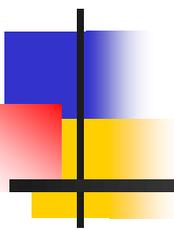# Creating Effective Adult Learning and Teaching Environments
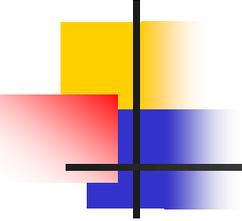
By Roger Hiemstra

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Creating Effective Learning Environments for Adults

- Presentation objectives:
  - To facilitate you obtaining a heightened sensitivity to the many aspects of a learning environment that can unknowingly inhibit adult performance or knowledge acquisition
  - To provide some tools, resources, and ideas for your subsequent efforts to create more effective learning environments for those adults you teach, train, counsel, or manage
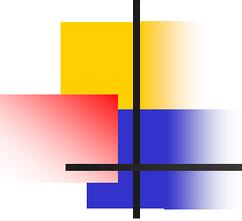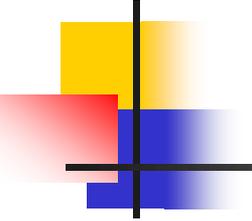
Understanding the Learning Environment

- Defining the learning environment: All of the physical surroundings, psychological or emotional conditions, and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in some educational enterprise
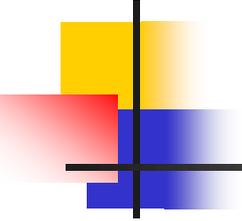
An Advanced Organizer

- See Creating Environments for Effective Adult Learning, a Jossey-Bass sourcebook I edited. Available electronically at the following site: http://roghiemstra.com/leindex.html

- This is a book in which I selected colleagues who could write about the topic of learning environments

Topics Within the Jossey-Bass Sourcebook

- Physical Environment:

  Territoriality, seating, etc.; Lighting; Aesthetics, etc.; Using technology

- Social/Cultural Issues:

  Race/racism; Gender bias

- Emotional/Psychological Issues:

  Setting the learning climate; "Baggage" brought to the learning setting
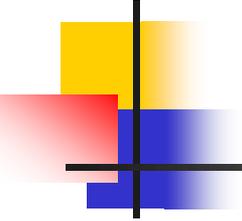
Physical Characteristics/Issues of Concern

- There are various physical characteristics or issues that can impede, affect, and/or impact on a learning environment
  - Lighting and sound
  - Territoriality
  - Seating arrangements
  - An instructor's first contact with learners
  - Technology, etc.
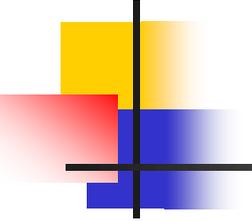
Ergonomics – The Art of Designing Spaces for People

- Borrowing knowledge from architects, designers, cultural anthropologists, engineers, artists, etc. is useful in understanding the use of physical space

- This helps us understand more about such issues as the comfort needs of those using space and furnishings, room size issues, chairs and seating arrangements, etc.

This Chair Is Just Right – So Say Ergonomic Experts

A new ergonomic chair, called the "Aeron," is designed to accommodate a wide range of office tasks — from upright intense computer programming to sleepy, laid-back board meetings.

PRICE: $765 to $1,190 depending upon options

MATERIAL: Transparent "Pellicle," which has no foam or fabric, permits flow of air and conforms to individual worker's shape.

LUMBAR PAD: Can be adjusted vertically through a 4.5-inch height range.

TENSION TILT: Worker can adjust the resistance felt when leaning back and can easily pivot forward.

SIZE: Available in three sizes; user can adjust seat height from a low of 14.375 inches to a high of 20.875 inches.

