

Principles of Teaching and Learning

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Preamble

The following are the **fundamental** principles upon which successful learning depends in the post-compulsory education sector. Note that these also apply to young people and children, but since my working experience is almost totally amongst adult learners, I am limiting my comments as a matter of course. Originally this was supposed to be a long-form discussion of these thorny ideas, but the more I considered this (rather egocentric) plan, the more I realised others were more likely to read it if I limited its size to around two pages at most. Hence, it's short.

Secondly, I am sure some of what I am writing here will cause consternation amongst those from an older tradition. Some of the statements below may sound counter-intuitive. But can I assure you that they are an accurate reflection of contemporary thought. They are effective as a foundation for planning and teaching.

Lastly, this document comes from forty years of work in the post-compulsory education sector in the UK, ranging from pre-entry to doctoral levels. I am a specialist in teacher education, having trained new tutors within such courses as the C&G 730, 7306, 7307, 7323, AET, CET, DET, and at MA level. I have a first-class honours degree in further education, am a holder of Qualified Teacher Status, have a Licentiate of the City & Guilds, and was twice-elected President of the national Institute for Learning.

Principles and Fundamentals

1. **Learning is a participative matter.** Individuals learn at their very best when interacting with their teacher and with the rest of their learning group.
2. **Learning is best assimilated when encountered in a positive and supportive atmosphere:** low stress, high enjoyment, and with a feeling of group solidarity
3. **People learn best when cooperating.** Competition has its place, but tends to create negativity when it is the only aspect of a learning situation.
4. **Adults, like children, need praise** for, and recognition of, their achievements, but this needs to be respectful of their age and experiences.
5. **Learning is a natural capacity** that all humans have, to some degree or other.
6. Start teaching from what people **already know!**
7. **Assessment is finding out what has been learned.** 90% of the time it should be informal, subtle, and unnoticed by the students.
8. **Never use the term 'deliver'.** Learning is not pizza! It is never 'delivered'. Especially when one can alternatively say 'taught', 'facilitated', 'organised' or 'structured', etc.

9. **Remembering is only a small part of learning.** The most profoundly affective learning you ever did is probably something you don't remember ever doing.
10. **Learning does NOT happen in the individual mind.** Learning is a co-participative process, moderated between individuals in 'communities of practice' (to quote Jean Lave).
11. **What we know and what we can do are, in principle, the same thing.** Both skills and knowledge are learned by handling a topic in real time (practising it, discussing it, asking questions, talking about it, etc.)
12. **There are no such things as 'learning styles'.** This theory has no supporting evidence.
13. **Learning participants need to feel confident with their tutor.** They need to know about you, what your background is, how your personality functions (etc.) so that they can relate to you. Don't be afraid to be open about yourself, within the limits of safeguarding.
14. Never say a learning adult is **stupid, or a failure, or 'thick'**. Not even when chatting to others casually about your work.
15. **Adults who are learning are students**, not 'learners'. They do this of their own volition, unlike children.
16. **If you must give a talk or lecture, limit it to fifteen minutes** at most, and then use another method to engage the group (an activity, a bit of group work, a quiz, questions, case studies, etc.).
17. **Never embarrass an adult student.**
18. **Evaluation looks at the 'value' of the learning to those who took part in it.** It is not the same as assessment.
19. **Keep paperwork to the absolute minimum.** Nothing discourages adults more than bureaucracy.
20. **A sense of humour always helps.**
21. Organise accessible sessions and courses that have **multiple teaching modes**. For example: a session can be face-to-face, online, blended, distance-learned, or self-study.
22. **Never expect students to acquire expensive resources** (books, software, tools, machines, etc.) Always find a free or very cheap alternative.
23. **Make sure all venues and online systems are disability friendly.** Double-check.
24. **As we get older it takes longer to learn**, but we have the advantage of having better learning strategies, and a better ability to focus over longer periods
25. **There is no such thing as a difficult topic or subject.** All topics are equally understandable, and it is the teacher's job to find good ways of translating the seemingly complex into the simple.