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**Malcolm Knowles - Six Principles of Andragogy**

The late Malcolm Knowles was a key figure in the US education system during the mid to late 20th century. Knowles embedded the word *Andragogy* in the adult learning literature which he described it as the "art and science of adult learning" and he is considered the "father of the andragogical approach to adult learning".

Studying the *Six Principles of Andragogy* by Malcolm Knowles (1980), I will argue that his theories, when applied to online learning can have an effect to transform the low engagement and pass rate of online students. According to Ferreira and MacLean (2018), with attrition rates as high as 80% for online learning, a new paradigm is needed for instructional design and delivery of online content, and I wholeheartedly agree

I am a Business Lecturer at North Regional TAFE in the Northwest region of WA. Over 90% of the adult learners I teach come from remote locations in the Pilbara region, including Karratha, Broome, Newman, Tom Price and Marble Bar. For them, online studies are the only option.

Due to the high dropout rate, it has a detrimental effect on the universities and TAFEs, losing millions of dollars every year, creating negative perceptions of online learning, and reducing student satisfaction (Greenland & Moore, 2021).

During COVID-19, online learning became the cornerstone of higher education. Ubiquitous anytime, anywhere learning is attractive to adult learners who balance home and career (Lemoine et al. citing Hansen & Gray, 2018).

I have been teaching and assessing online students since 2014. The biggest hurdle I have encountered is keeping students motivated and committed, with only 6-8% of my online learners achieving their qualifications. My dropout rate for 2021 was high, and I have become disillusioned.

As I have observed over the years, students start enthusiastically, then they eventually become discouraged by time pressures, family or work commitments, or lose interest.

Schultz (2012) cites Malcolm Knowles's theories that adult online learners require certain aspects of andragogy that complement the content in an adult online experience. These include but are not limited to

* The need to know the reason for learning something
* Be responsible for their decisions on education
* Be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction
* Being interested in learning subjects having immediate relevance to their work and personal lives
* They are problem-centred rather than content-oriented, and
* Adult learners respond better to internal versus external motivators.

In their research, Greenland and Moore (2021) found five reasons for students' withdrawals from online courses:

* Work-related factors include being too busy with general and unexpected work commitments.
* There are reasons related to health, family obligations, bereavement, and breakups.
* Problems related to computer hardware and Internet connectivity.
* The context in which learners learn; their abilities and competencies in an online environment.
* Poor time management and study skills.

After reviewing a plethora of literature on Knowles, I discovered that whilst he was undertaking his Masters's in 1949, Knowles discovered that adults quickly lose motivation when taught in the same manner as children, particularly if they have a wealth of knowledge and experience to bring to the classroom.

Knowles continued to search for a coherent theory of adult learning. During his tenure at Boston University, he popularised his Six Principles of Andragogy. His comprehensive perspective on adult learning was first published in 1970 in his book *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*, revised in 1980.

In a book review of Knowles's work, written by Brian Bolton, he states that the first word in Knowles's book, Andragogy, is not a word most readers will recognise and it is not even in any dictionary. The term may not have made it to the dictionary, but it has undoubtedly made it to Google, receiving over 2,320,000 hits on 6 April 2022.

In his journal article, Allen Tough (1985) reviewed Knowles's work and proudly states that Knowles ended his 1984 book with the disclaimer: "I was the first in the United States to use the andragogical model, but I did not coin it; I stole it from the Europeans".

**Understanding the Six Principles of Andragogy**

I came across a paper by Dan Ferreira and George MacLean (2018), *Andragogy in the 21st Century: Applying the Assumptions of Adult Learning Online*. I think they have hit the nail on the head. They state that one of the failures of online learning is that most instructors and instructional designers lack the required training to deliver online learning effectively.

The high attrition rate can be attributed to online instructional design and delivery does not account for the distribution of diverse characteristics that online students bring to the learning situation.

To describe Malcolm Knowles' Six Assumptions, I will be referring to the paper by Ferreira and MacLean (2018) in the following section of this assignment. Their paper triggered lightbulb moments for me.

**The Need to Know**

Adults need to know why they need to learn something. The best way to motivate adults to learn is to explain why what, and how. They need to feel like they are part of the experience.

According to Ferreira and MacLean (2018), the positive implications for online learning can overcome the isolation that comes with distance learning. Conversely, a motivation to immediately take advantage of their own (often newly) advanced and personal goals. Simply put, they want it, and they want it NOW.

A Core Competency Diagnostic and Planning guide is recommended, and peers are encouraged to share ideas, give feedback, and participate in online discussions.

**Prior Experience**

It is important to recognize an adult learner's previous experience as the strongest incentive.

Learners' experience must be built upon in adult education since the adult learner is a product of their experience (Lemoine et al., 2021).

Knowledge and experience play an essential role in instructional design and teaching methods, according to Knowles et al. (2015). The challenge is how to integrate them into online activities. One-size-fits-all instructional design does not consider the diverse range of learners' experiences; therefore, resistance may result.

