

How Adults Learn

The first thing I learned from this week's assigned reading is that andragogy is a learning theory and not simply a word for referencing the art and science of adult learning which, until recently, is how I understood the term. About two weeks ago in another course I am taking I viewed a presentation in which they discussed how the andragogical learning framework was different from the ways in which children learn. As I said up until then, I had thought that andragogy was just a way of designating that adults were being educated instead of children. During that presentation, the presenters were talking about how andragogy was more learner-centered and more about self-directed learning. I thought the presenters were confusing the terminology and were instead describing the difference between behaviorist learning theory and constructivism. After reading chapter four I now understand that even though it is not empirically founded, andragogy is considered by many as a learning theory. Actually, the more I read about all of the learning theories that exist I'm starting to feel like there are as many theories as there are educators with PhD's. I think we can attribute this to the "publish or perish" phenomenon present in the American university system.

I found Jarvis's Learning Process interesting, even if he does make up words like "miseducative." I think Jarvis makes an interesting point when he says that all learning begins with the five senses and that learning is essentially how human cope with encounters that are unfamiliar to them. What I see a lot as a teacher, are students who have a resistance to learning something new because it makes them feel uncomfortable. They feel outside of their comfort zone because they have to stop and think about how to perform a task or solve a particular problem that they have not encountered before.

For me, the most interesting subject covered in this week's reading assignment was the chapter on self-directed learning. I certainly agree with the first goal of SDL, enhancing the ability of adults to be self-directed learners. This is something I give a lot of thought and effort to in my classes. I try to think about what motivated me to learn the subject I am teaching and why it is important to learn a this particular concept. I figure if students can just get a feeling for my passion regarding the subject and why that passion exists then they will want to put forth the effort to get themselves to do what it takes to learn all that is necessary to be proficient with regards to the subject matter. The hardest part is goal number two, getting students to reflect critically on the material we've covered. Especially in face-to-face settings where they feel they may be ostracized for giving a silly answer or one that isn't necessarily consistent with what they think others are thinking. But that's so silly, because by being too worried about what others might think, they deprive themselves of the opportunity to take a chance and put their thoughts out there so that they can hear their thoughts in a social context and get feedback. Whether

that feedback is positive or negative should make no difference, it still helps them better understand the concept. If they just hold their thoughts to themselves, they are really doing a disservice to themselves, and getting them realize that is probably the most difficult part about teaching. You can try to make the environment as friendly and welcoming to a plethora of ideas as possible, but that motivation to speak out, for a lot of students, is a trust that is or is not internalized within them. If you can just get students past that hurdle then the third goal emancipatory learning and social action comes much easier.