

Theories of learning essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This assignment will address andragogy – a theory of learning. To do this it will focus on the specific areas of andragogy and compare them to other theories of learning. The theory of andragogy has been around for nearly two centuries and the findings are particularly linked to the work of Malcolm Knowles. The judgements will be related to the experiences of students in higher education. The theory of adult learning is a “ dynamic area of research and theory building. ” (Merriam, 2008 p2).

Malcolm Knowles explains that “ andragogy assumes that the point at which an individual achieves a self concept of essential self-direction is the point at which he psychologically becomes adult. ” (As cited by Atherton J. S, 2005 p1). Knowles (1970) sees andragogy as a contrast to pedagogy (the teaching of children) which he says is a “ teacher dominated form of education, long regarded as appropriate for children’s learning, and [andragogy] a learner-centred one, now viewed as particularly relevant for non-traditional adult learners.” (Bartle, 2008 p1).

Knowles explains andragogy to be the “ art and science of helping adults learn” (as cited by Bartle, 2008 p1). He also argues that “ adults were self-directed, problem solving learners whose life experience constituted a significant learning resource. Thus instead of the traditional hierarchical relationship between the teacher and pupil, the adult learner participates fully in his or her education, influencing the curriculum and determining learning objectives.”(Bartle, 2008 p1)

Knowles’ assumptions are based around five key facts: 1. Self-concept: as a person matures his concept moves from one of being a dependant

personality toward one of being a self-directed human being 2. Experience: As a person matures he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. 3. Readiness to learn. As a person matures his readiness to learn becomes orientated increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles. 4. Orientation to learning.

As a person matures his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centredness. 5. Motivation to learn: As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles 1984: 12) (As cited by Smith M. K, 1996; 1999 p1) Each of these assumptions comes under considerable debate. His idea of self-concept implies that all adults move from dependant to self-directed learning and that they need to be responsible for their own decisions.

Adults need to be treated as capable of self-direction (Smith M. K, 1996; 1999). Knowles believes that adults should participate in designing their own development tasks and the educator should help to focus on the goals and provide ideas, resources and feedback to guide towards progress (Knowles, 1970). The next point explains the belief that adults learn effectively through “ experimental techniques of education such as discussions and problem solving” (as cited by Smith M. K, 1996; 1999 p3).

Sometimes experimental learning is inappropriate, especially when large amounts of new information are necessary and the decision must be made as to what is being learnt before making judgements (Smith M K, 1969;

1999) It could be argued that different experiences could be bias and presumptuous. Knowles third assumption regarding readiness to learn emphasises the place at which the importance of study becomes clear to carry out a particular task. It could be interpreted as adults learn things that are useful rather than intriguing or interesting – do we not learn some things just for sheer pleasure?

It has also been argued by Dewey (1993) that “ literature on reflection (e. g. Boud et al 1985) would support the argument that age and amount of experience makes no educational difference” (cited by Smith M K, 1996; 1999). If this is the case then Knowles assumptions on the difference between andragogy and pedagogy are queried. With regard to orientation to learning Knowles sees this as conditioned rather than natural learning (as cited by Smith M. K, 1996; 1999).

He states that the educator should ensure the adults desire for growth and anticipated results are clear, personal and realistic. He also expresses that adults are goal orientated in their learning (Knowles 1970). In his final point Knowles (as cited by Bartle, 2008) suggests that as adults the motivation to learn becomes internal, enquiry based and directed by the learner. He also suggests that as adults the relationship between the educator and the learner is one of mutual responsibility where the educator is seen more as a guide or coach.

The life experiences of the learner are respected by the educator who becomes “ a colleague who contributes to the learner’s self-esteem and sense of accomplishment” (Knowles, cited by Bartle, 2008 p4). This creates a

setting to help the adult realise their full potential and move towards fully independent learning. In comparison to andragogy the constructivist theory of learning, as suggested by Biggs (2003), focuses on the learners knowledge and their approach to learning, suggesting learning is not just about acquiring knowledge but “ as we learn our conceptions of phenomena change and we see the world differently.

The acquisition of information in itself does not bring about such a change, but the way we structure the information and think with it does. ” (Biggs, 2003 p13) Andragogy relates to Higher Education students as it recognises the great amount of learning that takes place throughout life and in various non-academic settings with the adult learner taking control.

Knowles suggests that “ students should be empowered for self-education, determining course content and self evaluation” (Knowles as cited by Bartle, 2008 p4) and prominent adult educators maintain a student-centred classroom by encouraging a problem-solving curriculum inclusive of self-pacing, designed by students, and also offering the opportunity for risk taking. The educator continues to “ raise student consciousness while acknowledging life experience, and building a democratic, flexible, and personally supportive climate. ” (Bartle, 2008 p4).

In this assignment I have looked at the main areas of andragogy – adult learners being self directed, ready to learn and intrinsically motivated. Andragogy has been compared to pedagogy and constructivism theories and the differences highlighted. The findings have been related to the experiences of students in higher education showing the educators role to

remain meaningful but less instructive and the learners learning what they need to know in order to grow. Adult learning is an ever-expanding area of research and theory, challenging ideas and confronting the theories of learning.