogue.

Reflection. Reflection can be an essential practice in my developing theory of learning. Starting with the learner, it is useful to reflect on motivation, level of voluntarism, past experiences, goals for learning, micro-systems, and meso-systems when they begin a learning experience. How do you know how far you have come if you don't know who you were and where you started? Merriam (2008) suggested that “[e]ncouraging reflection... whether with the self, another, or a group, enables learning to take place” (p. 93). In other words, understanding your level of motivation, goals for learning, and related experience at the outset of a learning experience is important for learning to take place. Additionally, since the learning experience can be a fluid and dynamic experience, constant reflection allows individuals and groups of learners to re-evaluate the factors that impact them, making reflection a valuable formative assessment practice. These individual reflections could be in the form of written responses, readiness scales, or be in the form of dialogue with other learners, for example.

Reflection does not have to be limited to individual practice. In many adult learning environments, groups of learners are working collaboratively toward similar or identical goals; in such settings, group reflection can be valuable. Kawalilak and Groen (2014) described many historical examples of adult learners working together to achieve goals. In one example, they describe the Antigonish movement in the late 1920s when adult learners in the Canadian Maritimes worked toward helping their economy and ending poverty (p. 107). Collectively reflecting on their motivations, goals, and learning

is valuable for this type of adult learning experience. In another example, Kawalilak and Groen discussed early 1900s farmers' wives who began to form study groups to help with their work on farms: "Together they directed their focus to personal growth and development, individual and community health and wellness, and fundraising, and campaigned on socioeconomic issues and challenges that warranted collective action and protest" (p. 116). The key word in this example is 'together.' These adult learners collectively reflected on the effectiveness of their learning. Reflection in a group setting might take the form of dialogue among learners, circle meetings, or written responses.

Reflection is also important for educators and the individuals responsible for designing learning experiences. It is useful for educators to reflect on motivation, level of voluntarism, past experiences, goals for learning, micro-systems, and meso-systems when they begin learning and throughout the learning experience because they too are learners. Theories of adult learning have various assumptions about the role of the educator and who is responsible for designing the learning experience. For example, Holmes and Abington (2000) suggested that the learner's degree of voluntarism should dictate whether the learning experience is more teacher-directed or more student-directed (p. 52).

Regardless of the directedness of the learning experience, reflection is a powerful tool for educators and learning designers. For example, if an adult educator is facilitating a more collaborative group, reflecting on their personal involvement and the group's relationships, motivation, and goals will be useful. If an adult educator is facilitating a more individual adult educational experience, reflecting on their relationship with the individual learner and reflecting on the learner's needs and growth will be useful. These may take several forms, such as dialogue or journaling.

Critical thinking. A second practice educators can draw on to offer meaningful learning experiences is critical thinking. Critical thinking is a common thread throughout traditional and contemporary theories of adult learning. It has been described as a process that begins and ends with the world outside the learning experience. Garrison (1992) described five phases of critical thinking: “a triggering event, an appraisal of the situation, an exploration to explain anomalies, development of alternative perspectives, and integration of perspectives into the fabric of living” (p. 138). Some authors, such as Kawalilak and Groen (2014), discussed theories that consider critical thinking and learning as the same concept. They described the ten phases of the traditional theory of transformative learning as beginning with a disorienting dilemma, involving critical reflection, and ending with integrating new understandings into one’s life (p. 155). This aligns closely with the phases of critical thinking.

Other traditional theories of adult learning also incorporate critical thinking. Merriam (2001) explained that in order for meaningful self-directed learning to occur, learners must think critically about their readiness and personal characteristics prior to entering a learning experience (p. 9). Experiential learning also includes the concept and practice of critical thinking. According to Kawalilak and Groen (2014), experiential learning occurs when a learner experiences something, thinks critically about that experience, comes to new understandings, and projects how those understandings may impact future decisions (p. 152). Kawalilak and Groen suggested that learning experiences should be designed to cultivate this type of learning. Whether or not it is viewed as a distinct process, critical thinking can contribute to meaningful learning and a clearer understanding of learners within the systems outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1976).

Dialogue. Dialogue is a third practice that educators can draw on to enhance adult learning. Merriam (2008) suggested that new directions in adult learning research identify dialogue as an essential part of the learning process: either with one's self, another individual, or a group (p. 93). Mezirow (1993) originally described classroom dialogue as a process that aligns with the critical thinking process and referred to it as discourse: "In discourse, a conscious effort is made to place biases aside and to thoughtfully review the evidence, hear the different arguments and viewpoints and to make the best informed collective judgment possible" (p. 145). In other words, dialogue can be a tool for thinking critically about one's learning. Dialogue, or discourse, can be taught or facilitated by adult educators through modeling and practice in many adult learning environments.

