

THE LINGUISTICS OF ANDRAGOGY AND ITS OFFSPRING

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ABSTRACT

The use and meaning of the term, andragogy, has spawned not only a considerable quantity of discussion, called the "Andragogy Debate"; it has also fostered the creation of additional terms intended to define either the broad field of adult education itself or some designated portion of that larger arena. This paper, and the accompanying presentation, examines many of these terms and points out their etymological and, in some cases, semantic, deficiencies. The presentation closes 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.

INTRODUCTION

The "Andragogy Debate" has experienced a long, sometimes glorious, sometimes laborious, and certainly well-documented life span (see, for example, Pratt, 1993; Davenport, 1987; Davenport & Davenport, 1985). This debate has included discussion and disagreement about the definition, content, strength, and applicability of andragogy as a theory of adult learning. It has also spawned a number of ancillary discussions on a number of related topics.

Although andragogy has neither established itself universally among educators as a viable theory of learning for adults nor, as a term, entered the common American parlance, theorists and practitioners alike still have created a variety of other terms, apparently inspired by and based on the word andragogy, to define the entire field of adult education or some portion of that larger arena. Courtenay and Stevenson (1983) have labelled this phenomenon "the threat of gogymania" (p. 10).

THE PROBLEM AND CONCERN

Lost in this morass (the word used by Davenport, 1987), however, has been careful and appropriate attention to the actual terms which have been used and proposed--their linguistic form and construction (morphology), their meaning (semantics), and their use and application within the context of human discourse in general and adult education in particular. Most of the proposed terms are linguistically bankrupt and semantic foolishness; they are, in fact, nonsense words.

ANALYSES

The majority of this study involves the examination and analysis of 1) the linguistics (morphology and semantics) of terms proposed to describe the field, or portions of the field, of adult education and 2) the suggested use for such terms, considering both the theoretical foundations, if any, undergirding these words and their recommended uses. This discussion flows naturally, then, into implications for practitioners, from professional to voluntary, of adult education and its various categories and applications.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The linguistic examination of the terms falls into three categories: 1) the improper form and use of the common suffix, -gogy; 2) the use of incomplete and incompatible stems; and 3) concerns related to definitions of these terms. This analysis is based on the use and meaning of the ancestors of these morphemes and words in the original Greek (using Liddell & Scott, 1940, as the primary authority), Latin (using Lewis & Short, 1879, as the primary authority), or other language family sources and the general and accepted rules for the formation of words in the English language, American version. The suffix, -gogy. The common suffix is discussed first because this is the place at which most suggested terms founder from the start; they make use of what is actually a non-existent suffix, -gogy. Fortunately, Knowles (1980) avoided this pitfall by seeking the advice of the publishers of the Merriam-Webster

Knowles (1980) avoided this pitfall by seeking the advice of the publishers of the Merriam-Webster dictionaries about the possibility of using the spelling, androgogy, rather than that to which we have become accustomed, andragogy (see Appendix A, pp. 252-254).¹ Crawford (as cited in Knowles, 1980) provides the following summary:

The elements to be joined are the stem *andr-* of the Greek word *aner* "man", [sic] and the Greek word *agogos* "leader". [sic] The first element of a Greek compound is regularly the stem (not the nominative or dictionary form). There is no *o* in the stem of the word for "man"; the form *andr-os* is the genitive case, "man's", [sic] the *o* belonging to the case ending. If, however, the stem of the first element ends in a consonant and the second element begins with a consonant, an *o* is commonly inserted to facilitate pronunciation. . . . But where the second element of a compound begins with a vowel, not only is no connecting *o* needed after a consonant, but stems ending in *o* or other vowels drop that vowel (e.g. *mon-archy*, *phil-ately*). What does not happen in any circumstances is dropping the initial vowel of a second element. We do not say *mono-rchy* or *philo-tely*; much less should we say *andr-o-gogy*. (p. 254)

This means that the suffix *-gogy* has no meaning; the morpheme must be *-agogy*. Had those who would invent or coin new words, usually inspired by the term *andragogy*, given heed to this readily accessible piece of information and advice, the world of adult education might have been spared some of the malformations that have been suggested and which are discussed next.

The suggested stems. Three suggested terms--*gerogogy*, *synergogy*, and *anthrogogy*-- share two problems in common: 1) The suffix, as discussed above, is incorrect and has no meaning. 2) The suggested stems are truncated and, consequently, also fail to convey meaning. The root for *gerogogy*, a term suggested by Battersby (1982), Lebel (1978), and Pearson and Wessman (1996), should be *geront-*, as in *gerontology*. The correct form of the word would be *gerontagogy*. Now the English word *geriatrics* lends some support to the use of *ger-* as a root. However, as Klein (1966) notes, *geriatrics* was formed improperly; it was "coined by I. L. Nascher (1863-1944) in 1914 [from the] Greek *geron*, 'an old man', [sic] and *iatria*, 'a healing'. [sic] . . . The correct form would have been *gerontiatrics*" (p. 652).

Mouton and Blake (1984) propose *synergogy* as the term that would best describe their concept of a "systematic approach to learning in which the members of small teams learn from one another through structured interactions" (p. xii). They also provide the etymology of the term. "Synergogy is derived from two Greek words: *synergos* ('working together') and *agogus* ('leader of'), which has come to mean 'teacher.' Synergogy thus refers to 'working together for shared teaching" (pp. xi-xii). Their analysis is basically correct,² but the result should be a different form, as they acknowledge in a footnote: "Synergagogy is technically correct, according to conventions of creating words from Greek roots, but needlessly difficult. Synergogy is an acceptable alternative" (p. xii). Yes, *synergogy* is the correct term; whether it is needlessly difficult is open to debate. However, baldly stating that *synergogy* is an acceptable alternative without any supporting evidence is unacceptable; saying that it's so doesn't make it so.

