Quotations from Knowles (1984) about Adult Characteristics and Their Approach to Education

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1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interest that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities.
2. Adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects.
3. Experience is the richest resource for adults’ learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning. (Knowles, 1984, p. 31)

Andragogical Model

1. The need to know. “Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it….they will invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will gain from learning it and the negative consequences of not learning it” (Knowles, 1984, pp. 55-56).
2. The learner’s self-concept. “Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions….they have] a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction” (Knowles, 1984, p. 56).
3. The role of experience. Adults have greater quantities of experience and different qualities of experience than pre-adults (i.e., “When I was 15, I had not had the experience of being a full-time worker, a spouse, a parent, a voting citizen; when I was 30, I had had all those experiences”) (Knowles, 1984, p. 57).
4. Readiness to learn. “Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (Knowles, 1984, p. 58).
5. Orientation to learning. “Adults are life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. [They] are motivated to devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations.” They learn best when material is “presented in the context of application to real-life situations” (Knowles, 1984, p. 59).

When we start treating adults like children “we create a conflict within them between their intellectual model—learner equals dependent—and the deeper, perhaps subconscious psychological need to be self-directing. And the way most people deal with psychological conflict is to try to flee from the situation causing it—which probably accounts in part for the high dropout rate in much voluntary adult education” (Knowles, 1984, p. 57).

Adults derive their self-identity from their experiences. “The implication of this fact for adult education is that in any situation in which adults’ experience is ignored or devalued, they perceive this as not rejecting just their experience, but rejecting them as persons” (Knowles, 1984, p. 58).

Reference