ARM RESTS: Pivot inward degrees for comfort when typing and outward 15 degrees for using a computer mouse. Arm height adjusts independently with a four-inch vertical range.
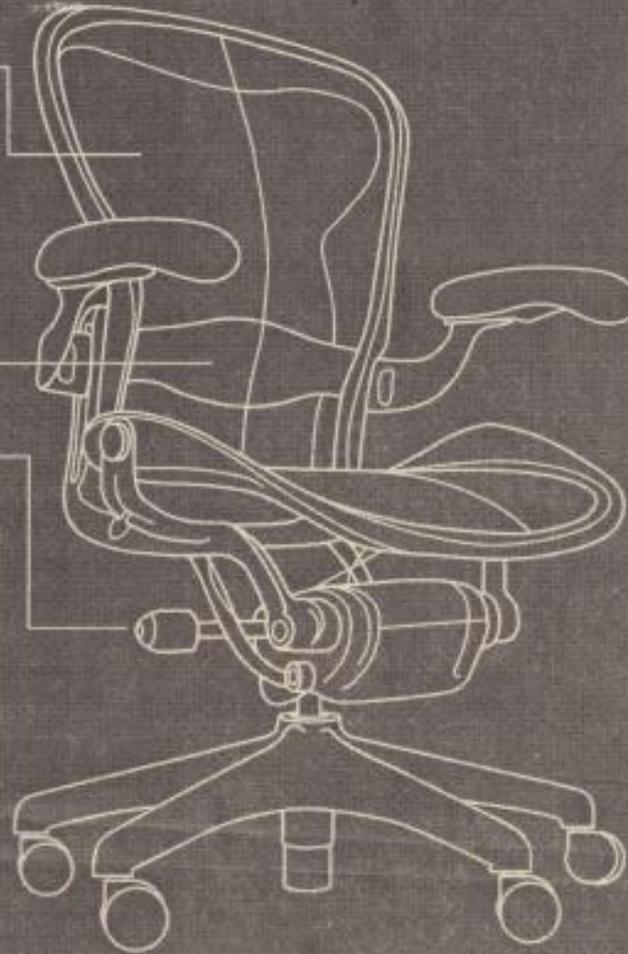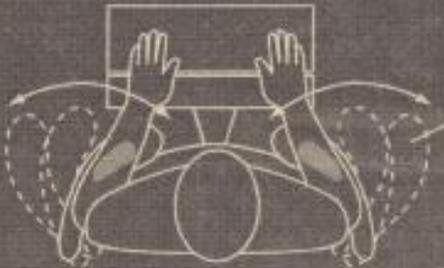
# Anthropometry – The Science of Human Body Measurements

- Another useful body of knowledge in thinking about physical space is the study of the human body

- This helps us think about such issues as seat pan size and human comfort needs, seat cushioning, table size and design, posture and lumbar support needs, the needs of left handed people, etc.
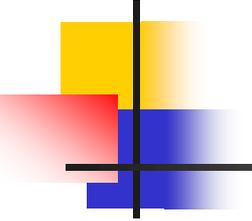
Proxemics – Observations of How People Use Space

- It also is valuable to understand how people use space as a special elaboration of culture
  - People have differing views and expectations about how close the sit or stand to another person (differences exist because of gender, culture, territoriality expectations, "herd" instincts, etc.)
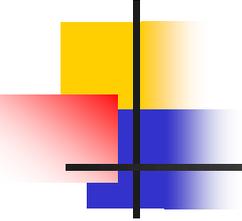
Even Seating Arrangements are Involved

- Socio-fugal Patterns – this puts learners in straight rows like bus station seats
  - Can discourage interaction
  - Can focus attention during didactic lectures
- Socio-petal Patterns – this puts learners in circles or "U"-shapes
  - Usually encourages interaction
 - Puts teachers in a facilitative role
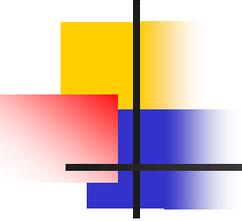
Aesthetics – Study of Human Potential in Using Senses

- Understanding how people perceive the use of their senses can be important in terms of appeal opportunities
  - Kinesthetics
 - Sight
  - Sound
  - Taste, etc.
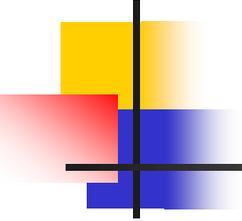
Synaesthetics – Ability to Use Many Senses Simultaneously

- Understanding the ability of an individual for poly-sensory perceptions can be useful in learning environments
  - Multiple learning and teaching modalities can be utilized
  - Too much stimulation of any one sense may be limiting
 - Suggests the value of flexibility & variation
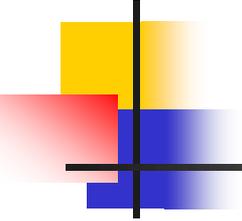
There are Sensory Changes During the Aging Process

