

Malcolm Knowles is considered the father of adult learning theory. And, as such, he determined that adults like their learning to be delivered or created in accordance with the following principles; adult like their learning to:

1. Be self directed
2. Be problem centered
3. Be collaborative
4. Pull from their experiences
5. Be active

Recently there seems to be a renewed interest in the principles of adult learning theory and how they apply to workplace learners. This series will discuss each one of these principles and how you can model it in your training design or delivery.

This month we focus on: Adults like their learning to be collaborative.

When we are children we are used to the instructor “on the stage,” leading the class and orchestrating our every move. But as adults, we want to be part of the learning process – not *subject* to it. Therefore, whenever possible the learning should be collaborative – this includes collaboration among peers as well as collaboration among the class and the facilitator.

Collaboration among peers. Collaboration research indicates that knowledge is created socially, not individually. While we *could* read a book and learn from it, we learn better when we read a book and discuss it with others. We can enhance the learning process by allowing learning to be created and transmitted by the group. When designing training, think of ways to design the transmission of learning that isn’t dictated – but rather led - by the facilitator. Some ideas include asking open ended questions (Who has had experience in this area? What pointers would you share?), providing little structure for activities (Look through your notes from this morning and prepare a review question for your peers), and asking participants to teach the content (allow 20 minutes to read the repair manual and then 20 minutes to design a lesson for your fellow trainees).

Collaboration with the facilitator.

Facilitators must develop methods of sharing their expertise without stifling the attempts of learners to acquire knowledge in their own fashion. He or she must create an environment in which participants feel free to share their ideas and opinions – even if they go against the opinion of the group, the perceived opinion of the facilitator, or are contrary to what is being “officially” taught in the course. Through the use of open discussion and idea sharing, you’ll find your participants have a deeper grasp of the subject matter rather simply memorizing what they believe they are supposed to regurgitate as a result of the training. Without an environment in which learners feel free to share, challenge, and be challenged, collaboration will not truly occur.

Facilitators often have trouble with this approach because they feel responsible for course coverage. *If I don’t ensure this knowledge is transmitted, how can I be sure the students have learned?* In reality, better, deeper learning occurs when the learners are enabled to create the content they need to come away with. According to numerous researchers:

...facilitators must be willing to surrender complete authority for the learning process and become co-learners with [the] participants (Bruffee 1987; MacGregor 1990; Romer 1985).

###

Word count 519