



Andragogy, Part II

Teaching children (pedagogy) can be quite different from teaching adults (andragogy). We delve again into andragogy.

Why do adults learn differently from younger students? Their personal experiences have shaped their thinking. Adults feel compelled to put academic learning into the context of their lives. This is especially true in the workplace, where teaching and learning is expected to increase proficiency or productivity.

Andragogy has been studied widely for nearly a hundred years beginning with Eduard Lindeman in the 1920s. Malcolm Knowles added significantly to the research in the 1970s. Yet many educators feel that the theories still have not found their way into practice today.

We all know well the lecture teaching model, possibly as purveyors or practitioners, certainly as students ourselves in the past. Some of us were content with lectures and succeeded well enough to gravitate back to traditional settings which use that method. Instructors who see only the returning flock naturally feel rewarded and continue to deliver instruction in the same way.

Others perhaps did not succeed, or are not content to glue themselves into a chair on the receiving end of a one- or two-hour lecture. It's not that we aren't as smart as the other guys. We learn differently. What should instructors be doing differently to help us succeed too?

Eight andragogic methods

Tom Drummond, an instructor at North Seattle Community College, offers a list of adult learning practices.

1. Alternative lectures Talk in seven to 10 minute segments. Ask pre-planned rhetorical questions. Ask if students agree or disagree. Ask them to share examples of the point just made. Include an immediate mastery test in the last few minutes of each session, which will double a learner's retention, both factual and conceptual.

When presenting complex material, have students listen to 15-20 minutes of lecture without taking notes. Then have students spend five minutes recording all they can recall. Break into small discussion groups, and reconstruct the lecture conceptually with supporting data.

2. Group discussion triggers

Engage learners by assigning simple tasks preceding the class discussion, such as short reading assignments, self-assessment questionnaires and brief surveys of learner attitudes and values. Use student autobiographies and oral histories to bridge the gap between experience and the content under study, because adult students more readily participate in discussions when they can personally relate to the material.

Case studies force learners to articulate their thoughts, frame problems, generate solutions, and establish principles that may apply to other situations. Role playing can explore feelings, attitudes, values, and strategies that help individuals resolve personal dilemmas with group assistance.

3. Thought-provoking questions.

- *Description:* What happened? What is the difference between...?
- *Common Purpose:* What is the purpose or function of...?
- *Procedures:* How was this done? What will have to be done?
- *Possibilities:* What else could...? How could we...?
- *Prediction:* What will happen next?
- *Justification:* How can you tell? What evidence led you to...?
- *Rationale for reality:* Why? What is the reason?

- *Generalization:* What is the same about ___ and ___?
- *Definition:* What does ___ mean?

4. Reflective responses to learner contributions Effective teachers respond to learners with respect, without changing the topic and without domination. Effective teachers avoid 'parroting' a learner's words, because to do so is both irritating and condescending. Instead, paraphrase or rephrase the underlying message, especially when the learner says something new, something more than the commonplace. Without changing the topic or bending it, connect it to a current situation or a past experience closely related to what the learner has said. Ask for an example. Or "Who can build on what she just said?"

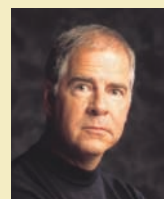
“Others perhaps did not succeed, or are not content to glue themselves into a chair on the receiving end of a one- or two-hour lecture.”

5. Reward learner participation

Support initiative, cooperation and perseverance with well-timed positives. Be careful to avoid flattery which tends to foster approval-seeking rather than independence. In fact, avoid personal evaluation and stimulate group discussion with "That's a topic we need to discuss." Or "I have wondered that, too. Anyone else?"

Use nonverbal signals that are gestures of excitement and success: smile; wink; thumbs up. Don't hesitate to respond at times as a member of the group. For example, "I get discouraged, too." Emphasize enjoyment: "That was fun!" Competence: "You did it!" Cleverness: "Creative." Growth: "You've taken a step forward."

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Best Practices

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6. Active learning strategies Many techniques other than exams stimulate adult learners. In a "construction spiral," ask a sequence of questions in a three-step learning cycle: individual, group, entire class. In a "round," have each person in turn express a point of view on a given topic, while others listen. Use a round to elicit a range of viewpoints and build a sense of safe participation.

In-class journals, reading summaries and essays improve learning of subject matter while improving writing skills. Brainstorming exposes possibilities without judgments. It can demonstrate that working together can create more than individuals alone. Simulations and games help learners practice coping with stressful, unfamiliar or complex situations.

Use "question pairs," in which learners prepare for class by reading an assignment and prepare questions on the major points, then ask them of each other and provide corrective

feedback as necessary. In "learning cells," each learner reads different selections and then teaches the material to a partner.

7. Cooperative group assignments Ninety years of research and 600 studies show cooperative learning stimulates higher-level reasoning, more frequent generation of new ideas and solutions, and greater transfer of what is learned within one situation to another. Cooperative learning groups embrace five key elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing, social skills, and face-to-face interaction.

8. Goals to grades connections Goals, objectives, measures, criteria and grades should all agree. Goals should be stated as outcomes, not processes. Performance expectations should be derived from "measurable verbs" taken from *Bloom's Taxonomy*, specified in advance for students. This planning is often done well by groups of instructors. Learner achievement should not

be measured against other learners' achievements. Failure should not be an option, and alternative learning activities should be available.

9-12. Drummond catalogs four more andragogic practices: modeling, double loop feedback, climate setting and fostering responsibility.

Only infrequently will an instructor or academic institution stipulate the learning outcome. Adult learners or their employers appropriately make such decisions. The instructor's art will enable learners' experiences to contextualize the subject matter and assist the learner's mastery of it.

How can even a gifted instructor determine which andragogic practices to bring to bear when teaching adults? That question often lies in the predisposition – or voice – of the learner. At North Carolina State University, Carol Casworm has identified five such voices. We'll take a listen to them in the May issue of *The Greentree Gazette*. ■

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