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# ANDRAGOGY: HISTORY, MEANING, CONTEXT, FUNCTION

**Abstract:** *The article discusses some of the very basic problems of the science of andragogy, gives an overview of the development of andragogy as a scientific discipline, of conceptional and terminological issues and draw perceptions for the future development of andragogy. The "international career" of this term is interesting, as well as the ways, in which it was used, developed and conceptualized through international cooperation. Special attention is given to the positioning of andragogy as the field for university teaching and to the ways this scientific area was developed in Germany, some other European countries and USA.*

**Key words:** *andragogy, adult education terminology, history of andragogy, international cooperation.*

The term 'andragogy' has been used in different times and countries with various connotations. Nowadays there exist mainly three understandings:

1. In many countries there is a growing conception of 'andragogy' as the scholarly approach to the learning of adults. In this connotation andragogy is the science of understanding (= theory) and supporting (= practice) lifelong and lifewide education of adults.
2. Especially in the USA, 'andragogy' in the tradition of Malcolm Knowles, labels a specific theoretical and practical approach, based on a humanistic conception of self-directed and autonomous learners and teachers as facilitators of learning.
3. Widely, an unclear use of andragogy can be found, with its meaning changing (even in the same publication) from 'adult education practice' or 'desirable values' or 'specific teaching methods,' to 'reflecti-

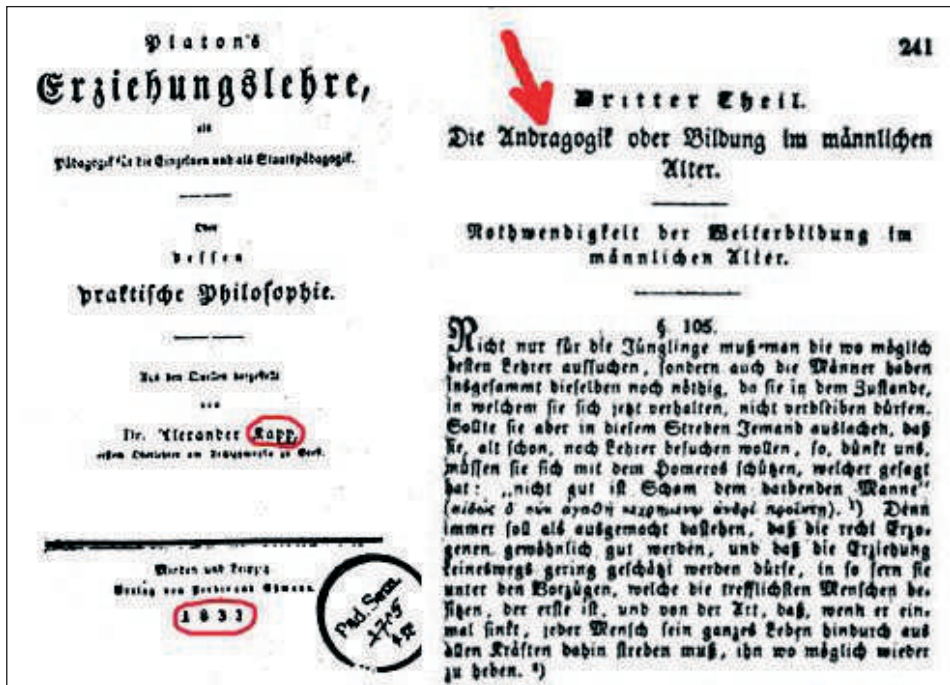
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ons' or 'academic discipline' and/or 'opposite to childish pedagogy', claiming to be 'something better' than just 'Adult Education'.

Terms make sense in relation to the object they name. Relating the development of the term to the historical context may explain the differences.

