

## **The Need of Paradigm Shift on Method of Adult Education Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered**

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**Abstract:** *Education is a principally organized endeavor to provide socio-economically rich learning engagements and creating conducive environment to the learners to manifest their ingenuities into a valuable human being through lifelong learning; empowered with spiritual, critical, intellectual, judicial, knowledge, physical, psychomotor, compassion and foresight to make the learner frugal, caring, self-dependent, capable, competent, courageous and ready to help community voluntarily. Rigid formal educational system and its traditional method of teaching-learning process for adult learners who are majority and productive group of the society alone are not effective to reach every group of the society especially school dropouts. This brings a negative impact on learner's future life and community at large. In this context, adults means productive group of the society who are seeking external intellectual inputs or driving force which are guidance, motivation, direction, encouragement and facilitation from their instructors for their better achievement through learner-centered approach. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to bring critical analysis of viewpoints on method and principle of teaching-learning process for paradigm shift on method of adult education from theoretical perspective and aimed to suggest possible solutions for further implementation.*

**Key Words:** Adult Education, Andragogy, Learner-Centered, Theories and Principles

### **Introduction**

An adult is a human being that is of relatively mature age, typically associated with sexual maturity and the attainment of reproductive age. In human context, the term has other subordinate meanings associated to social and legal concepts, for example a legal adult is a legal concept for a person who has attained the age of majority and is therefore regarded as self-dependent, self-sufficient, and responsible (contrast with "minor"). Adulthood can be defined in terms of physical, psychological adult development, law, personal character, or social status.

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Adult education across the world has had as one of its chief purposes the creation and maintenance of democracy, both at a societal and community level. Two intellectual traditions underscore this commitment, progressive humanism and critical theory. By far the most commonly discussed and acknowledged of these traditions is progressive humanism. Drawing equally on American pragmatism and humanistic psychology, this tradition enjoins adult education to create conditions for learning that encourage the full flowering of human potential in whatever direction the learner chooses to take that process. Critical and Progressive humanism is seen historically in the ideas of Malcolm Knowles and other adult educators. In its broadest sense, adult education is the practice of teaching adults. Practically speaking, however, the term is typically applied to adults learning basic or vocational education in a non-traditional setting. The current educational system that dates back to several hundred years depends primarily on the skills of the instructor (Sonwalkar 2010). There are instructors/teachers who have facility with the words and good blackboard writing skill and can articulate concepts well, and, as we all have suffered through, many more instructors who are at loss of words, confusing, with poor blackboard techniques, and regurgitate the content already given in the prescribed textbook.

The good instructors, who can motivate the class-room learning, are few and majorities are those who merely meet the minimum standards of learning and teaching. The wisdom of having small class size to teacher ratio goes only so far to remedy the situation where the instructor's style of teaching does not match with the style of learners. In most cases, students who are not able to relate to the instructors style of teaching have no alternative, but to depend on their own resources. Majority of learning process in the class-room is one-way and delivered by – “sage on the stage”. Let us look further, the instructor is given a set-of curriculum standards and requirements that he/she needs to meet in a given semester or year. The lectures, home assignment, and recitation session are organized in fast paced environment where student is subjected to five to seven subject matters.

### **Theoretical framework**

Critical theory is one of the most influential theoretical frameworks influencing scholarship within the field of adult and community education. It argues for a set of adult learning tasks that are embedded in this analysis and

that apply both to formal adult education settings and non-formal learning projects carried out in communities. Habermas (1974) has provided the foundation for formulating a comprehensive theory of adult education by clearly differentiating three domains of learning. These domains of learning can be categorized as cognitive domain (knowledge), psychomotor domain (skills) and affective domain (attitudes). This categorization is best explained by the Taxonomy of Learning Domains formulated by a group of researchers led by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. As each domain has its own learning goal (namely, learning for task-related competence, learning for interpersonal understanding and learning for perspective transformation), learning needs, approaches for facilitating learning, methods of research and program evaluation are implied.

