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Implications of Adult Learning Styles

The extensive literature on adult learning or adult education has been neglected by most speech-language pathologists and audiology supervisors and the people they supervise. In adult education, Knowles (1984) differentiated between pedagogy, the teaching of children, and andragogy, “any intentional and professionally guided activity that aims at a change in adult persons” (p.50). The two are seen as somewhat similar to the continuum presented here, moving from dependency of the learner in pedagogy to self-directiveness in andragogy. Knowles suggested that an andragogical model of learning be based on several assumptions:

- (1) Adults need to know why they need to learn something before they begin the process;
- (2) Adults have a concept of being responsible for their own decisions which may lead to resistance to certain types of educational experiences;
- (3) Because adults bring more experience to a learning situation, not only is there a greater need for individualization in teaching but often the “richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves” (p. 57), providing educators can open up their minds to new approaches;
- (4) Readiness to learn is as important to adults as to children;
- (5) Orientation to learning is life-centered, that is, task-centered or problem-centered, not subject-centered (in other words, adults learn best when they can perceive application of learning to their daily life);

(6) Although adults respond to some external motivators like money and promotions, the most potent motivation for learning is from internal pressures (increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life).

Knowles advocated such methods as organizing adult learning around needs and interests, life situations (not subjects), analysis of experience, mutual inquiry, and allowing for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning. In fact, the points he made are compatible with the continuum of supervision. Thus, the continuum is as relevant for the supervisor-in-training as it is for the clinician-in-training.

Knowledge of adult stages of development is also relevant to preparation of supervisors. Individual differences and needs are factors that should be known. Adult learners are often voluntary participants, which implies sacrifices of time and money (Haverkamp, 1983). On the other hand, they may be meeting mandatory requirements of an organization or a degree requirement, which influences attitudes.