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Intersection between Andragogy and Transformative Learning

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the intersections between andragogy and transformative learning through two lenses: application of Andragogy and transformative learning theories in adult classrooms and their roles in spirituality.

Introduction

Adult learning is at the heart of all adult education practices—ranging from formal, non-formal, and informal education. According to Merriam (2009), in the early decades of 20th century, adult learning in North America focused mainly on individual adult learner and their cognitive practices that might impact adult learning process and their perspective transformation as adult learners. Andragogy and transformative learning are widely known as the common adult teaching and learning theories, in which their practices have yielded colossal benefits to both adult educators and learners in all around the globe. This study aims to explore the intersections between andragogy and transformative learning through two lenses: application of Andragogy and transformative learning theories in adult classrooms and their roles in spirituality.

Understanding Andragogy Theory and Practices

The term "andragogy" was first introduced to the U.S. by Lindeman in 1926. He explained it as a key method for teaching adults and reiterated the concept as it was to the new land of the U.S (Anderson & Lindeman, 1927). Malcolm S. Knowles was known as the first adult educator who developed his adult pedagogical principles under the name of "Andragogy" from the 1970s on. He indicated he acquired the term "andragogy" in 1966 from Dusan Savicevic (Knowles, 1970). According to Knowles (1980), the term "andragogy" derived from the Greek root—agog—meaning "leading." "Andra" was translated as "adult," which made andragogy the art and science of helping adults to learn. Andragogy, thus, was defined by Knowles (1970) as the art and science of helping adults learn, and it acknowledged adults as self-directed learners and teachers as the facilitators in the learning process.

This theory has been affirmed, applied, and criticized by various scholars in the field. However, those criticisms did not hamper the practices of Andragogy in multifarious settings including corporate, workplace, business, industry, healthcare, government, higher education, professions, religious education, elementary, secondary, and remedial education (Knowles, 1970).

Understanding Transformative Learning Theory and Practices

Transformative learning was known as the learning activities and/or events that happened and dramatically transformed adult learning experiences—it can be both internal and external transformation in a person's experiences. The theory was first introduced by Mezirow in the late 70s and early 80s (Christie, Carey, & Robertson, 2015). Mezirow and Taylor (2009) described transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change." The influences on Mezirow's early theory of transformative learning included Kuhn's (1962)

paradigm, Freire's (1970) conscientization, and Habermas's (1971, 1984) domains of learning (Mezirow, 1978a, 1991, 2000). The key ideas of these theorists informed Mezirow's transformative learning theory and the significant concepts of disorienting dilemma, meaning schemes, meaning perspectives, perspective transformation, frame of reference, levels of learning processes, habits of mind, and critical self-reflection (Kitchenham, 2008).

      According to Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 1985), there are three stages of consciousness growth—intransitive thought, semitransitive, and critical intransitivity. Intransitive thought happens when people feel out of control about the situations and believe that changes are up to destiny or God, while semitransitive, people start to have some thoughts and take actions for the change, though, rather than become the change agent, they will follow a strong leader whom they believe has a wiser decision to lead the situations. Last, at critical intransitivity stage, people develop self-reflection and are able to merge critical thought with critical action to effect change in their lives and to see what the catalyst for that change could be. It is this last stage of critical consciousness that clearly influenced Mezirow in his notions of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, critical self-reflection on assumptions, and critical discourse (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1985).

      In 1985, Mezirow revised transformative learning theory and came up with three different types of learning: instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective. This was developed from Habermas's (1971) original three types of learning—technical, practical, and emancipatory (Mezirow, 1985). Within each learning type, three learning processes occur: 1) learning within meaning schemes: working with present meaning themes by expanding on, complementing, and revising their present system of knowledge; 2) learning new meaning schemes, acquiring a new set of meaning schemes that are compatible with existing schemes within the learners' meaning perspectives; and 3) learning through meaning transformation: encountering a problem or anomaly that cannot be resolved through neither present meaning schemes nor learning new meaning schemes so that the resolution comes through a re-definition of the problem (Kitchenham, 2008).

