

# [Application of malcolm knowles' theories to teaching practice](https://assignbuster.com/application-of-malcolm-knowles-theories-to-teaching-practice/)

Application of Malcolm Knowles’ Theories to Teaching Practice

6N3326 ASSIGNMENT 5

Consider and discuss how you might apply the theories ofMalcolm Knowlesto your current or future training work.

“ The art of teaching is essentially the management of these two key variables in the learning process – environment and interaction- which together define the substance of the basic unit of learning, a “ learning experience””( Knowles n. d. p. 56).  The words and insights of American education theorist Malcolm Knowles have inspired educators all over the world. The practice of adult learning has attracted many theorists, psychologists and critics, each contributing their perceptions and principles of adult learning.  In the late 1950s, Malcolm Knowles popularised the difference in “ the art and science of teaching a child”, referred to a pedagogy (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 36) and the integrated framework of educating adults termed as andragogy (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 58).  His influence on informal adult education still resonates in adult learning today.  I believe that the trainer has an immense impact on how a student learns.  Understanding the needs and requirements of the adult learner will influence the effectiveness of my training.  In this essay, I would like to address Knowles’s concepts and determine how I can apply his recommended practices to my future work and strengthen my transaction as a trainer with the trainee.  I will also consider the concepts of another prominent theorist and how I might reflect aspects of those concepts as a facilitator.

Traditional pedagogy methods of teaching for adults have been used for many years and still exist but have proven to have many problems. Adults have been frequently resistant to the strategies and the methods were insufficient to motivate adults (Knowles, n. d. p. 40).   Knowles describes adult learning as ‘ a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes’ (Knowles 1975  p. 18).

He defines that crucial psychological point of becoming an adult as the time we “ arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for our own lives, of being self-directing” (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 64).   Knowles’ Andragogical Model identifies a number of principles:

1. The need to know. Adult learners need to know why education or skills are needful to them before they invest time.  Knowles explains that the first task of a trainer is to help the learners become aware of the “ need to know” (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 64).  If adult learners have clarity of why they are learning and understand why this learning experience can impact their life positively, it should encourage dedication to the process.  I write that as my own experience as an adult learner. I will apply this concept to my own teaching practice. In the design of every learning programme and lesson plan, I will write a detailed course description.  This description will give an overview of the aims of the course.  It will also state measurable and observational learning outcomes. Learning outcomes that begin with, “ By the end of this lesson, the learner will be able to …..”, gives the trainer an opportunity to state clear reasons why this lesson will be beneficial to the learner.  The overview will outline the course, descriptions of the target group, course duration and the training methods that will be used.  This overview should build enthusiasm and expectations for a positive learning experience.  While the information will be essential for myself as the facilitator, it will also be very useful for the trainee and their “ need to know”.

2. Self-concept of the learner. Becoming an adult comes with the self-concept of being responsible for our own lives and the choices we make.  “ This concept starts to mature during the adolescence phase and by adulthood, would have developed a deep psychological need to be treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 65).  Knowles stated that “ adults,  will no longer see themselves as merely a full-time learner”.  They are now producers and doers as they fulfil their life working, raising their families and living as responsible adults (Knowles 1975 p. 45). Adults recognise their abilities to direct their own lives and beliefs. So how would this development in adulthood effect learning as an adult?  Knowles stated four implications that involve self-concept and influences the adult learners experience.  The first is the learning climate. He reiterated that the self-concept of being an adult has several consequences regarding the requirements of an environment that will encourage learning (Knowles 1975 p. 46).   The environment for learning should be one that is comfortable for adults.  Furnishing, amenities and decoration should be carried out with the needs of adults in mind.  The setting should be one in which adults feel “ accepted, respected and supported” (Knowles 1975 p. 47). The trainer has a large role, to establish this adult learning environment.  As adults will enter this environment each with their own self-concepts, as a trainer my attitude towards my students will be paramount to establishing this environment of learning.  In the Andragogical Curriculum for Equipping Facilitators, the addressed various learning climates.  The  “ the climate of mutual trust” states that people learn more from those they trust.  Facilitators should avoid presenting themselves as an authority figure but as a relatable human beings in which mutual trust can be built (Henschke, 2014).  From the methods of teaching and the classroom environment to the psychological aspects such as trust and respect, facilitators should make this aspect of learning as important as the lesson material itself.  A setting that meets the needs of the learner makes learning easy and enjoyable. The second implication addresses the diagnosis of needs, which involves including the learners in the process of self-diagnosis of their needs to learn.  The process of performing and getting feedback from the trainer can help learners identify areas in which they need to grow. This process is followed by the planning process. With adult self-direction and self-concept in play, Knowles implies that humans tend to feel more committed to an activity to the extent that they have participated in planning it (Knowles 1975 p. 48).  In the last implication, Knowles describes, Conducting learning experiences which implies that the teacher-learner process is the mutual responsibility of both trainer and trainee. The teacher’s role is to be a helper in the process. (Knowles 1975 p. 48).  This largely contrasts with pedagogy learning in which the teacher is fully responsible for the teaching process.  Taking all of these concepts into consideration for my own teaching journey, the framework of my course should greatly consider the elements of teaching that is influenced by the self-concept of adult learners.  A comfortable, positive, informal learning environment with amenities (water, notepads, pens, and learning resources etc), respect and inclusion of all students, appreciation for trainee experiences and contributions are just a few of the initial steps to take.

