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### **Malcolm S. Knowles: Four Major Historical Social Movements that Influenced Him and He Influenced as He Became An Adult Educator**

This paper is based on the dissertation research conducted by Dr. Marti Sopher, for her Ph.D. degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Abundant thanks are due her. She may be contacted as follows: [cacl@chorus.net](mailto:cacl@chorus.net) <<mailto:cacl@chorus.net>> John Henschke served as a volunteer sixth member of her Dissertation Committee, a visiting professor at UW-Madison.

**Abstract:** Using a qualitative approach, this research provided thematic analysis and description of the context of Knowles' times. This study set out to rewrite history to complement Knowles' autobiography, *The Making of an Adult Educator*. The research questions included: What took place when Knowles and Savicevic

met in 1966? How did Knowles decide to make use of the term andragogy to name his theory of adult learning in 1967 and 1968? What discourse followed Knowles' introduction of his theory? What social movements in the U.S. occurred during Knowles' times?

Denzin's (1989) model of a fully triangulated biographical investigation, consisting of a case history, a case study, a life story, a personal experience story, an oral history, and a personal history was used, allowing the subject to also participate in interpretation. Sartre's progressive-regressive method, according to Denzin (1989) provided the framework for interpretation. The event chosen for this framework was the period of 1966-1969 when Knowles learned of the term andragogy from Savicevic and introduced his theory of adult learning after developing it for two decades. Knowles introduced andragogy in a 1967 speech and a related 1968 publication. The spelling was corrected to andragogy in 1968. Knowles, a pioneer and leader in the field of adult education in the U.S., created social change itself by making use of the term andragogy as he saw fit.

The social movements which provide context of Knowles' times included: the humanistic adult education movement, the human services movement, the group dynamics movement, and the human resource development movement. Though Knowles had an eclectic philosophy of adult learning, humanism, a common theme through the movements, is central to the assumptions included in his theory. From the humanistic movement, Knowles gained consistency in philosophy. From human services, he recognized the need to be practical in his approach with adult learners. From the group dynamics movement, he became more authentic in his style. From the human resource development movement, he used action research to share the application of andragogy with others.

#### **Background**

It must be remembered that some discussion regarding andragogy in the United States is now almost 40 years old. Therefore, to best understand Knowles' andragogy and the discourse about andragogy, it is useful to construct the context of Knowles' time because it is from within this context that Malcolm S. Knowles composed, expressed, modified and defended his ideas.

Like many leaders and many adult educators, Knowles had a long and active career. He is considered "one of the most influential adult educators in the United States" (Elias & Merriam, 1984, p. 131). Knowles was possibly the "most quoted author in world literature of adult education" (Dusan M. Savicevic, personal communication with

Marti Sopher, March 25, 1995), yet not the most published. Historians in the field (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994) cited Knowles more than any other adult educator. Savicevic (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, March 25, 1995) shared that he considered Knowles to be "one of the prominent figures in world thought about adult education." Some people have referred to Knowles as "the father of adult education" and several other similar variations.

Knowles referred to his conceptualization of adult learning as andragogy. He had learned of the term from Savicevic, who attended a summer session course on adult learning at Boston University in August, 1966 (Dusan M. Savicevic, personal communication with Marti Sopher, March 25, 1995), which was taught by Knowles (1989b; Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20-21, 1996). Andragogy was introduced as Knowles' theory of adult learning at a time in U.S. history when there was no one theory of adult education (M. S. Knowles, personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20, 1996). Through andragogy, Knowles defined his philosophy of adult education.

#### Sopher's Study of Knowles

Sartre's (1963) progressive-regressive model was used to interpret history. The starting point chosen to be central to the application of this model is an event, or a series of related events. The series of related events which are included to interpret the history related to Knowles included: Knowles' meeting Savicevic in Boston in August of 1966, Savicevic introducing the term andragogy to Knowles, Knowles sharing his 'theory' in the U.S. in a speech in 1967, then again introducing his theory in the U.S. through a published article in April, 1968 which included andragogy misspelled as androgogy, Knowles' communication with Merriam-Webster to clarify the spelling of andragogy and his correction of its spelling, the circulation of his theory (largely through the April, 1968 published article) in 1968-69, and other publication of andragogy in the U.S. at this time (Savicevic, 1968).

This series of related events are referred to as "the event" because the series of related events are progressive and related steps within a more general process of naming and introducing Knowles' theory of adult learning. Had he not met Savicevic and learned of the term andragogy from Savicevic, it is highly unlikely Knowles would have named his theory andragogy and it is most likely he would have published his theory of adult learning anyway using

some other title to name it (Sopher, 2003). However, Knowles did meet Savicevic and learned of the term, chose to make use of it, and deliberately did so to introduce his theory of adult learning--"and the rest is history", as they say. This event was a deliberate choice because Knowles was one of the creators of language of adult education, a language in which budding ideas were--and are--expressed within a new vocabulary.

Sopher's (2003) study made use of a fully triangulated biographical investigative approach (Denzin, 1989) to provide thematic analysis and description of the context of this phenomenon in the history of adult education. This model of inquiry required the combination of case history, case study, life story, personal experience story, oral history and personal history (Denzin, 1989). She chose to apply Sartre's (1963) progressive-regressive model of interpretation, according to Denzin's (1989) explanation of how it "begins with the pivotal event in a subject's life and then works forward and backward from the event" (Denzin, 1989, p. 197) to create context and provide insights.

Despite the fact that much has been written by and about Knowles, this slice of biography has not been recorded making use of an historical framework. Sopher's study was the only time that both Knowles and Savicevic were interviewed for the same publication in regards to Savicevic introducing Knowles to the term "andragogy." Savicevic, in fact, had never been interviewed regarding this event until this research (Dusan Savicevic, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, March 25-26, 1995). To put this portion of Knowles' life as an adult educator into historical context by identifying and framing the event, the discourse which followed for decades, and the social movements of his time provides a framework to better understand this phenomenon.

The purpose of Sopher's study was not to argue if Knowles' theory is a theory or not, nor was it to engage in the debate which has surrounded andragogy for almost forty years. The purpose of her study was not to define andragogy. It acknowledged that the theory of andragogy was developed by Knowles, a man with brief experience in educational research, and it certainly doesn't discredit Knowles to state that. Both Knowles and Sopher acknowledged many individuals as well as a variety of publications were occasions for Knowles' thinking about adult learning. However, the purpose of her study was not to identify individuals who had influenced Knowles' thinking about adult learning. Instead, the purpose of Sopher's study was to record what happened during a period of Knowles' life as an

adult educator and to identify historical social movements which influenced Knowles to provide context of the times.

Through interviews, this research allowed Knowles to share his reaction to the discourse which followed and to identify what movements were important and relevant to him preceding and during the period of the phenomenon of andragogy in the U.S. The process of collecting Knowles' version of history, adding Sopher's interpretation, and then adding Knowles' response to her interpretation, is an interactive process of recording one version of meaning within context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988a). Sopher made use of data from Knowles and relevant others to gather information about Knowles' life to grasp the meaning of his life as it was lived by him (Denzin, 1989). This is the step when interpretation takes place.

Use of interviewing kept the subject aware that many life experiences are of importance even though they may seem unimportant to the subject. What was discovered in the personal communication process between Knowles and Sopher could have been overlooked by Knowles while writing his autobiography (Denzin, 1989).

The reader may find that Sopher's study provides new meaning, or extends the reader's experience, or simply confirms what is already known. The reader may find insight into how this event occurred or might identify previously unknown relationships and variables. This study might lead to a rethinking about Knowles' use of the term andragogy, or at least the discourse about andragogy (Merriam, 1988a).

#### For the Record

Much has been written about Knowles' work, some of it speculation and some of it factual. In a July 21, 1967 speech (J. Agan, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 2, 2003; West Georgia College, 1967) and then a published article in April of 1968, one of the most controversial "theories" of adult learning in the U.S., "androgogy," was offered by Knowles. Knowles (1989b) used the term andragogy in the U.S. to describe his theoretical framework for thinking about adult learning. He changed the spelling of the term to "andragogy" after corresponding with Merriam-Webster February 26, 1968 and receiving their response February 29, 1968 (Knowles, 1980).

Sopher (2003) states 1966 for the date when Knowles met Savicevic. Sopher asked both Knowles and Savicevic about their first

meeting and when it occurred. Knowles (1989b) claimed in his autobiography that they met in 1967 (p. 79), Savicevic claimed that they met in 1966 (personal communication with Marti Sopher, March 25-26, 1995). Their stories matched in every detail except for the date, specifically the year. During the course of Sopher's study, however, it was proven that they met in August, 1966.

Savicevic traveled to Boston in August, 1966, to sit in on the M.A. summer session program of adult education at Boston University, which Knowles led. That is where he had his much anticipated first meeting with Knowles. He prepared a summary of what he shared during these visits in a monograph which was published at Syracuse University in 1968. The monograph does not include his itinerary but it does make use of the term andragogy multiple times. Its existence suggests that Savicevic could have shared the term andragogy many times in many sites during his 1966-67 travels, possibly even before Knowles did. However, Savicevic is not identified with the term in the U.S. nor has anyone who might have been introduced to his explanation of andragogy in 1966-67 ever published their recollection of an exchange with Savicevic about andragogy.

When Knowles met Savicevic, it was not at a meeting planned by Knowles and the purpose of their meeting wasn't, at that time, of any significance to Knowles or directly related to the theoretical framework he had been developing for years, actually decades. At the time he wrote his autobiography in 1989, it is highly doubtful he had any personal records of when he met Savicevic because he would not have had any purpose for such a record. During interviews, Knowles, then 83, referred Sopher to his book for a date of when he met Savicevic, and spoke only in general about the 1960s when recalling their meeting, to recall dates of meetings with Savicevic thirty years earlier. The average person would most likely not be able to accurately recall a meeting date thirty years later. Knowles had a long, full life and many, many significant experiences to recall.

Sopher verified it through *The Exeter Papers* (Liveright & Haygood, 1968), a report of the first International Conference on the Comparative Study of Adult Education which took place in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1966. When Knowles wrote his autobiography in 1989, he could have referenced this source, also, but he may not have remembered or possibly wasn't aware that Savicevic had attended it. Knowles would have been able to communicate with Savicevic in 1989 to inquire as to what year their initial meeting had occurred but it appears he did not.

Sopher then verified it through records at the State University of West Georgia (the former West Georgia College), specifically a

copy of the four page program of the fourteenth annual Delbert Clark Award, Knowles' biographical summary from 1967, a letter from the Chair of the Adult Education Committee to the President of the College, recommending Knowles for the award, and a copy of the press release for the event. The program includes the award dinner announcement, list of award recipients, program and citation. Knowles was presented with the award on that campus.

It was in Carrolton, Georgia, at this event when Knowles gave a speech that included the term and his original explanation of "androgogy" and was later published as his first article about andragogy. Therefore, it would have been impossible for Knowles to first hear the term from Savicevic in August of 1967, a month after Knowles used the term in Georgia. Instead, it is much more likely that they met August, 1966 and Knowles applied the term to his theory of adult learning from August, 1966 until his speech that introduced the term, eleven months later, in July, 1967.

Sopher (2003) also states both 1967 and 1968 as the introduction of Knowles' theory of adult learning in the U.S. This acknowledges that he first introduced "androgogy", his theory of adult learning, in the form of a speech in 1967. It also acknowledges that his speech then appeared as a 1968 written publication (article), which introduced his theory to a larger audience and where it was visible in print for the first time that he had misspelled the term andragogy by spelling it androgogy.

#### **The Four Movements**

The regression part of the progressive-regressive model was defined as the identification of the social movements which led up to the event and occurred during Knowles' lifetime, 1913-1997. The four historical movements in the U.S. which Sopher (2003) identified as major influences on Knowles as an adult educator include the following: the humanistic adult education movement, the human services movement, the group dynamics movement and the human resource development movement. The four social movements are interrelated and overlap. They are presented in the chronological order in which Knowles experienced them.

The four social movements are not self-contained movements; they are interrelated and overlap. As mentioned above, they are presented in the chronological order in which Knowles experienced them. As Denzin (1989) points out, "lived time is not linear; it is circular and interactional" (p. 199). In telling of a story, the division between past, present and future blurs.

