

## Chapter II

# PRINCIPLES AND THEORIES OF ADULT EDUCATION

# LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- ▣ define concepts, theories and findings about adult education
- ▣ discuss adult education, literacy and learning
- ▣ summarize and compare the theories and educational philosophies of selected thinkers

# THEORIES AND EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES OF SELECTED THINKERS

The two theories that have a significant influence on adult teaching and learning are those of Malcolm Knowles and Paulo Freire.

### 1.3.1 The principles underlying the teachings of Knowles

Knowles was the first person to chart the rise of the adult education movement in the United States.

- ❑ The education of adults should recognize the experience of learners and use that experience as a resource for teaching and learning.
- ❑ Learners have to be self-directed, motivated volunteers of learning and cannot be forced. It is important to equip learners with motivation and skills for lifelong learning. The learners should be engaged in informal learning activities where they share and learn by doing.
- ❑ The education should recognize and respect readiness to learn

- The learners should practice and refine the things learnt.
- The learners should be made to know why they should learn particular skills.

- ▣ **Adult learning should produce at least these outcomes:**

*Adults should acquire a mature understanding of themselves.* They should understand their needs, motivations, interests, capacities and goals. They should be able to look at themselves objectively and maturely. They should accept themselves and respect themselves for what they are, while striving earnestly to improve themselves.

*2- Adults should develop an attitude of acceptance, love and respect toward others.*

This is the attitude on which all human relations depend. Adults must learn to distinguish between people and ideas, and to challenge ideas without threatening people. Ideally, this attitude will go beyond acceptance, love and respect, to empathy and the sincere desire to help others.

*3- Adults should develop a dynamic attitude toward life.*

They should accept the fact of change and think of themselves as always changing.

They should acquire the habit of looking at every experience as an opportunity to learn and should become skillful in learning from it.

*4- Adults should learn to react to the causes, not the symptoms, of behavior.*

Solutions to problems lie in their causes, not in their symptoms. We have learned to apply this lesson in the physical world, but have yet to learn to apply it in human relations

*5- Adults should acquire the skills necessary to achieve the potential of their personalities.*

Every person has capacities that, if realized, will contribute to the wellbeing of himself/herself and of society. To achieve this potential requires skills of many kinds — vocational, social, recreational, civic, artistic, and the like. It should be a goal of education to give each individual those skills necessary for him/her to make full use of his/her capacities.

*6- Adults should understand the essential values in the capital of human experience.*

They should be familiar with the heritage of knowledge, the great ideas and the great traditions of the world in which they live. They should understand and respect the values that bind men together.

*7- Adults should understand their society and should be skillful in directing social change.*

In a democracy the people participate in making decisions that affect the entire social order. It is therefore imperative that every factory worker, every salesperson, every politician and every housewife knows enough about government, economics, international affairs and other aspects of the social order to be able to take part intelligently.

### 1.3.2 The principles underlying the teachings of Freire:

- ▣ The education should engage in problem-solving and social tasks
- ▣ Create products, small group collaboration projects, presentations and portfolios that will bring education to the disadvantaged.
- ▣ The education should be learner-centered – not to spoon-feed learners, and not to literally deposit information in the minds of learners.
- ▣ The education should also operate through dialogue, and lead to emancipation, empowerment and freedom.

**1.3.2.1 Theory of value** *What knowledge and skills are worth learning? What are the goals of education?*

Education should raise the awareness of the students so that they become subjects, rather than objects, of the world. This is done by teaching students to think democratically and to continually question and derive meaning from (critically view) everything they learn

**1.3.2.2 Theory of knowledge** *What is knowledge? How is it different from belief? What is a mistake? What is a lie?*  
Knowledge is a social construct.

*Knowing is a social process, whose individual dimension, however, cannot be forgotten or even devalued. The process of knowing, which involves the whole conscious self, feelings, emotions, memory, affects, an epistemologically curious mind, focused on the object, equally involves other thinking subjects, that is, others also capable of knowing and curious. This simply means that the relationship called "thinking" is not enclosed in a relationship "thinking subject - knowable object" because it extends to other thinking subjects.*

**1.3.2.3 Theory of human nature.** *What is a human being? How does it differ from other species? What are the limits of human potential?*

*The ability of humans to plan and shape the world for their future needs is what separates humans from animals. The oppressed majority must be taught to imagine a better way so that they can shape their future and thereby become more human. There are many things that limit the success of the oppressed majority.*

#### **1.3.2.4 Theory of learning.** *What is learning? How are skills and knowledge acquired?*

Freire talks about the fallacy of looking at the education system as if it were a bank, a large repository where students come to withdraw the knowledge they need for life. Knowledge is not a set commodity that is passed from the teachers to the students. Students must construct knowledge from knowledge they already possess. Teachers must learn how the students understand the world so that these teachers understand how the students learn.

**1.3.2.5 Theory of transmission.** *Who is to teach? By what methods? What will the curriculum be?*

Teaching is a political process. It must be a democratic process to avoid teaching authority dependence. The teacher must learn about (and from) the student so that knowledge can be constructed in ways that are meaningful to the student. The teachers must become learners and the learners must become teachers.

### 1.3.2.6 Theory of society. *What is society? What institutions are involved in the educational process?*

Freire challenges the conventional assumption that there is equal opportunity in a democratic society. He often asserts that education is a political process.

Freire's most well-known work is *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970). Throughout this and subsequent books, he argues for a system of education that emphasizes learning as an act of culture and freedom. He is most well-known for concepts such as "banking education", in which passive learners have pre-selected knowledge deposited in their minds.

"Conscientisation" is a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness; the "culture of silence" is the culture in which dominated individuals lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them by a dominant culture. Other important concepts developed by Freire include "dialectic", "empowerment", "generative themes/words", "humanization", "liberatory education", "mystification", "praxis", "problematization" and "transformation of the world".

### 1.3.3 The principles underlying the teachings of Nyerere

Nyerere's ideas on education for liberation and development resonate with those of Paulo Freire's ideas expressed in *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Nyerere was an advocate of equality, unity and economic and social justice at home, regionally and globally. According to Nyerere,

Nyerere's educational philosophy can be approached under two main headings: education for self-reliance; and adult education, lifelong learning and education for liberation.

### 1.3.3.1 Adult education, lifelong learning and learning for liberation

adult education had two functions:

- ▣ 1. to inspire both a desire for change, and an understanding that change is possible
- ▣ 2. to help people make their own decisions, and to implement those decisions for themselves.