

Elements of Adult Learning in Teacher Professional Development

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This article examines the concept and philosophy of andragogy (the art and science of teaching adults) and the ways that adults' self-image, experiences, and readiness to learn differentiate adult education from pedagogy (the instruction of children). By creating an environment for adult learning and engaging the school staff in mutual planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development learning experiences, school leaders can improve the process of school-based teacher professional development.

Principals in the United States are facing a period of rapid and accelerated change—the new age of accountability. The increased pace and complexity of the profession leave many principals overwhelmed with decisions that they must make quickly and accurately. Among many attributes of accountability, teacher professional development within a school is an area in which principals are expected to “help educators develop insight, knowledge and skills they need to become effective classroom and school leaders and better able to increase student learning” (National Staff Development Council, 2001, p. vi). Crucial to this process are the principal's involvement in school-based professional development and his or her capacity to engage staff members in a continuous process of learning, discovery, and growth. In general, professional development for teachers has been conducted outside of schools, but there is an increasing demand on principals to develop programs that will support ongoing professional learning and improvement within schools. “Development of others” is included as one of the ten vital skills for effective school leaders in “Selecting and Developing the 21st Century Principal,” the newest assessment model used by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Buckner & Flanary, 1997). Performance data from this model reveal that the “development of others” skill was repeatedly found as an area needing improvement.

One challenge facing principals who are accountable for school-based teacher professional development is structuring a process that creates an enthusiastic atmosphere of mutual inquiry and growth among staff members as well as mutual accountability for student achievement. Instead, they get

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too concerned with content, focusing on “what needs to be covered in the learning situation; how that content can be organized into manageable units; the most logical sequence for presenting these units; and the most efficient means of transmitting the content” (Glaser, 2002, p. 7). But are there elements missing from the process of professional development that keep teachers from being interested and engaged in the learning process? How can the knowledge of adult learning best help principals meet their staff’s professional development needs? When working with adult learners, principals need to be aware of the essential elements of adult learning—such as the characteristics that distinguish adult learners from student learners—and the principles on which the process of adult learning is based. The decisions that principals make in planning a professional development program and the way in which they integrate these decisions during the program’s delivery will determine whether or not teachers are able to assimilate and accommodate the course material.

Overview

In the planning of professional development programs, many principals assume that professional development learning methods should mirror the methods teachers employ with their students. In other words, they take responsibility for deciding what is to be taught and learned. This means that methods that are based on pedagogy—the art and science of teaching children—are applied to adults. This approach is understandable because traditionally teaching and learning have been focused on children; but the art and science of teaching adults—*andragogy*—has its own philosophy of facilitating adult learning based on characteristics of adult learners and principles that are essential for the adult learning process.

The word *andragogy* comes from the Greek noun *agoge*, meaning “the activity of leading,” and the stem *andr-*, meaning “adult” (Ingalls, 1984); taken together, they mean the art and science of teaching adults or helping adults learn. This article invites principals to consider the elements of adult learning in their process of planning and designing professional development programs that will help “establish a positive learning climate and spirit of mutual inquiry” (Ingalls, 1984). In essence, principals’ knowledge and consideration of the *andragogical* concept can enhance their capacity to assist in the professional growth of others and bring about developmental “changes in internal consciousness” (Boucoulalas & Krupp, 1989) that will ultimately benefit the school, community, and society.

The essential elements of *andragogy* are set forth in the model of adult learning developed by Knowles (1980). This model fits into the process of school-based teacher professional development, in which a principal takes the role of an adult educator and develops a program to create an addi-

tional learning capacity for staff members. As adult educators, principals should know that there are significant differences in the conditions surrounding adult and adolescent learning and differences that emerge in the learning process during various stages of maturity (Ingalls, 1984). These differences deserve careful attention and consideration in the process of professional development because they characterize adults as learners and distinguish them from student learners—a significant concept for school leaders who are engaged in the professional development of others. These distinctions are illuminated in the areas of adults' self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning.

