Andragogy in Action: Drama Techniques for Adult Learning

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Abstract

Along with a discussion of andragogy, which is the concept that adults learn differently than younger learners, and therefore require different teaching methods, this paper also explores a specific set of exercises, called drama techniques, to increase the effectiveness of adult foreign language teaching and learning that can be employed within the framework of andragogy. Each of Knowles's assumptions (see Knowles, 1984; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), which form the basis for the andragogy concept, will be analyzed in conjunction with specific drama techniques. Through this exposition it will be shown that drama techniques are effective tools for implementing the andragogical approach to adult foreign language teaching.

There are several theories of adult learning prevalent in the field of education today, but the most well-known of these is andragogy by Malcolm Knowles, which he first proposed in his original book on adult learning, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy* (Knowles, 1970, 1980). Although Knowles was the first researcher to define the concept of adult learning in terms of specific criteria, which he stated as four assumptions, the idea of teaching differently to adults than to younger learners has been in existence for as long as humans have been teaching and learning. As Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) state in reference to great teachers in history such as Confucius, Socrates, Cicero, and others, "Because their experiences were with adults, they developed a very different concept of the learning/teaching process from the one that later dominated formal education" (p. 35). The term andragogy was first proposed by Knowles (1968) and, as quoted in Merriam, Caffarella, and

Baumgartner (2007), Knowles defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn." Knowles originally published his work as a theory of adult learning, but after further research and consideration, he revised the theory into a set of assumptions, which he continued to call andragogy (Knowles, 1980).

Knowles's four assumptions about adult learners (Knowles, et al., 2005, p. 39-40) are as follow:

1. As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.

2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.

3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.

4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature – from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning.

Knowles (1984) later revised his original set of four assumptions by adding two more assumptions. These are:

5. The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.

6. Adults need to know why they learn something.

Background

Prior to the official publication of Knowles's theory of andragogy, the standard of pedagogy, which is defined by dictionary.com (2017) as "the art and science of teaching; education; instructional methods," was widely accepted as the common practice for learners of all ages and grade levels. Pedagogy can be seen at its most basic level as the practice and activities wherein a teacher or instructor gives information and disseminates educational materials, intended to create knowledge acquisition and learning, to a group of students in a teacher-centered environment. Knowles understood what many educators and researchers have discovered after attempting to use standard

pedagogical teaching practices with adult learners, often without success; that many pedagogical practices were not designed to be effective for adult learners. While children are well-equipped to take in information simply because it is being delivered to them by a recognized authority figure such as a teacher, coach, or counselor, this is not the case when adult learners are involved. Knowles believed that the study of adult education must focus on the learner. As Smith (2002) notes, "Knowles was convinced that adults learned differently to children – and that this provided the basis for a distinctive field of enquiry. Subsequently, Knowles dedicated his life's work to examining and defining the specific constructs of adult learners. Specifically, Knowles was interested in how adults were different from younger learners in terms of attitude, motivation, and experience. His findings resulted in his groundbreaking set of assumptions known as andragogy.

Criticisms of Andragogy

One of the most controversial aspects of andragogy is the inability to definitively classify what activities fit into the mold of andragogy. When discussing the efficacy of andragogy in terms of what can be empirically defined, Rachal (2002) notes, "Such investigations are further impeded by the absence of clear meaning as to what procedures constitute andragogical practice" (p.211). For many educators the lack of empirical data and established methodology is reason enough to discard andragogy as a viable system for adult education. There simply is not enough solid proof for some practitioners to accept andragogy and abandon the pedagogical practices that they are used to. However, the implementation of performance-assisted language learning techniques, especially drama techniques, can satisfy each of Knowles's assumptions about adult learners.

Also included in the many criticisms of Knowles's andragogy is the idea that individual learners cannot be pigeon-holed into one clearly defined group. According to Cooke (2010), "The 'theory' of andragogy was criticized for implying that all adult learners are self-directed and that children are not" (p. 214). It is unreasonable to claim that every learner of a certain age group is exactly the same, but this does not discredit andragogy and the assumption that adult learners are self-directed. There will always be outliers in any theory or concept of learning, but common characteristics are still valid when they describe a large majority of a particular subset of learners.

This paper will present an account of various performance-assisted language learning activities that are successful in addressing one of the main criticisms of andragogy, which is the inability to concretely define learning activities as either andragogy or not andragogy.