This extension of Habermas' theory of areas of cognitive interest is reinforced by the experience of adult educators. We have understood through conventional wisdom that educational design and methodology must be a function of the learning needs of adults and that formula or package programs which do not fully address the differences in goal and nature of the learning task are of questionable value. Perhaps it is because we have been marginal to the mainstream of education for so long that we have been able to sustain our own rather distinctive perspective on learner centeredness in conceptualizing our role. As educators, we need not concern ourselves with the philosophical question of whatever Habermas has succeeded in establishing the epistemological status of the primary knowledge-constitutive interests with categorically distinct object domains, types of experience and corresponding forms of inquiry. There is sufficient force in hypothesis for investigation of and design of appropriate approaches for facilitating learning relevant to these three domains of learning. Despite their obvious interrelatedness in everyday life, a compelling argument has been made for recognizing that each involves its own different way of knowing and each is different enough to require its own appropriate mode of inquiry and educational strategy and tactics.

Educators have not only failed to recognize the crucial distinction among the three domains, but have assumed that the mode of inquiry derived from the empirical - analytical sciences is equally appropriate to all three learning domains. The behavioural change model of adult education - derived from

this approach and therefore appropriate to facilitating learning concerned with controlling and manipulating the environment - has been indiscriminately applied as appropriate to the other domains as well. This misconception has become so pervasive that the very definition of education itself is almost universally understood in terms of an organised effort to facilitate behavioural change. Behaviorism has become a strongly institutionalized ideology in both psychology and education. Habermas' analysis of primary cognitive interests helps us demystify the learning.

If we ask most professionals in adult education to outline how they would conceptualize program development, the model would probably be one which sets educational objectives in terms of specific behaviours to be acquired as dictated by a task to be accomplished. The task or role to be played is analyzed to establish its requisite skills, behaviours or 'competencies'. This is often referred to as a 'task analyses'. The difference would constitute a 'needs assessment'. An educational program is composed of a sequence of educational exercises reduced to their component elements with immediate feedback on each learning effort. Education is evaluated by subtracting measured learning gains in skills or competencies from behavioural objectives.

There is nothing wrong with this rather mechanistic approach to education as long as it is confined to task oriented learning common to the 'technical' domain of learning to control and manipulate the environment. It is here such familiar concepts as education for behaviour change, behavioural objectives, needs assessment, competency based education, task analysis, skill training, accountability and criteria-referenced evaluation based upon the empirical-analytic model of inquiry have relevance and power.

It is only when educators address the other two domains of learning, social interaction - including educational process - and perspective transformation, using the same model that they have been wrong and generally ineffectual. The most common form this has taken is to attempt to broaden behavioural skills necessary to perform the task for which education is required. The assumption is that these are learned much like any other behavioural skill except that practice occasionally requires the use of hypothetical reality contexts, such as role playing, which are unnecessary in learning to operate a lathe or to perform other manual tasks.

Perspective transformation, the process central to the third learning domain, involves other educational approaches. Here the emphasis is on helping the learner identify real problems involving reified power relationships rooted in institutionalized ideologies which one has internalized in one's psychological history. Learners must consequently be led to an understanding of the reasons imbedded in these internalized cultural myths and concomitant feelings which account for their felt needs and wants as well as the way they see themselves and their relations. Having gained this understanding, learners must be given access to alternative meaning perspective's for interpreting this reality so that critique of these psycho-cultural assumptions is possible.

### **Approaches to Adult Education**

Throughout the literature, many have differentiated the characteristics of adult learners from those of younger students (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1980; Mathews-Aydinli, 2008; Mezirow, 1990; Pascual-Leone & Irwin, 1998). Four major themes emerge: adult learners are self-motivated, they are goal-driven or problem-centered, they benefit from connecting their new knowledge to their life experience, and they come from a variety of backgrounds, often creating a multi-level classroom.

These characteristics have implications for what adults need from an educational setting. Knowles (1980) provides a concise overview of the implications of these characteristics for instructional practice, noting that, due to their self-motivation, adults respond better to an internal drive for learning than to external sanctions, such as grades. While this may be less true for college students, who are often very grade-focused, an internal motivation for learning should be encouraged among college students in order to promote an inclination toward lifelong learning. Knowles also notes that adults are goal-driven, focused on the immediate application of new knowledge. As a result, they will benefit more from instruction centered on an identified problem that they can learn to solve. Because adults define themselves based on their life experiences, Knowles proposes that educators employ experiential techniques such as discussion and skills practice. Finally, Knowles acknowledges that it is typical in adult education to have groups of students with widely varying backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles. Approaches to such multilevel classes, as well as those

addressing the other characteristics of adult learners, will be discussed below.