**Self-Concept**

The third aspect is self-concept, which is expressed by the desire to be respected as a person capable of directing their actions, beliefs, and values. Integral to self-concept is the need to be accountable for one's decisions and direction in life (Knowles et al., 2015).

To teach adult learners online, one must create an environment that fosters the development of self-concept. Knowles states that the challenge for teaching adult learners online is creating a learning environment that nurtures the growth of self-concept.

Adults need to be accountable for their learning, and they want to take responsibility for their learning decisions. We must give them control over their learning to satisfy their need to learn autonomously. It must also have a WIFFM and be beneficial to them.

**Readiness to Learn**

Adults will approach this fourth principle when they are ready to learn, such as changing jobs, career changes, and internal rewards.

External rewards such as social recognition or work-related benefits are secondary to the more powerful motivation associated with internal inducements (Knowles et al., 2015).

Lemoine et al. cites Wozniak (2021) that adults' readiness to learn most often occurs when learning opportunities are directly applicable to their personal or professional lives. Adult students want to be active participants in the online learning process. Online teachers should facilitate rather than just dispense information (pg. 39).

It has been proven that adult learners learn best when they can apply the training to a practical, immediate situation such as an apprenticeship, learn on the job type learning. However, online learning calls for differentiated instruction.

Ferreira and MacLean (2018) recommend project-based learning, where small groups of learners select problems to solve, and he encourages peer-group learning.

Readiness to learn is about matching instruction with the development stage of the learner. I take from this that I need to determine how much the learners already know about the content, and others require a tool readiness assessment.

**Problem Orientation**

The fifth is that adults are willing to learn if training solves their problems. The content that focuses on solving a problem is most effective for adults. Adults want to see how their learning can address and solve the problems, needs, and concerns they face daily. (Coker 2013).

Through research and exploration, online teachers can offer adult learners an orientation to more meaningful and practical learning in their real-world situations. In contrast, technology allows adult learners to connect their previous experiential learning with real-world situations.

**Motivation to learn**

The sixth principle is that adults learn best when motivation comes intrinsically. This does not imply that adults cannot be motivated externally; they absolutely can. It could be that they are motivated to improve their lives and are intrinsically motivated and enjoy the learning process.

Motivating factors from within are practical and add value to their existing skills because they are internal factors. To independently research, explore, and gain first-hand experience on the subject matter.

The intrinsic motivators that people use to achieve their objectives know that they feel better about themselves or that it will give them additional opportunities to grow professionally. Intrinsic motivations are typically more powerful and last longer than external motivations.

In conclusion, to best meet the needs of adult learners in higher education, teachers should apply to learn andragogy principles and motivation of learning to design a simple, easy and effective online instruction for better engagement (Lemoine et al., 2021).

The literature always refers to offering a collaborative and supportive environment to motivate online students. The adult learner should feel empowered to propose ideas and share them with other learners and teachers. As part of our Charles Sturt lectures, we are encouraged to participate in blogs and forums.

From the takeout of this paper, Knowles (2005) rightly puts it, the key attribute to andragogy is self-directed learning. They understand their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify human and material resources, implement appropriate strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes.

The role of the educator in an andragogical approach involves that of tutor and mentor, with the teacher assisting learners in developing the ability to empower themselves to become more self-directed in their learning (Lemoine et al., 2021).

I am currently using a Learning Management System (LMS) called Catapult, which the company has been working on the user experience for years. However, I am returning to the Blackboard LMS, as Catapult is being phased out at North Regional TAFE. I find Blackboard to be clunky and not user friendly, and it does not motivate students to use it effectively. Nevertheless, I will do my best with the resources I have.

Many adult learners turn to online learning to earn a qualification, a degree to get a better-paying job or a promotion. So in light of my new knowledge of Knowles' Six Principles of Andragogy, I will incorporate creative designs of the content and implement the following strategies:

* Create a sense of community from the first point of contact with the student.
* Together, devise a plan that encompasses measurable expectations and goals. Take the time to get to know them, talk to them on a regular basis, and learn about what their experiences.
* Ensure assessment tasks are relevant to the student's previous learning and motivate them by incorporating their past experiences. Connect their learning to real-life situations.
* Creating a discussion board where students can share ideas, ask questions, and discuss concepts.
* Throughout their learning journey, I will encourage them to believe in themselves and be flexible to honour their family and work commitments.
* My fullest respect will be given to them as they begin their online learning journey.
* And I will keep up my own personal and professional development.

The number of online students I currently have is 27 following semester one enrolments. All of these students are actively engaged.

My goal is to halt the low attrition rate and increase the pass rate from the 8% to 25% for my online learners by 30 June 2022. To date, eighteen students have already completed two units, four students have completed their third unit, three students have completed their first, and two students have yet to open the LMS.

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