

# **An Update on Adult Learning Theory**

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# Forces Affecting Adult Learning

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- Globalization
- Communication Technology
- Knowledge Age (Information doubles every 73 days)
- Rapid Change (1/2 life of knowledge)

# Shift to Lifelong Learning

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Learning is lifelong and lifewide

UNESCO “pillars” of learning:

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to live together
- Learning to be
- Learning to change (Delors, 1996)

# I. Three Foundational Theories of Adult Learning

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- Andragogy
- Self-Directed Learning
- Transformational Learning

# Andragogy

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- As adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing;
- An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience;
- Readiness to learn is related to life stage and social role;
- An adult is more problem centered; wants immediate application;
- An adult is more internally motivated.  
(Knowles, 1980)

# Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

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- Upwards of 90% of adults are engaged in independent learning projects;
- In these projects, adults plan, carry out, and evaluate their own learning;
- Learner's interest in and ability to engage in SDL varies, and may depend on the situation;
- SDL is about taking control of your own learning.

# Transformational Learning

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- Transformational learning is about change--dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live;
- Most often begins when an important life event causes us to question our way of making meaning in our lives;
- We then *critically* examine our assumptions and beliefs.

# Transformative Learning

(con't)

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- The learner considers options for new roles, relationships, activities (often with the help of others)
- A new course of action is engaged in
- The learner has a changed perspective from which he/she reengages with society.
- The change is usually visible to others.

# II. Some Recent Thinking

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- Situated Cognition/Contextual Learning
- Embodied/Somatic Learning
- Spirituality and Learning
- Non-Western Perspectives

# Situated Cognition

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- Context-based
- Tool-dependant
- Socially interactive

# Problem Solving in Conjunction With Context (not simply a mental process)

## ■ Grocery Shopping



- 98% correct when actually shopping
- 59% correct on paper and pencil test

## ■ Yogurt



How much is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a cup?

# Importance of Context

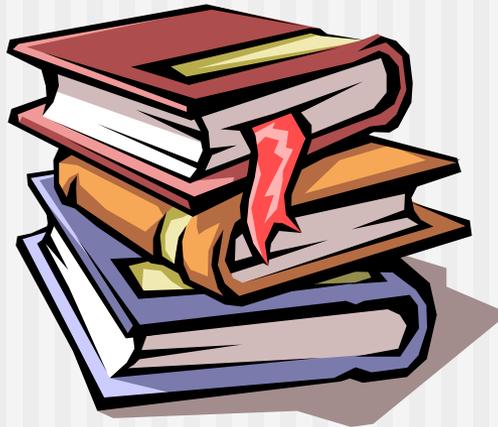
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- Whether formal or informal, learning occurs in context with others – it is a social activity
- Use of “authentic” vs. decontextualized contexts
- Locate learning in real-life problem solving and experience

# Emotions and Somatic Knowing

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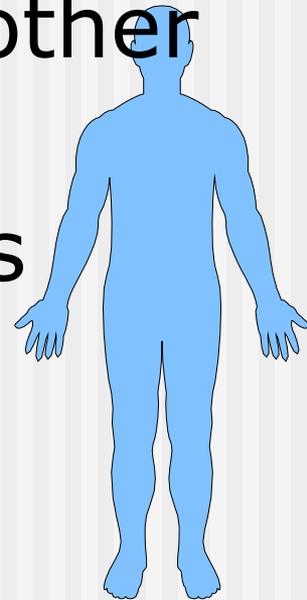
- In the West – Learning is a rational, cognitive process through the brain
- But body, spirit and emotions are also involved in meaningful learning



# Somatic or Embodied Learning

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- Learning through our bodies – since receptors are throughout the body's nerves, emotions can be stored and mediated by parts of the body other than the brain.
- We learn *in* the experience; It is immediate, physical, emotional



# Japanese for River (Kawa:川)

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“When I finished the third stroke, I recognized a strong feeling that remained in my body...It was similar to a feeling in my palm which I remembered from canoeing in the wilderness. I closed my eyes with this image. And again I wrote *Kawa* with a brush as if I was paddling with the flow of the river. In the left sidestroke the water flows with a paddle (brush). In the middle stroke, I hold the water and stop the brush. For the third, I sink the paddle deep down, holding the heavy water for the longest stroke. I push it all the way down.

I felt the *Kawa* character written in this way came alive, as if flowing in front of me. I encountered the vital life of the *Kawa* character in this way....The character is no longer an object outside myself, it is something living within” (Yoshida, 2005, p. 133).

# Somatic/Embodied Learning

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- Kinesthetic – movement and action of the body
- Sensory – accessing and processing information through our senses
- Affective – emotions enmeshed in neural networks; “There are no neurotransmitters for ‘objectivity’; even the simplest responses to information signals are linked with possibly several ‘emotional’ transmitters” (Mulvilhill, 2003, p. 10).

# Embodied / Somatic Learning

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- ❑ Yoga – mind, body and spirit in concert to work towards enlightenment
- ❑ The Relationship between physical condition and levels of stress in one's life
- ❑ Athletes "Visioning" Their Movements Prior to Actual Engagement
- ❑ Health Practitioners "Reading" Body Language of Patients for Better Diagnosis

# Spirituality and Learning

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- Spirituality – “one’s personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose” (Tisdell, 2000, p. 309)
- Connected to learning through meaning-making
  - Helps to give our lives coherence
  - Helps to make sense (meaning) of our experience
  - Meaning-making uses myths, symbols, images, dreams that are culturally embedded, spiritually oriented

# Fostering Spirituality in Learning

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- Examine own beliefs, current spiritual preferences and resistences
- Create space that is safe, supportive, open, for spiritual connectedness to occur
- Dialogue to connect with others, with community, with inner self, perhaps with energy beyond self
- Use creative and imaginative activities such as visualization, storytelling, poetry, music, symbols and rituals

# If the World Consisted of 100 People

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- 61 Asians
- 14 Americans  
(North and South America)
- 13 Africans
- 12 Europeans
- 1 Australian  
(Oceania)
- 70 Would Be Non-White; 30 White
- 50 Women; 50 Men
- 7 Are 65 Years Of Age and Above
- 67 Are Non-Christians; 33 Are Christians

# Non-Western Perspectives

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- Learning is a Lifelong Journey
- What “Counts” as Knowledge is Broadly Defined
- Learning and Instruction are Holistic and Informal

# Implications for Practice

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- Develop self-directed, autonomous, *lifelong* learners
- Make learning as “authentic” as possible
  - apprenticeships
  - reflective practicums
  - internships
  - case study instruction

# Implications for Practice

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- ❑ Foster *holistic learning* wherein instructional activities engage not just the mind, but the body and the spirit
- ❑ Be aware of and acknowledge cultural differences in learning; draw upon the strengths of other worldviews about learning and knowing

# All Learning Theories Suggest:

Learning is most effective when connected to

- Real-life Problems, Issues, and Needs
- The Learner's Previous Life Experiences
- Other Learners