Each of these movements provided Knowles with a piece of his style as an adult educator modeling andragogy. Experiencing the mix of these social movements as well as contributing to them and, 'making his mark' in the new emerging field of adult education provided growth for Knowles to develop his own style. It is likely that it was the combination of four historical social movements, uniquely occurring in the U.S., which provided the greatest influence upon Knowles preceding the introduction of andragogy and during the discourse which followed.

His experiences throughout his career reinforced what he had learned from observations of adult learning and provided an action research lab for his ongoing learning and clarification of his thinking (Carlson, 1989; Knowles, 1989b). It is almost seamless to observe where Knowles' personality and theory begin and his practice and experiences end. His method of andragogy became a part of who he was and he believed in it very strongly (Boudreaux, Chermack, Lowe, Wilson, & Holton, 2002).

#### **Knowles and the Humanistic Adult Education Movement**

The humanistic movement in the U.S. and the application of its beliefs into practice in mainstream America had a direct impact on Knowles throughout his career. His observations about how adult learners succeeded made note of their independence and individuality, and were core beliefs of andragogy in the United States. Knowles was considered a leader of humanistic adult education.

There is much agreement that Knowles was a humanist (Elias & Merriam, 1984; Pratt, 1988) and Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20, 1996) also identified himself as a humanist. His style was eclectic with the strongest influence from the humanistic movement. Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20-21, 1996) chose to include in his style the elements which made sense to him personally. The sources of the elements included books, people he knew or read about as well as his own observations. Henschke (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, November 1, 2002) explained it well, "Malcolm was 'utilitarian' in his philosophy, which means you attach to a concept what you consider to be useful, you don't look into the historic origins, background, and a standard (or other people's) definition of the concept."

Lindeman (1961), familiar with Dewey's early writings, originally published *The Meaning of Adult Education* in 1926. Knowles, who worked under Lindeman, and received a copy of Lindeman's book directly from his boss, was influenced by this early pioneer of adult

education (Henschke, 1973; Knowles, 1989; M.S. Knowles, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20-21, 1996). Lindeman's book focused on what happened to people, the effects on individuals in terms of their behavior and their thought processes when they learned. Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20, 1996), recalling why it became one of his favorite books, shared, "It was putting education in a humanizing framework that made sense to me."

The one aspect of Lindeman's work which most influenced Knowles was Lindeman's focus on the individual. Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20, 1996) explained, "He was one of the first people to publish in educational journals insisting on the essence of the learning process being what goes on between individuals and that made a lot of sense to me so I adopted a bunch of his theoretical formulations. He was very heavy on participation, on involving the learners actively in the process of diagnosing their own needs to formulating their own learning plans, identifying resources for helping them carry out their learning plans and then evaluating their own outcomes and that made a lot of sense to me."

Knowles was also influenced by Maslow, one of the Third Force psychologists like Rogers, May, Allport and Fromm, who had roles in the development of humanistic education (Elias & Merriam, 1984, p. 10). They were referred to as "third force psychologists" because there were only two major theories before they further developed the field. These two dominant theories were Freudianism, or psychoanalysis, and the scientific behaviorist's theory (Crain, 1985, p. 262; Snelbecker, 1985, p. 481). "Maslow's (1943) first step in the direction of a humanistic psychology was the formulation of a new theory of motivation. In his major works, Maslow was most interested in the highest need, the need for self-actualization. Self-actualization, a concept borrowed from Goldstein (1939), refers to the actualization of one's potentials, capacities, and talents" (Crain, 1985, p. 263).

Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 21, 1996) acknowledged that Rogers was an influence on Knowles (Knowles, 1989b, pp. 111; Knowles, 1984, p. 85-105). Knowles and Rogers shared a strong belief in freedom of the learner; Maslow was more conservative in this belief. Knowles and Rogers were pioneers, mavericks, leaders, agents of change, rebels. They dared to "hear their own drummer" as well as act on it.

Henschke (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, December 30, 2002) recalled,

I studied with Malcolm and had him for courses at Boston University between September, 1967 and May, 1969. I saw some little smatterings of philosophy that came through his teachings during that time. He obviously did not embrace the philosophy of B. F. Skinner. He talked some about Carl Rogers. But other than that, I don't remember much being articulated. However, his behavior and attitude toward students conveyed his developing philosophy. He treated us as "human beings," "as adults." He was kind, caring and spontaneous. He exemplified his "religious" perspective, in that he believed in the "ultimate goodness of human beings," which is one of what I would call the theological tenants of the Unitarian Religion. This showed itself in his being classified as one who espouses the 'humanistic philosophy' of education, albeit adult education.

Rogers was a professor of psychology at The University of Chicago from 1945-1957 (Merriam, 1984, p. 67). Knowles was "accepted into the graduate program of adult education at the University of Chicago" in June of 1946 (Knowles, 1989b, p. 12; M. S. Knowles, Personal communication, April 20, 1996). During his master's work, Knowles enrolled in a seminar in group counseling which was taught by an associate of Rogers, Arthur Shedlin (Knowles, 1981). Shedlin was the first teacher who referred to himself as a facilitator of learning. When Sopher was in Arkansas to interview Knowles, he gave her a copy of his 1981 article, a recollection of this introduction to the ideas of group dynamics and how he experimented with them. That series of events led to his deliberate decision to be a facilitator of the learning process rather than a teacher. Written in Knowles' informal and descriptive style, it shares much context of an experience that introduced him to the group dynamics movement. According to Knowles (1981), Shedlin shared with the class the first night they met as a group, "I am hoping that you will help me become a better facilitator of learning." It was an exhilarating experience for Knowles to learn in a new way, based on Rogers' humanistic beliefs (Knowles, 1981; Knowles, 1989). It was actually life-changing for Knowles who had taught in the same style he had been taught in for years. When the first meeting of the class ended, Knowles rushed to the library and checked out all the books

and periodicals he could locate which were by or about Rogers. Knowles (1989b) wrote,

I was so curious to find out what this man was all about. I never read so many books and worked so hard in any course I had ever taken. I had never before experienced taking so much responsibility for my own learning as I did in that seminar. It was exhilarating. I began to sense what it means to get 'turned on' to learning. I began to think about what it means to be a facilitator of learning rather than a teacher. (pp. 13-14)

According to Knowles' perspective, Rogers behaved authentically. His authenticity influenced his relationships with others (Knowles, 1989b, pp. 32-35). In the 1970s, Knowles recalled Rogers' work related to learning theory, which made Rogers stand out from the other learning theorists (Knowles, 1989b, pp. 46-47). Rogers' work influenced how Knowles (1989b) thought about leadership (pp. 53-55). The common theme in these incidents was humanistic thinking, which Rogers (1969) articulated well.

