Chapter 8

Adult Learning Principles as the Foundation for Innovative Technology Applications in Business and Higher Education Venues

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ABSTRACT

As Web 2.0 surfaces as the latest trendy phrase in education and technology discussions, it is imperative that instructors not get caught up in the glamour of the latest technology and loose sight of the required andragogical underpinnings necessary for effective and efficient teaching and learning. This chapter will begin by exploring the major theories and theorists in the field of adult education and the meshing of these theories with technology applications in higher education and global business venues. While Malcolm Knowles is credited with popularizing adult learning theory in the 1970's, Stephen Brookfield, Jack Mezirow, Maxine Greene and Knud Illeris are among those who have moved the field forward over the past decades. Along with this progression in theory, the use of technology has escalated in popularity creating a need to frame its application in the foundational principles of adult education; an "Andragogy 2.0" focus is required. This chapter will expand on this theoretical base by offering short case studies that are linked to the theories as examples of innovative strategic approaches in the use of technology in adult teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

As Web 2.0 surfaces as the latest trendy phrase in education and technology discussions, it is easy for instructors to get caught up in the glamour of the latest technology and loose sight of the required andragogical underpinnings necessary for effective and efficient teaching and learning. Online social networks are in. Wiki's and blogs are the norm. But what do these add to the learning process? Some universities offer space behind password-protected firewalls, while others advocate the use

of public spaces for these online collaborations. What impact does this have on confidentiality and intellectual property issues for students and faculty? A plethora of questions begin to emerge and answers are only beginning to follow.

This chapter will begin by exploring the major theories and theorists in the field of adult education and the meshing of these theories with technology applications in higher education and global business venues. While Malcolm Knowles is credited with popularizing adult learning theory in the 1970's, Stephen Brookfield, Jack Mezirow, Victoria Marsick and Knud Illeris are among those who have moved the field forward over the past decades. Along with this progression in theory, the use of technology has escalated in popularity creating a need to frame its application in the foundational principles of adult education; an "Andragogy 2.0" focus is required. This chapter will then expand on this theoretical base by offering short case studies that are linked to the theories as examples of innovative strategic approaches in the use of technology in adult teaching and learning. These case studies may serve as examples for professionals who might want to adapt them to their own venues or use them as a springboard for new innovations in the field. This chapter will then explore the possibilities of utilizing Web 2.0 to generate even more effective and efficient learning 2.0. If I were to create a lighthearted subtitle to this chapter, it would be "Andragogy meets Web 2.0".

BACKGROUND

The need for theory as a foundation of practice is articulated by Elias and Merriam (2005). "Theory without practice leads to empty idealism and action without philosophical reflection leads to a mindless activism" (p. 4). In Malcolm Knowles' (2005) classic text "The Adult Learner" he provides the historical development of learning theories in a summary of propounders and interpreters of

learning theory from Thorndike and Dewey of the early 1900's to Brookfield and Mezirow today. His list includes 61 propounders and 33 interpreters who have influenced the development of learning theories over the past 130 years. Only a few individuals from this extensive list will be profiled in this chapter. Dewey believed that experience was always the starting point of an educational process, not the end result. Thorndike believed that 3 laws governed the learning of animals and human beings: the law of readiness for learning, the law of exercise which connects learning to practice, the law of effect which is dependent on the consequences of learning. In stark comparison Knowles refers to his own ideas of separating humans into adults and children.

In his autobiography, Knowles (1989) credits a seminar led by Cyril Houle at the University of Chicago with initiating his own interests in the historical foundations of adult education. He notes that many great teachers of ancient China, Rome and Greece taught adults, not children, and "invented techniques for engaging learners in active inquiry" (p.61). He noted the continuing importance of adult education throughout and on history and described himself as being "part of a long and significant historical movement" (p.72) He cited examples in the citizen involvement initiatives in the American colonies and during the Civil War and the "compulsion for knowledge" (p.64) instigated by the industrial revolution. Building on Houle's classic "The Inquiring Mind" in 1961, Tough's seminal publications in "Learning Without a Teacher" (1967) and later in "The Adult's Learning Projects" (1979) introduced the idea of self-directed learning and further influenced Knowles andragogical model. Tough (1979) discovery that adults were more successful learners if they knew the benefits from their learning and the negative consequences of not learning became one of Knowles assumptions about adult learners. Knowles (2005) articulated his 6 core andragogical principles as "the learner's need to know, self-directed learning, prior experience

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