

Teaching with the Adult Learner in Mind

Resources



Webinar Handbook 2017

Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators

RESOURCES

Teaching with the Adult Learner in Mind

Rod Duckworth, Chancellor
Career and Adult Education, Department of Education

Stefany Deckard, Director
Adult Education

Ila Waite-Burns, Program Specialist
Adult Education, Career and Adult Education

June Rall, Director of IPDAE
Tamara Serrano, Project Support Specialist for IPDAE

Resources Developed and Designed By
Bonnie Goonen



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Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators
3209 Virginia Avenue - Fort Pierce, FL 34981
Phone 772-462-7409 • E-mail info@floridaipdae.org

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Seven Characteristics of Adult Learners

1. Adult students are mature people and prefer to be treated as such. They learn best in a democratic, participatory, and collaborative environment. They need to be actively involved in determining how and what they learn and they need active rather than passive learning experiences. They are self-reliant learners and prefer to work at their own pace.
2. Adults have needs which are concrete and immediate. They tend to be impatient unless they see that information can be applied to practical problems. They are task or problem-centered rather than subject-centered. This doesn't mean they are not interested in subject area, but their learning is not complete until it is expressed in appropriate action.
3. Adults are more impatient in the pursuit of learning objectives. They are less tolerant of 'busy work' that does not have immediate and direct application to their objectives. If it is not relevant to their needs then they aren't very interested.
4. Adults have useful past experience. They are more realistic and have insights about what is likely to work and what is not. They are more readily able to relate new facts to past experience.
5. Adults enjoy having their talents and information made use of in a teaching situation. They bring their own experiences and knowledge into the classroom, which they like to use as a resource for learning-provide them with practical learning activities to build on and use their prior skills and knowledge.
6. Adults are intrinsically motivated. They are motivated by internal incentives and curiosity, rather than external rewards. They are also motivated by the usefulness of the material to be learned and learn better when material is related to their own needs and interests.
7. Adults are sometimes fatigued when they attend classes. They therefore, appreciate any teaching devices that add interest and sense of liveliness, variety of method, audiovisual aids, change of pace and sense of humor-anything that will make the learning process easier.

Andragogy and Pedagogy – What’s the Difference?

For centuries, the most commonly accepted approach towards teaching and learning was pedagogical in nature. The Greek roots of the word pedagogy are *ped* or child, plus *agogos* which means to lead. A literal interpretation would be *to lead a child*. By definition pedagogy is the art, science, or profession of teaching. Andragogy, on the other hand refers to the art or science of helping adults learn. The Greek roots of this term, *andro* meaning man -or adult- and *agogos* to lead, literally means *to lead a man or adult*.

	Pedagogical	Andragogical
The Learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learner is dependent upon the instructor for all learning • The teacher/instructor assumes full responsibility for what is taught and how it is learned. • The teacher/instructor evaluates learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learner is self-directed • The learner is responsible for his/her own learning • Self-evaluation is characteristic of this approach
Role of the Learner’s Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learner comes to the activity with little experience that could be tapped as a resource for learning • The experience of the instructor is most influential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner brings a greater volume and quality of experience • Adults are a rich resource for one another • Different experiences assure diversity in groups of adults • Experience becomes the source of self-identify
Readiness to Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are told what they have to learn in order to advance to the next level of mastery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any change is likely to trigger a readiness to learn • The need to know in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of one’s life • Ability to assess gaps between where one is now and where one wants and needs to be
Orientation to Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is a process of acquiring prescribed subject matter • Content units are sequenced according to the logic of the subject matter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners want to perform a task, solve a problem, live in a more satisfying way • Learning must have relevance to real-life tasks • Learning is organized around life/work situations rather than subject matter units
Motivation for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily motivated by external pressures, competition for grades, and the consequences of failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal motivators: self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, self-confidence, self-actualization

The Principles of Andragogy: Helping Adult Learners to Learn

Part of being an effective adult education instructor involves understanding how adults learn best. Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles). Specifically, andragogy places value on the **process** of learning. It uses approaches to learning that are problem-based and collaborative rather than didactic or rooted in lecture, and emphasizes more equality between the instructor and the learner.

