

In the Classroom 44

Andragogy - Treating Learners as Adults

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking time to listen to my podcast. I certainly appreciate it. It means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me, and I do appreciate it. For most of our academic lives our education has been crafted under the term pedagogy. Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. However, if you start breaking down the term, you'll get the Greek word for Paedos, which means boy or child and Agogos, which is leader. Really looking at pedagogy for the greater part of our academic career, we've been receiving instruction designed for teaching children. That puts the instructor very much upfront. It assumes that there's no knowledge or experience and therefore it is transmitting content to the learner. But when we get to college, we have to start making some other assumptions.

We have to assume that students that we are teaching are coming to us with some experience and some knowledge, and this is even more so when we're talking about post-traditional students. Shouldn't we start switching from pedagogy to instruction that is primarily for adult? This week we are going to be talking about Andragogy. I can't wait to do this because I think this shift can certainly help in motivation in the classroom. I'll tell you why. First of all, what is Andragogy? Very simply, Andragogy is a method or technique used to teach an adult. The term actually came about in 1833 with a German teacher named Alexander Kapp. He's the one that coined the term. However, it's really known due to an American educator named Malcolm Knowles and his advancements in this field.

This theory was really in the 1960s through the 1990s and others have picked up and moved it forward since. Malcolm Knowles, he put a lot of things on the map that really made adult learning or this concept of Andragogy brought it really to the forefront. In his research he basically defined six assumptions about adult learner. This is really what separates it from the idea of pedagogy is these six assumptions. The first assumption is adult learners are self-directed. This idea of being self-directed that they will find a problem and start tackling that problem, and they don't need somebody to tell them even to consider the problem. The idea is that they are moving away from a dependence on an instructor. That to learn they don't necessarily need someone, but that's not to say to get rid of instructors.

Instructors are guides and facilitators and will help shape the learning path, but really a lot of what we're doing is trying to teach them to be lifelong learners and to be self-directed. The second assumption which is really important is that the learners come to the table with prior experience for learning. They want that experience to be used in the classroom, they want to be respected and not discounted and not talked to. That they want to enter in dialogue as part of their learning journey. They want their experience to be used as a resource in the learning environment. Now with this, this

doesn't mean that we can let learners just go maybe with false understanding, that we need to challenge these learners, take them out of their comfort zone, we have to disrupt what they know, but we also have to respect them for knowing that.

As people develop, they're picking up all kinds of things, and they're creating these connections to previous knowledge and they keep building on that, and they want to have that self-worth of what they're doing. One way to certainly approach this idea of taking into this previous experience and that sometimes you need to shape it in a different direction is really just asked them to experiment. By doing experiments, people if they're not satisfied with it, they can go back to their old ways, but this gets them to move to try something new. Another assumption is adult learners are ready to learn. They come to the table very often with a problem they want to solve, and they're ready to go, and they're eager to get going.

Often, they also need to know why when they're not self-directing this instruction, they need to know why they have to learn what they need to learn. This concept of explaining why, why the course is important, why this program is important, why this activity in the course is important, why, just answering why is really critical. Adults are not the only ones that can benefit from it. If you can get somebody to move from the concept of that I have to do something to where they want to. You can get there by getting them to buy in on why it's important, and so that'll help move the conversation around. The other assumption about adult learners is they want to apply new knowledge immediately. Whatever their learning has to be applicable and relevant to what they're doing, what they're trying to solve.

That's why it's often tied to Problem Based Learning is because very often they're going out to try to solve a problem. Therefore, they enter into this learning mode in order to do it. The more that you can tap into their life situation and things that they are doing, the better the learning will be. Number five, adult learners learn best through Problem-Based Learning, they learn through experience. If it's all theoretical, and you're not getting them to put that theory into practice, it's a tougher learning opportunity. You need to create activities where they're going to put it into practice. The course I'm teaching right now is on program planning and evaluation. I was struggling on finding the right assignment for the course, but I think I finally tapped into it.

What it is, is they actually have to build a program plan, but based on something that is important to them, and that's pretty much what we're doing, use this program plan and make sure that it's a program that's applicable to them. I'm thinking it's working out quite well. My students seem to be liking it. They're finding it relevant to what they're doing and therefore, dealing with a problem that they want to solve. All right, and the final assumption, number six is that they are intrinsically motivated for learning. That it really comes down that they want to self-improve. It's not necessarily chasing grades, not chasing that they're worried about if they're going to fail. That they're really trying to improve their quality of life, improve how they can do what they do. Those are the six assumptions.

