REFLECTION ON THEORY AND PRACTICE

Educating adult learners: twelve tips for teaching business professionals

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ABSTRACT   *The goal of this paper is to provide specific suggestions for teaching adult business professionals. The suggestions we present are based on our combined experiences as instructors of business professionals who have returned to school for continuing education and as adult learners ourselves. In this article, we discuss the unique characteristics of adult learners, the importance of accommodating adult learners' needs, and how to create an academic environment that addresses these needs. Relevant educational literature is cited to provide support for the suggestions offered.*

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Educating adult learners: Twelve tips for teaching business professionals

Over the last several decades, the number of adults returning to school for continuing education

has increased exponentially (Altbach, Berdahl, and Gumport 2005; Brazziel 1989; Pillay 2002;

National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2008). Despite decreases in the traditional

college age population during the late 1980s and early 1990s, total enrollment increased during

this period (NCES 2008). In fact, according to Altbach et al. (2005) "…between 1975 and 1994,

fall enrollment in higher education institutions grew more than 25 percent, increasing from 11.2

to 14.3 million students" largely due to increased enrollments by nontraditional students (p. 319).

Adults over the age of 25 have been a rapidly growing demographic group in higher education

institutions; this group represents approximately 44% of currently enrolled students in higher

education (Altbach et al. 2005). The trend of adults returning to school to advance their

education is expected to continue. The NCES predicts a 21% rise in enrollment of nontraditional

aged students between 2005 and 2016.   For educators this is an exciting time to learn about and

explore new teaching techniques.

The field of adult learning, termed *andragogy*, developed from pioneering work by

Malcolm Knowles including his landmark book *The Adult Leaner: A Neglected Species*.

Knowles' work over the past 35 years suggests there are six basic principles of andragody: the

learner's need to know, self-concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, readiness to

learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson 2005).

The field of andragogy is becoming increasingly relevant as adults return to colleges and

universities to continue their education. The purpose of the current paper is to provide tools and

techniques for effective instruction of adult learners, especially in programs designed for working adults. While the six principles of andragogy are echoed in the tools and techniques we provide, we discuss the tools in the form of 12 simple and practical tips for teaching adult business professionals. Based primarily on our direct experiences teaching adult learners, these tips are also backed by student feedback and support from the adult education literature.

1. Acknowledge and alleviate their fears

Adult learners are often returning to school after a significant break from formal education. Instructor recognition and acknowledgement of returning students' fears can help students renew their sense of self-efficacy for learning in a formal educational environment. Because adult learners may experience feelings of inadequacy, especially when in a mixed student environment and after a long break from formal schooling, instructors should find ways to address and alleviate student fears so they do not become a barrier to effective learning.

More often than not, the fears of adult learners are unwarranted as adults have continued to learn while they have been working. Although their on-the-job *education* has been relatively informal, most adult learners quickly adjust to the formal educational setting. In our experience, while adult learners returning to school may have a high level of anxiety, their motivation to succeed is usually higher. Unlike traditional age students, the decision to go to school was not simply the next step in the nontraditional student's maturation process but a decision that required much contemplation. Adults considering returning to school usually weigh the costs and benefits that would be realized by the student personally, as well as likely effects on members of the student's family. Adult learners tend to be highly engaged students who take the process of education seriously and who are likely to complete their programs of study. Wolfgang and Dowling (1981) found that, "older adult students had an internal drive for

knowledge that set them apart from younger students" (p. 642). Instructors can leverage the high motivation of adult learners and alleviate their fears by pointing out that their real-world experiences and genuine commitment to learning has already poised them for success.

Research and literature regarding adult education supports the recommendation to acknowledge and alleviate students' fears. Sappington (1984) indicated that instructors can acknowledge students' fears by creating a safe environment for students to express their concerns. Effective interpersonal skills are a plus in helping instructors develop a strong rapport with students. By developing a good rapport, the classroom climate will encourage open discussion of fears and anxieties, including those that the instructor experiences. This type of sharing, according to Galbraith (1998), is crucial for the development of trust between instructors and students. Berger (1997-1998) took these interpersonal support efforts a step further, setting up a support group designed to give older students returning to school a means in which to help each other with various problems they were encountering. Such support groups may be helpful to students who are experiencing anxiety in returning to school, especially those students who do not have understanding, supportive family members. These efforts are likely to be sought out, utilized, and appreciated by adult learners who need them to maximize their chances for learning success. The camaraderie of other returning students provides an opportunity for students to share tips, encouragement and other forms of support with each other.

