

Diversity & Differentiation

How do I perceive social differences?

What kind of social differences do I see?

Due to my work in occupational rehabilitation I see lots of social differences. First, my students are of different age. My youngest students are 19 years old and the oldest 55. That not only leads differences concerning generations but also different learning experiences and practices. Second, the knowledge differs. That is especially visible when it comes to working with computer technology. Third, my students come from different the different corners of the society. Some of them worked as teachers, engineers etc. before, some of them were farmers, plumbers etc. or unemployed for several years – which has a potential for conflicts. Forth, I also work with students whose mother tongue is not German, which makes the learning process even more interesting. Finally, most of my students have health issues – physical or psychological. So, I am used to working in diverse groups.

What have I done so far to deliberately minimize these?

Fortunately, I work in a so called multi-professional team. Apart from instructors/teachers there are a psychologist, a doctor and a social education worker available for students. Nevertheless, I must take care of everybody in the classroom and meet his/her needs. Therefore, I have to take into consideration different learning types, different ages and different background knowledge when preparing my lessons.

I always ask my students for feedback to improve my work.

What else could I do?

I am sure there is always something that could be done.

Do my considerations apply to online environments as well? What is transferable to the online setting? How can these be broken up in online settings?

Of course, my considerations also apply to online environments. I want to make offers suitable for almost everybody, so I need to think carefully about how to design them. Online material gives every learner the change to learn at his/her own speed. It is very useful especially because of the different background knowledge of my students. I can also address different learner types.

Have a look at the approach by Gardenswart & Rowe and reflect on following questions: in how far did you consider the aspects of diversity mentioned in here? Did you also consider aspects not mentioned in this model?

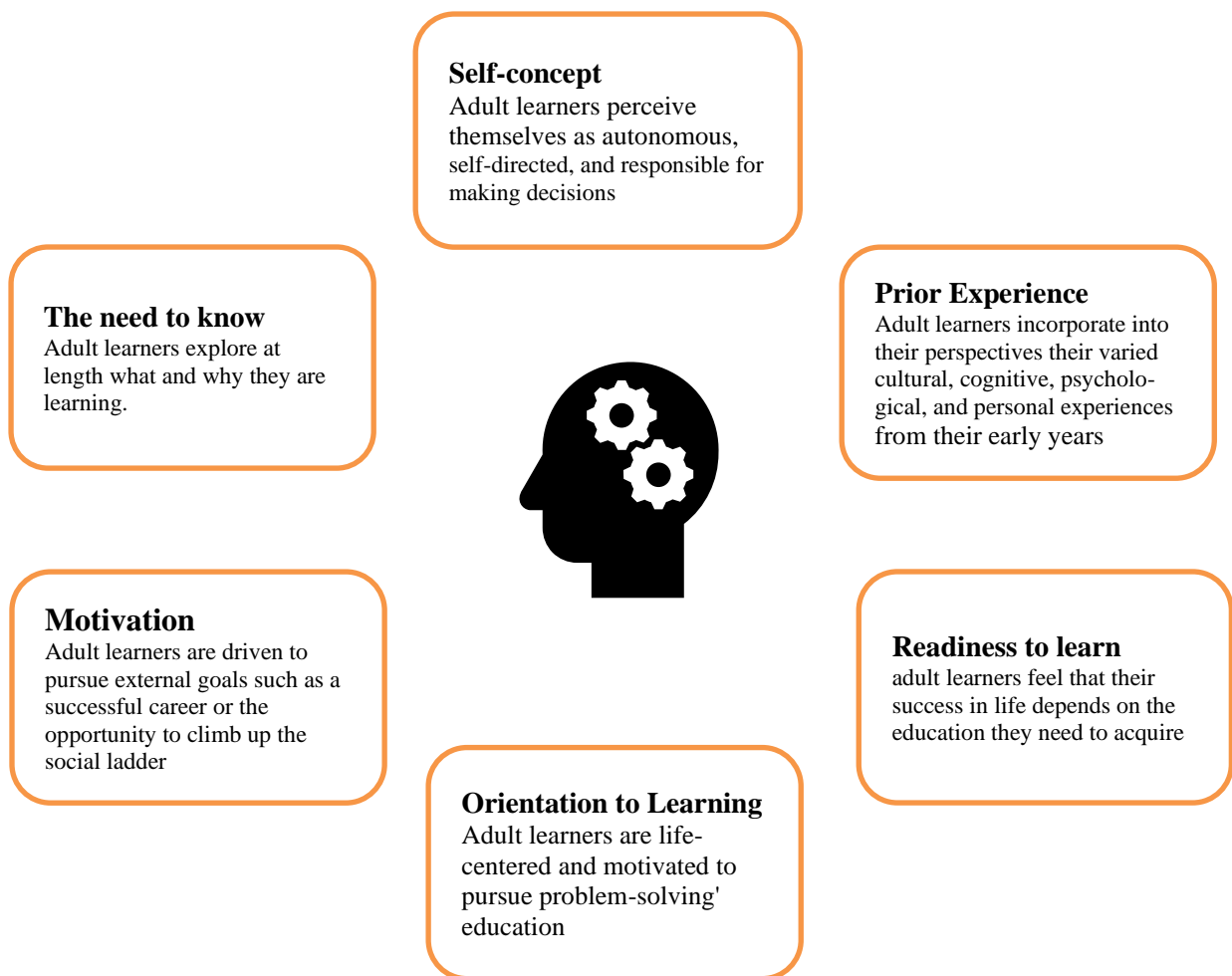


Picture 1: The four Layers of Diversity (source: <https://www.gardenswartzrowe.com/why-g-r>)

For me, this approach is very suitable. Because of our team work we consider all layers of diversity.

People are diverse in their different aspects of personality. That's also the reason I love my job. Since my groups are not that big, I can realize every person with his/her personality, or at least the aspects which he or she wants me to see. I meet many really interesting and fascinating people. So I also learn many things from my students.

In the next step, find a framework/guidelines/approach, which you consider helpful for improving your (e-learning) diversity competence within your professional context.



Picture 2: Diversity in adult learning (adapted by E. Mayes, Diversity in Adult Education, https://www.academia.edu/38576543/Diversity_in_Adult_Education.docx)

I tried to put the main ideas of the article into an illustration. E. Mayers refers to the book *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.) by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson and published in 2015. The article appealed to me, because adult education not connected to university or evening classes seems to differ a bit. This framework or approach, whatever you may call it, covers the most important aspects of my work area. People I deal with usually know what they want in life. Most of them have a family and/or other responsibilities. They must train for a new profession since for different reasons they cannot perform in their old one. They have a clear idea what they want and what they expect from the team. Therefore every person I meet and teach during the day is unique and I have to figure out what they need to be successful.