

PHI 800-12: Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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Adult education theory refers to a set of principles designed to enhance the learning process for adult learners. These principles consider the distinct characteristics and needs of adults, setting them apart from younger learners. In this paper, we will take a closer look at the core principles of adult education theory, including andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, transformative learning, and social constructivism. By examining these principles, we aim to shed light on how they work together to promote effective adult education and the impact they have on educational practices.

Andragogy: The Art and Science of Helping Adults Learn

Andragogy, a concept popularized by Malcolm Knowles, helps us understand how adults learn. Knowles believed that adults take responsibility for their own learning and have much experience. They are motivated to learn by their own interests and are eager to learn when the material is relevant to their personal and professional lives. The principles of andragogy stress the importance of treating adult learners with respect, involving them in the learning process, and providing practical, problem-solving activities (Merriam & Bierema, 2018; Hansman & Mott, 2020).

Pedagogy: Bridging Theories and Practices in Adult Education

Pedagogy is traditionally defined as the art and science of teaching children focusing on effective education through a learner-centered approach, active participation, continuous assessment, support, and reflective practice. When combined with adult education theories like self-directed learning and experiential learning, pedagogical practices can be customized to meet

the specific needs of adult learners. This integration creates a respectful, collaborative, and engaging learning environment that encourages personal and professional growth by combining theoretical knowledge with practical applications and promoting critical reflection and social interaction.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning (SDL) is when learners take charge of their learning by figuring out what they need to learn, setting goals, finding resources, and checking how well they've learned. SDL encourages independence and personal responsibility, urging learners to be active in their education. Important parts of SDL include feeling independent, learning how to assess yourself, and becoming more resourceful. This idea is crucial in adult education because it fits with adults' desire to be independent and in control of their learning (Cerccone, 2018; Rocco & West, 2020).

Experiential Learning

David Kolb's experiential learning theory says that we learn by doing and reflecting on what we've done. Kolb's model has four parts: doing something, thinking about it, making sense of it, and trying it out. This cycle shows how important it is for adults to have hands-on experiences and think about what they've learned. When adults learn by experience, they can link what they've learned in theory to real-life situations, which helps them understand and remember new information better (Jarvis, 2020; Dirkx & Jha, 2019).

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning, introduced by Jack Mezirow, is about a big change in how people see themselves and the world around them. This kind of learning involves thinking deeply, talking things through, and taking in new points of view. Transformative learning encourages adults to question what they believe, have important conversations, and use their experiences to make changes. This idea is very important in adult education because it helps people grow personally and develop a more open-minded and thoughtful view of the world (Mezirow, Taylor, & Associates, 2019; Kasworm & Bowles, 2019; Taylor & Cranton, 2021; Brookfield, 2018).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism, based on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, focuses on how people learn through interacting with others and their culture. According to this theory, we build knowledge by working together and talking to others. Important ideas include the zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, and learning together. Social constructivism shows how important it is to learn in a social setting in adult education, suggesting that learning is something people do together and that it's better when we interact with peers and mentors (Dirkx & Jha, 2019; Hansman & Mott, 2020; Bandura, 2018).

The principles of adult education theory offer a comprehensive framework that helps us understand and support adult learning. Andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, transformative learning, and social constructivism each give us different ways to see how adults learn and what affects their learning. When educators bring these principles together, they can make learning experiences that work well and are interesting for all kinds of adult learners. This complete approach to adult education not only improves what learners get out of education but also helps them grow in their personal and professional lives. Because of this, the principles of adult education theory are important for making education that has meaning and makes a big impact.

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