Andrological and Pedagogical Training Differences for Online Instructors

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Introduction

Colleges and universities are rushing at an alarming rate to answer the call of the growing number of online learners. Many are motivated by promising financial forecasts. Others are simply keeping up with their peer institutions. Regardless of the reasons, the rush to join the ranks of "e-institutions" often results in the significant aspects of the online learning paradigm being overlooked. Can faculty make effective use of the online platform to design, construct and deliver a meaningful online course that addresses the motivations, needs, learning styles and constraints of nontraditional learners, while achieving the same learning outcomes as onground?

Answering this question requires an examination of online learners and their needs, which reveals the need for substantive differences between online and onground methodologies. Online learners are the products of a fast moving society that values time, productivity and measurable results. They demand only that which is necessary to the learning process and shun traditional student life distractions. The differences in online and onground course methodology lead to a comparative discussion of pedagogical and andragogical theory.

Pedagogy describes the traditional instructional approach based on teacher-directed learning theory. Andragogy describes the approach based on self-directed learning theory. Malcolm Knowles, a recognized leader in the field of adult education, coined the term andragogy from the Greek words aner, meaning adult, and agogus, meaning guide or leader, to describe the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1992).

Distance education and, in particular, online education is primarily directed to nontraditional learners. Historically, nontraditional learners have been defined as persons over age 25 (Whisnant, Sullivan, & Slayton, 1992). However, Knowles (1980) defined adulthood as "the point at which individuals perceive themselves to be essentially self-directing" (p. 46). Self-directedness is not necessarily correlated with age.

More young people are choosing nontraditional education to start and advance in their careers while completing and furthering their formal education. "Typical distance learners are those who don't have access to programs, employees who work during scheduled class hours, homebound individuals, self-motivated individuals who want to take courses for self-knowledge or advancement, or those who are unable or unwilling to attend class" (Charp, 2000, p. 10). Three key elements surround the online learner: technology, curriculum, and instructor (Bedore, Bedore, & Bedore, 1997). These elements must be keenly integrated into one smoothly and operationally functional delivery tool.

Technology

Technological advances have created an educational environment where student and professor are tied neither to synchronous learning activities nor to physical meeting locations. Although a reliable and stable delivery platform, easy to master and versatile in functionality is an important part of the online delivery equation, it is nothing more than a tool used to affect the transfer of knowledge. Many administrators, preoccupied with delivery, assume that, by themselves, these new simple-to-use tools are sufficient

to ensure a quality online course or degree program.

The intuitiveness and ease of the new course platforms places technology behind the elements of instructor and curriculum in importance in the Bedore (1997) model presented above. These two elements are so tightly interwoven, they are best addressed within the framework of online instructor training. Training must produce online instructors who fully understand the differences between onground and online delivery methods, the conversion or development of onground course material to an online format, and the unique needs of the nontraditional learner.

Andragogy

The nature of the online learner suggests that online instructor training be based on andragogical theory. This theory is anchored in five assumptive differences between pedagogy and andragogy. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Andragogical Assumptions

Assumptions			
About	Pedagogical	Andragogical	
Concept of the learner	Dependent personality	Increasingly self-directed	
Role of learner's experience	To be built on more than used as a resource	A rich resource for learning by self and others	
Readiness to learn	Uniform by age-level & curriculum	Develops from life tasks & problems	
Orientation to learning	Subject-centered	Task- or problem-centered	
Motivation	By external rewards and punishment	By internal incentives curiosity	

Source: Knowles, M.S. (1992). Applying principles of adult learning in conference presentations. *Adult Learning, 4*(1), p. 12.

Day and Baskett (1982) offer that andragogy should be understood not as a theory of adult learning, but as "an educational ideology rooted in an inquiry-based learning and teaching paradigm" (p. 150). Andragogical theory "suggests all kinds of humanistically desirable and democratic practices; and it separates educators and trainers of adults from their counterparts in childhood, secondary, and higher education" (Brookfield, p. 96). Online instructor training provides insight into the differences between the traditional learner, who values the time honored didactic objectivist approach, and non-traditional learner who values the experiential applications-based constructivist approach.

Training

Assumptive Differences. Traditional learners rely heavily on an instructor's knowledge, which is disseminated in a unilateral (teacher-to-student), lecture-based method. Learners are expected to accept without question the information disseminated, 'learning' the material and delivering it back to the instructor in the same manner it was presented to them.

Nontraditional learners require an alternative framework within which to learn. Knowles suggests that nontraditional learners need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). This need suggests that the responsibility for learning be transferred from facilitator to learner. Prospective online facilitators learn to affect this transfer by training in the same collaborative learning model as their students: an experiential model that is learner-centered rather than instructor-centered, dialogue-based rather than lecture-based.

