

Adult learning principles are a set of assumptions about how adults learn (Malcolm Knowles, 1980). Adult learners prefer learning when the concepts of autonomy, acknowledgement and application are addressed. Addressing these principles increases participation and engagement in the learning process. Let's take a quick look at each principle:



1

AUTONOMY

Adults have developed a sense of autonomy and independence. They have their own motivations for learning and participation. Autonomy and independence are addressed when adult learners are given opportunities to self-direct aspects of the learning process with support from an instructor or facilitator (Reischmann, 2004). Facilitators can generate ideas about how to address autonomy by asking:

- *How can I create choice and self-direction for my participants?*
- *How can I tap into their internal motivation to learn?*



2

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Adult learners are far more engaged when their experience is acknowledged. When we take interest in their past experience and what they can contribute to the learning process, they feel valued and more engaged. Learning is constructed by evaluating past experience against new information to create new meaning and understanding. Facilitators can generate ideas about how to address acknowledgement by asking:

- *How can I acknowledge all the experience participants bring to the learning process?*
- *How can I help participants construct new learning by integrating the new learning with past experience?*



3

APPLICATION

Adult participants are often problem-centred instead of content-centred (Abrami, Bernard, & Bures, 2012; Fidishun, 2005; Knowles, 1980). This means they want to learn in ways that will help them grow and solve problems. They need to understand how the material is practical and applicable to them. It is commonly assumed giving adults information will automatically translate to them knowing how to apply the information to solve a problem or gain a new skill. That is simply not the case. Facilitators can generate ideas about how to address application by asking:

- *How can I help participants understand how:*
 - *the material is relevant to them?*
 - *they can use what I'm teaching to solve a problem or reach a goal?*
- *How can I help them answer "What's in it for me?" ?*