

Chapter 12

Andragogy, Culture, and Adult Learning Worldviews

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ABSTRACT

Adults differ from children in the ways they learn. This is not only due to the fact they have more experiences to relate to but also due to the motivations behind why they are learning. So why do so many teachers, trainers, and professionals teach courses and provided training to adults in the same manner as if they were teaching children? This discourse explores the adult learning construct of andragogy, applications of different andragogical approaches, and challenges and considerations of andragogy. It also briefly describes a quantitative andragogical scale that was developed, which may provide a useful tool to an otherwise qualitative concept. Finally, the chapter provides several adult learning worldview overviews to be used considered in conjunction with the application of andragogy to potentially increase andragogical effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

John Dewey (1944) stated, “We start not so much with superior capacities as with superior stimuli for evocation and direction of our capacities” (p. 36). Dewey’s statement in 1944 could perhaps capture the philosophical catalyst for all learning that occurs in humans. Dewey stressed that learning beings with *superior stimuli of our capabilities*. This stimulus comes from many sources and differs from person to person. Understanding this stimulus and how people learn has been a central focus in education for many years and has often been referred to as pedagogy or the study of educating children (Knowles, 1970). During the 1960s, a new concept was reignited around a word that had limited consideration for over 100 years—*andragogy* or the study of adult learning (Knowles, 1970).

Knowles (1970) defined *andragogy* as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 38). More recently, *andragogy* has been defined as the teaching, facilitating, and learning of adults (Brookfield, 1986) and has been firmly associated with the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) (Gilley, Egglund, & Gilley, 2002; Swanson & Holton, 2001; Werner & DeSimone, 2006). The field of HRD has

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played a vital role in the progression of andragogy by incorporating and applying many of the assumptions set forth by Knowles (Gilley et al., 2002; Swanson & Holton, 2001; Werner & DeSimone, 2006).

This discourse discusses the origins of andragogy, andragogical applications, measuring andragogy, and adult learning worldviews. These four areas provide an overview and practical understanding of andragogy and its potentially positive implications to the study of and effective implementation of andragogy as an adult learning tool. Most often, adults are taught, instructed, and trained as they were when they were children. To say there is an underlying frustration in the work environment centered on the effectiveness of training that adult employees receive and the perception of cost effectiveness of training employees by management and leadership may be a mild understatement. As competition grows, and the drive for lowering costs and identifying the measurability of performance becomes an unprecedented expectation, more companies are questioning the value of training their employees and the value behind maintaining staff capable of training them.

Herein, this chapter integrates three main topics: andragogy, HRD, and adult learning. The rationale behind this was to provide an understanding behind the direct and applicable linkage among the three areas. A caveat to *adult learning* would be that the author poses an informal distinction between andragogy and adult learning whereby andragogy would be the utilization of the specific approaches of andragogy whereas adult learning primarily refers to the generalization of adults who learn or people in a professional capacity (e.g., teacher, trainer, or professor) who teach adults, which itself is separate and distinguished from HRD professionals and practitioners.

ORIGIN OF ANDRAGOGY

Malcolm Knowles has contributed much to the realm of adult learning and andragogy; his work spans over 50 years. Though some may credit him with the development and maturation of the concept, the term *andragogy* itself dates to 1833 where a German grammar school teacher named Alexander Kapp coined it during a description of Plato, the Greek philosopher. Further exploration into the idea did not occur until the early and mid-1900s, where it received more attention after the Second World War. Early writings were mostly out of Europe, primarily Germany, the Netherlands, the former Yugoslavia, Switzerland, and France (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2005). Knowles' work became prominent in the late 1960s to the present.

From an etymological perspective, *andragogy* may not necessarily be as accurately a composited Greek word as potentially the word *teleiagogy*. It is generally argued that andragogy literally means the teaching of adult males, pedagogy literally means the teaching of people (non-age/gender specific), and teleiagogy means the teaching of adults (non-gender specific) (Mohring, 1990). Though this view does not affect the usage of the term andragogy in the current discourse, it appears that potentially spirited discussions regarding the term, its origin, and its interpreted meaning may be evoked; albeit the term itself currently possesses an accepted scholarly definition (Forrest & Peterson, 2006).

Adulthood Defined

Knowles et al. (2005) distinguished adults from children by four factors: biological, legal, social, and psychological. Specifically, they define the biological factor as when a person has reached an age during early adolescence and is capable of reproducing. They also define the legal factor as being the age

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