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WHAT THE #!\$% IS ANDRAGOGY? (Pedagogy for Grownups)

By Lucille Maddalena, Ed.D.
July 2015

If you have not heard of the term andragogy, you are in good company.

The term andragogy¹ was coined in the 1800s by Alexander Knapp, a German educator, to refer to “methods or techniques used to teach adults” and was popularized in the 1960s by Malcolm Knowles, an American educator. Andragogy is often compared to Pedagogy, the term used to describe teaching techniques for children.

The misnomer of pedagogy as encompassing all learning was acknowledged by Knowles in 1970:² “...somewhere in history the ‘children’ part of the definition of pedagogy got lost. In many people’s minds—and even in the dictionary “Pedagogy” is defined as the art and science of teaching. Period. Even in books on adult education you can find references to “the Pedagogy of adult education,” without any apparent discomfort over the contradiction in terms. Indeed, in my estimation, the main reason why adult education has not achieve the impact of our civilizations of which it is capable is that most teachers of adults have only known how to teach adults as if they were children.”

The purpose for this paper is to highlight andragogy as an approach to learning that is a critical element of coaching. Knowles’ work should be studied as a theory or set of assumptions about learning that when applied to coaching will guide our exploration of innovative approaches to encourage self-development. Andragogy describes the unique adult learning experience that can be captured in a coaching relationship.³

¹ The term andragogy (or andragology) is a combination of the classical Greek noun *agage*, which is the activity of leading, and *andr*, the word for adult. Knowles, M.S., Holton III, E.F., & Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The Adult Learner*, 6, 15.

² [W]hat we describe as adult learning is not a different kind or order from child learning. Indeed our main point is that man must be seen as a whole, in his lifelong development. Principles of learning will apply, in ways that we shall suggest to all stages in life. The reason why we specify adults throughout is obvious. This is the field that has been neglected, not that of childhood. (Kidd 1978: 17) <http://infed.org/mobi/andragogy-what-is-it-and-does-it-help-thinking-about-adult-learning/>.

³ The expanding field of heutagogy may also have applications for coaching that should continue to be studied. “Heutagogy is the study of self-determined learning ... It is also an attempt to challenge some ideas about teaching and learning that still prevail in teacher centred learning and the need for, as Bill Ford (1997) eloquently puts it ‘knowledge sharing’ rather than ‘knowledge hoarding’. In this respect heutagogy looks to the future in which knowing how to learn will be a fundamental skill given the pace of innovation and the changing structure of communities and workplaces. <https://heutagogy.wordpress.com/history-of-heutagogy/>

A Coach manages or guides the process itself rather than lecturing ‘content’ as in traditional pedagogy, employing an andragogical approach to achieve an effective intervention or successfully completed engagement. Across all disciplines applied in the coaching process, an evaluation of the initiatives to inspire learning will reveal the existence of an andragogical approach. As we seek new levels of involvement through our carefully organized multi-disciplinary events we are employing andragogy to unite social media, training, management development, coaching as well as organizational and academic research. Awareness is the key to understanding: naming a concept and applying a definition enable us to better embrace and apply all facets of the approach.

A COACHING EXAMPLE

I will use my work as an Executive Coach to illustrate how andragogy is a consistent element in an effective coaching event. My clients are top level corporate executives, successful people who may be experiencing some type of transition, promotion or organization change.

A useful example occurred recently with a talented Senior Vice President (SVP) at a global Corporation responsible for approximately 2,000 employees in his region. We worked together for about a year to seek ways for him to better engage with his new and larger regional team while creating a position of greater respect among his peers. To accomplish this I elected to initiate and facilitate a Team Strategy Session with his newly assigned Regional Team Leaders. The regional HR staff member co-facilitated to allow the SVP to exhibit the new skills he mastered during our time together. The event was extremely successful on several levels:

1. The organization benefited with the implementation of the strategy the regional team developed in support of the corporate mission.
2. The SVP benefited as he was able to present his mission in an inspiring manner, revealing his genuine commitment to the strategy his team would develop and dedication to the success of every member of his team. He also benefited by receiving immediate feedback from his team and he reestablished himself as a leader by confirming that he had followers -- essential to the role of a leader.
3. The Regional Team Leaders benefited by organizing into smaller teams required to interact to achieve stated goals, thus forming new avenues for communication and interaction within the region.
4. Team staff benefited on multiple lower levels as mission and task were clearly presented and supported with opportunity for growth and increased recognition.