Reflection, critical thinking and dialogue can have considerable overlap. For example, dialogue can enable a learner to reflect critically on their learning, goals, and experiences. Reflection, critical thinking and dialogue are also practices that enable every learner to better understand the factors and systems that are impacting them and their learning. For example, in the big four traditional adult learning theories (andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning), life experience was identified as a significant factor that impacted adult learners. Reflection, critical thinking and dialogue are practices that would enable a learner to better understand how their life experience or 'story' is affecting them as a learner in that moment. Additionally, reflection, critical thinking, and dialogue can enable learners to better understand the influence of the various systems they are part of. This can empower learners to set clear goals for learning and increase motivation.

Reflection, critical thinking, and dialogue will also help the adult educator differentiate learners' experiences. The learning experience in Figure 1 lists various approaches to adult learning. In this theory of adult learning, adult educators, based on the learners involved in the learning experience, can tailor the learning experience to create meaningful learning for each learner. In some cases, this may involve taking a more teacher-directed approach because a learner or group of learners have low motivation. In other cases, adult educators might facilitate story-telling because learners have identified story-telling as a familiar or powerful practice. Perhaps a shared experience among learners supports an experiential approach to learning.

Proposed Framework for a Foster Parent Education Program

In addition to providing a basis for meaningful instructional strategies such as reflection, dialogue, and critical thinking, my theory of adult learning can also be considered and applied to the context of foster parent training programs. Understanding foster parents as adult learners is key to the development and implementation of a framework for foster parent training programs.

Rationale

Recognizing foster parents as adult learners who are impacted by various settings and systems is key to designing and implementing a meaningful foster parent training program. Figure 1 identifies the factors that impact foster parent learners. Based on Figure 1, which is grounded in adult learning theory, the following discusses why content, timing, and delivery are three major factors that should inform the framework for foster parent training programs. What do foster parents need to know (content)? How can it be accessible (timing)? What is the best way to teach/train/learn (delivery)? Following

this discussion, a description of a framework for foster parent education will be suggested.

Many factors in Figure 1 highlight the importance of content in a foster parent training program. These include voluntarism, motivation, goals for learning, exo-systems, and macro-systems. Knowles et al. (2012) suggested that adult learners want to learn specific things because they are motivated to address real life situations and challenges (p. 34). In other words, adult learners may not be interested in learning simply for the sake of learning. Consider again a foster parent who is caring for an infant with FASD. It is likely they will be motivated to learn about FASD because it applies to their life in that moment. Giving foster parents the ability to access relevant content may increase their voluntarism and motivation to participate. In their discussion of voluntarism, Holmes and Abington (2000) suggest that a higher degree of voluntarism suggests a higher degree of motivation (p. 53). Naturally, motivation can lead to more meaningful learning. Knowles et al. (2012) pointed out that adult learners have specific goals for learning (p. 34). This is true for foster parent learners. Whether it is content related to caring for specific children or content that increases knowledge of the foster care system, for example, foster parent learners crave a curriculum that meets their knowledge needs in a timely manner.

Exo-systems and macro-systems also highlight the importance of foster parent training content. For example, it can be vital to understand changes and shifts in government, social systems, or political systems. Foster parents are part of this complex system leading to challenges such as role ambiguity (Brown & Calder, 1999; Buehler et al., 2003; Cooley & Petren, 2011). Training content must reflect and address the complex and fluid nature of exo-systems and macro-systems. Clearly content is vital to foster

parent training programs; however, foster parents have specific needs and goals for learning, and the fluid nature of foster care necessitates content that is meaningful and relevant.

The factors that highlight the need for relevant content also highlight the need for accessibility or timeliness. As I mentioned earlier, Knowles et al. (2012) suggested that adult learners want relevant learning experiences (p. 34). Foster parents can have children placed in their home with little or no notice and challenges can arise quickly and unexpectedly. Accordingly, educational opportunities must reflect this timely responsiveness. Likewise, aspects of exo-systems and macro-systems such as governments and political systems can change, heightening the need for timely training opportunities so foster parents are well-equipped to be successful in the context of these systems. Foster parent training programs should have relevant content, but this content must also be accessible to foster parents when they need it.

