

Adult education and lifelong learning

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There is little doubt that the most dominant form of instruction in Europe and America is pedagogy, or what some people refer to as didactic, traditional, or teacher-directed approaches. A competing idea in terms of instructing adult learners, and one that gathered momentum within the past three decades, has been dubbed andragogy. The purpose of this resource piece is to provide the interested reader with some background information regarding both instructional forms. The pedagogical model of instruction was originally developed in the monastic schools of Europe in the Middle Ages.

Young boys were received into the monasteries and taught by monks according to a system of instruction that required these children to be obedient, faithful, and efficient servants of the church (Knowles, 1984). From this origin developed the tradition of pedagogy, which later spread to the secular schools of Europe and America and became and remains the dominant form of instruction. Pedagogy is derived from the Greek word "paid," meaning child plus "agogos," meaning leading. Thus, pedagogy has been defined as the art and science of teaching children.

In the pedagogical model, the teacher has full responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if the material has been learned. Pedagogy, or teacher-directed instruction as it is commonly known, places the student in a submissive role requiring obedience to the teacher's instructions. It is based on the assumption that learners need to know only what the teacher teaches them. The result is a teaching and learning situation that actively promotes dependency on the instructor (Knowles, 1984).

Up until very recently, the pedagogical model has been applied equally to the teaching of children and adults, and in a sense, is a contradiction in terms. The reason is that as adults mature, they become increasingly independent and responsible for their own actions. They are often motivated to learn by a sincere desire to solve immediate problems in their lives. Additionally, they have an increasing need to be self-directing. In many ways the pedagogical model does not account for such developmental changes on the part of adults, and thus produces tension, resentment, and resistance in individuals (Knowles, 1984).

The growth and development of andragogy as an alternative model of instruction has helped to remedy this situation and improve the teaching of adults. But this change did not occur overnight. In fact, an important event took place some thirty years ago that affected the direction of adult education in North America and, to some extent, elsewhere as well. Andragogy as a system of ideas, concepts, and approaches to adult learning was introduced to adult educators in the United States by Malcolm Knowles.

His contributions to this system have been many (1975, 1980, 1984; Knowles & Associates, 1984), and have influenced the thinking of countless educators of adults. Knowles' dialogue, debate, and subsequent writings related to andragogy have been a healthy stimulant to some of the growth of the adult education field during the past thirty years. The first use of the term "andragogy" to catch the widespread attention of adult educators was in 1968, when Knowles, then a professor of adult education at Boston University, introduced the term (then spelled "androgogy") through a journal article.

In a 1970 book (a second edition was published in 1980) he defined the term as the art and science of helping adults learn. His thinking had changed to the point that in the 1980 edition he suggested the following: ". . . andragogy is simply another model of assumptions about adult learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their 'fit' with particular situations.

Furthermore, the models are probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum , with a realistic assumption (about learners) in a given situation falling in between the two ends" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). The andragogical model as conceived by Knowles is predicated on four basic assumptions about learners, all of which have some relationship to our notions about a learner's ability, need, and desire to take responsibility for learning: Their self-concept moves from dependency to independency or self-directedness.

They accumulate a reservoir of experiences that can be used as a basis on which to build learning. Their readiness to learn becomes increasingly associated with the developmental tasks of social roles. Their time and curricular perspectives change from postponed to immediacy of application and from subject-centeredness to performance-centeredness (1980, pp. 44-45). Andragogy as a concept and set of assumptions about adults was actually not new to Knowles' popularization of the term.

Anderson and Lindeman (1927) had first used the word in the United States via a published piece, although Stewart (1986a, 1986b) notes that Lindeman apparently even used the term as early as 1926. Brookfield (1984) suggests <https://assignbuster.com/adult-education-and-lifelong-learning/>

that Anderson and Lindeman drew upon the work of a German author of the 1920's, Eugene Rosenstock. However, Davenport and Davenport (1985) assert that the word was first coined in 1833 by Kapp, a German teacher. Several European countries, such as Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia, also had used the term prior to 1968.

Hungarian educators, for example, place teaching and learning within an overall system called "anthropogogy" (Savicevic, 1981). This system is subdivided into pedagogy (dealing with youth education) and andragogy (concerned with adult education). There is some variety, too, in the application of related terms. Some countries use adult pedagogy, one (the Soviet Union) uses the term auto didactic among others to refer to adult education activities, and a few countries use andragology to refer to andragogical science (Knoll, 1981, p. 92).

Outside of North America there actually are two dominant viewpoints: "one by which the theoretical framework of adult education is found in pedagogy or its branch, adult pedagogy and the other by which the theoretical framework of adult education is found in andragogy as a relatively independent science that includes a whole system of andragogic disciplines" (Savicevic, 1981, p. 88). Knowles in describing his particular version of andragogy associated it with a variety of instructional suggestions and he, too, detailed roles of facilitation for instructors and talked about ways of helping learners maximize their learning abilities.

His early work with andragogy and subsequent interpretation of the learning projects research by Tough (1978) and others led to a 1975 publication on self-directed learning where he provides a variety of inquiry projects and <https://assignbuster.com/adult-education-and-lifelong-learning/>

learning resources on the topic. Knowles (1975) offered some reasons for his evolving scholarship in the area of self-directed learning. One immediate reason was the emerging evidence that people who take initiative in educational activities seem to learn more and learn things better than what resulted from more passive individuals.

He noted a second reason that self-directed learning appears "more in tune with our natural process of psychological development" (1975, p. 14). Knowles observed that an essential aspect of the maturation process is the development of an ability to take increasing responsibility for life. A third reason was the observation that the many evolving educational innovations (nontraditional programs, Open University, weekend colleges, etc.) throughout the world require that learners assume a heavy responsibility and initiative in their own learning.

Knowles also suggested a more long-term reason in terms of individual and collective survival: ". . . it is tragic that we have not learned how to learn without being taught, and it is probably more important than all of the immediate reasons put together. Alvin Toffler calls this reason 'future shock'. The simple truth is that we are entering into a strange new world in which rapid change will be the only stable characteristic" (Knowles, 1975, p. 15).

It is this ability to carry out individual learning long after the stimulation of some activity like a class or workshop is completed that we believe results from individualizing the instructional process (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Knowles and the andragogical movement as some refer to it, has not been without critics. Carlson (1989) summarizes some of the concerns many people have had about Knowles at times zealous promotion of andragogy.

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Welton (1995) brought together four other colleagues who share in various ways a more radical philosophy of adult education.

They present several arguments against aspects of andragogy and self-directed learning. However, it is clear that andragogy and Malcolm Knowles have brought considerable attention to the adult education field as a separate field during the past three decades. Applied correctly, the andragogical approach to teaching and learning in the hands of a skilled and dedicated facilitator can make a positive impact on the adult learner. Appendix A provides a bibliography that contains many of the references devoted to andragogy and Malcolm Knowles.