Adults' Self-Concept

Most principals would agree that teachers are adults, no longer dependent in the same way as children; they are responsible for themselves and are capable of managing life in the adult world. "Something dramatic happens to their self-concepts when people define themselves as adults. They begin to see their normal role in life no longer as being full-time learners. They see themselves increasingly as producers or doers" (Knowles, 1980, p. 45). Translated into the context of professional development, this premise suggests that teachers' self-concept as it relates to learning would involve a sense of personal freedom to learn, choice of learning, and the relevance of experiences during learning. Principals have the task of creating a balance between the unique learning goals of teachers and schoolwide staff development. To accomplish this task, the principal needs to consider self-directing personalities of teachers and appropriate resources in their professional development congruent with the mission and goals of the school. "When adults discover that they are capable of self-direction in learning, as they are in other activities in their lives, they often experience a remarkable increase of motivation to learn and a strong desire to continue the learning process" (Ingalls, 1984, p. 6). The discovery of this capability forms the concept of maturity in adults; adults in the professional world do not want to be treated like children again. Thus, taking a pedagogical approach to the process of professional development will most likely seem patronizing to teachers. However, principals who create a professional development environment conducive to self-directedness can help teachers develop the capacity for self-direction within the mission and goals of the school.

Role of Experience in Adults

In andragogy, experience provides a rich resource for adult learning. Principals should recognize the importance of valuing their teachers' experiences because these represent their long-term investment in their self-image. With either growing or plentiful experience, teachers contribute not only to students' learning but also to their colleagues' and their own as they continue

to fill the reservoir of experience with additional learning. Knowles (1980) asserted, "if adults' experience is not being used, or its worth is minimized, it is not just experience that is being rejected—adults feel rejected as persons" (p. 50). The importance of the application of experience in the learning process for adults is emphasized in the andragogical literature. For example, Tenant and Pogson (1995) suggested that there ought to be an attempt during learning activities to link presented material to the prior experiences of learners, in order to build a bridge from the known to unknown. In addition, adapting the presented material to the immediate problems and concerns of learners ensures that learning is relevant. Finally, creating interactions such as simulations, role-playing, or group discussions originates new experiences as a result of the active participation in learning. Many school communities are strengthened by the principal's effort to recognize the role of their staff members' professional development by sharing and reflecting on their experiences; in this way, all participants have the opportunity to act as a rich resource for learning. New experiences become more meaningful when they are intertwined and linked with past and current experiences.

Conversely, children begin developing their experience by learning from teachers, textbooks, software programs, and the Internet, which contribute to their accumulation of facts and, eventually, experience. It takes a significant amount of time before their experiences are associated with learning. With adults, though, there is a direct relationship between learning and experience because "learning is an active process in the sense that learners are continually trying to understand and make sense of their experiences" (Tenant & Pogson, 1995, p. 150).

Readiness to Learn in Adults

Readiness to learn is another characteristic featured in andragogy that distinguishes adults from children. Children's learning is generally contingent on teacher's structured activities. In formal settings, students generally learn the same material at the same time, regardless of their development. That is why the learning process for students is organized into a curriculum with predicted progression (Knowles, 1980). With adults, Ingalls (1984) declared "it is well known that educational development occurs best through a sequencing of learning activities into developmental tasks so that the learner is presented with opportunities for learning certain topics or activities when he/she is 'ready' to assimilate them, but not before" (p. 7). In the context of professional development, this means that teachers feel the readiness to learn something or experience a teachable moment (Knowles, 1980) depending where their needs and interests are during a particular developmental stage.

