

# **INTRODUCTION TO ADULT LEARNING THEORY**

**Bringing  
Education &  
Service  
Together**



# Adult Learning Theory

## Concept:

Adult learners (and probably any other learners) learn best through **interactive, learner-centered** teaching focused on their **self-defined learning goals**.

Wilkerson LA, Irby DM. Strategies for improving teaching practices: a comprehensive approach to faculty development. *Academic Medicine* 1998; 73: 387-396.

# **1970s: Behavioral Learning Theories**

- **Learning defined as a change in observable behavior**
- **Behavioral learning objectives**
- **Student ratings of teachers became more popular.**

# **1980s: Cognitive Learning Theories**

- **Learning defined as the active construction of meaning**
- **Teaching strategies focus on helping learners “encode” new knowledge within existing conceptual frameworks.**

# **1990s: Social Learning Theories**

- **Learning defined as socialization into a new community of knowledge**
- **Teachers seek to promote a “learning culture” among students.**
- **Role modeling becomes particularly important in professional training.**

# **21st Century: New Learning Theories?**

**Resident teachers and medical faculty can combine and expand learning theories from past decades to create new approaches to teaching and learning.**