Although Knowles "was not the primary force behind a shift in educational thought away from behaviorism, he was the most potent adult educator to move in this direction since Lindeman" (Pratt, 1993, p. 16). His legacy and that of fellow students at the University of Chicago, like Charters, would be to establish the field of adult education in the U.S.

Knowles' theory of adult education, andragogy, was his translation of humanistic goals into a theoretical framework for adult educators (Ali, 1982; Elias & Merriam, 1984; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). He emphasized the learner and human development. "An examination of what Knowles considers to be the four underlying assumptions of andragogy reveals the humanistic foundations" (Elias & Merriam, 1984, p. 131). These humanistic assumptions were: As a learner matures, self concept moves from a dependent personality to being self-directed; adults have acquired unique individual life experiences that may be a resource to their own and others' learning; adults' readiness to learn implies that they learn what is relevant, based on an intrinsic motivation to meet their unique needs and interests; and, adults prefer immediate application of what they learn. In addition to the assumptions, the basic principles of humanistic education, such as self-concept, self-diagnosed learning, respect,

trust, self-evaluation and a cooperative learning climate are very apparent in Knowles' work. His theory of andragogy emphasized the learner and the learner's development, which is humanist in nature.

Sopher shared with Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20, 1996), "If I would use Elias and Merriam's framework of philosophies, you seem humanistic to me." Knowles responded, "Yes, yes." Sopher observed that when he wanted to emphasize his response, he repeated it.

Malcolm Knowles is indeed a humanistic adult educator. For him, the learning process involves the whole person, emotional, psychological and intellectual. It is the mission of adult educators to assist adults in developing their full potential in becoming self-actualized and mature adults. Andragogy is a methodology for bringing about these humanistic ideals (Elias & Merriam, 1984, p. 133).

#### **Knowles and the Human Services Movement**

The development and growth of human services in the U.S. was a response to meeting people's needs at a community level in a holistic manner. As the population in the U.S. increased and became more diverse, more needs of people were identified and response increased. The focus was placed on social action, building community, treating people equally, meeting social as well as physical needs, and making practical use of limited resources. People who serve in this field often refer to it as "a calling" as they serve others with their hearts, minds and bodies. The philosophy and practice of this field has been founded on humanistic thought and actions.

For the purposes of Sopher's study, the term human services was used to describe a broad movement of social action in the U.S. that provided services, including educational services, to people of all backgrounds, economic levels and ages. Human service agencies have been organized as non-profit and for profit, private as well as government operated, to serve the wealthy or the nation's poor. Human services agencies have charged a fee for service or received funding to provide free or inexpensive services. These agencies were both large and small and operated with both paid and volunteer staffing. They were often referred to as voluntary associations.

A common thread in the existence of human services is providing services in response to a customer need or, on occasion, a customer want. They are market-driven, as are the humanistic adult education institutions. They provide a wide variety of services as diverse as the

communities they serve. A small sampling of program offerings in human services, in addition to a variety of adult education, includes providing shelter to the homeless, offering counseling, responding to natural disasters, providing organized youth activities, offering meals or clothing for the poor, sheltering victims of violence, and responding to transportation needs for handicapped.

In Knowles' times, human services agencies played a special role in the history and growth of adult education. Human services were "concerned with the education of adults as volunteers, members, or clients" (Knowles, 1955, p.70). With this variety of stakeholders served by human services, the listing of their adult education programs was limited by only funding and creativity. Adult education in these settings included financial training, teaching English as a second language, offering workers' education, coordinating continuing education, providing citizenship education and leadership training. The sampling also included teaching safety and first aid, training volunteers, offering and responding to public health concerns or homeland security by informing the public at the community level, coordinating lifelong learning opportunities in a traditional or nontraditional setting, and providing educational literature or workshops to change public attitudes or improve health behaviors. Teaching parenting skills, or bringing together a group of adults who share the same hobby or interest such as sewing or gardening, providing driver safety instruction for senior citizens, teaching Bible studies or leading book discussion groups, and coordinating support groups have also been offered.

Knowles (1950) noted the existence of formal and informal adult education through this publication of his master's thesis. Formal programs were usually part of the established educational institutions, including universities, technical colleges, and high schools. Though they offered courses for credit, adults often participated without earning credit. Informal adult education was offered in such organizations as the Young Men's Christian Associations (Y.M.C.A.), Young Women's Christian Associations (Y.W.C.A.), community centers, labor unions, industries, and churches. "Many formal educational institutions also offer informal classes in addition to their regular curriculum. These courses are not for credit or a degree, but have as their objective the meeting of an immediate interest or need" (p. 23). He also noted that the Y.M.C.A.s invest much time in the training of adult volunteer leaders, "a critical element in their accomplishing their character-building goals with youth" (Knowles, 1980, p. 34).

At the time Knowles became affiliated with the Y.M.C.A., in 1940, it was approaching a century in age in the U.S. after being introduced into this country from England. It is holistic in its approach, dedicated to building a healthy mind, body and spirit. Y.M.C.A. programs promote good health, strong families, youth leadership, community development, and international understanding.

