

NEW HORIZONS IN ADULT EDUCATION
ISSN. 1062-3183

Volume 14 Number 1 Winter 2000

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New Horizons in Adult Education
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The articles in this issue of New Horizons in Adult Education reflect two very different but significant aspects of our society as we move into this new century: distance learning and spirituality. In the context of a rapidly changing world, both articles also challenge adult educators to explore innovative strategies to continue the sound philosophical traditions that have been important to this field in the past century.

Andragogy and Distance Education: Together in the New Millenium by Mark Rossman provides an excellent review of the set of assumptions familiar to adult educators, known as andragogy, and clearly demonstrates their applications to distance learning. He presents several specific strategies that have been effective in distance learning programs designed for adult learners.

Into the 21st Century with Spirit by Leona English is a short “think piece” submitted as a response to the call for short articles on issues that impact adult education in this new century. The author considers how the increasing interest in spirituality in our society presents a new challenge for adult educators. She notes that in the historical tradition of several adult education movements of the last century, adult educators can have a role to play in helping adults to find meaning and engage in the development of an authentic spirituality for the 21st century.

Readers are invited to make these articles “interactive” by responding on AEDNET and sharing their comments. (Directions to guide this discussion are given in this issue on page .) Readers also are encouraged to submit an article for consideration by the editorial board of New Horizons on a related topic or other topic relevant to adult education philosophy, research, and practice. (See Call for Manuscripts on page XX for details.)

NEW HORIZONS IN ADULT EDUCATION
Volume 14, Number 1, Winter, 2000

ANDRAGOGY AND DISTANCE EDUCATION: TOGETHER IN THE NEW
MILLENNIUM

Mark H. Rossman, Capella University

ABSTRACT

Andragogy, as promulgated by the late Malcolm Knowles, is a set of assumptions designed to facilitate adult learning and program planning. Distance education is a process of delivering education used extensively by adult learners. Burge (1988) proposed that the implications of andragogy to distance education be examined. This article continues in that direction. Following a brief overview of andragogical development, the author presents andragogy as a framework for discussing distance education programs designed for the adult learner. Andragogically compatible processes, such as the "general to specific" approach for developing learning contracts and individualizing course projects, and the "group charter" concept for learner participation in asynchronous discussion forums, are presented and discussed as examples of applying andragogy to climate setting and learner involvement in distance education settings.

Introduction

Since Malcolm Knowles introduced andragogy to North America in the 1970's, it has gained wide acceptance as a set of assumptions designed to guide the development of programs for adults. At its core is "the idea that the attainment of adulthood is concomitant on adults' coming to perceive themselves as self-directing individuals" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 92). Andragogy facilitates a learner-centered, humanistically oriented approach and has served to produce much information regarding program planning and development for adults. Recently, distance education programs have assumed a major role in the delivery of adult education. Fewer than ten states were promoting distance education in 1987, while today virtually all states have an interest or effort in distance education (U. S. Congress, 1989). This growth, which has escalated unabated into the 90's, is primarily due to increases in educational requirements that have coincided with the expanding capabilities and services of the telecommunications industry (Giltrow, 1989).

Burge (1988) argued that the andragogical assumptions advanced by Knowles would contribute to knowledge regarding the design and development of programs in distance education settings. This article continues that discussion.

Andragogy

The late Malcolm Knowles spent a career trying to formulate a theory of adult learning based on research and experience related to the characteristics of adult learners. It was not until the mid-1960's that he was exposed to the term "andragogy" by a Yugoslavian adult educator who was attending a summer session workshop at Boston University" (Knowles, 1990, p. 54). Knowles realized that this term more adequately encapsulated his ideas. In 1968, "Androgogy, Not Pedagogy" was published. This introduced the term to North America and began the rise in popularity of the concept and the term.