- Several corresponding implications exist
  - Improved lighting may be needed
  - Visual clutter may need to be reduced
  - Glare may need to be controlled
  - Stimulus and luminance contrast may need to be considered
 - Color variations may be required
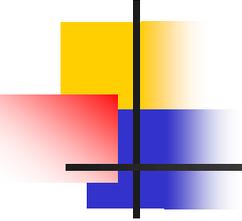
Other Areas of Potential Concern

- Acoustics, sound amplification
- Lighting
- Environmental conditions/temperature
- Room color
- Break out space, etc.
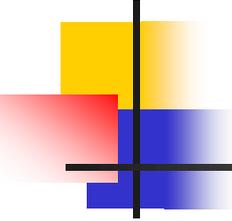
Some Useful Tools

- The resource noted earlier (http://roghiemstra.com/leindex.html) contains useful checklists or checklist links within or at the end of most chapters.

- For example, http://roghiemstra.com/lechecklist.html could analyze any teaching or training setting for the existence of a physical concern or deficiency needing attention.
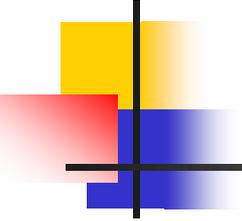
Psychological/Emotional Issues of Concern

- There are several psychological or emotional areas that need to be considered in the design of a learning environment
  - Various barriers to learning (situational, dispositional, and institutional)
  - Helping adult learners feel at ease
  - Helping adult learners assume control of their own learning efforts
  - Helping teachers/facilitators understand how to work effectively with adult learners

Three Types of Learning Barriers
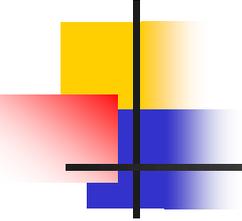
- Situational – those barriers related to a person's situation in life, such as lack of time due to job and home responsibilities, transportation problems, no childcare, etc.

- Dispositional – those barriers associated with a person's attitude about learning and perception of self as a learner, such as a lack of confidence, a feeling of being too old to learn, being bored with learning, etc.

- Institutional – those barriers put in place by a learning institution that discourage or prevent an adult from participating, such as inconvenient scheduling, compulsory attendance requirements, restrictive locations, etc.
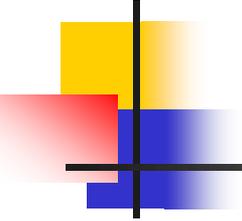
Helping Adult Learners Feel at Ease

- The following Chapter by Sisco provides a number of ideas and material related to helping learners feel at ease: http://roghiemstra.com/ndacelech5.html
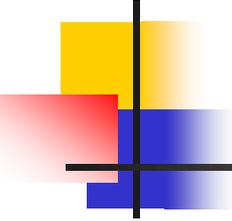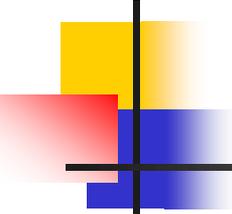
Helping Learners Take Increasing Control of their Own Learning

- The following book by Hiemstra and Sisco the book by Brockett and Hiemstra provide numerous ideas about helping learners take increasing control:

http://roghiemstra.com/iiindex.html
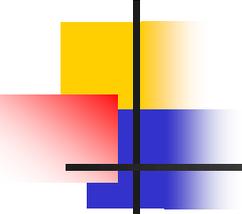http://roghiemstra.com/sdlindex.html

Helping Teachers Become More Effective with Adults

- The two books described in the previous slide contain information for teachers, trainers, and facilitators

- In addition, the following two links provide additional information:
  http://roghiemstra.com/lll.html
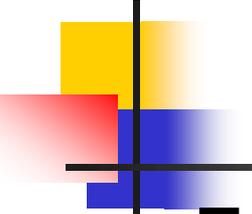 http://roghiemstra.com/learning.html

Social/Cultural Issues of Concern

- The two books described in the previous slide contain information for teachers, trainers, and facilitators