Learning Environments

Once andragogy is accepted, it becomes necessary to define the exact learning environments where it can be implemented successfully. Andragogy should be applied not only in universities, but in all fields of education that involve adult learners. In addition to the traditional universities and community colleges, there is an increasing need for continued professional development and skills training in today's modern global world. Additionally, societal changes and technological advances have created an environment where learning is pursued well into adulthood. No longer does the standard education track consist of four to eight years of college and then a career bereft of adult education. As noted by Chao (2009), "With the changing demographic situation of the developed world, there has been a focus on the concept of lifelong learning, where people are learning throughout their lives. The emergence of the knowledge society, rapid introduction of new technology and the changing work place increases the importance of adult learning" (p. 905). This concept is supported by Kilpi-Jakonen, Vono de Vilhena, and Blossfeld (2015) who state, "Adult education is an increasingly important form of education in globalized and aging societies" (p. 1). Andragogy, which can be applied to many forms of adult education, including specialized skill training for professional advancement, focused-knowledge acquisition for specific projects or endeavors, and connected content for expanding existing base knowledge in a given field, may potentially become even more prominent in the coming decades.

Andragogy in Japanese Education

In relation to Japan, andragogy can be applied to university EFL teaching, business English classes, leadership studies, as well as older adult learning environments such as community centers and hobby groups where Japanese learners want to increase their English skill level simply for fun or for future travel. The rapidly aging population in Japan creates a unique opportunity for EFL teaching in which andragogical practices can be utilized to their full potential. One of the most

effective ways to make use of the adult learning concepts Knowles has presented is to blend drama techniques into the standard curriculum of adult education at every level within Japan.

What are Drama Techniques?

Within the framework of the six assumptions that make up Knowles's andragogy, drama techniques can be implemented as a catalyst for deeper engagement and increased motivation in various adult learning settings. However, before precise analysis of each of Knowles's assumptions it is useful to define and explore the broad concept of drama techniques, and to state why they are a beneficial strategy for use in foreign language education. Firstly, drama techniques can be utilized in various adult learning environments to heighten the quality of engagement for language learners, as well as increasing the motivational level of participants. One of the most discouraging aspects of foreign language learning is the stress and anxiety many EFL learners suffer from. The Japanese system of high pressure testing and focus on rote learning and memorization can cause many students to become disengaged at an early age, particularly in foreign language environments. Drama techniques, in the focus of andragogical practices, directly combat this often-debilitating construct of foreign language learning. Drama techniques can unleash creative energy that students possess but are rarely given the opportunity to express in typical pedagogical learning environments. As Kobayashi (2012) states, "Drama techniques are basically games that are used to help actors enhance their creativity and unlock spontaneity" (p. 30).

Although this definition of drama techniques would seem to imply that the user must be an actor, this is not the case. The original design of drama techniques was for actors, but they can be transformed or adapted for use by adult learners as well. When using drama techniques in the classroom students become the actors. They participate in meaningful exercises that increase learning because they are physically and emotionally invested in the learning process, just as actors are invested in the piece they are performing.

Another characteristic of drama techniques that lend themselves to more effective adult learning is the inclusive nature of all members of the learning group, as well as the intrinsic ability to build motivation and lower anxiety for learners of any adult age, regardless of individual backgrounds and experiences. The importance of raising motivation and lowering anxiety in adult

learners cannot be overstated. As Cooke (2010) noted, "Whatever benefits adult learners may reap in their pursuit of education, there are fears, anxiety and mental barriers to overcome, which will hopefully not overwhelm or squelch learner motivation and success" (p. 212).

The use of drama techniques also ties in with andragogical belief that the focus should be on the learner and the activity rather than a piece of information or a particular concept. Along with a focus on the learner, the theatrical nature of drama techniques contains elements such as fun, energy, creativity, and enjoyment that satisfy the assumptions of andragogy in unique fashion. In fact, it is as if Knowles had drama techniques in mind when he was defining his methodology.

Andragogy activities can be implemented in all forms of adult learning; however, the following discussion will focus on formal and non-formal settings. Adult education can be classified into three distinct modes (Merriam, et al., 2007): Formal education, which involves colleges and universities where students work towards obtaining formal degrees; non-formal education, which does not lead to formal degrees but may lead to certifications, and is usually sponsored by employers or community-based organizations such as libraries and civic centers; and informal education, which includes self-directed learning and learning gained from general life experiences. In the next section, the six assumptions of andragogy will be discussed in terms of university and college, business English classes, and non-formal settings.

