

# SEVEN ESSENTIALS for EFFECTIVE ADULT EDUCATION

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS FOR THE AI ERA



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## WE LEARN LIKE WE EAT

What did you notice about the people enjoying the buffet in the cover photo? They each have something different on their plate. Some folks aren't even eating; they are socializing with others at the buffet event. Some are simply enjoying a beverage.

This is a great metaphor for how adults learn. Each of us has slightly or significantly different needs at any given moment on our learning journey.

With that in mind, use this guide to hit the ground running with an effective, customized adult teaching and learning strategy.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Welcome to a new era in adult education! While this primer provides essential elements of effective adult education, it doesn't elaborate on the urgent need to update our strategies for the AI era. For a deeper dive into that crucial topic, we invite you to explore our resource, "Adult Learning Revolution: Shifting from Educator to Facilitator in the AI Era."

Before you move forward on your journey toward cost-effective solutions, use this primer to expand upon what you already know about adult learning tenets, get up to speed on a few best practices, and identify ways to apply new insights to your teaching and learning approach, equipping you with the knowledge and tools to design impactful adult education programs. These same essential elements are explored further to support the AI era in the *Adult Learning Revolution* document.



## A BRIEF HISTORY

Adult teaching and learning have been evolving for a long time. Its roots can be traced back to the first distance learning or correspondence courses during the 19th century.

Today, adult education is often a combination of technology-based and face-to-face instruction. The concept grew in popularity in the 1990s with the rise of CD-ROM-based courses.

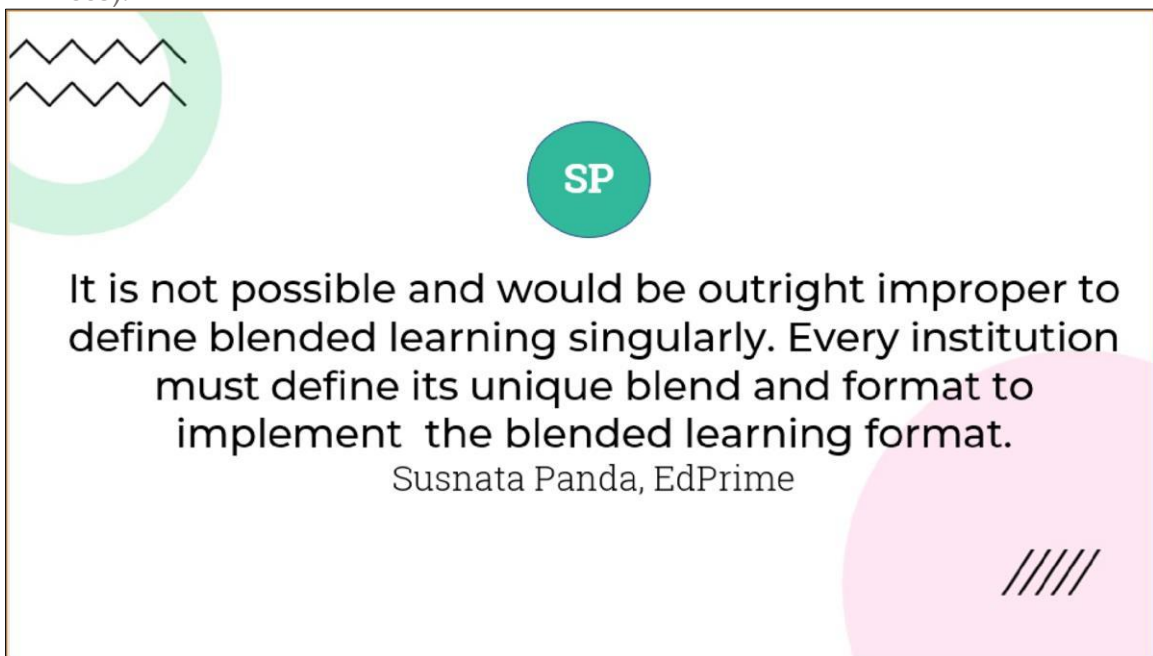
More than ever, a program's instructional endurance is tied to the relationship between learning and impact. For generations, we've selected instructional content and, in some instances, proverbially forced learners. Today, our response to the need for simple and effective teaching and learning will define our level of success and determine what resources will be available in the future.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

- Measuring the success of virtual learning has not been as effective as measuring the impact of inperson learning.
- Learning technology has improved significantly, yet substantial technological challenges remain.
- Economic downturns often lead organizations to reduce or eliminate educational programs.

