



Teaching Adults

A Practical Guide for NEW TEACHERS

Ralph G. Brockett

Teaching Adults

The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series

Teaching Adults

A Practical Guide for New Teachers

Ralph G. Brockett

 **JOSSEY-BASS™**
A Wiley Brand

Cover Design: Wiley
Cover Art: © Vasya Kobelev | Shutterstock
Copyright © 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved.

Published by Jossey-Bass
A Wiley Brand
One Montgomery Street, Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594—www.josseybass.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Readers should be aware that Internet Web sites offered as citations and/or sources for further information may have changed or disappeared between the time this was written and when it is read.

Jossey-Bass books and products are available through most bookstores. To contact Jossey-Bass directly call our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 800-956-7739, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3986, or fax 317-572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for and is on file with the **Library of Congress**.

ISBN 978-1-118-90341-4 (hbk)

ISBN 978-1-118-90359-9 (ebk)

ISBN 978-1-118-90377-3 (ebk)

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Preface	vii
About the Author	xi
Part One: Getting Started	1
1. So, You're Teaching Adults?	3
2. What Is Effective Teaching?	9
Part Two: Four Keys to Effective Teaching	21
3. So, What Are You Teaching About?	23
4. A Dozen Things You Need to Know About Adult Learners	31
5. Building Blocks of Adult Learning	43
6. Planning Instruction	59
7. Teaching Techniques	69
8. Knowing Yourself: Understanding the Teacher Within	85
Part Three: Unlocking Doors to Effective Teaching	97
9. Creating a Positive Learning Environment	99
10. Overcoming Resistance to Learning	113

11. Motivation	121
12. Dealing with Dilemmas and Challenges	133
Epilogue: So, Now You're Ready: Go and Teach Adults	145
References	149
Index	153

Preface

Most of us, at some time in our lives, teach adults. It may be in a classroom or training setting. But most likely, it is in an informal way: teaching a friend or relative a craft or skill that we can pass on, in the workplace when we help a colleague learn a new computer application, during a religious education class at the local church or synagogue, teaching first aid techniques to a group of adult volunteers, or organizing a protest around a controversial issue facing the community. The point is that most people who teach adults do not primarily identify themselves as adult educators. For many educators, such as college instructors, adults usually represent a percentage of all learners. However, adult learning can be found in almost any setting in our society; and where adults are learning, there is someone who is teaching these adults or helping to facilitate their learning.

The purpose of this book is to introduce you to the world of teaching adults. For me, the book presents both a challenge and an opportunity. I have spent my professional life writing mainly for the academic world—those people who identify with the profession and practice of adult education. In this book, my goal is to reach out beyond the academy to share ideas with you in a way that can be read quickly and used as a resource that you can revisit from time to time as you face new challenges and questions in teaching adults. For me the goals are to keep jargon to a minimum and to be sure that the book is grounded in ideas developed from theory, research, and practice in adult education, while

presenting these ideas without the extensive use of footnotes and references. I have included a brief list of books for further reading at the end of each chapter for those of you seeking more in-depth discussion. By writing this book, it was my hope to be able to share ideas I believe are worth sharing with readers like you who may be new to teaching adults or who are seeking new ways to reach the adult learners with whom you are already working.

The book is comprised of twelve chapters and an epilogue divided into three parts. Part One, which includes the first two chapters, begins with Chapter One, which sets the stage for understanding the exciting world of teaching adults. In Chapter Two, I describe seven qualities or attributes of effective teachers and introduce what I envision as four keys to effective teaching. The six chapters of Part Two focus on each of the four keys described above: knowing the content, knowing the adult learner, knowing about teaching, and knowing yourself. In Part Three, four chapters address topics of particular interest in working effectively with adult learners. These include understanding the learning environment, overcoming resistance to learning, motivation, and dealing with special situations that can arise when teaching adults. Finally, a brief Epilogue brings the discussion to a close by summarizing main themes and offering a call to action as you begin to develop your own identity as a teacher of adults.

I wrote this book with four kinds of readers in mind. First, the book is intended for people who are totally new to teaching but who find themselves responsible for some form of teaching. Included here are professionals who are suddenly told they have to offer a training session on an area of their practice; the non-teacher who agrees to teach an adult Sunday School class; people who train volunteer leaders in 4-H, scouting, Junior Achievement, or some other youth group; or the historian who is called upon to teach a group of adults about how to do genealogy on the Internet. These are people who have special skills but have not

previously had an opportunity to help others learn about what they know.

A second audience is made up of people who have responsibility for teaching adults but who don't think of themselves primarily as teachers. These include ministers, social workers, health care providers, and other professionals who identify with a specific profession but who don't *think* of themselves as teachers, even though they know that much of what they do is teaching.

A third audience to whom I have targeted this book is made up of professors or instructors in colleges, universities, community colleges, and preparatory schools. While this group of educators has had a lot of experience with teaching, they often are not prepared to face the challenge of meeting the unique needs of the increasing number of adult and part-time students who enter their classes.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not include as one of the audiences for this book those graduate students in adult education or related fields who are interested in learning about teaching adults. While you need to think of this book as an introduction or overview, I believe it can be a primer that will help you identify areas that you might like to pursue in greater depth during your graduate studies.

