Nebraska Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy

Andragogy: Alternative Interpretations and Applications summarized from Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning by Stephen Brookfield (1986)

Facilitating learning is a transactional encounter in which learner desires and educator priorities will inevitable interact and influence each other.

I. Andragogy
- A. Andragogy is described as:
  1. a theory of adult learning
  2. a theory of adult education
  3. a theory of the technology of adult learning
  4. a method of adult education
  5. a technique of adult education
  6. a set of assumptions
  7. a set of assumptions concerning adult learning processes from which we can derive a number of injunctions concerning appropriate teaching methods.
- B. Two assumptions (behavioristically inclined, competency-based) which need to scrutinized carefully (Brookfield, 1986):
  1. that educational programs should be organized around life application sequences
  2. that learning experiences should be organized around competency development categories
  3. These assumptions are problematic in that they
     - a. ignore the reflective domain of learning that accounts for most significant personal learning
     - b. Underestimates learning that takes place just for enjoyment or personal interest
- C. Other assumptions that are in question include
  1. Self-directedness is an innate characteristic of adulthood cultural influence
  2. Adult learning efforts are problem centered and adults seek immediate application of knowledge
  3. Adults always seek immediate application of learning within competency

II. Three distinct interpretations of andragogy:
- A. Lindeman refers to the way in which educators might assist adults to confront the anxiety that accompanies the transition to adulthood.
- B. Knowles offers how facilitators might base their practice on some assumptions about adult learning processes.
  1. Andragogy is an assumption
  2. Tendency toward self-directedness is not generally transferred to educational settings by adults.

3. Task of facilitator is to create educational program and setting in which adult students can develop their latent self-directed learning skills.

C. Seven components of andragogical practice

1. Facilitators must establish a climate of humanness, physically and psychologically conducive to learning:
   a. circular seating arrangements
   b. climate of mutual respect among all participants
   c. emphasizing collaborative modes of learning
   d. establishing atmosphere of mutual trust
   e. offering to be supportive
   f. emphasizing that learning is pleasant.

2. Facilitators must involve learners in mutual planning of methods and curricular directions. People will make firm commitments to activities in which they feel they have played a participatory, contributory role.

3. Facilitators must involve participants in diagnosing their own learning needs.

4. Facilitators must encourage learners to formulate their own learning objectives.

5. Facilitators must encourage learners to identify resources and to devise strategies for using such resources to accomplish their objectives.

6. Facilitators must help learners to carry out their learning plans.

7. Facilitators must involve learners in evaluating their learning. Principally though the use of qualitative evaluative modes.

D. The Nottingham Andragogy Group sees a process through which adults become critically aware of the assumptions they have uncritically accepted as governing their conduct and through which they attempt to re-create their lives.

1. Andragogy regards adults as contextually based, that is, social beings who are products of history and culture.

2. Reinterpret andragogy as development of critical awareness

3. Andragogical approach to instruction is one in which adults are encouraged to think critically and not accept another's interpretation or meaning.

4. Twelve salient features identified as essential to the andragogic process
   a. nonprescriptive attitude
   b. issue-centered curricula
   c. problem posing
   d. praxis
   e. continuous negotiation
   f. shared responsibility for learning
   g. valuing process
   h. dialogue
   i. equality
   j. openness
   k. mutual respect
   l. integrated thinking and learning

5. Evaluation of development of critical awareness should be integrated into andragogical process and involve all participants. It can be documented in four ways:
   a. Document change in style and content of verbal exchange in classroom
   b. Observe sharing of power and responsibilities
   c. Individual reflection
   d. All group members can reflect on changing nature of group progress.

Go Forward

Return to Table of Contents
Return to NISAL Homepage