

Principles of Adult Learning

Adapted from John Goodlad's writing

ADULTS PREFER LEARNING SITUATIONS WHICH:

1. Are practical and problem-centered

- Give overviews, summaries, examples, analogies & use stories to link theory to practice
- Help them see how new information is relevant to them
- Use collaborative, authentic problem-solving activities
- **CAUTION** – Be careful about becoming too theoretical.

2. Promote their positive self esteem

- Allow participants to showcase & get credit for what they know
- Don't put participants on the spot with potentially difficult questions unless you know they have the background knowledge & experience
- Provide low-risk activities in small group settings
- Help them become more effective and confident through guided practice and establishing routines.

3. Integrate new ideas with existing knowledge

- Draw out participants' experience and knowledge that is relevant to the topic
- Connect what you are teaching to their knowledge/learning base
- Ask for input & invite questions. Adjust time for topics to fit their needs.
- Ask what they would like to know about the topic
- Suggest follow up ideas and next steps for continued learning after the session

4. Show respect for the individual learner

- Treat adults as equals in experience & knowledge and allow them to voice their opinion freely
- Avoid jargon and don't "talk down" to participants
- Validate and affirm their knowledge, contributions and successes
- Provide for their physical needs (including breaks, comfort, snacks, etc...)
- Ask for feedback on your work or ideas, provide input opportunities

5. Capitalize on their experience

- Don't ignore what they already know, it's a resource for you
- Plan alternate activities and choice whenever possible so you can adjust the process to fit their experience level

- Listen and collect data about participant needs, experience & knowledge
- Create activities that use their experience and knowledge

6. Allow choice and self-direction

- Ask what they know already about the topic (their perception)
- Ask what they would like to know about the topic
- Build in options within your plan so you can easily shift if needed
- Build your plans around their needs, interests & motivation

7. Are informal

- Let them discuss issues & figure out possible solutions
- Make the environment relaxed, informal & inviting
- Involve adults in the learning process

8. Capitalize on their motivations to learn

- Find out what they are interested in
- For parents, play on the common motivation to help their children learn. Involve parents in the learning process for their kids.

When do adults learn?

Knowles, 1984 & Emerit Heritage Interpretation Professional Certification Workbook, February 1999

1. When they feel comfortable
2. When they feel respected
3. When they are allowed to make mistakes
4. When they can have some fun
5. When they have a distinct need to know something
6. When the content is meaningful & relevant
7. When they can use their experiences in the learning situation
8. When they are allowed to learn in a way that suits them best
9. When the process is interactive and participatory
10. When they are allowed to evaluate, especially to evaluate themselves