Chapter 36
Integrating Digital Photography into Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

As colleges and universities around the country face increasing budget challenges, pressure mounts for a more retail-based approach to education, where the needs of students and the ability of institutions to fulfill them are clearly defined. This article presents a case study of a successful digital photography curriculum for adult learners at a large school district in Southern California. The curriculum represents a retail-based approach to education grounded in meeting the needs of students, expanding their zest for learning and providing new educational opportunities. This approach rests on proven concepts of retail marketing woven into the fabric of the learning experience: Give people what they want and they will keep coming back; expand their universe of wants and you will have a customer for life. The article concludes that even with shrinking budgets, rising costs and a dwindling traditional student population, course curricula can be designed for student enrichment, program growth and ongoing institutional success.

INTRODUCTION

Today, just about everyone has a digital camera. These handy outlets for creative expression, however, have become increasingly complex, integrating with computer software and hardware, as well as the Internet. This universality, coupled with often baffling complexity, creates a perfect opportunity for adult education to tap into a mass audience. Potential students are hungry to discover not only how to decipher technologically complex digital camera equipment but to expand their unique creative vision (Rand & Zakia, 2006). This article explores how effective integration of digital photography curriculum blossomed to meet the fast-paced needs of a growing adult population in a highly visual society (Palmquist, 2008). By building curriculum based on the unique attributes of adult learners, continued growth and success was assured for the adult-education digital pho-

tography program, expanding from two classes per semester to twelve classes per semester in just four years. This expansion incorporated a retail-based approach to education, where students acted collaboratively with the instructor to develop classes meeting their growing need for exponential learning.

BACKGROUND

Ultimately, a successful digital photography program within the context of adult education relies on three factors:

1. Understanding the characteristics of adult learners (Wang, 2007).
2. Understanding how instructors can effectively facilitate adult learning (Penn, n.d.).
3. Fostering an appropriate educational setting (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999).

Characteristics of Adult Learners

To facilitate any successful adult education program, it is critical for educators to understand what drives and motivates the adult learner (Penn, n.d.). According to Malcolm Knowles (1970), a pioneer in the field of adult education who popularized the term andragogy in the U.S., the adult learner generally fits within the following assumptions:

a. **Self-concept of learner:** The adult learner is usually autonomous and self-directed, having lived as capable and independent people (Merriam, 2001). Adult learners usually accept responsibility for their own learning and take an active role in the learning process (Wang, 2007).

b. **Prior life-experience of learner:** The adult learner may have lived a number of years and gathered many prior life experiences, "accumulating a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning" (Merriam, 2001). Previous life experiences can present possible barriers to learning that must be overcome; on the other hand, a students' knowledge base can enrich the classroom experience, bringing new and useful information helping other students to feel connected (Penn, n.d.)

c. **Goal-oriented with a readiness to learn:** The adult learner comes to class ready to learn, especially if they must add knowledge to cope with real-life situations. Many students have a clear goal of staying current with the latest technology and others wish to improve their eye and artistic vision. Any information presented has to be relevant and meaningful to the learner's unique life perspective (Penn, n.d.).

d. **Motivation to learn:** Adult learners are generally highly motivated to learn and have a keen sense of progress towards their goals (Wang, 2007), responding best to internal versus external motivators (Merriam, 2001). Many adults are motivated internally by the desire for an improved quality of life, increased recognition, a greater sense of self-confidence and increased job satisfaction. A great number of motivated adult learners believe "learning is a means to an end, not an end itself" (Penn, n.d.). These are students who are motivated enough to take time out of their busy schedules, which may already be filled with the demands of family, jobs and running a household. They choose to come to class instead.

e. **Need to know:** The adult learner has a need to know why, what and how the material will apply to life. Information presented has to be relevant, practical and have meaning to where the learner is in life. Adult learners feel a strong desire to learn (Wang, 2007).

f. **Orientation to learning:** Adult learners, having lived awhile, are life-centered relative to learning. In other words, adult students generally respond well to information

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