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Andragogy and Transformative Learning: Imigration Meets Ratioalism in College Classrooms

Andragogy and Transformative Learning:
Imagination meets Rationalism in College Classrooms

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Although Andragogy and Transformative learning (TL) are highly prized concepts in Adult Education, many scholars are critical of their principles and often confusing strategies. While educators immerse themselves quite successfully in the nuances of theory, they remain puzzled over how to apply them in the classroom. A robust and dynamic approach that can capture the meaningfulness of these ageless paradigms is greatly needed. Therefore in this session we will identify some of the illusive elements that obfuscate the application of Andragogy and TL in university classrooms – undergraduate, graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral.

Description of the Practitioner Concerns

Transformative Learning (TL) may be defined as critical and reflective learning for living; and, Andragogy may be defined as the art and science of helping Adults learn. Mezirow's (1991) TL Theory – originally grounded in what he (Mezirow, 1981) called a Charter for Andragogy – and Knowles' (1970, 1995) Andragogical assumptions and processes, juxtaposes a remarkably interlinking philosophy of Adult education. Their mix of creative imagination, pragmatic structure, and agency heralds a call to action of untapped resources capable of delivering students and practitioners from "handed down frames of reference" (Spolin, 1999, p.4). Both approaches place great emphasis on self-directedness, reflection, learners' capacity for new experience, and a willingness to initiate and proactively participate in learning experiences. Knowles (1970) declared that Andragogy is both 'art and science' and guided by art principles – line, space, tone, color, and texture. Elsey (2009, 2010) argues that like Andragogy, TL is itself also an art form because of the rich sensory experiences and cognitive histories students and teachers bring into the classroom.

How these intangible, raw materials are organized and accessed for effective knowledge creation has up until not been the product of a rationally driven, creative process, exclusively in the hands of the learning environment created by those who may or may not be committed to either transformative learning or andragogical processes. Although some assert that the quest for transformative development is quite pervasive or nearly universal among Adult practitioners (Dirkx, 2000; Taylor, 1997), very few Adult educators have sufficiently established a practical teaching and learning strategy that can capture the illusive nuances of transformative learning in college classrooms (Taylor, 1997, 2009a). A more robust and dynamic approach is greatly needed for bringing Andragogy and TL together; therefore, it is the purpose of this paper and session to suggest the principles of Andragogy as a palpable vehicle for achieving transformative learning, growth and change.

Importance of the Concerns for both Research and Practice in the Adult Learning Field

Recently TL has been scrutinized as overly rationalistic (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 2009a).

On the other hand, in the past Andragogy has suffered its own share of intense debate over whether it is a theory, method, technology, set of assumptions, principles, paradigm, or schema (Davenport and Davenport, 1985). Nevertheless, in more up-to-date scrutiny of andragogy, Houle (1996) found it to be the most learner-centered of all patterns of adult education programming; Maehl (2000) investigated 34 Higher Education Institutions that were successfully using Andragogy for transforming their classroom learning in the direction of a lifelong learning orientation; Isenberg (2005, 2007) developed and researched a theoretical model that provides a break-through transforming framework for bringing together the interaction of andragogy and Internet learning in the university classroom, while blending the practical and theoretical, the practice and research, and the technology and learning process; Vodde (2008) found that while a traditional, pedagogical, military model of training may have at one time served the needs and interests of police and society, his experimental research revealed that an andragogical instructional methodology or facilitation of learning was more effective; and, Bright and Mahdi (2010) discovered that andragogical theory, processes and research in collaboration between American and Arab cultures are elemental and critical to realizing a vision of long-term transformation of nations around the globe into a peaceful and stabilized world.

We Adult Educators need to prepare themselves for the unexpected elements TL and Andragogy deliver or else be frozen in time by our own creative imaginations we have vowed to advocate. Andragogy's (Knowles, 1970, 1995) assumptions encompass self-directedness of learners; the learners' experience being a treasured reservoir for the benefit of their own learning and that of others; readiness to learn coming from life's tasks; orientation of learning for immediate application; motivation mostly by internal incentives and curiosity; and, adults want a reason to learn something that makes sense to them. Andragogy's qualitative processes include preparation, setting a climate conducive to adult learning, mutual planning, needs diagnosis, setting objectives, learning design, conducting activities, and evaluation/re-diagnosis of needs.

Transformational Learning's [TL] (Mezirow, 1991) 10 phases are: a disorienting dilemma; self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; critical assessment of assumptions; recognizing one's transformation process is not unlike what others experience; exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning action; gaining knowledge and skill for plans; trying out new roles; building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and, reintegration of the new perspective into life. Nonetheless, it is very important to remember that the phases of TL are deeply rooted in Mezirow's (1981) charter for andragogy, which asserts that to assist adults in enhancing their capability for functioning as self-directed learners, the facilitator of adult learning must: decrease learner dependency, help learners use learning resources, help learners define his/her learning needs, help learners take responsibility for learning, organize learning that is relevant, foster learner decision-making and choices, encourage learner judgment and integration, facilitate problem-posing and problem-solving, provide a supportive learning climate, and emphasize experiential methods.

The influence of TL and Andragogy to promote growth and change in the classroom is as unique as learners' experiences in the real world (Knowles, 1995; Mezirow, 1991) and in conjunction with students' teaching and learning philosophies, educator and learner strive to make the material also unique, each in their own way. Any less authentic approach tends to drift toward the security of teacher-centeredness which Mezirow and Knowles consider authoritarian

and therefore unacceptable in Adult education. The facilitation of learning is to be transparent, elegantly simple, and capable of reaching Adults wherever they happen to be in their lives.

