The Adult Learning Theory

ANDRAGOGY

of Malcolm Knowles

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles (1913 – 1997)

Was an American educator well known for the use of the term Andragogy as synonymous to the adult education.

According to Malcolm Knowles, andragogy is the art and science of adult learning, thus andragogy refers to any form of adult learning. (Kearsley, 2010).

The term andragogy can be supposedly equivalent to the term pedagogy. Andragogy in Greek means man-leading in comparison to pedagogy, which in Greek means child-leading. However, it should be noticed that the term pedagogy is used since the Ancient Greek times while Alexander Kapp, a German educator, originally used the term andragogy in 1833.
In 1980, Knowles made 4 assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners (andragogy) that are different from the assumptions about the characteristics of child learners (pedagogy). In 1984, Knowles added the 5th assumption.

1. **Self-concept**
   As a person matures his/her self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.

2. **Adult Learner Experience**
   As a person matures he/she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.

3. **Readiness to Learn**
   As a person matures his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles.

4. **Orientation to Learning**
   As a person matures his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness.

5. **Motivation to Learn**
   As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles 1984:12).
In 1984, Knowles suggested 4 principles that are applied to adult learning:

1. Involved Adult Learners
   Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

2. Adult Learners' Experience
   Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.

3. Relevance & Impact to Learners' Lives
   Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.

4. Problem-Centered
   Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. (Kearsley, 2010)

References:


