Andragogy and Metagogy:
The Evolution of Neologisms

Claudette M. Peterson
Chris M. Ray

Abstract

Although the Greek roots of the word pedagogy refer to teaching children, until the second half of the 20th century it was applied to any teaching-learning transaction regardless of the age of the learner. Some educators still use pedagogy in this generic way. A neologism is a newly coined word or phrase that is just emerging into mainstream use, and the educational term andragogy has evolved relating to adult learning. Finally, the term metagogy is introduced as a way to blend aspects of both pedagogy and andragogy in a way that meets the needs of adult learners depending on their needs in a specific educational context.

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In the most recent *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, Laurel Jeris (2010) noted:

Newcomers to the field of adult and continuing education are often surprised, perhaps even dismayed, with what may appear to them to be an inability of scholars in the field to define terms, write straightforward histories of important events and movements, and delineate areas of emphasis within the field in unambiguous terms (p. 275).

Knowles (1962) addressed the confusion related to the term adult education itself. He noted that although it had a "recognizable form" (p. v) in several countries including England, Sweden, Denmark, and the [then] Soviet Union, in his description of adult education in the United States, Knowles noted that it "has pro-liferated almost haphazardly" (p. v), and he commented on "the apparent formlessness of the adult educational enterprise in this country" (pp. v-vi). Knowles went on to say "perhaps some of the confusion is semantic" (p. vi) since there were three meanings for adult education: the *process* by which adults continue to learn after completing formal schooling, *organized activities* for adults offered by a variety of institutions to accomplish specific educational objectives, and a *movement* or *field* related to this learning.

Another term that has generated discussion is the word pedagogy, which some educators use broadly to describe the art, science, or professions of teaching. However, the Greek roots of the word refer to learners who are children and thus involves helping children learn (Cross, 1981). The word was created by adding the Greek word for child (peda) to the word for leading or teaching (agogos). When two words are initially joined together to create a new word, that new word may

become a neologism.

A neologism is a newly coined word or phrase that is just emerging into mainstream use. Neologisms may be coined by and attributed to a specific person, or they may be the outcome of a publication, period, or event. There are multiple ways to create a neologism. One is to blend together two words to create a new word such as blending breakfast and lunch to create brunch. Two other methods involve appending a new prefix or suffix such as *arch* to a word to create archangel or patriarch. Sometimes an acronym becomes commonly used as its own word such as BFF (best friends forever) and LOL (laughing out loud) in social media. So neologisms can become accepted language in several ways such as by word-of-mouth, in the social media, or in the mass media, but another path to acceptance is through academic discourse. Once a word is part of commonly accepted language, it is no longer a neologism. Because the word pedagogy has been in use for so long, it is no longer a neologism.

Two neologisms related to adult learning are andragogy and metagogy. Before their evolutionary path can be discussed, it is important to understand the historical context of the more basic controversy of whether adult learning is even possible.

Adult Education and Learning

Until recently in human history, there was not much focus on adult learning. In the past, what one learned as a child lasted a lifetime. "When life was simpler, one generation could pass along to the next generation what it needed to know to get along in the world; tomorrow was simply a repeat of yesterday" (Cross, 1981, p. 1). By the early part of the 20th century, this was no longer the case. Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1931) realized this and observed that this basic transmittal of known facts "was appropriate only when the time-span of cultural change was greater than the life-span of individuals" (p. xix). Now due to longer human life-spans and the shorter half-life of knowledge due to rapid changes in technology and acceleration of social change, lifelong learning is necessary to adapt and thrive.

In spite of these changes leading to a need for lifelong learning, there was initially debate whether or not adults were even able to learn (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1990) challenged this position by asking:

> Would it surprise you if I told you that the earliest thinking about the nature of learning concerned learning for adults? All of the great teachers of ancient times were teachers of adults, not children. In ancient China, Confucius and Lao Tse were teachers of adults, not children. The Hebrew prophets and Jesus were teachers of adults, not children. The ancient Greeks–Socrates, Plato, Aristotle–were all teachers of adults, not children. The great teachers in ancient Rome–Cicero, Quintilian, and Euclid–were teachers of adults, not children. Since their experiences were with adults, they perceived learning very differently from the way later teachers came to perceive it. (p. 63)

