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THE EDUCATIVE ROLE OF THE ANDRAGOGUE: FACILITATION AND MENTORSHIP IN ADULT DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The article examines the educative role of the andragogue within the field of adult learning, with particular emphasis on the convergence of facilitative and mentoring functions within a purposeful, adaptive and supportive model of practice. It traces the need to move beyond a traditional understanding of teaching as one-directional transmission of knowledge, and advances the view of the adult learner as an autonomous individual whose experience constitutes a formative intellectual resource. Drawing on contemporary theoretical and empirical considerations, the study introduces a model articulated through five sequential stages: orientation and diagnostic assessment; negotiation of goals and learning direction; experiential engagement with content; reflective reinterpretation of newly acquired knowledge; and continued mentoring after the formal completion of instruction. The model is applicable both in general educational contexts and in work with vulnerable adult groups, where support and trust form the basis for renewed motivation and responsible participation in learning. The central argument presented is that facilitation does not diminish the role of the educator; rather, it redefines that role by positioning the andragogue as a co-participant and partner in knowledge construction. Mentorship is therefore not an auxiliary function but an extended phase of learning which sustains critical reflection and enables the practical application of new competences. Taken together, the stages form a coherent framework through which the andragogue emerges as an architect of developmental processes, rather than a passive transmitter of information.

Keywords: *Andragogy, adult education, facilitator role, mentorship model, experiential learning, reflective practice, self-directed learning, adult learner development, learning autonomy, transformative learning, professional identity of the andragogue, adult learning environments, lifelong learning process.*

Introduction

Adult learning has evolved as an autonomous field of inquiry in which knowledge is understood as a process of continuous self-formation. The adult enters the learning environment not as an object to be shaped, but as a subject who carries biographical memory, social maturity and the capacity to choose. This prior experience cannot be ignored, for it determines how new content integrates into the learner's personal narrative. In this sense, andragogy does not study how to teach, but rather how to create a space in which self-awareness, knowledge and identity may converge. The contemporary adult lives in conditions that demand adaptability, critical reflection and inner flexibility. Learning is not a compulsory stage of life, but a conscious act connected with the need for change, a second chance, professional reorientation and personal reconstruction, which presupposes a dominant role of internal motivation in adult learning processes [1]. This renders the role of the andragogue one of particular responsibility, as it involves accompanying the learner through a process of development. The article considers the andragogue as a professional whose work extends beyond the traditional lecture format. Here the emphasis falls on the possibility of understanding this work as a deliberate system of pedagogical influence in which facilitation and mentoring function not as techniques, but as defining qualities of interaction.
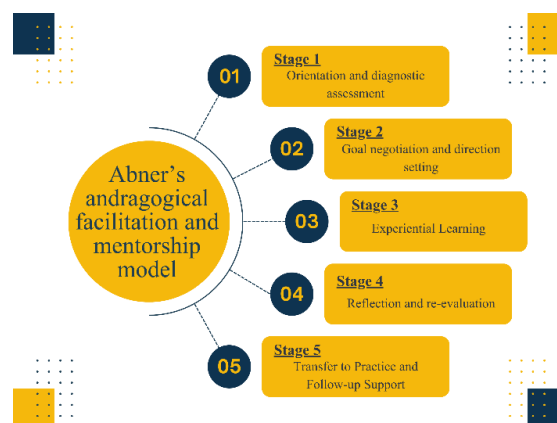
Exposition

Andragogy is the science of adult learning, which reinterprets the traditional "teacher's role" in the direction of partnership and learner support. Malcolm Knowles popularised andragogy by defining the adult learner as a self-developing and self-directing individual, and the educator as a facilitator of learning who creates conditions for reflection, dialogue and personal growth rather than dominating through authority and one-way transmission of knowledge [2]; [3]; [4]. Contemporary research confirms these principles: the defining characteristics of andragogy lie in the adult learner's pursuit of autonomy and in the role of the educator as a lecturer who enables and facilitates the learning process [4]. In English-language scholarship after 2015, andragogical approaches continue to evolve, incorporating contextual and cultural nuances. For instance, discussion has arisen around the idea that Knowles' model stems from a Western, individualistic context and cannot be treated as universally applicable, requiring adaptation to diverse sociocultural environments. Despite such critiques, andragogy has become an established perspective in adult learning, capable of flexible