There were numerous experiences he had in human services while he was growing up, and these continued throughout his life. Knowles credited his father for teaching many things to him--values, honesty, generosity, integrity, fairness, authenticity (Knowles, 1989b)--and a humanistic approach to serving others was certainly one of them. He shared through publication how he earned 50 Boy Scout merit badges, thus earning him a trip to England. He could have kept his process to himself and been a competitive "star" but the budding humanist forming in Knowles wanted to equally promote self-development in others as well as his own development. He also served the Boy Scouts as patrol leader and troop leader. During his Harvard years as a student, he served as a club advisor at Lincoln House, a settlement house in Boston. The club served adolescent boys who lived in poverty, giving them guidance and support. He served as the Massachusetts Deputy Administrator and Director of related training of the National Youth Administration [NYA] Recreational Leadership Institute. The purpose of this was to make youth more employable. Knowles served the Y.M.C.A., first in Boston, then Detroit, then in Chicago as a paid employee. He also worked with the Y.M.C.A. sometimes as a volunteer and sometimes paid, for many years throughout his life, and was instrumental in helping the National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations develop Training volunteer leaders: A handbook [of 110 hours of training materials] to train volunteers and other leaders of program groups. Knowles served as first Executive Director of the Adult Education Association of the USA for almost a decade. He worked with the American Society for Training and Development, and helped with all five of their professional competency studies. He continued to be involved in numerous volunteer and professional association human services for the remainder of his life (Sopher, 2003).

At the Boston Y.M.C.A., Knowles organized an "Association School" for adults. Knowles conducted a practical needs assessment and interest survey of members and the surrounding community, then developed a program that grew rapidly. He wrote an article on the practical value of evening classes, "Having Any Fun?", which was published in September, 1946 (Knowles, 1989b, Pp. 26, 153). Knowles shared it because of his commitment to help others make

better use of their leisure time. Later, about a dozen letters to the editor described how his article had helped them. Many of the ideas he shared were learned from instructors at the Huntington Avenue Y.M.C.A. in Boston (Knowles, 1989b). This was typical of Knowles' work throughout his career. He was observant, learned much from others, combined that with his own thoughts and experiences, synthesized it in print and practice, and passed the information along to reach as many others as possible. Knowles never showed interest in being territorial about his knowledge or resources. That would not have been consistent with his style. He influenced others to practice what he knew, to make use of it (J. A. Henschke, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, January 29, 2003; L. Johnson, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, January 28, 2003).

It was at the Y.M.C.A. setting that Knowles made use of his observation skills and deepened his preference for the practical. Three learners requested a course in astronomy. Knowles recruited an instructor through that department at Harvard. The director of the observatory recommended his teaching assistant, who needed the money. Twelve learners registered for it, but only six returned for the second session of the course. Then only three returned for the third session, causing the course to end and the fees to be refunded. The academician was replaced with a retired gentleman who had no training or experience with teaching but had much passion for astronomy. Knowles asked the original twelve learners to come back and give it a second chance. Those twelve were so engaged by the practical approach of the new instructor that they recruited six more of their friends.

While organizing job training courses which were held at the Y.M.C.A., Knowles "would wander around the halls and look through the little peep holes in the doors to see what was happening." He added,

I gradually became aware of the fact that those teachers that were hired from other educational institutions were standing up in front of the classes reading their notes from their day classes and the students were sitting there nodding off. Plus when I looked through the doorway holes, of those teachers I hired from industries or from social services had their students in little groups and the students were yakking and reporting and it was very lively. And, also, they seemed to be learning so much more when I talked to them and so I

gradually became, I started, formulating generalizations in my mind that adults learn better when they are actively involved in the process . . . And so I began developing theoretical framework. (M. S. Knowles, personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 20, 1996).

Knowles observed that the non-academically trained teachers he recruited from industry and social agencies outperformed the teachers who were prepared in academic settings, and it made a significant impression upon how he thought about adult learning. "The quality of relationships between service providers and the service recipients" was the biggest influence of working in this environment. "It was a much more kind of collaborative kind of relationship than in academia." (M. S. Knowles, personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 21, 1996). He started building a theory about adult learning based on those observations. This theory was influenced most by his observations of humanistic and practical adult education in the Y.M.C.A. Thus, his learning theory ultimately became labeled "andragogy."

#### **Knowles and the Group Dynamics Movement**

Knowles applied principles of group dynamics in many settings--human services (for NYA and the Y.M.C.A., for example), the National Training Labs (NTL), the Adult Education Association (AEA), facilitating learning for adults in higher education and developing human resources in business and industry. He observed, reflected, published and presented related to group dynamics. Applying group dynamics research became a way of life for Knowles. The group dynamics movement reinforced and refined his humanistic thinking. It also stressed the development of practical skills, which reinforced Knowles' appreciation of the practical aspects of adult learning in human services.

In the mid-1930s, Knowles started his personal evolution which spanned a few decades. He felt the tension between what he wanted to be and what he thought he should be. He began rejecting the social system which he found to be judgmental, prejudiced, and cold. Knowles, a humanist, felt like being warm and accepting of people. Rogers was instrumental in "giving him permission to be himself." Knowles recognized his need to be self-accepting, self-respecting, accepted, and respected, and chose to follow it (Henschke, 1973 from interview with Knowles, November 16, 1969).



Knowles was introduced to the group dynamics movement by Shedlin, an associate of Rogers, through facilitating a group at the University of Chicago about a year after Knowles began his masters studies. Knowles was fascinated by the role of the facilitator and the group experience. He became very intrinsically motivated to learn as much as he could about group dynamics. After the first meeting of Shedlin's course, a seminar in psychological counseling, Knowles developed a plan for inquiry teams and he presented his plan at the second meeting (Knowles, 1981).

NTL was founded through "its first lab session on human relations and group processes at Gould Academy, Bethel, Maine, in 1947" (Kidd, 1978; NTL, 1961). Its original name was National Training Laboratory in Group Development. T-Groups [Training Groups] was a large part of its focus on education and learning. It offered training, training aids, consulting, and research for human resource training and an improved society. Sensitivity group training, credited to Robert Tannenbaum in California, was associated with therapy, creative expression and new forms of communication (Kidd, 1978, p. 211). Its mission was to bridge the gap between the social scientist and the practitioner, applying scientific knowledge to solve day-to-day problems. The original focus was on practice of skills and group development. It evolved into an emphasis on self and awareness through T-Groups and sensitivity training. The tension between training and therapy was also addressed.

Intensive group self-study procedures were designed to bring about increased sensitivity and skill in relationship to social and psychological aspects which occurred in interpersonal, group or organizational settings. The actual interaction of participants of a group were studied and analyzed by the participants themselves, guided by trained staff. The focus was on individual behavior in the small group setting. Staff interpreted, shared comments and observations, analyzed, and guided procedures. The need was identified in response to an increase in formal organizations, voluntary associations, and even more complex family life which required more collaboration, social sensitivity, and creative work with others. It dealt with normal persons in search of improved social skills, going well beyond the cognitive realm.

