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The Adult Learner

The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development

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including Samolovcev, Filipovic, and Savicevic, began speaking and writing about andragogy, and faculties of andragogy offering doctorates in adult education were established at the universities of Zagreb and Belgrade in Yugoslavia and at the universities of Budapest and Debrecen in Hungary.

In the Netherlands, Professor T. T. ten Have began to use the term *andragogy* in his lectures in 1954. In 1959 he published the outline for a science of andragogy. Since 1966 the University of Amsterdam has had a doctorate for andragogues, and in 1970 a department of pedagogical and andragogical sciences was established in the faculty of social sciences. Current Dutch literature distinguishes between andragogy, andragogics, and andragology. *Andragogy* is any intentional and professionally guided activity that aims at a change in adult persons; *andragogics* is the background of methodological and ideological systems that govern the actual process of andragogy; and *andragology* is the scientific study of both andragogy and andragogics.

During the past decade, andragogy has increasingly been used by adult educators in France (Bertrand Schwartz), England (J. A. Simpson), Venezuela (Felix Adam), and Canada (a Bachelor of Andragogy degree program was established at Concordia University in Montreal in 1973).

To date, several major expositions of the theory of andragogy and its implications for practice have appeared in this country (e.g., Godbey, 1978; Ingalls and Arceri, 1972; Knowles, 1970, 1973, 1975, 1984b); a number of journal articles have been published reporting on applications of the andragogical framework to social work education, religious education, undergraduate and graduate education, management training, and other spheres; and an increasing volume of research on hypotheses derived from andragogical theory is being reported. There is a growing evidence, too, that the use of andragogical theory is making a difference in the way programs of adult education are being organized and operated, in the way teachers of adults are being trained, and in the way adults are being helped to learn. There is even evidence that concepts of andragogy are beginning to make an impact on the theory and practice of elementary, secondary, and collegiate education. *Andragogy in Action* (Knowles, 1984b) provides case descriptions of a variety of programs based on the andragogical model.

AN ANDRAGOGICAL THEORY OF ADULT LEARNING

Efforts to formulate a theory that considers what we know from experience and research about the unique characteristics of adult learners have been underway for more than five decades. An early attempt, *Informal Adult Education* (Knowles, 1950), organized ideas around the notion that adults learn best in informal, comfortable, flexible, nonthreatening settings. Then, in the mid-1960s a Yugoslavian adult educator attending a summer workshop at Boston University exposed participants to the term *andragogy*, and it seemed to be a more adequate organizing concept. It meant the art and science of helping adults learn, and was ostensibly the antithesis of the pedagogical model. (In fact, the subtitle of Knowles's 1970 edition of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* was *Andragogy versus Pedagogy*.) Accordingly, an explanation of the meaning of pedagogy is required to fully elaborate on the meaning of andragogy.

FIRST THERE WAS PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy is derived from the Greek words *paid*, meaning "child" (the same stem from which "pediatrics" comes) and *agogus*, meaning "leader of." Thus, pedagogy literally means the art and science of teaching children. The pedagogical model of education is a set of beliefs. As viewed by many traditional teachers, it is an ideology based on assumptions about teaching and learning that evolved between the seventh and twelfth centuries in the monastic and cathedral schools of Europe out of their experience in teaching basic skills to young boys. As secular schools organized in later centuries, and public schools in the nineteenth century, the pedagogical model was the only existing educational model. Thus, the entire educational enterprise of U.S. schools, including higher education, was frozen into this model. Systematic efforts to establish adult education programs in this country, initiated after World War I, also used this model because it was the only model teachers had. As a result, until fairly recently, adults have by and large been taught as if they were children.

The pedagogical model assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if it has been learned. It is

teacher-directed education, leaving to the learner only the submissive role of following a teacher's instructions. Thus, it is based on these assumptions about learners:

1. *The need to know.* Learners only need to know that they must learn what the teacher teaches if they want to pass and get promoted; they do not need to know how what they learn will apply to their lives.

2. *The learner's self-concept.* The teacher's concept of the learner is that of a dependent personality; therefore, the learner's self-concept eventually becomes that of a dependent personality.

