

Handout # 1: Adult Learning Concepts¹

Key points in Adult Education

The need to learn and the decision to learn. As a rule, children are not asked whether they wish to learn, and are also not given any rationale for doing so. Society dictates that a child should learn, and for most children it seems only natural that they do so in order to find their place in society. For adults it is different. Learning is more of a conscious decision for them. They have very specific reasons for learning something, and they are the ones who decide when, how and with whom they will learn it with. Adult education is based on the participant's own desire and recognition that he or she has a ***need to learn***. Adult education is driven by the participant's ***decision to learn***.

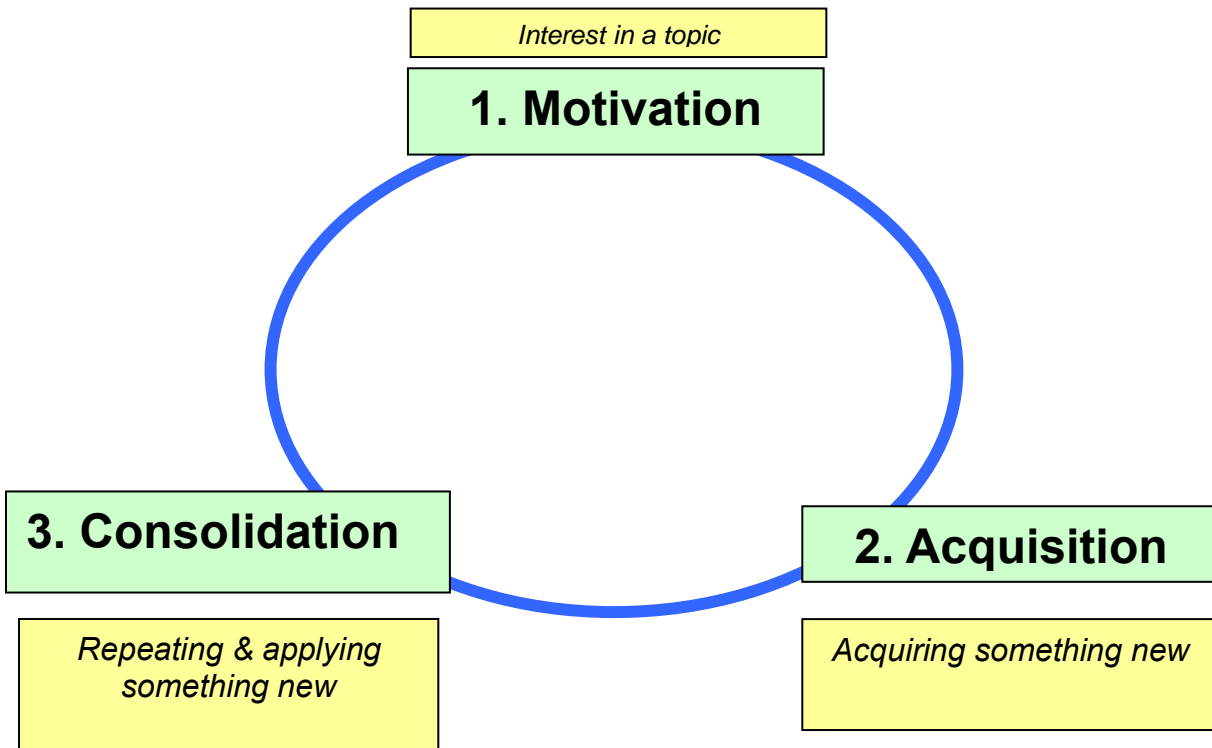
The ability to learn. Unlike children, adults already possess individually proven and relatively ***established mechanisms or strategies*** to deal with private and professional life situations. If the topic of the education is "neutral" (for example, a foreign language), the mechanisms and strategies rarely come into play. If, on the other hand, the topic of the education clashes with what the participant already "knows" based on his or her life experiences, the result may be ***resistance*** to learning.

Resistance, refusal or obvious "non-learning" attitudes from participants has nothing to do with their ***ability to learn***. Rather, it is driven by a desire to protect their own beliefs. Adults are not likely to be persuaded to change their established mechanisms and strategies by what a trainer says. Unlike with children, the participants in an adult training class do not necessarily believe the trainer is "better" or "smarter" than they are. In adult education, it is up to the participant to decide if the information provided in the training is important or not.

Instead, they need a ***chance to compare*** their beliefs with those of others. This allows them to judge the success of their own closely held beliefs for themselves. Thus, in adult education it is best for the participants experience problem situations in ***groups***. In this way the results of their own strategies can be compared with those of others, and conclusions can be drawn about the changes needed in their individual repertoires.

¹ Source: GFA Consulting Group, C³ Training Unit, http://www.c3-training.de/C3_Content_3508944.html

Three Steps in the Adult Learning Process



Source: GFA Consulting Group, *Trainer's Guide for Conducting C³Seminars*

Understanding adult learning participants

- Adults have a wealth of previous life experiences that they draw upon when learning something new. These experiences should not be ignored, but drawn upon to facilitate the learning.
- Adults are busy and have many preoccupations. If they feel they are wasting their time, they will not learn.
- Adults have real-life problems and decisions to make. Training should show the how it will help them deal with these issues.
- Adults often react negatively to an authoritarian approach to teaching. Adult learning cannot be forced.
- Adults prefer self-directed learning.

The Nine Principles of Adult Learning²

1. **The Law of Recency:** Topics that are learned last are those best remembered.
2. **Law of Appropriateness:** Training information, training aids, case studies and other materials must be appropriate and relevant to the participants' needs.
3. **The Law of Motivation:** Participants must want to learn, must be ready to learn, and there must be a reason to learn.
4. **The Law of Primacy:** First impressions or pieces of information participants receive from the trainer are the most important.
5. **The Law of 2-Way communication:** The training process involves communication with the participants, not at them.
6. **The Law of Feedback:** Both the trainer and the participant need information from each other.
7. **The Law of Active Learning:** Participants learn more when they are actively involved in the process.
8. **The Law of Multiple Sense Learning:** Learning is far more effective if the participants use more than one of their five senses.
9. **The Law of Exercise:** Topics that are repeated are best remembered.

² Adapted from GuenterJensen Consulting