In addition to content and timing, delivery is a major factor that must be considered when designing a foster parent training program. Dorsey et al. (2008) argued that widely used foster parent training programs provide didactic training but pay little attention to contemporary views of effective adult learning approaches, such as problem-based learning and interactive presentations (p. 13). Delivery should flow out of content and timing. For example, if foster parents indicate a strong need for foundational knowledge regarding FASD, training designers could gather relevant content and make it accessible immediately. In a different scenario, if foster parents have indicated a need for understanding the impact of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous communities, training designers could develop an interactive session that includes story-telling from a

Residential School survivor or could organize a Blanket Exercise for interested foster parents. In other words, certain content can lend itself to specific types of delivery, including online or in-person. Suggestions for other similar delivery approaches are illustrated in Figure 1. These include *dialogue*, *arts-based*, *story-telling*, and *experiential*, among others. Education program designers should consider the immediate needs of foster parent learners and the specific content in order to design a meaningful foster parent training program.

Framework

Adult learning theory suggests that learning should be relevant (content), accessible (timing), and meaningful (delivery) for foster parent learners. For this reason, foster parents must have a considerable voice in the design and delivery of foster parent training. Figure 2 captures my proposed framework for a foster parent training program based on my ecological theory of adult learning.

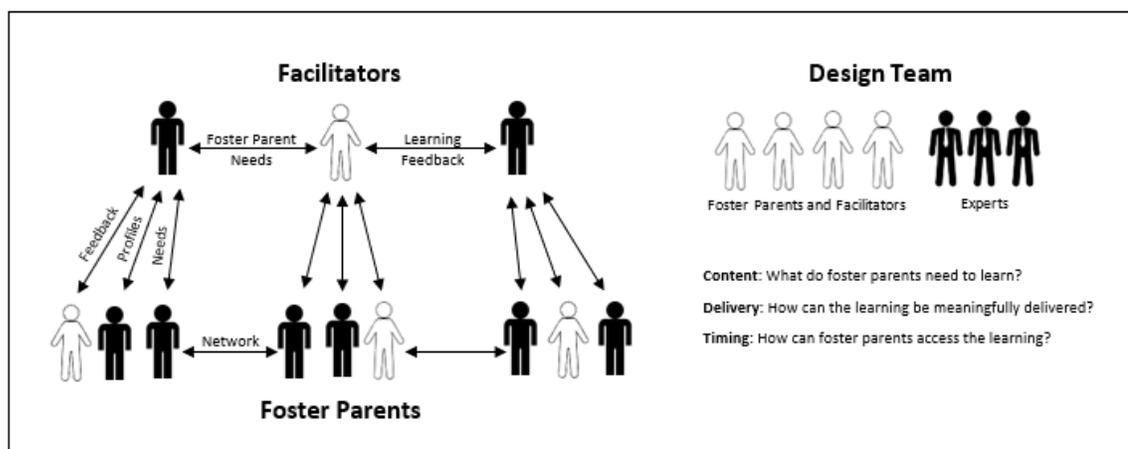


Figure 2. A proposed framework for a foster parent training program.

Facilitators. *Facilitators* are assigned a specific group of foster parents in this framework for a number of reasons. First, facilitators can communicate with their group of foster parents about their training needs. This will enable facilitators to identify trends

and common needs among their foster parents that can be communicated with other facilitators and the *Design Team*. This will allow the foster parent training program to respond to the developing and complex needs of foster parents. Secondly, facilitators can create a *Profile* for their foster parents, identifying the training they have completed and what their strengths and areas for growth might be. These profiles could be used as tools for placement of children coming into foster care. For example, if an infant with FASD comes into care, training profiles could be accessed and the child could be placed with someone who has infant care, brain development, and FASD training. Esaki et al. (2012) explained that “[w]hen foster parents receive quality training, they are more likely to retain their licenses, have greater placement lengths and provide more favorable ratings of their experiences as foster parents.”

In this framework, facilitators are also responsible for delivering training experiences for foster parents, a practice currently used in Alberta’ foster parent training program. Facilitators should also be part of the design team. A thorough understanding of foster parent needs and challenges, coupled with their experience with delivering training, make facilitators valuable members of the design team. Facilitators will understand what foster parents view as meaningful training and what training foster parents want improved or changed based on the feedback and communication with their group of foster parents and other facilitators.

