Kelley Wells
OMDE 601 Section 9040
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Andragogy: How This Early Distance Education Theory Influenced Current Distance

Education Practices

Introduction

Many earlier distance learning theories have made huge impacts on distance education, and the one that has been very influential in the way adults learn is andragogy. Andragogy is the educating of adults, and this term is used to delineate the distinct practices which should be applied in adult education. This concept distinguishes the learning needs of mature people from those of adolescents. This theory necessitates that mature learners be engaged in the preparation and planning of their learning needs, and to assimilate how to fulfill those needs. This paper will define andragogy, explain its postulates, and the impacts that this concept has had on current distance education practices.

What is Andragogy?

Andragogy is a learning theory that has been in existence since the 19th century. Andragogy was initially founded by Eduard Linderman in 1926, and he was the first to coin the meaning of adult education (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). In 1833, this concept was first put into print format by Alexander Kapp, who was a teacher in Germany (Knowles et al., 2011). Later on, Matthew Knowles revived this terminology in the 1970s and 1980s. Knowles described andragogy as the educating and teaching of adults (Knowles et al., 2011). Pedagogy is the educating of juveniles, and it is frequently used as a synonym for education. Since, education was focused on teaching children, a term needed to be geared towards how adults learn. Andragogy is aimed at how adults learn and not what they are

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beingtaught (Knowles et al., 2011). It is an alternative model for teaching and learning, and this word can be substituted for the term pedagogy (Knowles et al., 2011). Andragogical approaches are more learner-centered as compared to pedagogical techniques, which are teacher-centered (Knowles et al., 2011).

According to Knowles, Holton, & Swanson (2011), by working with adults, Knowles ascertained that educators needed to be concerned about the true interests of mature students, rather than concentrating on what they thought were the learners' interests. Knowles believed that the most optimal learning experiences were those that were collaborative and directed interactions amid the student and instructor, with an abundance of accessible resources. Throughout the students' learning experiences, the distance educator helps to direct the adults, so they can cultivate their own learning capabilities (Knowles et al., 2011).

Postulates of Andragogy

Knowles described six postulates that differentiate mature learners from juvenile learners and they are:

- Mature learners are autonomous and self-directed;

- Adults have an abundance of knowledge built up from their learning experiences;

- Mature learners are prepared and equipped to learn;

- Adult learning is problem centered and their learning needs are focused on their social behaviors;

- Mature people are internally stimulated by motivational factors; and

- Adults need to understand why they are learning something (Knowles et al., 2011).

Six postulates. The first postulate explains how adults are autonomous and self-directed learners. Older people have a self-concept about themselves (Knowles et al., 2011). This idea or mental image of themselves is being self-determined and self-regulated. As people grow, they become more independent and they start to take accountability for their own actions (Knowles et al., 2011). Adults select what they want to understand and how they want to learn it (Knowles et al., 2011). Mature students need to be intensely engaged in the determinations that will impact them such as being involved in the preparation and planning of their learning needs. This will aid them in setting up their own educational objectives (Knowles et al., 2011).

The second postulate is adult learners have an abundance of knowledge built up from their learning experiences. Mature people have a wealth of knowledge that comes from their many years of life experience. This abundance of knowledge can be used to create new learning experiences. The experiences that mature students have are seen as a learning resource, and it serves as a foundation for learning. Due to this learning resource, adults can contribute a wealth of knowledge to course discussions, and they are viewed as valuable assets when it comes to learning from and with others (Knowles et al., 2011).

The third postulate explains how adults are prepared and equipped to learn. When an older person is ready to learn, it all hinges upon what he or she needs to comprehend, in order to handle certain situations in life. Adults need to immediately see how learning is applied to something, in order for learning to be effective. Thereupon, learning is arranged around the applications in life. If a mature person is learning something, he or she needs to gain an immediate understanding of what is being learned (Knowles et al., 2011). Examples of circumstances in life that pushes mature people to learn include understanding how to take care

of a young ailing child or comprehending how to cook healthier meals to lower cholesterol (Knowles et al., 2011).

The fourth postulate describes how adult learning is problem centered and their learning needs are focused on their social behaviors. Adults are oriented toward problem solving and not material content. Mature students search for educational opportunities that will give them the ability to problem solve. Thus, a teacher's instructional approaches should include problem solving and stimulating dialogue. In addition, learning should be based on experiences in life, since adults learning is focused on their performance (Knowles et al., 2011).

The fifth postulate describes how older people are internally stimulated by motivational factors. Adults are motivated more internally than externally. Older students will search for educational opportunities because of intrinsic factors such as self-actualization and self-esteem. These internal motivators' make adults want to learn, problem solve, and find new ways to learn (Knowles et al., 2011).

Finally, the sixth postulate is mature people need to understand why they need to learn something. Mature students need to comprehend why they are learning something, in order for them to get something out of it. Older people invest a lot of time and energy into to searching for the advantages and disadvantages of them not learning something, before they decide to put forth an effort to learn it. Having an understanding of this new information will help them to gain a sense of what they have learned (Knowles et al., 2011).

Attributes of Mature Learners

In distance education, it is important to consider the preferences and attributes of mature learners, in order to effectively design distance learning courses for adults. Mature learners diligently search for information in order to expound upon their knowledge and

capabilities.Thus, learning is not seen as a waste of time or an inconvenience. Mature learners are more distinct than traditional college students. Older people are bogged down with the daily routines of life such as working full-time, and taking care of family obligations and personal commitments. This leaves very little time open to engage in learning or going back to school. Adults face many challenges in life. These obstacles include loss of employment, divorce or separation from a spouse, and career advancement. These situations can conflict with the learning process (Cabag, 1999).