Drama Techniques Within the Framework of Andragogy

The following is an exploration of each assumption of andragogy and examples of drama techniques that satisfy that premise. Within this discussion, the connection between drama techniques and andragogy as a system for adult learning will be made clear.

Assumption #1: As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.

Improvisation is a fun and exciting drama technique that satisfies the first assumption of andragogy. Improvisation is defined as "the act or art of speaking or performing without practicing or preparing ahead of time" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2017). Improvisation, or 'improv' as it is often referred to, can take place in any setting and within any field, including athletics, academics,

business, etc. Within the field of academics, and specifically relating to English language teaching, improvisation refers to a group of dramatic exercises and activities that can be implemented to help students increase learning and enjoyment. While it is natural for children to play and act creatively in normal interactions, it is much more difficult to perform structured improvisation games with young learners. Improvisation, by definition, should be creative and spontaneous; however, there still must be an element of structure involved if the improv is to be performed successfully. Structured improvisation is difficult or impossible to implement effectively with young learners because they are not self-directed in many instances, and therefore they likely lack the necessary life experience that must be brought to improvisation games if they are to be performed effectively. However, by the time students have matured into adulthood they are able to participate in improvisation activities, even without using foreign language skills. Furthermore, for adult learners within the Japanese education system, improvisation can be an effective tool for promoting critical thinking skills. Many improvisation games, such as 'Fruit', 'Numbers', and 'Mirror, Mirror' outlined below, do not require any language skills because they involve little or no actual conversation but they still promote critical thinking because students must decide the course of the activity while the game is happening.

The improv game 'Fruit' involves two or more students acting out a real-life situation but using only one word- a pre-chosen fruit such as 'banana', to express ideas and thoughts. For example, two students could improv a wedding proposal, but instead of "Will you marry me" the student simply says "Banana" with his biggest 'I love you' smile.

The improv game 'Numbers' is similar to 'Fruit' in regard to using no conversation, but in this game the students go back and forth counting up to 50 (or any predetermined number) in any group of numbers the participants choose. The key is that the students must act as if they are having a conversation but using only number sequences. For example, the first student may begin by saying "one, two, three, four," but with a questioning tone. Then the second student may reply with "five, six, seven," but in a tone of response or further questioning. Through the use of consecutive number sequences and tone the students are directing their own learning.

Another example of an improv game that shows self-directed learning is the popular game 'Tag'. Participants begin a scene, and then another student can yell 'tag' and replace one of the

players. The interloper must then change the scene in some way, which allows for self-directed learning because the new direction of the improv scene is determined by the learner rather than the teacher.

There are hundreds of improvisation games that can be used within the scope of andragogical teaching and learning because improv games require self-direction from the participants.

Assumption #2: An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.

One example of a suitable drama technique that satisfies the second assumption of andragogy is role-play. Throughout the history of adult education both informed educators and drama enthusiasts alike have worked to develop and implement a wide variety of drama techniques that relate to real-life situations and are useful in learning environments involving students from varying backgrounds and experiences. Role-play as a communicative activity involves students acting out a situation, usually with a loosely defined circumstance and some kind of conflict to resolve or obstacle to overcome. In this exercise the students decide which information is important and where the resolution will come from. Role-play is a powerful drama technique that is sometimes implemented in pedagogical teaching but can be equally or more valuable for adult learners in an andragogical teaching environment based on the common themes of role-play in EFL contexts, as we shall see below.

Assumption #3: The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.

Many junior high and high school textbooks in Japan involve role-plays where participants are doing activities that they have no foundation for, such as checking in at a hotel, ordering from a menu at a restaurant, or asking for or giving directions to a foreigner. With andragogy, the adult learners have much more experience and life skills to bring to the activity. Because of the life experiences they bring to the activity, older students are much more likely to problem-solve effectively or to try new ideas as well when these common role-play scenarios are explored.

Assumption #4: There is a change in time perspective as people mature – from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application.

