

Chapter 1

Foundations of Adult Education, Learning Characteristics, and Instructional Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines the concept of adult education by analyzing its emergence as an academic discipline, and assesses the philosophical ideologies through which it finds expression. It provides a critical review of andragogy as a framework for examining its perception as a teaching method exclusively for adult learners. The review reveals that andragogical principles can be used to develop learning strategies to support instruction for both children and adult learners. The unchallenged assumption that pedagogy is exclusively reserved for teaching children is critically assessed. To demonstrate that adults do learn from instructional strategies that are supported by both pedagogical and andragogical principles, a case study is conducted. Adults learn from similar methods as much as children. It indicates that the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy as principles of learning is somewhat spurious. The chapter discussed strategies for using digital theories to facilitate instruction.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the concept of adult education by exploring its emergence and its application in teaching and learning. The position taken in this chapter is that the early introduction of adult education is rooted in the political and economic empowerment of the underprivileged members of the society. Adult education, like some theoretical concepts, is embedded in some social and economic programs, which include social capital, social justice, civil society, and community engagement. The relationship between adult education, on the one hand, and social capital, as well as civil society, on the other hand,

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are explored to accentuate its (adult education) philosophical base. Examining the historical underpinning of adult education and its ascendancy to a program area of study constitutes a part of the dialogue in this chapter. Most literature on adult education views it (adult education) primarily from the framework of the advanced economies with minimal recognition that it is a universal phenomenon. In developing countries, adult education represents a channel through which people transmit cultural heritage from one generation to the other, including providing knowledge and skill for the workforce. The argument in this chapter is that adult education and its methodologies are not peculiar to specific economies (industrialized nations).

Adult education is practiced globally and has a widespread application. The belief is that the evolution of adult education is about future progress in society (Nurullah and Naik, 1951). The US, 1984 Adult Education Amendments Act is designed “to expand the purpose of adult education by including the new national priority on literacy. The goal of the Amended Act is to “enable all adults to acquire basic literacy skills necessary to function to reemphasize the importance of literacy. The rationale of the Amended Act also includes helping the “States to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack the level of literacy skills requisite to effective citizenship and productive employment” (US House of Representatives 1991, p. 505). The Morrill Act of 1862 is grant awards to universities for research in agriculture and mechanical area of study, and the objective is to promote adult and vocational education at the university level. (National Association for Public School, Adult Education, 1968). This chapter provides a narrative of adult education from a broad perspective rather than from a narrow position and examines the role of andragogy and pedagogy in adult learning.

Most educational practitioners have supposedly argued that andragogy is a method of instruction, exclusive to the teaching of the adult learners while ostensibly ascribing pedagogy to the teaching of the non-adult learners (children). The implicit distinction between pedagogy and andragogy suggests a false dichotomy. Houde, 2006 recognizes that “underpinning the model of andragogy is the idea that adults and children are different” (p. 91).

Mohring (1989), contends that the terms andragogy (implies the education of adults) and pedagogy (meaning the education of children) are etymologically inaccurate. Although pedagogy originates from paid, meaning “child,” from antiquity, it has also stood for education in general—without reference to the learners’ ages (p. 52). According to Knowles and Holton (1998), adults acquire experience from various life engagements and “self-identity” (p. 91). On the other hand, the child gains experience from family and social relationships. However, the authors fail to explain how the difference in experience impacts the learning process of the child and the adult. According to Marzano (2007), successful instruction depends on collaboration and interaction between the teachers and the students, including the knowledge content (the subject of instruction). “This trilogy, proponents of both pedagogy and andragogy seem to miss in their arguments” (Ekoto and Gaikwad, (2015, p. 13).

The difference between the two concepts (pedagogy and andragogy) is somewhat blurry. The present authors posit that andragogy as an instructional approach to learning is equally beneficial to both adults and non-adult learners. A critical analysis of the concept of pedagogy as a method of teaching children is provided to examine the premise underlying the assignment of pedagogy to the education of children as opposed to adult learners. Conversely, it is crucial to understand the assumption that supports the perception that andragogy is better suited for adult learners in comparison to children.

Abundant evidence exists in the literature that shows that adults learn from the application of andragogy. However, empirical data on specific instructional strategies preferred by adult learners is minimal. The difficulty encountered by researchers and adult education practitioners is that andragogy lacks

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