

STRATEGIC USE OF CONSULTANTS

Activity 2: Trying a Fresh Approach

Adult Learning Principles

Dr. Malcolm Knowles received national recognition for his influence on how people apply the theory of adult learning—“andragogy”—to their work with adult learners. He helped us to recognize that adults benefit most from experiences that are problem-based and collaborative rather than didactic. His theory teaches that training and technical assistance (T/TA) strategies that emphasize greater equality between the teacher and learner are likely to be most effective. His theory also suggests that T/TA strategies must connect with adult students’ work and lives.

Knowles and others point to six research-based adult learning principles. These principles can help you to envision the characteristics that need to be evident in the T/TA strategies you use.

Principle #1: Adults are internally motivated and self-directed. Adult learners will resist learning when they feel others are imposing information, ideas, or actions on them (Fidishun, 2000). Adults need to be free to direct themselves. T/TA providers must actively involve participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators rather than didactic teachers. They must guide participants rather than supply them with facts. They must get participants’ perspectives and give them the flexibility to work on projects that reflect their interests.

Principle #2: Adults need to draw upon their own life experiences and knowledge. Adults have accumulated a wealth of life experiences and knowledge—from school, work, and family life—that can be a resource for their own learning as well as the learning of others. Consultants who deliver T/TA must value this experience and help adults connect it to the theories and concepts that are introduced during T/TA activities. Consultants also should encourage collaboration and idea-sharing among adult learners.

Principle #3: Adults are goal-oriented. Adults appreciate learning when it is tied to specific professional or personal goals. They desire well-organized T/TA experiences that will help them attain their goals. Consultants should identify learning objectives, follow clear agendas, and show participants how the activities are helping them to achieve their goals.

Principle #4: Adults are relevancy-oriented. Adults must be able to see how learning connects to their work. Consultants should become familiar with the Head Start program and be able to facilitate appropriate connections. They should demonstrate how the theory and content of the learning relates to participants’ work.

Principle #5: Adults are practical. Adults will want to focus on those aspects of the T/TA that will help them solve problems in their work. They like hands-on exercises that simulate real-world situations. Consultants must design concrete learning activities and assist Head Start staff in seeing explicitly how the information will be useful to them on the job.

Principle #6: Adults need to be shown respect. Adults need to be given a strong voice during T/TA experiences. Consultants should establish a learning atmosphere within the Head Start program where adults are treated as equals and encouraged to share their opinions, experiences, and knowledge.



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