Trott (1991), responds to the question, "Is there a generic set of principles that guide lifelong learning?" by creating "the word 'anthrogogy' to name the way out of my confusion, [sic] and provide me with a means of understanding my ideals and readdressing my goals as a teacher" (p. 4). Again, there is a problem with the stem. The Greek word behind this formation is apparently *anthropos*; consequently, the stem should be *anthrop-*, and the coined word, *anthropagogy*. Trott was aware of this possibility; he notes Benne's use of *anthropogogy* [sic] as "a rallying call to the education professoriate to address education's mission" (as cited in Trott, 1991, p. 5). Trott should have kept that word, even with the problematic suffix, rather than truncate the stem.

The terms *humanagogy* and *eldergogy* present a different problem. These are examples of a stem from one language being wedded to a suffix from another language; this is not a standard process in English word formation. Knudson (1979, 1980) suggests *humanagogy* as "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" (Knudson, 1979, p. 261). However, *human* is an English word derived from the Latin *humanus*; *-agogy* is a Greek suffix. Similarly, *eldergogy*, proposed by Yeo (1982) to serve a purpose

similar to Lebel's (1978) gerogogy, uses a stem of Germanic origin that has come to us via Old and Middle English. Of course, the suffix is also problematic.

Definitions. Since -gogy is improperly formed, it is a suffix without meaning. However, the morpheme -agogy, as used in andragogy and its progeny, has been adopted from the word pedagogy. Pedagogy means, literally, "leading a boy." A pedagogue (the Greek word is paidagogos) was the slave who went with a boy from home to school and back again. He was charged with the responsibility of the boy's safe journey as well as that of guarding against potential truancy. He might also guide the boy's study at home. Over time (even in Greek literature) pedagogy took on, then, the meaning of "training, guiding, educating, moderating," and a pedagogue became the person who did these things. It is this later use that has led to the current definition of pedagogy as "the art or profession of teaching" (American Heritage, p. 914). The concept of "teaching children" no longer seems to inhere to the term pedagogy.

These observations lead to definitional concerns about the attempts to coin new words. Andragogy gains meaning only when compared to pedagogy. However, andragogy, strictly speaking, becomes a subset of pedagogy, if the definition cited above is accurate, rather than a contrasting term. Anthrogy and humanagogy, if these were viable terms, would carry definitions synonymous with the definition pedagogy now carries. The coining of such terms becomes meaningful only if the second meaning of pedagogy is used: "preparatory training or instruction" (American Heritage, p. 914). However, as argued below, there does not appear to be sufficient need for additional words if there is not something substantial for those words to describe.

THEORETICAL/SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

As Courtenay and Stevenson (1983) suggest, the need for such an array of terms is highly doubtful. The Andragogy Debate raises serious questions about the actual existence of a theory of adult learning. Many see the descriptions advanced by Knowles (1980) under the heading, andragogy, as a useful set of assumptions that serve the educators of adults well in practice; however, they do not view andragogy as an actual theory. Much less do such terms as gerogogy, eldergogy, and synergogy define a theory. Rather, they highlight more limited spheres of practice that, in fact, draw upon many of the same principles that the educators of adults use in other settings with other populations. Furthermore, the term educational gerontology (which, by the way, is properly formed) already exists to distinguish the special features and aspects involved in working with older adults.

Humanagogy and anthrogy have been proposed as ways to get out of the supposed andragogy/pedagogy dichotomy. Again, however, there is no new theoretical base requiring the use of such terms. Furthermore, educators of adults are already faced with a plethora of choices to describe what may be unique about working with adults in their particular setting; among them are lifelong learning or education, continuing education, nontraditional education, community education, recurrent education, and nonformal and informal education--as well as the term, adult education. One is certainly hard pressed to come up with good reasons for adding to this list.

PRACTITIONER CONCERNS

Qoheleth said, "Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12, NRSV). Apparently the same is true of the inventing of terms for the field of adult education, or portions of it, even though there is no need for such terms. The major purposes of this investigation are to warn against 1) the seductive temptation to coin and use "cute" or "catchy" terms for either the entire adult education enterprise or its various segments and 2) the application of these terms in ways that imply a theoretical base or foundation for practice--or the actual practice itself--when there is a lack of any clear evidence to support that area of practice as unique from other aspects either of adult education or of education in general. When we, as educators of adults, fall prey to the enticement to use words which, in themselves, are patently linguistic nonsense and which, furthermore, are based on insufficient, shaky, and inadequate theoretical underpinnings, we present ourselves as fools who possess neither linguistic astuteness nor a sound basis for our practice. We communicate to other professionals and practitioners, with whom we must interact as we apply and practice our expertise, that we are not serious about, prepared for, or competent in what we do.

NOTES

1) Knowles confuses nominative (dictionary) forms with the roots, which are based, as Crawford explains in his letter, on the genitive (possessive) form. 1) Knowles states that the Greek word for "child" is paid. (This statement has led others, e.g., Davenport, 1987, to make the same mistake.) However, the nominative form is pais; the root, which is used for the formation of compound words, is paid-. 2) Further, Knowles states that the Greek word for "man" is andros. As Crawford explains, the nominative form is aner; the root is andr-.

2) Mouton and Blake have made a couple of mistakes. First the dictionary form of the second term is agogos, not agogus (it is a Greek, not a Latin, word). Secondly, the word means, simply, "leader." "Leader of" implies the use of the genitive (possessive) form, agogou. Knowles (1980), by the way, uses both spellings (the second being incorrect) in his letter to Merriam-Webster.

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