Benne (October, 1989), one of the founders of NTL, Washington, D.C., recalled details of the times, including a story about the maverick in Knowles.

My early memories of Malcolm go back to 1948. The newly

elected president of the NEA Division of Adult Education had attended the first NTL summer laboratory session in 1947 in Bethel. He was so rapturous about his T-group experience there that he decided to make the national meeting of the division into a three-day T-group laboratory. It was a mad idea because of the time constraints, and because it departed radically from the usual pattern of national meetings, without preparing those attending. Most of the T-groups--there were seven or eight--bombed. Mine turned out a success. The members were intrigued with the examination of group processes and wanted more. One of the reasons for that outcome was that Malcolm was a member of my group. He was able to talk about his own behavior in the group and to report his feelings about others' behavior without antagonizing them. He was then the director of adult education at the Metropolitan YMCA in Chicago. I predicted then that Malcolm would become a major national leader in the field.

In 1952, NTL became part of the NEA. A small staff at NEA in Washington, D.C. administered the program of training, consulting, and research. More than a hundred social scientists from over forty leading universities and NTL staff provided the services. NTL offered an intern program to help social scientists become effective trainers. In this way, NTL was addressing the growing demand for trained staff in group dynamics.

When Knowles (1989b) reflected and remarked about NTL being an influence, he had an idea about the great impact this historical movement had upon him, as he shared in his autobiography,

Another major influence in shaping me as an adult educator at about the same time was the National Training Laboratories and its founding trio, Kenneth Benne, Leland Bradford, and Ronald Lippitt. I had a course in group dynamics with Herbert Thelen at the University of Chicago in 1949 and became intrigued With the concept of an unstructured group laboratory approach to learning interpersonal attitudes and skills and, particularly, to learning to receive feedback about my behavior nondefensively. So I

attended the 1952 summer session of NTL in Bethel, Maine, as the co-trainer of a T-group. I returned as the administrator of the summer session in 1954. My wife and children participated in labs both times, and our family relations were greatly enriched. The insights I gained from these experiences, but particularly from the models of behavior provided by Ken, Lee and Ron, have been among the most potent components of my professional equipment ever since (p.15).

Nadler and Nadler shared, "Malcolm is an authentic person; what you read is what he is. If you have had the opportunity to work with him, you know that he not only espouses concepts of adults as learners but that he also practices them" (Knowles, 1989b, p. xiii). Knowles indeed "practiced what he preached"--and in this case, his entire family learned how to apply humanistic philosophy to daily life through improved group dynamics as a family system. Knowles could not separate experiencing the group dynamics movement from his thinking about how he would practice adult education--he published about his group experience as a family, he made use of groups in the adult learning he facilitated, and he assisted in published training guides to be used in voluntary associations to train leaders.

As Executive Director at the Adult Education Association of the USA, he initiated the publishing of a leadership series of sixteen pamphlets in 1955. The titles included but are not limited to: *How to Lead Discussions; Planning Better Programs; Taking Action in the Community; Understanding How Groups Work; How to Teach Adults; and How to Use Role Playing and Other Tools for Learning* (AEA of U.S.A., 1955). Each pamphlet provided leaders in adult learning with introductory material, practical help in using a method, or gaining insight and skill in a particular area of adult learning.

Knowles continued his interest in group dynamics. In 1962, he collaborated with others and developed a 10-week series of half-hour programs on "The Dynamics of Leadership." It aired on WGBH-TV in Boston. It was also available to many individuals and groups. This series included "The Anatomy of a Group" and "Individual Motivation and Behavior in Groups", for example (Knowles, 1989b, p. 122). Knowles understood the impact the media could have to further the understanding of adult education--publishing to the public as well as being visible through the media.

Knowles was a natural as a group facilitator because of his well-developed human relations skills, consistency of his humanist philosophy, his developing authenticity by trusting his own instincts, and because being a change agent and observer came natural to him. Henschke experienced Knowles as a top notch group facilitator in all his adult education courses during his doctoral work at Boston University.

Sopher (2003) had participated as an adult learner in group instruction which Knowles facilitated in North Carolina for The Fielding Institute on July 19, 1991. Experiencing Knowles "the person" and Knowles the "facilitator of adult learning" was seamless. He modeled every aspect of what he taught and wrote. The process was consistent and practical. Knowles' style of delivery of his andragogical practices was authentic. Sopher had read some of his publications before she attended his workshop, and quite frankly was skeptical and somewhat nervous that she would be disappointed experiencing Knowles in person, thinking that perhaps he couldn't live up to her high expectations after connecting with his ideas. Easily, he exceeded her expectations from start to finish. After the introduction, one member of the group protested Knowles' decision to put them into smaller study groups to independently conduct their assignment, saying she had come to hear him, not to interact with her peers. She wanted to learn his ideas, see how he taught, hear what he had to say. To be honest, Sopher reflected that it could have easily been her verbalizing the same thoughts. Knowles appropriately responded, modeling conflict management and concern for self-esteem, and assured all of the participants that the best way to learn his method was to directly experience his method. He facilitated their learning throughout the day with the grace of a skilled conductor directing an orchestra. It left Sopher believing that if one has never experienced Knowles directly, it would be impossible to truly understand his impact.

#### **Knowles and the Human Resource Development (HRD) Movement**

In 1962, Knowles "formulated guidelines for developing a competency-based graduate program for training adult educators/human resource developers" (Henschke, 1991, p. 10), in the format of *A Theory of the Doctorate in Education*. The guide is reflective of adult education of the times. Its original purpose was to serve as a guide in the newly started graduate program in adult education at Boston University. It was a practical guide which he would share with adult learners he served until his death in 1997.

Henschke (1991) found that competency studies related to HRD began as early as 1938.

