

Presence of Andragogical Principles in English Language Teaching Practice

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Abstract: The contemporary market demand implies that the institutions training English teachers need to equip them with the knowledge of teaching approaches and techniques to be used in compulsory and non – compulsory educational settings with the learner profiles ranging from preschool students to retirees. Malcolm S. Knowles in his *The Adult Learner* (2005; 1973), while contrasting the pedagogical and andragogical educational models, concludes: the pedagogical model excludes the andragogical assumptions; the andragogical model includes the pedagogical assumptions; and, an ideological andragogue should be able to use or apply the model whose assumptions are more realistic in a given situation. One of the implications is that the effective foreign language teachers are supposed to master both the models if they are to teach adult learners. The second one is that the teaching styles will oscillate on the continuum between highly teacher-centered and highly learner-centered one due to the teachers' abilities and willingness to draw from both the andragogical and pedagogical educational models. The assumptions have been tested through a survey revealing that the teaching styles of the majority of the English teachers of the language schools tend towards the teacher-centered pole, thus the pedagogical model.

Key Words: Teaching Styles, Andragogy, Pedagogy.

Introduction

Since all adult learners are at different points on the different continua, due to all the physiological, psychosocial and other distinguishing variables among them, a group of adult learners is never completely homogenous (Knowles, 1990; Long, 1990; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Quinnan, 1997; Rogers, 1996; Wlodkowski, 1999). Hypothetically, the degree in heterogeneity of a group of adult learners might be decreased by placing the learners of the similar needs, goals, or characteristics together, but it can never be zero as there are no totally same adult learner profiles to be put together in the same group. Thus, a separate approach to every individual learner and every group of adult learners in both compulsory and non-compulsory educational settings might be needed if any teaching process is to be marked as maximally effective. This approach is based on the andragogical educational model which accounts for the necessity of including the uniqueness of every learner profile into the teaching – learning exchange context and answering it through both the andragogical and pedagogical educational perspectives which are to be implemented according to the learner profiles taught (Knowles, 1990). While the andragogical perspective constantly tends to the inclusion of the learner's individual features into every aspect of the teaching-learning exchange process (planning, delivery and assessment), the pedagogical model does not necessarily do so.

If a group of adults is to be taught, andragogically speaking, maximizing teaching effect requires a deliberate and constant attempt to seek for a perfect overlapping match of at least three factors: learners' features, which make each adult learner so unique, teacher's intended outcomes, prescribed to teachers by their teaching domain and their personal educational philosophy, and teaching-learning exchange context, where a teacher is expected to fulfill his/her professional roles (Heimlich and Norland, 2002; Rogers, 1996).

In order to maximize the overlapping match, the fields of adult education and foreign language teaching recognize and prescribe a number of teachers' roles, yet it is the context of an educational event and the teachers' beliefs about education based on their life philosophy and background by which the teachers interpret various educational contexts and engage in different roles through which they display a teaching style and create a certain atmosphere where the teaching-learning exchange occurs (Brown, 2001; Conti, 2004; Pratt, 2002; Rogers, 1996; Zinn, 2004).

Eventually, a maximally effective teaching style relies on fully correct interpretation of any teaching – learning exchange context, which is followed by a proper set of consequent responses that include both teaching decisions and behaviors, and a constantly ongoing interrelatedness between the two in order to keep learners' features, teacher's intended outcomes and teaching-learning exchange context perfectly overlapping. To ensure that the overlapping is maximized, therefore, the maximally effective teaching style has to constantly oscillate between

the poles of extremely teacher-centered and extremely learner-centered one, as it is trying to answer the varying needs of the learner profiles and the uniqueness of the context where the teaching-learning exchange is occurring.

If the starting point in designing a teaching – learning exchange experience, delivering and pacing the instruction, assessing the outcomes, and making any proceeding educational decisions are learners' temporary physiological and psychosocial characteristics, including their already possessed and currently gained knowledge or experience, their goals and expectations, and their learning pace or momentum, then the teaching style in charge is the highly learner – centered one, and it is driven by personal educational philosophy of the highly andragogical nature. Eventually, if the learner is capable and willing to be in charge of the teaching – learning exchange experience, an andragogue will agree and respond accordingly. If the learner is entering a new field, the andragogue will shape the educational process as much as he/she has to while trying to include the learners' personal traits as much as possible. An opposite teaching style, one that disregards the uniqueness of adult learner profile and operates under the 'one size for all' approach, is defined as highly – teacher centered one and is run by highly pedagogical philosophy. The pedagogue will exclude the andragogical perspective and use his/her own educational reasoning in making any educational decisions. Any oscillations fall in between.

