Is Androgogy at Its Best in OUM?

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Androgogy was advocated by Malcolm Knowles as the art and science of helping adults learn. According to this model, adults learn distinctively from adolescents. Does this model apply to our learners?

To find out, we need to investigate whether our learners fulfil the assumptions of androgogy. A general inspection of androgogy at OUM shows the following:

- Our learners need to spend close to 80% of their study hours in self-managed learning. So they are self-directed up to a point;
- Most of our learners have a reservoir of knowledge due to their experience and prior learning from training, work and life;
- Our learners are ready to learn because they could have quit if they wanted to;
- Our learners do not want to learn irrelevant stuff or be assessed on things that have no application of knowledge; and
- Our learners are motivated to complete the programme or else they would not be willing to sacrifice time and money for it.

If one delves into androgogy, one might see that it is not a teaching/learning model but rather, a model that requires the tutor to acknowledge the nature of an adult learner in a distance learning environment.

Androgogy works best when the unique needs of adult learners are recognised and addressed through suitable pedagogical instructions and methods.

Although OUM learners are required to engage in self-managed learning most of the time, they are dependent learners up to an extent. They depend on modules, tutorials and online learning support. The pedagogy of teaching is incorporated in these elements. Hence, androgogy cannot work on its own without pedagogy.

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The model of androgogy is effective if it works as a process of engaging adult learners in the making of learning experiences. Tutors can play a crucial role in developing the learning process.

Common grievances among tutors are that OUM learners are not proactive and do not discuss or actively participate in the class or online forum. Does this imply that the assumptions of androgogy are untrue for our learners?

Before the model is discarded, let's ask ourselves: "Have we geared our teaching strategy towards leveraging on the unique capabilities and attributes of adult learners?"

Albert Einstein once said, "Insanity is doing things the same way and expecting different results." So, we cannot continuously use the same methods but expect different results. We need to provide opportunities for androgogical learning by creating small-group discussions and breaking away from traditional room arrangements. But we must be discerning in using the learner-centred approach as it is not apt for all adult education settings.

The assessment component is another crucial aspect of adult learning that needs attention. Assessment questions and methods should be formulated in such a way that they could evaluate and reveal the actual ability of the adult learners. The learning aspects of androgogy should be reflected on in designing assessment for adult learners.

To sum it up, like any adult learner, OUM learners require help in their learning. Androgogy has some potential as it recognises the unique nature and needs of OUM's adult learners.

Nevertheless, the success of adult learning rests on the teaching approach that is contextual in the adult learning setting. Tutors should be able to manoeuvre learning strategies from a combination of diverse education theories but bear one purpose, that is, to engage learners in effective learning experiences.

So is androgogy at its best in OUM? The answer lies in our tutoring!