## The History of 'Andragogy'



The first use of the term 'andragogy' – as far as we know today - was found with the German high school teacher Alexander Kapp in 1833. In a book entitled 'Platon's Erziehungslehre' (Plato's Educational Ideas) he describes the lifelong necessity to learn. Starting with early childhood he comes on page 241 (of 450) to adulthood with the title 'Die Andragogik oder Bildung im maennlichen Alter' (Andragogy or Education in the man's Age - a replica can be found on [www.andragogy.net](http://www.andragogy.net)). In about 60 pages he argues that education, self-reflection, and educating the character is the first value in human life. He then refers to vocational education of the healing profession, soldier, educator, orator, ruler, and men as family father. So already here we find patterns which repeatedly can be found in the ongoing history of andragogy: Included and combined are the education of inner, subjective personality ('character') and

outer, objective competencies (what later is discussed under “education vs. training”); and learning happens not only through teachers, but also through self-reflection and life experience, is more than ‘teaching adults.’

Kapp does not explain the term *Andragogik*, and it is not clear, whether he invented it or whether he borrowed it from somebody else. He does not develop a theory, but justifies ‘andragogy’ as the practical necessity of the education of adults. This may be the reason why the term lay fallow: other terms and ideas were available; the idea of adult learning was not unusual in that time around 1833, neither in Europe (enlightenment movement, reading-societies, workers education, educational work of churches, for example the Kolping-movement), nor in America (Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, Lowell Institute in Boston, Lyceum movement, town libraries, museums, agricultural societies); all these existing initiatives had important dates between 1820-40 and their terminology, so a new term was not needed.

## **The Second and Third Invention**

In the 1920’s in Germany adult education became a field of theorizing. Especially a group of scholars from various subjects, the so-called ‘Hohenrodter Bund’, developed in theory and practice the ‘*Neue Richtung*’ (new direction) in adult education. Here some authors gave a second birth to the term ‘*Andragogik*’, now describing sets of explicit reflections related to the why, what for and how of teaching adults. But *Andragogik* was not used as “the Method of Teaching Adults”, as Lindeman (1926) mistakenly suggested in reporting his experiences at the Academy of Labor, Frankfurt, Germany. It was a sophisticated, theory-oriented concept, being an antonym to ‘demagogy’ - too difficult to handle, not really shared. So again it was forgotten. But a new object was shining up: a scholarly, academic reflection level ‘above’ practical adult education. The scholars came from various disciplines, working in adult education as individuals, not representing university institutes or disciplines. The idea of adult education as a discipline was not yet born.

It is not clear where the third wave of using andragogy originated. In the 1950’s andragogy suddenly can be found in publications in Switzerland (Hanselmann), Yugoslavia (Ogrizovic), the Netherlands (ten Have), Germany (Poeggeler). Still the term was known only to insiders, and was sometimes more oriented to practice, sometimes more to theory. Perhaps this mirrors the reality of adult education of that time: There was no or little formal training for adult educators, some limited theoretical knowledge, no institutionalized

continuity of developing such a knowledge, and no academic course of study. In this reality 'Adult Education' still described a unclear mixture of practice, commitment, ideologies, reflections, theories, mostly local institutions, and some academic involvement of individuals. As the reality was unclear, the term could not be any clearer. But the now increasing and shared use of the term signalled, that a new differentiation between 'doing' and 'reflecting' was developing, perhaps needing a separating term.

## **Andragogy: A banner for identity**

The great times of the term 'andragogy' for the English-speaking adult education world came with Malcolm Knowles, a leading scholar of adult education in the USA. He describes his encounter with the term: '/.../ in 1967 I had an experience that made it all come together. A Yugoslavian adult educator, Dusan Savicevic, participated in a summer session I was conducting at Boston University. At the end of it he came up to me with his eyes sparkling and said, 'Malcolm, you are preaching and practicing andragogy.' I replied, 'What-agogy?' because I had never heard the term before. He explained that the term had been coined by a teacher in a German grammar school, Alexander Kapp, in 1833 ... The term lay fallow until it was once more introduced by a German social scientist, Eugen Rosenstock, in 1921, but it did not receive general recognition. Then in 1957 a German teacher, Franz Poggeler, published a book, *Introduction into Andragogy: Basic issues in Adult Education*, and this term was then picked up by adult educators in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Yugoslavia ...' (Knowles 1989, p. 79).

