ADULT LEARNING THEORIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ADULT'S PHYSICAL LIFE

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Abstract:

Learning opportunities for adults exist in a variety of settings ranging from a formal institution to a place of employment. It is important to acknowledge prior knowledge and experiences of learners, including their ability to recognize their own skills as lifelong learners, Merriam, 1999 in Conlan, Grabwoski, Smith. Considerations for adult development and learning include biological, physical and psychological development including deterioration and disease processes that may occur and sociocultural and integrative perspectives on development (Merriam, 1999 in Conlan, Grabowski, Smith). While the most common reason for adults to place themselves in a learning environment is a life-changing event, once in that environment there are many factors that affect the learning experience. The most significant is referred to here as the briefcase brought with them. Briefcase may include (Conlan, Grabowski, Smith):

- Life experience (including life altering events that affect cognitive abilities);
- Work experience (including development of thinking patterns based on this experience);
- Positive/negative previous adult learning experiences;
- Performance effectors, including cognitive and physical abilities;
- Time between learning interactions;
- Aging factor.

In developing countries these factors may not be considered when planning adult physical and sport education programs, and with ignoring the importance of physical activities in those countries, it is very significant to have sufficient knowledge about philosophies and theories of adult education, the psychology and the physical statues of

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adult learner and to have the necessary tools to plan successful adult education programs. Therefore, this paper discusses the following issues: andragogy, kinds of learning and settings for learning. The paper concluded with recommendations for practitioners, adult teachers and adult program planers

Keywords: learning theories, andragogy, adult physical education, learning settings

1. Introduction

1.1 Andragogy
Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn. Malcolm Knowles is the father of andragogy as he proposed five factors involved in adult learning.

The five assumptions underlying andragogy describe the adult learner as someone who:

- Has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning;
- Has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning;
- Has learning needs closely related to changing social roles;
- Is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge;
- Is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Merriam, 2001, p.5, in-Conlan, Grabowski, Smith).

Conlan, et al said Knowles used these principles to propose a program for the design, implementation and evaluation of adult learning. Since the development of his theory, Knowles has acknowledged that the principles he outlined did not apply solely to adult education. The development of the theory simply illustrates that the designer "*should involve learners in as many aspects of their education as possible and in the creation of a climate in which they can most fruitfully learn*" (Merriam, 2001, p.7, in Conlan, Grabowski, Smith). Knowles' main focus with the development of andragogy was the notion of the material being very learner centered and the learner being very self-directed.

Principles (Conlan, Grabowski, Smith):

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction;
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities;
- Adults are most interested in learning about subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life;
- Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

2. Kinds of learning and settings for learning
The following discussion is taken from the source www.fsu.edu/adult_ed/jennyllearning.htm put it as a direct quotation to have an

overview of kinds and settings for learning that affect adult physical activities. The writer said:

"When we discuss adult learning, we need to clarify whether we're talking about the learning itself, the design and facilitation of the learning, or where the learning is taking place. As you can imagine, there are scores of charts and lists out there describing every possible kind of learning and various educational settings. Below, you'll find a sampling of a few of these ideas (it's much easier to digest that way!)."

2.1 Kinds of Learning

Cranton does a very nice job of quickly running through kinds of knowledge and kinds of learning… and it goes something' like this:

Habermas' Three Domains of Knowledge:

- **Technical Knowledge:** includes information about cause and effect relationships in the environment and behavioristic learning theories.

- **Practical Knowledge:** concerned with understanding what others mean; includes understanding social norms, values, political concepts, and making ourselves understood--humanistic learning theories are partly involved in this.

- **Emancipatory Knowledge:** gained through critical self-reflection and can be seen as a component of the constructivist paradigm. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is concerned with this kind of knowledge. (p. 9)

Mezirow's Three Domains of Learning

- Instrumental: gaining of technical knowledge;

- Communicative: gaining of practical knowledge;

- Emancipatory: gaining of emancipatory knowledge (p. 9).

Cranton's Three Perspectives of Adult Learning

Note: While reading this, ask yourself if Cranton is assuming that there's an external agent involved in facilitating the learning? What about self-directed learning?

- **Subject-Oriented Learning:** The goal is to acquire content (e.g. facts, problem solving strategies, practical or technical skills); it is positivistic, most often meets the expectations of the learner, and is, therefore, comfortable. The expert makes the decisions, not the learner.

- **Consumer-Oriented Learning:** Takes place when an individual expresses a need to learn, looks to the educator for fulfillment of those needs, and then proceeds to learn under the guidance of the educator. The learner makes each decision about learning--for this reason, this kind of learning falls under constructivism.

- **Emancipatory Learning:** A process of freeing ourselves from forces that limit our options and our control over our lives, forces that have been taken for granted or

seen as beyond our control. This kind of learning is constructivist in nature and can be transformative. At times, this learning occurs independently of the educator; at other times, it is fostered deliberately. Unlike the other two kinds of learning, emancipatory learning is often a difficult and painful process. (pp.10-20).

All of the above taken from: Cranton, C. (1994). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 3-21.

3. Situated Cognition

Situated cognition sees context as central in understanding how adults know something. It is, "*based on the idea that what we know and the meanings we attach to what we know are socially constructed. Thus, learning and knowing are intimately linked to real-life situations*" (p.156). This is not a new idea, but, as Merriam and Brockett note, adult educators are becoming more committed to respecting the role of context in learning by looking beyond individual physiology and psychology and by creating real-life contexts for learning. (*The Profession and Practice of Adult Education*, 1997).