Note that I listed the value to the organization first: without the organization support we would not be able to fulfill our calling as coaches. As a result of this event, the region created a model for developing strategy and effectively implementing their plan that has been shared globally.

The best part of the story is that it is not over. As we debriefed this event and reviewed our coaching discussions, the SVP gained the confidence to delve deeper into his reflections, perceptions, risks and fears. During our discussions of feelings, judgments, relationships and personal as well as organizational goals, I guided the SVP to express his feelings about the tasks and people he worked with.

This endeavor culminated in further success for the SVP. When required to make a presentation to peers and the corporate leaders about a LEAN⁴ project, the SVP sought my help to prepare his speech. Rather than the traditional approach we choose to not use power points, graphs and statistics, instead we decided to speak from the heart. We worked on a description of the process, the people, and how it felt to be involved in a continuous improvement program. We identified words that reflected the corporate culture, the commitment, and the pride as well as job satisfaction that best reflected how employees talked about their work.

This description of ‘feelings’ about the project won the SVP a second round of kudos from all levels in the company. He realized the extent of his success when the day after his presentation the global President used the same words and phrases we chose to describe his vision for the entire organization, explaining that to truly appreciate your involvement you must feel the value of your efforts.

The entire coaching event was deemed a success. But was this coaching? What else took place that dominated the agenda and brought the SVP to a new place in his career? The answer is Andragogy.

ANDRAGOGY: ADULT LEARNING

Andragogy appears to have enjoyed a much more rapid acceptance and growth in Europe than in the U.S. In the US, the developing fields of management and organizational development as well as psychotherapy and social psychology have inspired new interest. Addressing interpersonal as well as intrapersonal aspects of an individual’s level of understanding requires our awareness of how adults learn as individuals and as contributing members of a community or organization.

⁴Lean manufacturing is a business model and collection of tactical methods that emphasize eliminating non-value added activities (waste) while delivering quality products on time at least cost with greater efficiency. See <http://www.epa.gov/lean/environment/>

It is useful for today's coach to review the six crucial assumptions⁵ Knowles developed to base his premise describing characteristics of adult learners and possibly the same qualifiers we apply when considering an individual to coach:

1. **The Need to Know:** Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. *The decision to be coached is a choice of the individual; a self-driven initiative.*
2. **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. *Coaching seeks self-awareness and acceptance.*
3. **Experience:** As a person matures s/he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. *Coaching provides the opportunity to evaluate what we have learned, what we should retain or change, and what we could learn.*
4. **Readiness to learn.** As a person matures his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles. *Coaching inspires the development of new skills and recognition of a full range of options.*
5. **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. *Coaching encourages a world-view, embracing new opportunities for continuous growth.*
6. **Motivation to learn:** As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal. *Coaching embraces life-long learning and self-coaching.*

These six assumptions are with us today, applied by coaching practitioners representing all of the contributing disciplines, employing an andragogical approach using new mediums as we seek to inspire leadership and self-direction.

Concurrently within business and industry programs such as LEAN promote continuous learning for quality production, academics pursue research and study to expand our field and technology is in a never-ending evolution of research, learning and exploration that provides a means to share our knowledge.