2. *Make the learning environment mirror the work environment.*

The more the learning environment mirrors the work environment, the more comfortable and less anxious adult learners are likely to be. Additionally, the greater the coherence between the learning and work environment, the more likely students are to be able to apply newly acquired knowledge and skills to the workplace (Pillay 2000; Smid 2001). Instructors teaching adult

learners should use real-world cases and problems, and the technology that is used in the classroom should reflect the type of technology that adult learners are likely to use at their places of employment.

Formal classrooms in which rote memorization and theory are emphasized are unusual situations to adult learners; traditional classrooms are the antithesis of current workplaces which emphasize application of knowledge and skills and require team efforts. Adult learners spend a significant amount of time at work and are accustomed to operating and learning in environments in which team- and group-work are common. This team orientation also likely carries over into any parent-teacher organizations or community groups with which the adult learners are involved. Most organizations have adopted a "work team" process as a business model. Therefore, most working adults function in work teams everyday. By using a team-based structure in the classroom, instructors can provide a learning experience that is familiar to returning adults. Team-based learning mirrors the work and community environment and thus, is a form of learning with which adult students likely have had experience and success. We have found that use of team-based learning can alleviate anxiety of adult students through their realization that do not have to do it alone and that there are others upon whom they can rely for support and clarity as well as acknowledgement for the contributions that they make.

Work by Wlodkowski (1993) supports team-based learning as it helps students form strong relationships with others students. Wlodkowski (1993) explains, "cooperative learning builds and maintains cohesiveness with all its positive emotional consequences, [and] the chances for more complete adult whole-brain functioning become ever present when such a collaboration is a reality" (p. 212). A focus on team-based learning may, however, require more adaptive learning environments, not only in terms of instructor characteristics, but also classroom

characteristics. For instance, Jamieson, Dane, and Lippman (2005) noted that educators of the 21st century must realize that changes will have to be made to the traditional classroom design because "the formal classroom environment limits certain pedagogical activities" (p. 17). Making the learning environment mirror the work environment may require additional planning on the part of instructors and facilities personnel. Instructors will need to develop exercises and learning activities that lend themselves to the group process rather than to the individual. Further, examinations, projects and presentations that provide both individual and team assessments and scoring are critical to the team-based classroom. It is also important that the individual, especially in team-based programs, have the opportunity to "shine," and receive individual praise and acknowledgment of a job well done in addition to their work as a member of the team.

Instructors can maximize the abilities and education of adult students by using team-based learning approaches. While use of team-based projects can be problematic when dealing with traditional students, in our experience, adult learners welcome team projects and take the team process seriously. While traditional students may try to hide their lack of commitment to deep-learning, failing to contribute to the team process, adult learners are conscious and eager to contribute their fair share to projects, often going above and beyond requirements. Instructors can reinforce individual responsibility to team projects by incorporating peer-grading into course point allocation, another activity adult learners often request and take seriously.

3. Realize students will want to focus more on practical application of acquired knowledge and less on learning pure theory.

Although adult students can appreciate theory, they are more likely to excel at problem-based learning, given that they are typically responsible for solving a myriad of work-related,

community and family problems. Thus, not only can instructors make the classroom more conducive to adult learners through the use of team-based learning, but also through emphasizing practical rather than theoretical applications of course concepts. Theories are important, and adult learners will view theories as important to the extent that they guide and explain realistic or "true to life" experiences. Adult learners desire to gain a higher level understanding of the relationship of theory and practical application and to be supported in the process of assigning personal meaning to the new knowledge (Bamber and Tett 2000; Pillay 2002). Instructors can use students' work and life experiences to teach theory from a practical perspective.

Skilled instructors can use students' implicit theories, the things that they inherently seem to *know*, to demonstrate the cyclical process of theory development, application, and testing as well as theory revision. For example, an instructor can help adult learners feel more comfortable discussing theory by asking for several examples from students of particular behaviors they have observed or exhibited that fit with concepts being discussed. Then the instructor can ask the student why that behavior was selected and then ask the student to describe the premise for choosing that behavior. The process demonstrates that the student was operating on an implicit theory held at the time, which the student developed based on experience. The student may have applied the theory initially based on information and knowledge that the student found to be inherent; i.e., information that the student just somehow *knew*, which speaks to the richness of actual theoretical application returning students can and do bring to the classroom.