The term andragogy was proposed in the 1960s as an adult-centered alternative to pedagogy (Knowles, 1980; Deshler & Hagan, 1989; Merriam, 2001), but the term has not enjoyed sustained and widespread use to refer to the theory of adult learning. In fact, Merriam (2001) suggests that there is no single theory of adult learning, and that extant andragogical principles are best thought of as models or “pillars” of adult learning. Together with best practices those are widespread in the literature but may not be based in traditionally defined “theory” (due largely to the dearth of research in the field). We prefer to think of these andragogical principals as approaches to adult education. Common approaches include viewing the teacher’s role as a facilitator of learning, fostering a respectful and reflective classroom environment and using an assets-based approach through which learner experience is acknowledged and built upon (Deshler, 1990; Freire, 1993 and Worthman, 2008). While some of these practices are increasingly embraced in K- 12 and higher education, they are a clear departure from “traditional” educational settings in which the instructor was seen as the sole expert, delivering lectures and discipline based on perceived student deficiencies.

Another approach to adult education (1993) involves the related practices of intentionality and transparency. Freire describes intentionality as being the “essence of consciousness” and a quality to be invoked in learners. We would add that intentionality is critical for educators as well, meaning that there should be a specific intention behind each element of instruction. Instead of employing practices based on precedence or habit, educators must be conscious of the choices that they make in the classroom and the educational justification of each choice. One’s consciousness as an educator is only the first step, with the equally critical next step being transparency, or the communication of these intentions to students. Because adults are goal-driven, it is important for them to know the purpose of a project or activity at the outset, a desire that may also be seen in college students (Huba & Freed, 2000). Adult education instructors who are not transparent about their intentions may experience student dissatisfaction, discordant expectations, and confusion (Burns et.al, 2008; Johnson, 2005; Aydinli, 2008). Returning to the above example, if students are asked to learn a song without an

explanation of the educational benefits, they might view the activity as a waste of time and be less engaged. It is important that both educators and learners understand the educational justification for classroom projects and activities; educators can achieve this by being intentional and transparent.

Lastly, participatory and learner-centered approaches have been widely employed in both adult and higher education. The two terms are frequently used in conjunction or conflated. Together, we take them to mean an educational approach in which students take active responsibility for their learning, including involvement with determining their learning needs and evaluating their progress toward the same. As Brookfield (1986) points out, student self-diagnosis of learning needs does not release the instructor from the responsibility of contributing to the discussion of what gets taught, which should rather be decided in dialogue with students. As defined by Pima County Adult Education (1991), learner-directed practices encompass many of the approaches mentioned above, including transparency, teacher as facilitator, and assets based learning.

### **Andragogy for Adults**

Andragogy, as a professional of adult educators, must be defined as an organised and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners. To do this it must:

- ✓ progressively decrease the learner's dependency on the educator;
- ✓ help the learner understand how to use learning resources - especially the experience of others, including the educator, and how to engage others in reciprocal learning relationships;
- ✓ assist the learner to define his/her learning needs - both in terms of immediate awareness and of understanding the cultural and psychological assumptions influencing his/her perception of needs;
- ✓ Assist learners to assume increasing responsibility for defining their learning objectives, planning their own learning program and evaluating their progress;
- ✓ Organise what is to be learned in relationship to his/her current personal problems, concerns and levels of understanding;
- ✓ foster learner decision making-select learner-relevant learning experiences which require choosing, expand the learner's range of options, facilitate taking the perspectives of others who have alternative ways of understanding;

- ✓ encourage the use of criteria for judging which are increasingly inclusive and differentiating in awareness, self-reflexive and integrative of experience;
- ✓ Foster a self-corrective reflexive approach to learning - to typifying and labelling, to perspective taking and choosing, and habits of learning and learning relationships;
- ✓ facilitate problem posing and problem solving, including problems associated with the implementation of individual and collective action; recognition of relationships between personal problems and public issues;
- ✓ Reinforce the self-concept of the learner as a learner and doer by providing for progressive mastery; a supportive climate with feedback to encourage provisional efforts to change and to take risks; appropriate use of mutual support groups;
- ✓ Emphasise experiential, participative and projective instructional methods; appropriate use of modeling and learning contracts; According to Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997), American adult educator, the assumptions and principles of adult education are as follow:
  - Adult educators must be aware of two important terms associated with teaching and learning, namely Pedagogy and Andragogy.
  - Knowles observed that many principles of learning as well as teaching methods have been developed with and for children, and argued that teaching adults requires a different set of instructional strategies.
  - Pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching children. The term andragogy (designating the art and science of helping adults learn) was originally used by a German teacher, Alexander, to describe Plato's education theory. Andragogy (ane' genitive Andros – meaning 'man') could be contrasted with pedagogy (pais, genitive paidos – meaning 'child'), ago'gos meaning 'guide'.