As individuals mature, their need and capacity to be self-directing, to use their experience in learning, to identify their own readiness to learn, and to organize their learning around life problems increases steadily from infancy to preadolescence, and then increases rapidly during adolescence (see Bower and Hollister, 1967; Bruner, 1961b; Cross, 1981; Erikson, 1950, 1959, 1964; Getzels and Jackson, 1962; Iscoe and Stevenson, 1960; Smith, 1982; White, 1959).

In Figure 4-1 this rate of natural maturation is represented as a decrease in dependency (as represented by the solid line). Thus, pedagogical assumptions are realistic—and pedagogy is practiced appropriately—because of the high degree of dependency during the first year. Yet, the assumptions become decreasingly appropriate in the second, third, fourth, and subsequent years (as represented by the area with the vertical lines). Seemingly, U.S. culture (home, school, religious institutions, youth agencies, governmental systems) assumes, and therefore permits, a growth rate that is much slower (as represented by the broken line). Accordingly, pedagogy is practiced increasingly inappropriately (as represented by the shaded area between the solid and broken lines). The problem is that the culture does not nurture the development of the abilities required for self-direction, while the increasing need for self-direction continues to develop organically. The result is a growing gap between the need and the ability to be self-directing, which produces tension, resistance, resentment, and often rebellion in the individual.
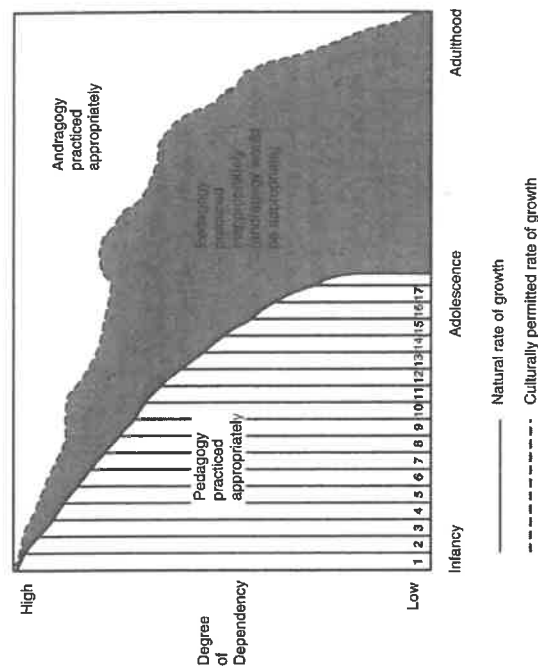
Figure 4-1. *The natural maturation toward self-direction as compared with the culturally permitted rate of growth of self-direction.*

3. *The role of experience.* The learner's experience is of little worth as a resource for learning; the experience that counts is that of the teacher, the textbook writer, and the audiovisual aids producer. Therefore, transmittal techniques (e.g., lectures, assigned readings, etc.) are the backbone of pedagogical methodology.

4. *Readiness to learn.* Learners become ready to learn what the teacher tells them they must learn if they want to pass and get promoted.

5. *Orientation to learning.* Learners have a subject-centered orientation to learning; they see learning as acquiring subject-matter content. Therefore, learning experiences are organized according to the logic of the subject-matter content.

6. *Motivation.* Learners are motivated to learn by external motivators (e.g., grades, the teacher's approval or disapproval, parental pressures).

And Then Came Andragogy

Before describing the andragogical assumptions about learners and learning, it is helpful to look at what is meant by "adult." There are at least four viable definitions of *adult*. First, the biological definition: Biologically, we become adults when we reach the age at which we can reproduce (i.e., in early adolescence). Second, the legal definition: Legally, we become adults when we reach the age at which the law says we can vote, get a driver's license, marry without consent, and the like. Third, the social definition: Socially, we become adults when we start performing adult roles, such as the role of full-time worker, spouse, parent, voting citizen, and the like. Finally, the psychological definition: Psychologically, we become adults when we arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for our own lives, of being self-directing. With regard to learning, it is the psychological definition that is most crucial. But it seems that the process of gaining a self-concept of self-directedness, starts early in life and grows cumulatively as we biologically mature, start performing adult-like roles, and take increasing responsibility for making our own decisions. So, we become adults by degree as we move through childhood and adolescence, and the rate of increase by degree is probably accelerated if we live in homes, study in schools, and participate in youth organizations that foster our taking increasing responsibilities. But most of us probably do not have full-fledged self-concepts and self-directedness until we leave school or college, get a full-time job, marry, and start a family.

