**Malcolm Knowles: Andragogy**

Malcolm Knowles was a professor of education in the US whose work pioneered ways of thinking about adult learning and how to support the learning process in contexts relevant to adults. His work drew on research into the main theories of learning.

From this, he concluded that most assumptions about education came from research into learning in animals and children, not adults. He drew on this work, and also on elements of psychotherapy (Carl Rogers), psychology (Abraham Maslow), group dynamics and change theory, and also on the research of other adult educators, to create his very influential theory of adult learning.

“Andragogy” was the concept he used to organise his system of ideas about adult learning. Andragogy is the “art and science of teaching adults,” often mentioned in contrast to “pedagogy,” which refers to the teaching of children. Knowles believed that if learning is a change in behaviour, then adult education needs to take into account the key elements that propel changes in adults’ behaviour. He identified four main elements:

1. **Changes in self-concept:** adults are self-directing and need to be seen as such by others. Situations that prevent adults from realising self-directedness cause tension and resentment and block learning.
2. **The role of experience:** the individual has an ever-expanding pool of experience that provides a rich resource for learning, and to which new learning can be related. The ‘transmittal techniques of traditional teaching’ do not tap into this experience.
3. **Readiness to learn:** for adults, readiness to learn arises not from age or a particular stage of biological development. It arises because of a need which has come about in the person’s life, in their role as workers, family members, leaders, members of communities and groups.
4. **Orientation to learning:** at school, children study ‘subjects’ in order to pass examinations, go to college or get a job. Adults, on the other hand, come to the learning experience to equip them to deal with practical, immediate demands of their life. Learning therefore needs to be problem-centred, not subject-centred; and to focus on application in the short-term.

Knowles gave many concrete guidelines on the practical implications of taking an androgogical approach to adult education. He cautioned against restricting teaching to “transmission” methods associated with pedagogy: fact-laden lectures, assigned readings, drill, quizzes, rote memorizing, and examinations.

He recommended using experiential techniques and facilitating practical application such as group discussion, case studies, critical incident analysis , simulation exercises, role playing, skill-practice exercises, field work and action projects. He does acknowledge that the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy is not hard and fast, but rather, that this represents two ends of a continuum.

Knowles, M. S. (1970) *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Cambridge Adult Education/Prentice Hall Regents) , pp 40 – 61. pp 43 – 44.

Knowles, M. S. (1973)*The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company) /American Society for Training and Development).