Based on the above assumptions of the theory of andragogy, the following six principles of adult learning were developed:

**(a) Adults need to know why:** Knowles noted that adults need to know why they need to learn something before they will take the time to learn it.

**(b) Responsibility for decisions taken:** Adults have a need to be seen by others as being capable of directing themselves. When adults realize others

are imposing ideas on them, they may withdraw by not returning to class or they may voice their concerns to the teacher.

(c) **Learners' experiences:** the value of the learner's experience with regards to adult education, observing that the approach to teaching adults should be through situations rather than subjects. He noted that 'experience is the adult learners living textbook'

(d) **Coping with real life:** Adult learning should help adults to cope with real life situations

(e) **Real-life applications:** According to Knowles (1984), when designing a curriculum for adult learners, courses should be organized around the acquisition of skills necessary for one to earn a living. These skills may include computer skills, farming skills, business skills and teaching skills.

(f) **Motivation to learn:** Knowles has stated that 'even though adults can be motivated by external factors (such as higher salaries, promotions, better jobs in the future), they are more motivated to learn by internal pressures, such as the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life issues.' Motivation is the activation or energization of goal-oriented behavior. It may be:

(a) Intrinsic: comes from rewards inherent to a task or activate itself, e.g. the love of playing.

(b) Extrinsic: Comes outside from the performer, for example, money, coercion and threat to punishment.

### **Student-Centered Approach (Active learning)**

Student-centred refers to any well-structured, teacher-guided and student-centred activity that "substantially involves students with the course content through talking and listening, writing, reading and reflecting." Learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to the students' lives, needs and interests. The students have to be engaged in higher order thinking tasks such as analysis, problem-solving, synthesis, and evaluation. These activities allow students to apply what they have learned early on in the academic process and/or give them a context/application for new material. Instructional activities should involve students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing. Students are not just memorizing information, but

they are allowed to work with and use the information alone or with peers. Their diverse thoughts and perspectives are a necessary input to every class and learners are treated as co-creators in the learning process.

### **Principles of Learner-Centered Approach**

Teacher's role	Learner's role	Teaching Strategies/methods
Guiding	Finding	Interactive Lecturing
Indicating	Inventing	Group Work
Encouraging	Innovating	Discussion Forums
Facilitating	Problem Solving	Role-Playing
Motivating	Creating	Hands-On Projects
Directing	Discovering	Field work

### ***Benefits of Student-Centered Learning***

1. Permits opportunities to connect the content to real life
2. Provides opportunities for higher order thinking as opposed to passive listening
3. Promotes greater student-faculty and student-student interaction
4. Increases student retention
5. Provides for improvement of social interaction skills, greater acceptance of others, and a greater sense of “community” in the class
6. Encourages alternative forms of assessment
7. Encourages innovation in both teaching and student involvement

### **Conclusion**

It is indeed high time that we make the paradigm shift to individually free form of education that is conducive to the learning, and provides ample nourishment to the curious minds at all ages. It is time for “sage on the stage” to become “guide on the side”. It is time for educational technology to fulfill its promise. It is time for learning to be “free” from the undesirable artifacts created by the defunct educational organization that kills the curiosity and makes each potential student a fatality of “bell shaped curve” where only few conformists succeed.

This state of the affairs has made schools a dreaded place for adults learners who hate to even participate in the educational process. We must work towards a better, adaptive and individualized educational paradigm that brings an effective organizational structure for the stimulating educational

inquiry where learning is at the centre and is free from all artificial barriers. The shift to a brain based synaptic learning paradigm will accommodate the learning preferences of each individual learner by providing them a personal experience, as compared to, inefficiency of “one size fits all” approach.

We believe the recognition of the function of perspective transformation within the context of learning domains, as suggested by Habermas’ theory, contributes to a clearer understanding of the learning needs of adults and hence the function of education. When combined with the concept of self-directedness as the goal and the means of adult education, the essential elements of a comprehensive theory of adult learning and education have been identified. The formulation of such a theory for guiding professional practice is perhaps our single greatest challenge in this period of unprecedented expansion of adult education programs and activities. It is a task to command our best collective effort.

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