Continuing Education

THE

ESSENTIALS
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Continuing education is one of the most rewarding fields of endeavor and work. It is essential to the improvement of the quality of life for all individuals. It is necessary for the success of business, government and employers. It is the primary delivery mechanism for lifelong learning. It enhances the sense of community. It is central to the improvement of society in the 21st century.

Continuing education is also critical to the mission and future of institutions that host continuing education programs. Continuing education provides unique contributions to help position your institution for continued success as we transition from the last century into the new knowledge society and information age of the 21st century.

THE ESSENTIALS is designed for anyone working in or associated with the field of continuing education, including:

Leaders
Continuing education CEOs will find the most important research and leadership practices for positioning your continuing education program for success in the changing marketplace of the 21st century. The book also serves as an independent objective way to verify the best management strategies in addressing an increasingly competitive external environment. And it is a handy guidebook for the training of continuing education staff and personnel to reduce risks and avoid failures.
Central administrators in institutions will receive the required information necessary for the oversight of continuing education units. Decision makers now have a resource for understanding how continuing education is a distinct and highly skilled, sophisticated and specialized area of work. And institutional leaders will have additional evidence to demonstrate how continuing education is critical to the mission of the institution, providing unique contributions to help position the institution for greater prosperity and service in the 21st century.

Professional Staff

Professional staff will get a checklist of the most important strategies, techniques and practices in improving continuing education operations, marketing and new program development. Every professional staff member working in the field of continuing education should have a working knowledge of the information contained in this book, especially the benchmarks and ratios for success. With this book, professional staff can improve execution, productivity and results, avoid the most common mistakes made in continuing education, and learn new ways to best use valuable and limited staff time.

New Staff

New staff members will find a unique resource for getting acquainted and up to speed quickly and effectively in their new positions. Continuing education is a different and specialized occupation, with unique skills and requirements. New staff will get the best introduction to the fundamental concepts and every-day processes that make continuing education programs work effectively and productively.

Everyone reading this book will find guideposts pointing to more advanced information. THE ESSENTIALS is a condensation of the fundamentals in continuing education. This book is intended as a beginning, a start, into the increasingly sophisticated knowledge areas of the field of continuing education.
LERN specializes in advanced cutting-edge research in continuing education practice for continuing education programs ranging from hundreds of thousands in income to $25 million or more. LERN provides answers and solutions to continuing education programs pursuing greater success.

Our professional consulting and training staff is the largest and most expert in the world in the field of continuing education. Contact us with your needs. For further resources, a bibliography and list of services for you and your program is provided at the end of the book.
Continuing Education: The Essentials
Chapter 2
Overview of the Field

Continuing education has always been important to society and individuals alike, but in the 21st century the new knowledge economy will make continuing education even more central to success for individuals, employers, professions, communities and society as a whole. At the same time, continuing education has become a very sophisticated, competitive, skilled and specialized business. This combination of mission (service to society) and money (the requirement to be financially self sufficient) make continuing education a unique, exciting and rewarding profession.

Continuing education in North America (Canada and the United States) differs somewhat from other countries around the world in that North America has a diverse provider base, with almost every and any type of organization participating in offering some kind of continuing education. It is that richness of offerings and choice for the learner that makes continuing education in North America innovative and of high quality.

There are a variety of providers in the field right now. Traditional non-profit institutions are major players. They include:

- Community colleges and technical institutes serving both the local community and area-wide audiences with continuing education.

- Universities and four-year colleges serving local, state and national audiences with continuing education.

- Public schools serving local communities with community education.
• Park and recreation departments serving local communities with recreation programming.
• Associations at the state and national level serving occupations, professions and interest areas with association education.
• Hospitals, museums, libraries, and other non-profits.

Joining these non-profit institutions is an increasing number of for-profits. They include:
• Businesses specializing in continuing education and training for one or more audiences.
• Corporations offering customer education.
• Shops and stores offering “boutique” courses for a niche market.
• Consultants and trainers providing specialized courses for a niche market.
• Online providers scanning the globe with general and specific online offerings.

Continuing education is usually thought of as organized educational offerings for adults beyond formal schooling in which there is a teacher and one or more learners.

Much continuing education is open to anyone in the public, other continuing education is available to anyone but of greater interest to someone in a particular occupation or profession.

Other continuing education is developed on contract for a specific client, company, or organization and is closed to the general public.