Foster Parents. In addition to participating in training experiences, foster parents play a major role in my proposed framework. First of all, foster parents are assigned a facilitator who creates a profile for them. Foster parents also communicate their training needs and give their facilitator feedback on current training opportunities. This

communication will help shape the design and implementation of the foster parent training program. Foster parents should also be part of the design team. Who better to help design foster parent training than the people who experience the day-to-day successes and challenges of being a foster parent? Foster parents can provide valuable insights into what foster parents need to learn, how the learning can be meaningfully delivered, and when foster parents need access to learning.

My framework also includes a *Network* for foster parents. In Alberta, there is currently no such system related to foster parent training. Foster parents can network through the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association and various social media outlets including Facebook. In my framework, foster parents would have the opportunity to engage in a networking platform. This might take the form of a website or App. Research on adult learning theory consistently highlighted the fact that adult learners have life experience to draw on. A networking platform would allow foster parents to ask questions and support each other in the care of children. In other words, foster parents could draw on their experiences with children and training and share information and advice with each other. I believe this could be a powerful tool for foster parent training: make every foster parent a resource.

Design Team. In my framework, foster parents, facilitators, and experts comprise the design team. The hollow people in Figure 2 symbolize the foster parents and facilitators who are part of the design team. The design team also includes experts, the people with ties in Figure 2, who can offer valuable insight when designing, implementing, and modifying training experiences. Experts on FASD, Children Services, trauma, Indigenous issues, and adult learning theory, to name a few, can help shape the

content, timing, and delivery of foster parent training. The design team would be responsible for ensuring meaningful training opportunities are available to foster parents. Three questions the design team should consider are (1) *What do foster parents need to learn?*, (2) *How can the learning be meaningfully delivered?*, and (3) *How can foster parents access the learning?* Table 3 describes the roles involved in my framework.

Table 4

Description of Roles in Proposed Framework

Role	Description
Foster Parents	Communicate with facilitators about training needs Reflect on training regarding training content, delivery, and timing; provide feedback to facilitators Be part of Design Team Participate in training experiences
Facilitators	Assigned a group of foster parent learners Communicate with foster parents about training needs Create training profile for foster parent learners Communicate with other facilitators to establish common needs for training Be part of Design Team
Design Team	Includes foster parents and facilitators Includes experts in relevant fields when designing training experiences Consider foster parent and facilitator feedback regarding content, timing, and delivery Design, schedule, and modify training experiences

Current approach. This framework varies significantly from the current approach to foster parent training in Alberta. First of all, this framework is designed to be responsive to foster parent needs. Currently, foster parents in Alberta must complete a

fixed set of training sessions covering specific topics within a set amount of years. Although foster parents can choose when to participate in these sessions as much as scheduling limitations will allow, many learning experiences will not relate to their day-to-day challenges. For example, due to limited availability and our need to complete all the mandatory training in the allotted time, I have participated in a session about transitioning teenagers into adulthood, despite the fact we were caring for newborns and had no intention of caring for older children. My proposed framework has established communication and feedback networks that will ensure training is tailored to the immediate needs of foster parents.

The delivery of training in Alberta's current approach is also limited. Training largely consists of three-hour, teacher-directed sessions. Although discussions, group work, and multi-media presentations may be used during some of these sessions, teacher-directed lectures comprise most of the approaches to training foster parents in Alberta experience. This does not align with traditional or contemporary theories of adult learning. As noted previously, adults are relational, learn from experience, and have specific goals for learning. In my proposed framework, foster parents, facilitators, and experts design training experiences that will vary in delivery approach depending on content and need. Based on the content and need, the design team may plan training experiences that are experiential, transformative, arts-based, teacher-directed, self-directed, or involve dialogue or story-telling, for example (see Figure 1).

Accessibility is another limitation of the current foster parent training program in Alberta. A fixed set of sessions with often limited availability does not reflect foster parent learners' need to know, nor their goals for learning. To a certain extent, the current

approach in Alberta does allow for foster parents to participate in relevant training when needed. For example, if a child with FASD is placed in your home, it might be possible to participate in related training in a timely matter. It is also possible, however, that desired training is not available when needed, or it was completed earlier because of the pressure of completing all sessions in the allotted time. Although my proposed framework would likely not be immune to accessibility issues, the design team would be flexible in ensuring that online training was available when needed and the design team would schedule training experiences based on foster parent motivation and need.

