FORUM

A CHRONOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF THE ANDRAGOGY DEBATE

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Andragogy, defined by Knowles (1970) as "the art and science of helping adults learn" has won widespread recognition in the United States during the last fifteen years. While some people attribute the word to Knowles, andragogy was actually coined in 1833 by the German teacher, Alexander Kapp who used it to describe the educational theory of Plato (Nottingham Andragogy Group, 1983). Another German, Johan Frederick Herbart, adamantly opposed the use of the use of the term for such a purpose, and andragogy disappeared for nearly a century. The term reappeared in 1921 and was being used extensively by the 1960s in France, Yugoslavia, and Holland. Anderson and Lindeman (1927) first introduced andragogy to the United States in 1927. However, they did not attempt to develop the concept; hence andragogy had to wait over 40 years before becoming part of the lexicon of American adult education.

Knowles was exposed to the term in the mid-sixties and reintroduced it to the United States in 1968. He elaborated upon his ideas in *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy*, a book which was aimed at "exploring a comprehensive theory that will give coherence, consistency, and technological direction to adult education practice" (Knowles, 1970, Preface).

Knowles' theory was based upon four assumptions which distinguished adult learning from childhood learning: (1) as a person matures the self-concept moves from dependency toward self-direction; (2) maturity brings an accumulating reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; (3) as the person matures, readiness to learn is increasingly oriented towards the person's social roles; and (4) as the person matures the orientation towards learning becomes less subject-centered and increasingly problem-centered (Knowles, 1970, p. 39).

Andragogy quickl became popular both within and outside of adult education circles. Andrage ,ical approaches became commonly employed in adult education, nursing, and social work and even found their way into business, religion, agriculture, and law. As might be expected with any new conceptualization of a discipline, andragogy has had its opponents as well as its proponents. Much of the controversy stems from differing philosophical orientations, classification of andragogy (whether it is a theory, method, technique, or set of assumptions), and general utility or value of the term for adult education.

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THE ANDRAGOGY DEBATE

Cyril Houle launched the first major criticism in *The Design of Education* (1972). Houle, who taught Knowles during his graduate years, rejected andragogy as an organizing principle in adult education. He preferred to view education as a single fundamental human process and felt that while there was differences between children and adults, the learning activities of men and women were essentially the same as those of boys and girls. Houle perceived andragogy as a technique or set of techniques.

Jack London (1973) wrote an essay on Knowles' *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* (1970) and essentially agreed with Houle. He stressed the oneness or unity of education, as opposed to a dichotomous perspective, indicated that some andragogical principles could be applied to children, argued that another "invented or imported" phase would not contribute clarity to a field already overburdened with jargon, and suggested that adult educators were emphasizing andragogy in an effort to achieve status and respect within educational circles. These criticisms were made in the span of one and one-half pages and were relatively undetailed.

Following the early reservations voiced by Houle and London, the late 1970s witnessed a flurry of articles in *Adult Education* and *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years* which intensified and refined the debate. Leon McKenzie (1977) reignited the controversy by asking:

> Is the word 'andragogy' simply a trendy neologism ↙ ↘oid of significance or is the term pregnant with a possible new theory of prac↙ce for adult education? Does the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy represent a mere word game, a fruitless semantic joust, a futile exercise in the fabrication of jargon? Or does the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy provide a point of departure for clarifying and amplifying the complex concept of 'adult education'? (p. 225)

McKenzie saw value in the term and posited that extant disagreement stemmed from different philosophical orientations. In other words, the debate existed because adult educators had different philosophical bases. McKenzie maintained that those who subscribed to a unified outlook on education argued from an understanding of human nature derived from classical metaphysics. He reduced their approach to a syllogism:

Major:	Adults and children are essentially the same since they share the same human nature.
Minor:	For those who are essentially the same, education is essentially the same.
Conclusion:	For adults and children education is essentially the same.
Corollary:	Andragogy is an illusion which represents more jargon in the lexicon of educationese (McKenzie, 1977, p. 226).