Almost all courses offered without credit are considered continuing education. Some credit and degree programs, such as night classes, evening college, summer courses, graduate degrees, non-traditional degrees, and online courses may be considered continuing education by the college or university offering them.

Continuing education is generally NOT:
• Literacy, adult basic education, GED or high school degree completion.
• Full-time degree programs for students of traditional age, 18-22.
• On-the-job training or in-house company training.
Lifelong learning is a much broader term which encompasses just about any kind of learning throughout life.

Within continuing education there are some distinctions in offerings, with some differences in benchmarks, procedures, and ratios for success among them. The two major broad areas of continuing education are open enrollment courses and contract training.

Open enrollment continuing education has two important different kinds of offerings. They are:

**Professional continuing education**

Work-related offerings, targeted to workers and employers, with brochures often mailed to an individual at the place of work. Professional development, professional studies, continuing professional education, and education are some of the various terms used.

**Community programming**

Avocational and leisure offerings, with some business and professional development courses included, targeted to individuals, with brochures often mailed to an individual at the place of residence. Community education, adult education, general interest classes, and leisure education are some of the various terms used.

**Contract training**

In addition to open enrollment courses and offerings, continuing education may also include contract training — education developed on contract for a specific client, company, or organization and closed to the general public. Customized education, work force development, training and in-house or on-site education are some of the various terms used. Contract training has led to consulting, a growing area of contract training for continuing education.

For administrators of continuing education, each of these major areas of continuing education has some variation in successful operations, professional staff skills, ratios for success, benchmarks and specialized skills.
Within open enrollment offerings, a wide variety of formats are engaged, including:

- One-night-a-week classes
- One-night-only classes
- Weekend classes
- All-day seminars
- Multiple-day seminars and Institutes
- Conferences
- Certificate programs
- Trips and tours
- Special events and festivals
- Lectures
- Tutoring and mentoring
- Consulting
- Online courses

Other formats are emerging, evolving and being created frequently to respond to the needs of customers.
The Philosophy of Continuing Education

The philosophy behind continuing education is often understated, implicit, and rarely discussed or debated. Yet throughout the history of North America, three philosophical tenets about learning and teaching have evolved and become accepted by most if not all providers of continuing education. Understanding these three philosophical tenets is essential.

1. The responsibility for learning rests not only with the continuing education program administration, but also with the teacher and the participants.

Continuing education promotes self-directed learning. Much of continuing education is voluntary, not mandatory. And almost all education authorities and professors say that continuing education is more successful when it is undertaken voluntarily and enthusiastically by a learner, rather than being mandated to a reluctant learner.

Continuing educators often act as a linking mechanism between teachers and other subject matter experts and the participants, leaving the subject matter content to the teacher or instructor, and the evaluation of whether the course was satisfactory up to the participants.
While continuing education providers and administrators take responsibility in the administration and offering of courses and activities, sometimes even guaranteeing them, responsibility for successful teaching and learning is shared with teachers and the participants.

One ramification of this notion of shared responsibility is the concept of self-directed learning. Continuing education places a good part of the responsibility for learning on the learner. This brings up the recurring argument about whether people know what is good for them, and continuing education as a field predominantly comes down on the side of “yes,” or at least that people should know what is good for them. Learners ought to be able to distinguish a good class from a poor one. Learners ought to be able to judge whether they are learning, whether they have developed a competency in the content of the class, and whether the instructor is able to help them learn.

2. Anyone can learn.

While this philosophical concept is widely accepted today, it has not always been the case. Before 1970, it was believed that you could not “teach an old dog new tricks,” as the saying went. Many people also believed that a traditional formal education was enough to last throughout one’s life.

Today it is commonly believed that anyone can learn, and that learning should continue throughout one’s lifetime, with the term lifelong learning having evolved and gained popularity. And yet continuing educators often are at the forefront of extending the notion that anyone can learn to new frontiers, breaking down other barriers and outmoded beliefs.

One ramification of this philosophical tenet is the notion that learning is good in and of itself, having both internal rewards as well as external rewards. Not all learning has to be for credit or a degree in order to be valuable.

Another ramification is that if anyone can learn, and all individuals are in some way different from each other, then individuals must necessarily then learn differently. Today continuing educators
are exploring ways in which to help individuals learn in a variety of ways.

