

# PRINCIPLES OF ADULT EDUCATION

## PRINCIPLE 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*Who needs what as defined by whom?* (WWW) (Hutchinson 1978)

This is an extremely important but for many teachers it can be a very daunting part of adult education.

We need to *learn* what the group *needs* to learn, *listen* to what they already *know* and design our teaching bearing those realities in mind.

**Challenge:** Meeting the requirements of the learners, as well as the manager or sponsor. Listening to both, forms the basis of a needs analysis. If you have a core curriculum, you need at a minimum to ensure that it is used in a way that takes the learners needs and desires into consideration.

## PRINCIPLE 2: SAFETY

Learning can be a very threatening experience for adults who often have lived with the stigmas because of bad or failed learning experiences in formal education.

Safety is a principle linked to respecting the learners as the subjects of their own learning.

It entails not only the design of the learning tasks but also the teaching methodology, setting of the room, design of materials etc.

It is created by a number of things: Trust, relevance, flexibility and recognition.

**Challenge:** Dealing with the over talkative or the non-talkative without alienating the former or intimidating the latter.

## PRINCIPLE 3: RELATIONSHIPS

There must be a relationship established the first encounter between the facilitator and the learners. The facilitator must show respect for the learners, making every effort to ensure that they feel valued and affirmed.

**Challenge:** Dealing with the learner who clearly does not want to be in the class.

### **PRINCIPLE 4: ACCESSIBILITY**

Adult learners should have access to the facilitator particularly during learning sessions and by arrangement afterwards. This allows for individual concerns to be addressed and for affirming the contribution that learners can make.

All barriers to this must be removed in a culturally sensitive manner e.g. titles, gender.

### **PRINCIPLE 5: SEQUENCE AND REINFORCEMENT**

**Sequencing** addresses the issue of ensuring that the material is developed from simple to complex and from group supported efforts to individual efforts. The facilitator needs to design the materials, the level of assignments and activities bearing this in mind.

**Reinforcement** is summarizing and recapping key principles at regular intervals and creating opportunities to 'test' the new learning through a case study or some other participatory exercise.

Challenge: Not boring the faster learners or leaving the slower learners behind.

### **PRINCIPLE 6: PRAXIS**

Praxis is a Greek word meaning action with reflection. It often happens via a three stage process: **act, reflect, new action**. In adult learning it will mean imparting new concept to the learners, getting them out into practice and then to reflect on what they have just done, with a view to change that action next time, if need be.

### **PRINCIPLE 7: IMMEDIACY**

Research is showing that adult learners need to see the immediate usefulness of new learning. When this is absent, there is a tendency for high drop out rates among learners.

The most effective learning takes place when the learner is given the opportunity to put the new learning into practice as close to the time of learning.

### **PRINCIPLE 8: MOTIVATION**

The facilitator must keep the learners motivated. Motivation can take place by several means: reward, concern, demonstrated relevancy and encouraging,

honest feedback.

### **PRINCIPLE 9: IDEAS, FEELINGS AND ACTIONS**

Learning with the cognitive (mind), affective (emotions) and psychomotor (muscles) is a vital part of adult education. Much of education, particularly formal tertiary education addresses the cognitive only. We need to design learning experiences for adults that allow them to incorporate all three dimensions.

### **PRINCIPLE 10: TEAMWORK**

Teamwork is both a process and a principle. Teams provide the adult learner with motivation, support and safety.

### **PRINCIPLE 11: EVALUATION**

Evaluation has a two-fold objective. It serves to see if outcomes have been achieved and whether the learner has gained new competencies. Unlike formal education where the emphasis is often on how the learner has done, in non-formal adult education equal emphasis is placed on how the learner and the facilitator have done in achieving the outcomes.

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