      The theory has been emerged, developed, applied, and criticized by a myriad of adult education scholars who have exposed to the research and application of transformative learning theory in diverse field including education, industry, traditional physical therapy (yoga and meditation), religion, and nursing practice, to name a few (Merriam, 2009).

Intersections between Andragogy and Transformative Learning

      Self-directed learning is known as a key element in adult education practices in both Andragogy and transformative learning. The father of Andragogy, Malcolm Knowles, for example, defined self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975). In addition, Jack Mezirow, the initiator of transformative learning theory, emphasized that "no concept is more central to what adult education is all about than self-directed learning" (Mezirow, 1980). Andragogy supported the fact that adults have a need to utilize their previous experiences to guide their thinking system as well as their current learning process, while transformative learning is known as the process in which adults are thinking critically while they reflect on their previous learning experiences, so that they can generate a new understanding of their current learning situations. The intersections between Andragogy and transformative learning, thus, are explored through perspective transformation of adults.

Intersections of Andragogy and Transformative Learning in Adult Classrooms
There are myriad of scholars in the field of adult education who have conducted research to both advocate and question the essential practices of Andragogy and Transformative learning theories. While these two theories are known as highly prized concepts yet received critical judgment in different parts, adult educators found the implementation of Andragogy and transformative learning confusing, especially when both are utilized as strategies to facilitate and support adult learning process in the classroom. The intersections between Andragogy and transformative learning in the classrooms, thus, can be observed through the process of learning and perspective changes of adults as they are engaged in the learning processes in the classrooms.

Andragogy was defined by Knowles (1970) as the art and science of helping adults learn. The theory per se embedded the assumptions of adult learning characteristics and processes that Mezirow (1991) believed the inclusion of critical and reflective learning for living. Mezirow (1981) claimed that transformative learning is the Charter for andragogy, and the juxtaposition of andragogy and transformative learning can be observed through their mix of creative imagination and pragmatic structure in adult education practices. These two approaches emphasized the fact that adults are both self-directed and reflective learners, and they are willing to take initiative and proactively participate in new learning experiences. Elsey and Henschke (2011), for example, concerned that even though some quested for the practices of transformative learning is quite pervasive or nearly universal among adult practitioners (Taylor 1997), very few researches had been conducted to delineate the illusion nuances of the implementation of transformative learning approach in the classrooms. Elsey and Henschke (2011) thus suggested the use of Andragogy as a palpable vehicle for achieving transformative learning of adult learners in the classrooms.

Knowles (1990) emphasized that in order to facilitate adult learners in a positive learning environment, it is important that adult educators are aware of six major assumptions on adult learning characteristics including the need to know, the learners' self-concept, the role of the learners' experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. Knowles (1995) indeed established eight components of andragogical process design that might be help adult learners become actively involved in the learning processes. His eight elements in adult learning model included preparation, climate, planning, diagnosis of needs, setting of objectives, designing learning plan, learning activities, and evaluation. Kheang (2018) added that professors should also be able to express their beliefs (teachers' trust of learners and teachers' accommodating learners' uniqueness), feelings (teachers' empathy with learners and teachers' sensitivity toward learners), and behaviors (delivery of various instruction techniques and appropriate use of learner-centered and teacher-centered learning processes in the right context) to help facilitate the learning of adults in the classrooms.

Transformative learning in adult classrooms, on the other hand, was examined through Mezirow (1978a) who corroborated that effective teaching engages both modalities and is accomplished through activities that involve distinct cognitive phases: 1) experiencing a disorienting dilemma; 2) undergoing self-examination; 3) conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumption and feeing a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations; 4) relating discontent to the similar experiences of others—recognizing that the problem is shared; 5) exploring options for new ways of acting; 6) building competence and self-confidence in new

roles; 7) planning a course of action; 8) acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action; 9) trying out new roles and assessing them; and 10) reintegrating into society with the other perspective. In addition, Armbrecht (2018) illuminated that adults learned better with the practice of transformative learning in adult classrooms including: 1) self-reflection paper and/or exercise; 2) considering gender as a transformative learning experience; 3) reaction versus analysis: communicative and instrumental learning; 4) small-group work for critical reflection and rational discourse; 5) acquiring knowledge: ways to provide information; and 6) reintegration through assessment.

