

CHAPTER 2

Principles of Adult Learning: Need for a Framework

Adult learning is viewed as a process for producing meaningful responses to life situations, acquiring new perspectives, and developing a deeper understanding and causal explanations for changing events. Although we don't know much about the processes and inputs that contribute to adult learning, the adult learning literature describes instructional principles and strategies that may assist us in producing positive professional enhancement of educators and administrators involved with the juvenile justice system. For example, Malcolm Knowles' (1990) work on adult learning indicates that once adults decide to pursue knowledge, they desire to engage in a targeted learning process which is usually the result of a specific life change event. This life change event may be a change in professions/careers, an increase in roles and responsibilities, or a shift in the philosophies, concepts, and values in which they work. They usually invest in a targeted learning process because they are willing to examine specific influences and changes associated with the learning experience.

According to Lawson (1997), the process of adult learning is facilitated when adults have the opportunity to plan and regulate their own learning. In this process of self-instruction, they establish their own learning objectives, regulate and monitor their own learning process, and evaluate their own learning outcomes. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1984) highlight the differences between andragogy and pedagogy indicating that, unlike pedagogy, andragogy is process-based rather than content-based learning. In the process-based approach, adults develop a sound rationale for the newly acquired information, learn about strategies for accessing valuable resources, and take full

advantage of the new knowledge base. In the subject- or content-based learning, the focus is on the details and quality of the information and not on its relevance or application. As people mature, they engage in problem-based learning approaches; prefer critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, application, activity-based learning; and tend to become more self-directed. They wanted to see the immediate utility of the newly learned information. With time, adults accumulate their own repertoires of experience that provide a resource for future learning. They prefer to build upon their own experiences to develop new perspectives. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind that professionals seeking learning experiences prefer to move from the state of acquisition to immediate application and they shift from a subject-centered approach to a problem-based orientation to learning. Facilitators of adult learners have a responsibility to create a professional learning environment that is conducive to this type of learning. Professionals seeking these experiences need to understand the context and rationale for professional development and should develop awareness of how this new experience can influence their knowledge, skills, and perceptions.

The EDJJ professional development activities are coordinated and implemented keeping the principles of adult learning in mind. Due to time constraints and increased responsibilities, adults prefer accelerated, efficient modes of instruction where learning expands upon experience. Professional development experiences therefore need to be rigorous, efficient, effective, and relevant. Professionals involved in EDJJ professional enhancement experiences develop personalized professional enhancement plans that include statements of goals, objectives, and specific outcomes related to the professional development experience. They are encouraged to start documenting how the new

information will help them change their own philosophy, knowledge, and skills, and how this change will result in producing meaningful and positive student outcomes. They also identify problem areas in the implementation process. Opportunities for self-reflection and application are embedded in these experiences. Research-based practices are identified and shared.

Emphasis on performance-based accountability has profoundly impacted the principles and processes of professional development (Quinn, 1998; Zimke & Zimke, 1995). If we consider education a professional service, then we need to produce consistent and predictable outcomes for recipients/students, participants, and administrators. If we engage in evidence-based practices in teaching, these ought to produce positive student learning outcomes. Professionals receiving professional enhancement experiences desire to have a clear idea how these experiences tie to projected goals and outcomes. Professionals receiving these experiences also like to establish benchmarks and indicators to measure progress toward successful goal accomplishment. Adult professionals are inspired by productivity. Therefore it is essential that professional development experiences provide these adults with opportunities that direct them toward creativity, ingenuity, and innovation. For example, recipients of professional development experiences would like to anticipate how the professional development in transition processes will help in producing quality transition plans and services for students involved in the juvenile justice system, how professional training in curriculum development will enhance the quality of instructional experience for students, and how the training in assessment procedures will help in making accurate and meaningful eligibility and instructional decisions for students with disabilities.

Standards-based education has led to higher expectations for the performance of teachers, administrators, and other education professionals. Some of these initiatives include:

- increase professionals' knowledge base to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging State academic standards;
- promote teacher understanding of effective instructional, classroom management, and evaluation strategies;
- provide training for teachers, principals, and other staff members in the integrated use of technology and technology-based applications;
- increase teacher effectiveness and student success through improved quality of professional development;
- include professional enhancement opportunities for teachers, principals, other staff members, and administrators to work more effectively with parents; and
- enable teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals to obtain the education necessary for initial and renewal of certification.

Evolving concepts and initiatives in the field of correctional education require that professionals serving in the juvenile justice system have a coordinated, comprehensive, professional development system that provides continual support for new learning. Adult professionals benefit from collaborative partnerships and self-directed, inquiry-based, and reflective approaches to learning.

Understanding Adults' Motivation

Adults engage in professional development activities for a variety of reasons. Job advancement, love of learning, and professional growth are a few reasons that motivate adults to engage in professional development activities. For most adults, professional development is a way of empowerment. When they find that professional development opportunities have relevance and possibility for immediate application, they feel empowered. Adults seek out learning opportunities that offer new and innovative ideas, expand upon existing ideas, heighten their self-esteem, and provide them with a sense of personal validation. They want to keep up with the emergence of new information and evolving concepts in professional fields. They want to be productive and prepare themselves for varied responsibilities and new challenges.