Framework in Action

My proposed framework for a foster parent training program is designed to acknowledge and apply traditional and contemporary adult learning theory. Consider the following examples of this framework in action in which foster parent training is relevant, meaningful, and accessible.

An example: Supporting school success. Many foster parents are struggling with supporting the success of their children in care at school. They feel frustrated because they are not familiar with available supports at schools. Some foster parents are not experiencing positive communication or interactions with school staff and administration. There is also confusion regarding what information should be communicated with the foster parents instead of, or in addition to, the caseworker and other professionals involved.

In my framework, these foster parents begin communicating a need for training in this area to their assigned facilitator, who may see this as a common theme among multiple foster parents in their group. Then, in regular, structured communication

between facilitators perhaps in person, by email or phone, or using some other platform it may become clear that foster parents from many groups share a need for training in this area.

Once facilitators have identified learning about supporting children in school as a common need, this information should be shared with the design team. At a design team meeting, facilitators and foster parents discuss various concerns that have been raised by foster parents. It may be agreed that a session be designed to inform and equip foster parents to better support children in care be successful at school. The design team considers different approaches that would provide a meaningful training experience related to this topic. It may also be decided that an expert should be involved in the design and delivery of this training. A principal from a local school district could be contacted because they have a high population of children in foster care attending their school. The principal would be asked to provide information regarding the supports and resources that schools can offer and outlines their school district's policy on communication when there are multiple guardians and professionals involved. A Children's Services expert may also be consulted to offer information on the policies that address foster parent roles and responsibilities regarding the schooling of children in care.

The information from both experts, in addition to any other information the design team identifies as relevant, may be compiled into a digital information package. The design team would also schedule an appropriate number of three-hour sessions for interested foster parents, during which they may decide that the session will include a teacher-directed learning component with a facilitator reviewing the information package then printing paper copies for participating foster parent learners. It may also be decided

that the Children's Services expert and the school principal will participate in the sessions. Time will be allotted for dialogue among participating foster parents to establish common concerns and experiences. A question and answer opportunity should follow, with both experts offering insights and information about common concerns and specific cases. The information package may then be made available in digital format for interested foster parents. This will allow foster parents to access this information as needed.

Once the session is designed and scheduled, interested foster parents could sign up to participate using the online platform. If sessions are in high demand and fill up quickly, the design team would schedule additional sessions to respond to foster parent need. Prior to this training experience, participating foster parents will be sent a *Reflection for Learning* (Appendix A) in digital format. This tool enables participating foster parents to reflect on and identify their level of knowledge and experience and allows foster parents to identify areas of interest and need. Appendix B provides an example of what a completed reflection might look like. These reflections are accessed by the facilitators prior to the training experience, allowing them to tailor the experience further to meet the needs of foster parents. In this example, facilitators might spend more time on resources available at schools and what the communication process should look like.

Time will pass from when foster parents begin to communicate their need to learn more about supporting success at school to when facilitators identify this as a common need, the design team creates a training experience, and it becomes available to foster parents. However, it may not always be necessary to design new training experiences

based on foster parent needs. Once a training experience is created and made available, if the same or similar need arises later, the experience can be made available again, scheduled more often, or modified by the design team to meet new, related needs. Additionally, by making the information package available in digital format, facilitators could direct interested foster parents to this information immediately at any time. So, although creating a new training experience will not be immediate, over time this framework will include many unique training opportunities that can be updated, modified, or deleted to reflect foster parent needs.

Another example: Future directions. Current issues in Canada and Alberta at the exo-system (mass media, government) and macro-system (legal systems, political systems) levels regarding the history of Residential Schools, the 60's Scoop, and the current state of the foster care system have caught the attention of many foster parents. Foster parents may begin to wonder how these issues will impact the foster care system going forward. Again, applying the elements of the proposed framework, foster parents may have been communicating a need for learning in this area with their assigned facilitators. Communication between facilitators could have revealed this as a growing trend among foster parents and this information would be shared with the design team.

In considering this specific foster parent need around understanding and applying First Nations, Metis, and Inuit knowledge, the design team may decide that a previously designed session can be modified and updated, rather than creating a new training experience. The previously designed training experience was a whole-day session on location at a nearby reservation during which an elder presented an Indigenous perspective on local history in a story-telling approach. The design team could decide that

this same approach would be meaningful for foster parents who need to learn more about Indigenous history. However, in order to address foster parent needs regarding the impact current issues may have on the foster care system, the design team agrees to partner with Children's Services. It may be decided that this training will still be a whole-day session, but it will be split between elder story-telling in the morning and a Children's Services presentation in the afternoon. A time for a talking circle, led by the elder, could be built into the end of the day, giving foster poster parents, facilitators, and experts the opportunity to share the impact of their learning. The design team could see this as an excellent way for all the adult learners involved to recognize and address the spiritual and emotional aspects of learning.

