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International research foundation for andragogy and the implications for the practice of education with adults

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This study searched the literature providing an international research foundation for andragogy. Six themes have emerged: The evolution of the term; historical antecedents shaping the concept; comparison of American and European understandings; popularizing and sustaining the American and World-Wide concept; practical applications; and theory, research, and definition. Implications are provided for the practice of andragogy within the fields of adult, continuing, community, extension, and human resource development education.

Merriam (2001) posited that the scholarship on andragogy since 1990 has taken two directions. One seeks analysis of the origins of the concept for establishing it as a scientific discipline. The other critiques andragogy for its lack of attention to the learning context. She also asserts andragogy as one of two “pillars” of adult learning theory [self-directed learning being the other pillar] that will engender debate, discussion, research, and thus further enrich our understanding and practice of facilitating adult learning. Kapp (1833) first introduced the term [see replica on <http://www.andragogy.net>]. Lindeman (1926) was the first to bring it to the USA, with the term coming into common use internationally through the work of Malcolm Knowles (1970).

On the one hand, some adult educators tended to strongly favor Knowles’ version of andragogy, by using a practical approach when facilitating adults learning within their own setting and context. Kabuga (1977) advocated using highly participative teaching/learning techniques with children as well as adults in his native Africa. Zemke and Zemke (1996) selected at least thirty ideas/concepts/techniques that they think we know for sure about adult learning. Henschke (1995) focused on describing a dozen different andragogical episodes with groups.

On the other hand, some adult educators tended to dismiss Knowles’ version of andragogy as being quite inadequate and unscientific. Hartree (1984) asserted that Knowles’ theory of andragogy fails to make good its claims to stand as unified theory and does not incorporate an epistemology. Davenport (1987) presented a case for questioning the theoretical and practical efficacy of Knowles’ theory of andragogy. Jarvis (1984) wrote that the theory of andragogy has moved into the status of an established doctrine in adult education, but without being grounded in sufficient empirical research to justify its dominant position.

The weakness of the above picture is that both sides seem to stop short in their discussion and understanding of andragogy. In our quest, we found that most of the published material on andragogy that reaches beyond these limitations is largely untapped and not understood.

The purpose of this study was to answer the question: What are the major English works published around the world on andragogy [the art and science of helping adults learn] that may provide a clear and understandable linkage between the research on andragogy and the practice of andragogy within the fields of adult, continuing, community, extension, and human resource development education?

Two major underpinnings were relevant for the decision of what was included in this interpretive study: Any material in English that presents various aspects of the concept of andragogy as viable and worth consideration for the field on a world-wide basis; and, a presentation and view of the content of andragogy within any country of the world that includes no date/time boundaries. Sources included that referenced andragogy were: Various data bases, research and theory journal articles, practice pieces, conference proceedings, books, dissertation abstracts international, and bibliographic references within the above materials. The six major themes discovered are: Evolution of the term andragogy; historical antecedents shaping the concept of andragogy; comparison of the American and European understandings of andragogy; popularization and sustaining the American and World-Wide concept of andragogy; practical applications of andragogy; and, theory, research and definition of andragogy. More than 300 documents have been found to date, although space allowed the inclusion of only a limited number here.

Evolution of the Term Andragogy

Van Gent (1996) asserted that andragogy has been used to designate the education of adults, an approach to teaching adults, social work, management, and community organization. Its future lies only as a generic term for adult education and as a complement to pedagogy, which has been used mainly to focus on the art and science of teaching children.

Nevertheless, in recent years pedagogy has been used to refer to the art or profession of teaching. Thus, Davenport (1987) argued that some adult educators strongly urge that adult education would simply be better off to

drop the word from its lexicon. However, Hooks (1994) said “the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being: concurrently one may practice theorizing without ever knowing/possessing the term...” (p. 61). Kaminsky (no date given) suggested that whether we have knowledge for naming something academically or not, we may still be practicing pedagogy, andragogy, or any other ‘gogy’ or ‘ism’. Thus, Henschke (1998a) asserted that long before the term andragogy appeared in published form in 1833, ancient Greek and Hebrew educators if not others used words that, although they were antecedents to andragogy, included elements of the concept that has come to be understood as some of the various meanings and definitions of andragogy. As an illustration of using words that may be unclear or do not have one precise definition, Webster (1996) included 179 definitions of the word ‘run’. However, we have not given up use of that term because of the multiplicity of definitions.

