

Elizabeth Douglas:

First of all, when you're considering adult learning you have to understand the fundamental differences between how we learn as adults and how we learn as children. So if you think back to your childhood learning experiences they will probably be linked to your parents and your schooling, and the key difference we first think of is that you don't have a choice as a child. So you don't have a choice about whether you want to go to school or not, and lots of old jokes about children not wanting to go to school, dragging their heels and what have you. As an adult the fundamental difference is that you do have the choice.

Malcolm [Knowles] has written a lot of work about adult learning, so I would urge readers to refer to his CDs on adult learning. He talks about adults having unique characteristics when it comes to learning; one, is they have a different motivation because they're usually interested in the learning; another is that they want to be autonomous and left to get on with it, so that's the polar opposite from us learning from a child's point of view; they need to have relevant learning, so it needs to have a context in their life, whether that's their own personal learning or work learning; and adults need to have goals as well to achieve their learning, a target to aim for.

Specifically in relation to diversity the point to note about adult learning is that as an adult you bring a lot of work life experience, and that doesn't necessarily embrace the principles of diversity. So what you have to be aware of is that if you were preparing a training session on diversity for adults you really need to try and understand what level to pitch that training at. And how to do that, one example would be to issue a questionnaire before designing the training session, to understand the level of the understanding of diversity, or you could just simply discuss it at the opening of the training session and then pitch your session from that point.

Children don't have any preconceived prejudices, stereotypes, we do as adults, that's all based, as I said previously, on our upbringing, our schooling, our parents, and we come equipped with lots of views and opinions that maybe don't reflect good practice in diversity. So you need to really think about an unconscious bias training session again for adults because of the life experiences that adults bring.