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Adult Learning Theory

What is Adult Learning Theory?

Adult learning theory, also known as andragogy, is the concept of learning in adults and how it differs from that of children's learning patterns. The theory is based on the idea that adult learning is highly distinct from the learning that humans do as children. It also emphasizes the determination of suitable learning techniques for adults.

Summary
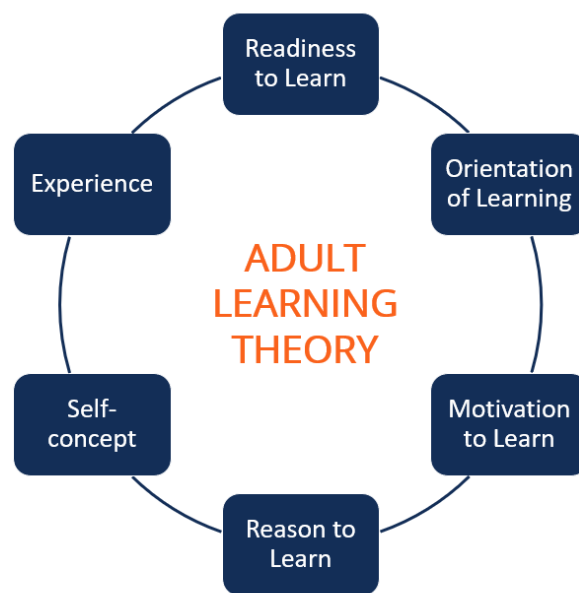
- Adult learning theory is the concept of learning in adults and how it may differ from children learning patterns.
- Malcolm Knowles developed the adult learning theory in 1968 and is based upon six key assumptions.
- Adult learning theory is important to consider in our ever-changing society, especially with rapid new technological advancements.

History of Adult Learning Theory

American adult educator Malcolm Knowles initially developed the adult learning theory in 1968, with six key points or assumptions. The assumptions are as follows:

1. **Readiness to Learn** – Adults who are ready to learn are usually spurred by a specific reason, such as self-development and growth related to their work or career path.
2. **Orientation of Learning** – Adults are more prone to learning when it is applicable to everyday lives instead of general learning about certain subjects that are unrelated to our lives. In general, adults will want to learn practical skills that will make their lives and work more efficient.
3. **Motivation to Learn** – Adults require their own motivations and reasons to learn new things. As children, the reason for learning is simply because they are directed to learn; however, adults need to develop their own motivation.

4. **Reason to Learn** – Adults require a strong reason to learn, such as a problem that they need to solve and an immediate application of new knowledge.

5. **Self-concept** – Adults' learning is much more self-directed and independent as they mature. It allows adults to decide when they want to learn, what they want to learn, and how they want to learn. Such an assumption shows that educators need to develop a plethora of choices for adult learners, allowing them to design their own learning environment.

6. **Experience** – Adult learning, in contrast to children, includes a significant amount of previous life experiences to rely upon to assist with new learning experiences. The previous experiences can bring a unique perspective that fosters discussions and are valuable learning resources. However, they may also result in some biases and misinformation.

Understanding Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory is also known as andragogy. As mentioned, Malcolm Knowles developed the theory based upon the six assumptions of adult learners. It is based upon the concept that adults will usually choose what they want to learn, where they want to learn, and how to learn. Gaining more autonomy over their learning is a key distinction between adult learning and children's learning.

Adult learning theory also places importance on the ability to share life experiences as adults with each other, which can enhance the

overall learning experience. Therefore, other adult experiences can be used as resources to learn. Furthermore, adults will base their learning on situations that arise in their life, which they may require new learning in order to deal with such situations.

Practical Applications

As an adult who progresses through life and is developing skills and their career, adult learning theory is crucial to understand in order to develop training programs for adults. The training programs are important for employees who are learning new skills and job functions. They are also essential for customers who may be learning to use a new product or new technologies.

To apply adult learning theory, there are a few steps that should be loosely followed, including:

1. Analyzing learning with the theory in mind to create a learning process and overall framework for training.
2. Foster collaboration within the learning process, which gives an opportunity for adult learners to benefit from each others' life experiences.
3. Create a self-directed learning experience where the learners are able to control when, where, and how their learning is conducted. New technologies have made this self-directed learning much easier through e-learning.
4. Examples should be derived from real-world cases. It allows the trainee to see the application of what they are learning.
5. Allow learners to problem solve and figure out solutions on their own. It fosters creativity and critical thinking on a deeper level.
6. Trial and error is important for adult learning, allowing learners to experiment and test different things is important to training.

Importance of Adult Learning Theory

Understanding adult learning theory is important in our ever-changing society. New technological developments, including [artificial intelligence](#) and machine learning, will reshape both the job market and the retail market.

Effective adult learning practices can help with the transition and ensure that the adults of tomorrow are well equipped to handle the resulting changes.

Additional Resources

Thank you for reading CFI's explanation of Adult Learning Theory. To keep learning and developing your knowledge base, please explore the additional relevant resources below: