

Humanagogy – The Right Term For Our Times

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Abstract: Educational conceptual frameworks and vocabulary need to evolve with modern, societal expectations. Education curriculum developers should use the term *humanagogy* as the appropriate 21st century replacement for the antiquated terms *pedagogy* and *andragogy*. Humanagogy has no inherent age and gender references, which, in an increasingly inclusive society, makes it superior to the former terms. Before I encountered that new word, I perceived andragogy as most the appropriate descriptor when referencing adult education; but, for reasons unknown, it was not being used broadly and consistently. In the process of strengthening the case to expand the use of andragogy, I discovered several “gogys,” including *teliagogy*, *metagogy* and *humanagogy*. Further investigation and analysis led me to determine that humanagogy was the best option. Surprisingly, the term is not new; it was introduced approximately 40 years ago. The purpose of this paper is to raise the profile of humanagogy and to encourage a broader adoption of its use among educators, as a symbol of a more enlightened era. Furthermore, a change in vocabulary will likely create further opportunity for the evolution of associated conceptual frameworks.

Résumé : Les cadres conceptuels et le vocabulaire éducatifs doivent évoluer avec les attentes modernes de la société. Les concepteurs de programmes d'éducation devraient utiliser le terme humanagogie afin de remplacer les termes désuets de pédagogie et d'andragogie du 21e siècle. L'humanagogie n'a pas de références inhérentes à l'âge et au sexe, ce qui, dans une société de plus en plus inclusive, la rend supérieure aux anciens termes. Avant de rencontrer ce nouveau mot, je percevais l'andragogie comme le descripteur le plus approprié pour faire référence à l'éducation des adultes. Toutefois, pour des raisons inconnues, il n'a pas été utilisé de manière large et cohérente. Après avoir fait une recherche intense, j'ai découvert plusieurs mots se terminant en « gogie », y compris la téliagogie, la métagogie et l'humanagogie. Une enquête et une analyse plus approfondies m'ont amené à déterminer que l'humanagogie était la meilleure option. Étonnamment, le terme

n'est pas nouveau. Il a été introduit il y a environ 40 ans. Le but de cet article est de rehausser le profil de l'humanagogie et d'encourager une adoption plus large de son utilisation parmi les éducateurs, en tant que symbole d'une époque plus éclairée. En outre, un changement de vocabulaire créera probablement d'autres possibilités d'évolution des cadres conceptuels rattachés au concept.

Introduction

Like many educators who entered the ranks of “instruction” in a post-secondary institution, I did not receive the formal training of “a teacher” and always looked at those from the kindergarten to Grade 12 system (referred to as K – 12 from this point forward) when they used some of their terminology with a certain degree of suspicion. For one, I did not fully understand some of their “language.” Secondly, as an adult educator, I did not want to be associated with the K - 12 system. I wanted to teach adults and did not want some of the classroom management issues that came with supervising minor children. On some level, I pictured myself like Socrates and that my students would be captivated by the wisdom that I would rain down on them and that they were in my classroom out of choice and a thirst for knowledge.

I have been an instructor for over a quarter of a century and have shed most of those idealistic notions, but some things have not changed. For example, I still bristle at the term “pedagogy.” A number of years ago, I became familiar with “andragogy” and was attracted to it because of its “adult” implications. That said, it was used sparingly and, depending on the circles in which it was used, it seemed that curricular specialists attributed secondary importance to it, for reasons that I could not understand. When I decided to pursue additional graduate education, I hoped to gain insight with respect to the chosen usage of these terms. I completed a Masters of Education in 2015 and finally felt that I could speak the same general language as those teachers – but, I still did not like their preferred curricular term; also, I still did not have a full understanding of the basis for that choice. I completed a Doctor of Education in 2021 and had developed little additional insight into that issue. However, I felt that I had earned the credibility to conduct the research necessary to resolve the issue to my satisfaction and then to advance my cause. Thus, the stated

objective of the project that I undertook was to gather support for using the term “andragogy” more extensively in the field of adult education. You can imagine my surprise when I discovered an even better term, “humanagogy.” In addition, this term was first introduced 40 years ago and has been in use for at least 20 years in selected spaces. This article makes the case that it is superior to both “pedagogy” and “andragogy” and should be immediately adopted for more widespread usage. In the course of promoting the change in terminology, because language can change perceptions, I also realized that what at first was perceived as a simple substitution, opens the possibility of changing paradigms.