Adult educators adhering to a differential perspective would be classified under the heading of phenomenology. This approach can also be placed in syllogistic form:

Major:	Adults and children are existentially different.

Minor:	For those who are existentially different, education is existentially different.
Conclusion:	For adults and children education is existentially different.
Corollary:	The concept of andragogy reflects a significant contribution to philosophical discourse about adult education (McKenzie, 1977, p. 227).

According to McKenzie, it is this difference in philosophical origination points that explains why intelligent and reflective adult educators can be found on both sides of this issue. They begin from conflicting philosophical premises and utilize different techniques of inquiry.

Elias (1979) took up the cudgel of Houle and London and reasserted the importance of unity in education. He did not think that the differences in adults and children justified a different educational approach. In fact, he implied that andragogy was essentially the same as progressive education and that progressive education could be applied to both adults and children. Elias believed that the general concept of education was adequate for both groups; hence, there was no need for andragogy or pedagogy.

He disagreed with McKenzie's position that the differences among adult educators were merely philosophical in nature. Furthermore, Elias (1979) made the strong charge that the andragogical-pedagogical debate was "not a matter of educational theory but a misguided attempt to enhance the status for the field of adult education" (p. 254).

Responding to Elias' critique, McKenzie again relied on philosophy. Assuming an existentialist stance, he explained that adults and children were basically different because of different modes of being-in-the-world, that they exhibited different modes of existing, that these modes were identifiable through phenomenological analysis, and that "the existential differences between children and adults require a strategic differentiation of educational practice" (McKenzie, 1979, p. 257).

McKenzie also differed with the charge that andragogy was a "superfluous symbol" for progressive education. Acknowledging lineal connections from Dewey to Lindeman to Knowles, he delineated several distinctions between progressive education and andragogy (e.g., progressive education was grounded in pragmatism while andragogy was grounded in existentialism; progressivism emphasized public school education while andragogy emphasized nontraditional settings; progressivism emphasized childhood education while andragogy emphasized adult education; progressivism represented a complete philosophical system while andragogy represented simply a paradigm).

Despite his rebuttal of Elias' ideas, McKenzie (1979) welcomed the debate and dialogue.

When faced with childhood and adulthood, the conjunctive thinker will see continuities and object to the idea of andragogy. The disjunctive thinker will spy discontinuities and applaud the idea. Both types of thinkers are needed in the field of adult education, if for no other reason than to ward off intellectual stagnation. (p. 260).

Knowles (1979), the chief spokesperson for andragogy, joined the fray to

clarify the evolution of his thoughts on this subject. He confessed that he had made a mistake in subtitling his *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* "Andragogy Versus Pedagogy." This established a controversial dichotomous view of andragogy-pedagogy even though Knowles' writings had always stressed the value of andragogical approaches even for children under certain circumstances. His revised book emphasized the continuum perspective and was appropriately subtitled "From Pedagogy to Andragogy." Additionally, Knowles indicated that adults learned better from pedagogical assumptions and approaches under certain circumstances.

Viewing andragogy more as a technique rather than a fully developed theory of adult education or adult learning, he concluded:

> So I am not saying that pedagogy is for children and andragogy is for adults, since some pedagogical assumptions are realistic for adults in some situations and some andragogical assumptions are realistic for children in some situations. And I am certainly not saying that pedagogy is bad and andragogy is good; each is appropriate given the relevant assumptions (Knowles, 1979, p. 52).

The thrust of Knowles' reasoning, however, still seemed to view pedagogy as most appropriate for children and andragogy as most appropriate for adults.

Even though Knowles eventually conceptualized andragogy more as a technique than a theory, Carlson (1979) offered more arguments that it be viewed as a theory. He responded primarily to Elias who felt that learning theory—the main theoretical base of andragogy—did not justify distinct differences in teaching. Carlson suggested that Elias may have missed the point by stressing teaching over adult learning.

He also questioned Elias' statements that all teaching involves "explaining, concluding, inferring, giving reasons, demonstrating, defining, comparing, motivating, counseling, evaluating, planning, encouraging, disciplining, and questioning." Carlson could not see how this schema accounted for Knowles' heavy emphasis on self-directed learning or Freire's commitment to dialogue.

