



Adult Learning Principles

These principles summarize what we know about adult learners. .

- ▶ Adults learn throughout their lives. Age does not reduce a person's ability to learn but may reduce the speed at which learning takes place. In addition, because of time elapsed since earlier learning experiences, adults may underestimate their own abilities to learn and/or may need additional time to adjust to new learning conditions.
- ▶ Adults exhibit a variety of learning styles, and there is no one "right" way of learning. They learn in different ways at different times and for varying reasons.
- ▶ The adult learner is a person with a sense of self, bringing all previous life experiences, both personal and professional, to bear on new learning. Past experiences affect what the learner learns and are the foundation for current learning. Adults learn best when new learnings are demonstrably tied to or built upon past experiences.
- ▶ Adult learners' stages of development, whether personal (cognitive, moral, ego, conceptual), chronological (early adulthood, mid-life, etc.) or professional (new or experienced teacher, etc.), profoundly affect their learning.

- ▶ Adult learners exist in situations separate from the learning context. They are motivated to learn by changes in their situations and learn best when new learnings apply in practical ways and/or are relevant to the changes in their situations.
 - ▶ The adult learner controls what is learned, selecting new information and/or deciding how to use it, and this takes place at both the conscious and unconscious levels.
 - ▶ Adults tend to be problem-centered rather than subject-centered learners and learn best through practical applications of what they have learned.
 - ▶ Adult learners must be treated as adults and respected as self-directed persons. They learn best in nonthreatening environments of trust and mutual respect.
 - ▶ The optimum role of the adult learner in the learning situation is that of a self-directed, self-motivated manager of personal learning who collaborates as an active participant in the learning process and takes responsibility for learning.
 - ▶ New learning is followed by a period of reflection to facilitate integration and application of new knowledge and skills.
 - ▶ Continued learning depends on achieving satisfaction, especially in the sense of making progress toward learning goals that reflect the learner's own goals.
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