Principals should be aware that their staff members' learning needs and interests differ; not all teachers might experience the readiness to learn at the

same time. A principal can help staff members diagnose their needs by teaming teachers according to their learning needs. Depending on the nature of the content, grouping teachers homogeneously during activities according to their developmental tasks would give them an opportunity to share their common needs and interests (Knowles, 1980). In other cases, heterogeneous groups may be preferable (Knowles, 1980) if the objective of the program requires input from all staff members (e.g., testing new multicultural curriculum ideas or working together on improved policy of technology issues). Also, Knowles (1980) suggested that a variety of subgroups during an activity works well because it gives the participants a flexibility of choice and an opportunity to discover colleagues with similar developmental tasks. This method provides an opportunity in the professional development for receiving feedback on ideas; sharing diverse perspectives, knowledge, and expertise; and encouraging communication. Having a principal serve as a facilitator and coinquirer during this process will help staff members to become more cognizant of their own thinking and that of others (Drago-Severson, 2000). According to the andragogical model, understanding the difference between children and adults in their readiness to learn is important because the concept of a developmental task for adults is connected to their own choice of time and learning content.

Orientation to Learning in Adults

Adults' orientation to learning differs from that of children in relation to goals. As Knowles (1980) explained, "adults enter into education with a different time perspective from children which in turn produces a difference in the way they view learning. To a child, education is essentially a process of the accumulation of a reservoir of subject matter—knowledge and skills—that might be useful later in life. To adults, education is a process of improving their ability to cope with life problems they face now" (p. 53). When this perspective is considered, teachers' professional development becomes not a subject-oriented activity but a performance-centered or problem-centered learning process. Ingalls (1984) described this process as an "orientation to the discovery of improved situation, a desired goal, a corrective experience or a developmental possibility in relation to the reality of the present situation" (p. 9).

Understanding adults' orientation to learning in the context of performance or problem centeredness can help a principal stay attuned to the concerns of teachers and create learning experiences that will address and resolve problem areas. A principal's assistance in assessing a performance gap can help a staff member see where he or she is and where he or she needs to be in order to increase the level of competence. Organizing the professional development process around specific competencies is a strategy

that principals can use to address problem areas and work toward competency progress.

Principles of Andragogy

Understanding and respecting the nature of teachers as adult learners means appreciation of their backgrounds, life experiences, and developmental growth. Principals who can identify the difference between pedagogical and andragogical approaches to learning understand how cognitive development emerges in adults and how professional development can contribute to future growth and facilitate new ways of thinking and reasoning. Professional development is a period of ongoing intellectual and cognitive growth for teachers; it is different from the way children experience intellectual and cognitive growth. Therefore, in structuring the process of school-based teacher professional development, principals should consider not only a different view of the learner but also different principles of adult learning to guide the process effectively. These principles are: (a) setting up an environment for adult learning; (b) involving adult learners in mutual planning; (c) attending to the adult learners' needs and interests; (d) involving adult learners in setting the program's goals and objectives; (e) involving adult learners in designing an effective program; (f) involving adult learners in implementing the program; and (g) involving adult learners in the program's evaluation.

What the Research Shows: Breaking Ranks in Action (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2002) advocates that school leaders see themselves as "school designers" and create an atmosphere conducive to standards implementation. This statement applies not only to children's learning, but also to creating structures that support high levels of learning for teachers. In the andragogical model, the creation of such structures for adult learners will have a significant difference from those for children. According to Knowles (1980), "When the principles of andragogy are translated into a process for planning adult educational programs, that process turns out to be quite different from the curriculum planning and teaching process traditionally employed in youth education" (p. 59). To create an environment that is conducive to awareness, growth, and development for teachers, principals can consider the seven principles of the andragogical process in which adult learners are guided through professional development in a respectful and trustful school culture.

Environment for Learning

Teachers, just as much as students, can be bored and unproductive if the physical and psychological environment for learning is not stimulating. A staff developer's attitude, frustration, passiveness after a long working day, and even physical uneasiness can make the environment for learning uncomfortable. A principal who acts as an adult educator can influence the

environment either by facilitating or inhibiting learning. He or she “may convey in many ways whether their attitude is one of interest and respect for the students or whether students are seen essentially as receiving sets for transmissions of wisdom” (Knowles, 1980, p. 47). Comfortable physical atmosphere, positive interpersonal climate, and well-prepared organizational setting define the andragogically correct environment for adult learning and can affect the process of professional development in schools. A principal’s recognition of teachers as “self-directed and autonomous” (Knowles, 1980) people can positively contribute to the informal, positive, and productive psychological climate. Participants in such a professional development setting will feel and function as adults and share enthusiasm, humor, and excitement during the learning process. A principal who exhibits a leadership style that provides opportunities for teachers to advance their knowledge, skills, and attitude will sense the important role of the educative environment for professional development in which teachers will feel cared for, respected, and treated as self-directed human beings.