Reischmann (2005) made a clear distinction in his definition between andragogy and adult education. He defined andragogy as the science of the lifelong and lifewide education/learning of adults. Adult education is focused on the practice of the education/learning of adults. Another definition is that of Zmeyov (1998) who aptly defined andragogy differently from others. He said that andragogy is “the theory of adult learning that sets out the fundamentals of the activities of learners and teachers in planning, realizing, evaluating and correcting adult learning” (p. 106).

Draper (1998) in providing an extensive, world-wide background on andragogy, reflected on and presented an overview of the historical forces influencing the origin and use of the term andragogy. He concluded, “Tracing the metamorphoses of andragogy/adult education is important to the field’s search for identity. The search for meaning has also been an attempt to humanize and understand the educational process” (p. 24).

Historical Antecedents Shaping the Concept of Andragogy

Wilson’s (2003) researched into the historical emergence and increasing value of andragogy in Germany and the USA and discovered, among other things, a connection between a foundational element in adults’ brain capacity to continue learning even into their later years – a concept labeled as ‘fluid intelligence’ – and their brain capacity for learning being enhanced through andragogical interventions in self-directed learning. However, Allman (1983) predated Wilson regarding this same connection between plasticity in adult development. She asserted that this concept and research coupled with Mezirow’s (1981) and Knowles’ (1970, 1980) understanding of andragogy could be linked with her ideas on group learning and then merged into a more comprehensive theory of andragogy.

Heimstra and Sisco (1990) suggested a situation that gave rise to the emergence of andragogy as an alternative model of instruction to improve the teaching of adults. They asserted that mature adults become increasingly independent and responsible for their own actions. Thus, those adults are often motivated to learn by a sincere desire to solve immediate problems in their lives, have an increasing need to be self-directing, and in many ways the pedagogical model does not account for such developmental changes on the part of adults, and thus produces tension, resentment, and resistance. Consequently, the growth and development of andragogy is a way to remedy this situation and help adults to learn. Their article also presented an extensive list of 97 annotated bibliographical references related to andragogy.

Savicevic (1999) suggested that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Sophists, Ancient Rome, the epochs of humanism and the renaissance, all reflect thoughts and views about the need of learning throughout life, about the particularities and manners of acquiring knowledge in different phases of life, and about the moral and aesthetic impact. Henschke (1998) went back earlier in history and claimed that the language of the Hebrew prophets, before and concurrent with the time of Jesus Christ, along with the meaning of various Hebrew words and their Greek counterparts -- learn, teach, instruct, guide, lead, and example/way/model -- provide an especially rich and fertile resource to interpret andragogy. Savicevic (2000) also provided a new look at some of the background and antecedents to andragogy on a much broader scale.

Comparison of the American and European Understandings of Andragogy

Savicevic (1999) provided a critical consideration of andragogical concepts in ten European Countries – five western (German, French, Dutch, British, Finnish), and five eastern (Soviet, Czech-Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, Yugoslav). This comparison showed common roots but results in five varying schools of thought: [1] Whether andragogy is parallel to or subsumed under pedagogy in the general science of education; [2] whether andragogy (instead of andragogy) is understood as a sort of integrative science which not only studied the process of education and learning but also other forms of guidance and orientation; [3] whether andragogy prescribes how teachers and students should behave in educational and learning situations; [4] the possibility of founding andragogy as a science is refuted; and, [5] that endeavors have been made to found andragogy as a fairly independent scientific discipline. Savicevic (1999) clearly aligned himself with the fifth school of thought in that this research aims toward establishing the origin and development of andragogy as a discipline, the subject of which is the study of education and learning of adult in all its forms of expression. He also declared J. A. Comenius of the 17th Century as meriting the designation of being the father of andragogy in that he drew equal lines for man and his learning.