Before Knowles, contributors to these competency studies related to HRD included Lindeman (1938) with a discussion of the purpose of adult education in the U.S. as well as five competencies, and Houle (1956; Eaves, 1985) who listed ten abilities. Both Lindeman and Houle served as influences on Knowles. Before Knowles further contributed to this aspect of development in the HRD field, Lippitt and Nadler (1967, August), another influence on Knowles regarding HRD, identified three major roles (learning specialist, administrator and consultant) as well as eleven related functions. Henschke (1991) suggested their work was "considered by some as groundbreaking in the HRD field" (p. 9).

"The work that had been done in the area of needs assessment, task analysis, and evaluation laid the groundwork for the introduction of competency-based learning, which came into popular use in the last half of the 1970s (Craig, 1996, p. 16). "Competency-based learning is concerned with having the trainees develop certain specified competencies that match the requirements of their job, while recognizing the fact that the trainee has certain competencies which fit the job requirements and do not require additional training" (Craig, 1996, p. 16).

Knowles (Craig, 1996; Knowles, 1970, 1980, 1984, 1986, 1987) then identified eight to ten roles in HRD for the developer as well as 70 to 80 abilities that included designing adult learning experiences and making use of a variety of learning and training techniques, for example. Henschke (1991) suggested that Knowles' contribution was "viewed by many as a major contribution/contributions throughout the history of the HRD and adult education fields" (p. 12). Knowles was rich in experience from his own action research as well as authentic, which was reflected in his contribution. "Started in 1969 and completed in 1974, ASTD's second major project focusing on competencies was entitled *Professional Development Manual*. Knowles' work was a major influence on this project" (Henschke, 1991, p. 19).

Then, in *Developing Competency Models*, Knowles (1970) "identified a systematic process for developing competency models, including self-diagnosis of needs" (Henschke, 1991, p. 12), consistent with his humanistic philosophy of his model. The impact of the group dynamics movement appeared in the findings of competencies for the HR developer: group participation, eliciting the judgment of experts, task and job analysis, and research.

Henschke (1987, 1989), a former student of Knowles, contributed *Instructional Perspectives Inventory* which identified competencies and common factors, building on the understanding he had gained from Knowles related to theory and practice, as well as his acquired knowledge of theory combined with his observations from practice in continuing education. "In 1989, he engaged more than 600 adult educators in identifying common factors of adult instructors" (Henschke, 1991, p. 25). Two of the five factors he identified included trust of learners and seeing the learner as an individual, or accommodating learner uniqueness. Henschke's studies "made the case for research and practice being closely linked in identifying competencies for HRD/adult educators" (Henschke, 1991, p. 15).

Nadler and Nadler (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, January 28, 2003) discussed with Knowles how his work would apply to the HRD field. Polaroid, near Boston, called Knowles in "and he became known in the HRD field" (L. Nadler & Z. Nadler, Personal communication, January 28, 2003). When Polaroid contacted Knowles, he contacted his friends in the HRD field, Nadler and Nadler. Knowles "said he had been approached by them to some work with them in adult learning. He wanted to know how I had been using concepts of adult learning in the workplace" (L. Nadler & Z. Nadler, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, February 2, 2003). Johnson (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, January 28, 2003) met Knowles at about this time, at "the beginning of the HRD movement" for Knowles, about 1964-1965. Referring to Knowles first work in the HRD field with Polaroid as his client, Johnson recalled, "He did a lot of work with them--sensitivity groups, T groups."

Johnson learned much from Knowles and from interacting with Knowles as a co-facilitator and a peer in the HRD movement. "I became more grounded, and had more respect for adult learners," Johnson (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, January 28, 2003) recalled.

It provided me with a solid background. It enhanced what I was doing. It made sense. I remember we conducted a workshop on conflict for Fielding. Many of the students there were HR managers. One was from an oil company in Canada. The training went really well. Malcolm believed in this stuff. The HR manager said to come up and do the same workshop in Canada. It grew into a five year program at that company.

When I was in northern Alberta working with miners who had less than an 8th grade education or with Fielding doctoral students, I applied Malcolm's model and it worked. He treated everyone the same way, whether they attended a three hour workshop or were his students all semester long. He presented it in a way to fit the learner's experiences. Sometimes that was a challenge. The model was not to be above them but with them. From spending time with people, you learned what their life was in reality. I learned all of this from him.

Many trainers saw themselves as adult educators and made use of adult learning concepts and methods in designing trainings. The Commission of Professors of Adult Education voted at its 1984 business meeting to found a task force on human resource development . . . The fact that professors of adult education take seriously the theory and practice of human resource development is not surprising given the extent and vigor of many business and industry training programs and inservice development activities. (Brookfield, 1986, p. 188)

The ASTD viewed the quality improvement movement as further promotion of participative management. Participative management was viewed as a way to increase organizational effectiveness. In American quality circles (QC's), workers came together as a team to analyze and offer solutions to problems related to their work. The quality improvement movement assumed skill development in workers, lifelong learning, continuous change, and a need for training.

Several thousand QC's existed throughout the U.S. in the 1980s. A large part of their process was to learn about a problem and then teach the organization about it as they offered possible solutions. The process modeled lifelong learning, collaborative methods, making use of adults' experiences, problem solving, collective decision making, leadership development, group dynamics, and facilitation skills (Brookfield, 1986, pp. 194-195). By 1985, millions of learners were enrolled in training through their employers in business and industry. Business and industry was investing billions of dollars in adult learners. "IBM alone is said to spend \$700 million a year on employee education" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 187; Eurich, 1985).

Knowles, a member of the HRD Hall of Fame, made a video, "Malcolm Knowles on HR Development." On tape, he was

interviewed and discussed such topics as self-directed learning in the workplace, diversity management, andragogy on the job, and learning organizations. His concepts of andragogy were successfully applied to the HRD setting.

Knowles (Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 21, 1996) made a deliberate decision to write to the general public, not academia. That was the audience he wanted to appeal to--and he did. "People started asking me to come to the universities, to government agencies, to social agencies as a consultant, to meet with them, to meet with their leadership groups, to do workshops for them, mostly on adult learning, how adults learn, what the differences are between adult learning format and thought processes as with youth education. Of course, my books paved the way for me, caused people to see me as a leader." Knowles knew he would have a greater influence on the field of adult education if he were part of the broader field of nonacademic settings for adult education. Knowles also knew, however, that he needed to be involved with the academic world to influence the field as well as learn from it.

