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Theory Pedagogical and Andragogical

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**Introduction**

Education is a lifelong process. Globally, children are taught in different environments, and various cultures choose to end the formal classroom learning experience at different points from early to late adolescence. Western cultures tend to encourage, though not always fund, higher learning for adults as well. All educators recognize the importance of appropriate strategies for effective learning; children and adult learners will receive content differently based on their developmental readiness and ability level.

The past two centuries in particular have seen a lot of study and development of education as a field. Sir Ken Robinson, in his famous talk “Changing Education Paradigms,” points out that modern educators are trying to reform a system built in and for the enlightenment era. In the same speech, he likens schools to industrial factories in a harsh criticism of how classrooms attempt to educate batches of students according to the same standards despite the fact the room is filled with unique individuals. Ripe with overgeneralizations, the example still effectively highlights the key difference between what some would define as a pedagogical approach to education versus an elusive andragogical model.

Merriam Webster’s online dictionary states that pedagogy refers to all instructional methods while andragogy is specifically “the art or science of teaching adults.” Teachers like Cory Wentworth would go further to say that as andragogy uses the Greek prefix for “man” or “human” to indicate the adult in contrast to pedagogy referring to children, andragogical methods are student centered and pedagogical methods are teacher centered (Wentworth, 2019). Particularly in his lessons titled “Intro Andragogy” and “Contributions from the Social Sciences” detailing his definitions and how teachers apply these theories, Wentworth uses controversial assumptions that pedagogy is subject centered and andragogy is student centered. While the methods and motivations of the newer branch of education we call andragogy is certainly focused on the learner choosing to learn according to need or interest, formal K-12 school systems are equally concerned with students despite having assigned curriculum and objectives for all learners to master. Additionally, the methods any teacher uses in a classroom must account for the experiences of all learners present; good teachers adapt strategies based on efficacy from year to year or even month to month depending on the needs of their students.

**Framework**

For a word that has been in usage for four hundred years, “pedagogy” is still a rather discipline specific word that is almost exclusively used by professionals in the field of education. While the etymology is linked to the instruction of children, the history of the discipline itself is heavily influenced by the Greek instruction of men in culture and philosophy and the religious reforms under Charlemagne’s influence. In fact, it is perhaps most notable to see how Charlemagne’s empire systematized education in ways that are still evident today. The European leader’s concern for education was primarily linked to his concern that clergy be able to accurately and consistently transmit Scripture to the masses (Gordon & Lawton, 2019). This need to reproduce the same results in order for church leaders across Europe to provide correct spiritual instruction led to a massive educational system of instruction that provided the same information across the continent. Charlemagne’s efforts linked systemic education to religious dogma, but he also sparked the Carolingian Renaissance. By inviting renowned scholar Alcuin to his palace in Aachen, Germany, Charlemagne oversaw the establishment of standardized education during the eighth century. Perhaps the most notable standardization effect still seen today is that the default font for academic writing and printing is based on the Carolingian miniscule that was taught to students as a standard of calligraphy (Berit & Strandskogen, 2009). From Greek philosophers to medieval monks, pedagogy has developed as the intentional transmission of valuable information from learned individuals to uneducated students.

In the modern world we find schools established across the world follow various patterns of instruction, but there are standards and expectations for learning. Foundationally, early childhood education provides instruction on socialization and interpersonal norms before establishing basic literacy skills. Increasingly, primary schools are integrating vital technology skills and a working understanding of math and science. Without ignoring the shortcomings of “batch educating” students by age and holding them to the same expectations in all disciplines under the same circumstances that is rightly criticized by Sir Ken Robinson and others (Robinson, 2010), there is great value to having standards and expectations for all members of a given society to know. A common cultural knowledge is vital – particularly literacy skills which allow for individuals to pursue additional knowledge on their own. In the traditional school settings, this vital information is held by the teacher and provided to the students in an intentional and orderly fashion. The significance here is that teachers have objectives and must develop curriculum according to their students’ needs and readiness to learn.

The primary divergence with the developing field of andragogy is that self motivated learners find teachers who can be a resource to direct their learning rather than a disseminator of information. Children are taught vital information to function; adults are motivated differently according to modern theorists. Edward Thorndike was one of the first men to systematically study the process of learning in adults, theorizing that their pace for learning slowed somehow in adulthood though capacity was not diminished (Wentworth, 2019). The past century has seen a great development of independent learners after the vision of Ivan Illich who wrote in his short critique of education in 1972, *Deschooling Society*, that he believed one day individuals would find groups of like-minded friends who could study literature or physics or biology together because of a common interest not that they were assigned the topic in schools. Fifty years later, scholars are rereading this text through the lens of modern life but still resonating with his claims that education should be accessible to all. Furthermore, Illich argued from a deeply theological stance as a devout Catholic and scholars recognize his passion to “liberate learning in the same way he wanted to liberate relationship with God” (Bruno-Jofré & Zaldívar, 2022). Andragogical learning is a fruit of this fifty year old vision as adults pursue ongoing inquiry for personal motivation. It is not antithetical to the pedagogy established to help children learn how to function in society. This functional separation of the two concepts of pedagogy and andragogy will clarify the further discussion of instructional strategies and the place and value of various methods based on the unique collection of learners in a particular environment.

