

Teaching Adult Learners in the Community College Environment
Written by Eileen Anderson

“At its best, an adult learning experience should be a process of self-directed inquiry with the resources of the teacher, fellow students, and the course itself being available to the learners but not imposed on them.”

- “Malcolm Knowles, The Modern Practice of Adult Education”

In the early years of the development of community colleges, some school systems saw them as extensions of high schools. Public school departments often drew up their syllabi through grade fourteen. Faculty in grades thirteen and fourteen were considered part of the secondary education teaching team. Though few programs are still following this model, the end results are still with us.

Many people teaching in community colleges today have also taught in public secondary schools. For them, the transition between the two learning environments seemed to be an easy one. Teachers who have taken this career path often bring to their community colleges the teaching methods with which they had been successful in the past.

Beginning in the 1950’s, one of the most prophetic educators of the century called into question the teaching methods being used in colleges across the country. Dr. Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997) was the first American educator to discern the need for a separate methodology for adult learners.

As Dr. Knowles wrote, taught and lectured across the country, college faculties gradually began to develop methods specific to the needs of their adult learners. The process that he pioneered came to be known as *andragogy*. It is the basis for many of the learning processes being used in higher education today.

Meeting the Needs of Adult Learners*

- Plan adult learning experiences to take place within a *cooperative* learning climate.
- ***Physical arrangements can help your classroom communicate a warm, welcoming environment.***

- Assist the adult learners in identifying their own needs and interests related to the course content.
- ***Early in the semester, invite your students to write their goals for the course and hopes for what they would like to learn in your class.***

- Enable the formation of learning objectives incorporating the diagnosed needs and interests of the adult learners.
- ***Review your “core” curriculum with your group. Plan some time to work together to incorporate their goals into your syllabus.***

- Plan sequential learning activities with the students for achieving the completed course objectives.
- ***Set aside time to add to your planned learning experiences in order to accomplish the goals contributed by the learners.***

***Knowles, M., The Modern Practice of Adult Education, 1970**

“From Pedagogy to Andragogy”*		
<i>Developmental Needs</i>	<i>Children as Learners</i>	<i>Adults as Learners</i>
<u>The Developing Self-concept</u>	Dependent on others	Independent, self directed
<u>Life Experiences</u>	Still being acquired	Rich reservoir to draw upon
<u>Readiness to Learn</u>	Requires motivation by the teacher	Ready to learn and grow
<u>Orientation to Learning</u>	Postponed applications	Immediate application to personal problem-solving.
<u>OTHER:</u>		
<u>OTHER:</u>		

**CON-
SID-
ER**

What other differences do you notice in your students who have just graduated from high school and those who are older, non-traditional students?

Publications by Malcolm Knowles

- **The Modern Practice of Adult Education**, (1970)
- **From Pedagogy to Andragogy**, (1980)
- ^a **The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species**: (1983)
- **Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers**: (1985)

Web Links :



These URL's will take you to a site's Index Page or Home Page. Then, look down the list of links for topics in adult education that interest you

<http://www.nl.edu/ace/index.html>

<http://www.ed.gov/>

<http://www.ericacve.org/>

Textbooks

College textbooks are not all created equal but some *are*

**Topics for Discussion
On**

published by firms that have demonstrated a consciousness of the literacy needs of students. As you prepare to teach from texts that are now in use, be aware that there are many things you can do to help students learn more effectively from them:

- Present and discuss the goals of the chapter. Invite conversation about prior experiences students might have had related to the topic of the chapter. This *focusing activity* will enable learners to connect the new material to what they already know.
- Present and discuss an overview of the chapter. Many learn more efficiently when they can see the “big picture” or the “gestalt” of the chapter.
- Present and discuss the new vocabulary used in the context of the chapter.
- Preview the main sections of the chapter signaling the key points in that section.
- Read and discuss the chapter summary.

CONSIDER

Choosing Textbooks

Consider these features as you review a new text:

- type size and fonts
- leading or line spacing
- ratio of type to photos
- frequent sub-heads
- chapter “advance organizers”
- frequent paragraphing
- list of new vocabulary
- “advanced organizers”
- chapter summary
- review questions of several levels
- related projects
- web site references



From your experiences, is pedagogy or andragogy the dominant educational model in our community colleges?

Please prepare to discuss on WebCT

Are the textbooks you are using being supported by the publisher with enrichment materials on the Internet?

Have students found this material helpful? Please prepare to discuss on WebCT.

More Web Sites:



<http://www.nl.edu/ace/resources/Knowles.html>

<http://adulthood.about.com/library>

<http://www.ed.gov/>