Evolution of the Terms

As with much of our English language, the roots of the terms discussed in this section are derived from the Greeks. While there is an ancient aspect to these terms, most terms entered modern usage within the last 200 years.

A Common Root

This discussion is limited to the terms that are or have been expressed in various education curriculum circles at various times. They are shared as evidence of the extensive search for the right terminology to describe educational curriculum conceptual frameworks. The approximate dates of their introduction demonstrate that most of this work has happened within this last half century.

It turns out that there are several terms that share the suffix “gogy” (<https://wordpandit.com/agogue-root-word/>). Those terms share a common origin, “agogue” (<https://wordpandit.com/agogue-root-word/>) or “agogus” (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000, p. 3) derived from the Greek language meaning “to lead” or “leader of” (<https://wordpandit.com/agogue-root-word/>) (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000, p. 3). Thus, in addition to the three primary terms at the core of this article, pedagogy, andragogy and humanagogy, a reader may encounter *heutagogy* (the science and principles of self-directed or self-determined learning) (Hase & Kenyon, 2000), *technoheutagogy* (the science and art of creating technology - enhanced learner directed learning) (National Sciences Association, n.d.) and *teliagogy* (“teleios” being the Greek word for adult) (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000, p. 3). Yeo (1982) brought forth the terms *geragogy* and *eldergogy*, both focusing on the education of

elders (Peterson & Ray, 2013, p. 84). Stroschen (2011) first used the term *metagogy* (<http://depaulinternational.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/call-for-papers>). Peterson and Ray (2013) supported Yeo's terms, as well as Strochen's, and they were all apparently unaware of the term *humanagogy*.

By the way, Peterson and Ray (2013) labelled terms like the ones discussed in this section as “neologisms,” newly coined words or phrases that are emerging into mainstream use (p. 80). I would argue that most of the terms in the latter part of this section have not yet reached that status, and I would predict that they won’t primarily because the opportunity for their usage is limited.

The Term “Pedagogy” – Its Origins and Current State of Usage

The Oxford dictionary defines “pedagogy” as the methods and principles that one uses in education. Its root can be traced to the Greeks and literally means “leading children.” It is impossible to trace the use of the word pedagogy to an exact time and place, but here in the western World, elements of it can be traced as far back as the Socratic Method from ancient Greece (Salvatori, 2003, p. 18). In more contemporary times, it would seem that the German educator Alexander Kapp adopted the word in 1833. In the United States, John Dewey, in his 1897 book, *My Pedagogic Creed*, raised the profile of the term. In that book and his subsequent ones, there is no doubt that Dewey perceived the student as a child and focused his instruction on meeting their needs. His 1902 book, *The Child and the Curriculum*, made that crystal clear.

For those educators preparing to enter the profession in a K-12 system, they were exposed to the term from the start of their training process and grew comfortable with it. (I was first exposed to the term when I took elective courses for my Bachelor’s degree from the College of Education at the university that I was attending at the time.) If or when they transferred into post-secondary contexts, they likely saw little or no distinction in the use of the term. Over time, it has likely been perceived in more universal terms.

The Term “Andragogy” – Its Origins and Current State of Usage

The Oxford dictionary defines “andragogy” as the methods and principles used in adult education. Its roots can also be traced to the Greeks and literally means “leading man.” (Loeng, 2018, p. 1). Thus, other than the lack of gender sensitivity in the latter term, the distinction relative to pedagogy is crystal clear. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy developed a theory with respect to adult education principles, circa 1925. (He published in German; some of his works were translated by Raymond Huessy in 1992.) In the United States, Malcolm Knowles in his 1973 book, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, advanced the cause of andragogy significantly.

Given the timelines identified, the field of adult education is younger and has received significantly less attention in post-secondary training contexts. Perhaps, it is time for adult education to come of age, so to speak, in part to be symbolized by being ascribed some of its own lexicon. On one hand, the evolution of thought and practice could be well served by having two distinct branches. On the other, however, a broader, more universal term might serve as a firmer point of reference, an educational equivalent to the North Star in astronomy.

The Emergence of “Humanagogy”

In 1979, R. S. Knudson, a rather obscure researcher, wrote an article entitled *Humanagogy Anyone?* That article was followed closely in 1980 by a second article called *An Alternative Approach to the Andragogy/Pedagogy Issue*. In both instances, he lay the foundation for others to take up the cause. But, his own contributions seemed to have ended abruptly.

Geraldine Holmes and Michele Abington-Cooper from Virginia Tech made the most compelling argument for the adoption of “humanagogy” in their article *Pedagogy vs. Andragogy: A False Dichotomy?*, published in 2000. I first learned of the term humanagogy in this article and, the authors convinced me that it was the best vocabulary choice with their well-presented case.

