Assumptions About Learning

The following are only a few assumptions about learning that tend to be recognized throughout education literature as fundamental to the planning of an education program. These assumptions came from the general field of educational philosophy.

- Persons at all ages have the potential to learn, with some learning faster than others. Age may or may not affect a person's speed of learning, and individuals vary in way they like to learn.
- The individual experiencing a change process, such as a new learning situation, is likely to feel stress and confusion. Some anxiety often increases motivation to learn, but too much anxiety may cause fatigue, inability to concentrate, resentments, and other barriers to learning. Learning is more comfortable and effective when the environmental conditions support open exchange, sharing of opinions, and problem-solving strategies. The atmosphere should foster trust and acceptance of different ideas and values.
- In the classroom the instructor facilitates learning by incorporating students' experience, observations of others, and personal ideas and feelings. Exposure to varied behavior models and attitudes helps learners to clarify actions and beliefs that will aid in meeting their own learning goals.
- The depth of long-term learning may depend on the extent to which learners try to analyze, clarify, or articulate their experiences to others in their family, work or social groups. The depth of learning increases when new concepts and skills are useful in meeting current needs or problems. This allows for immediate application of the theory to a practical situation.
- An educational program may only provide one step in an individual's progress toward acquiring new behaviors. The adoption of a new behavior depends on many factors. Some conditions predispose an individual to take a particular action, such as former knowledge and attitudes. Availability and access to resources, such as exercise or practice facilities, may enable a person to carry out new plans of actions. Other environmental conditions and family characteristics help to reinforce or hinder behavior changes.
- Learning improves when the learner is an active participant in the educational process. When selecting among several teaching methods, it is best to choose the method that allows the learning to become most involved. Using varied methods of teaching helps the learner maintain interest and may help to reinforce concepts without being repetitious.
- In recent years teachers have found that many principles of adult learning also apply to children and adolescents. For example, adults and children prefer learning experiences that are participatory; they learn faster when new concepts are useful in their present as well as future lives. The role of an educator is to assess the audience's interest, current skills, and aims. This information then guides the structuring of a learning atmosphere and selection of methods most satisfying and effective for the learners.