

Six adult learning principles Theory to Practice

2. HISTORY

Adults come to the learning process with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies. The more explicit these relationships (between the new and the old) are made through discussion and reflection, the deeper and more permanent the learning will be.

PRACTICE: Provide activities that permit learners to compare the theoretical aspects of the training with their experiences.

5. KNOWING WHY

Adults explore the benefits of learning something and the costs of not learning it before they are willing to invest time in learning it. Adults will commit to learning when they believe that the objectives are realistic and important for their personal and professional needs. They need to see that what they learn through PD applies to their day-to-day activities and problems.

PRACTICE: Design PD based on the actual needs of the audience. Include the reasons for learning in information about the training and agendas. Clearly show the benefits of learning. Base activities on real work experiences.

1. EMOTIONS

Adults' emotional states are inextricably tied to their abilities to learn. To learn, an adult must be emotionally comfortable with the learning situation. When we feel afraid, our brains shut down to learning and new information can't be absorbed.

PRACTICE: Accept all emotions in learning, invite feedback, understand emotional risks are part of learning, and normalize discomfort as part of the learning process.

3. SELF-DIRECTED

Adults want to be the origin of their learning and should therefore have some control over the what, who, how, why, when, and where of their learning. Adults must see a need for the learning they're engaging in before the learning can take place.

PRACTICE: Present professional development (PD) with as many options for learning as possible. Provide PD that can be used in the near future.

4. PROBLEM CENTERED

Because of life and work experience, adults have a task-centered or problem-centered orientation to learning. When PD is developed around problem-solving, then adults will learn the content to use it.

PRACTICE: Design PD so that learners are solving problems or performing tasks close to those encountered in their work.

6. INTERNALIZED LEARNING

Adult learners do not automatically transfer learning into daily practice. Adults need experiences to apply what they have learned to their work and guided practice that incorporates receiving feedback.

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