

# Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design

## Issues About Learning

The following pages provide you with information about different issues pertaining to learning and adult education.

### What is Learning?

- **Webster's Dictionary** defines **learning** as "the act or experience of one that learns; knowledge of skill acquired by instruction or study; modification of a behavioral tendency by experience."
- **Learning** is often defined as a **change in behavior** (Birkenholz, 1999), which is demonstrated by people implementing knowledge, skills, or practices derived from education.

Basically, from an educator's perspective, it involves **helping people along the learning process**, and it includes all of the things that we do to make it happen. As an end result, we know that learning occurs when people take newfound information and incorporate it into their life. For example, if we are working with an audience that lacks basic financial management skills for budgeting, one of our objectives is to see people gain knowledge in this area and to actually implement the practice – hopefully, over a long period of time.

### Adult Education

**Why is learning important?** Society today requires that people continuously upgrade knowledge and skills. Futurists have stated that education will play an ever-increasing role in society because of employment requirements as well as for personal development. Beyond societal and work requirements, lifelong learning is becoming a greater part of the life of everyone.

As a result, much research has been done on adult education. One of the most influential researchers in the area of adult education is **Malcolm Knowles**. His work started back in the 1970s to determine how adults learn. He **defines adult education** as:

"All experiences of mature men and women by which they acquire new knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, interests, or values."

This is an inclusive definition that encompasses all types of adult learning in formal and nonformal environments.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions about Adult Education**

### **What is adult education?**

The definition or philosophy of adult education suggests the organization of groups for the betterment of individuals with similar interests.

### **Why is adult education important?**

Basically adult education is important because of changing demographics, today's global economy, and increased technology. Adults outnumber youth for the first time in American society. Globalization and increased technology brings much change and the need to learn new skills (Merriam, 1999).

### **What is motivation and why is it important?**

Motivation is a concept that explains why people think and behave as they do (Weiner, 1992 in Wlodkowski, 1999). It is important because it can diminish or enhance the learning process. Without motivation, there is no learning (Wlodkowski, 1999).

### **How do gender and diversity affect learning?**

Gender and culture affect how we experience and interpret life; they provide us with a "gender" or "cultural lens."

### **What are the different learning styles?**

The learning style types are **field dependent** and **independent learners**. **Field dependent** learners are heavily influenced by things going on around them, are more abstract learners, have global perceptions, and are sensitive to the social environment. **Field independent** learners are relatively uninfluenced by things going on around them, are more focused learners, are perceptive of discrete parts, and are analytical.

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## **Adult vs. Youth Learning**

The field of adult education focuses on the similarities and differences between adult and youth learning. This encompasses variation in maturity, experiences, learning styles, and instructor roles. The academic terms that we refer to are **andragogy** and **pedagogy**, which were coined by Malcolm Knowles (Birkenholz, 1999). He defined these terms as:

- **Andragogy:** “The art and science of helping adults learn.”
- **Pedagogy:** “The art and science of helping children learn.”

Knowles has shown that there are both similarities and differences in andragogy and pedagogy.

## **Similarities of Adult and Youth Education**

- Learners must be ready to learn.
- Learners need clear objectives.
- Learners need to be taught at multiple levels of cognition.
- People learn best through a variety of techniques.

## **Differences Between Adult and Youth Education**

- Adults are voluntary learners (for the most part).
- Adults are application oriented.
- Adults have a greater need to see the relevance of course content.
- Adults know their needs better.
- Adults have higher expectations and desire to achieve goals and objectives.

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## Learning Styles

Many differences in how people learn are dependent upon each person's natural preferences and tendencies. These differences are called "**learning styles.**" Learning styles are an individual's characteristics that are expressed through the interaction of a person's behaviors and personality as he/she approaches learning.

## What Do We Know About Learning Styles?

- Learning style is a preferred mode of operation.
- Learning style characteristics can be learned.
- Learning style does not change much over time.
- Learning style has no correlation with intelligence.

Knowing about learning styles can help the developers of instructional programming better meet the educational needs of all learners.

## GEFT Contact Information

If you are interested in learning more about learning styles, there is a test of learning styles called the **Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT)**. For more information, contact:

Consulting Psychologists Press Inc  
3803 East Bayshore Road  
Palo Alto, CA 94303

## References

Birkenholz, Robert J. (1999). *Effective adult learning*. Danville, IL. Interstate Publishers, Inc.

Merriam, Sharan B., & Caffarella, Rosemary S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Wlodkowski, R. J. (1999). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults – 2nd edition*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass Inc.

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