By the end of the third quarter of the 20th century, the concept of andragogy (the spelling of which was changed in 1968 as the result of communication between Knowles and the publishers of Merriam-Webster dictionaries) was firmly a part of adult education vernacular, practice and policy. It was more fully defined and developed with Knowles' 1970 publication of his now classic work, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy*. He recognized that "adult education theorists in both Europe (especially Germany and Yugoslavia) and in North America are rapidly developing a distinctive theory of adult learning. And from this theory is evolving a new technology for the education of adults" (Knowles, 1970, p. 38). To differentiate this new technology from pedagogy, he indicated that he was giving this new technology a new name: andragogy, which he defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn." (Knowles, 1970, p. 38). Further, he indicated that andragogy was "premised on at least four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions about child learners on which pedagogy is premised" (Knowles, 1970, p. 39). These assumptions related to the adult self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning.

Initially Knowles saw andragogy and pedagogy as being at opposite ends of a continuum. This was reflected in the subtitle of the book. Many educators reported to Knowles that the model had application to youth and children; "that young people learned better, too, when the andragogical model was applied" (Knowles, 1984, p. 6). So prevalent were these reports that in 1980, he revised the book and changed the subtitle to "From Pedagogy to Andragogy." He also added an additional assumption (motivation) to the previous four.

Knowles (1984) maintained that andragogy was a "system of alternative sets of assumptions" (p. 64) about adult learning based on adult learning research and experience. He constantly admonished educators of adults to recognize that these assumptions were not empirically validated nor was andragogy a theory of adult learning. These admonitions notwithstanding, many adult educators debated the value of andragogy as a theory of adult learning and program development rather than a set of alternative assumptions. Knowles himself seems to have added to this debate when he wrote the following: "I believe that andragogy qualifies as a theory according to both definitions (in Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary). However, I prefer to think of it as

a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory" (Knowles, 1989, p.112).

A major contribution of Knowles was the development and dissemination of the andragogical process of planning and operating educational programs for individual learners and organizations. The andragogical process consists of the following seven elements: (a) the establishment of a climate conducive to adult learning, (b) the creation of an organizational structure for participative learning, (c) the diagnosis of needs for learning, (d) the formulation of directions of learning (objectives), (e) the development of a design of activities, (f) the operation of the activities, (g) the re-diagnosis of needs for learning (evaluation) (Knowles, 1984, pp. 14-18).

Distance Education

Distance education and distance learning programs are popular ways for adult learners to attain educational objectives. Moore and Kearsley (1996) indicate that "around the country and around the world, most distance education students are adults between the ages of 25 and 50. Consequently the more one understands the nature of adult learning, the better one can understand the nature of distance learning" (p. 153). The technology associated with this phenomenon allows virtually instantaneous access to instruction at times and places that are convenient to the adult learner rather than for the instructor or the institution. Distance education is a prominent and growing way to reach a widely dispersed population. Among more than 1000 colleges and universities surveyed, 860 planned to offer distance learning courses in 1998 and 68% plan to use the Internet to deliver these courses (Peterson's, 1998).

Moore and Kearsley (1996) define distance education as follows:

Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements. (p. 2)

While discussing the evolution and advantages of distance education, Cantelon (1995) wrote,

Distance education allows for the application of time-sensitive self-paced learning and makes possible continuous registration and new forms of instruction freed from lock-step term or semester constraints. It respects individual learning styles, schedule differences, family responsibilities, and professional commitments. ... Gone is the need for a uniform lockstep curriculum geared to the learning speed of the so-called average student. Time rather than space rules. (p. 9)

Verduin and Clark (1991) discuss how distance education serves adult learners: "Before any propositions or designs can be advanced for effective distance education, recent research on what is known about adults, their learning styles, their motivations,

and other related qualities needs to be reviewed and analyzed" (p. 21). They present a model of distance education and indicate that "further support for our model comes from some of the ideas associated with andragogy and learning styles" (p. 134). Moore and Kearsley (1996) recognize the value of andragogy as a "very helpful basis for the design and teaching of distance education courses, particularly with respect to motivational aspects" (p. 153).

How does andragogy apply in distance education settings? The response to this question is the basis for the remainder of this article.

