



Applying Adult Learning Principles to CPD Planning

What do we know about how professionals learn?

As CPD developers and providers, it is useful to understand some basic principles of how adults learn. We want our program participants to not just learn the material but be engaged by it and most importantly, retain it so they can apply it to their practice settings.

We know that the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes is complex, particularly with the frame of learning in diverse environments and with diverse teams. Theories of how adults and professionals learn are wide ranging and too numerous to itemize. What is of most value from the literature are the principles and beliefs that, when implemented, contribute to effective learning.

Why is this information relevant to you?

The majority of accreditation requirements are based on adult learning principles. They require that you assess learning needs, define measurable outcomes, incorporate active learning in all activities to a minimum of 25% and design your evaluations based on stated outcomes. This ensures that conferences and programs are relevant, effective and engaging.

Commonly held adult education principles tell us that adults learn best when:

- their learning is relevant to their practice.
- their learning is focused on solving a problem.
- their previous experience is valued.
- they maintain responsibility for their learning.
- they are actively engaged.
- they have opportunities to interact with peers.
- they are provided with opportunities to apply what is being learned.

What can you do as a program planner or course director to implement these principles into your CPD conferences and programs?

- Before the event find out more about the target audience by conducting a learning needs assessment.
- Make sure the learning environment is comfortable physically, psychologically and consider cultural safety as part of the program design.
- During the activity, incorporate the practice realities of your target audience and encourage participants to bring in examples from their own contexts.

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- Encourage active participation through different teaching and learning techniques (either online for in person), for example, real case studies, live patients, discussion groups, reflection etc.
- Acknowledge participants as colleagues and equals.
- At the end of the event:
 - Ask for feedback
 - Provide feedback
 - Provide practice reminders

Other quick tips in this series can help you incorporate these principles into your planning. Please contact one of CPD's Educational Consultants for more assistance: jane.tipping@utoronto.ca or kate.hodgson@utoronto.ca.

References

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For more reading, references and general information on adult learning:

<http://infed.org/mobi/malcolm-knowles-informal-adult-education-self-direction-and-andragogy>

Acknowledgements

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