If there was a need for reinforcement of their argument, it came in a 2015 article on the got2knowmore website, titled *Pedagogy v Andragogy . . . v Humanagogy*. While providing strong confirmation for the adoption of the term, it included discussion of several other terms ending in “gogy,” which illustrated a range of possible terms, but diluted the argument that they were attempting to make. The

Holmes and Abington-Cooper article remains the authoritative resource.

Additional, recent literature sources on the topic appear to be scant or non-existent. It appears that this article was needed to revive the discussion and to advance the cause.

Implications for Adult Education and Education in General

Educators are often perceived as progressive contributors to society. Through educational processes, advancements in civilized thought and behaviour are celebrated and promoted. In the 21st century, our interconnected society strives towards the reduction of discriminatory practices which hamper the inclusion of all of its members. Significant advancements have been made with respect to the changing of language to eliminate gender and age biases. As we have learned on numerous occasions, language shapes perceptions and in turn is shaped by those perceptions. For example, changing occupational names to “police officer” from “policeman” and “firefighter” instead of “fireman” have changed perceptions related to those jobs and provided a more welcoming environment for non-male genders. Thus, this discussion to bring about a change in terminology warrants the time and energy expenditure.

Rarely does one encounter a case in which the recommended change is so clearly and concisely articulated. Rarely can a change be implemented with as little or no cost and with such limited expenditure of energy. If educational professionals accept the rationale laid out in this article and make the rational decision to add the term “humanagogy” to their vocabulary as a replacement for whichever term they had used before, then the field of education will rise to a higher standard. Scholars will inevitably start using it in their publications and, over time, the term will be the widespread standard. In addition, conceptual frameworks will evolve. There is no set timeline for this conversion to occur and no need to retrofit previously written works. The new term will take over, much like other vocabulary changes that have taken place in modern society.

Despite the potential ease of adoption described above, the challenge of changing minds, prior learning and revising publications and other written sources will take sustained and persistent effort. Changes in curriculum training would be the best place to start that transition. Then, as new graduates enter the work force they can bring their new understandings with them.

Introducing this concept during professional development sessions for current practitioners can be a second front for the change and, in addition to the contributions from new entrants, create synergy and momentum. At some point, the language used will reach the tipping point and become the broadly utilized term. This evolution of language will be consistent with other changes in terms used in the English language to support increased societal inclusivity.

A final benefit to using this quasi-new term moves the discussion of learning from age (and gender) based models to ones using wider and more credible sets of criteria, such as subject matter, learning styles of individuals and the level of motivation to learn of the individual (Breathe, 2015). Our focus going forward can be steadfast on meeting the needs of the student, regardless of their personal characteristics.

For those in the K – 12 system, use of the term pedagogy and its related constructs could remain, but in limited contexts.

Time is of the Essence

I do not wish to be unnecessarily alarmist with the title of this section, but I do want to build upon findings that I made during the production of my doctoral dissertation. In that dissertation, I relied largely on a call to action presented by Barber et al. (2013) in their publication entitled, *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead*. I accept their central message that current higher education institutions had to evolve to remain relevant, thus avoiding the negative consequences that could potentially have an impact on those who chose or were unable to evolve. Ironically, in the middle of my research, the global COVID-19 pandemic struck and many of my earlier assumptions were challenged or outright demonstrated to be obsolete. A key lesson from that experience is that one act decisively and not assume that stability will be the normal state of affairs. Also, educators, rightly or wrongly, are often ascribed leadership roles as models of good citizenry; as our societies adopt more inclusive and progressive language in a number of other social areas, educators should be clamoring to get to the front of the parade, so to speak.

Conclusion

There are a number of dichotomous debates which may elude solution, but in terms of describing education curricular perspectives, it is clear that the term “humanagogy” rises above the

pedagogy/andragogy debate with a meaning which is much more inclusive than age-related or gender-based terms. The term has been present in academic literature for at least 40 years. First introduced in 1979, it received heightened exposure in the year 2000, in the Holmes and Abington-Cooper article. This article should be perceived as an additional contributor to raising its profile and in encouraging practitioners to adopt it. It could be considered further evidence that the study of curriculum has risen to a new level of professionalism. Implementing this recommendation might raise to term humanagogy from a neologism into commonly accepted language. That evolution would essentially end the false dichotomy between pedagogy and andragogy that has existed for far too long.

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