The aim of this study is to place the teaching styles English language teachers display while teaching adults in non-compulsory language schools onto the continuum between highly pedagogical and highly andragogical poles, thus attempt to point out the qualities a contemporary English teacher might have to be extra equipped with in order to answer the current demands of the language learning market.

Method of the Study

After the literature review, which heavily focused on the literature produced in the fields of Philosophy of Education, Adult Education, and English Language Teaching, the survey specifically designed to place teaching styles on the continuum between teacher-centered and learner-centered poles (Conti, 2004) was carried out with seventy (70) English teachers teaching adults in the non – compulsory language schools. The results were compared and contrasted to the andragogical principles derived from the literature under the scope providing both quantitative and qualitative features grounded in the overall interpretation and conclusions (Kovačević, 2007).

Sampling

Seventy (70) English Teachers of different language schools (Istanbul) were asked to respond to fifty-two questions; eight of the questions related to their personal profiles, and forty-four questions were taken from a survey designed by Conti (2004). Thirty four (34) of the respondents were of male and thirty six (36) of female gender; fifty nine (59) of the respondents had a teaching degree and eleven (11) of them did not; thirty four (34) of the respondents were between twenty and twenty nine years old, twenty five (25) of them were between thirty and thirty nine years old, eight (8) of the respondents were in the forties, and three (3) of them in the fifties; five (5) of the respondents had been teaching adults for less than a year, thirty eight (38) of them had been teaching adults for between one and five years, fourteen (14) of them had been teaching adults for between six and 10 years, and thirteen (13) of the respondents had been teaching adults for more than ten years; fifty eight (58) of them were of Turkish and twelve (12) of them were of other nationalities (British, American, Australian, Indian) (Kovačević, 2007).

Data Analysis Processes

The data was primarily analyzed according to the formulas suggested by the survey designer (Conti, 2004), which interpreted the results within the categories defining any teaching style; *Learner-Centered Activities, Personalizing Instruction, Relating to Experience, Assessing Student Needs, Climate Building, Participation in the Learning Process, and Flexibility for Personal Development*. However, there have been eight (8) other questions included to help in diagnosing the teaching profiles whose teaching styles have been placed on the continua between teacher-centered and learner-centered poles across all the categories. All the results were compared and contrasted to the principles derived from the referred literature revealing both matching and mismatching points. Yet, the analysis presented in this article has tried to broaden the previously arrived conclusions (Kovačević, 2007) by adding two new dimensions: the arrived results have been projected onto the continuum between pedagogical and andragogical teaching style poles; and, there has been an attempt to outline the implications for the contemporary English teacher training programs.

Findings and Discussion

The majority of the English Teachers questioned expressed tendency or favourism towards *encouragement of dialogue and interaction among the students*. Calling upon literature used in this research, this fact might be evaluated as one of the matching points between literature on adult education and the practice. Learning a foreign language requires setting the different contexts for using the learned language as a mean in communication. By encouraging the learners to communicate among themselves a real – life context is provided. In addition to this, the majority of respondents expressed that they *arrange the classroom in the way to facilitate the communication among the learners*, and that they *tolerate errors* by which they encourage risk – taking and secure learners' self – esteem. Either if the learners are just stimulated to communicate with each other, despite of the language used, there are numerous positive consequences; the cohesiveness of the group is strengthened, thus the atmosphere is less threatening and more supportive, for example, or, the experiences and different perspectives are shared, therefore, the context for experiential or unintended learning is provided (Burden, 1995). Even through the tolerance of those short chats or dialogues that are not exactly related to the topic learned at a certain moment during the class, the teachers foster friendly atmosphere where learning is enjoyed and fun.

The majority expressed that they also *encourage competition*; the competition might be considered perhaps motivating as it is usually driven by inner needs to win, however, if it results into some hurt feelings and thus being threatened and feeling insecure in the learning environment, the idea of encouraging it might be reconsidered. In other words, if it is perceived as fun, each of the learner should be having fun, and not only those with characteristics which help 'winning'.

