Adult Learning Theory

Speck (1996) notes that the following important points of adult learning theory should be considered when professional development activities are designed for educators:

- "Adults will commit to learning when the goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to them. Application in the 'real world' is important and relevant to the adult learner's personal and professional needs.

- Adults want to be the origin of their own learning and will resist learning activities they believe are an attack on their competence. Thus, professional development needs to give participants some control over the what, who, how, why, when, and where of their learning.

- Adult learners need to see that the professional development learning and their day-to-day activities are related and relevant.

- Adult learners need direct, concrete experiences in which they apply the learning in real work.

- Adult learning has ego involved. Professional development must be structured to provide support from peers and to reduce the fear of judgment during learning.

- Adults need to receive feedback on how they are doing and the results of their efforts. Opportunities must be built into professional development activities that allow the learner to practice the learning and receive structured, helpful feedback.

- Adults need to participate in small-group activities during the learning to move them beyond understanding to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Small-group activities provide an opportunity to share, reflect, and generalize their learning experiences.

- Adult learners come to learning with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, self-direction, interests, and competencies. This diversity must be accommodated in the professional development planning.

- Transfer of learning for adults is not automatic and must be facilitated. Coaching and other kinds of follow-up support are needed to help adult learners transfer learning into daily practice so that it is sustained." (pp. 36-37)