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Hypothesis

Pedagogical teaching methodologies have little relevance to adult learners.



Context

Within West Midlands Ambulance Trust, education and training is of significant importance to the long term functioning of the service. However, the resources available to provide the required sessions are frequently very stretched. This often leads to teaching methodologies that are traditionally more akin to those used for teaching children, or pedagogical methodologies. It is also easier and quicker to write and deliver sessions pedagogically, from a teacher's perspective.

If pedagogical methodologies as less effective in facilitating adult learners to achieve learning outcomes that are essential to the Trust, then any session delivered will be a poor investment in time and money.

Findings Continued...

Ozuah (2005) considers the place of pedagogy and andragogy in medical education and concludes that:

They are many instances in medical education where the learners, albeit adults, have no relevant prior experiences and are indeed dependent. In these instances, it is appropriate to begin instruction using the pedagogical design. However, if one accepts the precepts of andragogy, then every effort should be made to move the learners gradually but firmly in the direction of autonomy and self-directedness. (p. 86)

This makes perfect sense, given that one of the key differences between child and adult learners is experience



Research

The term pedagogy literary means "leader of children" and originates from the seventh century in Europe, when a set of assumptions about teaching and learning strategies were first formed (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). It has now come to be defined as the art and science of teaching children, which is in the same spirit as it was originally intended.

The first use of the term andragogy is attributed to Alexander Kapp in 1833, in a book entitled 'Plato's Educational Ideas' (Reischmann, 2004). Literary meaning "leader of men", andragogy refers to the art and science of teaching adults.

In order to analyse the hypothesis that 'pedagogical teaching methodologies have little relevance to adult learners', it is necessary to establish the key principles of both pedagogy and andragogy.



Assumption area	Pedagogy	Andragogy
The need to know	Do not need to know how what they learn will apply to their lives.	Need to know why they need to learn something.
The learner's self-concept	Dependant personality. The degree of dependence reduces with advancing age.	Responsible for their own decisions – independent. Resent and resist others wills being imposed upon them.
The role of experience	Learner's experience is of little worth as a resource.	Have a vast resource of personal experience. Need to be respected as an individual.
Readiness to learn	Ready to learn what the teacher tells them they must learn.	Become ready to learn the things they need to know. Especially where it helps them to cope effectively with real-life situations.
Orientation to learning	Subject centred and see learning as acquiring content of said subject.	Life centred (or problem centred) and see learning in terms of its relevance to their life.
Motivation	External motivators (e.g. grades, teacher and parent approval).	Although responsive to some external motivators (e.g. promotion, salaries), the most potent are internal (job satisfaction, self-esteem, etc.).

Findings

The principals of pedagogy and andragogy are compared in the right hand table:

The key differences between teaching children and adults that can be extracted from this table are:

- Need to know why learning something is important
- Dependence on the teacher
- Life experience
- Relevance of subject to real-life
- External and internal motivators



McGrath (2009) states that, 'andragogy might be classed under the category of cognitive theories in that adults are allowed to analyse the material given to them in the classroom and they learn to make connections between the material and their own life experiences'. She then contrasts this with pedagogy, stating that it 'is associated with the behaviourist stream of learning where the student takes for granted what is being said to them and they learn it word for word so that they can receive positive feedback from their lecturers' (McGrath, 2009).

Knowles, Holton, & Swanson (2005) state that 'adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; adults orientation to learning is life-centred; experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; adults have a deep need to be self-directing; and individual differences among people increases with age'.

The last part of that statement is hardly surprising, as different experiences, from different perspectives are bound to emerge as different opinions in different people.

This is one of the key differences between child and adult learners.

Conclusion

From the author's research, it appears that experience and dependence are the key factors in deciding which teaching approach is used, whether in child or adult education. It follows that the younger a child is, the less life experience they will have and the more dependant they will be. This logical conclusion is illustrated well by Knowles, Holton, & Swanson (2005, p.63) in a graphic entitled, 'the natural maturation toward self-direction as compared with the culturally permitted rate of growth of self-direction'. The author concludes that pedagogical teaching methodologies can be appropriate in adults learners, if there is no previous experience on which to build. However, where there is some relevant experience in the adult learner, pedagogical teaching methodologies do not motivate and are wholly inappropriate.

References:

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- McGrath, V. (2009). *Reviewing the Evidence on How Adult Students Learn: An Examination of Knowles' Model of Andragogy*. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 99-110.
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