In addition, Knowles explained that business and industry were a strong influence in pushing him to include competencies in his model of adult learning. He remarked that he measured how information was used. In contrast, he added, academicians measured facts or information required versus how information or facts were used. The world of academics measured scores, grade point averages instead of behavioral observations and observed outcomes. Grades weren't of importance to Knowles. He saw himself as being more practical.

Knowles retired from The Department of Adult and Community College Education of North Carolina State University in 1979. He remained active well into the 1990s in Human Resource Development consulting and facilitating workshops for business and industry, government agencies, educational institutions, religious institutions, human services and ASTD chapters and conferences in North America, Europe, South America, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Thailand and Korea (Craig, 1996, p. 253).

### The Discourse

The period of 1970 until the present, 2006, which is when the discourse followed the event, represents the progression part of the progressive-regressive model. The discourse which followed Knowles' introduction of his theory of adult education, andragogy, helps to understand what followed after Knowles shared his thinking about adult education. This literature review is what represented one

of the first steps in the process of Sopher's qualitative inquiry. It helped to focus and narrow what was missing to understand Knowles' theory, within context. Her criticism of the literature stimulated the pursuit of an answer to her questions. The literature search provided part of the answers and assisted in pursuing the search to identify the themes, or historical social movements which most likely influenced Knowles and he influenced prior to his introduction of andragogy and during the discourse which followed the introduction of andragogy.

Knowles began publishing his ideas about adult learning in 1950 and continued with several publications each decade until his death in 1997. The literature recognized, questioned and developed andragogy. The social movements of Knowles' times were occasionally referenced in the literature. After Knowles published his theory of andragogy, Savicevic became aware of Knowles' use, or "misuse", of the term andragogy. His impression was that Knowles "didn't get it." Articles, such as the one written by Boyer (1984), appeared to be out of context at times and were inaccurate as a result. Some, like Cross (1981), rejected andragogy. Others, like Grace (2001) and Welton (1995) thought andragogy should be excised from the adult education lexicon. Others, like Hartree (1984), found the theory of andragogy to be confusing. Others, like Jarvis (1984), would not accept it as a "theory." The controversy and the discourse continue in the adult education field today, as evidenced recently in Rachal's (2002) article.

It is significant to point out that the sharing of Knowles' theory of andragogy came at a time when the newly and rapidly developing field of adult education was becoming established as a discipline in the academic world. Therefore, it is no surprise that much of the criticism came from academia. Knowles straddled a career in academia and as a practitioner of adult learning outside of academia. Knowles' work is best understood by practitioners and researchers if it is historically accurate, within his humanistic philosophy, and explained in the context of his times, recognizing the role that each historical movement in the U.S. plays in Knowles' theory of andragogy.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to augment the historical and social context, in addition to giving order and insight regarding Malcolm S. Knowles' contribution to the Field of Adult Education. Knowles' ideas were rooted in the movements of his times in a society that had not yet experienced adult education as we know it today. The atypical of his age has become the typical. This additional history is beneficial.

Humanism is at the core of Knowles' thinking about andragogy. Its emergence into mainstream thought and practice in the 1960s and 1970s served as a base for his work in adult learning as well as the context of his times. When the discourse which followed his introduction of andragogy was not from a humanistic philosophical perspective, it was out of context from Knowles' perspective and at times not historically accurate (Boyer, 1984). Some approach andragogy from a perspective of liberal or behaviorist philosophies of education. This may be compared to trying to make use of an overhead transparency to make a complex point but putting the wrong overlay on top of it. It doesn't fit because it's not a good match – you can't clearly understand humanistic thinking if your philosophical framework is limited to liberal or behaviorist thinking (M. S. Knowles, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, April 25-26, 1996).

The human service movement, based on humanistic thinking and practice, was concerned with individual growth as well as interpersonal relationships and human relations. Human services offered practical adult education and access for the masses, both of which Knowles found appealing. The group dynamics movement, also based on humanistic thinking and practices, had a strong relationship with human services. Training and experience working in this field emphasized development of the individual and relationships with others. Facilitating these groups with the grace of a master brought out the authenticity of Knowles' style. The field of HRD offers many leaders and philosophies but Knowles rose in popularity in this field because of the humanistic style he practiced in delivering HRD. It focused on development of the individual as well as groups and teams.

Putting the influence of these four movements together rounded out his initial theory of adult learning – andragogy. Knowles (April 25-26, 1996) deliberately chose to use the term andragogy to name his theory of adult learning, and he chose to write it in such a fashion that a wider audience than academia would have access to his thinking.

Based on Savicevic's (1968) statement that andragogy was the theory of adult education in Yugoslavia, perhaps Knowles understood it as a theory. The discourse which followed this event recorded the context of the times. The four social movements of the times were identified, and it was recognized that Knowles' use of the term andragogy also created social change (Foner, 1976). Knowles was a pioneer in the rapidly growing field of adult education in the U.S. He was a leader in the development of the field and his thinking about andragogy added another paradigm for consideration to challenge accepted practices of the times. Each of these four movements as well as the combination of these movements influenced his thinking about his theory and practice of andragogy. Though they are listed as four separate movements, the four social movements are not mutually exclusive (L. Nadler & Z. Nadler, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, February 2, 2003).

Knowles named his learning theory andragogy in 1967 because it made sense to him to make use of it in the manner he did. Had he not learned the term from Savicevic, he would have introduced his theory at about the same time anyway and called it something else. "Malcolm had been developing all of his expertise in teaching adults, adult learning, and adult education for numerous years which was in his book *Informal Adult Education*, and other materials after that" (J. Henschke, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, November 1, 2002). When Savicevic told Knowles he was practicing andragogy, "Malcolm attached the 'andragogy' label to all of his previous expertise, even though Savicevic, who had been 'observing' and reading Malcolm's ideas for some years, didn't know or understand all of Malcolm's accumulated expertise. Consequently, Malcolm got out of 'andragogy' what Malcolm wanted to get out of it, despite the fact that Savicevic thought 'Malcolm didn't get it', whatever the 'it' was that Savicevic thought Malcolm (or anyone else) ought to get" (J. Henschke, Personal communication with Marti Sopher, November 1, 2002).

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