Climate Setting

Setting a climate that is conducive to learning is vital. Knowles (1984) indicated that this is so important that he devotes "about 10 percent of the time available to this educational element" (p 15). There are at least two aspects of climate: physical environment and psychological atmosphere. Within most distance learning settings, classrooms are not in use so the physical environment usually plays a minor role. However, in settings where video is used to transmit the course to simultaneous sites at a distance, it is important that the learning environment be organized so that each learner is able to see the face of the other learners in the group. This assists classmates to "see" what is being said rather than to rely exclusively on hearing, a physiological attribute that tends to decrease in efficiency with passing years.

The psychological climate is even more important than the physical climate. Adults must feel secure and safe within any learning situation. They must be treated with respect and dignity. In distance learning settings, the facilitator must work diligently to assure that learner responses are valued and are not belittled. This is particularly important in settings using asynchronous discussion forums in which learners post responses to facilitator questions or post responses to the responses of other learners. In an environment in which the written word is the primary means of communication, it is easy for words to be misinterpreted as non-verbal cues, a powerful form of communication, are not available.

Learners must also feel supported. Knowles (1980) wrote "people learn better when they feel supported rather than judged or threatened" (p 16). Learners in online courses using discussion groups who feel their responses will not be unduly criticized will be more open to participation. They will be more honest and sincere with their responses. This is not to say that responses should not be subjected to critical analysis for as Brookfield (1988) wrote, "the ability to be critically analytical concerning the assumptions underlying our own actions and those of others is organizationally and culturally beneficial as well as personally liberating" (p. 43). To avoid the negative associations often associated with criticism, distance education facilitators need to establish ground rules or policy related to participation clearly indicating that responses are directed to what has been written and are not intended as a criticism of the person writing the response. This needs to be established by the facilitator in the initial unit of the online course.

Learners need to feel they will not be belittled for asking a "dumb" question. They need to be assured that mistakes and failures are a natural part of the learning process. Perhaps, most importantly, learners need to feel they have been heard.

Learner Involvement

Knowles (1980) wrote "... the starting point in program planning is always the adults' interests, even though the end objective may be to meet their (and an institution's and society's) 'real' needs (p. 82). Facilitators in distance learning settings need to recognize and value that often they are dealing with experienced and competent individuals. Distance learning frequently involves the use of learning contracts or course completion plans in which learners negotiate with course tutors to design learning activities. The learning contract or course completion plan usually involves some or all of the following elements: (a) Description of Course or Individualized Learning Experience, (b) Learning Objectives, (c) Resources for Accomplishing Objectives (books, articles, journals, internet sources, individuals, and other materials), (d) Documentation, and (e) Timeline.

Using the "general to specific" approach, each element of the process potentially allows for individual needs to be met. Generally, catalog course descriptions in college catalogs follow this approach. The first sentence or two provides a general overview of the course. The remaining sentences provide examples of specifics related to the course. Online course or individualized learning experience descriptions negotiated in this manner are responsive to individual needs. The "general to specific" approach can be used for required or elective, credit or non-credit courses as well.

The formulation of learning objectives presents an excellent opportunity for the adult learner to express needs and to be an active player in deciding what is to be learned and when it will be learned. Application of the "general to specific" approach when designing learning objectives is useful when seeking ways to meet individual learning needs. Here, the learner negotiates both general and specific objectives clearly emanating from the course or learning experience description. Knowles (1980) points out that learning objectives "can be made congruent with the spirit of andragogy by describing what ...[a learning plan]...will help learners do, rather than what it will do to people" (p. 121). The "general to specific" approach also can be applied to the selection of resources and serves as the framework for documentation of course completion.

Individually designed course projects are another way of encouraging active participation in the learning process. In these instances, facilitators and learners have created course projects reflecting individual interests and needs. In addition to the more traditional term paper, final projects can be audio- or video-tapes, a CD-ROM, a revised manual or other means of demonstrating accomplishment of individual learning objectives.

Participation in asynchronous online discussion forums can be enhanced through the use of a "group charter" in which the members of the discussion group set and agree on the expectations, rules, and responsibilities to be utilized within the group. This process taps into the notion that the more adult learners have participated in the formulation of rules and practices, the greater will be their participation.

