Andragogy: The Common Thread in the Teaching of Adults in Colleges of Education, Criminal Justice, and Health Management

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought dramatic changes to higher education. Students and educators face challenges never anticipated, including switching classes from on-ground to online and back again, mental fatigue, stress, and burnout. Faculty across disciplines may turn to Andragogy to best teach college students to inform their teaching practices. This paper demonstrates how professors from education, criminal justice, and healthcare management have used andragogical techniques in their classrooms.

Keywords: Andragogy; higher education, Covid-19; faculty; online learning; education; healthcare administration; criminal justice

Introduction

The years 2020 and 2021 have been trying for just about everyone. Indeed, it has been a challenge for students and educators alike with moving from in-class education to online to some combination. As educators, especially those trained before the ubiquitousness of the personal computer and smartphone, anything but face-to-face teaching was not even considered. That, of course, changed over the past decade or so – at least in bits and pieces.

This article will address the teaching of adults in the university setting – how can a professor best reach their students to ensure maximum learning takes place under these new circumstances? When teaching adults, we often refer to Andragogy: the academic study of adult learning and the theory and approach to educating adults (Knowles, 1968, 1980). In addition, it is often used to refer generally to adult education, learning, and scholarly

study (Reischmann, 2004). It is not solely limited to one particular field of study or even the classroom context. It has been used in almost any context where an adult may be conceived as a learner, including business, education, religion, athletics, and law (Henschke, 2004; Lubin, 2013; Shostak, 2019).

Alexander Kapp, a German high school teacher, first used the word "andragogy" in 1833 to describe lifelong learning and the importance of self-reflection and life experience in learning. In the United States, Lindeman was the first to write about Andragogy and its application to teaching adults (Reischmann, 2004). Knowles (1968, 1980) was the first to bring Andragogy to the forefront in the 1960s in the United States. (Reischmann, 2004). Knowles's Andragogy was rooted in the belief that the teacher should not be an oracle who passed down knowledge to the student, but rather the teacher should be more of a facilitator of the student's learning. (Reischmann, 2004). Knowles is often considered a father of Andragogy (Bates, 2009).

To explore Andragogy, it is often helpful to compare and contrast it with the assumptions of child and adult learners. Pedagogy dates to the 17th century and relates to the teaching of children. Pedagogy essentially assumes four principles about child learners. They are: (1) the learner is dependent upon the teacher; (2) children learn best by subject matter; (3) child learners are not internally motivated to learn but are motivated through external rewards and punishments; and (4) the child learner's life experience does not play a significant role in learning (Ozuah, 2005).

The essence of Andragogy, the teaching, and learning of adults, lies in its six assumptions. Unlike pedagogy, Andragogy assumes: (1) the adult learner has a clear, developed self-concept; (2) life experience plays a significant role in how the adult learner learns; (3) the adult learner's readiness to learn influences their learning; (4) the applicability and immediacy of the material's application to the adult will influence learning; (5) the adult learner's motivation for learning will impact the learning outcome; and (6) the adult learner's reason for wanting to learn will likewise influence the learning outcomes (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

As adults mature, Andragogy explains that they become more self-directed in their learning. Naturally following this, adults tend to see themselves responsible for their actions and learning. With additional personal responsibility, adults likewise accept more responsibility for their education. The second assumption concerning adult learners' readiness to learn involves the social roles of adults and their impact upon their readiness to learn. As a person matures and develops, their social roles begin to change. An adult's role as an employee, spouse, or parent requires a different knowledge base. Not surprisingly, a single person without any children would likely not be interested in learning parenting skills, while a new parent would (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Likewise, an adult's life experiences inform how they learn. Learning new information is viewed through the lens of life experiences and serves as a guide to help facilitate learning. The following assumption provides that information that has an immediate application for the learner will be more effectively internalized. Not surprisingly, most adult learners want to learn something they may immediately put to use. Similarly, motivation to learn for the adult learner is internal. For instance, a small business owner who wants to increase client referrals undertakes the study of marketing to do so. Lastly, the final assumption provides that adult learners want or need to know why they are learning something. An adult who knows why the material is essential is more likely to retain that information (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Henschke, a pioneer in Andragogy, instructs the essence of the teaching of adults rests upon five building blocks. The first building block focuses on the teacher's understanding of the adult and Knowles's assumptions of adult learners. The second building block rests upon the teacher's interest in the subject matter and students, communication ability, knowledge of the subject matter, and preparation. The third building block rests upon understanding learning as a process instead of simply providing information about a subject. The fourth building block concerns the teacher's teaching technique and bringing life to the classroom. The final building block, considered most important, is implementing a learning plan (Henschke, 1987).

