

Twelve Principles for Effective Adult Learning

(Jane Vella)

- 1. Needs Assessment: The First Step in Dialogue.** Discover what the group really needs to learn, what they already know, what aspects of the course that we have designed really fit their situations. Listening to learners' wants and needs helps to shape a program that has immediate usefulness to adults. Who decides?
- 2. Safety: Creating a Safe Environment for Learning.** Create an inviting setting for learners. Begin with simple, clear, and easy tasks before advancing to more complex or difficult ones. The environment is nonjudgemental. Affirmation of every offering.
- 3. Sound Relationships: The Power of Friendship and Respect.** Foster an open communication process involving respect, safety, listening. Balance between advocacy and inquiry. Relationships must transcend personal likes and dislikes.
- 4. Sequence and Reinforcement: Knowing Where and How to Begin.** Program knowledge, skills, and attitudes in an order that goes from simple to complex and from group-supported to solo efforts. Reinforcement means the repetition of facts, skills, and attitudes in diverse, engaging, and interesting ways.
- 5. Praxis: Action with Reflection.** Doing with built-in reflection, an ongoing beautiful dance of inductive and deductive forms of learning. Doing-reflecting-deciding-changing-new doing.
- 6. Learners as Subjects of Their Own Learning: Recognizing learners are decision makers.** The dialogue of learning is between subjects, not objects. Learners are not designed to be used by others. They suggest and make decisions about what occurs in the learning event. Do not steal the learning opportunity from the learner.
- 7. Learning with Ideas, Feelings, and Actions: Mind-Emotions-Muscles.** Equality? conceptualize it, get a chance to feel it, and do something with it. Make every learning task an element of ideas-feelings-skills.
- 8. Immediacy: Teaching What is Really Useful.** Experience the immediate usefulness of new learning, what makes a difference now. Combine with sequence and reinforcement.
- 9. Assuming New Roles for Dialogue: The Death of the "Professor".** "Only the student can name the moment of the death of the professor" (Paulo Freire). No disagreement? No questioning? No challenge? No dialogue? Whatever impedes dialogue must be courageously addressed and eradicated. Whatever enables dialogue must be fearlessly nurtured and used.
- 10. Teamwork: How People Learn Together.** Teams provide a quality of safety that is effective and helpful. Teams are the real world (feelings are not simulated!) but also are limit situations. Teams invite the welcome energy of constructive competition. Consider results-process-relationships.
- 11. Engagement: Learning as an Active Process.** Invite learners to put themselves into the learning task ... into the delight of learning! Without engagement there is no learning.
- 12. Accountability: Success Is in the Eyes of the Learner.** How do learners know they know? What was proposed to be taught must be taught; what was meant to be learned must be learned; the skills intended to be gained must be manifest in all the learners; the attitudes taught must be manifest; the knowledge conveyed must be visible in learners' language and reasoning.