Knowles published his first article (1968) about his understanding of andragogy with the provocative title 'Andragogy, Not Pedagogy'. In a short time the term andragogy, now intimately connected to Knowles' concept, received general recognition throughout North America and other English speaking countries; 'within North America, no view of teaching adults is more widely known, or more enthusiastically embraced, than Knowles' description of andragogy' (Pratt & Ass., 1998, p. 13).

Knowles' concept of andragogy - 'the art and science of helping adults learn' - 'is built upon two central, defining attributes: First, a conception of learners as self-directed and autonomous; and second, a conception of the role of the teacher as facilitator of learning rather than presenter of content' (Pratt & Ass., 1998, p. 12), emphasizing learner choice more than expert control. Both attributes fit into the specific socio-historic thoughts in and after the 1970's,

for example the deschooling theory (Illich, Reimer), Rogers person-centered approach, Freire's 'conscientizacao.' Perhaps a third attribute added to the attraction of Knowles concept: Constructing andragogy as opposing pedagogy ("Farewell to Pedagogy", 1970) (later reduced) provided opportunity to be on the 'good side,' not a 'pedagogue,' seen as 'a teacher, especially a pedantic one' (Webster's Dictionary, 1982, p. 441). This flattered adult educators in a time, where most adult educators were andragogical amateurs, doing adult education based on their content expertise, experience, and a mission they felt, not based on trained or studied educational competence. To be offered now understandable, humanistic values and beliefs, some specific methods and a good sounding label, strengthened a group that felt inferior to comparable professions. And this came coincidentally along with a significant growth of the field of practice plus an increased scholarly approach, including the emerging possibility to study adult education at universities. All these elements document a new period ('art and science') in adult education; it made sense to concentrate this new understanding in a new term.

Providing a unifying idea and identity, connected with the term andragogy, to the amorphous group of adult educators, certainly was the main benefit Knowles awarded to the field of adult education at that time. Another was that he strengthened the already existing scholarly access to adult education by publishing, theorizing, doing research, by educating students that themselves through academic research became scholars, and by explicitly defining andragogy as science (Cooper & Henschke, 2003).

## **Issues with Andragogy**

Over the years critique developed against Knowles' understanding of andragogy. A first critique argues that Knowles claimed to offer a general concept of adult education, but like all educational theories in history it is but one concept, born into a specific historic context. For example, one of Knowles' basic assumptions is that becoming adult means becoming self-directed. But other genuine concepts of adult education do not accept this 'American' type of self-directed lonesome fighter as the ultimate educational goal: In family, church, or civic education, for instance, the 'we' is more important than the 'self'. Similarly an instructor who presents (=teaches) the name of the stars in a hobby-astronomy class would not work andragogical because this is not autonomous learning. Consequently the Dutch scholar van Gent (1996) criticizes, that the andragogy concept of Knowles is not a general-descriptive, but

a 'specific, prescriptive approach' (p. 116). Another critique is Knowles' conceiving of pedagogy as pedantic schoolmasters' practice, not as an academic discipline. This hostility toward pedagogy had two negative outcomes: On a strategic level, scholars of adult education could make no alliances with the colleagues from pedagogy; on a content level, knowledge developed in pedagogy through 400 years could not be made fruitful for andragogy (more critical remarks see Merriam/Caffarella, 1999, p. 273ff, Savicevic, 1999, p. 113ff). Thus, attaching 'andragogy' exclusively to Knowles' specific approach means that the term is lost for including pedagogical knowledge and those who do not share Knowles' specific approach.

## **The European development: towards Professionalisation**

In most countries of Europe the Knowles-discussion played no or at best a marginal role. The use and development of 'andragogy' in the different countries and languages was more hidden, disperse, and uncoordinated, yet steady. 'Andragogy' nowhere described one specific concept or movement, but was, from 1970 on, connected with the in existence coming academic and professional institutions, publications, programs, triggered by a similar growth of adult education in practice and theory as in the USA. 'Andragogy' functioned here as a header for (places of) systematic reflections, parallel to other academic headers like 'biology', 'medicine', 'physics'. Examples of this use of andragogy are

- the Yugoslavian (scholarly) journal for adult education, named 'Andragogija' in 1969; and the 'Yugoslavian Society for Andragogy';
- at Palacky University in Olomouc (Czech republic) in 1990 the "Katedra sociologie a andragogiky" was established, managed by Vladimir Jochmann, who advanced the use of the term "andragogy" (andragogika) against "adult education" ("Vychova a vzdelavani dospelych"), which was discredited by communistic use. Also Prague University has a 'Katedra Andragogiky';
- in 1993, Slovenia's 'Andragoski Center Republike Slovenije' was founded with the journal 'Andragoska Spoznanja';
- in 1995, Bamberg University (Germany) named a 'Lehrstuhl Andragogik';
- the Internet address of the Estonian adult education society is 'andra.ee'.