Mutual Planning

Input from teachers is one of the points that experts on teacher training include on their checklist for planning a professional development program. They agree that “teachers are more likely to buy into training they helped design or select” (Duffrin, 2002, p. 16). When principals plan professional development activities without involving teachers, they may encounter passivity or resentment from their staff. In this case, the potential for effective problem finding and problem solving is minimal, which will influence the school’s culture and, most important, the effectiveness of learning. In contrast, “when planners of adult learning activities involve their participants in the planning process, the resultant richness and vitality of the program demonstrates the feasibility of this approach” (Ingalls, 1984, p. 20). Such an approach suggests that developing a structure for mutual planning in professional development is not an easy task for a school leader.

“Teachers are still, for the most part, treated as solo practitioners operating in isolation from one another under conditions of work that severely limit their exposure to other adults doing the same work” (Elmore, 2002, p. 4).

It is possible, however, for principals to employ leadership initiatives that target the development of collaborative skills in teachers through shared leadership. Principals who enlist these initiatives appreciate the benefit of engaging their teachers to work in groups. They see teachers cooperating and assuming responsibility for both decision making and success of the program. According to the andragogical approach, both principals and teachers are expected to learn during the planning process. Drago-Severson (2000) offered testimonials to mutual planning that showed the importance

of providing all participants with leadership opportunities, because such opportunities invite individuals to engage in role taking as opposed to role playing. Regarding the emotional state of this process, Ingalls (1984) asserted "mutual planning is occurring when the group is aware that it has moved from a somewhat artificial milieu to one of emotional closeness, warmth, and spontaneous interaction" (p. 21). In this collaborative effort, teachers who assume responsibility and authority for work may become session organizers, meeting facilitators, or leaders of brainstorming sessions sharing their opinion, expertise, and vision. Depending on the role, they also may take charge of mentoring and coaching less-experienced teachers or working in teams designing and developing, for example, an integrated curriculum or self-evaluation. In other words, mutual planning offers the promise and potential to facilitate developmental growth not only of competencies but also of the capacity to learn from a collective effort of teamwork. It creates a sense of novelty and relationship between teachers and leadership functions. In addition, mutual planning creates a balance between competition and collaboration because teamwork opens reflective thinking that transforms assumptions from self-centeredness to objectivity.

Needs and Interests

Principals who focus on the pedagogical model and determine what should be taught to the staff members should not be surprised if there is an indifferent reaction to the program. It is essential to remember during professional development program planning that teachers are volunteers in learning compared to children, who are compulsory learners. If the entire school staff plans the program with a planning group as a catalyst, staff members will be more interested in the program. One organizational method might include a group survey of the needs and interests the program intends to serve. To be interested and willing to meet teachers' needs and interests, a principal has to help teachers in discovering their basic and educational needs.

Understanding and taking into account the basic needs of their staff members can help a principal create an environment where teachers have not only physical but also psychological comfort. Teachers need to know that the learning experience will provide them with a sense of growth in their knowledge, understanding, skills, attitude, and interests. They also want to feel secure in terms of their self-respect and self-image within the economic, social, and psychological areas of life (Knowles, 1980). A principal who understands the importance of providing a safe and stable environment for the program will make people feel secure and confident about learning. The need for security parallels a need for new experiences, where adults challenge themselves not only with new ideas and interests but also with new people (Knowles, 1980). If a principal is mindful of this need and if the program in-

cludes opportunities to discuss new ideas and new ways of working, then the concept of new experience becomes important, and staff members will be stimulated and challenged to learn. Similarly, an attempt to create a friendly atmosphere will meet the need for affection because all people want to be appreciated. As Knowles (1980) acknowledged, "this is the most social of the needs, the one that causes people to be willing to do things to please others even at a personal sacrifice, that causes them to seek out certain individuals with whom they can share interests, experiences, joys and sorrows" (p. 85). In learning communities, principals acknowledge the role of recognition and their staff members' need for recognition. Therefore, naturally created opportunities in which this need is satisfied will motivate staff members and will make them feel worthy and respected. The desire for job recognition motivates people to strive for the best in their position and beyond.