And yet another ramification is the notion that we each can, and should, learn throughout our lifetime. Continuing education is unique and essential in that it not only embraces but carries out and executes the notion of lifelong learning. Without continuing education, lifelong learners would be without one of their primary ways to continue learning.

Continuing educators understand that lifelong learning extends one’s actual life, keeping the brain and body active longer in life. Continuing educators understand that avocational and leisure learning keeps the brain active for workers and employees who then can acquire new work skills much faster. Continuing educators understand that lifelong learning is positive not only for the individual, but for businesses and community development and the economy and for society in general. When an individual engages in lifelong learning, everyone benefits.

3. Anyone can teach.

The notion that anyone can teach, and can teach anything, was also considered educational heresy at one time. Today continuing educators understand that people who are doing something are most often the best teachers of that ‘something.’

Continuing educators also understand that new subject matter is being created every day. Continuing educators understand that an unlimited offering of courses and subjects is far preferable for all concerned than a limited offering, and that the marketplace of participants is the best judge of what can and should be offered in almost all circumstances.

There is an unlimited number of topics and specialties that adults want to learn about today, and the only way to meet that need is to encourage learners to be teachers as well. In fact, it is a repeatedly proven concept that the best way to learn something is to teach it. Thus, the interplay between teaching and learning is very positive and beneficial.

At one time this “right to teach” any subject was challenged by
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traditional gatekeepers. But always the freedom to learn in a democratic society was tied to the freedom to teach. Continuing educators have behaved responsibly in this regard, and so have almost all teachers and learners. There have been almost no instances of irresponsibility when it comes to teaching various subjects and topics in a democratic society.

Other ideas about the role of continuing education

In addition to these three basic concepts about continuing education, there are other ideas about the purpose and role of continuing education in society. Some of them are stated here.

Informal structure. That continuing education is supposed to remain flexible, responsive to the marketplace, providing interaction among people as well as subject matter, and that social interaction among participants is a positive side effect that actually enhances the learning.

The community is a learning environment. The community is a learning environment which provides a rich array of resources for learning and teaching. Some of the resources are not always visible, and continuing educators play a role in discovering some of those resources and making them available to the public.

Linking knowledge and action. That continuing education is one way in which knowledge can be linked to action, and that community development, economic development, social progress, and other positive societal action and individual action comes from continuing education. There is also the belief that individual self development, behavior change, and growth can, should and does stem from continuing education.

Process is as valuable as content. Many continuing educators believe that the process of learning, engagement, teaching and sharing is as valuable as the actual content of a class. The process of learning, of learning how to learn, engages the brain and allows us
as individuals to later acquire other knowledge when needed in a much faster and more productive manner.

**Responsiveness to the community.** Whether the community is local and geographic in nature, or dispersed and targeted by occupation or interest area, that continuing education is, and is supposed to be, responsive to the individual needs of the community it is serving.

**Education creates social change.** Since the beginnings of adult education in the history of North America, continuing education has often led to positive social change in society, and continuing education can and should be a catalyst for social change, offering innovative and alternative ways of thinking so that society can move forward.

### A Short History of Continuing Education

The history of Continuing Education has evolved both from institutions and from adult educations. For much of the history of North America, continuing education activities were called adult education.

Adult education developed very differently from formal schooling. Historically, adult education programs have arisen to meet specific needs, not as part of an overall general design of education for the country.

There is a rich tradition of adult education throughout the history of our country. During Colonial times in America, apprenticeships were a common way for young men and women to learn a trade. Although organized to some degree, an apprenticeship was essentially an agreement between two people. The apprentice would agree to work for his or her “teacher” for a given length of time and in return would be trained in an occupational skill. Benjamin Franklin is sometimes referred to as the father of adult education in this country. In 1727 he formed in Philadelphia a weekly discussion group called the Junto. Subscription libraries, the predecessors of today’s free public libraries,
were started in colonial times. In those days, people paid a subscription for the privilege of using a library, with the fees going to purchase new books. The primary education institution of those times was the church.

Between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, other adult education movements arose. The lyceum movement which flourished between 1826 and 1839 was a popular one. It was started by Josiah Holbrook and comprised a series of lectures and town forums offered in circuit fashion throughout the small towns of New England and later extended to other parts of the country. Public libraries and museums started during this time, and mechanics’ institutes were instrumental in providing training — the Cooper Union and the Lowell Institute being two famous ones. Such voluntary associations as the YMCA blossomed, leading de Tocqueville, a French commentator of the time to note that America was a land of volunteer organizations.

