

Resource Review

Digital Promise's *Adult Learner Variability Navigator*

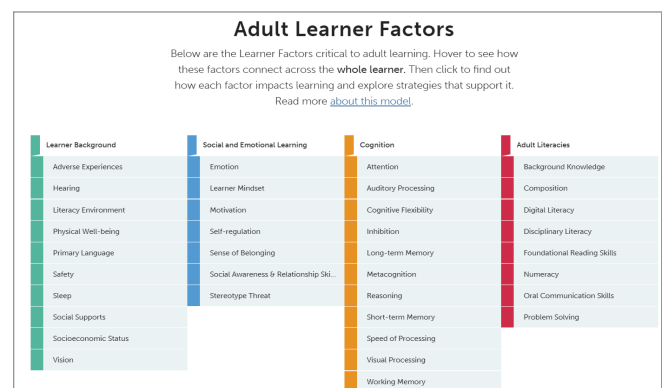
Susan Gaer, OTAN Subject-Matter Expert,
Kristi Reyes, MiraCosta College



■ <https://lvp.digitalpromiseglobal.org/content-area/adult-learner/factors>

The Adult Learner Variability Navigator, developed as part of the Learner Variability Project by Digital Promise, is a tool designed to support educators in meeting the diverse needs of adult learners. This tool compiles resources and research that back up instructional and learning strategies to meet adult learners “where they are across varied contexts and needs” (Digital Promise, n.d.). Students in adult education programs represent a wide range of diversity that presents strengths and challenges. These challenges beset both the learners themselves and those who strive to prepare them for their next steps, whether workforce, academic, or personal goals. Digital Promise starts from the premise that there is no such thing as an “average” student; all students bring to their learning experiences varied factors. The objective of the site is to facilitate educators’ efforts to address adult learners’ abilities in the areas of literacy, numeracy, problem solving, communication, and digital skills in a connected way. The navigator centers on analyzing customized factors and strategies -- and, based on research -- assists the instructor in the types of activities to meet these needs. The navigator uses the term “factors,” which are not to be confused with learning styles, and which can change with different contexts. For instructional and learning

approaches and practices, the term “strategies” is used. The site recommends users follow a three-step process: 1. Choose a model, in this case “Adult Learner” (the site also has models for PK-12 Literacy and Math), 2. Identify factors, and 3. Get strategies. However, users of the site can also browse by factors or strategies.



The main factors are Learner Background, Social and Emotional Learning, Cognition, and Adult Literacies. Each factor is broken down into subfactors that are critical to adult learners’ success. As an example, in the Adult Literacies category are the factors of background knowledge, foundation reading skills, and numeracy, to

name a few. Each factor leads to multiple strategies. When Digital Literacy is selected, 36 strategies for supporting students are provided, one option is Game-Based Learning. For this strategy, an overview and explanation of how to use the strategy in the learning environment are provided, and there are more than a dozen links to examples, research, and professional development opportunities.

Evaluation

The Adult Learner Variability Navigator is an innovative and powerful tool designed to support educators in meeting the diverse needs of adult learners. This online platform offers a wealth of resources, strategies, and personalized learning approaches to address the unique challenges faced by adult learners. Through a user-friendly interface, the navigator equips teachers with the knowledge and tools necessary to create inclusive and effective learning environments for their adult students.

One of the standout features of the navigator is its ability to provide personalized learning strategies. Teachers can use this tool to locate strategies for individual learners' strengths and weaknesses. By understanding learner variability within their classrooms, educators can tailor instructional methods, content, and pacing to suit each student's needs, enhancing engagement and motivation.

The platform houses an extensive repository of high-quality resources, research-backed strategies, and best practices, catering to the varied interests of adult learners. It also serves as a valuable tool for teacher professional development. There is a module for professional learning focused on the K12 navigator which is also relevant for adult educators to enhance their understanding of learner variability and implement

evidence-based practices effectively. This support empowers teachers to continually refine their teaching approaches, which can lead to improved outcomes.

The navigator offers reliable and useful information and saves educators time because everything is organized in one central location. All the resources on the site are freely available. While not all resources are specific to adult learners they are, nevertheless, typically applicable. The site does not require a subscription to explore, but by registering for an account, users can save resources to a workspace.

The navigator is the only tool of its kind developed for those who teach in adult education. One minor disadvantage to the navigator is that at times the links are not updated, so some links may not be viable. Also, while the resource is valuable for finding ways to address learner factors, the site itself does not provide information about uncovering these factors. For that reason, it is crucial that adult educators get to know their students well early in a term. This can be accomplished with an intake survey that is sent out to students even before a class begins, asking questions about such topics such as previous educational experiences, goals, and interests.

Recommendations

The Adult Learning Variability Navigator has the potential to be a game-changer in adult education. By starting from a foundation of the variability among adult learners, this resource offers educators the tools and knowledge they need to advance inclusive, differentiated, and effective learning experiences. The platform's focus on educators' professional development equips teachers with research and teaching practices that enable them to learn, grow, and improve.