Students may, through exposure to new information or a different viewpoint, see a need to modify behavior or perceptions of a situation as a result of a student's implicit theories being brought to light. The instructor can continue or build on the process by presenting a competing theory and asking the class to consider how the new theory can be applied as well as what

behaviors might ensue as a result of its application. This process helps students feel comfortable with the concept of *theories*, the idea that we all hold and use them everyday. Alternatively, instructors may present theories and ask the students to think about and verbalize real-world cases and problems they have seen or experienced that are applicable to the theories discussed. This process makes learning exercises more germane to the adult learners' lives and learning and provides opportunities for them to make significant contributions.

4. Recognize adult learners' desire to assimilate new information with old information and the possibility that they will sometimes make incorrect linkages.

While traditional-age students often have well-developed rote memory they are less able to apply their own knowledge. Adult learners, on the other hand, are most comfortable when they can assimilate new material with their existing knowledge and experience. In our experience, adult learners will naturally try to make linkages between concepts thus, educators of adult students must be able to help the "learners to make links between different kinds of experience and learning in different contexts" (Babmer and Tett 2000, p. 62). Instructors must also, however, be able to explain why certain concepts are not linked. Asking students to describe example situations or experiences that demonstrate the linkages between concepts can help adult learners assimilate their new knowledge more easily. It is critical, however, that instructors listen to students' answers carefully and be prepared to offer alternate, perhaps, more appropriate linkages when incorrect linkages are made or incompatible examples are chosen. When a correct linkage is made, the instructor can be assured that the learner correctly understands the concepts and the relationships between them. Instructors can take the process even further by using techniques such concept mapping (see Novak and Canas 2006 for more information) which requires having

students actually diagram how various concepts or phenomena are linked to reveal whether the linkages between and among concepts are accurate.

Teaching adult learners is very rewarding as they naturally want to assimilate their learning, going beyond rote learning and creating complex networks of knowledge. This is further evidence that adult learners are interested in learning for the sake of knowledge rather than merely to do well on a test.

5. Use evaluation methods that emphasize comprehension rather than rote memory.
Evaluation methods should relate to students' desire to assimilate new information with old information. Adult learners may not be accustomed to being tested on facts for the sake of knowing facts, but rather their ability to apply knowledge to generate solutions to real problems. Overall, education is increasingly shifting to teaching students how to access and make use of information as students are more concerned with how new knowledge can be utilized rather than focusing on simply the *what* and *why* of the information (Nicoll and Harrison 2003). Assessment methods should emphasize students' understanding and ability to utilize and apply their knowledge rather than merely re-iterate facts. Evaluation tools such as exams and projects should involve adult students' application of course material to realistic problems and creative projects rather than simply focusing on their ability to recall facts and figures.

Students now function in the age of Google and Wikipedia where information is available at the click of a mouse. Information is increasing exponentially and the availability of such storehouses of information is just a computer or cell phone away.   There is way too much information for anyone to be expected to commit it all to memory. Providing students with formula sheets or allowing open notes and take-home exams are appropriate, when students are instead required to generate unique, practical solutions to realistic problems. Prior to

assessments, however, instructors should be sure to discuss any facts and figures the students must absolutely know without reference, as well as specifically indicating any resources that students are permitted to use to complete exams and assignments. Instructors can also provide sample questions for exams or projects completed in previous semesters to help students gain a better understanding of what they will be expected to do. All students, especially those who have recently returned to school after a significant break, greatly appreciate example cases, problems, and projects that reflect the types of tasks they will be required to do and products they will be expected to produce for exams and other assignments.

6. Treat students as equal partners in the learning process.

Soliciting and incorporating ideas from students is similar to processes of participative forms of decision making utilized in the workplace. The paradigm is the same; individuals who are a part of processes and have an investment in how and why things are done, feel more ownership and higher commitment. In fact, when team members engage in participative decision making, including when there is a high level of dissent among team members on how to complete a given task, creativity increases resulting in outcomes that are more innovative (De Dreu and West 2001). Also, when team members feel that procedures their leader uses to make decisions are just, team members are more satisfied with the leader and feel more attached to the team (Phillips, Douthitt, and Hyland, 2001).

Similarly, adult students have wisdom and experiences that enhance the learning process (O'Connor, Bronner, and Delaney 2002) and should be allowed to incorporate these experiences into their coursework. This can lead to greater innovation in the classroom as well as greater satisfaction with the instructor and learning process. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of knowledge and experience the students bring to the classroom and create a climate that conveys

respect for this knowledge (Edmunds, Lowe, Murray, and Seymour 1999). Instructors must also be receptive to the various approaches to learning the adult student takes (see Pillay 2002). The needs of the adult learners should be the primary focal point of the design and delivery of the program and considering the learner's perspective will enhance the process.

