

ADULT LEARNING STRATEGIES and CHANGE THEORY INFORMATION

Helping adults to learn calls for teacher leaders to use strategies that research has shown are the most conducive for adult learning. Understanding how change takes place for adults is also a key to deciding what strategies work best for different colleagues. See both sections for ideas and for author names to cite in prompts. You do not have to provide a reference listing, but do cite using last name and year as you do in research writing.

Source 1: Davis (2012)

If you have adult learners in your class, it does help to keep several points about their motivations, interests, and perspectives in mind as you teach and lead. In the Instructor's Manual for *The Adult Learner's Companion: A Guide for the Adult College Student, Second Edition*, Deborah Davis (2012) [citation is below] offers the following suggestions for teaching and motivating adult learners effectively. Review her suggestions and consider which might help you in your quest to support them:

- **Use the adult learner's experience and knowledge as a basis from which to teach.** [Textual] information becomes more relevant to the adult learner if it is related to life experience. Furthermore, the older student's accumulated knowledge can be tapped to lend credence to their career goals. Incorporate the adult learner's valuable practical experience and knowledge into each lesson to illustrate the relevance of the topic under discussion.
- **Show adult learners how this class will help them attain their goals.** Adult learners appreciate a class that is specifically directed toward helping them achieve their goals—in this case, the college degree. By illustrating how the information in this class leads them in that direction, adult students can recognize how this course will benefit them in accomplishing their goals.
- **Make all course and text material practical and relevant to the adult learner.** Older students need to relate the course information directly to their careers; therefore, all course material needs to be directly related to the adult learner's career. For adult learners, information must carry some very practical and applicable purpose. Tell students exactly how the material and information will be useful to them on the job. Examples, exercises, metaphors, and analogies need to be career relevant, familiar, and timely.
- **Show adult learners the respect they deserve.** Adult learners possess a wealth of experiences; such knowledge should be honored and respected. Be courteous toward adult learners; treat them as equals, and allow them to voice their opinions freely and without judgment.
- **Adjust your teaching speed to meet the needs of the older learner.** Because adult learners learn differently than younger students, be conscious of the rate at which material is presented. Be aware of offering too much information too fast; regulate the flow of information accordingly.
- **Motivate adult learners to learn new information.** Through such techniques as positive reinforcement, motivate adult learners to learn and retain new information as a means to recognize the relevance of information to their careers and achieve their goals. (Davis, v-vi)

Reference: Davis, Deborah. 2012. Instructor's Manual for *The Adult Learner's Companion: A Guide for the Adult College Student, 2nd ed.* Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

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Thoughts on Teaching Techniques that Motivate Adult Learners

1. End each session with an activity they enjoy.

2. Prior to the class, ask participants to rate their knowledge on the topic and any experience they may have. This gives the leader a pulse for where each participant is so you can adjust instruction accordingly. Be ready to juggle diverse levels and go slow enough for those who need the extra guidance and provide a challenge for those who know it. Encourage and support all levels.

Adult Learning Theory and Principles

Become familiar with Adult Learning Theory and the six principles of adult learning

Adult Learning Theory

Part of being an effective educator involves understanding how adults learn best (Lieb, 1991). **Andragogy (adult learning)** is a theory that holds a set of assumptions about how adults learn. Andragogy emphasizes the value of the process of learning. It uses approaches to learning that are **problem-based and collaborative** rather than didactic, and also emphasizes more **equality between the teacher and learner**.

Andragogy as a study of adult learning originated in Europe in 1950's and was then pioneered as a theory and model of adult learning from the 1970's by Malcolm Knowles an American practitioner and theorist of adult education, who defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Zmeyov 1998; Fidishun 2000).

What do you mean by 'adult learning principles'?

Knowles identified the six principles of adult learning outlined below.

- Adults are internally motivated and self-directed
- Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences
- Adults are goal oriented
- Adults are relevancy oriented
- Adults are practical
- Adult learners like to be respected

How can I use adult learning principles to facilitate student learning on placement?

Good question!! Here we will discuss some ways to facilitate learning by applying Knowles' Adult Learning Principles: (the following is edited for this course)

1. Adults are internally motivated and self-directed

Adult learners resist learning when they feel others are imposing information, ideas or actions on them (Fidishun, 2000).

