

Northern Arizona University

An Adult Learning Environment

A Dental Hygienist takes a CE course

Adult Learning Environment

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When adult learners pursue an educational opportunity of their own choosing they go through an exciting process. Since the motivation to learn something new often comes from an intrinsic source for an adult learner rather than a more extrinsic source or having a compulsory factor the learner needs to be more engaged in the choice of what and how they learn for the process to be more effective (Conner, 2007). In the case of my student learner, she is pursuing continuing education classes in order to be able to maintain her dental hygiene license.

My adult learner is taking CE classes to maintain her dental hygiene license. She has to take 8 final hours to complete her requirements for maintaining her license. There are several options for meeting these credit requirements which helps the learner feel a sense of independence even though there is an aspect of compulsory learning to these classes. This style of class offering is an example of one of Knowles's assumptions of Andragogy. This assumption is 'orientation to learn' or the idea that adults learn things specific to their needs (Hatcher, 1997).

Many people who are in these classes are eager to learn. They are excited to increase or maintain their knowledge in their field of knowledge. The local constituency of the American Dental Hygiene Association is the sponsor of these CE classes. The classes are held in a convention center in a hotel. The rooms are divided according to the size of the class and the lights are dimmed in order for the participants to see the screen better during the presentation. Due to the temporary walls set up, at times, our learners can hear the applause from other classes during a session. Our adult learner will sit in class from 8 am to 5 pm with an hour for lunch. They offer a selection of relevant classes that can increase the Dental Hygienists' knowledge base. Most of the classes are lecture-style with free pens and notepads available for note-taking in addition to a full pamphlet with short paragraphs describing the content of each class. 2

classes are hands-on, one for administering local anesthesia and one for CPR certification. Many flock to these classes as the adult learner can still find these classes to be more engaging because they are interactive and can be taken with a partner. The learning style for the interactive classes is shown by Kolb's theory. With this theory of adult learning, it is important not just to observe the information that is being presented but the learner must do something with that new knowledge (Conner, 2007).

For the lecture style of classes, the ones that are talked about the most in smaller groups afterward are the ones where the presenters were the most engaging or the ones with little quizzes and small prizes or raffle tickets that encourage interactive learning. When classes were complained about, it was due to repetitive content. Because the content was stale and too familiar to the students Jarvis' theory would say that it's due to the lack of challenge that leads to a lack of learning. (Jarvis, 1991).

Our adult learner has taken 8 hours of CE classes today. This has proven to be an overload of information and when asked later about the length, she stated that the last 2 hours of class were the hardest to sit through, because she didn't get to choose that class due to the others being at capacity and it was purely lecture. This is an example of how learning is more effective when the adult learner gets to choose his or her own subject matter. Our student learner is aware of her learning style and that it is important for her to be able to observe and interact as she is learning a new topic. Kolb would be credited for this example of adult learning as not just observing to gain new knowledge but also being given an opportunity to use that knowledge in class right away (Conner, 2007). Our adult learner was enthusiastic about taking new knowledge back to her dental office and start using some of the new ideas and information that she learned.

This progression of watching and listening to the lectures, feeling excitement, and finally using the new information is a great example of Kolb's theory as well.

My adult learner shows that the concept of learning doesn't just fit into any one strict educational theory. Even though continuing education classes can initially be viewed as compulsory due to the requirement of a certain number of credits needed to maintain the dental hygienist's license, there are many aspects that fall into andragogy. Choosing classes, and being self-motivated to keep track of credits. Sitting in a lecture that also includes an interactive portion encourages the use of all senses and handing out pens and notebooks gives the student a chance to write down any thoughts or feelings during class time or even plans to take action once class is over.

References

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