Admitting that learning theory alone might not completely support the concept of andragogy, Carlson called for a political dimension. He pointed out that even Elias had stressed the importance of socialization of children. He then questioned whether a democratic society should have the right to socialize or resocialize adults. Carlson said that it did not have that right and that persons reaching adulthood, which is the point when society confers the legal and social rights and responsibilities of adulthood, should learn from andragogical approaches.

Finally, Carlson added a philosophical ingredient. Adult educators must possess a view of humankind consonant with the emphases of andragogy. Human beings are essentially good and capable of self-directed learning. A democratic philosophy honors the individual and his or her humanity. Subject matter is not "everything" to education but simply the vehicle for human development. Carlson (1979) urged that:

> . . . we infuse a deeper, more substantial meaning into andragogy—a philosophical and political meaning that supplements and enriches the learning theory that currently seems to support the concept. With the political and philo-

> sophical dimensions suggested here, it seems to me that we are on the way to a more profound theoretical base that may well warrant the retention and further progression of the andragogy-pedagogy dichotomy. I hope that adult educators will engage in a continuing dialogue on this issue, a dialogue that might lead to important new insights regarding the theory underlying our practice (p. 56).

The dialogue certainly continued throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Lebel (1978) felt that older adults were sufficiently different from younger adults to warrant their own theory—geragogy. Yeo (1982) preferred eldergogy as a specialized approach to education for elders. Knudson (1979) eschewed the dichotomy or continuum of andragogy-pedagogy and substituted humanagogy:

> . . . a theory of learning that takes into account the differences between people of various ages as well as their similarities. It is a human theory of learning, not a theory of 'child learning,' 'adult learning,' or 'elderly learning.' It is a theory of learning that combines pedagogy, andragogy, and geragogy and takes into account every aspect of presently accepted psychological theory (p. 261).

Courtenay and Stevenson (1983) approved of the holistic emphasis of humanagogy but still questioned whether it could be classified as a theory. They definitely opposed another "gogy" referring to older adults and warned that labeling groups could get out of hand. Apparently responding to McKenzie's argument that adults were existentially different from children, they asked if existential differences applied to other groups (e.g., racial, sexual, ethnic). For example, if Caucasians differed existentially from Negroes, would that justify Caucasiogogy versus Negrogogy? Would sex educators be classified under heterogogy, homogogy, or biagogy?

Seeing similar dangers Rachal (1983) perceived even humanagogy as obfuscatory and feared that it could lead to an educational taxonomy of infantagogy, pedagogy, adolescagogy, andragogy, and gerogogy. He cautioned against redefining pedagogy as only concerning children when many people interpreted the word as encompassing all of education. For example, how would the andragogy-pedagogy classification be reconciled with the adult educator Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed?*

Rachal noted the possible confusion inherent in Knowles' remarks that under some circumstances andragogy was appropriate for children and pedagogy for adults. He believed that the terms self-directed and teacher-directed could be substituted for andragogy and pedagogy. The latter terms would be more self-explanatory and would not be limited to any particular clientele. Acknowledging that the debate would not soon go away, he hoped that it would become more muted. However, he anticipated that even the substitution of self-directed and teacher-directed would not resolve the substantive philosophical debate between the two approaches to adult learning. He felt, though, that the debate

> . . . is mitigated by the recognition that the two approaches are not dichotomous, but rather are on a continuum. Both have an appropriate place in adult education; indeed even in a single class some synthesis is possible, even desirable. The adult educator's challenge is to effect that synthesis to the best advantage for his or her students while at the same time maintaining the educational standard and quality for which he/she is ultimately accountable (Rachal, 1983, p. 15).

ANALYSIS

An analysis of the andragogy debate suggests that this issue will continue to liven adult education discussions for some time. If truly based on different philosophical perspectives of the world, the debate may never be resolved. The same phenomena may be perceived in different ways by different people. Adult educators adhering to an integrated world-view will stress unity in education and reject andragogy. Those adhering to a differential world-view will accept andragogy and reject an all-inclusive orientation to education.

