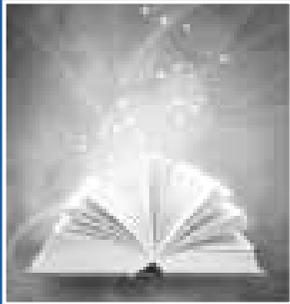


BOOK REVIEW



“Sit & Get” Won’t Grow Dendrites: 20 Professional Learning Strategies That Engage the Adult Brain By Marcia L. Tate

2012; 2nd Edition; Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA
192 pages, 20 chapters, paperback, \$34.95 (New)

How do adult educators ensure that their facilitations maintain a healthy balance between active engagement of learners and retention of the content being explored? What specific strategies stimulate brain cognition or a desire to participate? *Sit and Get Won’t Grow Dendrites: 20 Professional Learning Strategies that Engage the Adult Brain* by Marcia L. Tate offers answers to these questions. As its name suggests, the book rejects the notion that consistent stimulation of the brain and, by extension, effective learning can occur in a setting where adults receive information passively. As such, its purpose is to describe 20 methods of delivery that grow dendrites, or memory cells, and facilitate long-term retention. Tate begins with adult learning theories that outline the conditions under which adults learn best. She then discusses learning strategies related to these theories. She concludes with sample professional lesson designs and practical tips. Like its previous version, the book is geared towards adult educators in various contexts.

Throughout her work, the author echoes the belief that recall, retention, and other key outcomes of effective learning are directly proportionate to the levels of active engagement that adult learners experience. Active engagement, she contends, is dependent on the presence of specific conditions, unique to these learners. This perspective is firmly situated in the context of both traditional and contemporary adult learning theories. Her outline of adults’ ideal learning conditions in the first section, for example, includes an emphasis on knowledge co-creation, prior knowledge and experience, collaborative learning, and reflection. Such emphases mirror elements of Knowles’ (1980) conceptual framework of adult learning as

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well as elements of self-directed learning, transformational learning, and experiential learning theories.

In building on the foundation of these “best” conditions, Tate offers distinct strategies that embody them in the second section of the book. Strategies range from brainstorming, games, and humor to mnemonic devices, storytelling, and technology. They form the core content of the book, and she offers a holistic approach by exploring not only the “what” or definition of each but also the “why” and “how.” The “why” of a strategy offers diverse theoretical frameworks that provide a solid rationale; the “how” includes multiple learning activities that are specific and complement the strategy. Each strategy description concludes with a section that allows readers to reflect on its application to their teaching or learning.

The book’s strengths are content, organization, and layout. Its content is diverse, relevant, and practical in several ways. First, the author uses varied theoretical frameworks from research on the brain, on adult learning, and on learning styles. She clusters theories from these different areas of study and uses them to provide evidence for the potential effectiveness of each learning strategy. Because each one is framed in diverse theories, it reads as foundational to any effective facilitation, thus appealing to practitioners, program planners, and designers alike. This is also useful as an educational tool for many who facilitate adult literacy programs, but who are new to the field or may not be formally trained in adult learning principles.

Second, Tate provides over 150 specific activities that complement her strategies and closes with detailed lesson plan samples. While these are diverse and steeped in the theories, they are also written in such a way that readers can build on or omit aspects that may not relate to their contexts. These resources may prove invaluable particularly for the adult basic instructor looking to improve instruction with a wide range of fun, practical, and creative activities. They would also, by extension, benefit ESL or adult literacy learners who often struggle with tensions related to writing tasks or returning to a formal classroom environment.

Third, the author adds to the conversation in the field surrounding “[Knowles’] pedagogy to andragogy continuum” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.87) – noting that many of the strategies originate from K-12 spaces. Despite these strengths, Tate did not allude to cross-cultural training/teaching issues, which might have been useful given

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growing contemporary work on culture and non-Western ways of knowing in adult learning and ever-increasing ethnic and racial diversity within adult basic education programs.

The author skillfully models several of the adult learning strategies she advocates in the way the book is organized and laid out as well as in her writing style. Written in first-person narrative and interwoven with fun and lively accounts of her adult facilitation experiences, the language of the book is clear and simple; its tone is conversational. Though her target audience is adult educators, it seems the author avoids assuming that readers are *au fait* with the field's vocabulary because she explains most of these thoroughly. In addition, she uses open and closed questions to stimulate critical thinking and reflection, drawing on readers' lived experiences and inviting them to respond with ideas from their own contexts. Tate adds variety by including her own use of each strategy; she also caters to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile modalities by using textual information, visual illustrations, reflection writing, and other physical exercises.

Tate's objectives included describing brain compatible strategies and their associated theoretical frameworks, activities, and lesson designs - all of which are successfully met by the close of the book. The book's contents are precisely limited to these objectives, making it an even more fulfilling and enjoyable read. I highly recommend it not only to instructors who facilitate learning in adult basic education programs but also across diverse adult learning contexts.

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