This whole-day experience hosted in a specific space and place allows for many participants and the design team may schedule this training in proportion to foster parent need. Like the previous example, foster parents could sign up for this training experience using an online platform and, prior to participating, would be sent the Reflection for Learning template in digital format. Foster parents would complete this tool and facilitators analyze the responses for commonalities. In this example, many foster parents may indicate a strong desire to learn about the future direction of the foster care system based on current trends. Facilitators would share this with the Children's Services expert prior to the training experience in order that they customize their presentation accordingly. The expert's presentation, notes, or information package would also be made available online for foster parents to access at any time.

Reflection for Learning

In both examples of this framework in action, foster parents complete a Reflection for Learning (Appendix A). Many theories of adult learning suggest adult learners are individuals who must understand themselves before being able to meaningfully participate in adult learning. My Reflection for Learning tool enables foster parent learners to better understand themselves prior to engaging in a training experience, allowing for more meaningful learning. In addition to cultivating reflective practices among foster parent learners, the template can be used by facilitators, helping them create more relevant experiences. This tool increases the responsiveness of the framework in action by enabling facilitators to further differentiate participants' learning experiences.

Question 1. The first question for this reflection tool is *what do you already know about the learning content?* This question activates the learner's prior knowledge and allows facilitators to gauge the knowledge base of learners. If, for example, most of the participants in a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) session indicate having extensive foundational knowledge of FASD, a trainer may spend less time on that foundational knowledge. A wide array of answers to this question may prove challenging for facilitators in their effort to tailor the learning experience. However, this question will allow facilitators to better understand the learners in their classroom and address their needs more effectively.

Question 2. The second question for this reflection tool is *what relevant personal experiences might impact your learning?* This question is related to the first question in activating learners' prior knowledge and experience with a topic. Experience is a common theme in adult learning theory. Merriam (2001) noted that one of the

assumptions regarding adult learners in andragogy is that their accumulated life experience can offer a resource for learning (p. 5). Kawalilak and Groen (2014) explained that experiential learning agrees that learner experiences should guide the adult educator (p. 151). In addition to foster parent learners reflecting on related experience and understanding how experiences might impact their learning, this question will help facilitators better understand the learners in their classroom. Based on learner responses, perhaps a facilitator leads a case study based on a situation similar to responses submitted by a learner.

Question 3. It is also useful for adult learners to reflect on their motivation for learning. Motivation is closely related to voluntarism. The third question on this reflection asks *what is your motivation for participating in this learning?* In their discussion of voluntarism, Holmes and Abington (2000) suggested that learners vary in the extent to which this impacts their motivation. Some learners completely volunteer for learning experiences, while others are asked or told to participate. Therefore, educators need to tailor the learning experience based on the level of voluntarism of the learners (p. 53). Although every foster parent in Alberta is required to take the same set of modules, they have the ability to participate at relevant times, perhaps as needs arise, and they may participate in sessions that they would have volunteered for if they weren't required. If many foster parents reflect on their motivation and voluntarism and indicate they 'just want to get it done,' trainers can tailor the learning experience accordingly, perhaps using a more teacher-directed approach. However, if foster parents indicate their motivation and voluntarism is high, trainers may choose to take a more student-directed approach.

Question 4. Question four addresses foster parents' goals for learning. It asks *what knowledge, skills, or attributes do you hope to learn?* This is an important factor to reflect on prior to learning. By reflecting on the knowledge, skills, and attributes you hope to develop during a learning experience, it can focus your learning and make it more meaningful. According to Knowles et al. (2005), adults, unlike children and youth, are motivated by increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life (p. 68). In other words, foster parents may not be interested in learning for the sake of learning; they likely have specific goals for learning that will increase their knowledge, skills, and attributes as a foster parent, leading to better placement quality, outcomes, and quality of life. In addition to helping foster parents understand their goals for learning, this reflection question will again enable facilitators to tailor the learning experience to meet the needs of the learners.

