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# Ideas and Practices for Adult Learning-Teaching 1991 written by Neuman F. Pollack, Dean

Nova University

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**IDEAS AND PRACTICES FOR  
ADULT LEARNING/TEACHING**

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Published by

School of Business and Entrepreneurship  
Nova University  
Neuman F. Pollack, Dean

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

IDEAS AND PRACTICES FOR  
ADULT LEARNING/TEACHING

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As part of the February, 1991 Faculty Development Workshop, participants were asked to submit best ideas and practices. This publication, Ideas and Practices for Adult Learning-Teaching represents those submissions. In order to capture the specific intent of each contribution, very little editing was done. Thus, the editing experience was a pleasure. More pleasurable, though, was the experience that I had facilitating the workshop. The workshop participants were as fine a group of classroom instructors as could be imagined. This fact is reflected in the quality of the contributions. I salute the contributors.

Many thanks to Dean Neuman Pollack for providing support to these efforts.

Many thanks to Dr. Charles Blackwell for assisting everyone with everything so that this project could be successful.

Many thanks to Lea Toppino and Vi Troppe for helping me initially organize the contributions.

Many thanks to Renate Jaeschke for word processing support.

ROBERT C. PREZIOSI

THE "PRACADEMIC" APPROACH  
Neuman F. Pollack, Dean

At Nova University professional educators dedicate themselves to the design and delivery of academic programs that enable students and future alumni to reach the "leading edge" of **their** professions and then remain there throughout their productive years. In the School of Business and Entrepreneurship the program directors and faculty believe that one of the best ways of achieving this goal is to periodically take the pulse of business and industry and examine the needs of currently employed executives, managers, and other key system personnel to ensure that programs meet their stated objectives. Another mechanism used is to cultivate a cadre of "pracademics" who play a vital role in the design and delivery of programs.

Our "pracademics" are individuals who are actively engaged both in the practical side of business, government, and industry as a primary source of employment and in teaching in programs focusing on the needs of professionals in these fields. The "pracademics" have advanced academic credentials, i.e., earned graduate degrees in their teaching fields, but choose to apply their knowledge and skills in managing and directing organizational structures or industrial projects. Their academic training enables them to examine the nature of work-related tasks to be performed and to improve upon the performance of their organizations. They enhance their personal growth through the sharing of their knowledge and skills in the classroom on a part-time basis. The Nova teaching environment further enhances their ability to have an educational impact since the student clientele is comprised of mid-career adults seeking to enhance their own professional development. The classroom environment is a rich interplay among enlightened practitioners. The results of this interplay are evidenced by the accomplishments of students and alumni, as well as the faculty.

This document is the product of **collectively** hundreds of years of teaching and learning experiences shared by some of the "pracademics" of the School of Business and Entrepreneurship. I hope that all instructors are able to incorporate many of these ideas into their teaching, thus furthering the goal of higher education to improve understanding and productivity in business, government, and industry.

## FIRST CLASS SESSION

1. Delay introductions during the first course meeting until after the first break. Allow the group to form preliminary conclusions about the instructor, group and/or each other and course before being formally introduced. Then discuss the impact of the pre-break session and the conclusion formed.
2. Regarding student introductions during first class (assumption: students already know each other).... Have individual student give name only -- allow classmates to then state three things they know about that student. This combines humor, participation, and fun for professor to learn about class.
3. Set up goals, expectations and structure on opening night, leaving no loose ends or misunderstandings.
4. For introductions, you can place two students together to interview each other and subsequently introduce each other. This method immediately establishes rapport. For those who are shy or unwilling to disclose, this makes it easier for them to talk (on a one-to-one basis).
5. Develop an "opening" class participation exercise that will serve as an assessment tool of class level and background. Reveal to class how you will utilize the respective backgrounds and needs and refer to specific progress throughout the class. (A variation could be, ask class to assess progress from their viewpoint.) Also, solicit class for input on "how" to use group diversity/needs/etc. Part of the value of this process is to help students accept responsibility for management of the learning environment.
6. First class behavior -- assess the group, through self-introductions, and assure the group that the material (including the presentation of that material) will be tailored to their needs (within the parameters of the course syllabus, of course).
7. Having set the framework properly, follow-through in delivery is essential. If you stray from the framework, be sure to make note of it and provide an explanation.
8. When first meeting a new group of students, realize you are not just teaching another course. You are meeting a group of individuals with unique strengths, anxieties and expectations. Make a conscious effort to understand their uniqueness.

