

# Chapter 3

## Effective Teaching with Technology in Adult Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Effective teaching with technology in adult education stems from many factors. Technology is only used to enhance learning. Not only are teachers of adult learners required to study the tools related to the use of technology, but are also required to study the nature of knowledge, the nature of learning, constructivism and various kinds of teaching philosophies. Without thorough knowledge of these factors, effective teaching with technology cannot occur in adult education, let alone other educational fields. This article is comprehensive concerning effective teaching with technology in adult education because it also addresses the interrelationships between the use of technologies and the teaching and learning process.*

### INTRODUCTION

Using technology for education and training of adult learners offers many challenges. However, the greatest challenge is to focus not on technology itself but on the learner and learning (Olgren, 2000). Olgren argues that technology invites a tools-first emphasis, but technology is only as good as our knowledge of how to use it to enhance learning (p. 7). Her point is well taken in the field of adult education whose focus is placed on the education and training of adult learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the characteristics of adult

learners is that they have multiple work/family responsibilities (Wang, 2008). Because of this characteristic, adult learners find it hard to attend face-to-face meetings in a traditional classroom on a physical campus at the end of a week day or on a weekend. Universities and colleges have seized this great opportunity to accommodate the needs of adult learning by moving their courses onto computer screens, hence the issue of effective teaching with technology in adult education. Knowles, the father of adult education, predicted in the early 1970s that education, especially the education of adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be

delivered electronically. His predication came true as universities and colleges began to address adult learning by using WebCT or Blackboard programs. These educational programs were purchased in the late 1990s. Adult learners have been taking advantage of these educational programs by taking courses online to meet their needs of upgrading their work skills, getting a college degree/diploma/credentials or simply satisfying their sheer joy of learning. Giant online universities, such as the University of Phoenix, have emerged to launch massive online educational programs to address the learning needs of adult learners. Bash (2003) noted, "In 2002, the University of Phoenix, part of the Apollo Group, saw its enrollment surpass 100,000 students—making it the largest institution of higher learning in the United States" (p. 50). No doubt, this enrollment can be much higher especially when universities and colleges have the need to do more with less. As our student numbers are expected to grow, our budgets continually are shorn. It is not a matter of whether faculty enjoy teaching with technology. Gone are the days when faculty could argue that they are philosophically against teaching with technology. Currently, faculty is required to embrace with open arms the biggest change in their lives to integrate at least some measure of teaching with technology in their practice. It is not surprising when we hear that a certain university has put one third of its courses online. Teaching with technology has emerged as a new trend in this new century. As Brookfield (2006) noted, "These days no college teacher can avoid teaching in a hybrid manner, combining electronic and face-to-face communication. The only question remaining is the degree to which electronic communication is integrated into course activities" (p. 191). As I write, I am teaching over 100 adult learners in four different classes via either hybrid format or entire online format. Here, I am not trying to say that face-to-face education with adult learners would be marginalized with the advent of Internet technology. Rather, teaching

with technology like regular teaching in university settings seems to treat learning as a commodity, turning it into an external object marketed for a hefty price to save cash-strapped programs trying to stay afloat (Brookfield, 2006, p. 192). Perhaps this is where pragmatism comes into play. Where there is learning with technology, there is teaching with technology. After all, programmed instruction with computers was popularized even in the 1960s by behaviorists. Pedagogically, faculty is worried about the fact that teaching with technology would take the personal dimension out of teaching, or remove the relational element. The fundamental question that can be asked is how can students always trust someone they have never seen in person or spoken to directly? Or another question can be asked is can students learn with technology in an isolated environment?

To address such pedagogical questions, let's turn to the advantages of teaching with technology as summarized by Brookfield (2006):

- Teaching with technology is not necessarily qualitatively different from its face-to-face counterpart. Indeed, various introductory guides to e-teaching explore many of the exact same problems (how to engage students, respond to racial differences, take account of different learning styles, and so on) that engage the attention of teachers in face-to-face classrooms (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 1999, 2003).
- In asynchronous discussion learners would have the time to think through their responses without the pressure to come up with an impromptu contribution or response to a teacher's question that would make them look good in class.
- Students who struggled with language, who were introverts, or who needed time to process information and create meaning, as well as those who were intimidated by the theater of the classroom (particularly having to play the role of the smart, capable,

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