There are some simple ways instructors can allow for input in the learning process. Instructors can leave room in their syllabi for student-generated topics that are relevant to the course, for which some students may hold expertise. Instructors can acknowledge a student's expertise in the area, allowing the student the opportunity to teach other students the skills and knowledge he or she brings to the class. This type of environment exemplifies the value of assimilating returning and traditional students' strengths and experiences. Another way instructors can treat students as equal partners in the learning process is to make them responsible for contributing to, developing, or teaching part of the course material. This can be as easy as making them responsible for the development of discussion questions, leading a course discussion on a particular topic, or presenting a recently published research article in conversational terms to class members. There are many benefits to having students present part of the course material. These include giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their new learning, exposing the instructor and class members to a new perspective on the material, illuminating gaps or errors in student learning which can be corrected immediately, and changing the energy of the classroom by incorporating innovative and interesting presentation formats into the course.

We must restate that in our experiences, adult students take assignments seriously, both in presenting the material and in their appreciation of learning from the presentations of the other

students. Adult students are also more likely to realize that everything presented in the course is important material, regardless of who is actually presenting it.

Adult education research supports the suggestion that learners should be treated as equal partners in the learning process. According to Wlodkowski (1993), adult learners realize, "that it is their own behavior that is most responsible for their learning" (p. 92). Instructors of adult learners must take this into consideration, and it has certainly been our experience. As Merril (2004) stated, "adult educators need to listen to the voices of working-class adult learners and challenge the structures, policy and practices in their institutions in order to improve the learning experiences…" (p. 73).   In so doing, instructors can "create an environment of respect or adultness… [thus] the control of the learning process is placed in the hands of the student" (Sappington 1984, p. 28).

Besides making the adult learners increasingly responsible for their own learning, instructors can also expand their teaching arsenal to include relevant organizational members to which the student reports. This ties into our next tip, of supporting adult learners continuing education efforts by getting their managers and supervisors involved in the program.

7. Get students' managers or supervisors and relevant organizations involved in the program.
It is important for the adult learner that he or she has the opportunity to practice new knowledge and skills in the workplace (Billett 2001). Instructors and program administrators can gain support from returning students' managers and organizations. Gaining such support is a win-win situation for students, organizations, and the program. For instance, instructors can invite organizational members to collaborate in the learning process by having them serve on juries, capstone or thesis committees, support student research projects, and attend open-house events and social gatherings. Alternatively, instructors can engage organizational members even more

in a course by having them propose organizational problems the students and their teammates work to solve as a class project. Organizational members are generally quite willing to engage in this process when they realize that a team of professionals, who are also students, can provide innovative, well-designed alternatives to organizational problems with very low cost to the organization itself.

Adult learners who work full-time often experience anxiety about meeting all the requirements of their job and schooling in addition to family and community commitments. When representatives from within the students' work organizations are involved in the educational process, everyone wins. Employers see the fruit of their employee's educational endeavors as well as how the organization has helped facilitate that educational experience. Students gain a greater sense of support and encouragement from their employers while making real contributions to organizational projects as part of their studies. In addition to supporting the education of their employees, the ability to see how students' efforts will benefit the organization is an added bonus to organizations. Employers' appreciation of the program and the return on investment they gain by supporting their employees' educational pursuits can and often does lead to more support for other interested employees. Employer support is especially valuable in assuaging the anxiety level that adult students experience which is brought on by having "too many irons in the fire."

In some instances, adult learners are looking for a diversion from work life or are looking to make radical career changes as a result of dissatisfaction with their current career or job prospects. Often, adult students are or want to be involved with non-profit agencies or volunteer projects outside of work and family life. Instructors can offer project opportunities that involve a community service component in which students apply principles learned in class to a project

designed to assist a community service agency. Such service learning projects can help students apply relevant principles they have been learning in class while also giving them the satisfaction of contributing to an important service for a community agency. Service projects are a wonderful opportunity to apply learning in a meaningful way for both returning and traditional students.

8. Be responsive to business and industry changes that may affect the students and their careers.

Adult students enter a program and enroll in a class looking for, and ultimately demanding that there is something useful in the educational experience that has some application to their lives. They want to be able to apply what they are learning to their own circumstances and see immediate results. Often, adults return to school to update their skills and learn ways to address emerging issues in their organizations. Instructors should be sure to look for and develop exercises, applications, and other course requirements that are applicable and beneficial to adult students and their careers.