## 9. HOW TO GET STARTED

- A. Get students to do most of the talking during the first 25 minutes.
  - B. If anyone asks a question, provide a direct answer in 20 seconds or less.
  - C. Be friendly, but firm.
  - D. As each person introduces him/herself, give your complete attention.
  - E. If you must be humorous, one joke will suffice.
  - F. Keep your statement of course objectives short and directly to the point.
  - G. Make sure that every student receives positive eye contact or one positive comment from you.
  - H. Be sure to use everyone's name at least once.
10. Thoroughly explain the syllabus and any addenda or amendment that you make.
  11. Before your first class session begins, review your hand-outs to make sure that they are customized and current.

## ADULT STUDENT ESTEEM

12. When you recognize competence and experience in a student, welcome and encourage their participation based upon that competence and experience.
13. To behave in a manner conducive to enhancing student's self esteem, you must first have a high level of self-esteem. Always keep yours in excellent working order.
14. Ask basic questions to stimulate discussion among students and draw them into discussion on basic concepts and allow the students to achieve a feeling of competency in the subject area.
15. Use formal address (Mr. Smith or Miss Jones) to emphasize respect for students as adults.
16. Maintain student self-esteem with body language and eye contact. Show the student that they have importance by personally coming up to them (look at them with sincerity). Through total body language and spatial relations, indicate that they have your total attention. Focus in on them for the moment.



17. Use the student's name frequently. Show you know who they are as individuals.
18. The way and the manner of the response is often more important than the response itself. Give assurance to the student that it is quite alright that he/she may not know something at this point in the course.
19. Provide individuals the opportunity to become expert in a topic or issue that will recur throughout or later in the course. Refer others to that person as appropriate - to increase self-esteem.... students can be recognized experts, also.
20. Differences in learning styles should be acknowledged, and teaching styles should adapt so that all learning styles are allowed for.
21. Provide a student profile for the faculty to review before the course starts. The profile might include such items as the student's learning style, his or her work experience, etc.
22. Make every student believe that you have a direct line to his or her concerns and that you want to address those concerns.
23. Protect every student from other student criticism.
24. Avoid sarcasm and defensiveness in your communication with students.
25. Be flexible on whatever issues allow for flexibility or individual student need.
26. Stay in control without using techniques from the Idi Amin School of Adult Education.

#### STUDENT PARTICIPATION

27. Regarding the "Friday night vs. Saturday morning" issue....to add stimulation to Friday evening class during hour one have students report on: (related to course content)
  - A. Personal experiences
  - B. Professional experiences
  - C. Readings
  - D. Viewings
28. The student knowledge base is formidable. DEMAND and REWARD participation.

29. Recognize that clusters will be cohesive and relatively homogeneous after the first year together. This will be true no matter how diverse and cosmopolitan their professions, backgrounds and interests.
30. Demand student participation (take advantage of their varied experiences). This may require that more than 10% of the grade be allowed for participation.
31. When experts are in the class, use them to reinforce/support your teaching accuracy.
32. Get each student to respond to a question on the text at each session, to assure that they are keeping up with their reading requirements.
33. Maintain "control" through leadership (followers have the opportunity to be leaders and leaders have the opportunity to be followers).
34. Facilitate, don't dictate. Capitalize on students' resources.
35. To help people with various learning levels all enjoy and learn from a class, pair experts with novices.
36. The expert designs strategies and the novice learns to implement tactics and develops vocabulary and conceptual skills.

#### GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

37. Assess the peer clusters so that balance occurs as far as personalities (right brain vs left brain), thereby adding to potential stimulus within group interaction. Random grouping may cause one-sided stimulus.
38. A suggestion for group projects is to establish a leader in the group to evaluate each person's performance. Also, place people into groups by diversified backgrounds in order to increase group learning.
39. A suggestion for the barrier of multiple levels/backgrounds is to subset into 3-4 groups. Now you have three or four subsets of people to reach - similar to market segmentation - grouping according to like variables that have meaning.
40. When some students exhibit different levels of capability, assign students to groups so that they can complement each other.
41. Have students form study groups and have them call you as a group using a speakerphone so that you can be more respon-

## EVALUATION

42. Around mid-term, the instructor can have an open discussion evaluating what has been happening and setting guidelines for the remainder of the course.
43. Student identification card should be made out at first class meeting (index card - 3x5) name, phone number. This card can be used for interim roll, random selections for participation, and recording grade for participation.
44. At the midpoint of the course use an open forum in the classroom to allow students to evaluate the course to date and air individual problems with the course or the instructor.
45. Give the final test in groups that have worked together during the semester. The group that gets the most correct answers gets the "A".
46. Provide choices for demonstration of mastery of competencies and completion of assignments; i.e., written/oral presentation, test, exercises, etc.
47. Provide for peer evaluation of term project presentations.