Intersections of Andragogy and Transformative Learning in Spirituality

The intersections between Andragogy and transformative learning in spirituality involves making space for individual self-expression, attending to paradox, sacredness, and the graced moments in teaching and learning that lead to unexpected insights. People usually confused the meaning of "spirituality" and how it is distinguished from religion. According to Merriam (2009), spirituality refers to the individual's personal experiences with the sacred, which can be experienced anywhere—in the natural world, a secular setting, or in a religious context. For those who believe in specific religions, their spirituality is developed through their connection or faith in God. Nonetheless, those who do not believe in any religions identify themselves as spiritual but not religious, and their spirituality is developed through personal experiences at anywhere including their learning and living environment as well as their cultures at home, classrooms (Tisdell 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006), and workplace or individual experiences at the community in which they are part of (Fenwick & Lange, 1998).

Adults often reported how their spiritual experiences shaped their learning concept as well as how they see themselves as learners. Henschke (2013) thus suggested that in order to help adults learn, it is important that the professor trust and believe that every student is a capable adult learner. He empathized that the trust per se would serve as a key element to unlock an open-heart conversation, in which the learners feel safe and comfortable to share their learning concerns with the professor. Once this relationship is built, it is easier to help the learners overcome their learning struggles and achieve their learning goals in a more effective way.

On the other hand, the spirituality can be developed through different approaches taken toward transformative learning. Hoggan (2016) introduced Taylor's (1998) categorization of four approaches to transformative learning including psychocritical, psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental, and social emancipatory approaches. First, in psychocritical approach, adults are aware of their own spirituality and the expectation of others, so that they can assess the relevance and interpret the situations in a more reflective way. As a result, adults change their habitual mechanisms for making meaning in a more inclusive, discriminating, Open, emotionally capable of change, reflective, and self-directed ways. Second, spirituality can be developed through psychoanalytic approach to transformative learning that focused mainly on the expansion of one's ego consciousness. In this phenomenon, adults allow their ego to become more aware of the unconsciousness and its powerful influence (Dirkx, 2012). As a result, the transformative outcomes were developed through an integration of one's inner and outer worlds, greater self-awareness, greater authenticity, and become a more whole person.

Third, spirituality can be developed through psychodevelopmental approach to transformative learning. Kegan (2000) emphasized that the learning can be deemed transformative only if it involves a powerful shift in the way someone makes sense of, or knows,

the world. The transformative learning outcomes thus can be resulted from the differentiation between what used to be part of a person's subject and what that person is now able to perceive as an object. Fourth, spirituality can be developed through social emancipatory approach to transformative learning. In this approach, adults no longer tolerate with unfair social practices—they perceive themselves as active subjects that involve constantly reflecting and acting to make the world a more equitable place (Freire, 1970).

Conclusion

In summary, observing the intersections between Andragogy and transformative learning through the lenses of their applications in U.S. adult classrooms and spirituality enables adult education scholars to draw several implications for practice. First, this research encourages the reflection and dialogue whether with the self, another, or a group enables learning to take place. Second, the research confirms the importance of processing new information or experience with prior experiences. Finally, in addition to connecting with the learner's life experiences and promoting reflection and dialogue, adult educators can expand their repertoire of instruction to include creative and artistic modes of inquiry. With the growing understanding of the intesections between andragogy and transformative learning, adult learning is more likely be viewed as a multi-dimensional and holistic phenomenon. As a result, adult educators would begin to recognize the value of incorporate more creative modes of inquiry into their practice.

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