The time between the Civil War and World War I was a transitional period, with the country moving from an agricultural economy to an industrial one and people moving from rural settings to increasingly urban ones. Cooperative Extension was started during this time, as were a multitude of correspondence courses. Perhaps the most intriguing movement of the time was the Chautauqua movement. It was started on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in New York State as a residential summer church school. Soon it became popularized, and its range of study broadened to include cultural, artistic, political, and even scientific endeavors. With speakers, plays, music, and demonstrations, summer learners were both entertained and informed. In due time, other Chautauquas were established, and then traveling Chautauquas, using circus tents, were sent throughout the East and Midwest. Millions of people would attend a Chautauqua in its heyday, listening to the great speakers of the time, outstanding musicians and vocalists, and other performer-educators. Although the movement died in the mid-1920s, its spontaneous birth, fresh and innovative style and orientation to the general public have made it an exciting example of adult learning in our history.
Since the 1920s, much adult education was institutionalized — in labor unions, churches, Cooperative Extension, the military, business and industry. But much of it still arises spontaneously at different times to meet local needs, sometimes startling professional educators. The moonlight schools of Kentucky were started by a woman who saw the need to teach reading to adults. Being a public school teacher, she opened up her school at night so adults could attend. They were called moonlight schools because the adults could only come on moonlit nights when they could see their way to the school. The Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, started in 1927 by Myles Horton, remains to this day a testament to the craving that adults have for linking learning with their own social condition. Highlander has provided a place where poor mountain people, blacks, labor leaders, coal miners, and others could come and learn from each other. Some of the recent great social movements have been spurred on by unique adult learning centers.

In the 1960s civil rights leaders engaged in adult education activities to help African Americans understand their voting rights and to encourage them to vote. These unstructured activities were called Freedom Schools. After college students participated in one such effort in the south in the summer of 1964, the college students took the idea of Freedom Schools back to their campuses and turned it into Free Universities.

The first Free University started in the fall of 1964 at the University of California at Berkeley. The concept, educational heresy at the time, was that anyone could teach, anyone could learn, and any subject could be offered. Courses were ungraded and offered without credit, and became enormously popular. Free universities spread to over 300 campuses, and then were started as independent entities in communities and cities all across North America.

The free university model, both in terms of philosophy and in terms of structure, practice and marketing, became so successful with the general public that traditional institutions began to adopt and expand their own course offerings using the free university model.

Many institutions had been offering courses before. But beginning in the 1970s the numbers of offerings, the broadening scope
and variety of those courses, and number of institutions offering courses began to explode. Over the next thirty years the number of people participating in such courses would triple.

Colleges and universities expanded their non-credit offerings, calling them continuing education. Public schools expanded their offerings to adults, calling them community education. Parks and recreation departments expanded their class offerings, calling them recreation programs. Associations expanded their educational offerings to members, calling them association education. Museums, hospitals, vocational technical institutes, libraries and other non-profit organizations also began or expanded their course offerings. Some for-profit companies, local businesses, shops and stores also began offering courses to customers and potential customers. In all, one central feature of continuing education in North America is the rich diversity in providers and subjects offered to the public and targeted audiences.

The term “continuing education” became popular in the 1970s, replacing “adult education” as the most common term. In 1964, Congress in the United States passed the Adult Education Act providing funds and support for adult basic education and high school degree completion for adults. From then on, the term adult education became confused with adult basic education.

Continuing education implies a continuing of one’s education beyond college. From the 1970s to today, studies show those most likely to participate in continuing education are people with undergraduate degrees or some college.

Continuing education today continues to undergo change, adapting to the ever-changing marketplace and needs of the public. Given that the 21st century is seeing an information or knowledge economy replace the industrial economy of the last century, continuing education is likely to be even more important to individuals and society in this century than ever before.
Chapter 4
Learning & Teaching

How Adults Learn

As an administrator of a continuing education program, you not only work with teachers and instructors. You also are a teacher yourself. Administrators and staff in continuing education thus should know these essentials about how adults learn.

The adult’s mental learning state is not a blank chalkboard on which you, the teacher, can write as you wish. Neither is the adult learner’s head an empty pail for you to fill with your knowledge and ideas. The adult learner’s chalkboard already has many messages on it, and his mental pail is almost full already. Your job as teacher is not to fill a tabula rasa, but to help your participants reorganize their own thoughts and skills. A prerequisite to helping adults learn is to understand how they learn.