Question 5. The influence of emotions in adult learning has recently received attention. In their discussion of emotions and learning, Kawalilak and Groen (2014) explained that emotions are an integral part of the process of adult learning and by acknowledging and including emotions, more holistic learning can take place (p. 166). These emotions can be positive and/or negative, and each can lead to meaningful learning. They content that, “[i]mportant to our learning process is recognizing, naming, and accepting our negative emotions, especially since they can lead us to important learning and change” (p. 167). Question five on this reflection tool asks *how might your emotions impact your learning and how might your learning impact your emotions?* Returning to the FASD session example, this question would allow a foster parent to reflect on how their knowledge and experience with FASD has either negatively or

positively impacted their emotions and how this might impact their learning. For example, if a foster parent has negative emotions associated with experiences with FASD, they might be more or less motivated to learn based on these emotions. Additionally, facilitators can tailor the learning experience more effectively knowing some of the emotions of the learners prior to the learning experience.

Question 6. Question six addresses the spirituality of the learner. It asks *how might your spirituality impact your learning and how might your learning impact your spirituality?* Kawalilak and Groen (2014) pointed out that there is potential for spirituality to play an important role in adult learning and it is a topic that has received a lot of attention in recent literature (p. 169). It is useful for foster parent learners to reflect on the impact of their spirituality because it is possible that foster parents' spirituality negatively or positively impacts their learning about various topics and issues. For example, foster parents are encouraged to support the cultural background of children in care. At times, children's spirituality or their community's spiritual practices may not align with foster parent spirituality. Being aware of how your spirituality might impact your learning or how learning might impact your spirituality will better prepare foster parents to meaningfully engage in learning experiences.

Question 7. This question addresses the impact of other micro-systems and settings that foster parent learners are part of. It also addresses relationships that might impact their learning. This question asks *how might your family, friends, work, or other areas impact your learning and how might your learning impact these areas in your life?* Bronfenbrenner (1976) argued that adult learners are impacted by various settings such as family and work environments. Again, by reflecting prior to the learning experience on

how these other settings might impact their learning and how their learning might impact these settings, foster parents will better understand themselves and be able to engage more meaningfully in the learning experience.

Question 8. Question eight asks *if you were going to facilitate this learning, what would you do?* This question allows foster parents to have input on the design of the learning experience. Holton et al. (2001) suggested that, in general, adult learners see themselves as capable of self-direction and resist ‘education’ or ‘training’ that implies dependency (p. 120). Although this may not be true for all foster parent learners in Alberta, this question allows foster parents who see themselves to be capable of self-direction to indicate what type of approach might be valuable to them. These responses would capture much of the previous reflection questions. Returning to the FASD session example, after reflecting on their prior knowledge and experiences with FASD, goals for learning, motivation, and emotions associated with FASD, a foster parent might suggest that they would prefer to explore personal experiences to learn more about the impact of FASD. After reflecting on the first seven questions, a different foster parent may suggest a more teacher-directed approach would be useful because they lack prior knowledge, experience, and emotions associated with FASD. Their goal for learning might be learning the foundational knowledge associated with FASD.

Question 9. A final question on this reflection tool allows foster parent learners to reflect on whether they have questions about anything related to the learning experience. It asks foster parents to *write down any other thoughts or questions you have about this learning.* Similar to the previous one, this question allows learners to indicate if they have questions about the upcoming learning experience or if they have comments about

anything related to the learning experience. This gives foster parent another opportunity to have a voice concerning the content and delivery of the learning. Continuing with the FASD session example, perhaps learners may ask if certain topics can be covered or certain skills or attributes can be explored.

Limitations

There are potential limitations to this project and to the resulting proposed framework. First, the review of traditional and contemporary theories of adult learning is not exhaustive. In other words, I do not claim that my Ecological Theory of Adult Learning (Figure 1) is based on a comprehensive study of adult learning theory. Rather, it captures assumptions of the major traditional theories of adult learning and incorporates many facets of contemporary ideas regarding adult learning. Naturally, this means my proposed framework for a foster parent training program reflects these limitations.

Additionally, my proposed framework is theoretical in nature and its implementation faces practical challenges. First, an appropriate number of trained facilitators would be needed, and their role would necessitate a higher level of commitment than the current role of trainers. Facilitators would also require training in adult learning theory and approaches, all of which requires time and financial support. Second, a platform for accessing information, signing up for training, and networking would need to be established and maintained. This might be in the form of a website or App, for example. Again, this requires time and financial support.

