



# Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Professional Paper

## *Andragogy*

### *From Subject-centered to Problem-centered*

*“It is no longer functional to define education as a process of transmitting what is known; it must now be defined as a lifelong process of continuing inquiry.”*

~ Malcom S. Knowles, 1970  
*The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, p. 38

### **ANDRAGOGY IS...**

*Andragogy* is a term that has been extensively used for adult education and has been defined as the “art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1970, p. 38) as contrasted with *pedagogy*, the art and science of teaching children. *Pedagogy* is derived from the Greek word *paid*, which means *child* combined with *agogos*, which means *leading*. *Andragogy* is derived from *andr*, meaning *man* plus *agogos*. The European monastic schools of the Middle Ages are credited with originally developing the pedagogical model of instruction. Several hundred years later, in 1833, a German teacher named Alexander Kapp formulated the term *andragogy* (Davenport and Davenport, 1985). However, not until 1968 did the use of the term *andragogy* widely capture the attention of adult educators. Malcolm Knowles, then a professor of adult education at Boston University, introduced the term through a journal article.

### **BACKGROUND**

In the field of adult education, *andragogy* and the name *Malcolm Knowles* have become inextricably linked. For Knowles, the andragogic model for learning is premised on at least four crucial assumptions about adult learners that differ from assumptions about child learners. (Four made up his original proposal; the fifth was later added.) They are as follows:

1. Self concept: *As a person matures, his self concept moves from one of being a dependent 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 oriented 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 centeredness.*
5. Motivation to Learn: *As a person matures, the motivation to learn is internal* (Knowles, 1984b).

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEDAGOGY AND ANDRAGOGY**

It is important to note that the claims of differences between pedagogy and andragogy are the subject of much debate. The pedagogical model was first used in the monastic schools of Europe in the Middle Ages when young boys were received into the monasteries and taught by monks. The system of instruction required these children to be obedient, faithful, and efficient servants of the church (Knowles, 1984a). The tradition of pedagogy seems to have essentially developed from this origin later spreading to the secular schools of Europe and America. It became and is still the dominant form of instruction.

The pedagogical model gives the teacher full responsibility for making decisions about the learning, and development is based upon **transmission** of the content as the major concern:

- What **content** needs to be covered
- How the content can be **organized** into manageable units or modules
- How the content can be transmitted in a logical **sequence**
- How the content can be most effectively transmitted (**media**) (Knowles, 1984b, Clark, 1999).

In andragogy, development is based upon a process design with the major concern being **facilitating** the acquisition of the content. The teacher's role is

- Designing and managing a process for facilitating the acquisition of content by the learners
- Serving as a content resource and providing leads for other content resources (e.g., peers, supervisors, specialists) (Knowles, 1984b, Clark, 1999).

Until recently, the pedagogical model had been applied equally to the teaching of adults and children. Knowles (1984) proposes that this is a contradiction in terms because as adults mature they become increasingly independent and responsible for their own actions. A sincere desire to solve immediate problems in their lives is an authentic motivator for adult learning. Adults, also, have an increasing need to be self-directing. The pedagogical model, in many ways, does not address these developmental changes (Knowles, 1984a). Because of the need to remedy this situation, andragogy has developed as an alternative model of instruction and has been instrumental in improving the teaching of adults.

Also, it is interesting to note that as the use of the term *andragogy* has evolved, it has taken on a wider meaning and now more often refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages. Knowles, himself, suggests (in the second edition of his original 1970 publication):

...*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).

## **ADULT LEARNERS**

Adult learners are self-initiated, and the desire to learn tends to last a long time; so motivation is usually not a problem. Adults tend to seek opportunities for learning while also balancing life responsibilities with the demands of learning. These opportunities are often prompted by life changes, such as marriage, divorce, a job change, job termination, retirement or a geographical change (Cross, 1981). Adults usually want to learn something that will better their lives in some way. They are not necessarily interested in knowledge for its own sake; learning may be simply a means to an end. Also, very importantly, these adults bring a wealth of information and experiences to a learning situation and, therefore, generally want to be treated as equals who can assume responsibility for their own learning (Zemke & Zemke, 1984). For these reasons, Knowles hypothesized in his work that adult learning could not follow the principles of traditional pedagogy with teachers making all the decisions about the learning. To fully understand what is meant by "the adult learner", it is important to note that the definition of "adult" is not strictly related to age. As his thinking and work evolved, Knowles (1980) himself defined adulthood as "the point at which individuals perceive themselves to be essentially self-directing".

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*With adults being self-directed, goal oriented, practical, problem solvers, and having accumulated life experiences, what implications might these characteristics have for teaching and learning, especially as related to professional development?*

Some considerations when planning courses for adults or professional development sessions might include having instructors who:

- Assume a role of facilitator or resource rather than that of lecturer.
  - Create an educational program and setting in which adult learners can develop self-directed (perhaps latent) learning skills.
  - Involve adults in the planning and evaluation of their learning experiences.
  - Involve adults actively in their learning.
  - Provide scaffolding for learners (the instructor provides a higher level of support in the early stages of the course or class; this support gradually diminishes as learners become self-reliant).
  - Stimulate dialogue and knowledge construction through learner-centered organization.
  - Organize learning experiences around competency development.
  - Make learning experiences relevant to job and/or personal life.
  - Provide explanations as to why specific things are included in the learning experience and/or materials.
  - Take into account the wide range of learner backgrounds.
  - Include opportunities for reflection, which can account for significant personal learning.
- Involve participants in diagnosing their own learning needs and formulating their own learning objectives.
  - Encourage learners to identify and use resources to accomplish their objectives.
  - Assist learners in carrying out their lesson plans.
  - Include learning for enjoyment and/or personal interest.
  - Involve learners in evaluating their learning.
  - Establish a climate of humanness, physically and psychologically conducive to learning that includes some of the following:
    - circular seating arrangements
    - collaborative and supportive modes of learning
    - climate of mutual respect among participants
    - atmosphere that encourages mutual trust (Knowles, 1975, 1984a, 1984b; Brookfield, 1986; Zemke & Zemke, 1984).

## CONCLUSION

Andragogy as an alternative model of instruction has caught the attention of educators, especially adult educators. It continues to prompt much discussion and debate and has been an impetus for further examination of teaching and learning for children as well as adults.

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FLaRE Center  
Teaching Academy – Suite 403  
University of Central Florida  
4000 Central Florida Blvd  
Orlando, FL 32816-1250  
Phone: 407-823-4785  
FAX: 407-823-4682  
<http://flare.ucf.edu>

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