Knowles (1995) provided the most articulate expression and understanding of andragogy from the American perspective. The structure of the theory is comprised of two conceptual foundations: The learning theory and the design theory. The learning theory is based upon the adult and her/his desire to become and/or to express themselves as a capable human being, and it has six components. [1] Adults need to know a reason that makes sense to them, for whatever they need to learn. [2] They have a deep need to be self-directing and take responsibility for themselves. [3] Adults enter a learning activity with a quality and volume of experience that is a resource for their own and others' learning. [4] They are ready to learn when they experience a need to know, or be able to do, something to perform more effectively in some aspect of their life. [5] Adults' orientation to learning is around life situations that are task, issue- or problem-centered, for which they seek solutions. [6] Adults are motivated much more internally than externally.

Knowles' (1995) conceptual foundation of the design theory is based in a process, and is not dependent upon a body of content, but helps the learner acquire whatever content is needed. There are eight components of the design process: [1] Preparing the learners for the program; [2] setting a climate that is conducive to learning [physically comfortable and inviting; and psychologically – mutually respectful, collaborative, mutually trustful, supportive, open and authentic, pleasurable and human]; [3] involving learners in mutual planning; [4] involving learners in diagnosing their learning needs; [5] involving learners in forming their learning objectives; [6] involving learners in designing learning plans; [7] helping learners carry out their learning plans; and, [8] involving learners in evaluating their learning outcomes, or re-diagnosing their additional learning needs. Active involvement seems to be the watchword of Knowles' (thus American) version of andragogy, and each step of the andragogical learning process.

The European concept of andragogy is more comprehensive than the American conception. Europeans do not use the terms andragogy and adult education synonymously, as do some Americans (Young, 1985). Dover (2006) suggests that although Malcolm S. Knowles was not the first to use the term, his popularization of andragogy explains why Knowles is one of the most frequently cited theorists in adult education, and is often referred to as 'the father of adult learning'.

Popularizing and Sustaining the American and World-Wide Concept of Andragogy

Lindeman (1926) was first to bring the concept to America. Although he clearly stated that andragogy was the method for teaching adults, the term did not take hold in the new land until many years later. Knowles (1970, 1980) infused it with much of his own meaning garnered from his already extensive experience in adult education. He then combined his expanding practice around the world with his university teaching of budding adult educators.

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Henschke (2000ff; 2009) provides an extensive battery of works on andragogy in his andragogy websites. His hope is that this continuing research will contribute toward sustaining andragogy. Those andragogy websites are as follows: <http://www.lindenwood.edu/education/andragogy.cfm> and <http://www.umsl.edu/~henschke>

In contrast to Savicevic's (1999) earlier expressed concern that Knowles' misunderstanding of andragogy had caused some confusion, Savicevic (2006) reflected about his perception of Knowles' position in sustaining andragogy over the long range of its history into the future. His idea was that over a 40 year period Knowles was very prominent in enlarging and rooting the concept of andragogy through texts, spoken word and lectures, especially but not exclusively in the American literature. Thus, Savicevic considered that Knowles would have a meritorious place in helping andragogy develop and solidify into a scientific academic discipline.

Practical Applications of Andragogy

Practical applications of andragogy – the 66 applications of andragogy in 25 countries (Cooper and Henschke, 2006) were in such varied contexts as business, corporate, web technology, government, continuing professional education, colleges and universities, adult basic education, personal growth, nursing, foreign language, health care, real estate, service industry, religious education, distance education, NGOs, and rural community education. This list defied identifying the most important one, since all of them seemed important on their own merits.

Nevertheless, we will indicate a few applications. Billington (2000) contrasted growth and regression elements in learning environments. Simonson, et al. (2003) identified that andragogical characteristics are needed in distance education systems designed for adults that are derived from Knowles' concept of andragogy. Mezirow (1981) and Suanmali (1981) found adult educators supporting self-directed learning as forming a charter for andragogy.

