

## **Success in Studies for Adult Students (Part 1)**

**By Daniel Theyagu**

With the fast changing pace of the knowledge economy it has become a crucial factor to upgrade and update your academic qualification.

Nowadays there are many credible private institutions that offer academic courses that are tailored to meet the demands of the various industries. These courses are specially structured to keep the adult learner in mind and range from professional certificates to doctoral programs. Many of these courses are challenging and demands from the adult learner time, effort and lots of concentration.

However if you are a working adult you will find it a tremendous challenge balancing academic advancement on the one hand and managing your career and family life on the other. Malcolm Knowles (1978) an advocate of the concept of androgogy (adult learning) describes adult learners as a ‘neglected species’. This is indeed an astute observation and true in principle. Although there are many well researched books on helping children cope with their studies, this is a far cry when it comes to adult learners. It is assumed most of the time that adult learners will find it easier to learn because they are adults and thus better placed to cope with their academic studies. This consensus is indeed a fallacy as adults perhaps more than children require assistance in coping with their studies.

Having had the experience of lecturing primarily adult learners for the past 17 years, I’ve come to observe that many adult learners have real difficulties in effectively coping with the progressively increasing demands of the academic studies especially

when they have to juggle their academic advancement with their other obligations. Worst are some students who end up having to leave their career just so that they can complete their studies without distraction and at the same time being uncertain as to whether they've made the right move. I've even had cases where the pursuit of academic studies has ended in divorce as the spouse of the adult learner feels unable to cope with his/her other half having to go through the turmoil of balancing family relationship with studies.

If you are an adult learner it is important to understand that the way you perceive and process information is very different from that of a child. Another advocate of adult learner theory, David Kolb (1984) suggested that all learning is fundamentally 're-learning'. Adult education is very much in tune with this observation. As adults we already have a body of knowledge that has been gained through our education system, career and personal experiences. Sometimes these experiences disrupt the pursuit of new knowledge as we might be entrenched in our own paradigm and ways of thinking. It is not an easy process to break away from this pre-existing paradigm and learn something new. To do so would require a shift in the paradigm and this would entail a better understanding of how we absorb information as adult learners.

In comparison, children have to be directed to the learning process and they absorb information differently than adults. Adults have to be self-directed in their learning process. Unlike the child where the teacher has to 'teach' the child on the fundamentals of their studies, adult learners have to be self-driven and self-motivated to 'learn' what is imparted to them by their lecturers. Also adults learn best when the information they gather are inherently useful to their everyday life. This is where the

challenge lies. Sometimes the adult learner is unable to relate the concepts taught to their everyday life as they are trying to remember chunks and chunks of information without attempting to make a co-relation of the theoretical concepts to practical purpose. When this happen de-motivation sets in and leads to loss of interest in the studies.

In my experience I've come to notice that only those adult learners who are mentally and emotionally prepared to take on the onslaught of academic advancement are the ones that eventually succeed. This is easier said than done. Balancing varying responsibilities is never an easy thing. However, if you are an adult learner and you have invested money in upgrading your education, you will have to apply a few learning strategies that will help you see through your studies successfully.

Success in your studies is all a matter of creating the right physical and mental atmosphere that allows you to stay on top of your career your family and naturally your studies.

In the next segment I will share with you some of the strategies that you need to adopt as an adult learner to ensure success in your studies.

*Daniel Theyagu is a keynote speaker and seminar leader for conferences and training programmes. He runs Lateral Solutions Consultancy which designs and conducts competency-based training for organizations He is also an adjunct lecturer with Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) E-mail: [dtheyagu@singnet.com.sg](mailto:dtheyagu@singnet.com.sg); website: [www.lateralsolutionsconsult.com](http://www.lateralsolutionsconsult.com).*