⁵ Knowles, M.S., Holton III, E.F., & Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The Adult Learner*, P. 57-58

THE ANDRAGOGICAL PROCESS

Early in my career I created and offered a training program titled TRANSITION TO MANAGEMENT⁶, and later TRANSITION TO LEADERSHIP for higher level employees that applied the principles of andragogy. The series of seminars were offered at sites in North and South America for a global pharmaceutical firm during twenty consecutive years as well as at other client companies during the same period, reaching about 6,000 executives. Part of the series required selected high potential employees to participate in a group coaching program and some were targeted for individual coaching. This interaction helped the potential new leaders to identify their strengths and develop individual career paths for future success.

Every Coach understands the need to recognize the learner's capacity, interest and present level of knowledge before beginning an event, utilizing an assessment or psychological evaluation instrument before beginning to coach. The key components of today's Coaching events as well as business training and development compose the foundation to the andragogical process.

Knowles refers to as the technology⁷ of andragogical learning as a continuous circular application in the development, organization and administration of a program which can easily be applied to the development of a coaching event:

- Setting a climate for learning
- Establishing a structure of mutual planning
- Assessing interests, needs and values
- Formulating objectives
- Designing learning activities
- Implementing learning activities
- Evaluating results (reassessing needs, interests and values)

The organization itself provides the foundation for andragogy⁸:

1. A climate for Learning
2. A structure for mutual planning

This environment for continuous learning from personal experience recognizes the impact of the organization's culture, the importance of evolving organization development and the agility of the organization to respond to the changing environment:

- In small learning groups (teams) as a process to redirect risk and conflict issues through interpersonal activity
- Self-directed learning to encourage continuous re-assessment of our own evolving needs as they emerge from the demands of the changing situation.

⁶ See <http://www.mtmcoach.com/leadership-development/team-development/>

⁷ Knowles, M.S. (1970). *Modern Practice of Adult Education*.

⁸ Ibid.

It is interesting to consider Knowles' comparison of assumptions between pedagogy and andragogy.⁹ Below I have inserted the term 'DIRECTIVE/CLASSROOM' in our consideration of pedagogical learning and 'SELF-DIRECTIVE/EXPERIENTIAL' for andragogical learning.

| | Pedagogy (Classroom/Directive) | Andragogy (Experiential/ Self-Directive) |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| The learner | <i>Dependent.</i> Teacher directs what, when, how a subject is learned and tests that it has been learned outside of actual situations. | <i>Moves towards independence.</i> Facilitator encourages and nurtures sharing and involvement as situations unfold. |
| The learner's experience | <i>Personal experience is not referenced.</i> Teaching methods are didactic | <i>Stories and illustrations are shared as a rich resource for learning.</i> Teaching methods include discussion, problem-solving etc. |
| Readiness to learn | <i>People learn what society expects them to.</i> The curriculum is standardized. | <i>People learn what they need to know,</i> so that learning programs organized around life application. |
| Orientation to learning | <i>Acquisition of subject matter.</i> Curriculum organized by subjects. | <i>Learning experiences should be based around experiences,</i> since people are performance centered in their learning |

It may be of interest to some to note that in the U.S., the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) offers certification in levels of Human Resource Management, accordingly a directive field of study of organization and employee laws and regulations. The Association for Talent Development (ATD, formerly **ASTD**), offers certification in self-directive skills such as facilitation, coaching, team building and of course training for employee learning.

⁹Knowles, M.S., Holton III, E.F., & Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The Adult Learner*, 6, 57-58.

COACHING AS LEARNING

A well-known quote credited to Confucius describes living itself as a learning experience:

*“I hear and I forget,
I see and I remember
I do and I understand.”*

Learning can effectively occur in a classroom, on a manufacturing floor, in a coaching session, or while walking down a hall way. It is the individual’s capacity and receptivity to an idea or concept that when internalized becomes thought for possible future action. Whatever medium is chosen to disseminate information, the critical factor is first knowing the audience.

Again, allow me to share my personal experience. While a graduate student, and before I created the TRANSITION leadership series, I was chosen as the only outside consultant called in to work with a team of manufacturing executives who were in conflict. The drug they produced had been tampered with while on the store shelf, resulting in several deaths. The situation devastated members of the manufacturing group that produced the drug; a few became despondent, questioning themselves as to what else they could have done to prevent any type of product tampering.