As complex human beings, we bring to the learning situation a combined set of emotional, physical, mental, and social characteristics that make each one of us unique. The way to approach this diversity in learners is with variety in your teaching. To do that, it is best to understand some of the characteristics of adults.

Emotional Characteristics

Adults’ emotional states are inextricably tied up in their ability to learn. To learn, an adult must be emotionally comfortable with
the learning situation. Indeed, some educators have gone so far as to equate a good emotional state with learning. Says J. Roby Kidd in How Adults Learn, “Feelings are not just aids or inhibitors to learning; the goal of learning and of emotional development are parallel and sometimes identical and can probably be most conveniently stated as self-realization and self-mastery.”

Throughout the ages, one’s emotional state has always been manipulated to try to induce learning, but somehow the attempt to produce positive feelings became distorted in the mistaken belief that greater learning would occur if one produced negative feelings of pain, fear, or anxiety.

The dunce cap, a sign of humiliation, was not originally intended to be so. Instead, the cone-shaped headgear was believed to have magical powers, just as some contemporaries believe the similar pyramid shape has unknown powers. Putting the cap on one who had missed a question or needed help was not a punishment, but was believed to help that person learn. Over the years the symbolism changed from a positive helping gesture to a sign of humiliation and ignorance.

Unfortunately, vestiges of the punishment principle either consciously or unconsciously are present in even the most enlightened classes. Learning can be inhibited by frowns and other gestures.

In helping a person learn, the teacher must be able to help create a positive emotional climate, and the key to that state is one’s self-image.

Although most adults come to class mentally ready to learn, at the same time, they may be inhibited from learning by a poor self-image. That poor self-concept may not be correct, may not be rational, but nevertheless exists in many people. It comes from various sources.

A shy person may feel unable to participate to meet the expectations of others in the class. A manager who has been turned down for several promotions may feel trapped in a dead-end job and doubt the value of learning anything. A housewife who has stayed at home with children for many years may feel she is not current or informed enough to converse on an adult level again. Someone
who has been out of school for several decades may feel incapable of studying anymore, and may fear being left far behind the other students. The causes of a less-than-positive self-image are many. They stem from natural feelings about inadequacy and growing older, and some are induced artificially by society.

**Physical Characteristics**

Abraham Lincoln may have been able to read at night by firelight, and children may have learned in straight-backed wooden desks in drafty log cabin schools, but today’s adults can detect and be influenced by the slightest changes in comfort. Adults are more attuned to comfortable surroundings, more sensitive to discomfort.

Make sure your setting is comfortable, neither too warm nor too cold. Older people chill more easily, and your sense of warmth may not coincide with those in your group. In a small crowded room, your participants will become hot and stuffy sitting next to each other sooner than you will. Ask your participants to tell you if they are uncomfortable.

All adults in your class, even the younger ones, are declining physically. Everyone is aging, even those who refuse to admit it. Our physical state affects our capacity to learn. Physique and intelligence are related because our bodies influence how and whether we can learn.

To compensate for visual difficulties of learners of all ages, think carefully about how you can make words, charts, objects, even yourself, clear to all your participants.

Set up your room so that no one has to look directly into sunlight. Make sure there is enough overhead lighting. If you use a flip chart, use large letters when writing on it. Seat people so they can see each other. Participants will engage in discussion and learn more from each other if they can see each other.

Just as important as seeing well is hearing well. Inability to hear well, either because of one’s own capability or because of the setting, can make learners feel insecure, less intelligent, isolated, and far less willing to participate.
In preparing your class, think about how you can ensure that every participant will hear you. Try to select a room that is reasonably free of outside street noises, or noises from other rooms in the same building. Listen for any interference from heating sources, air conditioning, coffee pots, and any other systems or appliances in the room.

Design your space so that you can always be heard by your participants, and so that they can hear each other. If you have a large class, experiment to see if a microphone helps or hinders. Speak in clear, loud, and distinct tones. Don’t talk to your group with your back turned to them while you are concentrating on something else, like setting up some projection equipment. Ask as often as you need to whether people in the back can hear you. When others in the class are talking, make sure they are facing the majority of the class. Ask people to stand up if necessary. Repeat questions from the group so everyone can hear them.