The Andragogical Model

The andragogical model is based on several assumptions that are different from those of the pedagogical model:

1. *The need to know.* Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. Tough (1979) found that when adults undertake to learn something on their own, they will invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will gain from learning it and the negative consequences of not learning it. Consequently, one of the new aphorisms in adult education is that the first task of the facilitator of learning is to help the learners become aware of the "need to know."

At the very least, facilitators can make an intellectual case for the value of the learning in improving the effectiveness of the learners' performance or the quality of their lives. Even more potent tools for raising the level of awareness of the need to know are real or simulated experiences in which the learners discover for themselves the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be. Personnel appraisal systems, job rotation, exposure to role models, and diagnostic performance assessments are examples of such tools. Paolo Freire, the great Brazilian adult educator, developed an elaborate process for what he calls the "consciousness-raising" of peasants in developing countries in his *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

2. *The learners' self-concept.* Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction. They resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them. This presents a serious problem in adult education: The minute adults walk into an activity labeled "education," "training," or anything synonymous, they hark back to their conditioning in their previous school experience, put on their dunce hats of dependency, fold their arms, sit back, and say "teach me." This assumption of required dependency and the facilitator's subsequent treatment of adult students as children creates a conflict within them between their intellectual model—learner equals dependent—and the deeper, perhaps subconscious, psychological need to be self-directing. And the typical method of dealing with psychological conflict is to try to flee from the situation causing it, which probably accounts in part for the high dropout rate in much voluntary adult education. As adult educators become aware of this problem, they make efforts to create learning experiences in which adults are helped to make the transition from dependent to self-directing learners. *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers* (Knowles, 1975) is a collection of such experiences.

3. *The role of the learners' experiences.* Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths. By virtue of simply

having lived longer, they have accumulated more experience than they had as youths. But they also have had a different kind of experience. This difference in quantity and quality of experience has several consequences for adult education.

It assures that in any group of adults there will be a wider range of individual differences than is the case with a group of youths. Any group of adults will be more heterogeneous in terms of background, learning style, motivation, needs, interests, and goals than is true of a group of youths. Hence, greater emphasis in adult education is placed on individualization of teaching and learning strategies.

It also means that for many kinds of learning, the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques—techniques that tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques. Also, greater emphasis is placed on peer-helping activities.

But the fact of greater experience also has some potentially negative effects. As we accumulate experience, we tend to develop mental habits, biases, and presuppositions that tend to cause us to close our minds to new ideas, fresh perceptions, and alternative ways of thinking. Accordingly, adult educators try to discover ways to help adults examine their habits and biases and open their minds to new approaches. Sensitivity training, values clarification, meditation, and dogmatism scales are among the techniques that are used to tackle this problem.

There is another, more subtle reason for emphasizing the experience of the learners; it has to do with each learner's self-identity. Young children derive their self-identity largely from external definers—who their parents, bothers, sisters, and extended families are; where they live; and what churches and schools they attend. As they mature, they increasingly define themselves in terms of the experiences they have had. To children, experience is something that happens to them; to adults, experience is who they are. The implication of this fact for adult education is that in any situation in which the participants'

experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience, but rejecting themselves as persons.

4. *Readiness to learn.* Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations. An especially rich source of "readiness to learn" is the developmental tasks associated with moving from one developmental stage to the next. The critical implication of this assumption is the importance of timing learning experiences to coincide with those developmental tasks. For example, a sophomore girl in high school is not ready to learn about infant nutrition or marital relations, but let her get engaged after graduation and she will be very ready.

Bench workers are not ready for a course in supervisory training until they have mastered doing the work they will supervise and have decided that they are ready for more responsibility.

It is not necessary to sit by passively and wait for readiness to develop naturally, however. There are ways to induce readiness through exposure to models of superior performance, career counseling, simulation exercises, and other techniques.

5. *Orientation to learning.* In contrast to children's and youths' subject-centered orientation to learning (at least in school), adults are life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations. Furthermore, they learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations.

This point is so critical that reinforcement is required:

For many years, educators sought to reduce illiteracy in this country by teaching courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and our record was terribly disappointing. The dropout rate was high, motivation to study was low, and achievement scores were poor. When researchers started to discover what was wrong, they quickly found that the words presented in the standard

vocabulary lists in the reading and writing courses were not the words these people used in their life situations and that the mathematical problems presented in their arithmetic courses were not the problems they had to be able to solve when they went to the store, the bank, or the shop. As a result, new curricula organized around life situations and the acquisition of coping skills (e.g., coping with the world of work, of local government and community services, of health, of the family, of consuming) were constructed. Many of the problems encountered in the traditional courses disappeared or were greatly educed.