However, not all the teachers think that learning should be fun. The majority of the respondents prefers *well – disciplined classroom*. Of course, it might be claimed that both disciplined and fun class could be possible. Some brainstorming would lead to an assumption that goal – oriented learners could actually have fun (or perhaps feel excitement) while being surrounded by an environment where the process of learning – teaching exchange is well emphasized and all the unrelated acts or factors are evaluated as threatening thus desired to be kept out of the process. This assumption views goal – oriented learners as blind to everything else but their goals.

If the majority of the questioned teachers favors well – disciplined classes, perhaps it might be logical to expect the same majority to favor *quiet desk – work* and *disciplinary actions*. A scene of the first one is an excellent example of a silent working class where 'everything is under control and in progress'. The last sentence does have a negative connotation about the quiet desk – work, however, many of the contemporary English language teaching adult course books often ask learner to read an article or fill in the gaps with a suitable word (Cunningham, Moor and Carr, 2005; Dubicka and O'Keefe, 2004; Redston, 2005; Richards, Hull and Proctor, 2005;) and this requires quiet desk – work, or does it not? Perhaps the silence could be broken by some music playing while the students are doing their work or by an occasional comment or chat that could make others laugh, because laughing and music might provide a happy teaching climate, which is needed if the continuity of a group is aimed or desired. In the same light, the concept of a disciplinary action could be examined. The necessity of disciplinary actions might perhaps be clarified in a compulsory adult educational context, however, it is difficult to clarify it in a non – compulsory setting as, firstly, the learners are there mostly on their free will, and secondly, they are adults, thus are responsible for their actions and are not types of students that could and should be disciplined. Even, if the majority of the respondents expressed that they apply disciplinary actions when they are needed, the researcher assumes that what they meant could be some of the maneuvers that classroom management requires when there is a certain problem or conflict to be solved.

The biggest gaps between the literature on adult education and the practice of the majority of the questioned language teachers teaching adults English at language schools are found in the facts that they *prefer determining the objectives for the learners at the beginning of a program and prefer sticking to them, use the same materials with different students, assign the same tasks to all the learners, practice lecturing*, and that they *apply formal testing and rely on it*.

'One size for all' approach is based on the idea that two or more adult learners might be taught the same way at the same time, and this is what founds the base of the teacher – centered approach in the teaching practice, or vice versa; the teacher centered approach is an approach expressed in 'one size for all'. While defining the concept of 'adult' Long (1990) illustrates the perspective:

For example, a research report may state the mean income level of a particular population segment as being \$15,333. In reality it is possible that *no* individual actually has such an income. The mean fails to communicate either the modal, or most frequent income, or the income range in the population. For example, given a sample of six individuals whose incomes are as follows: \$25,000, \$24,000, \$21,000, \$10,000, \$6,000, \$6,000. The total income of the six individuals is \$92,000. The range is from \$6,000 to \$25,000. The mean is \$15,333 and the modal income is \$6,000. This reveals how the \$15,333 mean income is rather low when compared with the three highest incomes and is equally high compared with the three lowest incomes.

Although even the adult learners might be highly dependent on their educators at certain stages while progressing in a certain domain, this fact does not imply that all of them should be treated or approached the same way; rather, all of their individual profiles should be examined and matched with certain teaching strategies, styles, techniques, tasks and materials. Yet, the majority of the respondents is, it seems so, ignorant of the profile differences by offering them all 'the same'. Their ignorance is so big that they even expressed that they prefer *not to spend a certain amount of effort in order to find what each learner wants and needs to know*, and that they prefer *not to allow older students more time to complete assignments when they need it*.

The majority of the English language teachers questioned is not following the andragogical principal of desired stimulated independency as they prefer *not to support a collaborative mode and practice behaviors that provide the learners with the opportunities to initiate actions and encourage them to be responsible for their own learning, not to let the adult learners participate in deciding what topics are to be covered during the lessons, not to let the adult learners take part in developing criteria for evaluating their performance*. In this way, adult educators are ignorant towards the learners' self – concepts, their experiences, in other words the learners' already going on personal lives which actually get the learners into an educational setting, and motivate them to learn. Can the learners be expected to remain a part of the educational setting where their experience is not integrated into the learning progress and where they might be learning something that they believe would not help them perform their life – tasks?