Mental Characteristics

Although adults may come to the learning situation with bodies that are not always in prime shape, the story is different for their mental attitudes. Mentally, adults are eager to learn — otherwise they would not be there.

Several aspects of adult learning mentality relate to your helping them to learn: a readiness to learn, problem orientation, and time perspective.

A readiness to learn. Adults for the most part will come to your class ready to learn. Almost all adult learning is voluntary these days, and even societal coercion, such as peer pressure, does not seem to affect adult learners. They attend because they want to.

Part of that readiness may be a natural growth process in which “true learning” — self-study, personal inquiry, or self-directed learning — is more welcome after one’s formal schooling or education ends. Even the sixteenth century master of self-study, Montaigne, wrote about his education, “At thirteen... I had completed my course, and in truth, without any
benefit that I can now take into account.” Whether their experiences in school were beneficial or not so positive, adults want to view their adult learning experiences as separate from more formal school, and will approach them differently. This may be because adults are not only ready to learn but need to learn.

**Problem orientation.** Education for children is often subject-centered, concentrating on various disciplines like philosophy and science, and the abstract as well as the practical. Adult learning, on the other hand, is more problem-centered. Adults want to learn to solve or address a particular problem, and are more satisfied with their learning if it applies to everyday experiences, is practical, or is current.

Adults are oriented toward problem solving because they are faced with certain developmental tasks stemming from the roles they assume, or want to assume, in their families, work, and society. These tasks and roles demand a good deal of adjustment, accomplishment and learning. Although society pushes few adults into the classroom, it certainly creates enough needs and wants to encourage adults to perform their best in various roles and life stages.

**Time perspective.** Another and related impetus for problem orientation in adult learning is that an adult’s time perspective is different from that of a child. For a child, time, both past and future, is a vast quantity. A year ago is a long time. And the future is endless. Increasingly, as one becomes older, time becomes less expendable and more limited. The future is not so endless after all, and the past blurs a little so that ten years wasn’t all that long ago. As time becomes more limited, it becomes more important. In the learning situation, adults prefer what can be learned today or in the near future to what can be learned over a longer period of time. The adult’s interest in solving problems within their older time perspective makes adults more concerned with specific narrow topics of relevance than broad, generalized or abstract subjects.

A readiness to learn, problem orientation, and specific time perspective contribute to an internal motivation to learn.
The time and problem orientations do not imply that everything adults want to learn is so immediate as fixing the plumbing. Many different kinds of issues, thoughts, and ideas may constitute a timely problem. For one person, finding out whether beauty lies in a museum painting or in a mountaintop view may constitute a legitimate learning problem. For another person, determining how the ancient philosophers combined work with study may be an equally immediate problem.

Social Characteristics

The most important social characteristic of the adult learner is an abundance and variety of experiences. This aspect alone makes teaching adults different from teaching children or youth.

Your participants will be coming from different backgrounds, occupations, types of upbringing, ethnic heritages, and parts of town. Each one will have a different mix of experiences and previously formed perceptions when entering your class. Some of these perceptions are about school group interactions, and the subject.

School. Even if you are not working in a school-like atmosphere, structured learning situations are inevitably associated with previous schooling. For many people, their formal schooling was less than successful. Many adults received low grades in school and have some stigma attached to that period of time. Others may have outwardly done well in school, but inwardly felt the experience was boring or a waste of time. Generally speaking, it is best to reduce the number of associations with formal schooling in your references, style, and approach to your subject. When teaching those with unfavorable school experiences, it is wise not to repeat those mannerisms and actions which may remind your participants of their past situations. The imprint of our schooling is still on all of us, and if those memories are not good, it is best not to revive them.

Group interactions. Your class is just one kind of group in which adults participate. Some will come with positive expectations about interacting in a group; some will not. Some will come
wanting to be leaders in the group; others will have already decided before the class starts to be passive or take a minimal role in group participation. Some will see the group as an opportunity to display talent and knowledge while others will see it as a possible threat to exposing their lack of talent and knowledge.

The subject. Every adult coming to your class will have some perception about the subject to be discussed. Some will have a degree of proficiency in the topic; others will have been acquainted more superficially. Some will have had a negative encounter with the topic, or gained some misinformation. Others will have thought about it from a distance, but come with curiosity and some ideas not based on reality, but on what others have said or done.

