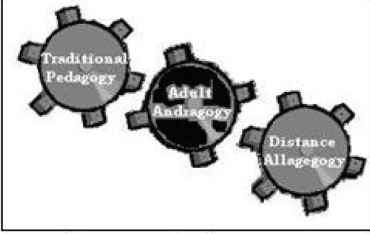# Chapter 2
Learning Theories and Andragogy:
Teaching the Adult Learner

Learning Objectives. The reader will become familiar with two key concepts related to teaching the adult learner: the concept of andragogy and the psychology of cognitivism. Andragogy is defined as the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1970). Cognitivism focuses on mental processes such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving that contributes to learning. Whereas, learning is defined as change in learner behavior by the behaviorist (see Chapter 2), learning is defined as a change (i.e., growth) in a learner's schemata (or models for addressing and solving problems). At the conclusion of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Define the nature of the adult learner and definition of andragogy.
- Identify the characteristics that distinguish how a child learns and how an adult learns.
- Define cognitivism and distinguish the important differences among the developmental stages of cognitive development, the zone of proximal development, and psychosocial development
- Recognize the major theorists of cognitivism to include: Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Erik Erikson.
- Apply the major instructional applications of cognitive psychology to include: Discovery Learning, Reception Learning, and the Information Processing Model

Figure 1. Adult Lesson Plan Template (Focus on the Learner)

Focus on the Learner

Grade Level: **200-level Science Elective**

Psychology of the Lesson: Cognitive

Major **instructional application:**

☐ Discovery learning ☐ Reception learning ☐ Other _____

Adult student characteristics targeted by this lesson plan:

☐ Problem-centered; seek educational solutions to where they are compared to where they want to be in life

☐ Results-oriented; have specific results in mind for education - will drop out if education does not lead to those results because their participation is usually voluntary

☐ Self-directed; typically not dependent on others for direction

☐ Often skeptical about new information; prefer to try it out before accepting it

☐ Seek education that relates or applies directly to their perceived needs, that is timely and appropriate for their current lives

☐ Accept responsibility for their own learning if learning is perceived as timely and appropriate

- Discuss the key criticism of cognitivism and the adult learner
- Cognitivism and the Engine for Designing Technology-based Instruction

Lesson Plan Template. Refer to **Appendix B, Adult Learner Lesson Plan Template** as the chapter discusses **Focus on the Learner** as depicted in Figure 1.

INTRODUCTION

The adult learner is a relatively new phenomenon in the annals of educational practice. How can this be considering we have been teaching adults for almost as long as we have been teaching children? – longer if you believe in the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve. Still, any review of the educational literature on teaching and learning will show a preponderance of research and investigation concerning children and comparatively little specifics regarding adults.

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