**Pedagogical Strategies in the Modern World**

Educators fall into the broad categories of cognitive or behavioral theory when approaching how they view their students and present new material to them. Behavioral theorists are externally focused as they view learners as a blank slate to teach or an empty vessel to fill with knowledge. The emphasis is on resulting behavior patterns from what is taught. Cognitive theorists find this too narrow and are concerned not only with what happens externally but the motives and cognitive processes behind it. These theorists will have higher concern for the background of their students; no child comes as a blank slate because they have a home life and previous experiences that will influence how they react in the learning environment. At some level, every teacher will acknowledge this is true because once you get past the first classroom experience, teachers are constantly building upon that prior knowledge.

Regardless of the primary theory a teacher holds, quality educators will treat each student as an individual in their classroom and tailor learning activities to the needs of all individuals in the group. Pioneers of pedagogical methods like Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner wanted teachers to focus on the needs of the student as they came into the learning environment. Significantly, both of these educators felt it important to meet holistic needs of the students in their classrooms. Montessori focused on early childhood education, and she included in her tenants of quality childcare a recommendation that “two nutritious meals a day be fed to the child” (Povell, 2018, p. 45). Steiner schools, also called Waldorf schools, felt the socialization and spirituality of the child was so important, they focused learning in play format for children. “The main reason for withholding formal learning and instruction in literacy and numeracy in Waldorf schools until the age of 6 yeras is to allow the life processes to complete the initial structuring of the brain” (Rawson, 2021, p. 42). This attention to holistic health, consideration of physical needs, and valuing of spirituality is not the norm in teacher education globally. However, as qualified teachers enter the classroom, all of them will begin to account for these details. Those who work in American Title I schools know the difference the breakfast or free and reduced lunches can make on the attentiveness and readiness to learn of their lower socioeconomic students.

Each grade level and subject has standards or objectives to cover, and traditional classrooms have students receiving instruction to understand the necessary objectives. This subject centered curriculum can be disseminated in a variety of ways. The pedagogical approaches will differ based on teacher strengths as well as the demographics of the students. “More teachers need to understand and provide hands-on experiences for children to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge – as opposed to whole class teaching without differentiation of instruction” (Povell, 2018, p. 46). While every student should achieve the same learning objective, there must be various access points for diverse learners to engage with the content. Waldorf schools encourage generative principles where students are given an experience of the concept they are learning about. Rawson provides a long description of a lesson on optics in a seventh grade classroom where students are immersed in a dark room where the teacher shines light and then they write drawings and reflections of the lesson (Rawson, 2021). This method allows content to be spoken, experienced, and reflected upon by all students; the purpose is reinforcement of the learning, but it also allows for students who may struggle with the initial content description to understand better through demonstration, or a student who still had not solidified the concept may be able to understand through drawing a diagram for which the teacher can provide real time feedback.

Montessori’s focus was early childhood education, but educators have found success with her methods at the secondary level as well. Steiner started formal education with primary and secondary students, yet these principles of open inquiry and experiential learning continue to be effective in higher learning classrooms. There is no evidence that holistic, experiential learning should stop after secondary education. In fact, the experiences make learning more personal, more student centered, which is a working understanding of adult or andragogical learning. Leather et al. (2021) studied the importance of play in postsecondary education and shared, “play is an important form of behavior that facilitates creativity” (p. 214). Their study shows how play in adults allows for all kinds of holistic benefits to the learner; their paper concludes it should be a pedagogical approach in a postsecondary classroom because educators need to stimulate positive learning experiences. Within their discussion, they also acknowledge the current educational climate that equates students as customers and the subsequent resistance to a model that encourages play. Undeterred, they challenge the current model in hopes of influencing educators to adjust methods of instruction in order to benefit learners.

**Differentiation for Student Experiences**

Based on the writings and research of educational philosophers within the past century, teachers should approach educating a whole person in their classroom using strategies that engage with physical, emotional, and spiritual elements alongside their cognitive academic needs. As all learners bring different experiences into the classroom, it is important for teachers to have not only carefully crafted lessons to communicate their content, but flexibility with the fluid nature of their growing students. Pedagogical theory involves accounting for various learning disabilities, and teachers need to additionally look for the emotional maturity of each student in their class. Significantly today, many students enter classrooms with hidden trauma, and teachers must learn the signs of various trauma in order to best teach their particular students.