This event was a learning experience for the organization, for the individuals, and for me. The feelings, thoughts, reactions of those executives were acknowledged and served as a learning tool to plan the company’s future as well as their personal futures. During this coaching event the executives were able to express their pain privately and learn to balance emotions with action. When together they learned how to use their strength to develop and share plans and processes to prevent future attempts at tampering.

Learning cannot be ‘siloe’d’ to one person or one event, we are all connected and there is not one correct answer or response to a complex situation. Conducting individual as well as group sessions with the team brings a collaborate focus to understand what had transpired and how to move forward. Team building and conflict resolution workshops are as valuable to the development of today’s leaders and organizations as is private coaching. We must ask ourselves how much more effective each interaction could be if we consistently applied an andragogical approach by establishing a relationship between the learning events.

When we agree to coach corporate leaders we must acknowledge the complexity of the task. Our work must be aligned with the corporate vision and mission, become a collaborative effort to support the individual’s goals and respect the existing corporate culture. The following is my ode to a leader using the yin-yang philosophy, which can be easily applied as a useful definition of a coach:

***“A successful leader must be consistent and flexible:
consistent in process, flexible in implementation.”***

Kurt Lewin¹⁰ in the 1940's offered a prescription for resolving social conflict through what he described as 'reeducation'. The term and its application comes very close to how we define Coaching today as it is extremely useful in the structured environment of a corporate workforce.

Consider that Lewin demonstrated that the processes for acquisition of normal and abnormal social behaviors are fundamentally alike, thus our perception of reality may at any time be correct or incorrect. Acknowledging this duality reinforces the importance of current non-directive coaching practices. By questioning norms and challenging assumptions for self-direction the learner becomes the teacher; the coach is the guide to inspire self-development.

Further, applying Lewin's concept in a learning environment leads us to understand that perceptions of reality that steer or direct our actions requires changes in cognitive structure (facts, concepts, beliefs, expectations) as well as changes in values (attractions, aversions, feelings of acceptance and status). To survive and succeed, a leader must be able to transition from old values and ideas to new ones by internalizing new behaviors that reinforce the new values.

My preferred evaluative instrument is the Hogan Leadership Assessment because it provides a useful exploration of the individual's values. From this data we are able to open the door for deep discussion into anger, reactions, judgments and especially risk. Along with values and needs, an individual's perception of risk is critical to the way s/he conducts meetings, make decisions and manage a team.

"Every meeting must have an equal amount of dissension and humor"

WHAT DOES ANDRAGOGY MEAN TO COACHING TODAY?

Coaching has brought a new dimension to learning. What can we, as coaches, learn from these theories of education that will enable us to support the learning experience of those we coach? How do we contribute to the individual's life-long, evolutionary process of gaining new concepts, challenging existing assumptions and seeking innovation?

When we consider that coaching is about learning and self-development, we recognize that as coaches we embrace existing proven processes embodied in our disciplines to benefit those we coach. Whether we are deep in confidential discussion with our clients, conducting a group coaching session with key staff members, or facilitating an exploratory session with the leader's team, we must respect our role as guide. We enable those we coach to examine all that is new as well as all that is old by reminding them of options and sharing our experience as well as interdisciplinary learnings.

¹⁰ Lewin, K. (1997). Resolving social conflicts and field theory in social science. *American Psychology Association*.

Thus, coaching has earned its place as a learning tool in today's corporations by engaging the individual to examine personal assumptions, historical preferences, and existing habits that may help or hinder future advancement. Perhaps what early advocates of andragogy were seeking was to reinstate the Socratic approach to learning, allowing the learner to direct exploration of the topic by responding to questions and uncovering truths implicitly known by all rational beings.

