Andragogy and Pedagogy: A Comment on Their Erroneous Usage. Training and Development Research Center Project Number Twenty-Nine.

The use of the term "andragogy" to mean education of adults and the term "pedagogy" to mean education of children is etymologically inaccurate. Although pedagogy derives from "pais," meaning child, from antiquity pedagogy also has stood for education in general—without reference to learners' ages. Andragogy derives from "aner," meaning adult male and not adult of either sex. Given current efforts to purge English of sexist words, introduction of a term that excludes women is nonsensical. A new term based on the Greek could be coined. "Teleios," not aner, is the Greek word for the English "adult." Andragogy could be replaced by "teleiagogy," a term "...includes adults of both sexes. (YLB)
ANDRAGOGY AND PEDAGOGY:
A Comment on Their Erroneous Usage

Popie M. Mohring
January 1989
Abstract

Using andragogy to stand for educating adults and pedagogy for educating children is etymologically inaccurate. Although pedagogy derives from pais, meaning child, from antiquity pedagogy also stands for education without reference to learners' ages. Andragogy derives from aner, meaning adult male, not adult of either sex. Given the efforts to eliminate "sexist" words, why introduce a new one? We would be served better by using English than by using etymologically inaccurate Greek. If Greek is desired, teleios, not aner, is the Greek word for the English "adult." Andragogy should yield to teleiagogy, thereby including adults of both sexes.
Andragogy and Pedagogy: A Comment on Their Erroneous Usage

Those who use or coin Greek words to stand for scientific concepts and bodies of knowledge sometimes unintentionally incorporate erroneous meanings. Such is the case with the terms andragogy and pedagogy.

According to Malcolm Knowles (1987) andragogy "is a term that is now widely used around the world as an alternative to pedagogy" (p. 169) when referring to teaching adults. Knowles' influential work on the ideas conveyed by these two concepts has led to their extensive use in the literature on adult education and training. Although andragogy is not listed in the Merriam-Webster or Oxford unabridged dictionaries, it does appear in The Random House Dictionary of the English Language second unabridged edition (1987). It has the meaning "method's or techniques used to teach adults (Andr- +(ped)Agogy)."

This note is not addressed to the substantive issues that Knowles and other scholars associate with andragogy and pedagogy. It is aimed only at clarifying the etymology of these two terms.

Quoting from Knowles (1987):

All formal educational institutions in modern society were initially established exclusively for the education of children and youth. At the time they were established there was only one model of assumptions about learners and learning—the pedagogical model (derived from the Greek words paid [sic], meaning "child," and agogus [sic], meaning "leader"; so "pedagogy" means literally "the art and science of teaching children"). (p. 168)

True, the first component of the composite word pedagogy (paidagogeia) derives from the Greek word pais, meaning child, whereas the latter component...
derives from the Greek word that, in verb form (*ago*), means to teach, to lead, to guide, to attend. In noun form (*agogos*), it means teacher, leader, guide, or attendant. However, in antiquity and in later times, this, and similarly rooted terms as *paideia*, not only have meanings associated with children, but have meanings that are conveyed in English by the terms education, learning, and teaching. These meanings are not necessarily associated with children only. For example, quoting from Liddell and Scott (1968), the word *paideia* means: "1. [that which pertains to] the rearing of a child; 2. training and teaching, education; 3. its result, mental culture, learning, education;...." These same meanings are listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1961).

Despite its root in the word *pais*, in antiquity, the common understanding of the word *paideia* had to do with culture and the education not only of children but also of adults. While ancient and modern Greek differ in many usages and word meanings, they also have many similarities. The modern Greeks’ Ministry of *Paideias* is not the English equivalent of a ministry which deals with the rearing of and teaching of children. It is, rather, the ministry of education.

In short, although one may accurately say that (Knowles, 1987) "'pedagogy' means literally 'the art and science of teaching children'" (p. 168), one may also use it to mean the art and science of teaching—with no restrictions on the age or sex of the recipients of the teaching.

Neither now nor in his time could one view Socrates’ pedagogical method as fitting the assumptions of what Knowles terms pedagogical. In antiquity and early Christian times (Arndt & Gingrich, 1979), a pedagogue was not a teacher, but a man (usually a slave) having the oversight of a child, an attendant who led a boy to school and carried his satchel. Plato may well be responsible (we don’t know for sure) for the metaphorical usage of pedagogue and its cognates in the sense of educator, teacher, and their like.
The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (1971) defines pedagogy as:

Office of a paidagogos. The function, profession or practice of a pedagogue; the work or occupation of teaching, the art and science of teaching, pedagogics.... 2. Instruction, discipline, training.

The Webster's Third New International Unabridged (1976) definition of pedagogy has no reference to children or their education:

1: INSTRUCTION....2: the art, science or profession of teaching, esp: the study that deals with principles and methods in formal education: EDUCATION.

