

WHAT ARE THE KEY CONCEPTS OF ANDRAGOGY?

Andragogy: the understanding of the science and practice of adult learning.

Knowles initially identified four key pillars of understanding adult learners, then added a fifth later.

PILLAR #1: A MATURING SELF-CONCEPT

As a person matures from a child to an adult, their self-concept also matures. They move from being dependent on others to being self-driven and independent.

In other words, maturity leads to growing independence and autonomy. Whereas children are fully dependent on others for learning and understanding, adults learn and understand independently.

Knowles described the maturation this way:

...in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

PILLAR #2: INCREASING EXPERIENCE

In addition to a maturing self-confidence, adults build an increasing reservoir of experience. This increasing experience becomes a deepening resource for their learning. Children, on the other hand, have very little experience and must rely on the experience of others to learn.

In other words, as children mature into adults and gain more experience, certain things become intuitive. Their experience allows them to intuit things that they never would have understood previously.

PILLAR #3: AN INCREASING READINESS TO LEARN

As an adult moves into various social roles (employee, parent, spouse, citizen, etc.), their readiness to learn becomes oriented toward those roles.

Consider how this plays out in life. As an adult moves into the workforce, they must orient their learning toward the skills necessary for their job. As they become a parent, they suddenly must learn all that's involved in taking care of children. New roles require new knowledge.

PILLAR #4: A SHIFTING APPLICATION AND ORIENTATION

When a person is young, their application of a subject is postponed and their orientation is subject-centered. For example, when someone takes algebra in 9th grade, they don't normally apply it immediately to real life problems. They must wait until they're older and encounter a need for algebra.

As a person matures, their application of learning becomes immediate and more problem-centered. Adults encounter problems, learn how to solve those problems, and then immediately apply their knowledge to those problems.

PILLAR #5: AN INTERNAL MOTIVATION TO LEARN

A child's motivation to learn is typically external. They are required to go to school and will encounter externally enforced consequences if they don't. This changes as they mature into adults.

Adults are motivated to learn internally. They want to grow in self-development. They desire to move up the career ladder and need to acquire new skills. They find themselves facing an unfamiliar problem and need to find a solution. Instead of having education forced on them, adults actually pursue education.

These five pillars provide the foundation for how Knowles understood adult learning and andragogy. Knowles believed that all adult learning must take these five pillars into account and shape the teaching and curriculum accordingly.

WHAT OUTCOMES SHOULD ANDRAGOGY PRODUCE?

According to Knowles, adult education should always produce at least seven outcomes.

OUTCOME #1: A MATURE UNDERSTANDING OF ONESELF

Proper adult education helps adults understand themselves clearly and objectively. They learn to grasp their:

- Motivations.
- Needs.
- Interests.
- Goals.
- Capacities.

As they grow in self-understanding, adults should also increase in self-respect and a passion for continuing growth.

OUTCOME #2: ACCEPTANCE, RESPECT AND LOVE TOWARD OTHERS

In addition to increasing self-respect and love, andragogy should lead adults to increasingly accept, respect, and love others. There must be a keen understanding of the difference between people and ideas.

This understanding will give adults the power to thinking critically about ideas without attacking or threatening the people who hold them.

OUTCOME #3: A FLUID AND DYNAMIC ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE

Every experience is a new opportunity for adults to learn. Additionally, people are always changing, which adults must learn to accept and even embrace.

When combined, this means that adult learning should create a dynamic, even passionate attitude toward life that causes people to embrace every new experience as an opportunity to learn.

OUTCOME #4: UNDERSTANDING AND REACTING TO CAUSES, NOT SYMPTOMS

Typically, when a problem arises, people respond to the symptoms. Proper andragogy should change this.

Rather than only seeing symptoms, adults should be able to see beneath to the actual root causes of the problem. Once they understand the root causes, they can appropriately react.

OUTCOME #5: UNDERSTANDING HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Everyone tends toward recency bias. In other words, people tend to assume that modern equals better and to ignore the past. Andragogy creates a perspective shift. It teaches people to understand, appreciate, and share the ideas, experiences, and traditions of the past. Rather than denigrating the past as irrelevant, it highlights it as essential.

OUTCOME #6: UNDERSTANDING OF AND ABILITY TO CHANGE SOCIETY

Living in a democracy requires that adults be able to understand the society they live in and bring about effective change. Thus, proper adult education educates people on the social order and how that social order is shaped.