A second example is from university extension courses. For many years, it was the practice of universities to offer late afternoon or evening courses for adults that were exactly the same courses taught to teenagers in the day. Then in the 1950s, the evening programs changed. A course titled "Composition I" in the day program became "Writing Better Business Letters" in the evening program; "Composition II" became "Writing for Pleasure and Profit"; and "Composition III" became "Improving Your Professional Communications." And it wasn't just the titles that changed; the way the courses were taught also changed. While students in "Composition I" still memorized rules of grammar, students in "Writing Better Business Letters" immediately began writing business letters and then extracted principles of grammatical writing from an analysis of what they had written.

6. *Motivation*. Adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like). Tough (1979) found in his research that all normal adults are motivated to keep growing and developing, but this motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities or resources, time constraints, and programs that violate principles of adult learning.

It is important to note that the number of assumptions has grown from 4 to 6 over the years. Originally, andragogy presented four assumptions (shown here as numbers 2-5; Knowles, 1975, 1978,

1980). Assumption number 6, motivation to learn, was added in 1984 (Knowles, 1984a), and assumption number 1, the need to know, in more recent years (Knowles, 1989, 1990).

Putting the Pedagogical and Andragogical Models in Perspective

So far, the treatment of these two models may suggest that they are antithetical, that pedagogy is bad and andragogy is good, and that pedagogy is for children and andragogy is for adults. This is pretty much the way the models were presented in the first edition of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy* (Knowles, 1970). But during the next decade, a number of teachers in elementary and secondary schools and in colleges reported that they were experimenting with applying the andragogical model, and that children and youths seemed to learn better in many circumstances when some features of the andragogical model were applied. So, in the revised edition of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1980), the subtitle was changed to *From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. Also, a number of trainers and teachers of adults described situations in which they found that the andragogical model did not work.

Therefore, putting the two models into perspective requires making a distinction between an ideology and a system of alternative assumptions. It seems that the pedagogical model has taken on many of the characteristics of ideology, ideology being defined as a systematic body of beliefs that requires loyalty and conformity by its adherents. Consequently, teachers often feel pressure from the educational system to adhere to the pedagogical mode. For example, the best motivator of performance, teachers are told, is competition for grades; therefore, grades must be on a curve of normal distribution—only so many "A"s are allowed and there must be some failures. The pedagogical ideology is typically sanctified by the shibboleth "academic standards." (Giving too many "A"s violates academic standards.)

What this means in practice is that we educators now have the responsibility to check out which assumptions are realistic in a given situation. If a pedagogical assumption is realistic for a particular learner in regard to a particular learning goal, then a pedagogical strategy is appropriate, at least as a starting point. Examples of this

occur when learners are indeed dependent (such as when entering into a totally strange content area), when they have in fact had no previous experience with a content area, when they do not understand the relevance of a content area to their life tasks or problems, when they do need to accumulate a given body of subject matter in order to accomplish a required performance, and when they feel no internal need to learn that content. But there is one big difference between how an ideological pedagog and an andragog would go from here. The pedagog, perceiving the pedagogical assumptions to be the only realistic assumptions, will insist that the learners remain dependent on the teacher. On the other had, the andragog, perceiving that movement toward the andragogical assumptions is a desirable goal, will do everything possible to help the learners take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

Even dyed-in-the-wool pedagogical instructors have reported that their teaching became more effective when they adapted some of the andragogical concepts to the pedagogical model. Some ways they do this are by providing a climate in which the learners feel more respected, trusted, unthreatened, and cared about; by exposing them to the need to know before instructing them; by giving them some responsibility in choosing methods and resources; and by involving them in sharing responsibility for evaluating their learning.