Basic needs "change as we go through a process of maturation in intensity and quality over the life span" (Knowles, 1980, p. 86). Middle-aged educators and those who are close to retirement might have different basic needs. Younger professionals strive for achievement and to advance their career, but older teachers may feel a need to preserve and protect their positions. These factors should be taken into account when planning teacher professional development so as to provide the "richest possible opportunities for continuing growth and self-fulfillment, and to let the older adults choose, individually, which route to follow for themselves" (Knowles, 1980, p. 87).

Basic needs correlate directly to educational needs when educators feel a desire to further their learning in order to contribute to schoolwide improvement. Creating a consciousness of the gap between their present level of competence and the higher level required in their profession can help teachers realize these needs. Knowles (1980) identified this gap as a "discrepancy between what individuals want themselves to be and what they are; the distance between aspiration and reality" (p. 88). Principals need sensitivity to help individuals assess their educational needs and weave them into the needs of the school and community. After these various needs have been assessed, the critical part of the principal's job is to stimulate in their staff members the transition of these integrated "needs into interests and eventually values" (Knowles, 1980, p. 88). Some of the assessment methods may include individual assessment, which can help develop a self-diagnostic attitude as well as build competency models to promote self-development. Small-group discussion is another dynamic tool that can help teachers clarify their own learning needs and become resources for each other's learning. Documenting the discussion can provide evidence of the expressed needs of the group.

Conducting needs assessment for staff members requires additional time, which is already in short supply for principals in their high-pressure

school environment. However, rushing ahead with a program without knowing the staff members' needs may be inefficient because there will not be a collective and agreed-upon understanding of the program's goals. In essence, it short-circuits the formulation of objectives and the design of the competency model within the program.

Goals and Objectives

Typically, a principal will begin planning a teacher professional development program with a general goal "to help educators develop the insights, knowledge, and skills they need to become effective classroom and school teachers, better able to increase student learning" (National Staff Development Council, 2001, p. vi). In addition, according to Elmore (2002), the broad mission and goals that shape professional development should reflect a path of continuous improvement in specific domains of student learning. Although the general goal provides a broad sense of direction, a list of program objectives should describe "explicitly what new knowledge and skill educators will learn as a consequence of their participation, how this knowledge and skill will be manifested in their professional practice, and what specific activities will lead to this learning" (Elmore, 2002, p. 8). Program planning is not complete without specific learning objectives for desired behavioral outcomes, such as increased capacity in performance, that teachers will acquire through the program. This is where needs-assessment data becomes critical, because program and learning objectives are derived from this data to serve as guidelines and a focus for activities. Before translating needs into objectives, though, the andragogical model of Knowles (1980) suggests that the needs be screened through the organizational goal and mission, potentiality factor, and interests of participants.

Program Design

The design of a program for children in a pedagogical setting usually depends on the outline of the curriculum, which a teacher orchestrates into implementation using various instructional assistance. As Ingalls (1984) noted, "there is a definite body of information to be communicated that can be taught to all of the students in approximately the same length of time, and that all of the students are required to possess the information being processed" (p. 47). If this approach is used in a professional development program for teachers, many of them might question whether the program meets their needs, interests, and values. The reason for this perplexity is that adults learn what they think they ought to learn depending on their professional needs. Taking this perspective into consideration, principals should make an effort to design a program "based on direction and support needed by learners" (Pratt, 1988). Knowles's (1980) andragogical model compares a creative design of a pro-

gram with a work of art that includes an imaginative layout, a variety of activities, a categorized system for grouping the activities, lively and descriptive language, and a sense of unique personality. Given this layout, the program creator can design the shape, theme, and techniques of the program to result in balance and cohesion. Regardless of the chosen program format—a workshop or conference, meeting or course, creativity session or study mission tour—the instructor should view the learner as a partner in the design of the program (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Thus, the andragogical model suggests that the program be designed to center on the adult student within a framework of self-directed learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999)