In the 1960's, theorists began to recognize that the emphasis on growth through the tutor/mentor relationships as places too great a focus on cognitive development to explain what learning is really about. Knowles writes: "[R. M.] Jones (1968) objects to [Jerome] Bruner's under-emphasis on emotional skills, his exclusive attention to extra psychic stimuli, the equating of symbolism with verbalism and his preoccupation with the processes of concept attainment to the seeming exclusion of the processes of concept formation or invention."¹¹

Knowles further notes that Bruner "is moving away from the perception of learning as a process of controlling, changing or shaping behavior and putting it more in the contest of competency development." Knowles further describes "the most dynamic and prolific developments in the field of psychology, *humanist psychology*, has exploded on the scene...and carried his trend of thought much further," referring to Carl Rogers' five elements of humanistic psychology (1968).

Similar descriptions of learning during this period include:¹²

- 1961 Harris and Schwahn: "*Learning is essentially change due to experience*"
- 1963 Cronbach: "*Learning is shown by a change in behavior as a result of experience*"
- 1965 Gagne: "*Learning is a change in human disposition or capability, which can be retained, and which is not simply ascribable to the process of growth.*"
- 1966 Hilgard and Bower: "*Learning is the process by which an activity originates or is changed through reacting to an encountered situation, provided that the characteristics of the change in activity cannot be explained on the basis of native response tendencies, maturation or temporary state of the organism.*"
- 1970 Maslow: The goal of learning is self-actualization. "*The full use of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc.*"

The common theme in these statements acknowledges the impact of change on human behavior.

¹¹ Knowles, M.S., Holton III, E.F., & Swanson, R.A. (2005). *The Adult Learner*, 14

¹² Ibid.

NEW FREEDOM AND JOY

By sharing my examples of applied andragogy, my intention is to make it clear that among my passions for my field of study I advocate continuous learning, the sharing of emotions, the exploration of feelings, and the awareness that life is evolving; in the work environment change is a constant often impacted by the dominating organization culture. For those we coach to be able to learn, function, and succeed in these sometimes clashing environments is a challenge.

Our skills as coaches can support even the most successful to continue to grow, achieve a new life goal, or gain greater satisfaction from their career.

Storytelling has long been accepted as a tool for learning. I often refer to my years working with unions, serving as an elected government official, or participating in the sport of dog sledding to offer analogies of risk when opening the door for this many-faceted discussion. Whether we discuss the physical challenge of sports or the mental challenge of politics, the core subject is a means to open the door to a deep discussion of faith, confidence, privacy, leadership, negotiations, etc. My sharing inevitably establishes a bond and increases the rapport allowing the client to offer personal experiences and explore deeper relationships and feelings, including work and life decisions that contributed to the current situation.

This self-exploration, one of the first steps in andragogy allows my clients to shed pre-conceived notions, historically repeated behaviors and assumptions that enabled them to be successful in previous situations. As a result of this decluttering, many of my clients describe an unexpected and highly appreciated found freedom. They state they now have the confidence to move ahead in their careers by granting themselves the freedom to be themselves.

Personal discovery and release of behaviors formerly assumed necessary to achieve goals is a cathartic experience. Many recognize that former behaviors often did not express their attitudes and approaches --and in some situations caused the individual to act contrary to their nature resulting in mental stress and physical illness.

Those who have successfully completed a coaching engagement have learned how to grant themselves the right to choose to act and respond according to their personal values, perceptions and needs. Hearing a client express new excitement for their work and future with the self-commitment and confidence to be who they are, brings joy and satisfaction to my life.

A successful coaching event ends when the individual being coached is ready to continue the process through self-coaching. One of my favorite statements to share is my definition of Self-Coaching:

“The process of self-coaching is addressing evolving transitions and change, where innovation, imagination, and creativity are born. This source of self-confidence is exposed in spontaneity, laughter and, ultimately joy. As a person changes a life pattern, they evolve, changing life perspectives and expanding their acceptance to embrace greater wisdom and understanding.”