Andragogy is particularly effective with teaching and learning because it focuses on two of the essential principles of learning: (1) the active participation of the learner and (2) the usefulness of the material for the student (Seaman & Fellenz, 1989). The designing of lessons that encourage student participation and demonstrate the usefulness of what is desired to be learned (Patterson & Peg, 1999).

Application in Education Courses

In adult learning, Malcolm S. Knowles is known as the trailblazer of the adult education movement and the theorist who documented the differences between how children and adults learn. Knowles' adult learning principles characterize how we approach educational design, as the principles have been used extensively in the development and design of online courses. Educational design that encourages willing and meaningful participation contributes to achieving desired learning outcomes collectively and individually. In writing this paper, we believe that we help to ensure adequate student performance and knowledge retention. Educational designers earnestly seek to recognize students, their experiences, communities, and authenticities -- how does one apply Andragogy to learning?

We start with introspection, as we see it as a valuable component to creating relevance and connection between the adult learner and course content. Introspection is an ongoing process of observing, experiencing, and understanding internal states with the external elements. Every week, every semester, every academic year offers opportunities to consider the intersections of identity that inform students' experiences and interactions with their world. In the spring of 2019, we worked on restructuring the Master of Arts in Teaching Program. One task was redesigning the initial course, Foundations of Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade Education, which helps prepare learners for traditional and innovative professional roles in education. Serendipity can be an educational designer's best friend, especially if one does not know precisely what they are seeking. For this initial course, we wanted to couple the art of storytelling with multimedia. Storytelling is culture, and culture is storytelling. After exploring multiple media creation applications, Adobe Spark offered basic digital storytelling principles most compellingly. Adobe Spark is a web-based application that creates radical video presentations. To heighten learners' engagement with course content, authentic learning tasks with inquiry-based learning to connect real-world relevance and content knowledge were integrated. Given the combination of mobile connectivity and digital resources, students shared their experiences and identities via photos, audio, video, and narrative to enhance and increase cultural inclusivity. A eureka of discovery awaits in digital storytelling, as there is no one way to design a course or achieve desired learning outcomes collectively and individually.

Application in Criminal Justice Courses

The quality of student learning can be seen as a function of the classroom's quantity and quality of interaction. Essentially, the more sustained and better the interaction between the professor and students, the more the students are likely to learn. Similar to the context of a large meeting, there are three areas in the classroom setting for interaction between professor and student: the platform used such as lecture and audiovisual presentation; the interaction between the platform used and the students, such as discussion, debate, or demonstration; and the interaction in and amongst the students, such as discussion groups and pairings (Henschke, 2011).

How might a professor increase classroom interaction in a traditional introductory undergraduate course with those principles in mind? The live lecture is one of the simplest methods a professor uses in an introductory criminology course, where many students do not have a background and the material. The professor has a prepared lecture on the topic matter in the learning lecture. Usually, the professor may provide a handout or materials before the lecture. The professor next divides the class into groups to serve as listening teams. The listening teams are divided into groups and are instructed to listen to the lecture and identify things they wish to have clarified, points with which they disagree, the material they wish for elaboration, and lastly, to identify problems with practical application (Henschke, 2011).

This may not be accomplished in every classroom setting. However, that doesn't mean that a relationship of trust cannot be established. For instance, within the confines of a courtroom, successful attorneys have worked to demonstrate and earn jurors' trust. They did this in several ways, including establishing themselves as authentic human beings that were reliable and credible (Shostak, 2019). To the extent possible, professors may do the same even when they may not rearrange the classroom seating. What can the professor do, within the confines of the classroom, to make sure the room is as comfortable and inviting to the students?

Further, how can the professor establish and demonstrate a caring attitude? Something as simple as allowing a break if needed can go a long way in showing that the professor cares for students. The same goes for showing concern and compassion for the factors outside of the classroom that impact students' lives and learning, particularly Covid-19 and other family matters.