3. The role of the learners’ experiences.  One major difference between pedagogy and andragogy is the experiences that adults have accumulated through their life, whether good or bad.  Adults, naturally because they have lived longer than a child, have acquired knowledge and gained a wealth of experiences.  Knowles stated that “ adults derive their self-identity from their experiences.  It is these experiences that define them and give them value.” (Knowles 1975 p. 50).  As a trainer, I believe this trainee contribution makes the classroom environment intriguing for all.  The more diverse the trainees are in their occupations, cultures and abilities, the more experiences you have in one learning setting.  Allowing trainees to share their experiences, produces a resource-rich environment not only for the students but for the trainer as well.  In my opinion, a good learning session consists of learning for both trainer and trainee.

4. Readiness to learn.  Learning theories state that “ adults reach a point in their life in which they recognise the value of education and are ready to focus and become serious about learning.” (Esthermsmth, 2017).  As adults, go through life, timing and experiences bring them to periods of readiness for learning to meet new responsibilities.  Knowles gave an example of a girl in high school not being ready to learn about infant nutrition or marital relations, but if she gets engaged after graduation, she will be very ready (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 67).  Taking the time to listen and understand the trainees may give the trainer the opportunity to identify the milestone that prompted the learner to seek training.

5. Orientation to Learning. Knowles acknowledged that, children are subject centered when it comes to orientation whereas adults are life-centered in their orientation to learning. Adults are motivated to learn skills, values and knowledge that they perceive will help them with a task and tackle various problems of life (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 67).   I could incorporate this concept into future training by designing projects that relate to “ real life” tasks as much as possible.  For example, a graphic design assignment could involve rebranding a logo for a real company.  Practical exercises that would be replicas of real-life tasks in the workforce may be deemed more beneficial to the adult learner.

6. Motivation.  Motivators for adults could be external (such as a better job or a  promotion) but the main motivators would be internal pressures such as the desires for a promotion, self- esteem, quality of life and greater self-confidence (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005 p. 68).  Unconditional Positive Regard is a term coined by humanist Carl Rogers.  By providing unconditional positive regard we help clients accept and take responsibility for themselves and their actions (Tumulty, 2019 Notes).  I feel I could incorporate this concept of motivation into my teaching with unconditional positive regard.  Positivity grows motivation.  Positivity also starts from the top.  If I can exemplify positivity as a trainer, that would encourage positivity from the trainees toward each other, the training programme and themselves.

Knowles wasn’t the only theorist who positively influenced adult education practices. He often mentioned humanist psychologist Carl Rogers in his writings, as their beliefs in the approach in which adults should be taught have many similarities. Rogers was a prominent 20th-century psychologist who believed every human had the need to grow, learn and achieve their potential (Zimring, 1999).  Roger’s theory for adult education is based on experiential learning which addresses the needs and wants of the learner (InstructionalDesign. org, 2019).  His belief in human abilities influenced his concepts which includes:  setting a positive climate for learning, clarifying the purposes of the learners, organising and making available learning resources, balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning and sharing feelings and thoughts with learners but not dominating (InstructionalDesign. org, 2019).  As I mentioned earlier, it is Rogers that introduced the term “ unconditional positive regard”.  He stated that positive regard is implemented ‘ to the extent that the therapist finds himself, experiencing a warm acceptance of each aspect of the client’s experience, as being part of that client, he is experiencing unconditional positive regard.’ (Zimring, 1999).  I have gathered from studying the principles of Carl Rogers that everyone has the potential to learn and be accomplished in the learning process if the learner has the external and internal motivators to learn.  The learning environment should be a free environment, in which views and feelings can be expressed and heard with empathy and understanding (Zimring, 1999).  I can apply the many aspects of Carl Rogers to my work as a trainer, especially the concept of unconditional positive regard, in which trainee experiences are not judged or treated with bias but regarded positively as a contribution to the learning process. As a facilitator, I must be ready to listen and able to show understanding and empathy in an open and free environment to encourage learning.

One of the most important matters throughout this study is understanding how the adult learner approaches education.  The traditional methods of pedagogy will not fulfil the expectations or needs of the learner when applied to the adult learning environment.  The Adult has a different set of needs that develop and define who we are.  I believe that Knowles and Rogers’s concepts are conducive to learning.  As a trainer, understanding the andragogy needs will be the foundation for every learning programme I design and implement.  Andragogy is about learning as a whole person, both physically and cognitively, in which both play equal parts in the outcome.  I have a better understanding of myself as an adult learner and therefore I have a more positive perception of myself as a facilitator of adults on their learning journey.

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