UDL
NEWSLETTER

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ADULT LEARNERS

Understanding adult learners is critical to the success of any adult education program. Recruitment, retention and graduation hinges upon student investment and continued engagement with the program (Bigatel & Williams, 2016). Program administrators and educators of adult learners must understand the factors which influence engagement. The generation from which an adult belongs provides important clues to the unique context of the learner and reveals subtle preferences which can be used attract and retain adult students. Each generation typically values and weighs aspects of the educational experience differently. Taking note of the characteristic differences can help educators to respond to diverse needs and expectations. Adults are internally motivation to learn, want to learn what is personally important to them, desire opportunities for collaboration, problem solving, and application of new knowledge to personal or work life (Chan, 2010; Ekmekci, 2013)
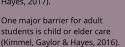
SIMILARITIES

Adult learners in the 21st century are not traditional students because most juggle competing demands of home, work and school (Stevens, 2014)

Adults are internally motivation to learn, want to learn what is personally important to them, desire opportunities for collaboration, problem solving, and application of new knowledge to personal or work life (Chan, 2010; Conaway& Zorn-Arnold, 2015; Ekmekci, 2013).

Students of all ages desire a connection (Love, 2012). One of the most powerful motivators for students is the ability of instructors to communicate to students a sense of genuine caring either about the student specifically or about the subject matter (Therrell & Dunneback, 2015).

DIFFERENCES

Adult learners over the age of 35 are less likely to seek education based on a desire for a pay increase, a new career, or respect from peers while those under 35 are more likely to be motivated by a desire to please their parents (Kimmel, Gaylor, & Hayes, 2017).

One major barrier for adult students is child or elder care (Kimmel, Gaylor & Hayes, 2016).

Many Generation X did not go directly to college and many Generation Y children are motivated by self-fulfillment (Baker College, 2004; Merrick, 2016).

Millennials are described as achievement oriented and heavily pressured to excel in education (Baker College, 2004).

One of the hallmarks of Generation X is a profound feeling of being judged to the point that the generation is also referred to as the *Slacker Generation* (Baker, 2004).

Millennials need regular, individual feedback from supervisors about their performance (Merrick, 2016).

Experiences change the architecture of the brain (Berger, 2014). Therefore, learners who have been exposed to technology in greater volume, and during critical periods of development, have brains which are different from those of adult learners with little to no exposure to technology (Prensky, 2001)

KEY CONCEPTS

21st Century adults learners are not traditional students.

Understanding adult learner motivation is necessary for meeting diverse student needs.

Adult learners have different brains based on exposure to technology.

Constructivist , learner centered environments are critical for learning.

Course design is essential for maintaining engagement.

Understanding student context is important.

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PROMISING PRACTICE

Quality adult education requires time, energy, flexibility, and above all, humility. Educators of adults have to be willing to let go of practices that are no longer effective. Lecture and regurgitating facts for the exam does not grow dendrites. Such teaching certainly does not prepare adults for the demands of collaborative group problem solving and critical thinking needed in work place settings in the 21st century.

Eberle (2009) describes heutagogy as self-directed learning that includes reflection and response. Consider the value of learner choice. Consider asking learners to read, research, and share with one another. Consider applied learning involving problem-solving and critical discourse.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Multiple means of representation

Multiple means of action and expression

Multiple means of engagement

https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2_TEAL_UDL.pdf