## CURRENT BENEFITS

- Experts are more accessible to learners, allowing them to share insights when they are most relevant to the learner.
- Modern adult education offers a more practical use of time with ample opportunities for control, repetition, and independent study, which traditional approaches often lack.
- Contemporary strategies provide a safe environment to practice soft skills, safety protocols, and decision-making scenarios.
- A blend of diverse resources helps to effectively combat the "forgetting curve" (Ebbinghaus, 1885).



It is not possible and would be outright improper to define blended learning singularly. Every institution must define its unique blend and format to implement the blended learning format.

Susnata Panda, EdPrime

## ALL. YOU. CAN. EAT. ALL. DAY. LONG.



Imagine you were invited to join friends at your favorite restaurant for an “all you can eat all day long” buffet. How would you do it? How much food can we absorb?

## HOW MUCH CAN WE ABSORB?



Many instructional strategies use a firehose approach in both face-to-face and virtual by teaching all day long.

## LEARNING IN BITE-SIZED CHUNKS



Training, like eating, is an event. Learning, like digestion, is a process.

### NO LONGER THE NORM

“The face-to-face classroom is no longer the norm. It’s an atypical and archaic approach for some organizations. HR and learning professionals use self-paced learning material accessed from a portal, online discussion groups that support a business line, user produced videos, learning communities that provide useful information and support, and online knowledge centers with PDFs, videos, and graphical information accessed through keyword searches.”

—Claire Schooley of Forrester Research™

## DYNAMIC LEARNING STYLES WITHIN THE SAME LEARNER



Today you might crave broccoli; tomorrow, doughnuts with sprinkles. How we learn at any given moment is as dynamic as our food preferences.

Learning styles address habitual ways of perceiving, processing, or reacting to information. The instructional content (nutrients) we need at any given moment varies from learner to learner. For instance, an adult learner might prefer to learn socially one day and independently the next. Their preferred modality might depend on how they perceive the learning objectives, their other priorities, or even something as trivial as whether their barista correctly made their coffee drink that morning.

How often have you heard someone say, "I'm an auditory learner"? While a person may have a predominant learning preference, the different methods of learning, understanding new information, and the ways in which a person expresses and remembers information can vary greatly.

Everyone is born with certain tendencies toward familiar intellectual processes, but culture, personal experiences, maturity level, and development significantly influence these biological or inherited predispositions.

## PEDAGOGY AND ANDRAGOGY



Learning strategies encompass the specific actions and techniques used to facilitate learning. Many teaching and learning strategies are rooted in pedagogy, or child-based learning. Teaching children is often a one-to-many process, whereas adult learning, or andragogy, tends to be a many-to-one process.

Training events often employ a pedagogical approach. Pedagogical models, dating back to the late 16th century, emphasize the didactic premise of one teacher for many learners. A classic example is the 19th-century one-room schoolhouse, where a single teacher instructed students from first through eighth grade.

Higher education, too, seems to be experiencing a quiet crisis as frustrated, unfulfilled adult learners persist in pedagogical settings. Retooling efforts aim to transform learning toward andragogy, recognizing that education is a fundamental global human cause.

In 1966, Dusan Savicevic, Ph.D., of the University of Belgrade, Serbia, a leading expert in andragogy (adult education) in South-Eastern Europe, introduced andragogy to Malcolm Knowles, an American practitioner and theorist of adult education. In adult education, learners are provided with ample resources and are internally motivated and self-directed to achieve clearly defined learning objectives.

Organizations and educational institutions that focus on andragogy, rather than pedagogy, offer a distinct advantage to their target audience. Andragogy enables each learner to begin where they are and take ownership of transforming their performance, utilizing resources tailored to their unique perspective. In short, it gives adults a better chance of achieving greater success because they have input into their learning goals.

Andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn, is viewed and implemented with a wide range of perspectives and nuances. While this document explores one particular approach to adult education, it

is essential to recognize that numerous other valid theoretical and practical frameworks exist. These diverse perspectives, from historical contexts to contemporary models, all contribute to the everevolving field of andragogy.