In his 1926 book *The Meaning of Adult Education,* Lindeman noted that adult learners attend classes voluntarily, appreciate the intrinsic merits of learning, and learn according to their needs and problems rather than being focused on a particular subject. In addition, he noted that adult learners thrive with collaborative learning and that their life experiences contribute to their learning.
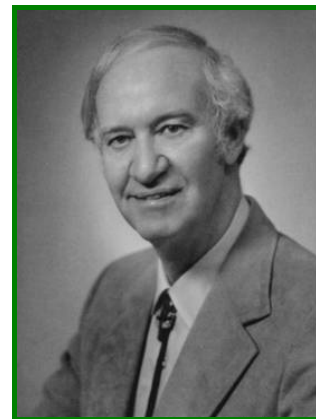
The Evolution of the "gogies"

Since the term pedagogy which is commonly used in education to discuss the art or science of teaching refers to children, perhaps a new word was needed to

apply to adult learners. In the twentieth century, a new word emerged in the education lexicon: andragogy, "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

Because andragogy was introduced to readers in the United States in articles and books by Malcolm Knowles, he is often credited with being the father of andragogy or the apostle of andragogy (Carlson, 1989). However, those more familiar with andragogy know that the term was used at least as early as 1833 by a German educator, Alexander Kapp. The term was also used by adult educators in Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria (Van Gent, 1994). Eduard Lindeman first introduced the term andragogy in the United States in 1926 (Brookfield, 1984; Lindeman, 1926). He described several aspects of adult learning that are often attributed to Knowles, such as the importance of the adult learners' life experiences.

However, a word does not become a neologism until it reaches a certain critical mass of usage. The use of the term andragogy did not gain real acceptance until Knowles wrote about it four decades later. It was then, in the second half of the twentieth century, that the word andragogy was re-introduced in the United States.

As described earlier in the definition of neologisms, creation of a neologism can be triggered through academic discourse. Knowles (1968) termed andragogy "a new label and a new technology" (p. 351) to distinguish adult learning from pedagogy. The title of the 1968 article was "Andragogy, not Pedagogy," which indicates that Knowles perceived the two concepts to be mutually exclusive. The publication of that manuscript seems to be the tipping point for andragogy to become a neologism in the United States.

For the next 30 years, Knowles published the development of his ideas related to andragogy. Nowadays if public figures make known the evolution of their positions or thoughts as their understanding of a concept or event develops or they develop more nuanced or refined ideas, they are accused of flip-flopping. However, as an educator, Knowles was interested in the critical development of ideas. Consequently, Knowles' articles and books give the reader an interesting glimpse into the development of his ideas. It is possible to follow this evolution from the titles as well as the content of his publications.

Two years after his initial article, Knowles continued the theme of mutual exclusivity in his discussion of andragogy in his book titled *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* (1970). The title of the third chapter of this book is "Andragogy: Farewell to Pedagogy" in which Knowles describes andragogy as "an emerging technology for adult learning" (p. 37).

When Knowles revised his 1970 book a decade later, it retained the title *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1980), but the subtitle was changed to *From Pedagogy to Andragogy* to reflect his evolving view that pedagogy and andragogy were not dichotomous, but rather they were two parallel models that should be considered in each learning situation. The chapter title became "What is Andragogy?" with subheadings "In the Beginning was Pedagogy" which was followed by "Then Came Andragogy."

By 1984, Knowles acknowledged that his ideas continued to evolve:

> It seems fitting, therefore, that I present my current thinking about adult learning as a personal account of my wanderings through the morass of learning theory; for, like the wanderings of Odysseus, mine were circuitous, not a direct flight. I see this chapter as a way of introducing newcomers to the world of andragogy with a route map, but those who are already familiar with this world may want to scan the chapter to note certain changes in my current views of adult education. (p. 1)

In the preface of that same book, Knowles made a disclaimer "of personal ownership of the andragogical model....[He] did not coin it; [he] stole it from the Europeans" (p. xvi). In his autobiographical memoir, Knowles (1989) recounted how a Yugoslavian educator, Dusan Savicevic, listened to Knowles' ideas of a theoretical framework of adult learning and identified it as andragogy. Knowles recollected that his response to the unfamiliar term was "Whatagogy?" (p. 79). In this same book, Knowles acknowledged Lindeman's use of the word andragogy in 1926 although it did not become a strong part of the education vernacular in the United States at that time.