Self-directed, prior experience for learning, they're ready to learn, they want to apply new knowledge immediately, learn best through Problem Based Learning, and have

intrinsic motivation for those. Those are the six assumptions. I talked about pedagogy earlier, and I'm talking about these assumptions for Andragogy. How do these differ? One, I'm not saying that we need to dismiss or discard the idea of pedagogy, because pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. More specifically if you dive a little deeper historically it's been teaching children, and there's a place for that. There certainly is a place for that even with adult, but there's also a place for Andragogy. By knowing both you can expand your toolbox and be able to help learners more appropriately based on this knowledge.

Let's talk about pedagogy first. Pedagogy is considered a content model, that you have content or information that you are presenting students. That it's very much dependent on the instructor, the instructor is the sage on the stage, and they are pushing this content to the student. The instructor is responsible for what is taught, how it's learned, and they dictate to the students on what they have to learn and in what order. There's a reason for this, that the learner has very little experience that you can tap into this activity. The instructor is the one coming with the most experience and driving this conversation forward. As you move along the spectrum, as you go from kindergarteners and primary school and you move up to grad school, these grad students are coming to the table with a lot of experience.

That they're doing a lot of self-directed learning, and they're bringing a lot of this to the table. That's why I said it's on a spectrum we have to know where our students are at, at that moment in order to best help them. In pedagogy really the concept is a process of acquiring knowledge, that learning is all about acquiring knowledge, and externally motivated by grades and consequence for failure. On the other hand, Andragogy is a process model. The process is trying to provide skills and resources so the learner themselves can acquire this information. The instructor rather than being the sage on the stage is the guide on the side. They serve as a facilitator, and they are focused on helping the student learn, helping them become an expert in that area, and teaching them to be self-directed.

The learner is more responsible for the learning part of that, as we've noted in the assumption, that the learner is bringing experience to the discussion. They are also a resource, not only is the instructor a resource, but also fellow students are resources for each other in the classroom. Learners want to know how they are fitting into the bigger picture. The emphasis on why the topic is important is critical. As mentioned before, learners are trying to solve a problem. Whatever they're learning has to be relevant, and therefore they're learning this because they want to improve. It's very much intrinsically motivated as they're moving forward. All right, how do we put this into use? Using Andragogy, how do we do this?

First of all, you have to really assess your students to determine which strategy you're going to use, whether it's a pedagogy strategy or an Andragogy strategy or maybe even a mixture of both. If your students are mature and have experience then probably under Andragogy may be more appropriate. Online students are often more self-directed; therefore, Andragogy are probably more appropriate. When I talk about maturity and experience, our classrooms are moving more to a post-traditional composition. That we are having more adults, adults are 25 years older post-traditional students, they have full-time jobs, they have families. They're involved in a lot of these

activities where traditional students are not necessarily. That they're typically residential students, things like that.

We have to very much understand our students. When Malcolm Knowles put together his Andragogy learning model, one of the things that he also did in addition to the sick assumption was develop these learning process design elements for adult learners. There's eight of them. These eight helps create a condition where these adult learners will end up learning more. First of all, is preparing the learner. Learners don't right away flip a switch and say, "Oh, well, I'm now doing Andragogy instead of pedagogy." A matter of fact, they probably don't even know but they know that something's different. The more that you can prepare them for this type of learning experience, the more successful that you will be. That you need to explain why you're making the switch and how they can be successful in this particular switch.

Preparing the learners and you need to do this upfront. It can be part of your syllabus, it can be part of that intro module, but you need to get them very much involved and onboard that you are taking a different tack as you are moving through the course. Number two, climate setting. You need to establish a trusting climate, one that's mutually respectful. One where there's collaborative basically, a place where folks can feel safe as they enter into dialogue. Number three, mutual planning. Implement a collaborative approach to the planning of the learning experience by engaging learners in planning their learning experience. Get them involved as much as possible and guiding the path. I'll talk about how I use a certain discussion format for my online discussion to help some of this choice.

Finding out what their learning needs are, diagnosis of learning needs, that's number four, that you want them involved in that to make sure that you are going to present material that's at the appropriate level, or be able to guide them to either higher or lower content levels based on where they're at in their learning. Negotiate and setting learning objectives through negotiation between the instructor and the adult learner. I'm going to tell you, some of this stuff is hard because you got 16 weeks, and you have in mind all this content that you're going through, and to spend time to sit down and set learning objectives, it is possible. In the show notes, I'm putting a lot of resources that you can tap into to get a better idea of this idea of Andragogy. Next is, design of the learning experience.

Lesson plans are effective when they're really focused on project, and that your sequencing levels of readiness, getting them to build on skills that they can use in their project later. This program plan that I'm working on in the class, or that the students are working on, there's a model that is being described in the book. We are doing this basically in three parts. They've gone in and put together a first draft, sat down and identified areas where they can certainly improve that draft. They're bringing it to a second draft. Right now, I'm going through those and looking for areas to further improve those, and then finally to the final draft. As they're moving through this, areas where there was a lot of gaps, are being filled by the content that we're picking up a class so we're moving through.