Implementation

From the andragogical perspective, the role of a principal in conducting school-based professional development is one of a resource person and co-inquirer rather than instructor. The principal's role, however, is critical in the implementation phase because he or she sets the program's tone, develops a sense of enthusiasm, and supports freedom of expression and decision making. Implementation of an andragogical program assumes that the principal and staff members take part in the program's design and enter into a relationship of motivation and participation that draws them closer together, provided that the group is mature and responsible (Ingalls, 1984). As Knowles (1980) noted, the teaching-learning transaction becomes a mutual responsibility of those who teach and those who learn. If teachers sense the principal's concern for their needs and respect for their personalities and participation, they will respond with the sense of motivation, appreciation, and quality learning. As Knowles (1989) asserted, "People feel a commitment to a decision in proportion to the extent that they feel they have participated in making it" (p. 53).

Evaluation

The final step in the andragogical process is evaluation. This begins in the planning stages and is based on clarity of thoughts regarding outcomes (National Staff Development Council, 2001). It "requires a review of the learning effort, principally by the learner" (Glaser, 2002, p. 11). As Knowles (1980) acknowledged, it is a way of making value judgments about the results. The andragogical model suggests that a principal consider the four elements of evaluation: reaction, learning, behavior, and results (Kirkpatrick, 1976). Reaction can help a principal reveal the feelings staff members have about the program. The key question about learning is: "To what extent have I learned the new information, skills, and attitudes?" (Glaser, 2002, p. 11). Behavioral changes in the performance of staff members are important indicators of the program's effectiveness or ineffectiveness. The question that can be addressed is: "How has what I have learned affected my thinking and my behavior?"

(Glaser, 2002, p. 11). Finally, improvement in students' achievement and performance that results in the enhanced quality of teaching is the most significant indicator of evaluation's outcome. The question to answer is: "To what extent have I used the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the performance of my real-life roles?" (Glaser, 2002, p. 11). In the andragogical process, evaluation is a step in which a principal witnesses the developmental growth in teachers as they rediagnose their needs, interests, and values.

Implications for Principals

A principal's responsibility for professional development of others is directly connected to the academic success of children. Knowing how adults learn can guide a principal in improving the process of school-based teacher professional development and making such activities more effective. Rather than concentrating on a program's content, the andragogical orientation invites principals to focus on the program's process and to consider the characteristics of adult learners as well as principles of adult learning. Emphasis on these elements will communicate the principals' attitude of respect for school staff members through their behavior and the way they manage the learning process (Glaser, 2002). The application of andragogy suggests that principals should not keep their school staff members dependent on them, but neither should they assume responsibility for making decisions about what is to be learned, how it will be learned, and when it will be learned. Instead, they must create opportunities for learning by providing the school staff members with rich resources "to build up a foundation of knowledge about the content area sufficient for them to feel confident about taking responsibility for planning and carrying out their own learning projects" (Knowles, 1989, p. 81).

Understanding the andragogical concept leads one to realize that it is inseparable from a democratic philosophy. Translated into the context of school-based professional development, the learning activities are based on the real needs and interests of school staff; the planning and design of programs are determined by a group that is representative of all participants; learners are involved in formulating their own goals and objectives; the learners are involved in the program's implementation and evaluation; and finally, there is a maximum participation by all the members in sharing responsibility for making and carrying out decisions (Knowles, 1980).

Creative school leaders who are committed to improve their school-based teacher professional development programs can amplify this opportunity by considering the elements of the andragogical practice. The value of this practice manifests in adults knowing why it is important to learn something; directing themselves through learning resources; and taking on the character of acquiring information, knowledge, skills, attitude, and wisdom (Boucoulalas & Krupp, 1989). 🐘

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