Early observations that the term andragogy would contribute little to adult education may have been premature. The word was introduced in the United States in 1927, but few people were exposed to it before the early 1970s. Since then growth in acceptance and usage had been rapid. A decade has witnessed around 200 publications relating to andragogy, and a current adult education textbook devotes considerable attention to the topic (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982). Perhaps most suprising is andragogy's penetration into the continuing education programming of other disciplines. The professional literature in nursing, social work, and other groups is replete with accounts of the utilization of andragogy in staff development and continuing education.

Andragogy is obviously an unusual and distinctive word. It seems to attract attention, especially from outside adult education, and it provides a relatively understandable framework for conceptualizing the differences in adult and child education. Continuing educators in professional disciplines may first become introduced to andragogy and then associate it with the profession of adult education. This association may then lead to additional learning from other sources in adult education. Ironically, opponents of the term (e.g., Houle, London) quite likely find that their own writings reach a larger audience because of Knowles. The concerns that Knowles receives too much credit for the ideas of others may be justified, but these concerns have to be weighed against the public relations value of Knowles and andragogy.

The charge that andragogy is an obfuscating term is also difficult to resolve. Some see it as clarifying distinctions between adult and child education while others find it confusing. Suggested substitutions (e.g., self-directed, teacher-directed) avoid the paradoxical statements of andragogy for children or pedagogy for adults, but these replacements do not fully convey what is included in the original words. For example, "self-directed" describes an important part of andragogy, but it does not adequately emphasize the importance of other components, such as immediate application of knowledge, utilization of life experiences, or problem-centered learning. Conceivably, a student could have the option of self-directed learning while the assignment required a subject-centered approach aimed at developing knowledge and skills for future use. Each choice of terms has its advantages and disadvantages. Each partially illustrates and partially obfuscates adult education. The andragogy-pedagogy classification is certainly not perfect but neither are any of the proposed alternatives.

A final area of contention centers on classification of andragogy. As previously indicated, andragogy has been classified as a theory of adult education, theory of adult learning, theory of the technology of adult learning, method of adult education, technique of adult education, and a set of assumptions. Unfortu-

nately, the nature of this particular debate essentially consists of one side claiming that it is a theory while the other side contends that it is not. Little attempt is made to select a definition of theory before attacking or defending it on such a basis. Since theory is used in both a general and a specific sense, failure to establish precise definitions precludes resolution of this conflict. Resolution may be possible if discussion proceeds from established definitions of theory, method, and technique.

Opponents and proponents of andragogy tend to argue their positions from personal and impressionistic perspectives while virtually ignoring the growing body of literature. For example, the Nottingham Andragogy Group (1983) published a 48-page monograph on andragogy which did not refer to any of the recently published research articles on this topic. This may have been understandable earlier when many of the initial articles were descriptive accounts of andragogical assumptions being applied in a plethora of settings. These articles attested to the growing popularity of andragogy, but they contributed little in the way of scientific data.

Hadley (1975) took the assumptions underlying andragogy and operationalized them into a construct measurable by an educational orientation scale. This instrument and others similar to it have been used to accumulate a developing data base. Katz (1976), Kerwin (1979, 1980, 1981), Holmes (1980), Hopkins (1981), and Jones (1982) have studied andragogical-pedagogical orientations of adult educators in a variety of settings. Christian (1982), Davenport (1984), Grubbs (1982), and Van Allen (1982) have done additional work on the orientations of adult learners. It is this research-supported data base that ultimately will determine andragogy's claim to theoretical status. The preliminary findings indicate that andragogical orientations can be defined, measured, and evaluated. Early indications are that andragogical-pedagogical orientations vary by age, sex, and other variables. If additional research continues to confirm such distinctions, andragogy may well possess the explanatory and predictive functions generally associated with a fully-developed theory.

Even if andragogy is finally regarded more as a method of instruction than as a theory, the method must be based on the best available educational research. Future discussions of andragogy should include the growing empirical base. It is time for the andragogy debate to move to a higher level.

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