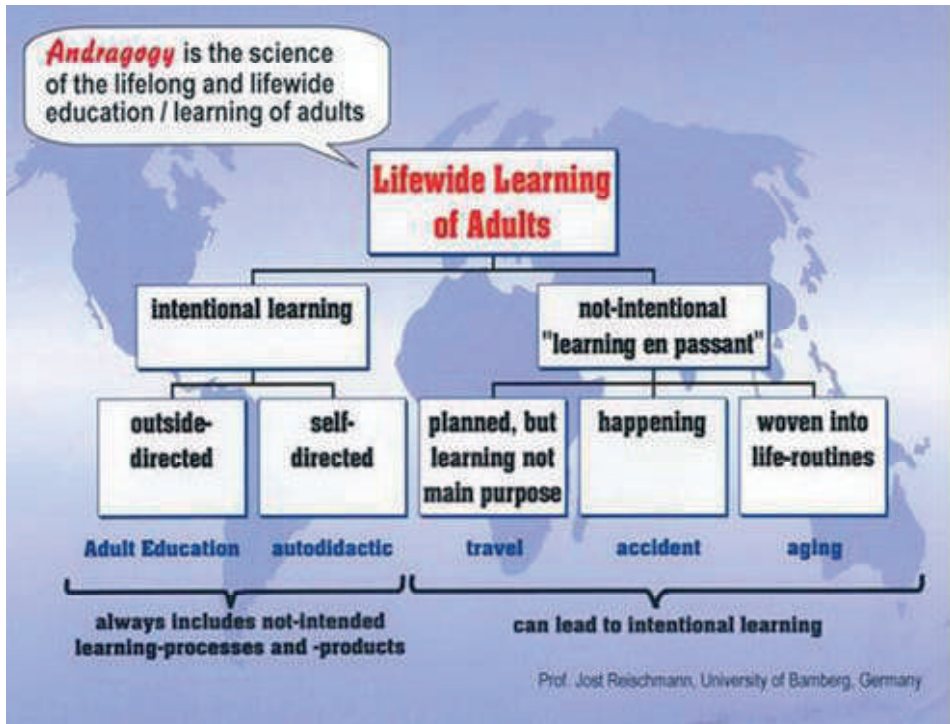
On this formal level 'above practice' and specific approaches, the term andragogy could be used in communistic countries as well as in capitalistic, relating to all types of theories, for reflection, analysis, training, in person-oriented programs as well as human resource development.

A similar professional and academic expansion developed worldwide, sometimes using more or less demonstratively the term andragogy: Venezuela has the 'Instituto Internacional de Andragogia', since 1998 the Adult & Continuing Education Society of Korea publishes the journal 'Andragogy today'. This documents a reality with new types of professional institutions, functions, roles, with fulltime employed and academically trained professionals. Some of the new professional institutions use the term andragogy - meaning the same as 'adult education', but sounding more demanding, science-based. Yet, throughout Europe still 'adult education', 'further education' or 'adult pedagogy' is used more than 'andragogy'.

## **Adult education or education of adults?**

Some writers limit andragogy to a teaching situation (or more in the jargon: helping-adults-learn situation). An early example is Lindeman (1926), when reporting from his experiences at the Academy of Labor, Frankfurt, Germany: he connects *Andragogik* (using the German term) with teaching by giving his article the title 'Andragogik: The Method of Teaching Adults'. Knowles, who brought the Americanized version "andragogy" into discussion, also uses this limiting understanding: 'Andragogy is the art and science of teaching adults'. This definition is generalized by Krajinc (1989, p. 19) from Slovenia in a British international handbook: "Andragogy has been defined as...the art and science of helping adults learn and the study of adult education theory, processes, and technology to that end."

