Research Paper

Concept and Assumptions of Andragogy: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

In fast changing environment due to globalization, adults are facing challenges in their technological, socio-psychological and economical settings. They have to learn new attitudes, knowledge and skills and improve continuously for survival as well as for growth. On other side, trainers find it difficult to train adults and often they complain about the rigidity of adults in learning new things. Andragogy which focuses on the principles of adult education, tries to address these issues in separately rather than relying on pedagogy which is related to principles of child education. Researcher has reviewed the concept of andragogy, context and critical issues associated with it. It will help to explore the field of adult education which will emerge as a promising field in coming future.

Though the word 'andragogy' first used by Kapp, a German educator,in 1833 while describing elements of Plato's education theory in which Andr- meaning 'man' and 'Agogos-meaning 'leading' was stated,it became a professional field of practice since 1920s, the exhaustive debates between pedagogy (art and science of child learning) and andragogy (art and science of adult learning) have taken place only after worldwar II.The critical and detailed account of both has been discussed first by Knowles (1988) in his book titled 'The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy'.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ANDRAGOGY:

According to Knowles, Elwood and Swanson (1998), in pedagogy, child learner is dependent and instructor determines what learners want through learning. Experience of child learners is less valued. Child learning mainly happens through external demands. His/her motivations are extrinsic and the role of reinforcements are crucial. Children are interested in subject content and knowledge rather than handling real life situations. As child grows and moves towards adulthood, such theory and models have seemed to be less fruitful. Knowles, Elwood and Swanson (1998), have therefore challenged them and tried to formulate separate

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assumptions for adult learning i.e. andragogy. Knowles (1980) suggested spirit of mutuality for joint inquiry coupled with acceptance and respect for learners as essential ingredients of effective adult training design.

Few important assumptions put forward by researchers in andragogy are as follows:

1. Before learning, adults must know 'WHY' something is important (Knowles, Elwood and Swanson (1998). The first stage applied in an andragogy class is to convey to the adult students the need to learn. Before 'what' and 'how' the question of 'why' this material is to be learned should be addressed. Once the relevance of the contentfor their livesis established, objectives of learning and commitment towards them can be arrived at. It helps to make learners as well as instructors more responsive(Knox 1986).

2. Adults should be treated as if they are self-directed learners. Knowles (1975), described self-directed learning as 'a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes'.

3. Andragogy values learner's life experiencesand insights gained through them. The reservoir of life experiences of learner is considered here as a rich resource for learning.

4. Learner's readiness to learn depends on his/her need which arises through social rolesand life situations. Instructor's role here is to connect the learning material to life situations of learners and equip learners to cope with them.

5. Adult learners are problem-centered rather than subject-centered. They are interested in immediate application of knowledge gained through learning. The validity of instruction is determined by the impact it leaves on learners' lives.

6. Adult learners though influenced to some extent by external pressures, their main motivation is internal demands to enhance quality, efficiency and effectiveness of different aspects of life

The closer look reveals that pedagogy and andragogy are not mutually exclusive but instructor has to choose a right combination of methods and tools from both. The age-wise physical growth though brings maturity in mental functioning in general, it may or may not be associated with the learning material.In case of slow adult learners or specially-abled population, it is more visible. The appropriate combination of principles and practices from both sciences will be effective in these cases. Some ways to exercise them are to motivate learners to understand the need beforeinstructing, to assign them tasks to choose learning resources and methods, to allow them to participate in evaluation of their learning (Knowles, Elwood and Swanson (1998).

