



Creating Effective Adult Learning and Teaching Environments

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Creating Effective Learning Environments for Adults

- Presentation objectives:
 - To facilitate your obtaining a heightened sensitivity to the many aspects of a learning environment that can unknowingly inhibit adult performance or knowledge acquisition
 - To provide some tools, resources, and ideas for your subsequent efforts to create more effective learning environments for those adults you teach, train, counsel or manage



Understanding the Learning Environment

- Defining the learning environment: All of the physical surroundings, psychological or emotional conditions, and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in some educational enterprise



An Advanced Organizer

- See *Creating Environments for Effective Adult Learning*, a 1991 Jossey-Bass sourcebook I edited. Available electronically at the following site:
<http://www-distance.syr.edu/leindex.html>
- This is a book in which I selected colleagues who could write about the topic of learning environments



Topics Within the 1991 Jossey-Bass Sourcebook

- Physical Environment
 - Territoriality, seating, etc.
 - Lighting, aesthetics, etc.
 - Using technology
- Social/Cultural Issues
 - Race/racism
 - Gender
- Emotional/Psychological Issues
 - Setting the learning climate
 - “Baggage” brought to the learning setting



Physical Characteristics/Issues of Concern

- There are various physical characteristics or issues that can impede, affect, and/or impact on a learning environment
 - Lighting
 - Territoriality
 - Seating arrangements
 - An instructor's first contact with learners
 - Technology, etc.



Ergonomics – The Art of Designing Spaces for People

- Borrowing knowledge from architects, designers, cultural anthropologists, engineers, artists, etc. is useful in understanding the use of physical space
- This helps us understand more about such issues as the comfort needs of those using space and furnishings, room size issues, chairs and seating arrangements, etc.



Anthropometry – The Science of Human Body Measurements

- Another useful body of knowledge in thinking about physical space is the study of the human body
- This helps us think about such issues as seat pan size and human comfort needs, seat cushioning, table size and design, posture and lumbar support needs, the needs of left handed people, etc.



Proxemics – Observations of How People Use Space

- It also is valuable to understand how people use space as a special elaboration of culture
 - People have differing views and expectations about how close they sit or stand to another person (differences exist because of gender, culture, territoriality expectations, “herd” instincts, etc.)



Even Seating Arrangements are Involved

- Socio-fugal Patterns – this puts learners in straight rows like bus station seats
 - Can discourage interaction
 - Can focus attention during didactic lectures
- Socio-petal Patterns – this puts learners in circles or “U”-shapes
 - Usually encourages interaction
 - Puts teachers in a facilitative role



Aesthetics – Study of Human Potential in Using Senses

- Understanding how people perceive the use of their senses can be important in terms of appeal opportunities
 - Kinesthetics
 - Sight
 - Sound
 - Taste, etc.



Synaesthetics – Ability to Use Many Senses Simultaneously

- Understanding the ability of an individual for poly-sensory perceptions can be useful in learning environments
 - Multiple learning and teaching modalities can be utilized
 - Too much stimulation of any one sense may be limiting
 - Suggests the value of flexibility & variation



There are Sensory Changes During the Aging Process

- Several corresponding implications exist
 - Improved lighting may be needed
 - Visual clutter may need to be reduced
 - Glare may need to be controlled
 - Stimulus and luminance contrast may need to be considered
 - Color variations may be required



Other Areas of Potential Concern

- Acoustics, sound amplification
- Lighting
- Environmental conditions/temperature
- Room color
- Break out space, etc.



Some Useful Tools

- The resource noted earlier (<http://www-distance.syr.edu/leindex.html>) contains useful checklists or checklist links within or at the end of most chapters.
- For example, <http://www-distance.syr.edu/lechecklist.html> could analyze any teaching or training setting for the existence of a physical concern or deficiency that needs correction.



Psychological/Emotional Issues of Concern

- There are several psychological or emotional areas that need to be considered in the design of a learning environment
 - Various barriers to learning
 - Helping adult learners feel at ease
 - Helping adult learners assume control of their own learning efforts
 - Helping teachers/facilitators understand how to work effectively with adult learners

Three Types of Learning Barriers



- Situational – those barriers related to a person's situation in life, such as lack of time due to job and home responsibilities, transportation problems, lack of childcare, etc.
- Dispositional – those barriers associated with a person's attitude about learning and perception of self as a learner, such as a lack of confidence, a feeling of being too old to learn, being bored with learning, etc.
- Institutional – those barriers put in place by a learning institution that discourage or prevent an adult from participating, such as inconvenient scheduling, compulsory attendance requirements, restrictive locations, etc.

Helping Adult Learners Feel at Ease



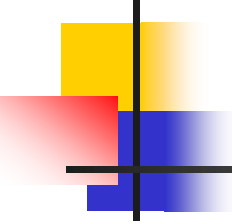
- The following Chapter by Sisco provides a number of ideas and material related to helping learners feel at ease:

<http://www-distance.syr.edu/ndacelech5.html>



Helping Learners Take Increasing Control of their Own Learning

- The following book by Hiemstra and Sisco the book by Brockett and Hiemstra provide numerous ideas about helping learners take increasing control:
<http://www-distance.syr.edu/iiindex.html>
<http://www-distance.syr.edu/sdlindex.html>



Helping Teachers Become More Effective with Adults

- The two books described in the previous slide contain information for teachers, trainers, and facilitators
- In addition, the following two links provide additional information:
<http://www-distance.syr.edu/III.html>
<http://www-distance.syr.edu/learning.html>



Social/Cultural Issues of Concern

- There are various social and/or cultural area that need to be considered in the design of a learning environment
 - Gender discrimination
 - Age discrimination
 - Racial discrimination
 - Internal/external issues faced by learners



Gender Discrimination Issues

- Following are several resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/ndacelech8.html>
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/attachc.html>
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/tips.html>



Age Discrimination Issues

- Following are several resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/agefact1.html>
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/agefact2.html>
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/unospeech.html>



Racial Discrimination Issues

- Following are several resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/protips.html>
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/ndacelech7.html>



Internal/External Issues Affecting Adult Learners

- Following are two resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:
- <http://www-distance.syr.edu/ndacelech6.html>
- <http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.345;jsessionid=iMDMM372Wia-?cookieSet=1>



Tips in Setting A Good Environment

- Have the teaching room ready ahead of time
- As students arrive, circulate and greet them; have a name tag on as you meet each of them
- In conversation find out something about each learner so you can relate to them as a person



Tips in Setting A Good Environment (2)

- Suggest that they grab a cup of coffee or tea (that you have already prepared), pick a seat in the socio-petal arrangement you have created, and get acquainted with their neighbors on each side
- Make sure each student can hear, see, and has adequate work space on the table at which they are seated
- Have learners establish a group identity, perhaps using an ice breaker to do this



Tips in Setting A Good Environment (3)

- Have people introduce themselves to fellow learners by describing something about themselves and what they hope to get out of the learning experience; include yourself in this introduction process
- Talk about the various learning resources and your teaching philosophy and approach
- Move into content slowly being conscious of individual differences and needs



Commit to Creating an Effective Learning Environment

- You are challenged to reexamine what it is you do and how you think regarding your educational role
- Help learners take more control of and responsibility for what happens in the learning environment
- Analyze and control the learning environment continuously



Commit to Creating an Effective Learning Environment (2)

- Find ways of incorporating the best of technology into the learning environment
- Discover how “you” can best work with learners
- Become proactive in bringing about change
- Make a personal commitment to change



FINALLY



Make your own personal
commitment to create
effective learning
environments!