

Differences in Adult and Child Learners

Benjamin Straight

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Abstract

Child Learners learn in different ways than Adult Learners. Traditional methods of instruction are pedagogical for Child Learners. Academics have posited numerous theories about how Adult Learners have different learning requirements than Child Learners. Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy has been the most influential Adult Learning theory. Adults require more instructional material application to the adults' daily lives, flexibility in material consumption to allow self-directed study, and a problem-centered resolution approach to instructional material. This base difference between Adult and Child Learners can readily be adapted through creative technology to suite visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles in the online classroom.

Keywords: Adult Learners, Child Learners, Learning Styles, Andragogy, online learning.

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Child Learners learn in a different way than Adult Learners because both require different delivery of classroom materials tailored to the vast differences in age, experience, and education. Adult Learners have life experiences and maturity that Child Learners lack. Adult Learners have also completed their secondary education and have a variety of time demands in their personal lives that require instructional material to be succinctly delivered and at a self-directed pace. Adult Learning theories have been specifically addressed for over thirty years now by academics and online classrooms have required a new review of these theories in order to align Adult Learning with available technology.

There have been several major theories on Adult Learning such as andragogy (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998), self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1995), and transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997). All of these theories justify the differences between Child Learners and Adult Learners.

The most influential contributor to Adult Learning theories is Malcolm Knowles. Knowles developed a theoretical model that focused on the teaching and learning of adults (andragogy) as being distinctly separate from the model traditionally used to teach Child Learners, pedagogy (Snyder, 2009). Knowles (1998) proposed andragogy as a learning-centered environment that fostered learner-centered approaches, mutual trust, and respect among learners and instructors. Andragogy is based on the following six assumptions:

- 1. *The Need to Know:*** Adults need to know why they are learning something.
- 2. *Self-Concept:*** People, as they grown, move from having a Dependent Personality to a Self-Directed Personality.
- 3. *Experience:*** Experience gained through life becomes a learning resource.

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4. *Readiness to Learn:* Adults want to learn things that are applicable to their daily lives.

5. *Learning Orientation:* People evolve their learning orientation from task- or content-centered to problem-centered as they mature.

6. *Motivation:* Adults are intrinsically motivated.

The video that is linked to this assignment identified the three primary learning styles of children as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The video provided suggestions as how to identify a child's learning style and tailor educational tools to fit each individual style. Visual Learners learn by observing a task being done; Auditory Learners best learn by hearing the instructions for the task to be completed, and Kinesthetic Learners must get their 'hands on' the task and learn by manual completion.

Adult Learners are no different in their individual base learning styles than children. Adult Learners are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners, just as children are. The question then becomes the following: How can the online classroom employ the andragogy model while utilizing available technology to suite visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles?

Instructional design needs to be filtered first through the andragogy model submitted by Knowles. The material needs to clearly enumerate why the material needs to be learned, needs to be flexible in consumption so the Adult Learner may self-direct the learning of the material, needs to enumerate how the material is applicable in the adults' daily lives, and needs to be problem-centered in approach. This base andragogy filter can be delivered in the three primary learning styles by various methods.

Online instructional material is, by default, visual. The Adult Learner must read the material (to some extent) to learn the concepts. This can be enhanced by providing visual lectures conducted by the instructor. Visual lectures also serve the auditory learner

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well because she can listen to the lecture without observing and still learn. The visual learner may observe and listen to the lecture.

Online instructional material could be adapted to the auditory learner by the instructor providing audio lectures and explanation of course material. This allows the auditory learner to listen to material explanation without having to observe the instructor's delivery.

Online instructional material could be adapted to the kinesthetic learner by providing step-by-step instruction that requires student interaction to complete the material. This learning style could be most useful to students who attend manual skills classes online, such as Culinary Arts or Electronic Circuit Design.

In conclusion, there is a vast difference between Adult and Child Learners. Adults require more material application to the adults' daily lives, flexibility in material consumption to allow self-directed study, and a problem-centered resolution approach to instructional material. This base difference between Adult and Child Learners can readily be adapted through creative technology to suite visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

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