Your role is to facilitate your colleagues' work and to foster internal motivation to learn.

As clinical educator you can:

- *Develop rapport* with your colleagues to optimize your approachability and encourage asking of questions and exploration of concepts.
- *Show interest* in your colleagues' thoughts and opinions. Actively and carefully listen to any questions asked.
- *Review goals* and *acknowledge goal completion*

- *Encourage use of resources* such as library, journals, internet and other department resources.

2. Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences

- Adults like to be given opportunity to use their existing foundation of knowledge and experience gained from life experience, and apply it to their new learning experiences. As a clinical educator you can:
- *Find out about your colleagues* - their interests and past experiences (personal, work and study related)
- *Assist them to draw on those experiences* when problem-solving, reflecting and applying clinical reasoning processes.
- *Facilitate reflective learning opportunities* which Fidishun (2000) suggests can also assist the student to examine existing biases or habits based on life experiences and "move them toward a new understanding of information presented" (p4).

3. Adults are goal oriented

Adult students become ready to learn when "they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems" (Knowles, 1980 p 44, as cited in Fidishun, 2000). As an educator, you can:

- *Provide meaningful learning experiences* that are *clearly linked* to personal, client and fieldwork goals as well as assessment and future life goals.
- *Ask questions* that motivate reflection, inquiry and further research.

4. Adults are relevancy oriented

Adult learners want to know the relevance of what they are learning to what they want to achieve. One way to help colleagues to see the value of their observations and practical experiences is to:

- *Ask the student to do some reflection* on for example, what they expect to learn prior to the experience, on what they learned after the experience, and how they might apply what they learned in the future, or how it will help them to meet their learning goals.
- *Provide some choice* of fieldwork project by providing two or more options, so that learning is more likely to reflect the student's interests.

5. Adults are practical

Colleagues like hands-on problem solving where they can recognize first hand how what they are learning applies to life and the work context. As a clinical educator you can:

- *Be explicit* about how what the colleague is learning is useful and applicable to the group you are working with.
- *Promote active participation* by allowing colleagues to try things rather than observe. Provide plenty of practice opportunity in assessment, interviewing, and intervention processes with ample repetition in order to promote development of skill, confidence and competence.

6. Adult learners like to be respected

Respect can be demonstrated to your colleagues by:

- *Taking interest*
- *Acknowledging the wealth of experiences* that the colleague brings to the project;
- *Regarding them as a colleague* who is equal in life experience
- *Encouraging expression* of ideas, reasoning and feedback at every opportunity.



Speck (1996) noted that the following important points of adult learning theory should be considered when professional development activities are designed for educators:

- "Adults will commit to learning when the goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to them. Application in the 'real world' is important and relevant to the adult learner's personal and professional needs.
- Adults want to be the origin of their own learning and will resist learning activities they believe are an attack on their competence. Thus, professional development needs to give participants some control over the what, who, how, why, when, and where of their learning.
- Adult learners need to see that the professional development learning and their day-to-day activities are related and relevant.
- Adult learners need direct, concrete experiences in which they apply the learning in real work.
- Adult learning has ego involved. Professional development must be structured to provide support from peers and to reduce the fear of judgment during learning.
- Adults need to receive feedback on how they are doing and the results of their efforts. Opportunities must be built into professional development activities that allow the learner to practice the learning and receive structured, helpful feedback.
- Adults need to participate in small-group activities during the learning to move them beyond understanding to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Small-group activities provide an opportunity to share, reflect, and generalize their learning experiences.
- Adult learners come to learning with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, self-direction, interests, and competencies. This diversity must be accommodated in the professional development planning.

- Transfer of learning for adults is not automatic and must be facilitated. Coaching and other kinds of follow-up support are needed to help adult learners transfer learning into daily practice so that it is sustained." (pp. 36-37)

Speck, M. (1996, Spring). Best practice in professional development for sustained educational change. *ERS Spectrum*, 33-41.

Teacher leaders do not resign themselves to situations the way they are if there is any chance of improvement. Instead, they consider the problem or area needing improvement, they consider what others have tried in a same or similar situation, they collaborate with colleagues, they develop potential solutions, and they try something!!