3.1 Settings for Learning

When you read about providers of adult education, you usually only see the kinds of learning that are attached to specific educational institutions, but learning can happen in many kinds of settings. Several educators have attempted to come up with frameworks to include learning in nontraditional settings including physical aspects. There is some overlap here between the settings and the kinds of learning that takes place in them. And, as you've seen in kinds of learning, the framework ranges from having external direction to self-direction. (Both are educational, but one tends to emphasize instruction, the other learning.) From: Apps, J (1989). "Providers of Adult and Continuing Education: A Framework." In Merriam, S. and Cunningham, P. (Eds.) *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 275-286.

Coombs' Framework
- Formal Learning: schools and universities;
- Non-formal Learning: organized outside the formal system;
- Informal Learning: from everyday interactions.

Peterson's Framework
- Deliberate Education and Learning;
- Unintentional Learning.

Peterson puts adult education into the context of the rest of education; he recognizes the power of the self-directed learner who chooses and practice a wide variety

of physical activities and approaches to learning; and he points out the importance of unintentional learning at home, work, from friends or the mass media, etc. (p.277)

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) discuss settings for learning and include, for nonformal settings, community-based learning and indigenous learning. Community-based learning can take many different forms--citizens of a town gathering to overcome an issue in their community, cooperative extension programs, literacy and job skills programs, "*A common thread to all of these programs is their focus on social, physiological action and change for the betterment of some part of the community" (p.30) Indigenous learning, "...refers to processes and structures people within particular societies have used to learn about their culture throughout their history*" (Brennan, 1997 cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 31). This kind of learning is often connected to oral traditions and indigenous arts and can be used in other non-formal learning programs to enhance physical learning.

4. Self-Directed Learning

From: Merriam, S. & Caffarella, R. (1991). Learning in Adulthood. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 54-55:

> "*Learning on one's own, being self-directed in one's learning is itself a context in which learning takes place. The key to placing a physical learning experience within this context is that the learner has the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating his or her own learning. Participation in self-directed learning seems almost universal--in fact, an estimated 90 percent of the population is involved with at least one self-directed learning activity a year…Adults engaging in self-directed sport learning do not necessarily follow a definite set of steps or linear format. In essence, self-directed learning occurs both by design and chance--depending on the interests, experiences, and actions of individual learners and the circumstances in which they find themselves…Self-directed learning does not necessarily mean learning in isolation--assistance is often sought from friends, experts, and acquaintances in both the planning and execution of the learning activity.*"

A word to teachers: self-directed physical learners are not necessarily learners who work alone and need no guidance from an instructor. As a teacher or trainer, you may have learners who wish to be more self-directed than they are capable of being. Brookfield points out that our function as facilitators is to challenge our learners to examine their ways of thinking and doing--regardless of their level of self-direction.

From: Brookfield. S. Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 21:

"To say one is meeting felt learner needs sounds humanistic, learner-centered, and admirably democratic, yet to do so without allowing one's own ideas, experience, insights, and knowledge as an educator to contribute to the educational process makes the facilitator a service manager, not a full participating contributor. It also condemns learners to staying within their own paradigms of thinking, feeling, and behaving."

Candy's Four Dimensions of SDL

- Personal Autonomy (SDL as a person attribute);
- Self-Management (SDL as the willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education);
- Learner Control (SDL as a mode of organizing instruction in formal settings);
- Autodidaxy (SDL as the individual non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities in the "natural society setting").

Cranton uses Candy's dimensions as a framework for some of her writing on this subject; See Cranton. P. (1996). *Professional Development as Transformative Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 50-74 (www.fsu.edu/adult_/jenny/learning.htm).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Much of adult learning including physical exercises occurs in a corporate environment involving a variety of training processes. Trainers/facilitators in such environments need to have a working skill set to meet the demands of fast-paced, changing environments. New trends involve instructional designers and facilitators becoming long-term assets to training departments. Expectations are for trainers to arrive not only with delivery skills, but also with design experience and application of learning theories in a variety of settings (Meyer, 2003, in Conlan, Grabowski, Smith).

The most significant trend that continues to make an impact on facilitators is the demand for the incorporation of technology into the content and delivery of professional development (King, 2003, in Conlan, Grabowski, Smith).

The professional development toolkit for trainers should include:

- The basics of design and delivery - needs assessment, developing objectives, creating an agenda, selecting appropriate activities, providing for transfer, and designing and conducting evaluation activities;
- An understanding of diverse clients and their different learning styles;
- The ability to read the context, assess needs, and select or create appropriate mini-learning sessions that are often delivered as just in time learning;
- The use of reflective practice skills to make sense of their situation, tailoring learning solutions to their own and other local learning physical needs, developing and nurturing collaborative communities of practice;

- The ability to coordinate university-based, certificate, and in-service training psychomotor programs designed as learning laboratories;
- The ability to develop activities that increasingly involve active experiential learning and debriefings;
- The ability to use more than one delivery system, particularly online and e-learning;
- The use of learner-centered instruction, especially physical self-directed learning, means trainers will need to create better ways to include opportunities for reflection, clarification, and guidance (Conlan, Grabowski, Smith).

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