Instructors have generally underutilized traditional students' experiences as a resource for learning, considering them as pre-existing knowledge merely providing a foundation upon which new knowledge will build. Nontraditional students bring a variety of life and work experiences to the virtual classroom and are most responsive to learning models that provide an opportunity to apply theory to their experiences. The open and collaborative sharing of experiences within the context of the course material serves to enrich the

learning process for themselves and their peers. Thus, online facilitators are taught to encourage a continual stream of dialogue concerning the subject matter in a constructivist atmosphere "where meaning is created in relation to students' prior experience and knowledge" (Truman-Davis, Futch, Thompson, & Yonekura, 2000, p.50).

Online learners should be recognized for who they are and where they stand in achieving their educational goals. Their readiness to learn and orientation to learning are inexorably tied together, as both of these assumptions center on learners' life tasks and problems. Nontraditional learners have a life-centered orientation to learning, as opposed to the subject-centered orientation of traditional learners. Stimulating dialogue that is meaningful to the learner capitalizes on this life-centered orientation.

The most effective tools for generating dialogue are discussion questions, case analysis, and other applications-oriented materials that put theory into practice. These tools, combined with group and team activities integral to the learning model, allow learners to synthesize theory with their own experiences to best demonstrate learning outcomes. Facilitators learn to design open-ended questions, constructed to require learners to draw and support conclusions based on this synthesis and analysis.

Listed below are two examples of a discussion question:

> *Bad example:* Define independence as it relates to the auditor-client relationship.
> *Good example:* List four real world relationships that, when viewed from the auditor-client perspective, will impair the auditor's independence and explain how or why.

Dialogue is the methodological heart of the online learning paradigm. "Learning a subject well requires [the ability to provide] intensive discourse in that field, whether it be math (Mokros, Russel, & Economopoulos, 1995), science (Gallas, 1995), social studies (Lindquist, 1995), literature (Brady & Jacobs, 1994), or any other discipline" (Coulter, Konold, & Feldman, 2000). "The learners' … need for individual dialogue" contributes as much to the teaching and learning structure as the teacher offers in the way of course content or design (Saba, 2000, p. 4).

"Discussions are characterized by students articulating their own understandings, raising questions, and examining others' assertions. In the process, the students go beyond hands-on activities to interpret and reflect on their experiences and develop new understandings of phenomena" (Coulter, et al., p. 45). Well-designed discussions are critical thinking- and application-based and are relevant to nontraditional learners' current life tasks and problems. Students enthusiastically embrace these activities because they are motivated by their intrinsic pursuit of personal growth and achievement.

Facilitators are trained to respect the maturity of the learners and their motivations for learning. The assumption of the source of motivation for nontraditional learners neatly ties together the previous assumptions regarding student learning. It moves the concept of andragogy beyond theory into a successful and widely accepted practice of nontraditional learning techniques and processes, which foster the personal growth and achievement of the learner. Self-motivation of the nontraditional learner is frequently stated as one of the most significant factors influencing academic achievement (Kuh & Cracraft, 1986; Wolfgang & Dowling, 1981).

Online Facilitator Training. Training conducted online allows new facilitators to learn experientially under the same conditions as their future students. This hands-on approach provides instructors an understanding of the differences in the online learner, online course delivery, and appropriate learning strategies, as well as fostering empathy for the online learner's needs and challenges. Prospective online facilitators, themselves nontraditional students, participate in training with a constructivist design where their own instructional experiences are incorporated. Arguably, both the structure of the training program and the subsequent development of the new online facilitator's course evolve from the andragogical assumptions previously outlined.

A self-selection process is critical to the success of future online facilitators. At the heart of this process is a self-evaluation, which addresses their written communication skills, belief in the facilitated, dialogue-based model, acceptance of the value of critical thinking in an applications-based environment, technology skills, and academic credentials. They should also consider the significant, and often underestimated, time commitment required in an online class.

During training, online faculty evolve from an instructor and content expert to a facilitator and resource person. New facilitators become capable of creating an "educational program and setting in which adult [nontraditional] students can develop their latent self-directed learning skills" (Brookfield, p. 92). Through this evolutionary process, the new facilitator learns to create a course that "emphasizes the primacy of the learner, grants a substantial measure of control to learners and places learning directly in the context of learners' own experiences" (p. 124).

Facilitator training has a significant impact on student learning. Training provides an opportunity for facilitators to learn about online learning, but also provides a model for best practices. Training is essential to the successful design and delivery of an online course. To allow instructors to teach online without formal training may be condemning the process to failure.

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