

Reframing Teacher Professional Development through Adult Learning Theories

¹*Sreelekshmi V R, ²Dr D. Radharamanan Pillai

Abstract:

Research in the past few years have probed into how adults learn and many theories have been put forward regarding adult learning. Teachers are very central to any education system. For teachers to be better professionals, teacher education and professional development is crucial. Adult learning is now the basis for many effective training and development programs for teachers. This paper outlines adult learning theories and how these theories can be effective when it comes to teacher education and professional development.

Keywords: *Adult learning theories, teacher education, professional development.*

Adult learning is very much in the center of academic discussions now. Andragogy refers to the ways, methods and process by which adults learn. The concept was first introduced in 1968 by the American educator Malcolm Knowles. Andragogy: This was an attempt to differentiate between how adults learn and how children learn. Knowles put forward certain basic characteristics of the adult learner:

1. Adult learners are self-directed learners
2. They draw from their own experiences to aid their learning process.
3. Is open to learning to fulfill their social or other life roles.
4. They are problem-centered learners
5. Motivation is more often internal than external.

Self-Directed Learning: Knowles defined self-directed learning as “a process in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learner needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resource for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes”(18). Andragogy puts forth the concept that adults are self-directed learners. And this theory builds on this concept of adult learners. “The key to understanding SDL is to recognize that SDL does not mean sitting in a room alone, learning something; rather SDL is about the learners taking control of her or his own learning” (Merriam 24).SDL is giving the learners the autonomy and they can decide on what developmental path to take , for instance, he/she can decide whether they need online learning, mentoring, or discussion for their development.

Transformative learning: This theory put forward by Mezirow focuses on the individual as reflective learner. This deals with useful and constructive learning. “The adult educator must recognize both learners’ objectives and goals” (Mezirow 8). The adult educator must perform the role of a facilitator so that the adult learner can become an autonomous thinker.

Experiential learning: This field of learning was put forward by David Kolb. This theory focuses on the idea that adults are shaped by their experiences and their effective learning happens from making sense of these experiences. So, memorization of facts and figures is not very effective way to learn rather more practical hand-on learning style is suggested by experiential learning. Learning by doing is preferred to simply being passive consumers of knowledge.

Project- based learning: This is more or less similar to experiential learning and this involves creating projects for learners that they may encounter in their job. They can choose their own projects and they get to learn by doing. Teacher Professional development is now a widely discussed topic in the educational sector. So, in order to develop effective development programs for teachers we need to focus on teachers as adult learners. Effective professional development programs should incorporate the foundations and features of adult learning theories and it can be done in the following ways:

1. Involve learners in planning their learning: Teacher training must be converted from a top-down to bottom-up approach giving teachers opportunities to plan their learning.
2. Allow autonomy: Introducing self-directed learning pathways can motivate the adult learner.
3. Build communities of practice: A community of practice can help to achieve transformational learning and also helps to lead project-based learning.
4. Collaboration: Before developing training modules and courses it is important to collaborate with the teachers and identify their learning needs as adults.

¹*Research Scholar, Reg no- 19213094012015, Centre for PG Studies and Research in English, Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithan code, Affiliated to M.S. University, Tirunelveli-627012.

² Research Supervisor-, Professor, Centre for PG Studies and Research in English, Muslim Arts College, Thiruvithan code, Affiliated to M.S. University, Tirunelveli-627012.

5. Learning benefits: Adults will be motivated to attend training if it has any benefits for them. So, the training must offer something that they can effectively incorporate in their class rooms.

So, the pathways for teachers professional development can be laid through the principles of adult learning and international studies shows that training programs that are based on adult learning theories are more effective in promoting teacher development.

Works cited

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