I would like to thank several people who have helped to make this book a reality. First, I thank David Brightman, my friend and former editor at Jossey-Bass. His belief in and support of this project was crucial in bringing it to fruition. It has been a pleasure working with such a wonderful editor. Roger Hiemstra has been a constant source of inspiration to me throughout my entire teaching career. He has been my teacher, mentor, colleague, collaborator, and, most important, a trusted friend. Nearly everything I know about teaching adults has been touched in some way by Roger's example, experience, and writings. I would also like to thank the many students I have taught over more than three decades, first at Syracuse University, then at

Montana State University and, since 1988, at the University of Tennessee. I am especially grateful to several students over the past two or three years whose encouragement to write this book truly convinced me that I needed to do it, as well as several students who read earlier drafts of the book in my “Facilitating Adult Learning” course and gave me valuable feedback. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Mary Rowden Brockett, for her support, encouragement, nudging, and, most important, her love. You have truly been the best part of me.

Teaching adults is a journey ... one that is filled with joy, excitement, fear, frustration, doubt, and possibility. My hope is that this book will, in some small way, serve as a map to guide you on your journey. Happy travels.

Ralph G. Brockett
August 2014

About the Author

Ralph G. Brockett, Ph.D., is a professor and the interim head of the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He received his B.A. in psychology and his M.Ed. in guidance and counseling from the University of Toledo, and his Ph.D. in adult education from Syracuse University. Previously, he held faculty positions at Montana State University (1984–1988) and Syracuse University (1982–1984) and has worked in continuing education for health and human services professionals. He is past chair of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education and has served on the board of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. In addition, he is a past editor-in-chief of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* and co-editor of *Adult Learning*, and has served on the editorial boards of four adult education journals. He received the Malcolm Knowles Memorial Self-Directed Learning Award in 2004, was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2005, and was co-recipient of the AAACE Cyril O. Houle Award for Outstanding Literature in Adult Education in 1997 and the Imogene Okes Research Award in 2012.

Among Dr. Brockett's previous books are *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education* (1997; updated 2007, with S.B. Merriam); *Toward Ethical Practice* (2004, with R. Hiemstra); *The Power and Potential of Collaborative Learning Partnerships* (1998, co-edited with I.M. Saltiel and A. Sgroi); *Overcoming*

Resistance to Self-Direction in Adult Learning (1994, co-edited with R. Hiemstra); *Self-Direction in Adult Learning: Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice* (1991, with R. Hiemstra); and *Ethical Issues in Adult Education* (1988, edited). His major scholarly interests are in the areas of self-directed learning, ethics in adult education, and the study of the adult education field.

Part One

GETTING STARTED

SO, YOU'RE TEACHING ADULTS?

Many years ago, a young student was asked by his professor to teach the last two sessions of his introductory psychology class, on classical and operant conditioning. The young instructor-to-be found himself both excited and terrified as he agreed to teach the classes. With only a few days to prepare, he planned to use a combination of lecture, brief discussion, and a film recommended by the professor. The day of the first class arrived, and the young instructor entered the room. With a shaky voice, he introduced himself and said, "Dr. Burns won't be able to be here for the last two classes so I will be filling in." It turned out to be a long session. The film worked fine, but the lecture was presented a little too quickly and the teacher's lack of confidence was apparent. He did his best to answer questions, but there weren't many, and the session ended early.

As you probably guessed, I was that young instructor. This was my first experience teaching in a classroom setting. What I distinctly remember all these years later were two very different emotions: the first was a sense of failure that I had not done a very good job. The second emotion, however, was a tingling inside that said to me "Whew, I'm glad its over, but *I want to try it again*. This was pretty exciting. I want to teach, and *do it better* next time." As it turned out, the next day's class was cancelled due to a snowstorm and I didn't have my second chance . . . until years later.

I have shared this story because many teachers are called upon to teach without having had previous experience. In fact, very few people who teach adults have had some sort of training or preparation in how to do so. There are graduate programs that offer master's and doctoral degrees in adult education or learning (I teach in one), but most people don't know they exist. Indeed, many people who teach adults really don't need an advanced degree. What they *do* need are some basic strategies and tools that can help them to reach the learners they are expected to teach.

Most people who teach adults do so as a *part* of the other responsibilities in their lives. Volunteer literacy tutors, community volunteers, ministers, social workers, health care providers, musicians, and others perform many roles in their jobs, and teaching may only be a small part of their responsibilities. Likewise, most of the people who teach non-credit courses for school districts, community colleges, or university continuing education programs are not full-time teachers, but rather professionals for whom what they are teaching is a hobby or personal interest. Here are a few examples of the kinds of people I am talking about:

- A counselor at a diabetes center works with individuals and groups to help them learn about the disease and how they can better manage their own situations;
- A public official is invited to teach a session on ethics to a group of public administration students at the local university;
- A young stay-at-home mother decides to become a part-time literacy tutor in order to “give back” to others and to have a new challenge outside the home;
- A social worker teaches job skills to a group of unemployed young adults as part of a welfare-to-work program;
- A musician gives private guitar lessons to adults and sometimes teaches a class for the local community college;