Another facet of role-play that relates to the third and fourth assumptions is the ability of the adult learner to imagine various situations that younger learners have no basis for imagining. These assumptions have their foundation in the concept that an adult learner is ready to learn certain ideas which will be useful in real life and which can be applied immediately to their daily life rather than stored away for future use, as is the case with pedagogical learning. As stated by Knowles et al. (2005),

> Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations… furthermore, they learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations. (p. 67)

Role-plays about checking in at hotels and airports are examples of how this drama technique is an effective learning tool within the framework of andragogy. The life experiences of an adult learner allow them to try new possibilities and interact with others to problem-solve, even in unfamiliar situations.

Some critics argue that just because a person is of adult age does not mean their life experiences are sufficient to enhance their learning process. Again, drama techniques can answer this criticism because they can be used with all types of adult learners, regardless of their individual life experiences and collective knowledge. In fact, the nature of adult individuals' various experiences works to increase the effectiveness of drama techniques within the scope of adult learning because each activity will be enhanced only when each individual learner brings something unique to the table. By contrast, pedagogical practices (which focus on instruction and dissemination of knowledge) with adult learners, may impede the use of life experiences to increase learning due to the teacher-centered nature of pedagogy.

Furthermore, role-play allows students the freedom of becoming someone new for a brief moment during the learning process. Instead of being a student sitting at a desk listening to a lecture (pedagogical practice), the student can become a flight attendant or tourist in a foreign country. This transformation, regardless of how brief, can have a powerful effect on the learning

process. According to Bray (2010), role-play can "transform the atmosphere of a classroom because it encourages students to step out of themselves to take on roles and respond appropriately to others in the present moment" (p. 13). The key aspect of andragogical practices that students bring their own life experiences to the learning environment will show clearly in role-play activities because there is no script provided. Students choose the direction and output for the activity while the teacher merely facilitates the creative process from a bystander's position. Additionally, role-play is a perfect example of a drama technique that has intrinsic problem-solving features. According to Kawakami (2012), "Drama techniques are problem solving in nature, often about conflict resolution – they require students to work together towards a concrete goal that they can perceive easily" (p. 18).

Assumption #5: *The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.*
Adult students who participate in drama techniques are more motivated to succeed because they must work as a group in many situations. One example of a group-focused drama technique is 'Description Circle'. In this exercise students form small groups and then work together to create a list of descriptive words or phrases in reference to a certain topic. For example, students might view nature pictures and then go in turn to create their descriptive list. After creating their list, they then write complete sentences using the words and phrases. This activity satisfies the fifth assumption of andragogy because students who work together are motivated by the ordinary desire to be part of a team and to help your 'group' achieve success in a given task. When students work together they are naturally invested in the learning outcome, which satisfies Knowles's assumption that students "possess a desire to actively participate in the learning process," as well as the assumption that 'students are highly motivated to learn" (Cooke, 2010, p. 209). The internal motivations that adult possess come to the surface when drama techniques like "Description Circle' are implemented, regardless of the topic or lesson focus.

Furthermore, drama techniques like 'Description Circle' and role-play are useful catalysts for expressing preexisting internal motivation, as well as increasing engagement and enjoyment for adult learners. Kobayashi (2012) says drama techniques "can be used to develop students' creativity and to boost confidence; encourage group participation and build trust and acceptance in

the group; utilize cooperative noncompetitive interaction; and support learner autonomy" (p. 30). These concepts all tie in closely with internal motivation.

Assumption #6: Adults need to know why they learn something.

This assumption was added by Knowles (1989) later in his research when it became obvious that there was a connection between meaning and action in adult learning. Adults have a different mindset because the world that they function in, regardless of their individual circumstances, is based on vastly different parameters than that of younger learners. Even those in their late-teens have different views and ideas based on the general constructs of a teenage world as opposed to an adult world. In regard to elementary and preschool learners, the differences in mindset and general constructs of daily living and thinking can only be described as night and day.

Improvisation can be applied to this assumption as well because the participants in any improv game must use their own experiences, perceptions, and ideas to create the outcomes. Like role-play, improvisation involves students actively engaging in situational drama, with the difference being that improvisation gives nothing more than a general starting point. There is no stated conflict to resolve or obstacle to overcome, just a general situation. The students then decide collaboratively where the scene will go. The benefits are the same as with role-play, but the input from the learners involved is even greater. As noted by Barbee (2016) in reference to Spada's (2007) support of drama techniques for use in the L2 language classroom, "The learner becomes an active participant in the language learning and teachers are expected to develop activities to promote self-learning, group interaction in real situations and peer-teaching," (p. 7). Furthermore, Barbee (2016) discussed Maley and Duff's (1978) ideas related to dramatic activities, which directly tie into the concepts of andragogy, "They [dramatic activities] are activities which give the student an opportunity to use his own personality in creating the material on which the language class is to be based. These activities draw on the natural ability of every person to imitate, mimic, and express himself through gesture. They draw, too, on his imagination and memory" (p. 8).