Let's see, where am I at? Number seven, learning activities. The most effective learning activities are projects where they have to do some independent studies, some

inquiry-based experiential type learning, that's all part of these learning activities. Once again, you want them to have an experience, you want them to have an experience that is relevant to their lives, or solving a real-world problem and so you go and create those types of activity. Lastly, number eight, evaluation of learning. This is done through a collection of learner-collected evidence, that is, criterion reference. Having some rubric where you're looking at various projects or artifacts that they are turning in, and you may have some of this where their peers are also reviewing this content. This is what I'm using in this project.

Program planning and evaluation course, is I'm also having their fellow students review their papers and provide guidance that way too. Those are the eight. Once again, it is preparing the learner climate setting, mutual plan, diagnosis of learning needs, set learning objectives, design of the learning experience, learning activities and evaluation of learning. I have to say there's nothing really scary there. That's a lot of things that we're doing. It's just now we have to consider our audience just a little different that we are focusing on this adult learning. When I look at all this, one of the things that immediately comes to my mind is Andragogy is really tied to Universal Design for Learning pretty closely. Adult learners, they prefer self-direction when learning a new thing.

In Universal Design for Learning, one of the things that you're doing is providing choice for how a learner is to be assessed. Giving those opportunities, giving choice on what they can focus on, giving choice on how they can do it. That's all very much that benefits the adult learner because they can either go work on areas that they want to improve or accentuate their strength and going from there. The other is providing choice for what content the learner consumes to build knowledge, and also providing choice how the content is presented. Having text-based material, having multimedia material, having a variety of materials. Curating content, so the learner can pick and choose what they want to go through in order to build their knowledge base. Next is, here are some strategies for implementing this into your list.

Right away, one of the things that you want to do is make sure that they understand why. Having them understand the purpose of your learning objectives, what you're planning to achieve, how this fits into their bigger picture. This is all things that you want to do right away with your student. Part of what you also need to do is you need to get to know your student. Know what kind of experiences they've had and what their needs are, so you can help tailor the instruction to fit those. Ideally, keep your lectures short but have active learning activities weaved in. There's nothing saying that you can't lecture, but it's not lecture for 50 minutes or not lecture for two hours. Instead, break up your lectures with something that allows them to apply what they are learning right away, and get them to work with that.

Ideally, you want to tie into problem-solving. This could be working on case studies. It could be Problem Based Learning; it could be educational game role-playing that you want to create the condition where learners want to know the content. What I mean by that is, you may initially present a topic and they can't see the value of it until you start explaining why that particular topic is essential. Then, once you have that buy-in, then you can forward. Discussion is another strategy. This allows the adult learner to tap into their previous experiences and be able to share them and therefore, be that

resource for the rest of the class. I've talked about, in Episode 30, when I talked about online discussions, I use this discussion called IRA format.

Students have to read a crazy amount of content, but then they have to provide three insights and why those three insights are important, and go out and find an external resource that is relevant. Then finally, tell me how this applies to their life right now, how it's maybe applied in the past, or what they see they're going to apply in the future. This makes it very relevant to them. There is no right or wrong answer, but it definitely takes into account the learner. Then also, I would encourage you to curate content information that the learner can go look through to get more ideas. One of the things with each of these episodes, I'm giving you my spiel. I went and pulled together information I thought was relevant and I put it together and I created this podcast episode.

Also, I'm including in the show notes, a lot of different articles that I thought were relevant at the time. You can go and find out more and you can piece together your own knowledge. This is all good but there's also some challenges to this. As I noted earlier that when you are bringing something new like this to your students, there may be some pushback. They have been under pedagogical model for their whole lives pretty much, and now you're expecting them to switch where you're expecting to be more self-directed. Personally, I've had experience in my classes that learners expected me to be the sage on the stage. We weren't going that direction, that they had as much knowledge in a lot of the areas as I did, and probably in some cases more.

That we were going to learn together and they were going to-- Yes, basically, just having me lecture to them was a no go and a lot of different reasons, and it just wasn't going to happen. I got pushed back. In my evaluation, I've had people outright that I did not teach them because I didn't go out there and create a lecture that I required them to watch. Yes, there definitely is some push back in that. It's going to be necessary for you to go out and lead the learning in this new model. You will have to teach your learners how to be self-directed learners. I think that the end goal in this, at least for me is create learners that go out and are lifelong learners that are self-directed, that are going out and seeing a problem and learning how to solve it themselves through all the different mechanisms.

That doesn't mean solve it by themselves, but it means having the initiative to go out and know how they can learn about that particular concept. That's what I have for you dealing with Andragogy. I think it's just this mindset shift in one on how we can maybe better approach our higher education class. I'm going to leave you with that. Before you go, however, here's a quick plug for my book.