In Knowles' (1996) chapter titled "Adult Learning" in the *ASTD Training and Development Handbook*, the subtitle "Wherefore Pedagogy?" was followed by "Then Came Andragogy," then "But Not Andragogy *versus* Pedagogy." Knowles again stated that they are two models and that it is incumbent upon educators to determine which set of assumptions is appropriate in a particular situation and then use the appropriate concept.

Many writers recounted and debated andragogy and Knowles' work during his career and since his death in 1997 (Davenport, 1987; Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Ferro, 1997). Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly Malcolm Knowles who caused the term andragogy to reach the status of neologism by creating the tipping point in academic discourse.

During the period when Knowles was developing his ideas regarding andragogy, other educators were developing words for a specialized aspect of adult learning. For example, eldergogy (Yeo, 1982) and gerogogy (Batterby, 1987; John, 1988; Lebel, 1978) reflect the belief that older adults are sufficiently different to warrant a distinct educational theory. These terms have not reached the status of common usage outside the field of gerontology.

The Decline of a Neologism

Words or phrases can cease being a neologism in one of two ways: either by disappearing from common use or by aging. When a word is no longer new, it is no longer a neologism. Andragogy is no longer a neologism simply due to the fact that it has been commonly used for 50 years. Might it also disappear from common use? Cross (1981) claimed that "although the word andragogy makes a neat contrast with the more familiar and traditional pedagogy, the contrast appears difficult to maintain" (p. 223). In contrast, in the 2001 *New Update on Adult Learning Theory*, Merriam opined that andragogy is so ingrained in the identity and practice of adult education that demoting it "to the status of historical artifact is inconceivable" (p. 11). Brookfield (1986) noted:

Andragogy is also now, for many educators and trainers of adults, a badge of identity (p. 90).

Such individuals frequently describe themselves as "andragogues," declare that their practice exemplifies andragogical principles, and believe that the concept represents a professionally accurate summary of the unique characteristics of adult education practice.

However, the primacy of andragogy that may be in flux. The *International of Encyclopedia of Education* 2nd edition published in 1994 had an entry for andragogy (Van Gent, 1994). This was a 12-volume set containing 7,740 pages. The third edition of that encyclopedia published in 2010 (Peterson, Baker, & McGaw, 2010) is now an 8-volume set with 6,962 pages. Andragogy is mentioned in 11 entries dealing with adult learning in this third edition, but it no longer has its own entry. Is the term andragogy disappearing from common use perhaps to be replaced with a newer "gogy"?

Stroschen (2011) in her call for chapters for a book titled *Metagogy* noted that educators who work with adult learners "lean on a variety of 'gogies' – pedagogy, andragogy, critical pedagogy, etc." (para. 2). Strohschen and Elazier (2011) suggested a metagogical approach to facilitating the learning process. While pedagogical and andragogical approaches are sometimes still discussed as though they are mutually exclusive, metagogy is inclusive of an andragogical approach but also includes conventional pedagogical approaches as they are appropriate to a task at hand depending on the context, learner needs, or stated goal.

The term metagogy has recently been used in disparate ways. Recent blog entries define it as teaching about teaching (mplsbohemian, n.d.; Propenko, 2009; Rollermation, 2011)

In 2000, an instructional designer named David R. Lavoie took a more direct and assertive approach and filed to trademark the word metagogy. The filing was published for opposition in 2001, and the trademark was registered in 2003. The trademarked term covered a broad variety of educational services, including instructional consultation and design; development of educational materials; and the conduct of classes, seminars, workshops, conferences (Lavoie, n.d.).

It is too early to know if the term metagogy will gain traction and become commonly used in a context

that is useful for adult educators. Luckily for Strohschen and Elazier, Lavoie's trademark was cancelled in 2010. There have been other neologism candidates in the wings, including geragogy and eldergogy (Yeo, 1982) which refer to teaching older adults. Knudson (1979) proposed reconciling the differences between the "gogies" by using the term humanagogy as a holistic approach to teaching human beings. That approach would take into account a learner's experiences, interests, motivation, and need for directive or facilitative learning under particular circumstances regardless of chronological age. As logical as that term might appear, it did not gain the status of neologism. Perhaps the creation of these neologisms is simply a way to help educators of adults remain focused on ways to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning transaction. As adult education continues to evolve, so does the language.

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Claudette Peterson is an assistant professor in Occupational and Adult Education within the Education Doctoral Programs in the School of Education at North Dakota State University.

Chris Ray is an assistant professor in Institutional Analysis within the Education Doctoral Programs in the School of Education at North Dakota State University.