Knowles identified the following six principles of adult learning:

1. Adults are internally motivated and self-directed

Adult learners make choices relevant to their learning objectives. Students need to be given the freedom to assume responsibility for their own choices. To encourage more self-directed and internal motivation to learn, instructors should:

- Develop interactive learning exercises that are challenging, but not overwhelming
- Show genuine interest in the thoughts, opinions and questions of learners
- Provide feedback to learners, as appropriate, that is both constructive and specific
- Support disparate learning styles and generational differences by employing a variety of learning methods

2. Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences

Educators should encourage learners to connect past experiences with current knowledge and activities. Educators must know how to relate the sum of the learners' experience to the current learning experiences. Examples are to:

- Welcome opportunities for learners to share their interests and experiences
- Draw correlations between past experiences and current problem-solving challenges
- Facilitate opportunities for reflective learning
- Examine existing biases or habits that may influence future learning or skill development

3. Adults are goal oriented

Adult learners aim to acquire relevant and adequate knowledge and for this reason intended learning outcomes should be clearly identified. Once the learning goals have

been identified, educators must align the learning activities such that these objectives are fulfilled within a certain period of time. For example:

- Provide meaningful learning experiences that are clearly linked to personal/professional goals
- Share real-life case studies that connect the dots between theory and practice
- Ask questions that motivate reflection, inquiry and further research

4. Adults are relevancy oriented

Adult learners benefit by relating the assigned tasks to their own learning goals. If it is clear that the activities they are engaged into, directly contribute to achieving their personal learning objectives, then they will be inspired and motivated to engage in projects and successfully complete them. Make sure to:

- Ask learners at the beginning of the learning experience what they expect to learn
- Check for meaning, understanding and relevance (to the context of work) throughout the learning experience
- Identify what skills, knowledge or expertise learners gained as a result of participating in the learning experience
- Determine how learners might apply what they learned in the future (and in the context of their everyday lives)

5. Adults are practical

It is very important for educators to identify appropriate ways and convert theoretical learning to practical activities. Contextualizing instruction assists students in seeing the “why” something is important to learn. Learning is assisted when appropriate ways of implementing theoretical knowledge in real-life situations is made clear.

- Clearly explain rationale for learning something when presenting new ideas or innovative solutions
- Be explicit about how the content is useful and applicable to the learners’ work, daily life, or educational goals
- Promote active participation by allowing learners to try new things, offer suggestions or share healthy skepticism rather than simply observe
- Provide ample opportunities for repetition to promote skill development, confidence and competence

6. Adult learners like to be respected

Adult learners thrive in collaborative relationships with their educators. Learners become more productive when they're considered by their instructors as colleagues. When their contributions are acknowledged, then they are willing to put out their best work. Examples include:

- Taking an active interest in the development of all learners
- Acknowledging the wealth of experiences that the learners bring to their work
- Regarding learners as colleagues with unique perspectives and valuable life experience
- Encouraging the expression of new ideas, reasoning and feedback at every opportunity

10 Helpful Questions – How Are You Doing?

	Absolutely	Working On It	Not Currently
1. Do I have a set of standards for instructional practices and do I communicate them? (Am I using the Florida Curriculum Frameworks?)			
2. Do I use a variety of interest-engaging advance organizers?			
3. Do I maintain a focus on essential content that meets intended learning outcomes?			
4. Do I make use of previews at the beginning of class and reviews at the end of class?			
5. Do I apply adult learning principles to engage adult students?			
6. Do I have ways to encourage and reward participation in class?			
7. Do I make use of active learning group exercises to facilitate collaboration?			
8. Do I evaluate higher-order learning and thinking, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and inquiry skills, rather than memorization skills?			
9. Do I make use a process approach to assignments where that is appropriate?			
10. Do I make use a process approach to assignments where that is appropriate?			

Engaging Adult Learners: Philosophy, Principles and Practices (2013) – Jim Bryson