
Comparing Pedagogy and Andragogy for Both Common and Dissimilar Meanings

HRD 631: The Adult Learner

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When modern people use the words pedagogy and andragogy, I sense there is a meaning implied that is understood by our wider culture. In the case of pedagogy, the general definition implied the connection of the teaching by the teacher, to the learning of the child student. Lately, that definition has enlarged to encompass more than the teaching of children, and now refers to the teaching of both children and adults as "the art or profession of teaching." (Ferro, p.3) Andragogy, on the other hand, a term that Knowles introduced into the idiom of adult education, infers an even more expanded notion of adult teaching and learning which includes, on the part of the learner: voluntariness; readiness to learn, life experience that serves as an infrastructure from which the adult may build their present and future learning upon; self-directed learning activities that are based on their own wants, needs and styles; and the opportunity to decide which life situations or challenges the adult(s) will center their learning quest on, in the hope that one may find new solutions and/or new goals to attain. (Knowles, 1980)

While similarities exist between the meanings of the two words, it is clear that they also differ. For one thing, andragogy, at least from Knowles perspective, refers only to adult learners and adult learning, while pedagogy, in its most expanded definition, includes adults and children. Another difference, I believe, is that pedagogy is sympathetic to the "banking system" of education that Freire refers to: the teacher has the knowledge and deposits it into the mind of the student. At the other end of the spectrum, andragogy implies that while the teacher may have knowledge and resources that the learner doesn't possess, it is up to the self-directed learner to decide what is worth learning, and then to avail him or herself to what can be known or understood by them, voluntarily. The teacher does not "deposit" or bank the knowledge in the learner, instead, the teacher facilitates the learner in trying to reach the goals which they have set out for themselves. Responsibility for learning belongs with the learner, and the teacher tries to balance the process for the student through resource support and guidance.

Another difference that I felt was inferred by the two ideas was this: pedagogy, lacked a sense of learning freedom and responsibility to learn into that freedom,

while andragogy seemed to invite more ownership of how one can know what one cares to know.

There seems to be a distinction about the shared quality of learning. Andragogy offers the philosophy and action of reciprocal learning events, where both "teacher" as well as "student" enjoy the exchanging of roles every now and then. Teaching and learning are not exclusive to the individual or the group. Everyone teaches and everyone learns. Pedagogical tracts, however, set a tone that keeps the teacher wearing the teaching hat and the learner wearing his or hers. A sense of power between teacher and learner seems less balanced than it might in an andragogously charged atmosphere, where collegiality has a greater opportunity for birthing itself, thus the potential for creating more spontaneous space for sparking new ideas and ways of knowing.

As an aside, one comment made by Ferro really bothered me. He said that his presentation (paper) closed with a plea "for adult educators to concentrate on what they know best, the planning and delivery of learning opportunities for adults of all ages and in a variety of settings, and to resist the temptation to become linguistic innovators, a task at which very few adult educators are competent and for which even fewer are trained." (Ferro, p.1) This comment really stuck in my craw, and I didn't put it together for myself as to why until I read the bell hooks article, where she said, ".the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being: concurrently one may practice theorizing without ever knowing/possessing the term, just as we can live and act in feminist resistance without ever using the word feminism."(Hooks, 1994, p.61)

The reason that I selected that quote from hooks is this: whether we have the elitist knowledge for naming something academically, or not, we may still be practicing pedagogy, andragogy or any other "gogy" or "ism." I find Mr. Ferro's remarks snobbish and exclusionary sounding. It appears that he does not want anyone, other than "linguists," to try and name the world, or even to make up new ways of naming things. He wants that job to belong to the expert name-makers, who, it seems, can never be adult educators, let alone people who have never seen the inside of a college or high school.

I have news for Mr. Ferro, it is my belief that ms. hooks and I would vehemently disagree with him. Ms. hooks states that: " Indeed, the privileged act of naming often affords those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place" (hooks, 1994, p. 62) Furthermore, ms. hooks might add that "any theory that can't be shared in

everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public. (hooks, p. 64) For it is indeed the purpose of such theory to divide, separate, exclude, keep at a distance....this theory continues to be used to silence, censor and devalue various feminist theoretical voiced, we cannot simply ignore it." (hooks, p.65)

Andragogy and pedagogy, as words, as definitions, models, and thus as a kinds of theories, are ideas which have been named and given dictionary meanings. Ultimately, however, it is the practice of these ideas which have been named that finally give them substance and history and value. Mr. Ferro, it appears, would like to take away the creative birthright of naming from all but those who are expert linguists, for fear that the name and the action will be incongruent. My dear Mr. Ferro fails to see, that is why we must name some things ourselves, through our imaginations and creations, so that we can make sense of our everyday world, bringing power to our ideas and our speech and our generative selves? Doesn't he see that experts, alone, can not own the exclusive rights to naming and defining? Doesn't he know that a lot of the healing that our world needs, comes through the power of naming? Now that these ideas have been shared with you, and if I were to also be able to convey them to Mr. Ferro, could these thoughts be freeing, somehow? Do you suppose that it could help Mr. Ferro to think of me as a helper, who is busy not only trying to liberate myself and others through the power of language, but who wants to invite him, also, to live in the freedom of words with us? If I could tell him this directly, I would summarize this by saying: "Think on these things with me, Mr. Ferro, and together we just might create a better world."

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