

# Prescription for Adult Education

This paper presents and defends my definition of learning:

*Learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be applied in new and familiar contexts. It is dependent on learner motivation, both extrinsic and intrinsic, and is affected by the environment and those in the environment.*

The paper provides a rationale for the above definition, describes my observation of an adult learning experience, and describes suggestions for improving the adult learning experience based upon adult learning theory.

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## Method

My definition of learning could be seen in action during an evening cooking class at the Cook Street Culinary School of Denver. I observed an evening course at the school targeted to recreational chefs. It was the fourth in a four-class series entitled "Classic Techniques: Essentials." On the night I observed there were 15 adult learners between the ages of 25 and 65 participating. An experienced chef taught the course with the help of an assistant. While this adult learning experience demonstrated various aspects of my definition of learning—including the acquisition and application of new knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the importance of the environment, those in the environment, and learner motivation—it also could benefit from application of appropriate adult learning theories.

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## Findings

The Cook Street Culinary School addresses many different types of needs during its courses for recreational chefs, including organizational needs, individual needs, and learning needs. The Cook Street class addressed established learning needs, which are summarized in the table below.

Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes Addressed During Cook Street Class		
Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Five rules of roasting</li><li>• Grades of red meat and where to buy them</li><li>• Soup styles</li><li>• Types of pan sauces</li><li>• Definition of a gratin</li><li>• Uses for compound butters</li><li>• Characteristics of wine</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slicing potatoes for a gratin</li><li>• Roasting nuts</li><li>• Making an au jus</li><li>• Making a butter sauce</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feelings towards the grades of meat</li></ul>

I also observed additional learning needs that students had. For example, one student struggled with her knife skills and asked the instructor how to chop a bowl of shallots. Other learners expressed interest in that topic so the instructor demonstrated correct knife skills to the entire class.

In addition, instructor continually made reference to how learners could use certain techniques when they entertain at home. This was not a stated learning need, but as recreational chefs it can be assumed that most learners would be applying these skills as they cook for friends and family (as opposed to in a

professional situation). Learners asked multiple questions in this vein, such as, "So could you prepare all these ingredients ahead of time and then just throw it in the oven?" While students needed to learn how to apply these skills at home, their desire to efficiently entertain at home is an individual need—not a learning need.

Learners also had individual learning needs that they brought up with the instructor; for example, one learner asked how to prepare an abundance of butternut squash.

In addition, as a class about cooking, learner had learning needs stemming from all five senses as well. Learners needed to know how things were supposed to feel, taste, and smell. For example, as learners made the potato au gratin, they pushed the potatoes down to determine if it felt wet enough or if it needed more cream. Learners also smelled and tasted the different dishes as they cooked.

Another learning need was the reasons behind the cooking techniques demonstrated. As instructors described how to prepare each dish they also described the reasons for doing so; for example, the chef showed how to blanch green beans and told the class to boil the beans with the top off. He went on to tell learners the reason: because if you leave the top on the beans will lose their vibrant green color.

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## Evaluation

My prescription for adult learning is based on my observation of the Cook Street Culinary School's class and presents a redesign for that class. This redesign is based upon the identified areas for improvement and my definition of learning.

The table below summarizes some of the key changes in my revised instruction that relate to the needs of adult learners.

**Table 1**

<b>Features of the Revised Design That Address Adult Learning Theory</b>
Assessment of learner's needs
Focus on helping learners' emotion control
Opportunities for learners to describe and showcase their past experience
Shorter didactic instruction with a focus on affective needs
Activities and discussion to help learner "self-scaffold" knowledge to new levels
Opportunities for learners to develop goals for future learning
Opportunities for learner to self-assess learning

In a nutshell, the new activities are meant to build upon the experiences of the learners in the class and allow the instructor the opportunity to highlight, respect, and build upon those experiences. As Knowles would say, the focus of this instruction is not on "making" students learn; rather, it is about creating an environment and structured activities that provide an opportunity for learners to construct meaning and develop goals for future learning while providing the appropriate amount of support to help them get there.

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## Competencies

This project meets competencies 4, 6, 8, and 11. A description of how this project meets these competencies is included below.

### ***4. Be a lifelong learner and professional.***

This Prescription for Adult Learning contributes to the community of practice by analyzing an adult learning situation and providing recommendations for improvement based upon appropriate adult learning theories.

### ***6. Conduct a learning or performance instructional analysis***

I analyzed the learning context of a cooking class given by the Cook Street Culinary Institute of Denver. It included analyzing the learners; the organizational, individual, and learning needs; and the learning environment.

### ***8. Apply various theories/strategies and current research, and consider local needs and constraints to design activities and experiences for learning***

My redesign for the Cook Street class applied appropriate, constructivist adult learning theories. See Table 1 above.

### ***11. Evaluate effectiveness of programs, products, or practices***

This paper provides a formative evaluation of the Cook Street cooking class and recommendations for improvement.