Obviously, Andragogy and TL are student-centered philosophies with a purpose and focus well suited for creating climates conducive to helping learners seek profound levels of self-understanding; however, their gifts do not necessarily come easily. In fact, much of the criticism directed toward Andragogy and TL stems from the challenge of making the abstract concrete. In other words, how do practitioners meld the abstract with all of its nuances into a cohesive whole? Andragogy and TL beckon teacher and learner to reply and get proactively engaged in both.

In a moment that appears curious, Taylor (2009) suggests that Transformative Learning Theory needs to be the New Andragogy, thus replacing andragogy and moving beyond it. This sort of assertion shows an obvious lack of acquaintance with and understanding of much recent research that has been conducted regarding Andragogy (Henschke, 2008a & b, 2009a & b, 2010a & b, 2011; Isenberg, 2005, 2007; Vodde, 2008; Savicevic, 2008). If Transformative Learning (TL) is worthy of some prominence in the field of adult education, it is puzzling that one of its proponents (Taylor, 2009b) would not want it to stand on its own name, rather than seeking to adopt the name of Andragogy, call it New, thus, eliminating all of what andragogy is. In spite of over 35 years of dissertations, articles, and conference presentations, few adult educators have been able to establish an imaginative and sustainable teaching and learning strategy that can consistently release transformative (TL) phenomena in college and university classrooms.

Various Approaches Seeking to Deal with the Concerns – TL & Andragogy as Art Forms

The concept of student/educator as artist is an empowering perception (Spolin, 1999). It sharpens awareness to our own abilities and skill (Elsey, 2010) when we consider how perception makes life more interesting. Learners discover an enlivened sense of personal responsibility, courageousness, and spiritedness enhancing knowledge creation (Knowles, 1970; Mezirow, 1991). Participants are challenged to answer the call for applied imagination in order to test cognitive and affective driven hypotheses within groups of learners and gain greater understanding about why we think and behave in particular ways (Cranton (2006; Lawrence, 2008). These epiphany become transformational because learners realize immediately when a new threshold is crossed and they leave behind, and become aware of leaving, part of their former self. This art form strategy in Adult education is no different than the artist working in paint or clay where each new brush stroke reveals something never before seen, while transcending the process of thoughts and ideas that brought them to that point. This approach is very different from teacher-centered authoritarianism.

Andragogy and TL artistically invite students to jettison their dependency on authoritarian figures, empower themselves to shrug off fear, and to become self-directed thinkers. Specifically, self-directed knowledge materializes through a sequence of activities that are mutually planned, cooperative, and based upon learners' diagnosed needs and interests (Knowles, 1970). Clearly, the Andragogical perspective can serve to streamline Mezirow's 10 phases in ways that overcome "self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame" (Mezirow, 1991, P. 168) and obsessive or misguided critical reflection (Brookfield and Preskill, 2009).

Artful adult learning holds life changing phenomena in high esteem. Gravitas emergence collides with formerly held fondnesses and demonstrates for the individual how far they have

traveled from earlier set benchmarks of personal achievement as well as the effects of misdirected energies. We may conjecture that the role of TL permits these insights to flow freely, and that the principles of Andragogy have established a healthy learning climate. TL in an Andragogically driven learning environment makes its appearance known through intuitive insights emanating from the intrinsic self. They are explored and tested through the application of group agreement, imagination, and evaluation. Unique proclivities and eccentricities support emergent phenomena which are applied through an exercise, improvisation, game, or sequential activity designed to achieve an objective (Knowles, 1970). Transformation occurs when participants go beyond their traditional self-imposed boundaries and negative emotions, seek new levels of experience, are self-motivated, and truthful with themselves and peers. This perspective emerges from theater improvisation which is another creative art form supporting TL and Andragogical research (Elsey, 2009). TL's power is released through imaginative interpretation, and it is here where we begin to see the advantages of the collaborative, student centered climate Andragogy provides (Knowles, 1970).

The authors believe that spontaneity and original thinking can displace unproductive thoughts and actions that interfere with our lives. When TL is explored in an Andragogical climate its access to original thinking prevails before the brain can censor its arrival. We all have experienced moments when the right answer *just came as a flash insight* and we took action immediately. We also know of our frustration when a significant insight disappeared as quickly as it arrived. As Spolin (1999) remarked, intuition is our private source of inherent genius that overrules the questioning, doubtful, rational side of self. Seizing upon these moments in a spontaneously driven classroom can confront dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors with an undeniable presence that juxtaposes past and present beliefs in a moment of clarifying insight. These are the gifts of TL and Andragogy. In an Andragogically driven classroom, learners simultaneously share their astonishment as the display of humanistic qualities is immediate and real; the humanity of group engagement transforming negative relics of the past.

Conclusion

Coupling TL and Andragogy commands an intensified commitment to research and practice. Andragogy's student-centered, facilitator driven technique yields the perfect structure to enhance the qualities of TL in the classroom. Knowles (1970, 1995) in a landmark presentation and update of his version of Andragogy dovetailed eight simple principles that convey the excitement and promise of Mezirow's (1991) theory.

Andragogy and TL by their very nature demand imaginative, art form strategies to bring their facets to life. The authors advocate experiential strategies based on the chemistry between educator and learner to determine cognitive and affective engagements that can close the divide between critical/rational teacher-centered approaches and innovative student-centered strategies. By creating andragogical environments operating on physical, intellectual, and intuitive levels we believe participants become self-empowered to explore TL in ways that will provide ample research opportunities for graduate students enchanted by the work of Knowles and Mezirow. Scholars' abilities and passion to create an Andragogical, Transformative Learning (TL) environment will move the work forward and restore some of the luster Adult Education has acquiesced.

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