## ATTITUDE, STYLE and TECHNIQUE

48. One of my primary goals is to provoke my students to engage in meaningful dialogue, both in and out of class.
49. An effective instructor of adult learners instructor is more of a facilitator than a lecturer.
50. The education industry is one of the most noble fields of endeavor. As a wise man once said, "If you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he will eat for a lifetime."
51. Your own expectations can mold the class. If you are dynamic, if you are demanding, you can raise the energy level of the classroom. You owe your students that kind of performance. If you are dry, if you are dull, if you will settle for mediocrity, you'll get it. You'll deserve it. Do your students?
52. Always be well prepared yourself, but if you get a question from a student that you aren't sure of, never FAKE or BLUFF an answer. Admit that you will need to research an answer. Then follow up and deliver a superior answer at the next session.

53. Maintain your "focus" at all times, to include:
- \*What is my purpose here?
  - \*Why are the students here?
  - \*What do I want them to get from the course when they are finished?
  - \*What does Nova expect from me as an instructor?
54. By doing this consciously, you should be able to avoid the appearance of a "canned delivery" and should be able to deliver a fully and carefully personalized presentation.
55. No matter how beaten up you may personally feel, do not be a carrier of pain. Become an "actor", be jovial, positive, upbeat, enthusiastic. Instructors are not allowed to have a bad day.
56. NOVA PRODUCT -- We sell smart.
57. We must remember, over and over again, that what we take for granted or is obvious after getting a Ph.D. and teaching the course over and over is NOT taken for granted or obvious to the student.
58. A professor needs to be an actor/actress, producer, stage manager and director all at once. We must entertain to teach, even if the "act" is outrageous. If I can keep their attention, and entertain at the same time, I will create interest and excitement. If I can get their attention, entertain them, create interest and excitement, they will learn something, and they will remember.
59. Use color on the chalkboard to separate ideas, points, concepts.
60. Teach to impart understanding, not to impress.
61. Love thy students, for they are our sole reason for teaching.
62. Calibrate to the low end, vector to the high side.
63. Constantly reinforce that they are graduate students and not in high school or undergraduate school. Encourage them to be creative, take risks and not be afraid to challenge either what they may read in the textbook or what the professor may say.
64. If the class needs "additional stimulation" (Friday night late), present a controversial issue related to the course content, and in presenting it take the unpopular side. This will stimulate debate and even argument, both are better than drowsiness. Don't use this method on the first weekend. Also, be careful with this method when teaching abroad.

65. Because of the method of presentation on Friday night and Saturday, two sets of students are often encountered. The dress is different, the attitude is different, and the ability to absorb appears to be different on Saturday than on Friday night. These differences should be addressed and course presentation should reflect the differences.
66. Relate the information in the course to the real world. Use examples from workplace. Mention current, new topics. Ask for student comments. Have they read articles or encountered situations related to the coursework?
67. In each course that we teach, experiment with at least one new teaching technique or learning activity. This "new" technique or activity may be something innovative or just something different from that which we have done in the past. By evaluating these "experiments" and keeping those that work well, we can constantly improve our effectiveness as teachers and prevent burnout, boredom, or the feeling of getting into a rut when teaching the same course term after term.
68. You're more than a tape player, and you know more about your subject than the book gives the student. Don't be afraid to interpret or to interpolate. Add a little color -- underline, italicize, tell a story, even a true story - make the subject more real. Include your experiences.
69. Use visuals, color, and anything that enhances excitement without degrading professionalism.
70. Often we teach more effectively by asking thoughtful questions than by giving brilliant lectures. Perhaps the most impressive instructor I ever evaluated used a technique of only asking questions, never stating opinions. We should try to develop our question/center question skills, i.e. "What would you have done?" "How does your firm ....?" "If you disagree, why?" "What were the opinions?" "How would you measure inefficiencies?" etc. Think of Socrates.
71. Consider every session taught to be a significant, emotional event resulting in a natural "high".
72. Establish expectations early as regards: Goals, Rules/Boundaries, Justification for the subject matter and its linkage to other courses.
73. Keep your material (particularly your examples) current, contemporary, and up-to-date.
74. To excel in teaching - you have to learn how to survive and improve. Are we thinking of our future? Are we planning about the future of our profession?

