



## **POINTERS IN WORKING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ADULTS IN EDUCATION**

1. One should try to arrive at least an hour before your class is due to begin, depending on the size of your group. Special Needs Adult Learners like to share their personal experiences since you last saw them and so each individual requires your full attention. This is especially true if the learners, because of their Special Needs, live together in facilities. Much of what happens in these “homes” finds its way into the classroom, and often personal issues become a barrier to learning.
2. You should be able to speak at least two languages, depending on your learners. The learner's home language is essential for the transference of knowledge and content.
3. One should not treat them as Special Needs Adult Learners. In other words, do not “dumb down” your content. Simply slow down your pace of facilitating learning.
4. A good teacher will know as much about each learner as possible before she begins to facilitate learning. Find out why they have decided to further their education. I work with a Special Needs group whose average age is fifty! You should create an environment conducive to history sharing and past experiences. Are the learners there because they want to be, or have to be (as a work requirement for example). This will give you great depth and insight into their levels of motivation and attitude. Often their stories are inspiring, motivating and very poignant.
5. Set your Ground Rules collectively as a group. Be flexible. Depending on the medical conditions, and associated medications, Special Needs Learners may require frequent visits to the bathroom for example. Agree as a group that the learners may leave as they wish without having to excuse themselves every time. It helps their dignity and expedites the learning process because they are not uncomfortable, and waiting for the next break.
6. Prepare a Learning Styles Assessment (VAK Learning Styles Questionnaire© is a useful tool.) This will allow you to assess level of knowledge, but most importantly, give you information as the educator about what stimulates each learner. These tools are available at [www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com). This is a great website with a huge amount of content for adult education, and has an extensive variety of relevant resources.
7. Prepare activities and games to teach your content. Special Needs Learners (depending on their condition, age or levels of ability) have short concentration spans, so short, fun and challenging tasks and activities are a useful vehicles to teach content in an effective manner.
8. Access to, knowledge of computers and online learning activities are rare in Special Needs Adults. This is often owing to their medical condition, age, and most often (particularly in South Africa) poverty. This precludes online quizzes, assessments, content, videos or any other internet based learning tools from the learning process. Planning, Preparation and Presentation (the three “Ps” in business-speak ) are therefore critical to the learning process.
9. Allow frequent five minute comfort breaks, so the Learners can have a “mental break”. Depending on the speed and ability of the learners, they often take much longer to grasp new content or concepts. Each learner is unique, and needs to learn at his own pace.

10. Find common ground. This can be quite challenging, depending on the needs of the learners, but use analogies and examples often. I typically use food or animals to frame content. Use a pizza as an example when teaching fractions. It makes concepts more accessible to the Learners.

11. Begin each session with a “catch-up” and revision conversation. This acts as a reminder of the last sessions content, but in aged adult learners, the retention and recovery of information becomes more difficult as they get older. This also allows the learners to “get things off their chests”. If there is personal friction, it must be resolved by the facilitator.