Andragogy has given adults a new outlook on education. Mature students go to school with a distinct point of view as compared to adolescents. Distance learning allows mature students to return to school, improve their quality of life, and eliminate many of the challenges they are confronted with (Cabag, 1999). Adults have the capability to learn using online resources, which has become instrumental in changing the nature of different learning approaches (Reddy & Devi, 2006).

Often, mature learners react favorably to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Frequently, extrinsic factors appear to be the main reasons why adults submerge themselves in the world of education. Furthermore, educational advancement can lead to a better position on the job. Knowing this in itself is stimulating and encouraging to mature people. This can give adults some kind of affirmation because the energy and time devoted to obtaining an education will lead to a physical accomplishment (Knowles et al., 2011).

Intrinsic factors are the most stimulating. Internal motivators are the driving force behind why adults want to learn and obtain an education by taking distance learning courses. Acquiring an education serves a way for adults to achieve satisfaction, whether it is raising one's self-esteem or having contentment on the job. Expanding on adults' competence levels can provide

them with a sense of knowledge, which is priceless. It is paramount for mature learners to value

what they are learning, and to understand the impacts from not learning(Knowles et al., 2011).

To the contrary, this is why older people are stimulated and self-determined. Mature

students are categorized as desirous and ambitious when it comes to selecting what they want to

learn, and what they want to get out of it. Hence, adults learn to augment their knowledge, in

order to obtain certain proficiencies. No matter what it is, older people depend on new

experiences to advance and push themselves towards an objective or goal (Cabag, 1999).

Impacts of Andragogy on Current Distance Education Practices

Adult learners are one of the fastest growing student populations. As compared to

conventional education, distance learning is aimed more towards the educating of adults not

children. Distance learning is a widely used process by which teaching and learning is

disseminated to mature people. Numerous distance learning programs are being created yearly.

Distance education institutions are making application of andragogy in their educational

programs (Reddy & Devi, 2006). With the development of online education and digitized

technologies, this has augmented distance education practitioners' curiosity about

andragogy. Distance educators are interested in andragogy because this concept is important in

the design of distance education courses. Instructors have learned how to employ the

andragogical principles to their pedagogical practices to help adults make more determinations

about their learning. This will motivate them to become more autonomous and self-directed

learners, and make adults who learn at a distance become more efficient (Reddy & Devi, 2006).

Andragogy is an influential theory in distance education. Teaching and learning is not

something that just happens in the conventional classroom, it can take place in digitized and

virtual spaces. This theory has allowed distance educators to direct their instructional content

more toward peoples' individual needs (Reddy & Devi, 2006). Furthermore, it has helped distance education practitioners to become more aware of the way they approach different learning styles among mature learners. Instructors have learned to use course presentations that are more pictorial, illustrative, tactile, auditory, and sensual. Furthermore, distance educators have learned to apply empirical and practical approaches in classroom activities, in order to help learners to make application of their life experiences (Reddy & Devi, 2006).

Students learning styles influence how they address educational activities. These learning styles pertain to the distinct ways in which people think and feel as they problem solve, generate solutions, and communicate. Hence, lifelong learning can be improved when adults understand their learning styles. Teachers should develop learning environments that are unique to each mature learner. Adults are human beings and they all have distinct needs. Learning environments are dynamic and they change all of the time (Reddy & Devi, 2006). Distance education practitioners can offer more options to their students, such as providing them with a cooperative educational environment, which promotes appreciation and admiration for others and stimulating dialogue. Hence, distance educators should motivate and foster this kind of activity among their students on a daily basis (Knowles et al., 2011).

Distance education practitioners who design online programs for distance learning courses, must learn to comprehend this andragogical learning theory and its relationship with distance learning; in order to effectively design distance education programs for older people. The majority of distance learning students are adults. If adult educators comprehend the nature of this theory and its concepts, the more they can comprehend the nature of distance education (Reddy & Devi, 2006).

Adults often go through different transitions in life or in their professional careers. Distance education practitioners must recognize that adult students are undergoing these changes in life, while they are learning. Teachers must support their students during these transformations, and this will allow them to engage in reflective learning, which plays an important role in the educational process (Reddy & Devi, 2006).

In order for andragogy to be effective in distance learning programs, distance educators must facilitate a learning environment that is conducive to adult education; design curriculum and instructional material to incorporate educational preparation and planning; and organize the course in a way that helps the students' determine their own learning needs and orientation of learning (Reddy & Devi, 2006). These things will help adults diagnose their own educational needs, gain an appreciation for what they are learning, and take charge of accomplishing their own didactic activities (Reddy & Devi, 2006).

Conclusion

Andragogy is a theory that has a lot to offer in distance learning and for distance educators. This concept and its correlating postulates help to distinguish adult learning from the way children learn. Andragogy stresses how adults are self-directed and independent learners. Adult learners are very diverse, learn differently, and have distinct learning styles. Mature people have acquired many years of knowledge and life experience, as compared to children. The accumulation of knowledge and life experience is viewed as a learning resource. This learning resource can be used to build new knowledge and learning experiences, which can be applied in distance learning courses. Andragogy has influenced how current distance education practices embrace adult education. Distance education practitioners need to comprehend the nature and context of distant learning and the culture and society that embody mature learners.

Further, distance educators need to review the andragogical principles and apply them in their pedagogical practices, in order to develop effective distance education programs and courses for adult learners.

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