Instructors, however, cannot always anticipate topics that will be of interest to students or that may develop while a course is being taught. Instructors can, however, build in class time to address these issues. In some instances, students may want to learn about an issue about which another student is already an expert while other times, instructors can invite a guest speaker who is a recognized expert in the students' particular area of interest. Depending on the novelty of the issue of interest to student, the instructor may want to simply provide class time for thoughtful discussion and debate, or turn the topic into the focal point of a course project. Overall, it is a good idea to ask adult learners what issues they would like to see addressed in the

course that may have not been foreseen by the instructor (Hadfield 2003) or program administrators.

9. Allow for flexibility in meeting course and program requirements.

Adult learners often have very hectic lives and yet maintain motivation not only to complete their program, but also excel at learning and applying the material. While instructors do not have to change the course requirements to accommodate adult learners, instructors can provide alternate means by which course requirements can be met. For instance, the adult learner may have unexpected family concerns arise, may be faced with an organizational responsibility or crisis, or may have heavy travel responsibilities for their work. Because the adult students' lives are much more complex than traditional age students, these complexities should be taken into consideration when it is time to develop ways in which requirements can be met.

        In our experiences, we have found that adult learners are appreciative when instructors are open to alternatives in terms of meeting course requirements. Adult learners are accustomed to, and have some level of expectation in contributing to or making decisions about events in which they are involved. It may be foreign and uncomfortable to them to have every detail predetermined and dictated. In other words, adults appreciate the ability to negotiate when tests are administered and determination of final due dates for assignments, within the parameters of the course. The instructor should clarify what points are (e.g., dates or time of day) and are not (e.g., whether to have a test) negotiable. Instructors can also give students options for the

projects they do. Instructors can allow students to choose from a list of instructor-generated projects or propose their own projects. All projects should require instructor approval prior to project commencement. Additionally, the students could be involved in the recruitment of team-members for team-based projects based on each student's area of expertise. Such student-generated projects are typically tied to the organization in which the students work, creating a tie between that organization and the university.

Instructors should not only be flexible with how and when students meet course requirements, but also program requirements. For instance, programs can be structured so that students have a variety of options (e.g., completing a thesis, capstone project, or a comprehensive exam) from which to choose in order to meet program requirements. Timeline for program completion also should be flexible given that adult students often must take a semester or two off from their education to live in another country for a foreign work assignment, to lead a major initiative at work, or to care for a family member who is ill (Hadfield 2003). Program requirements should not be overly rigid in terms of timeline or course sequencing. This allows the adult returning student to meet both life and career demands without having to sacrifice educational advancement. Just a few adjustments can result in successful degree completion of students in the program. Deadlines for admission applications also should not be too far in advance of actual admission. While traditional students are accustomed to having a significant interval between program acceptance and their actual start date, adults want to begin a program as soon as they decide that it is time to further their education. Programs with strict annual cutoff dates for admission applications will have difficulty competing with programs that have more fluid deadlines or multiple admission opportunities. This ties into our next tip, to accommodate students' schedules.

10. Make sure courses and educational resources are designed to accommodate adult

students' extra-curricular responsibilities and schedules.

Traditional age students usually spend a significant amount of time on campus as they often live

and work on campus. The lives of adult learners, on the other hand are typically off-campus.

Adult learners usually have full-time careers that are not affiliated with the university and

typically have families and significant responsibilities associated with family life. Instructors

need to recognize that adult learners may have many more demands than traditional students,

such as having a spouse, children, aging or ill parents, and significant career demands that may

include travel or leadership responsibilities.

These characteristics of adult learners reduce their ability to spend large amounts of time

on campus, and the time that they are able to spend on campus is usually limited to evenings and

weekends. Resources and facilities must be available for adult learners during off-peak hours.

Access to the building, meeting rooms, the library and computer labs, as well as the opportunity

to meet with instructors in the evenings and on weekends must be provided in order to support

the students academic development. Besides weekend and evening office hours, instructors

should ensure that course materials are available online, giving students 24 hour access to course

information. Also, instructors should check e-mail regularly and respond to students promptly.