On the other hand, the majority of the teachers questioned states that they *apply different teaching methods with learners of different learning styles, take into account their students previous experiences and encourage relating of the new ones to the already existing, and have students identify their own problems to be solved*. Compared to the so far presented indications of the survey this might sound contradictory. An answer to the contradiction might be found in the assumptions that the teachers questioned respect the learners' personalities and provide them opportunities to express them (but not always as the majority stated that they prefer *to avoid giving students opportunity to express value judgments*), and that they know or think that all the learners are different. However, they might be limiting all the differences in the learners' profiles by distinguishing only their learning styles.

To sum up, the majority of the questioned teachers has been found as teacher – centered oriented. Would inviting them to adopt a learner – centered approach be too enthusiastic? According to Daley (2003), changing an approach requires changes in the way the teachers think. This research does not ask the majority to switch to the opposite approach, yet asks them to always: *create a climate of respect, encourage active participation, build on experience, employ collaborative inquiry, provide the contexts for immediately applying the taught/learned, and empower the learners*. These are, according to Lawer (2003), the six principles "grounded in the literature and practice of adult education". So, the teachers are not invited to change the way they think, but to change the way they teach.

Conclusions and Recommendations

If they are to be summarized, then the following conclusions are to be underlined. To start with, the teaching styles of the majority of the English teachers of the language schools tend towards teacher – centered pole. Therefore, it might be assumed that the teachers are practicing the teaching styles which are mainly grounded into the pedagogical educational philosophy. Consequently, the first implication for the contemporary English teacher training programs is to make sure that the novice teachers are equipped with the andragogical principles apart from the pedagogical ones.

The majority of the teachers have a teacher – centered approach when it comes to providing aids for learner – centered activities, personalizing of instruction, assessing students' needs, providing them participation in the learning process, and stimulating their personal growth. Restated, the majority of the respondents tend to

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rely on the educational perspective which might be more appropriate with the non-adult or young learners, thus pedagogical one. Eventually, the second implication for the English teacher training programs is to make sure that their program outcomes account for the ability of the novice teachers to oscillate between the andragogical and pedagogical educational models according to the target group being taught.

When it comes to relating the taught to the already existing experience of learners, the results showed that half of the teachers are learner – centered oriented. This conclusion is found to be parallel to the desired andragogical reasoning, thus the implication is that this aspect of teacher training practice is to be reinforced.

One of the teachers' profiles does not necessarily always tend to one of the teaching poles in all the aspects of learning – teaching exchange to the same extent; the teacher's tendency to one of the poles vary according to the actions or the aspects in question. So, the teachers oscillate between the highly andragogical and highly pedagogical based styles. Yet, the implication would be to aim at sculpting the novice teachers who would be able to oscillate deliberately and to the extents that the teaching – learning exchange contexts require.

The teachers mostly apply what the English Language Methodology prescribes; however, the majority of them do not provide the circumstances for the collaborative mode prescribed by the principles of andragogy. One may argue that adult learners attending the language schools might just want to be taught, thus they might not ask for collaboration during the course. Yet, neglecting their needs, experience, or inner drives for being self – directing, creates a conflict within them. Therefore, the English teacher training programs are to make sure that the novice teachers are familiar with the drawbacks of the misapplied educational models.

Besides, the research revealed that the high percentage of teachers questioned applies teaching styles tending towards teacher – centered pole, a certain percentage of the teachers is either strongly or extremely teacher – centered oriented, a certain percentage tends towards learner – centered pole, and no teachers are strongly or extremely learner – centered oriented. Rephrased, this means that either the teaching style grounded into the andragogical perspective is impossible to be applied with the learner profiles of the teachers under the scope, or that the teachers do not know how to implement one. More pessimistic conclusion would be that the pedagogical educational model is prevailing as the result of the number of English teacher training programs which are fostering pedagogical educational philosophy and disregarding the andragogical one. Then, the last implication for the English teacher training programs would be to make sure that their novice teachers are exposed to both the models to the equal extents and trained to implement the both according to the educational context they are teaching in; it has to be ensured that they do not teach through the educational philosophy that they favor but through one that is more effective.

The results presented here could be compared to the results got from the teachers teaching adults either different contents in similar settings, or the same content in different settings. Another topic that could be considered would be the educational philosophies of the English teachers teaching adults either at language schools, in order to get more explanatory facts for the results and conclusions reached here, or across some other educational settings so that the educational philosophies of the English teachers teaching adults could be better understood. The further step could be investigating the English teachers' life philosophies, thus diagnosing the personal values that could be determinants in the professional preferences between andragogical and pedagogical educational reasoning.

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