Social psychologist Gardner Murphy says that adults, contrary to common assumption, are not able to detach themselves emotionally from the subject at hand. “The adult has not fewer but more emotional associations with factual material than do children, although we usually assume that he has less,” he says.³

Working with your participants’ experiences is perhaps your most rewarding challenge. These varied and copious experiences need to be handled on two levels. First, you as a teacher need to deal with the backgrounds your participants bring to class. If someone has a negative image of schooling, you may have to help that person see this situation as different from past schooling. If a person in the group has gained some misinformation about the subject, you will need to clarify the misinformation. If some of your participants automatically shy away from participating in a group, you may want to try to draw them out or structure exercises to give them as much interaction as your over-eager students have.

On another level, you have an abundant resource at hand in the past experiences of class members. Each has some event, skill, idea, or knowledge worth sharing with the rest of the group. As Sharon Merridan and Rosemary Cafarella note, “Life experience functions in several ways... Adults call upon their past experiences in the formulation of learning activities, as well as serving as one another’s resources in a learning event.”⁴ You can
tap into the variety in backgrounds to illustrate your points, to encourage discussion, to stimulate peer teaching, to gain new knowledge yourself. It is this wealth in your participants that makes teaching adults so exciting and rewarding. Drawing on your participants’ experiences can make the class an exciting and new interaction every time you teach; to ignore the past is to miss out on something valuable and special.

**Motivation to Learn**

The total of one’s mental, emotional, physical and social states determines a person’s motivation to learn. Much attention throughout history has been paid to how to motivate people. Generals have tried to motivate troops, supervisors have tried to motivate workers, salespeople have tried to motivate themselves, staffs have tried to motivate boards of directors, and boards of directors have tried to motivate staffs.

The quest for motivation has led to much thought on the subject as well. Those writing about the power of positive thinking can stay on the best seller list for weeks or even years, and those speaking about it can fill halls with rallies on motivation.

Most authorities on adult learning advocate encouraging self-directed learning. For example, author Laurent Daloz says, “We teachers sometimes speak of pushing our students to higher stages of development. We want the best for them after all, and need to know that we have made a difference in their lives — an important difference. To push a person to change is about as effective in the long run as trying to push a chain uphill. People develop best under their own power.” As a teacher, you will doubtless be confronted by people with a range of motivations. How much time you want to spend stimulating motivation is up to you.

This author’s experience is that almost all people want to learn. A given person may not want to learn a specific subject in a specific way at a specific time, but that person is nevertheless motivated to learn provided there is a subject of interest engaged with his or her own learning style.
Most adult learning experts agree that while motivation comes from the learner, responsibility for motivation to learn rests not only with the learner, but also with the teacher and program administration.

You as a teacher can help or hinder another person’s attempts to learn. By failing to recognize limits, by ignoring or even constructing barriers, by not understanding how a person learns, you can be a negative influence on someone’s learning. By facilitating learning and helping your participants, you can be a positive influence.

**Attributes of a Good Teacher**

We can describe the most commonly accepted characteristics of what makes a teacher of adults effective. But the descriptions will be general, and denote attitudes and basic skills. It may even leave you a bit unsatisfied; and that is simply because there is no one way to teach adults.

This author, like most of you, can recall having learned something on a snowy evening around a cabin fireplace while chatting with another person, and having learned just as much while sitting in a straight-backed high school desk in a classroom with a former West Point instructor lecturing. You will undoubtedly remember, as we list some of the favorable characteristics of adult teachers, equally outstanding teachers who didn’t have a sense of humor, didn’t care at all about the students or listen intently, and yet they excelled in teaching.

Nevertheless, it helps to talk about the kind of teacher people respond to most of the time. Even if you cannot develop every skill to the fullest, if you are sincere about becoming a good teacher, you probably will succeed. One of the chief characteristics of adult learners is that they appreciate and sympathize with someone who is trying.

Educator Frank C. Pearce describes the ideal teacher of adults as “people-centered, more interested in people than things, more interested in individuality than conformity, more interested in finding solutions than in following rules. The teacher must have
understanding, flexibility, patience, humor, practicality, creativity and preparation.”

One must meet three requirements before being able to teach adults:

- a basic competence in the subject,
- a desire to share one’s knowledge,
- a wish to help adults learn.\(^6\)

**Basic competence.** The first requirement has intimidated many potentially good teachers of adults because they have mistaken a basic competence for exceptional competence. Although the more one knows about a subject, the more one can share, most people underrate their competence rather than overrate it. If you have a basic competence and are honest about your skills and experience in describing the course, by all means teach.