Frequent communication can be accomplished by phone or through synchronous electronic

communication technologies including course chat rooms. Such methods greatly improve access

to adult students who must be away from campus due to family responsibilities or work-related

travel. Technology also allows communication between classmates and teammates to continue

when they are traveling. Instructors also are encouraged to be open to accepting and returning

assignments electronically as well as by fax or hard copy as communication is enhanced when

processes accommodate students' work and travel schedules. Allowing for multiple modes of

assignment delivery and return also helps accommodate differences in students' comfort level

with technology, particularly for courses offered early in a program.

11. Promote support, collaboration and networking through socialization.

Previously, we emphasized the need for students to feel supported by their employers. It is

important to emphasize that adult students need the support of their family and friends as well.

Instructors must keep in mind that the "obligations of parent or worker take precedence over

learner/student role obligations" (Galbraith 1990, p. 35). Once adult professionals have made the

decision to return to school, support from instructors, colleagues, classmates and their families is

crucial in terms of the students' ultimate success in their educational endeavors (Bamber and Tett

2000).

We have discussed some means that instructors and programs can provide support to

students already, including the development of support groups and integration of relevant

organizations into class projects. Another way for programs and instructors to provide support is

to foster a sense of community among the adult learners themselves. This can be achieved, for

example, by hosting social events which can be tailored specifically for the students as a means

to socialize outside of the classroom or may be set up as family-oriented events in which the

students' families can attend. Family-oriented events allow spouses and children to witness first

hand what their family member is involved in and may alleviate concerns surrounding the

students' absences from the home and from some family events. Additionally, family-oriented

social events can help children and other family members see that learning is a life-long

endeavor. Social events may be held at local restaurants, designed as pot lucks, or hosted by a

student's employer as a thank-you for benefits received from all the program participants.

12. Involve students in the development and modification of the program.

As adult learners progress through their educational program, they may be able to suggest

modifications or additions to the program that will benefit future students and faculty. A crucial

process in educating the adult learner is examining necessary changes in program curriculum,

methods of assessing student learning, and avenues to provide on-going support to the learner

(Bamber and Tett 2000). By allowing students the opportunity to provide feedback concerning

program modifications, they will develop a sense of a commitment, purpose, and dedication to

see the program flourish, even after they have completed their program requirements. An

appreciation of the program and the relationships forged in classes and work teams can result in a

strong alumni association, which will help in recruitment of future students. Also, program

specific alumni associations will allow the students to have a lasting impact on the quality of

their degree even after graduation. Students may be asked for feedback and suggestions via the

use of online feedback surveys, focus groups, newsletters or social gatherings. Students should

have the opportunity to participate in these forums anonymously or in-person. Alumni also

make a tremendous contribution to the program when asked to return and serve as jurors for

current students' projects. They are very familiar with the process, have applied projects

successfully in their organizations, and offer support, encouragement, and usable suggestions to

the work teams' projects.

Adult education literature also supports the need for responsiveness by educational

program directors to students' needs. Courses and programs targeted toward adult learners

benefit from operating with a customer-service type focus. Program design and needs are not

dictated by student whims, but the design of the courses and program must ensure that students

can see the value in what they are learning and are generally satisfied with the learning process.

Adults are accustomed to business world experiences and expect goods and services that meet

their expectations. Programs that meet or exceed these expectations will realize increased

enrollment and more importantly, provide learning that is useful and immediately applicable to

businesses and organizations. Adult learners will leave programs that are unresponsive to their

needs (Hadfield 2003), or that produces nothing of true value to their career development or the

operations of their organizations.

Combining the twelve tips for teaching adult learners

It is imperative for instructors of the adult learner to realize that support of the

nontraditional student does not end at the time of entry into the learning environment, but rather

it is an continuous and active process that requires reflection and flexibility (Bamber and Tett

2000). By utilizing the 12 tips for teaching adult learners presented here, faculty can be adaptable

and allow for creativity, collaboration, support and encouragement, and a sense of commitment

and dedication to the learning experience for their adult students. When adults have made the

decision to return to school, typically after a lengthy absence from the educational environment,

they seek programs that support their goals, alleviate their fears, allow them to collaborate and

provide direction in their own educational program. Most importantly, adult learners take what

they have learned back to their work environment and apply it appropriately. By allowing the

adult student to work as partners with faculty and organizations in their education, they are

highly likely to succeed and to feel a strong sense of accomplishment, both personally and

professionally. Faculty members, in addition to students, are likely to learn and grow personally

from this experience. Through collaboration with students and their organizations, faculty may

be provided excellent research opportunities that will benefit the program, the university and

community organizations. This becomes a win-win situation for all.

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