Theory, Research and Definition of Andragogy

Rosenstock-Huussy (1925) advanced the idea that andragogy is a necessity in which the past, present and future merges with theory becoming practical deeds; Simpson (1964) gave four strands for the training of adult educators; Hadley (1975) developed a 60 item questionnaire assessing an adult educator's andragogical and pedagogical orientation; Henschke (1989) developed an Instructional Perspectives Inventory with seven factors including teacher

trust of learners; Stanton (2005) validated Henschke's instrument in line with self-directed learning readiness, resulting in an almost perfect bell-shaped curve; the Nottingham Andragogy Group (1983) addressed their beliefs about adults and adults' abilities to think creatively and critically in learning settings; Poggeler (1994) listed the ten trends which he hopes will help future andragogical research; Schugurensky (2005) did not understand the scope of andragogy in general and Knowles' idea of andragogy in particular; Zemyov (1994) saw Knowles' view of andragogy as being the fundamental scientific foundation of the theory base of adult education in Russia; Delahaye (1994) found an orthogonal relationship between adult students' andragogical and pedagogical orientation; Christian (1982) developed a 50 item instrument to measure student's andragogical and pedagogical orientation; Connor (1997-2003) pressed us to become more self-reliant and giving up our teacher-reliance; Hoods Woods (1998) perceived andragogy as being based on four environmental influences active in every being; Boucouvalas (1999) posited the importance of the researcher in the research process; Johnson (2000) saw andragogy as fulfilling all the criteria of a theory; Rachal (2000, 2002) provided seven criteria for empirical research in andragogy; Ovesni (1999) supported the idea that andragogy is to generate its own knowledge and is able to offer something to other sciences in scientific cooperation; Aspel (2003) encouraged us to change from pedagogy to andragogy even though it may be a slow transition; Ross (1987) connects some of andragogy's value with its similarity to research in teacher effectiveness; Monts (2000) articulated the need for basic instruction of both teachers and students in andragogy; Reischmann (2005) represented a shift of understanding in the direction of andragogy; Henschke (1998a) called for andragogy to be a scientific discipline of study; Furter (1971) proposed that andragogy be recognized in universities as a science for the training of man throughout his life; Adande & Jegede (2004) hold that andragogy is one of the new sciences of education that is now gaining ground in many areas; Merriam (2001) posited that scholarship on andragogy is one of the two major pillars of adult learning research and theory; Reischmann (2005) offered some historical perspective on the various periods that the term "andragogy" emerged and later receded; Pinheiro (2001) found that international students in American universities prefer learning experiences with the andragogical themes of engagement and connectedness; St. Clair (2002) allowed that andragogy is one theory for the 21st century that will maintain its role as a necessary component of the field's shared knowledge; Savicevic (1999b) added another element to the scientific foundation and design of andragogy by searching its roots; Kajee (No Date) reported that with ESL students, the major impact of andragogy and technology is on learner autonomy and self-directedness; Wilson (2004) offered a new paradigm of the function of the brain and its anatomy being much more closely allied with andragogy and learning than previously thought; Milligan (1999) summarized andragogy as contributing vastly to the enhancement of human abilities of autonomy, self-direction, and critical thinking; Mazhindu (1990) established a foundational link between andragogy and contract learning; Ovesni (2000) proposed three concepts and models of andragogues professional preparation based upon scientific research in andragogy; Krajinc (1989) provided a very succinct and pointed definition of andragogy; Heimstra and Sisco (1990), and Heimstra (no date) contributes an annotation of 97 works related to andragogy; Savicevic's work in andragogy is the most comprehensive to date (1999); Savicevic (2000) also provided a new look at some of the background and antecedents to andragogy on a much broader scale. Cooper and Henschke (2006) provided an ongoing investigation into the comprehensive concept of andragogy.

Conclusions: Implications of Applying the Findings to Practice, Theory or Research

Although it has not been possible to go into the depth needed for a full understanding of andragogy in this paper due to space limitations, hopefully the six major themes that have emerged are enough to encourage the adult, continuing, community, extension, and human resource development educator to continue her/his exploration (theory, practice and/or research) of the concept of andragogy.

One important implication is that much of the research on andragogy emerged out of practice, and thus there is a strong connection for applying these findings to the improvement of practice and theory. A second important and striking implication is that the strength of the andragogical theory, research, and definition foundation, may advance the practice of helping adults learn in adult, continuing, community, extension, and human resource development education. A third implication is the benefit to be derived by those adult, continuing, community, extension, and human resource development educators, who are willing to intentionally use andragogy as a means for finding out, learning, ascertaining new things for their growth; thus, it may help them understand fresh ways to enhance the enlightenment and illumination of the adult constituents they serve on the journey to their full degree of humaneness.

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