



Teaching Adults: A Practical Guide for New Teachers

Brockett, Ralph G.
Wiley, 2015

Book Review

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Ralph Brockett has spent his career on the leading edge of adult learning theory and practice. He is widely published, a master in the classroom, and – having been inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2005 (among other accolades) – has earned the respect and admiration of his peers. In *Teaching Adults: A Practical Guide for New Teachers*, Brockett takes the posture of a caring mentor to provide a succinct and accessible introduction to the dynamic field of adult learning. His style is conversational, his expertise evident, and he is clearly most interested in helping to equip *you*, the teacher, with very practical advice for teaching adults in a wide variety of formal and informal learning contexts.

Teaching Adults is written for a variety of readers. Brockett suggests an audience that may include a professional tasked with offering a training session in her field, a layperson asked to teach an adult Sunday School class, and a scout leader needing to orient a cadre of adult volunteers. In addition, the book is applicable to those who may not primarily think of themselves as teachers, but who nevertheless spend a fair amount of time teaching – such as ministers, social workers, and health care professionals. Further, higher education professors and instructors will find this book valuable. As Brockett rightly points out, these educators are not always equipped to meet the unique needs of an ever-increasing population of adult learners. Finally, this book can benefit graduate students in the field of adult education, helping to further define and map the foundational concepts of adult learning.

Teaching Adults is organized around a simple formula: effective teaching leads to successful learning! To illustrate this, Brockett weaves together (1) seven essential attributes of effective teachers and (2) four keys to effective teaching. To describe the qualities of effective teachers,

Brockett continually reinforces seven characteristics: trust, empathy, authenticity, confidence, humility, enthusiasm, and respect. Attending to these essential qualities has a distinctive impact on the success of an adult learning event. Similarly, the four keys of effective teaching (know the content, know the adult learner, know about teaching, and know yourself) help to steward learning for maximum transfer and impact. Especially helpful in processing these concepts are the end-of-chapter “think about it” exercises and focused listings of additional resources.

Teaching Adults is an accessible and valuable primer. New and seasoned teachers alike will find practical resources for honing their skills, whatever their educational context. As a basic, introductory text, this book is not peppered with citations and endnotes; however, its bibliography serves as an essential reading list for those new to the field of adult learning theory. I would venture to suggest one drawback: despite its focus on new teachers there is a noticeable lack of discussion of new and emerging learning modalities (such as online environments). The concepts from the book are certainly applicable to all forms of teaching and learning, but an explicit mention of how these could be worked out in the online environment would have reflected the educational learning experiences for many new teachers and learners. The book does contain a self-made remedy, however. The end-of-chapter reflection questions provide teachers from any background with the implicit wisdom needed for addressing the diverse and ever-changing landscape of teaching and learning.

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