Application in Health Management Courses

Many students are non-traditional in this field, meaning that they are often in their mid-twenties or older, have families, and are employed full-time. This can be positive or negative. The non-traditional student may need to come late to an evening class, often cannot take a day class, and can often be overwhelmed by work and family life so that academics suffer. However, on the plus side, these students often bring a wealth of experience with the most current information on health management they may see in their workplace and can share this with classmates.

Students of any age may, at times, vacillate between being adult learners and not being adult learners. Most classrooms contain a mixture of students, and the professor must adjust their style to meet student needs. The teaching style is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

It is easy for an instructor to be complacent when teaching an online class. The instructor can experience essentially the same sense of anonymity students in the course may feel. The course is laid out in advance (sometimes by others than the instructor), and it can be set on auto-pilot. For those students who see their education as only a series of boxes to check off, this can seem ideal – do the assignments, take the tests, and be done with it. Then, it's on to the next semester, and move closer to receiving a diploma. However, some students personify adult students who take an active interest in what they are studying, perhaps seeing how one class can tie in with another. It is up to the instructor to help students transition to this point.

Switching from in-class to online learning has been a challenge for professors and students alike. It is challenging to move from the in-class environment with a built-in communication feedback loop to one where you are mostly communicating via email. Teachers and students can misinterpret the questions and their responses. In class, an instructor can encode their ideas using language, paralanguage, symbols, and nonverbals. Language is the meaning of the words we use – this is important as instructors do not want to use too much jargon. Healthcare is rife with alphabet soup that may even confuse insiders.

Paralanguage is simply the pitch, rhythm, and speed someone speaks. It's not what is said as much as it is how it is said. The phrase, "You're fired," can be said in different tones – one being very serious, the other being joking.

Symbols can be the representation of something. For example, a country's flag, blue on a map for water, or read on a sign for danger.

Finally, nonverbals are those actions we take with our bodies that consciously or unconsciously convey a message. They can be as simple as raising an eyebrow when questioning a statement or clapping your hands together when a student solves a problem.

The in-class setting allows the instructor to use all four of the above skills when communicating with a class of students. When a student questions something put forward by the instructor or indicates they do not understand (raised eyebrow, raised hand), the instructor can restate the idea in different terms until the message is received and understood.

When the language, paralanguage, symbols, and nonverbals don't seem to match, the instructor has a chance to resend the message and even adapt it, specifically students struggling to understand something. The possibility of getting a message transmitted and understood is most significant in this face-to-face environment.

Understanding is much more difficult in the traditional online environment. When a message is only in writing, you must rely on those words' meaning. Paralanguage, nonverbals, and symbols cannot help in deciphering the message. And, this can go from the instructor to the student or the student to the instructor. Some instructors receive what they perceive to be furious notes from students, which were not meant to be so – it was the only way the student's language was interpreted.

To ameliorate potential miscommunication in an online class, the instructor can call students before class starts (individually or via Zoom or another platform with multiple participants) and film weekly overviews and summaries. These establish a trusting relationship between students and the instructor – a primary tenant of adult education. The student realizes that a computer isn't teaching them. Additionally, the student can submit some assignments in videos that can be easier than writing to express themselves. It can also help students with presentation skills.

In a flex class setting, students can attend in-person, watch the class synchronously on a computer, or asynchronously when they have the opportunity; the possibilities for two-way communication are good. The instructor is videoed as they deliver a class lecture. The instructor can see the students in the classroom and those watching the video synchronously and can pose questions and have a two-way discussion in real-time.
Conclusions

Andragogy and its application to adult education remain an established method of instruction across various disciplines. The concept of Andragogy, popularized by Malcolm Knowles, emphasizes quality instruction that serves the needs of adult learners. Recognition of and focusing on adult learners in their learning process provides a foundation for effective learning environments conducive to lifelong learning. While more qualitative research linking Andragogy and its application to adult education is necessary, we can make the most of what is known through the principles and assumptions about adult learning. As we continue to understand better the link between andragogy and quality instruction, those connected with adult education can strive to create a welcoming, enriching, and valuable environment for the adult learner.

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