One of the more recently researched tramas and its impacts on learning is the incarceration of a parent:

Qualitative studies reveal that children feel isolated at school, and that peers and teachers treat them differently (Nesmith and Ruhland 2008). Incarceration in the family may affect adolescents’ relationships with peers and teachers, as well as influence their academic motivation, achievement, and behaviors (Shlafer and Poehlmann 2011). Based on this literature, schools appear to be just another arena for youth to experience failure and isolation. However, it is possible for schools to be a crucial safety net for these youth, as schools are the only institution that these children are guaranteed to pass through. There are multiple school characteristics that may protect or compensate for risks, such as school size or mental health supports. (Nichols et al., 2016, p. 1094)

The unmentioned and unstudied factor that may protect or compensate for risks is the pedagogical approach of the teacher. There are certainly elements a teacher could be attending to within the classroom that would support the resilience of such children. Not only does the personal rapport matter, but the presentation of certain content can be mitigated to account for such experiences.

An obvious example would be a Language Arts teacher aware that a student had an incarcerated parent adjusting the introduction to the class reading and discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Teachers would already be prepared to differentiate for learning disabilities; teaching that text to a group of students that included someone diagnosed with mental retardation would require sensitivity as students develop empathy for a character like Boo Radley. Were the teacher to prepare for a discussion on the trial of Tom Robinson, similar accommodation ought to be made for how to sensitively approach the topic of incarceration. Certainly a good teacher would think through layers of how to navigate the topic in class based on their knowledge of the individual student’s personal situation and emotional capacity. Nichols et al. noted school connection to be significant in reducing truant behavior and indicated it was a valuable part of resiliency (2016, p. 1102). Their further description of school connectedness and resources of the school did not touch on the specific strategies of teachers in the classroom. This is an opening for educational research to discover the pedagogical strategies that account for specific student traumas.

One detail necessary for the teacher adjustment is the knowledge of their individual students. In a classroom full of diverse learners, it is impossible to be aware of every home situation – divorce, eviction, death of a relative, abuse – but teachers ought to know their students well enough to discern distress as content is presented. Furthermore, there are some things teachers can be aware of that might present issues. A social studies teacher can be sensitive in presenting headlines of the day if a well known politician is accused of sexual assault because it is an unfortunate reality that a student in the room may have experienced assault. Teachers need not coddle students to avoid all discussion of difficult topics; rather they should be aware of how to present them in a responsible and developmentally appropriate manner. As mandatory reporters, teachers must listen for signs of abuse to report in order to protect children; it is reasonable to ask for a similar attention to removing learning barriers for such children.

Many students who have experienced something that sets them apart will do their best to blend in and hide their differences from peers and adults. Teachers should be aware of these patterns in students dealing with major transitions. A new student in an American high school who speaks perfect English and has a US passport may not raise any concerns among staff, but if she has just spent ten years living in Bulgaria, she will still experience plenty of culture shock that needs to be accounted for. Third culture kids, or TCKs, become what Pollock et al. (2017) call “hidden immigrants” in their passport cultures. In this increasingly cross-cultural world, more and more students will spend formative years in a culture different from their passport or parents’ home cultures. Pedagogical practices need to be informed by this reality of hidden immigrants as well as hidden traumas students carry into the classroom. Studying the return to school for students who had finished a psychiatric hospitalization, Savina et al. (2014) found that while parents were willing to share about the conditions and mental health of their child, “adolescents were less eager to disclose such information” (p. 738). There is a whole range of comfort levels that students have sharing personal information about their home life or negative experiences with their teachers.

No longer can teachers be turning out the same lessons over and over without consideration of the faces before them. Instead, pedagogical theory must incorporate how the learners are impacted by the presentation of material instead of just the importance of the content. It is because teachers value the content so much that they must concern themselves with presenting it effectively.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Teachers are trained to look for learning struggles, and often those are related to learning gaps from the previous year. In the aftermath of COVID, teachers must scaffold learning as students enter their classroom with various deficiencies from the two or three COVID impacted learning years. It may take a decade to return expectations for student knowledge to what they once were. That includes identifying learning struggles that are related to missing instruction rather than disability or diagnosable neurodivergence that require an IEP or 504 instructional plan. The wide range of responses to COVID in the classroom globally has led to devastating trauma in some students as so many parents lacked the time or resources to support online learning. Returning to the classroom now, education professionals have the opportunity to evaluate what barriers to learning have developed related to trauma. COVID is only a catalyst for the profession to think critically about warning signs of trauma in the classroom and consider how it impacts the learners because, unfortunately, nearly every classroom will have at least one other major trauma represented apart from the negative ramifications of COVID.

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