- In addition, the following two links provide additional information:
http://roghiemstra.com/lll.html
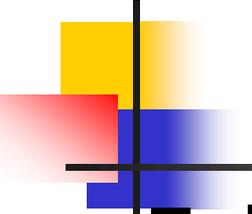http://roghiemstra.com/learning.html
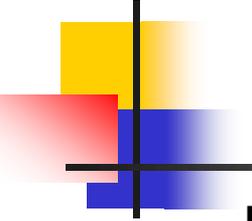
Gender Discrimination Issues

- Following are several resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:

- http://roghiemstra.com/ndacelech8.html
  http://roghiemstra.com/attachc.html
 http://roghiemstra.com/tips.html

Age Discrimination Issues

- Following are several resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:

- http://roghiemstra.com/agefact1.html

- http://roghiemstra.com/agefact2.html

- http://roghiemstra.com/unospeech.html

Racial Discrimination Issues

- Following are several resources that provide background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:

- http://roghiemstra.com/protips.html

- http://roghiemstra.com/ndacelech7.html
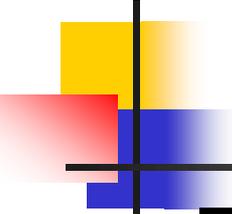
Internal/External Issues Affecting Adult Learners

- Following is a resource that provides background, recommendations, and supplemental resources related to this topic:

- http://roghiemstra.com/ndacelech6.html
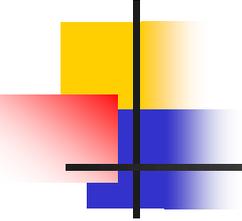
Tips in Setting A Good Environment

- Have the teaching room ready ahead of time

- As students arrive, circulate and greet them; have a name tag on as you meet each of them

- In conversation find out something about each learner so you can relate to them as a person
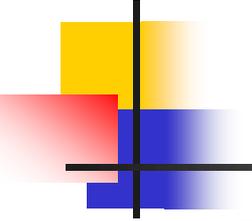
Tips in Setting A Good Environment (2)

- Suggest that they grab a cup of coffee or tea (that you have already prepared), pick a seat in the socio-petal arrangement you have created, and get acquainted with their neighbors on each side

- Make sure each student can hear, see, and has adequate work space on the table at which they are seated

- Have learners establish a group identity, perhaps using an ice breaker to do this
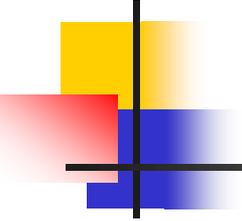
Tips in Setting A Good Environment (3)

- Have people introduce themselves to fellow learners by describing something about themselves and what they hope to get out of the learning experience; include yourself in this introduction process

- Talk about the various learning resources and your teaching philosophy and approach

- Move into content slowly being conscious of individual differences and needs
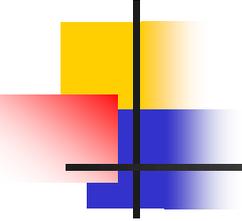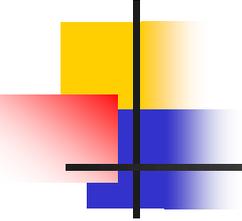
Commit to Creating an Effective Learning Environment

- You are challenged to reexamine what it is you do and how you think regarding your educational role
- Help learners take more control of and responsibility for what happens in the learning environment
- Analyze and control the learning environment continuously
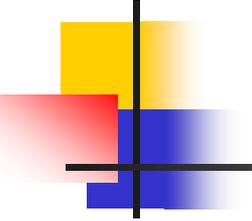
Commit to Creating an Effective Learning Environment (2)

- Find ways of incorporating the best of technology into the learning environment
- Discover how "you" can best work with learners
- Become proactive in bringing about change
- Make a personal commitment to change

Commit to Creating an Effective Learning Environment

- You are challenged to reexamine what it is you do and how you think regarding your educational role
- Help learners take more control of and responsibility for what happens in the learning environment
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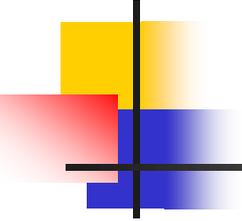
FINALLY

Make your own personal commitment to create more effective learning environments?