

# Andragogy and the Principles of Adult Learning



# Andragogy

- Andragogy (the science and art of learning in adults) was a revolutionary theory created by Malcolm Knowles to explain how learning in adults differed from the way in which children learn. According to andragogic theory, adults are motivated to learn, are self-directed, responsible, and use prior experiences as a template for learning.

For Knowles, **andragogy** was premised on six assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions about child learners

- **Self-concept:** *As a person matures his self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being*
- **Experience:** *As a person matures he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning*
- **Readiness to learn:** *As a person matures his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles*
- **Orientation to learning:** *As a person matures his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness*
- **Reason for learning:** *As a person matures the purpose and usefulness of the subject matter becomes a necessary component for learning*
- **Motivation to learn:** *As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal*

# Adults as Learners

Part of being an effective mentor involves understanding how adults learn best. Compared to children and teens, adults have special needs and requirements as learners. Contrary to student learning, adult learning is a relatively new area of study. The field of adult learning was pioneered by Malcolm Knowles , a professor in the field of education. Knowles identified six key characteristics of adult learners.

# *Adults are autonomous and self-directed.*

- They need to be free to direct themselves
- Mentors must actively involve new teachers in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them
- Mentors must be sure to **act** as facilitators by **guiding** new teachers to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts

# *Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge*

- Including work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education
- New teachers need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base
- Mentors should draw on new teachers' experience and knowledge which is relevant to their professional development
- Mentors should recognize the value of new teachers' life experiences and knowledge in learning

# *Adults come to the learning process ready to learn*

- Adults learners are eager to acquire new information
- Mentors need to be mindful of new teachers' developmental stage
- Mentors should be prepared to “make room” for novice teachers to learn from their mistakes by reflecting on their practice
- Allow time for novices to develop a variety of techniques, skills and approaches to:
  - Curriculum
  - Instruction
  - Assessment

# Adults are *goal-oriented*

- New teachers may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake
- Mentors should focus on aspects of the new teachers' practice that is most useful to them
- Working collaboratively on a Professional Development Plan will help guide new teacher growth



# *Adults need to know the reason for learning something*

- Designing a curriculum for adult learners that makes explicitly clear the **reason**, **purpose**, and **usefulness** of the subject matter is a necessary component of effectively reaching adult learners
- New teachers must see a reason for learning something
- Learning has to be applicable to their practice or other responsibilities in order for it to be of value to them
- Mentors may have to explicitly state the usefulness of a suggested professional development opportunity or a Professional Development Plan

# Adults are *motivated* to learn by both *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivators

- Adults are motivated to learn
- Adult learners respond to extrinsic motivators such as pay increases, promotions, better working conditions
- Intrinsic motivators include increased self-esteem, broadened responsibilities, life enrichment
- Extrinsic motivators for new teachers may include: certification requirements, pressures from administrator, parent and mentor expectations
- Intrinsic motivators may include: teaching efficacy, self-actualization

# Adults should be shown *respect*

- Mentors must acknowledge and embrace the wealth of experiences that new teachers bring to the classroom
- They should be treated as equals and encouraged to voice their perspectives and opinions
- Their input should be valued

# References

- Knowles, M. (1996). Adult learning. In Robert Craig (4<sup>th</sup> Eds.), *The ASTD training and development handbook: A guide to human resource development*. (pp. 253-265). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Knowles, M., Holton, E. & Swanson, R. (2005). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. 6th ed. Burlington: Elsevier.
- Smith, M. K. (2002). Malcolm Knowles, informal adult education, self-direction and anadragogy', *the encyclopedia of informal education*. Retrieved on November 16, 2010 from [www.infed.org/thinkers/et-knowl.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-knowl.htm).