Chapter 6 explores the implications for applying these assumptions to planning and conducting programs of adult education and human resources development.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Despite the fact that educating adults has been a concern for centuries, there has been relatively little research in the area of adult learning until recently. Only after World War I did a growing body of assumptions about the unique characteristics of adult learners emerge. Within the study of adult learning, there are two streams of inquiry, scientific and artistic, that are distinguishable. Initiated by Thorndike, the scientific stream uses rigorous investigation to discover new information. In contrast, the artistic stream, launched by Lindeman's *The Meaning of Adult Education*, uses intuition and analysis of experience to discover new information. A pioneering theorist, Lindeman laid the foundation for a systematic theory of

adult education and identified key assumptions about adult learners. These include the following concepts: Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; adults have a deep need to be self-directing; and individual differences among people increase with age.

Subsequent to the 1926 publication of *The Meaning of Adult Education*, interest in the field became evident and other related articles began appearing in the *Journal of Adult Education*. By 1940, most of the elements required for a conceptualization of adult learning had been discovered. However, these fragmented elements were not yet incorporated into an integrated framework. During the 1950s, the social sciences seized on adult learning and more intensive research began. These social science disciplines include clinical psychology, developmental psychology, sociology and social psychology, and philosophy. Noted clinical psychologists such as Freud, Jung, Erikson, Maslow, and Rogers made significant contributions to the study of adult learning. Freud identified the influence of the subconscious on behavior; Jung introduced the idea that human consciousness possesses four functions: sensation, thought, emotion, and intuition; Erikson provided the "eight ages of man"; Maslow emphasized the importance of safety; and Rogers conceptualized a student-centered approach to education based on five "basic hypotheses." Developmental psychologists provided knowledge of characteristics associated with age (i.e., physical capabilities, mental abilities, interests, attitudes, values, creativity, and life styles), whereas sociology and social psychology provided knowledge about group and social system behavior, including factors that facilitate or inhibit learning.

The label and concept of andragogy greatly enhanced the efforts to create a conceptual framework of adult learning. Although the term was first used in 1833, Americans were not introduced to it until 1967. Since then, a number of journal articles have reported on applications of the andragogical frameworks to social work education, religious education, undergraduate and graduate education, management training, and other spheres; and there is an increasing volume of research on hypotheses derived from the andragogical model.

A distinction between the concepts of pedagogy and andragogy is required to fully grasp the concept of andragogy. The pedagogical

model, designed for teaching children, assigns to the teacher full responsibility for all decision making about the learning content, method, timing, and evaluation. Learners play a submissive role in the educational dynamics. In contrast, the andragogical model focuses on the education of adults and is based on the following precepts: adults need to know why they need to learn something; adults maintain the concept of responsibility for their own decisions, their own lives; adults enter the educational activity with a greater volume and more varied experiences than do children; adults have a readiness to learn those things that they need to know in order to cope effectively with real-life situations; adults are life-centered in their orientation to learning; and adults are more responsive to internal motivators than external motivators. The pedagogical model is an ideological model that excludes the andragogical assumptions. The andragogical model is a system of assumptions that includes that pedagogical assumptions. The andragogical model is not an ideology; it is a system of alternative sets of assumptions, a *transactional* model that speaks to those characteristics of the learning situation.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

4.1 From your own experience, think of a situation that clearly illustrates pedagogy and one for andragogy.

4.2 Reflect on one of Lindeman's five key assumptions about adult learners.

4.3 How has clinical psychology contributed to andragogy?

4.4 How has adult education contributed to andragogy?

4.5 How does the andragogical model fit with your own learning style?

CHAPTER 5

Theories of Teaching

PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING FROM THEORIES OF LEARNING

Typically, theories of learning are only useful to adult learning practitioners when they are somehow applied to the facilitation of learning—a function assigned usually in our society to a person designated as teacher.

A distinction must be made between theories of learning and theories of teaching. Theories of learning deal with the ways in which an organism learns, whereas theories of teaching deal with the ways in which a person influences an organism to learn (Gage, 1972, p. 56).

Presumably, the learning theory subscribed to by a teacher will influence his or her teaching theory.

Hilgard, resisting this fragmentation of learning theory, identified 20 principles he believed to be universally acceptable from three different families of theories: *Stimulus-Response (S-R) theory, cognitive theory,* and *motivation and personality theory.* These principles are summarized in Table 5-1.

It is important for us to note Hilgard's conviction in his belief that his 20 principles would be "in large part acceptable to all parties"—a conviction that is grounded in his verification process. Hilgard limited the "parties" with whom he checked out these principles to control-oriented theorists. In spite of their differences about the internal mechanics of learning, these theorists are fairly close in their conceptualization of the role of the teacher.