

Handout from Deborah Ryan Johnson's Presentation Literacy Council Tutors, May 19, 2012

*Research/Experience About Adult Learners

Working Definition of Adult Learner:

- Performs roles in our culture associated with adults (worker, spouse, parent, soldier, responsible citizen)
- Perceives himself/herself to be responsible for his/her life*

*This second part of the working definition is the part most related to motivation!

Adult Learner Attributes: (all of these are generalizations)

- Present with many first-hand experiences (which can influence them either positively or negatively)
- Set habits/strong tastes (sometimes they are coping or compensatory mechanisms)
- Great deal of pride – how they show it differs (and may interfere)
- Cautious in educational environments – often times only bad experiences of schools as child and/or parent
- Preoccupied with life issues
- Can/want to change to better themselves (also may be scared to show weaknesses)
- Want choice
- Need to see progress (concretely helps-talk here about using **graphic representations**** to help students keep track of progress)
- Want to see immediate application of their learning

**Can include charts, graphs, list of books read or words mastered, etc.

Strategies to Help Adult Learners: (generalizations/need to individualize)

- RESPECTFUL!
- Explain why for each activity
- Recognize and value past experiences
- Meaningful, relevant, practical
- Collaborative (focus, planning, materials, etc.)
- Encourage active participation
- Try to diagnose and support learning styles – bring it to their conscious levels both to see if you are right and so they can do it when you are not there (learning styles, preferred modality, **metacognition*****) – point out and reinforce strategies
- Positive reinforcement – as much as or more than children, but honest
- Be flexible/respond to what is going on and what you see/hear
- Bend the rules, push the envelope

***I use metacognition to mean active control over the thinking processes involved in learning.

Characteristics of a Motivating Instructor:

- ❑ Expertise
- ❑ Empathy
- ❑ Enthusiasm
- ❑ Clarity
- ❑ Coach vs. “Sage on the Stage”
- ❑ Strength-based – both tutor and student recognize the students’ strengths and have them be the center/basis of instruction (particularly true if the student demonstrates any disabilities; they are too often focused on what they can’t (do instead of what they can do)
- ❑ Caring!