**Desire to share one’s knowledge.** The second requirement is essential. Someone with a basic subject competence will likely be a far better teacher with a desire to share it, than would be a subject expert without a desire to share it.

**A wish to help adults learn.** The third requirement is not only critical, but becoming more important than simply a subject expertise. Helping adults learn is such an essential teaching skill that it should occupy more of your time and attention than the subject material.

In evaluating classes, the problem most students point to *least* is the teacher’s knowledge of the subject. Most student complaints are not about the teacher’s knowledge of the subject but the teacher’s ability to share that knowledge.

Furthermore, teachers of adults acquire much of their competence by doing and experience. Credentials play a minor part in the teacher’s credibility and the student’s interest in one’s teaching ability. The old saying, “He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches,” just doesn’t hold true for teaching adults. In most adult learning, it is the person who can who does the teaching.
Bibliography

Information for *Continuing Education: The Essentials* was taken from the following books, manuals and publications, published and available from LERN.


2. *The Marketing Manual* (Sixth Edition), by LERN professional staff and consultants


4. *How to Teach Adults* (Third Edition), by William A. Draves


8. *Developing Successful New Programs*, by LERN professional staff and consultants

9. Certified Program Planner (CPP) Study Guide and Readings, Greg Marsello, editor

For information on these and other publications from LERN, go to www.lern.org.
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About LERN

The Learning Resources Network (LERN) is the leading consulting organization in continuing education and the largest association in continuing education in the world.

Begun in 1974, LERN is a non-profit, tax-exempt education organization. Services are provided by 30 staff and consultants located across the United States and in other countries. Members serve in the LERN leadership, including the Board of Directors.

LERN’s mission is to extend lifelong learning to all. We are the authoritative, distinctive source of practical information related to lifelong learning programs, such as continuing education programs. Our slogan is “Information That Works!”

At the time of this writing, LERN serves over 2,000 continuing education programs a year. More than 1,000 continuing education programs are Organizational Members and receive free and exclusive member services. Almost another 1,000 continuing education programs are customers every year, participating in LERN education and events, contracting with LERN for consulting or training, or otherwise purchasing products and services from LERN. Continuing education programs engaging LERN receive a 10:1 payback and ROI on all LERN services and consulting, with membership guaranteed.

LERN has the top consultants in the continuing education business, with professional staff and consultants specializing in various aspects of continuing education. Major areas of expertise include:

Continuing education training and consulting

Training, consulting, answers and solutions on eMarketing, marketing, promotion, finance, pricing, contract training, certificate programs, online courses, online certificates, program development, curriculum building, leadership, management, needs assessment, strategic planning and other advanced how-to aspects of continuing education.
**Strategic planning**

LERN also engages and works with institutional leaders and decision makers engaged in long-term institutional strategic planning and faculty development.

**Online learning and faculty development**

LERN is a leading provider of online faculty development, offering the Certified Online Instructor designation, online courses, and in-person faculty development seminars.

**Vision**


**Research**

LERN is a leading research organization in continuing education, higher education and learning, including pedagogy and teaching strategies.

**Standards**

LERN leaders are actively engaged in creating new educational standards for the 21st century, including the International Learning Unit (ILU), certificate standards, individual learning accounts, and other standards.
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Our four-day Institutes are the most intensive, advanced, comprehensive professional development available. Held in January/February and June. Also available in-house or on-site. Topics include:

- Program Management
- Contract Training
- Association Education
- Executive Leadership
- Successful Needs Assessment & Market Research
- Marketing
- Successful Certificate Programs
- Strategic Online Course Planning

Certified Program Planner (CPP)

The leading professional development recognition in lifelong learning. More than 1,000 CPPs awarded since the program started in 1990. Three specialties are offered:

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- Contract Training specialty.
- Certificate Programs specialty.

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- Creating Streaming Audio
- Generational Learning Styles
- Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace

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*Lifelong Learning*

- Marketing
- Finance
- Needs assessment
- Brochures
- Registration
- Program development
- Market research
- Staffing
- Management
- Pricing

*Online Learning*

- Learning online
- Designing online instruction
- Creating successful discussions online
- Teaching online
- Creating streaming audio
- Developing online courses
- Marketing online courses
- Strategic planning for online courses
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THE ESSENTIALS is designed for anyone working in or associated with the field of continuing education.