

Chapter 5

Conventional Online Teaching vs. Andragogical Online Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to promote the andragogical teaching model in helping adult learners learn online, the author of this chapter has sought to compare and contrast this model with conventional online teaching model. In doing so, the author argues while conventional online teaching is guided by behaviorism, in order to help adults learn in the online environment, instructors must go beyond the conventional online teaching model characterized by the use of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and embrace humanism from which andragogy flows. The two models addressed in this chapter were not developed in a vacuum. Rather, they were derived from pedagogical and andragogical assumptions of learners. According to the literature in adult education, pedagogical principles were developed as early as in the 7th and 12th centuries whereas andragogical principles emerged in the early part of the 19th century in Europe. Both pedagogical principles and andragogical principles have been used to guide online adult teaching and learning since universities began to deliver courses in the virtual environments at the beginning of the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

As people walked into the 21st century, they realized that teaching, especially teaching of adult learners is completed not only in the traditional classroom, but also in the electronic classroom or what we call "virtual environments". As early as

the 1970s, the father of adult education, Malcolm Knowles predicted that teaching of adults in the 21st century, would be delivered electronically (Knowles, 1975). We can all prove that his predication came true as more and more universities have begun to deliver courses online to reach learners far and wide. One logical inference as to why Knowles made such a precise prediction is the fact that mature learners cannot come to the

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traditional classroom to receive their education and training because of their multiple work/family responsibilities. Yet, they must retool their knowledge and skills in order to survive and thrive under any economical conditions in the 21st century. He further predicted that the de-institutionalization of education, in the form of open and independent learning systems, would create a need for learners to develop appropriate self-directed learning skills: Students entering into these programs without having learned the skills of self-directed inquiry will experience anxiety, frustration, and, often failure, and so will their teachers (as cited in Wang, 2005, p. 35). Self-directed learning skills will definitely help mature learners learn in the virtual environments where they have no face to face meetings with their course instructors except that some instructors may arrange some online interaction with mature learners via technologies. The virtual environments provide not only academic learning but also social networking. King and Gura (2007) argue that learners young and old in the information age, not only engage in learning on the Internet, but also engage in online social networking such as making virtual international friends via their online journals, MySpace and Facebook (Havenstein, 2007). In addition, learners, especially those with better computer skills, may engage in constant text messaging, watching movies and “Googling” for all sorts of their information needs directly from their cell phones (King, 2009). The implication has been people all live in such a digitally connected world and the Internet has become a bone fide tool for teachers to conduct teaching online and learners to engage in learning online. If positively used, the Internet can help maximize learning on the part of learners. In other words, the Internet can maximize learning anywhere, any time given the asynchronous and synchronous nature of online teaching/learning. If negatively used, the Internet may frustrate our learners in the 21st century, leaving our learners aimless “Googling” searching for useless information they may not need to achieve

learning. As teachers and learners, we should be aware of the dialectical relationships between the above positive and negative usage of the Internet.

On the basis of the above analysis, it is vital that teachers assume “appropriate” teaching methods on the Internet. Conventional online teaching may work well with children or preadults as the teaching methods were derived directly from the traditional teaching methodologies. Traditional teaching methodologies were directly derived from B. F. Skinner’s behaviorism (1968). Behaviorism’s influence on instructional technology “led to the design of piecemeal instruction with immediate feedback and reinforcement, drill and practice procedures, and self-paced programmed instruction (as cited in Dewald, 2003, p. 48). As Dewald (2003) further indicated, behaviorist instructors make an effort to measure learning outcomes. They also want students’ learning outcomes to be observable in addition to being measurable. Behaviorist instructors tend to have the notion: If they fail to measure and observe students’ learning outcomes, students fail to learn. As a result of the influence of Skinner’s (1968) behaviorism, instructors, including instructors of adult learners, have been using heavily Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives to outline their teaching objectives. While Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives proved to be a powerful tool in instructional design and in analyzing instructional outcomes, a critical question to ask is does Bloom’s Taxonomy allow instructors to involve learners in the instructional design process? To date, no behaviorist instructors have involved their learners in the instructional design process unless they change their teaching philosophy from behaviorism to humanism to accommodate adult learning. The purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast conventional online teaching and andragogical online teaching so that both learners and instructors can determine whether andragogical online teaching is superior to conventional online teaching in the instruction of today’s adult learners and vice versa. Without the

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