When implementing improvisation games, the students can choose the starting points for each exercise, thereby satisfying Knowles's assumption that students must value what they are

being taught, and they must play an active role in choosing the learning outcomes. The only contribution of the teacher is to possibly facilitate the starting and finishing points, but even these can be determined by the students if desired. It is possible to allow the activity to come to a natural end when the students decide they are finished. An example of an improvisation game that demonstrates these concepts is 'Freeze'. Similar to 'Tag', 'Freeze' involves two or more students acting out a scenario with a starting point but no predetermined direction or ending point. In 'Freeze' any student who wishes to join the activity can call out 'freeze' and then take the place of someone already doing the improv. The main difference between 'Tag' and 'Freeze' is that the interloper must join the scene in the exact physical position of the person they are replacing. Then the new participant must change the direction of the interaction, which allows the new player to bring their own life experiences and ideas into the mix, thereby creating meaning and learning outcomes. This is a direct result of the andragogical mode of adult learning because the entire activity is based around students creating meaning and controlling learning.

Teacher's Role

It is true that the concepts of andragogy are based on student-centered learning. However, this does not mean that the teacher can simply begin an exercise or present a dramatic technique such as improvisation or role-play, and then sit back and watch the action. The teacher plays a central role in the learning process through facilitation of dramatic techniques, followed by discussion and reflection of learning outcomes. It has been stated clearly in relation to the six assumptions that students must bring their own personal life experiences to the dramatic techniques that are implemented, but the teacher must also allow time for discussion of what actually takes place. Drama games are not only used to create fun and excitement in language learning; they must also be analyzed and discussed in whole-class settings to determine precisely what learning has taken place and how the actions can be built on to further the learning process. Students may not even realize that they have brought their own experiences and ideas into the drama games that they have participated in; therefore, the teacher must facilitate the learning process by helping the students recognize the context of personal experience that naturally comes to the surface when adult students participate in drama techniques such as role-play, improvisation, and 'Description Circle'.

Need for Further Research

Knowles's set of assumptions have been around for more than 50 years, yet there is still a lack of scholarly research into the efficacy of andragogical practices in the spectrum of adult education. One such study conducted by Merriam et al. in 2007 used Knowles's original andragogy idea as the basis for their exploration of learning in adulthood. According to Merriam et al. (2007), "Andragogy focuses on the adult learner and his or her life situation" (p. 22). Furthermore, "appreciating and taking into consideration the prior knowledge and experience of learners has become a basic assumption of our practice as educators of adults, wherever this knowledge was learned" (22). This study is useful in some aspects, but there is a strong need for more advanced and in-depth scholarly research into andragogy and performance-assisted language learning techniques. Presently there are scholarly articles supporting the usefulness of dramatic techniques in language learning, but there is a need for more focused research that uses specific techniques in recording data in support of andragogical teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Knowles et al. (2005) discuss other theories of adult learning that have been developed, such as Rogers's focus on teacher as facilitator, Brown's 'confluent education', and Houle's 'fundamental system' of educational design, yet none have remained relevant or have continued to gain in acceptance and popularity at the same rate as andragogy. Without question andragogy is a controversial topic in adult learning, but if the appropriate activities are implemented, Knowles's assumptions about adult learners can be satisfied. Once the assumptions are satisfied, then the benefits of andragogy can be achieved. Drama techniques can be applied in various adult learning situations because they allow students to bring their own unique life experiences to the forefront. Drama techniques are not hindered by cultural aspects of the learner, which can be the case for pedagogical teaching situations, because the adult learner plays the primary role in every andragogical learning activity. The value of these activities is also inherent because the learner decides the outcomes rather than the teacher. Furthermore, drama techniques are valuable for promoting student engagement and motivation while lowering anxiety and fear within the foreign language learning environment, as stated by Maley and Duff (1978; 2011, see Barbee, 2016). The

six assumptions of andragogy align fully with the use of dramatic techniques in language education because of the focus on the learner and the innate value of drama as a medium for learning and exploring individual thoughts and ideas in a foreign language classroom setting.

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