Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde: The ADD/ADHD Instructor through Undergraduate and Graduate Student’s Eyes

Abstract:

In this session we will consider a perennial issue from a perspective not often considered. What might explain a recurring difference in course assessment between graduate and undergraduate groups? How might the instructor’s of Adult Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AADD/ADHD) help explain the differing assessment? Might an instructor with AADD/ADHD demonstrate behaviors that explain the differing assessment? The session will consider this and discuss coping strategies while reducing the risks that these behaviors pose in the classroom. Designed primarily for instructors with ADD/ADHD, this session will also discuss this issue from the AADD/ADHD students perspective too.

Background: One of the authors attended OBTC for the first time in 2009. A number of conversations occurred with more senior faculty around the topic of polar reactions of students in these two groups. From those discussions, further reflection and research led to the idea of facilitating a discussion around the abstract presented above.
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One of the authors of this paper is a new faculty member who has been teaching in parallel, Organizational Behavior to undergraduate and graduate classes each semester since accepting a tenure track position in the Management department of a Business School. Almost since the beginning, the undergraduate student’s response to the classroom has been polarized—some students were very engaged but, a significant portion was very dissatisfied. Conversely, almost from the beginning, the graduate students were enthusiastic about the course and appreciated the instructor’s approach to the course. Hence, the quest for understanding of this phenomenon has been ongoing for several years. Along the way, a number of theories have been considered, interventions developed and implemented and much has been learned. In the remainder of this summary, we will highlight aspects of AADD/ADHD and its associated behaviors and give the barest of introductions to the differences between the two student populations. All of this background sets the stage for consideration of appropriate strategies that will be presented in the workshop/presentation.

No approved diagnostic measure has been accepted to assess AADD/ADHD in adults at present. However AADD/ADHD is diagnosed in children using the DSM-4 (1994). Review of the following list of behaviors can be read and adapted for parallels in adults. Many have developed their own adaptations (See the Attention Deficit Association website). Clinical diagnosis of children requires that at least 6 of the following behaviors are present:

(a) often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in school work, work, or other activities
(b) often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities
(c) often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
(d) often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)
(e) often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
(f) often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such a schoolwork or homework)
(g) often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g., toys, school assignments, pencils, books, or tools)
(h) is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
(i) is often forgetful in daily activities.

If read from an adult perspective it easy to draw parallels between the requirements for clinical diagnosis in children to adults in the workplace. Another way to reflect on behaviors listed above is through traditional measures of personality.
The sub-traits conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae 1985, 1992) and consolidation (Howard & Howard, 1981) include sub-traits that, on the surface at least, relate to this condition. Consider those with low scores in concentration, methodicalness, and organization. Those individuals at some point would respond affirmatively to a number of the behaviors used to diagnose children with AADD/ADHD.

Work by a number of researchers has considered this and is ongoing (Ranseen et.al., 1998; Campbell & Baer, 1998) suggest parallels between personality and AADD/ADHD, but has often gone beyond the suggestion that low scores in consolidation are suggestive of the condition. For example, Ranseen and collaborators suggested that adults with ADD exhibited significantly higher neuroticism scores in addition to lower scores in conscientiousness. Before considering the implications of these scores, we need to consider the two student groups.

Over a number of semesters, the same instructor has conducted a similarly designed Organizational Behavior course for the two groups of students. In the case of the undergraduate assessments, the instructor is perceived by many students as being a direct descendant of the evil Dr Jekyll. What are the characteristics of the adolescent learner –as compared to the adult student?

A vast research tradition has studied the intricacies of adolescent education and much work has been done around the unique dynamics of millennial generation students. The instructor has read some of that work, and has sought, over time to accommodate many of the dynamics that the research presents. E-Shamy (2004) and many others have made suggestions of how best to engage with those undergraduates thought of as comprising the millennial generation. Similarly, much research exists to differentiate adult education. One suspects that graduate students might more closely resonate with the principles that differentiate the adult student studied by Knowles and others (Knowles, 1970 and Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Assuming the instructor has effectively altered the approaches adopted for use in these two settings, what else might explain the differing reaction? Are there other characteristics that might explain this result? One suggestion is offered by Smola & Sutton (2002). They considered differences in work values across the generations. Might differences in classroom work values distinguish the perception of undergraduate and graduate students? Any number of explanations exist, but the suggestion that the dysfunctions of AADD/ADHD might be playing an important role has emerged over time.

**Strategies**

In the workshop/discussion, the focus will be on providing sufficient background (expanding and clarifying some of the information above) around the theories of adolescent
versus adult education to make the case that there are significant differences. Then, by considering the behaviors associated with ADD and selected dimensions of personality in light of different learning needs, we will discuss specific ways to adapt to each learning environment.

**References and additional reading.**