Other authors include 'education and learning of adults in all its forms of expression' (Savicevic, 1999, p. 97). Reischmann (2003) offers the term 'lifewide education' to describe the opening of this new field, thus encompassing formal and informal, intentional and 'en passant', institution-supplied and autodidactic learning.



These differences in understanding have to be seen in a historic development of the perception of 'adult education': What was perceived as 'adult education' in 1833 or 1926 is different from 1969 or 2001. While until the 1970's the interest in adult education was focused on the action-oriented questions "How can teachers/facilitators support the learning of adults?", now a new, more analytical-descriptive perspective was added. From the 1970's on it was more and more perceived and discussed, that learning of adults did not only happen in more or less institutionalized or traditional settings, arranged specifically for the learning of adults. In North America Allen Tough's research about adult learning projects provided evidence that only the 'tip of the iceberg' of adults learning was 'adult education'. In Germany the perception of learning in social movements like self-help groups or citizen-initiatives (peace-movement, feminist groups) started the discussion about the 'Entgrenzung' (de-bordering) of adult education. Distance- and E-learning, assessment of prior learning, learning in non-traditional forms, life-situations as learning opportunity, and other non-school-oriented forms and situations where adults learn widened the perception that the education of adults happen in more situations than just in adult education.



As a consequence today many experts understand “adult education” only as a segment of the wider field of the education of adults.

## **Andragogy: Academic discipline**

Besides this widened perception of adult learning another development challenged the understanding of ‘adult education’ in the last decades: The field of adult education worldwide went through a process of growth and differentiation, in which a scholarly, scientific approach emerged. And a new type of ‘adult educators’ was born, which was not qualified by their missions and visions, but by their academic studies. And writing a thesis or dissertation is a quite different task than educating adults: reflection, critique, analysis, historical knowledge qualified this new type of academic professionals.

An academic discipline with university programs, professors, students, focusing on the education of adults, exists today in many countries. But in the membership-list of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education of the USA (2003) not one university institute uses the name ‘andragogy’, in Germany one out of 35, in Eastern Europe six out of 26. Many actors in the field seem not to need a label ‘andragogy’. However, other scholars, for example Dusan Savicevic, who provided Knowles with the term andragogy, explicitly claim ‘andragogy as a discipline, the subject of which is the study of education and learning of adults in all its forms of expression’ (Savicevic, 1999, p. 97, similarly Henschke 2003, Reischmann 2003). This claim is not a mere definition, but includes the prospective function to influence the coming reality: to challenge ‘outside’ (demanding a respected discipline in the university context), to confront ‘inside’ (challenging the colleagues to clarify their understanding and consensus of their function and science), overall to stand up to a self-confident academic identity.

Again here this claim only makes sense when an object exists worth to get labelled. Not the term makes a (sub-) discipline, but a reality with sound university programs, professors, research, disciplinarian knowledge, and students. If, where and when this exists, a clarifying label like “andragogy” will make sense. The coming reality will show whether the ongoing differentiation in institutions, functions, and roles will need a term ‘andragogy’ for conceptual clarification.

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## ANDRAGOGIJA: ISTORIJA, ZNAČENJE, KONTEKST I FUNKCIJA

**Apstrakt:** Članak pruža uvid u bazične probleme andragoške nauke, daje pregled razvoja andragogije kao naučne discipline, osnovnih pojmovno-terminoloških problema i načina na koji im se pristupa, a izlaže i perspektive daljeg razvoja andragogije. Naročito je značajan „međunarodni put“ ovog pojma, njegova upotreba i konceptualizacija kroz međunarodnu saradnju. Posebna pažnja je posvećena razvoju andragogije kao univerzitetske discipline, pri čemu se prati uobličavanje ove naučne oblasti u Nemačkoj, nekim drugim evropskim zemljama i SAD.

**Ključne reči:** andragogija, terminologija obrazovanja odraslih, istorija andragogije, međunarodna saradnja.

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