<h1 style="text-align: center;">PEDAGOGY <i>versus</i> ANDRAGOGY</h1> <h2 style="text-align: center;">CHILD-CENTERED VERSUS ADULT-CENTERED</h2>	
<p><b>Pedagogy</b></p> <p>Ideal for children. The instructor directs learning, providing structured content and managing the environment. Learners are passive recipients.</p>	<p><b>Andragogy</b></p> <p>Learner-centered approach for adults. Emphasizes self-direction, experience, and practical application. The instructor facilitates, supporting learner independence.</p>
Core Principles	
<p><b>Learner Role</b></p> <p>Dependent, Passive, Recipient</p>	<p><b>Learner Role</b></p> <p>Independent, Self-Directed, Active Participant</p>
<p><b>Motivation for Learning</b></p> <p>External Rewards (grades, praise)</p>	<p><b>Motivation for Learning</b></p> <p>Internal Drivers (relevance, personal growth, problem-solving)</p>
<p><b>Learner Experience</b></p> <p>Limited life experience (learning foundation)</p>	<p><b>Learner Experience</b></p> <p>Rich life experience (resource for learning)</p>
<p><b>Learning Style</b></p> <p>Teacher-centered, structured, content-driven</p>	<p><b>Learning Style</b></p> <p>Learner-centered, flexible, problem-based</p>
<p><b>Planning &amp; Evaluation</b></p> <p>Teacher plans and evaluates</p>	<p><b>Planning &amp; Evaluation</b></p> <p>Learners participate in planning and evaluation</p>
Learning Goals	
<p>Often predetermined by curriculum</p>	<p>Often co-determined with learners; relevant to their goals</p>

## **SEVEN LEARNING ESSENTIALS**

While there are many variations regarding the elements of adult learning, experience has shown that they consistently align with the seven components outlined below. For instance, some models emphasize mentorship as a critical principle. However, mentorship is inherently part of social learning and, when provided effectively, encompasses feedback and may even involve experiential, hands-on exercises.

To assess these principles, before proceeding further in this primer, take a few quiet moments to reflect and jot down keywords or phrases that describe how you learn best. Then, as you review the principles below, try to categorize your keywords or phrases into one or more of them.

These principles may also be effective in improving neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to develop new neural pathways when learning how to approach and master a new topic or skill set.

	<p><b>Control</b> <i>Put the learner in the cockpit.</i> How we learn new things can change frequently, so we want control of the process.</p>
	<p><b>Relevance</b> <i>Think objectives.</i> Learning is most effective when goal-oriented and when directly related to immediate needs.</p>
	<p><b>Social</b> <i>Gathering at the same time (synchronous learning).</i> Observing and interacting with others often supports the learning process, enhancing engagement.</p>
	<p><b>Independent</b> <i>Let me figure it out.</i> We can think, act, and pursue our work effectively without the strict regimen of a formal training program.</p>
	<p><b>Repetition</b> <i>A crowd favorite for many (including Aristotle).</i> When did you last engage in an activity that required repetition for improved performance?</p>
	<p><b>Experiential</b> <i>Featuring hands-on.</i> The learner plays a comparatively active and engaged role in the process.</p>
	<p><b>Feedback</b> <i>Both formal and informal.</i> It must be concise. Timely and constructive feedback is critical in deciding the next best step toward improvement.</p>

## ASSESS PRE-EXISTING RESOURCES

Apply the seven learning essentials to your existing resources. This will help you identify gaps in the curricula, delivery methods, and the implementation of the seven learning essentials. This assessment can also help identify possible tweaks to your current strategy, leading to more effective teaching and learning initiatives.

Resource	Control	Relevance	Social	Independent	Repetition	Experiential	Feedback
Knowledge Check		x					x
Learning Objectives		x					
Instructor-led Session			x			x	
In-house mobile app	x			x	x		
e-Learning module	x			x	x		x
Industry conferences		x	x			x	
Performance review		x	x				x
One-on-one with subject matter expert		x	x			x	x
Compliance review		x					x
Online or print-based library	x	x		x	x		
Intranet chat functionality	x	x		x			x

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Armed with these seven essentials, you're now equipped to design and deliver more effective and engaging adult education experiences. The next step is to put these principles into action and start transforming your approach to teaching.

At RetoolED, we believe that these andragogical fundamentals are crucial for adults to effectively learn and integrate AI tools into their work. We offer consultations to help organizations migrate from

traditional pedagogical models to adult-based learning models that empower learners in the AI era. Contact us today to explore how RetoolED can guide you in this crucial transition.

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