

ANDROGOGY – WHAT’S THAT?

By Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh

Have you ever wondered whether children and adults learn in the same ways? Are they motivated by the same reasons? Do they approach assessment challenges similarly? As a tutor, do you differentiate between child and adult learners and design your lessons accordingly? Or are they all the same to you?

Educationists have, over the years, created two different learning models for child and adult learners, which are called pedagogy and androgogy respectively. Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997), who was known as the apostle of androgogy, was convinced that adults learned differently from children. He defined androgogy as the art and science of helping adults to learn.

Androgogy, which is also called andragogy, assumes that when an individual develops self-direction and independent learning, he psychologically metamorphoses into an adult learner. An adult learner will resent it if he is not allowed to be self-directing. In fact, according to Knowles, their learning process would be hindered if they felt they were being treated like children.

For us to understand androgogy, we need to understand pedagogy as well. Both terms come from Greek words, with “pedagogy” meaning “child-leading” and “androgogy” meaning “man-leading.” Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching children while androgogy is a theory of adult learning. In pedagogy, the teacher decides how and what a learner learns, thus promoting dependency on the teacher. In contrast, androgogy is learner-centred and the learner is not as dependent on the teacher for knowledge.

Knowles said both perspectives were so different that the term “androgogy” rather than “pedagogy” should be used to refer to adult learning activities. He added that adult learners differ in several ways:

- They are self-directed and willing to take responsibilities in making decisions;
- They have a vast and growing reservoir of experience and prior

knowledge which becomes a rich resource for learning;

- They are ready to learn things which are relevant to their job, personal life and social roles;
- They are problem-oriented, thereby focusing more on immediate application of knowledge to solve problems; and
- They have internal motivation to learn.

An adult learner will resent it if he is not allowed to be self-directing.

In 1980, Knowles altered his stance on the differences between pedagogy and androgogy. Now, he said androgogy was simply another model of assumptions about adult learners which was to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions. Just as one size would not fit all, one teaching model would not be suitable for all learners. Therefore, he suggested, the purpose and situation at hand should be considered in deciding whether to use the pedagogical or androgogical model of teaching. The use of both models, could, in fact, be beneficial to adult learners. Pedagogical principles could be used in adult learning according to the needs of the learners.



Knowles referred to pedagogy as a content model and androgogy as a process model. In pedagogy, the teacher designed the teaching methods so that the content would be covered, organised and taught in the media effectively. In contrast, in androgogy, the teacher emphasised on the designing and transmission of the content that would help the learner in acquiring it.

Knowles’ views were widely criticised. The following questions were posed:

- Is the androgogical model an attempt to describe characteristics of adult learners? Or is it a set of prescriptive state ments on what adult learners should be like?
- Is androgogy a theory or set of assumptions about learning; or a theory or model of teaching; or a theory or a set of guidelines for practice?
- Could the androgogical model succeed with two quite different and opposing learning theories – humanist and behavioural – integrated in it?

Although Knowles shed great insight into androgogy, it has yet to receive comprehensive analysis. Thus, the question remains – Does an adult learn differently from a child?