Quoting again from Knowles (1987):

Early in the 1960s European adult educators were feeling a need for a label for this growing body of knowledge about learners that would enable them to talk about it in parallel with the pedagogical model, and they coined the term (or actually rediscovered the term that had been coined by a German adult educator in 1833) andragogy. (p. 169)

In the times and the society of the adult educator who coined andragogy, the term may have been appropriate. Education and teaching were privileges for men only. Such privileges were not officially offered to women. Andragogy derives from the Greek words aner and ago, -gos. Aner (o, andro, andri, andra) however, means adult male. It does not mean, as Knowles (1987) claims, "adult" (p. 169). Similarly, the meaning for andragogy in the Random House dictionary, quoted previously, is erroneous. The English equivalent of andr- is not adult; it is adult male.

The term andragogy, then, means the art and science of educating adult males. The same applies to such related terms as "andragogue," and "andragogical." They connote the education of adult men, not of adults.
Greek does not, to my knowledge, have a word that stands for what
Knowles terms andragogy. It has only pedagogy. Unlike "man," which was
and still is sometimes used in English to imply both sexes, the Greek word
aner has always meant "adult male," not adults of both sexes. Unlike English,
the Greek language has a distinct word intended for both sexes,
anthropos—whence anthropology. Aner, then, means adult male; the word for
adult female is gýne. In Latin and in English andr- or andro-, and gýne- or
gyneko- have been used in composite words to stand for male and female,
respectively. Some English examples are androcracy, gynekocracy, androgene-
sis, gynekogenesis. In combination, androgyne- is used to connote meanings
associated with both sexes; for example, androgynous connotes having both
male and female characteristics.

Given current efforts to purify English of "sexist" words, it makes little
sense to introduce a term that, though not intended to exclude women, does
precisely that. Furthermore, interpreting the Greek andr- as "adult" in
andragogogy creates a discrepancy with its usage in other English words (e.g.,
androgenesis) that have a male connotation.

Greek may not be a good source of words for Knowles' concepts. In
Greek, pedagogy, and such related terms as pedagogical, do not have the
meanings Knowles attaches to them. Andragogy excludes women. Andragyne-
kagogy (or something similar to it) is a word of Greek origin that includes the
education of adult men and adult women. However, besides being awkward to
pronounce, this prefix inherits the tradition of previous usages, including
meanings associated with bisexuality, the union of two sexes, and the like.

If one were to coin a term rooted in the Greek word anthropos—for
example, anthropagogy—that term would leave out any sense of age and sex.
It would accurately be read as the education of people, but it would not serve
as a label (Knowles, 1987) "to talk about it [adult educational model] in parallel
with the pedagogical model" (p. 169), since Anthropoi (plural) includes youths and children. True, one may say that (E. Keuls, personal communication, 1988) when ancient Greeks used anthropoi they did not have children in mind—they usually meant adult males. If so, this is yet another commentary on the adult-male-dominated nature of their society. It does not, however, alter the fact that the meaning of their word anthropoi includes children and youths, male and female.

How about coining the term teleiagogy? For the Latin adultus and the English "adult"—fully grown, mature—the ancient Greek word is teleios. (Woodhouse, 1932; Glare, 1982). The superiority of teleiagogy to andragogy is unquestionable. The root, telei-, cuts out any sense of gender. Those familiar with classical Greek will immediately read teleiagogy in the context of the education of (for) adults. Emphasizing the meaning of the word pais (child) in pedagogy and bypassing its broader connotation noted earlier, teleiagogy would serve better than andragogy as (Knowles, 1987) "a label ... to talk about it in parallel with the pedagogical model" (p. 169).

But there is a catch. Teleios, hence also the coined word teleiagogy, has semantic complexity: Teleios is but one derivative of telos (end), a word with many derivatives and meanings in Greek (Chantraine, 1968), many of them incorporated, altered, and expanded in English and other languages, especially German. Prominent connotations of teleios include: perfect, entire, without spot or blemish, valid, authoritative, final, accomplished, perfect in his kind, fulfilled, full, complete, and full-grown (Liddel & Scott, 1968). The many connotations of teleios do not necessarily argue against using teleiagogy. That teleios connotes both the mature as subjects/objects of education and also final, perfect, and the like as ends of education, may give it added appeal to scholars of adult education (H. Y. Williams, personal communication, 1988).

In short, if we desire to distinguish the education of adults from that of
youths and children, *we would be far better served by using English words* than by borrowing or coining Greek words erroneously. On the other hand, if we desire to maintain the tradition of utilizing Greek words to attach, in this case, a distinct label to the body of knowledge about adult learners, my search suggests that *we abandon andragogy in favor of telelagogy which includes both sexes.*
Footnote

1. For reading an earlier draft and for their suggestions, I want to express my appreciation to: Rutherford Aris, Robert H. Beck, David Bjorkquist, George Copa, Deane Gradous, Eva C. Keuls, Stephen Miletich, Richard Swanson, and Karen Zuga.
References