Adult learners prefer to have options available for learning. It is important, therefore, to present learning experiences in alternative formats and modalities. They want their learning experiences to be easily accessible so they don't have to spend their time traveling or driving a distance to attend a class. For these reasons, adults find online instruction, distance education, and web-based learning opportunities appealing.

Adult learners benefit from teachable moments and critical reflection processes that result in transformations and renewal of their perspectives (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). A facilitator plays an active role in creating opportunities for critical reflection whereby these learners challenge their own perceptions, apprehensions, values, and beliefs and develop new ideas and views (Cranton, 1994). When learners discover themselves in relation to new knowledge, their experiences change their mind-set, attitudes, and beliefs. This process is referred to as *transformative learning in adulthood*

(Mezirow, 1991). According to Mezirow, when adults move away from the old ways of knowing, they discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to develop a more complete understanding of changing events, offer causal explanations to events, and exercise a higher degree of control over their lives. Adults tend to be motivated when they find themselves gaining more understanding, conducting successful causal analysis of events, and making accurate predictions.

Understanding Adults' Learning Processes

Cattell's (1971) work on intellectual development suggests that there are two distinct types of intelligence: crystallized and fluid. Crystallized intelligence refers to a person's verbal ability, access to general information, and concrete reasoning ability. Fluid intelligence is the ability to see relationships; to react quickly, accurately, and wisely; and to engage in abstract reasoning. As we mature, we tend to gain fluidity in our thinking. When instruction is characterized by redundancy and repetition and focuses on retention of information without application opportunities, adults don't seem to find value in those experiences.

Cross (1996) has suggested several implications of Cattell's work for instructional design for adult learners: (a) presentation of ideas should be meaningful; (b) curriculum should be organized to help the adult learner organize information with previously stored information; and (c) objectives should be presented at the pace that allows mastery. Facilitators who emphasize higher-level intellectual skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and exploration seem to hold adult interest in new concepts. When adult learners are pressed for time or are given irrelevant and busy tasks, they usually take an expeditious approach to acquiring information. Therefore, challenging activities that

require them to demonstrate critical thinking skills--and deeper and broader understanding of the subject matter--seem to hold their attention. Adults accumulate an enormous collection of life experiences, and they benefit when facilitators provide opportunities for a continuing dialogue where their conceptions are developed based on their experience. They like to engage in learning environments that allow them to apply new concepts to their own situations and to reflect on their own experiences.

Facilitators must create opportunities for professionals who are involved in serving youth in the juvenile justice system to interact with other professionals. By working in collaborative networks, teachers and other professionals become aware of their own behaviors, skills, and knowledge, and also develop awareness of how other professionals handle similar issues. If organized effectively and assessed accurately, collaborative group work processes will result in positive outcomes for these professionals and the youth for whom they are responsible.

Most literature on adult learning highlights facilitator survival skills and is limited in providing information on adult learning processes. Prominent instructional models highlight programmed instruction (Skinner, 1986) and Bandura's (1971) social learning model that focuses on direct instruction, modeling, practice, and feedback. These instructional practices often fall short in providing assistance in teaching adults. Adult learners respond to strategies that are more inductive than instructive, more suggestive than substantive. The questions of *how adults learn* and *what motivates adults* demand a different approach by the educator.

What Do Adults Expect from Professional Development?

Adults expect different outcomes from their learning experiences than do children and youth. Adults examine the quality of learning in terms of relevance, emergence of new perspectives, and professional success. They want to develop the ability to use the newly learned information successfully and to demonstrate the impact of that learning.

Professionals who are committed to lifelong learning are eager to develop a diverse set of competencies that enable them to meet the demands of their profession (Candy, 1991).

They expect that the newly acquired knowledge will allow them to see things differently, to think differently, and to act differently. They expect their instructors will impact new insights in thoughts, beliefs, and values. Research indicates that adult learners expect their instructors to be effective, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and dedicated to teaching; at the same time they like to assume responsibility for their own learning (Donaldson, Flannery, & Ross-Gordon, 1993). Effective professional development provides enrichment in their knowledge and skills and increases self-awareness and responsibility. Effective facilitators present materials clearly, use hands-on class materials, and use techniques such as participative learning and action learning where adults have the opportunity to share their experiences. Adults value information that has relevance and application for their professional role. They are constantly looking for better professional growth opportunities and direction for themselves.

What Should Professional Development Look Like to Adults?

Professional development must be consistent with the principles of adult learning. It should follow the *rigor and relevance principle* where adults have the freedom of

engaging in complex thinking processes as they accumulate new knowledge and use that knowledge to solve real-world problems (Daggett, 2001). Professional development should not be viewed as an adult pullout model, where professionals learn new information in isolation; rather, it should be established as a process that is embedded in the system. Reflecting this view, the *EDJJ Professional Development Series* fosters the establishment of collaborative networking and development of shared understanding among learners working to achieve a common goal. Professional development to better serve youth in the juvenile justice system begins when all professionals serving make a collaborative decision to expand their knowledge, skills, and competencies. Effective professional development results in increased public confidence in the professionals serving children and youth in the juvenile justice system.