

Chapter 28

Teaching Adults across Cultures, Distance, and Learning Preferences: Universal Tools for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the underlying principles of instructional design and delivery as means for adult education practitioners to discern which instructional methods and strategies are suited to learners and learning tasks. The considerations here are intended to assist the educator in grasping key elements of ISD that work across cultures, distance, and learning needs, styles, and preferences of adults. It offers a strategy for determining key components of instructional technology. As such, this chapter is a foundation that provides data points for decision-making about instructional design and delivery for today's adult educators.

INTRODUCTION

In any adult education endeavor, philosophy alone cannot address the contextual needs of today's adult learner; nor can technology bring about success in teaching and learning without clarity of why we use the tools. Adults return to education and training settings for a variety of reasons. Their goals include bridging a performance gap within their respective work environment; gaining knowledge and skills desired for personal development; or improvement or change of family

or community circumstances. In today's interconnected world, a world where technology is highly valued and prolific in every aspect of life, the task of educating ought to be based on a thorough understanding of our practices and options that best lead learners to their goals. Moreover, adult education practitioners need to acknowledge that there may not be *quick fix* or *one size fits all* or *instant customization to special needs* solutions to facilitating the learning process for adults, locally or globally, in virtual or real time settings. Whether ICT-based or in basements of churches; whether in seemingly homogeneous groups of learners or across borders of culture and geog-

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raphy, instruction by, with, and for today's adult learners requires a solid, examined foundation of instructional design and delivery principles.

Teaching successfully across a variety of purposes, cultures, distance, and learning preferences necessitates a strategy for selecting instructional technology appropriate to the context and task at hand. Adult educators need to be able to discern good practices, effective methods, and appropriate media for instructional design and delivery. It is at the intersection of educational philosophy, theoretical frameworks, and instructional technology with a keen understanding of the tools we are to apply in our practice that we strengthen our practice of instructional support to adult learners.

A theoretical base about key elements of our practice, such as learning needs assessment and analysis, design of learning events, and delivery of learning activities that result in evaluated outcomes exists, and it can scaffold our practice, irrespective of the conceptual frameworks (e.g., from behaviorist to constructivist) or philosophical values that undergird it. In other words, there is a universality in instructional methods and strategies which encompasses fundamental, key elements of facilitating the learning process for adults. Over the decades, models and paradigms for instructional design and delivery have abounded (Reigeluth, 1983). Bloom et al. (Bloom, Madeaus, & Hastings, 1981) interjected their concept of mastery of learning into the dialogue that emphasized the need to individualize the instructional process. A rich history of ISD is detailed here that spans over five decades of instructivist or objectivist designs. In his recent volume for ICT-based designs, Willis (2009) brings together an array of constructivist design concepts, ranging from the early linear designs based on information processing theory to current constructivist ones that value more and more iterative flows of the design and delivery phases. The latter designs put the learner at the center. Any of the described models include very basic and similar elements that had been developed at Florida State University in 1975.

These elements of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (ADDIE) remain stable and standard as phases or chunks in any instructional design today. Whether dominated by behaviorist or constructivist concepts, for example, the primary need in ISD has always been to develop approaches that teach the person as well as the content. Students and trainees in the 21st Century, in the USA or abroad, are characterized by a multi-layered diversity with respect to their backgrounds and learning needs. Individualizing instructional approaches to meet disparate needs is of the essence in today's education and training settings

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (1998), headquartered in Bangkok, reported that between 1960 and 1995 student enrollment worldwide has increased six fold, from 13 million to 82 million, while the so-called third world countries sorely lagged behind in their ability to provide educational services. With the increased globalization of the workforce, multinational corporations, for-profit education program providers, and not-for-profit educational institutions from North America, Australia, and Great Britain are sending trainers and educators to Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa to fill this education gap. This trend of exporting education and training will continue to grow. For instance, the median ages of workers in India and China are currently 24 and 30 respectively, who are relatively inexperienced; so, the need to educate and train workers to acquire new skills in this global market alone is high (Karoly & Panis, 2004).

The training and education models we generally export to foreign constituencies do not differ much in their methods and approaches from what we use with the Native language speakers and the large Spanish language population in workforce education and adult basic education programs in the USA. Karoly & Panis (2004, p. 205) point out that the "current U.S. education and training system largely evolved to meet the needs of the early twentieth century workforce, and the basic

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