A third consideration is the participation of foster parents, facilitators, and experts in the design team. Would this be a paid position for foster parents, and would facilitators receive extra compensation for involvement? Additionally, it may prove challenging to

access and finance experts in various fields to be part of the design team and be involved in various training experiences. My framework may also necessitate supervisory positions to manage the various aspects of this foster parent training program. Who will be responsible for hiring and managing facilitator positions? I would argue that one or more adult learning experts would be appropriate for such positions. Additionally, there may be room for adult learning experts to be permanent members of the design team, ensuring that all training experiences will be relevant, meaningful, and accessible.

Conclusions

Foster parents face many unique challenges that necessitate meaningful learning opportunities. Understanding foster parents as adult learners is essential in order to create an effective framework for foster parent education. This project has proposed a framework for foster parent training programs based on traditional and contemporary understandings of adult learners. Although this framework is not immune to limitations, it provides an ideal not bound by logistical and financial constraints. By understanding foster parents as adult learners impacted by various factors and systems, foster parent education programs can be designed to be responsive to foster parent needs with relevant content, meaningful delivery, and increased accessibility.

Finally, this project aims to improve the lives of children in foster care. Foster parent education programs should begin and end with those children in care. Children in care face significant challenges and trauma. In order to support their success, foster parents require education that increases their knowledge, skills, and attributes related to the day-to-day care of these children. Understanding foster parents as adult learners will cultivate meaningful foster parent education programs, which will positively impact their

ability to support the success of children in care. This, above all else, may be a goal worth striving for.

Appendix A
Reflection for Learning

Session name: _____

Your name: _____

1. What do you already know about the learning content?
2. What relevant personal experiences might impact your learning?
3. What is your motivation for participating in this learning?
4. What knowledge, skills, or attributes do you hope to learn?
5. How might your emotions impact your learning? How might your learning impact your emotions?
6. How might your spirituality impact your learning? How might your learning impact your spirituality?
7. How might your family, friends, work, or other areas impact your learning? How might your learning impact these areas in your life?
8. If you were going to facilitate this learning, what would you do?
9. Write down any other thoughts or questions you have about this learning.

Appendix B
Reflection for Learning Example

Session name: Supporting Success in School

Your name: John Smith

1. What do you already know about the learning content?
 - a. *I know very little about this topic. I have never had a child in school, so this is all new for me. I know from friends what communication looks like for them, but their children are not in care. My child's caseworker mentioned something about a 'Success in School' meeting we could have, but I'm not sure how that works.*
2. What relevant personal experiences might impact your learning?
 - a. *I don't have any personal experience with supporting children in care at school. Having a child in care attend school is new to me. When I went to school one of my friends was in foster care, but I think school's operated differently then.*
3. What is your motivation for participating in this learning?
 - a. *A child recently placed with me just started Grade 3. I have never cared for a child in school. I'm finding that the school is communicating more with the caseworker than with me, and my child is not doing well in school and doesn't want to go. I have no idea what I can do, or the school can do to support.*
4. What knowledge, skills, or attributes do you hope to learn?
 - a. *What supports can be put in place to help my child at school*

- b. *What information and communication am I entitled to?*
 - c. *What supports are available through Children's Service to help the situation?*
5. How might your emotions impact your learning? How might your learning impact your emotions?
 - a. *I am frustrated. I feel like I am being treated like a babysitter by the school, instead of a parent or caregiver. It breaks my heart when my child doesn't want to go to school and I feel helpless because I don't know how to support.*
6. How might your spirituality impact your learning? How might your learning impact your spirituality?
 - a. *I don't think my spirituality will impact my learning about this topic.*
7. How might your family, friends, work, or other areas impact your learning? How might your learning impact these areas in your life?
 - a. *I don't think these areas will impact my learning too much. I have some negativity towards family and friends because when I bring up problems with school, they appear unconcerned because my child is 'just a foster kid.'*
 - b. *I hope my learning gives me the knowledge and skills I'm looking for so my stress level can go down. This will have a positive impact on the other areas of my life.*

8. If you were going to facilitate this learning, what would you do?
 - a. *I would find out what information foster parents are entitled to and information about what schools can do and I would share it with foster parents. I think foster parents just need to know what they can do.*
9. Write down any other thoughts or questions you have about this learning.
 - a. *Will there be a chance to talk to someone about my specific situation?*
 - b. *Will the information be available online so I can find it later if I need it?*

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