Capella University, a distance learning university headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota (www.capellauniversity.edu) uses the group charter in many of its online courses. This approach encourages learner participation as each learner has an opportunity to add to the discussion regarding the rules and regulations that will govern the asynchronous discussion forum. The following is an example of a group charter formulated by a diad of adult learners in an online Education course:

We will take turns initiating e-mail discussions for each unit. We agree to initiate the discussion by Tuesday evening, and to respond to each other in a timely fashion so as to allow the partner initiating the discussion enough time to form the group response and send it for review by Saturday. The group response will be posted on Sunday--unless both partners have agreed that the response is ready for posting before then. The partner who is not initiating the discussion for the unit is responsible for selecting another group's response to respond to. After discussing the response with her partner, she will post our response to the other group's comments.

The need for recognition is another key to success in andragogically-oriented distance learning programs. Distance educators who understand this need should do the following:

offer programs designed to increase the economic, social, psychological, and spiritual security of adults, and will provide an environment in which they feel secure while learning. They ... also accept the fact that all people need recognition and they will be ingenious in creating numerous opportunities for adults to obtain recognition constructively. (Knowles, 1980, p. 86)

In 1999, this researcher completed a simple document analysis of more than 3000 evaluations submitted by learners enrolled in 154 online courses since the Fall of 1996 at Capella University. Using the guidelines suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981), the narrative responses were ultimately grouped into the categories that were judged to be comprehensive and illuminating: Faculty Feedback, Learner Discussions, and Course Requirements. A more detailed analysis of responses within each category demonstrated that recognition of responses and contributions by class participants (or the lack thereof) was the most frequently mentioned concern.

Conclusion

As Burge (1988) indicated, andragogy provides a context for developing distance education programs. It also provides a framework to build a climate conducive to adult

learning and a process for more actively involving the adult learner in the distance learning process. Distance educators and program developers are encouraged to review the vast information regarding andragogy and to incorporate the thinking of Knowles and others when developing distance education programs.

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Volume 14, Number 1, Winter, 2000

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY WITH SPIRIT

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In the past 5 years, just about every magazine, newspaper, journal, web site, and television station has addressed the issue of spirituality. The increasing attention stems, in part, from the demands of aging Baby Boomers to have their spiritual needs met, and this could increase in the new millennium. Similarly, adult educators have begun to respond to this spiritual hunger, trying to find creative ways that they can authentically integrate spirituality into their research and practice (MacKeracher, 1996). The growing emphasis on the spiritual is heightened by the reminders of postmodernity that spirituality co-exists with cognition and affect, and is not a private, unmentionable aspect of our lives.

Early forays of adult educators in justice movements, such as Highlander and the Antigonish Movement, were deeply influenced by spirituality. Current adult educators are trying to recover some of this early emphasis in their work (Tisdell, 1999), and to help adults find meaning or purpose in their lives. The emphasis is heightened by the crisis of materialism, and the growing disenchantment of churches and synagogues as places where spiritual needs can be met. Adult educators are challenged to respond to the human need to find meaning, to understand one's own self, and to work creatively to connect with the natural world.

A challenge for adult educators will be to avoid thinking of spirituality as a cure-all for modernity, or as a passing trend. Adult education not only has to continue to address spirituality with learners, but it also has to grapple seriously with understanding how spirituality is connected to adult education's roots and how it informs the lives of learners. Another challenge will be for adult educators themselves to actively engage in their own spiritual search, as a base from which to integrate spiritual practices in their practice. The educator needs to take time to develop his or her own spirituality, which can be defined as consisting of the following: (a) a strong sense of who one is, (b) care, concern and outreach to the other, and (c) the continuous construction of meaning and knowledge (English, in press).

Adult educators have the privilege of being close enough to learners to help them engage in the development of an authentic spirituality through journal writing, critical reflection, inquiry, dialogue, and narrative. They have the privilege of helping adults search for meaning, their connection to others in relationship, and their connections to the natural world. Adult educators have a role to play in facilitating the active engagement of learners with crucial life questions, and moving toward a spirituality that is beyond narcissism, not confined to religious structures, and directed toward justice and meaning.

Adult educators on the cusp of new century have the unique task of creating a spirituality for the 21st century.

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NEW HORIZONS IN ADULT EDUCATION Volume 14, Number 1, Winter, 2000

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