To prepare for clinical activities related to working with colleagues and other stakeholders, view or read the following materials. For each resource, make notes and be prepared to respond if required.

In Michael Fullan's article, which you will read later, the author articulated some big ideas from change efforts in education that have been attempted. Even though he points out why some of these strategies have not been as effective as hoped, he did identify important positive ideas:

What are the changes in teacher practice that are needed to improve schools?

- A collaborative culture
- Collective inquiry into best practice
- Learning by doing
- Developing the capacity for continuous improvement

Nothing will count unless people develop new capacities.

- What can you do as a teacher now that you couldn't do before?
- Are you able to put that new capacity into practice?

But no matter how much you know about change theory, it is not always easy.

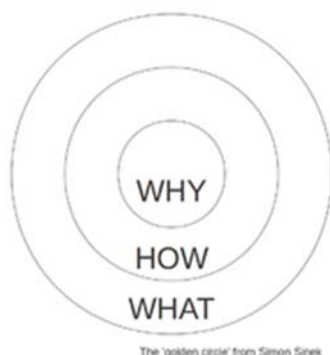
Behavior may change before belief.

We also must realize that behavior (our own and that of others) may change before belief. What does that statement mean? It means that we may convince ourselves and others to try some new practice even though we are very skeptical about whether it will be successful. We change our behavior before we change our belief - - we may need to be convinced by seeing the practice in action, by trying it ourselves, and by seeing success. That way of operating is not always bad. In one sense, we are looking for data - - for evidence - - to support our practice. Good educators work that way. We also may believe in the reason for the change, and we may be searching for a practice that will be effective, so we are willing to try.

Changing behavior in order to change belief means that often we have to “do first” but we also have to “think about what we are doing.” Another author has stated how we sometimes have to participate in doing something before we see its value. In other words, “The act teaches you the value of the act.”

Educational Change Theory: Some Foundational Reading and Viewing

One video: [A TED Talk you can view is by Simon Sinek and is titled *How Great Leaders Inspire Action*.](#) This introduction is taken from the TED website: “Sinek is an author best known for popularizing the concept of The Golden Circle. His first TED Talk on *How Great Leaders Inspire Action* is the 7th most viewed video on TED.com. His 2009 book on the same subject, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (2009) delves into what he says is a naturally occurring pattern, grounded in the biology of human decision-making, that explains why we are inspired by some people, leaders, messages and organizations over others.”



Simon Sinek's Golden Circle

You may need to view this talk more than once during this course, and you will be reminded to return to it as you work on each module. This talk is presenting a paradigm that should provide the basis of all of your work with others. View the video now; then return to this page to review some thoughts. The link provided below is for the YouTube version rather than on tedtalks.com because the YouTube version can be maximized on your computer screen.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0HIF3SfI4>

The big idea of this talk is that your chances of success when you are working with others (students, colleagues, parents, community members, etc.) or when you are thinking about some change you need to make in your own practice can be improved by working on it from this paradigm.

Think first about the WHY. Here are some questions that may apply in different situations:

- Why should we do this?
- Why does the situation need to change?
- Why should others support this?

Note that the answers cannot be “to increase our score on the CCRPI” or “to get more parents to our open house.” The question is about the real purpose, the real cause, the real belief, and why anyone should care. Why do scores matter for the students? Why is it important for parents to come to open house?

Then think about the HOW. Here are some questions you will ask yourself and others:

- How do we **currently** do this?
- How **should** we do it?

Finally, you should ask and be able to answer questions about the WHAT:

- What exactly will we do?
- What do we hope the results will be?

The WHY, HOW, WHAT paradigm - - in that order - - will be the foundation of the projects you will complete this semester and throughout the program. At the beginning of each project, you will be asked to determine your initial conception of the WHY, HOW, WHAT of each project. You will be asked to share your initial thoughts about the WHY with any stakeholders who are part of your project, let them add to your ideas, and get their buy-in. Then ask them to help you add to your thinking about the HOW and the WHAT. By collaborating on the WHY, HOW, and WHAT with your stakeholders, it is much easier for them to join you in working to achieve the WHAT, knowing that they buy into the WHY and have had some input into the HOW.