

# ANDRAGOGY FOR ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*There is much information available to the public through published course curricula, syllabi, and online course descriptions at university websites from which we could speculate what is taught to undergraduate business students in the United States. What we do not have as much information about is how the courses are taught. What teaching methodologies are used? And, to what levels do instructors of business classes understand and practice andragogical principles? As competition for adult students in higher education becomes more intense, not only what we teach, but how we teach it becomes more important.*

*This paper will review and summarize the literature that suggests a significant theoretical difference between andragogy and pedagogy. The premise is that the assumptions behind pedagogy, which in the original Greek means “child conductor,” do not always fit the needs of the adult learner. Andragogy, derived from the Greek word for “adult or man,” provides a better model for the growing number of nontraditional students enrolled in many universities.*

*This paper will present a theoretical foundation for curriculum development based on andragogical principles. The paper will also present a model with an example of innovative learning which meets the demands of these student populations. Finally, the authors make suggestions for how to plan a course based on the principles of andragogy.*

## INTRODUCTION

The student population of colleges and universities in the U.S. has changed dramatically in the past thirty years. Although there have been numerous demographic changes, it is questionable how many university professors consider their impact. Educators often speak about pedagogical models, but in our research we found few who mention andragogical models and how to apply them. We believe that new models of learning in higher education must be developed based on the theory of andragogy.

Malcolm Knowles' (1977) developed the paradigm of andragogy as we know it today (see Table 1). Lawson (1998) described Knowles' work as pivotal in terms of a shift in the educational paradigm. It is very interesting to note that, although in academic terms Knowles' work might be considered “dated,” that most of the articles reviewed for this paper cited at least one article by Knowles and proclaimed him the unmistakable “founder” of adult learning doctrine. Additionally, no one refutes his claims, but only supports them with additional arguments. So, for this paper, we believe it is appropriate to use Knowles' model as a foundation for course development, and to cite

additional supportive literature. Knowles defined andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (1980, page 43), and claimed that there were four critical andragogical assumptions of adult learners which differ from the assumptions of pedagogy (Knowles, 1977).

Table 1
Knowles' Principles of Andragogy (1977, p. 39):
1. His self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.
2. He accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. His readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the development tasks of his social roles.
4. His time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness

### Principle 1: Learner as Self-Directed

These principles are not mutually exclusive; by their very nature and in keeping with Knowles' intention, they are part of a system of learning theory. Only for the purposes of analysis and example, we will explain each principle individually. In his first principle of andragogy, Knowles (1977) claims that superior andragogical learning conditions should motivate the learners to feel a need to learn. Because adults regard education as a life-time activity, they are able to learn more effectively in a self-directed environment, which is quite different from the environment of traditional students (Patterson & Pegg, 1999). Learning as an iterative, dynamic process of change, dependent on the self-efficacy of the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning is summarized by Galbraith (1990) who stated that "learners and facilitators are involved in a continual process of activity, reflection upon activity, collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection, and collaborative analysis, and so on" (p.10). In an analysis of undergraduate management education, Gammie (1995) concluded that “maximum flexibility and student self-governance” result in the most effective programs.

As Reed (1993) indicated, adults should be motivated through internal rather than external means. In support of an andragogical model, students should be dynamically involved in planning their learning process (Cervero & Wilson, 2001).

### Principle 2: Learner as Resource

Knowles' second principle claims that adults can be a resource for their own learning and the learning of others. According to Patterson & Pegg (1999), collaboration was the most cited difference in adult learners when compared to children. Galbraith (1990) claims that collaboration is a key ingredient for successful adult learning methodologies. Using an andragogical model requires that educators undergo a basic change in the way that they feel about learning and allow learners to rely on themselves as resources of learning (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Cell, 1984). The model must follow Knowles' theory on andragogy and must value nontraditional students' life experiences and awareness of self (Uehling, 1996).

### **Principle 3: Learning as Developmental**

The third principle in Knowles' andragogical model is focused on the learners' developmental goals. The andragogy paradigm requires that instructors choose strategies that will enable adults to achieve their learning goals. By "romancing" the individual adult learner, organizations and society are improved because "a society whose central dynamic, change--economic and technological, political, social, cultural, even theological-- requires a citizenry that is able to change" (Knowles, 1980, p.36). This suggests a focus on learning to learn, which may be a developmental goal of the mature learner. Lawson (1998) supports the importance of andragogy in helping adult learners make career transitions and claims that andragogy can be a powerful tool in influencing the delivery of services to adults. "Program evaluation procedures can help determine if the participants in the learning activity reached their educational objectives and desired outcomes; they can be used in the planning process and for program improvement; and they can be used for program justification and accountability" (Galbraith, 1990, p.8-16). Beaman (1998) indicated that adults "need assessment not just for evaluation, but also for motivation and feedback. Assessment for adult learners can also be empowering and can lead to a richer, deeper learning experience" (p. 58). Learners may develop skills and self-awareness through feedback and evaluation of others' behavior in the classroom (Saunders, 1991). "The driving force in lifelong learning is not the acquisition of knowledge per se as it is amongst youngsters, but rather the self-actualization of individuals of themselves and through the organizations where they work and live. That can scarcely be accomplished through a normative curriculum or through any model of higher education provision based on the philosophy of 'faculty knows most - and best' " (p.328) (Prestoungrange, 2002).

### **Principle 4: Learning as Application to Real World**

The last principle of andragogy according to Knowles (1977) is the need for immediate application of theory to practice and the related focus on problems as opposed to content. The learning strategies should be less involved with theory, and more focused on emphasizing practical applications of knowledge relevant to the real world (Patterson & Pegg, 1999). Similarly, Galbraith (1990) claims that successful education will relate theory to practice, and Wankel & DeFillippi (2003) advocate bringing "real world" opportunities into the classroom through simulations, cases, technology, and collaborative learning opportunities between educational institutions and business. There is little evidence to suggest that making higher education for nontraditional adult learners should be anything but as real as possible, and as immediately applicable to their own lives as is reasonable.

In the Summer Semester 2003, one of the authors (Thompson) designed and facilitated a course which encompassed many of the andragogical principles presented in this article. The design of the course will be presented in terms of Knowles' model of andragogy.

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