CRITICAL ISSUES:

1. Andragogy: A theory, a model or a concept?

From 1970s onward, much critical debates were surrounded around the validity of theory of andragogy. Hartree (1984) disagreed to accept it as a theory and described it as principles of

good practices in adult learning. Shields and Tajalli (2006) perceivedit as a tool that guides exploration of a problem at hand However, scholars likeSavicevic (1999), Henschke (2003) and Reischmann (2003) explicitly claimed 'andragogy as a discipline, the subject of which is the study of education and learning of adults in all its forms of expression'. Boulton-Lewis et al. (1996) have demanded sound empirical base to establish it as a science. Knowles (1989) himself accepted this criticism and agreed that it was a conceptual framework and may serve a basis for emergent theory having significant qualitative and quantitative research material available. Also, he cautioned critics and appealed themnot limit the concept of empirical research to laboratories and other highly controlled environments.

2.   Adult learning: For adults only?

A valid criticism, still ongoing, is that the principles of adult learning may not be applicable in case of many adults butthey can be applied in case of bright children. Mental age is more important than chronological age which is not taken into consideration while defining 'adult learning'. Same is true in case of motivation. Adults may be motivated through external demands and pressures while children may show higher curiosity and intrinsic pleasure to master content. In few adult cases, the deeper life experiences may have negative impact on learning (Merriam, Mott, and Lee, 1996). On the contrary, few children may possess a range of qualitatively richer experiences than adults due to their peculiar environment (Hanson, 1996).

3.   Are all adults self-directed?

It seems that Knowles et al. (1998) have attributed the characteristics of self-directedness to adults unequivocally. This basic assumption having American leaning was not accepted by others. Boulton-Lewis et al. (1996) questioned this assumption. In their study conducted on adults in formal learning settings, they didn't find adults as self-directed learners. In fact, adults were behaved as university students and viewed learning as a function of gathering subject knowledge. Van Gent (1996), a Dutch scholar, criticized it as 'prescriptive approach' rather than general-descriptive approach. In family and community settings like church, temples, masjids or in civic education, 'WE' is more important than the 'ME or SELF'. Another criticism levelled against concept of self-directedness was that it was 'too linear' approach, moving from need diagnosis, identification of resources, formats for instruction and evaluation. Many models developed since 1980s are more interactive and have taken into account the context of learning. In Danis's (1992) model, for example, strategies for learning, phases during learning process, content, learner, environmental and contextual factors etc. have been taken into account while carrying the processof Self-Directed Learning (SDL).

4.   Andragogy: Full prescription or only a segment of education of adults?

Initially it was believed that andragogy was a prescription which had explained all adult learning. But nowadays it is accepted that "adult education" is only a segment of the wider field of the education of adults. Knowles et al. (1998) has also recognized itin later years and suggested to adopt as well as adapt it as per needs.

New terms like term 'life-wide education' (Reischmann, 2003), distance learning, E-learning, life-situations as an opportunity for learning etc. have widened the understanding that the education of adults may happen in more situations and contexts than just in adult

education. Learning in social movements like peace-corps, self-help groups, groups for gender equality etc. are good examples. In contemporary world, informal settings are for learning are utilized to a greater extent in adult education.

After reviewing various studies Marsick and Volpe (1999) have summarized following characteristics of informal learning.

- It is integrated with daily routine.
- It is less conscious.
- Internal and external jolts are triggers for it to happen.
- It is influenced by chance and is haphazard.
- It promotes reflection and action through inductive process.

Transformational learning is another area where the learner's form of learning is challenged which ultimately results not only in change but also in an improved capacity. During the process, the learner faces disorientation, dilemma first and then through inductive-deductive processes, critical reflection and reevaluation of assumptions, transformation takes place (Mezirow, 1991).

CONCLUSION:

The andragogy is heavily learner-centric. It may be used both for children and adults by taking their mental and learning competence into consideration. The strengths of andragogy lies in flexibility, broad applicability, consideration of learner's perspective and strong connecting bond with other learning theories (Roberts, 2007).It is particularly valuable in teaching life applications (likesocial and civic skills)and career growth competencies in adulthood. It shows explicitly humanistic orientation, which suits in today's democratic global environment (Henschke, 2003).

In a nutshell, it is more an art and technical application of socio-psychological knowledge rather than a science of adult education (Pastuovic, 1995).

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