75. Use a fax machine to receive written work from students and fax the work back to them with comments. This provides for more responsiveness than the mail.
76. Encourage student learning networks.
77. Combine superb preparation with a high degree of energy and make it contagious.
78. For all written projects, spell out clearly the information to be included in each section. This makes evaluation much easier.
79. When utilizing overhead transparencies, use reverse negatives with color. Duplicate the information on the transparencies and provide as hand-outs.
80. Use verbal encouragement positively as a way of motivating students.
81. Research suggests that adults learn best when they are treated like adults.
82. Avoid using red for written feedback....use blue or green.
83. Research suggests that a break in evening or weekend classes should occur every 50-60 minutes.

#### FOLLOW-UP

84. There is a need to keep or re-establish continuity and thought after a several week hiatus.
85. Instructors must provide accessibility to themselves after class so that students can call for help when needed. The use of fax machines is a good idea.
86. Leave time during each class meeting for random and off-the-wall questions. The end of a class meeting is best suited for this. When time is up, class can be adjourned and those who wish to stay can and not hold up the whole group.
87. Follow-up - If you can't answer a question fully, get back with the response in a timely manner.

#### SPATIAL ROOM ENVIRONMENT

88. Change room layout, move chairs, move podium, break down the seat selection, Example - After class assembled, sit in back of room and turn entire class around.
89. Update classrooms to provide more working space. Biggest complaint from students especially in quantitative courses is

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89. Update classrooms to provide more working space. Biggest complaint from students especially in quantitative courses is

that there is not enough space for notebooks, textbooks, and calculators. Also, provide more board space and switch to white boards.

90. It is much better for the classroom to be a bit too cold in temperature than a bit too warm.

#### INSTRUCTOR DEVELOPMENT

91. Continue to hold "inservice" type workshops such as this one to energize and freshen faculty. We need time to think about how we teach forums - such as this provides for this.
92. Provide more opportunities for faculty to learn from each other, especially personal interaction to share teaching techniques.
93. Have instructors teaching similar courses (quantitative methods, finance, cost accounting) break into think tanks to ferment ideas.
94. One of my barometers for a successful class is that if I have covered all the material, and I have learned more than my students, then it has been successful.

#### CURRICULUM/SYLLABI

95. I would like to suggest the use of more updated textbooks, especially books with disk programs to take advantage of the new technologies for learning.
96. Allow the electronic world to enter the classroom -- permit students who must miss a class to submit their exam, project, or in-class presentation via video tape (or audio tape).
97. Make a general computer literacy course at the beginning of the program mandatory.
98. An idea to add quality to term/research paper: Have students turn in the first five pages of paper at mid-term session. Professor reads this, comments on content, style, etc. and mails back to student. This encourages students to: start on paper early, do their own work, get past content problems at early stage, receive added guidance from professor. (Also, make this worth a certain percentage of final grade.)
99. If the syllabus is no longer meeting the needs of the course due to external changing forces, notify administration that a re-assessment is necessary. Include recommendations.



100. Provide students with an updated bibliography as an addendum to the syllabus.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS

101. Provide each site with access to a computer (laptop maybe) and an overhead projection device to be checked out from coordinator for use (or demos) in classroom. Computer simulations, accounting problems, analysis examples in quantitative courses.
102. Another way to enhance "lectures" is to use ECR (electronic classroom) sessions for help sessions (with or without instructor) for in-between scheduled classes.
103. Give every student a unix account for increased and maybe improved student-teacher communication (e-mail). Also, provide availability to programs such as SPSS-X, Minitab, WWB, etc.
104. Provide a better communication to all students (particularly cluster) and faculty in terms of all resources - availability of "special deals" (discounts for students) instructional materials support (videos, software, etc.).
105. Provide orientation to university resources such as library, computers, computer searches, etc. Maybe through a video for off-campus sites or clearly described in print.
106. Include qualifications of instructors in some printed format (perhaps cluster-specific catalogs, i.e.).
107. Show students how to get current publication information from computer databases - particularly from knowledge index. With this help, a librarian can usually borrow a reference for the student in a timely manner.
108. Consider using pass/fail grading system instead of "A" - "F" to defuse anxiety over GPA.
109. Establish an easily accessible resource person such as an experienced reference librarian or AV specialist who can show students how to best utilize local resources.
110. Use last 15 minutes of class time as a help session for one-on-one assistance.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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