

Conclusions

Teaching adults is a challenging and constantly evolving activity. It is also immensely enjoyable and satisfying. Good preparation, appropriate teaching styles, a supportive environment and a commitment to lifelong learning all go together to ensure that adults' learning experiences are positive and that tutors' jobs are equally fulfilling.

References

- 1 Corder, Nicholas (2002). *Learning to Teach Adults*. Routledge Farmer.
- 2 Honey, P. and Mumford, A. (1992). *The Manual of Learning Styles*. Maidenhead, Peter Honey.
- 3 Race, P. and Brown, S. (1993). *500 Tips for Tutors*. London, Kogan Page.
- 4 Rogers, A. (1996). *Teaching Adults*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- 5 Rogers, J. (2001). *Adults Learning* (4th edition). Buckingham, Open University Press.

Other Publications

The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) publishes a range of materials, including *The Adult Learning Yearbook* and a magazine *Adults Learning*, covering the education and training of adults.

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Teaching Adults

Your job may involve teaching and/or advising/facilitating adult learning. This article describes some of the main characteristics of adults as learners and suggests ways to help maximise their learning potential.

Although it is accepted that there are significant differences between being a child and being an adult, it is more difficult to define adulthood. Chronological age is usually used as the definition, but this can be misleading and current thinking tends to use concepts such as 'maturity' and 'life cycle.' It is often more useful to identify what *stage* adults are at, rather than what *age* they are.

Characteristics of adults may include:

- experience of life and work
- good and/or bad previous experiences of childhood learning
- responsibilities: family, domestic and financial
- a level of independence and an ability to make judgements

It is also important to remember that adults will have intentionally or unintentionally continued to learn throughout their lives – it's as normal, natural and unavoidable as breathing!

Characteristics of adults as learners may include:

- most (if not all) will have chosen to learn
- bringing with them experience, values and prior knowledge that will affect learning potential
- being usually well motivated, although some may lack confidence
- competing interests for their time, money and energy
- having varied styles of learning
- disabilities that require extra support

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Be as flexible as possible: allow for learner transfer to alternative courses



It is important to:

- get to know learners
- have a social area for learners and a private area where personal matters can be discussed
- explore learners' motivations
- help learners to identify an appropriate learning option and set realistic goals
- explain the concept of different learning styles and help learners identify their own preferred way of learning
- encourage learners to disclose any special learning needs or disabilities that might affect their learning, and respond in an appropriate way.
- help learners assess their basic skills levels (some may have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and computing skills may not be adequate for online learning)
- support learners throughout their learning experience and encourage them to continue learning

Teaching Adults

Although not exclusively applicable to teaching adults, the following may be of help in classroom teaching:

- ensure the classroom furniture is arranged in a learner-friendly way
- ensure the equipment is working
- plan each session carefully and explain the expected learning outcomes
- get to know your learners and facilitate time and opportunity for them to get to know each other
- make the class as interactive as possible
- revise and review at the beginning of each session
- use appropriate assessment tools
- make sure learners do not focus too much on the assessed aspects of the course – the non-assessed content is just as important
- use appropriate evaluation tools - verbal feedback at the end of each session can be useful
- be positive, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about your subject – don't panic if you don't know the answer to something
- be flexible so that individual learners' needs and interests may be met
- break down learning sessions into 15-20 minute blocks with regular comfort breaks
- use a variety of teaching methods and recognise learners' differing learning styles
- keep a journal that records your own teaching and learning

Above all try to make the learning enjoyable!

Coping with Non-Completion

It is a fact of adult learning that not all learners complete their chosen course. Reasons for dropping out may include:

- wrong course choice – either the topic or the level
- previous learning having a negative effect on new learning
- disabilities that are not appropriately supported
- changed personal/ work commitments or learning interests
- health or financial problems
- personality clash between the learner and the tutor

Although there will always be adults who discontinue their learning, you should try to find out why they have left and whether there is anything that could or should have been done by the learning centre.

Previous experience offers the following observations to minimise non-completion:

- organising taster sessions can be useful
- trying to identify difficulties before they become real problems: build in a short period before /after each class when learners can raise issues
- checking if there are any disabilities (disclosed or undisclosed) which might be affecting a learner's learning
- keeping in touch with learners, whether or not they have completed a class
- being as flexible as possible: allow for learner transfer to alternative courses
- ensuring course evaluations are completed, analysed and acted on

Chronological age is usually used as the definition, (of adulthood), but this can be misleading and current thinking tends to use concepts such as 'maturity' and 'life cycle'

Be positive, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about your subject – don't panic if you don't know the answer to something