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Mind, Motivation, and Meaningful Learning: Strategies for Teaching Adult Learners, by Melissa L. Miller

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Book Review: *Mind, Motivation, and Meaningful Learning: Strategies for Teaching Adult Learners*

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Within recent information literacy literature, scholars have considered the diverse identities of post-secondary learners and discussed the ways in which student identities interact with pedagogical approaches. Indeed, teaching librarians have focused on the experiences and needs of students from specific cultural backgrounds, students with disabilities, first-generation students, international students, and a wide variety of other cohorts. However, Melissa L. Miller's *Mind, Motivation, and Meaningful Learning: Strategies for Teaching Adult Learners* focuses on a broad commonality shared by almost all students served by academic libraries: Miller reminds readers that the majority of university and college students are adults (i.e., over 18 years of age), even if practitioners refrain from categorizing them by age.

Miller, a faculty member and librarian at the University of Southern California with an EdD in Educational Psychology, directs her message at academic librarians, who "have an important role as change agents in this dynamic learning environment" (1), and explicitly notes that the book was designed to help librarians "lead the charge through thoughtful and meaningful instructional design" (1). Asserting the unique characteristics of adult learners, Miller encourages instructors to enhance adult learning experiences by promoting metacognition, and posits that academic librarians are well-positioned to adopt pedagogies that better serve adult students. In applying theories of adult learning to instructional design, Miller contends that instructors can support students in retaining and applying lessons more successfully by "teach[ing] learners to identify, evaluate, and apply appropriate cognitive, learning, and motivation strategies" (1-2). However, the form and focus of this text may compromise its relevance to a teaching librarian audience, as its instructional design

templates envision how to teach adult learners over a multi-unit course on learning strategies, a subject area and delivery style that many teaching librarians may find unfamiliar and unrelatable.

The format of *Mind, Motivation, and Meaningful Learning* is unique from other handbooks of its kind. The first few chapters of the book introduce the pedagogical and psychological concepts from which the author's approach is derived, followed by the bulk of the text in appendix form, which consists of a "curriculum design blueprint." These first chapters are dense with information, covering the many theories and models that underpin the book's approach. Miller's perspective on adult learning is informed by a wide range of interrelated ideas, and she provides high-level descriptions of these theories and practices in rapid-fire sequence. She draws upon principles of andragogy, social cognitive theory, and motivational systems theory to highlight important factors in successful adult learning, such as self-efficacy and personal agency. She identifies habits and strategies, like self-regulation and goal setting, that are extensions of these cognitive theories, and provides recommendations for teaching and assessing different knowledge types, such as factual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and metacognitive knowledge.

As the author traverses this vast terrain, some clarity is compromised. Presumably, integrating these takeaways into lesson structure and activities will help instructors promote adult learner engagement. However, as these theories are described at a broad, macro-level, divorced from the curriculum blueprint itself, they may be challenging for readers to apply in their own teaching contexts. If these principles were directly mapped onto practical teaching techniques (e.g., offered in conjunction with activity suggestions or discussion points), they might be more readily implemented. While this section serves as a thorough literature review of the concepts that underpin the author's rationale, it also lacks the narrative and thematic cohesion that might engender a more meaningful read. Especially given the author's insistence that adult learners benefit from practical, relatable lessons, it is not often clear how theoretical content will eventually come to fruition in a classroom. Additionally, Miller draws heavily upon corporate and military instructional models, especially those developed for use by the United States Armed Forces. Many of these instructional models are oriented towards military, re-skilling, and job training scenarios, making them less closely aligned with the post-secondary library teaching environment.

The rest of the text, and its vast majority— about 80% of the whole volume— is composed of appendices, which illustrate the implementation of adult learning concepts through the exemplar of a seven-unit scaffolded course on "learning how

to learn" (113). This blueprint is meticulous and extensive. Each unit offers both a lesson plan and developer's guide, which provides instructors with pre-set learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment tools, and curriculum materials, which provide instructions for students. These lesson plans are rich with minute detail, providing slide-by-slide directions and narrative scripts for asynchronous voiceovers. The units call explicitly upon learners to deeply engage with cognitive science principles and strategies, such as learning tasks, knowledge types, analogies, and mnemonic devices, to better their own learning efficacy.

Miller makes a compelling case for integrating principles of adult learning into teaching and promoting the benefits of practicing metacognitive strategies. However, while the book is marketed towards academic librarians, very little of its content seems tailored to—or even translatable to—the academic library context. Miller's lesson plans focus exclusively on teaching metacognitive approaches to learning, without dovetailing with information literacy-related topics or competencies. Though library instruction cuts across a wide array of disciplinary and functional areas, Miller's units forgo any learning objectives that are related or adjacent to popular library instruction topics (e.g., search strategies, citation management, Open Access, scholarly publishing, etc.). While some units might pair well with information literacy content, others are distantly related to library instruction. For example, the "memorization" unit (5) prepares students to be tested on a topic; another unit focuses on creating "study questions" (6) that improve the retention and speed of learning.

Additionally, though it is described as scalable in nature, the book's structure may pose an obstacle to its use and implementation. While Miller notes that the course templates can be split apart and used individually, it is difficult to imagine how any relevant appendices would map onto a one-shot workshop, one of the most common settings in which academic librarians teach. While such templates might be useful when designing a semester-long credit course, they would be minimally helpful to librarians with shorter teaching engagements, like the one-shot or a limited workshop series. The delivery method, too, presents hurdles, as lesson plans and curriculum materials are specifically designed for an asynchronous online format.

Mind, Motivation, and Meaningful Learning is rich with information on pedagogical theory and technique, making it a valuable reference source to those looking to learn more on the components of successful adult learning. Its appendices, too, serve as thorough and detailed exemplars of thoughtful instructional design that could be helpful to an instructor with the flexibility and bandwidth to adapt them to their local context. However, its utility is hampered by its structure, which presents a fuzzy connection between concepts and practice, and the discrepancy between the book's stated audience—teaching librarians—and the content that it offers, which centres almost exclusively on developing the learning strategies of adult students through a multi-unit course.