application according to the needs of different learners [2]. The contemporary andragogue often combines several roles such as educator, facilitator and mentor in order to support the adult learner throughout the process of lifelong learning. Researchers including Merriam and Bierema, Brookfield and others emphasise that adult learning is inseparably connected with principles of humanistic pedagogy, social learning and transformative development [5]; [6]. A learner-centred approach comes to the foreground: the adult learner is viewed as a bearer of experience, motivation and personal goals, and the andragogue as the one who creates conditions for reflection on experience, acquisition of new knowledge and values, and personal change. In other words, the emphasis falls on facilitating learning in accordance with the needs of the adult rather than on directive instruction [7]. One of the key functions of the contemporary andragogue is the role of facilitator, that is, one who enables and guides the learning process. This means that the adult educator organises an environment and a process in which the learners themselves are active participants in learning. Research highlights that, unlike pedagogy (where the teacher is an authoritative source of knowledge), in andragogy the educator is "regarded as a facilitator and provocateur rather than as a commanding expert" [8]. The facilitator encourages learners to establish norms of mutual respect, fairness and collaboration within the learning environment, embracing diversity and ensuring equal opportunities for participation [9]. He models critical thinking and dialogue rather than one-way transmission of content. Within the framework of humanistic pedagogy (for example, the ideas of Carl Rogers), the facilitator builds an emotionally supportive and empathic learning atmosphere. Thus, learners feel valued and understood, which increases their motivation and stimulates active engagement [10]. Empirical evidence shows that fear of exclusion weakens social connectedness, whereas supportive social environments reduce this risk, thereby enabling more autonomous participation in learning processes [11]. The facilitator respects the individuality and autonomy of every adult and encourages the learner to bring personal experience into the learning process, connecting newly acquired knowledge with real life [12]. Contemporary research notes that such an approach increases the relevance of learning and strengthens learner engagement. According to Kaloyanova, facilitation is a specific pedagogical process in which educator and learner share responsibility for learning. She emphasises that "facilitation is an event of general didactics that integrates professional competence, emotional intelligence and reflective interaction between teacher and learner" [13]. In this context the facilitator "enables" the acquisition of knowledge and establishes a space of trust, cooperation and shared critical reflection. It is precisely this, as Kaloyanova highlights, that turns facilitation into a learner-centred pedagogical practice with an educative dimension oriented towards the development of self-reflection, social responsibility and autonomy in the adult learner. To be effective, the facilitator must achieve equilibrium between guidance and independence. Anne Rahaju points out that successful self-directed learning requires "a supportive learning environment and skilful facilitators". The educator must provide an appropriate balance of direction and freedom so that learners feel empowered, without being confused or overwhelmed [14]. The facilitator often employs open discussions, group problem-solving, real life cases and other active methods. Rather than providing ready-made answers, he offers guidance and resources, thus encouraging learners to discover knowledge independently and develop critical thinking skills. Studies on the professional identity of facilitators show that they

value understanding of human nature, demonstrate openness, engagement and empathy, and are able to apply varied teaching styles according to learners' needs [15]. These humanistic values are evident in everyday practice: the facilitator builds trust between himself and the learners, encourages inquiry and sharing, and demonstrates genuine concern for the progress of each individual. Within the context of transformative learning, the facilitator's function is particularly delicate. Transformative theory views adult learning as a process of critically reconsidering accumulated beliefs and patterns of thought [8]. Here, the facilitator acts both as a "provocateur" who challenges learners to break established frameworks, and as a supportive mentor guiding them through potentially "disorienting dilemmas". According to J. Mezirow, "the educator must assume responsibility for creating conditions that support critical reflection and discourse". Instead of transmitting facts, the facilitator encourages learners to express alternative perspectives, to analyse their own assumptions and to participate in equal dialogue. This critical dialogical support distinguishes the role of the andragogue as a facilitator of transformation: he does not "transform" the learner directly, but enables the learner to reach transformation through awareness and discussion. Within the theoretical perspective outlined, the need arises for a professional model capable of arranging the andragogue's roles into actionable steps and translating facilitation and mentorship from concept into practice. The absence of a structured sequence in existing literature poses a research question concerning how a coherent educative framework may appear in real adult learning settings, including work with vulnerable learners whose educational pathways have been interrupted. In response, Dr. Avi Abner proposes a step-developed model of practice. It is grounded in parity between educator and learner, as well as in the possibility for experience, knowledge and personal history to enter the learning process as authentic resources. The model provides a functional structure in which teaching is not the leading action, but a collaborative process of reflection, decision-making and transfer into personal and professional life.

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Stage 1: Orientation and biographical diagnosis

The aim of the first stage is to identify the experience, motivational attitudes and potential barriers that the adult learner brings into the learning process. The andragogue gathers information through conversation, biographical interview, self-assessment and the formulation of expectations. Here, learning

does not begin at zero but from an already existing personal history, which becomes a resource for development.

Stage 2: Joint formulation of goals and learning trajectory

Following orientation, the next step is negotiation of direction. The andragogue and the learner construct a learning plan through partnership rather than prescription. Outcomes, pace and levels of engagement are defined collaboratively. This stage fosters a sense of ownership over the process and positions the learner as an author rather than an executor of decisions made by others.

Stage 3: Facilitated learning through experience and exchange of practice

Here the learning process unfolds in its practical form. Work is carried out through case discussions, biographical situations, group tasks and professional narratives. The role of the andragogue is present, dialogical and non-coercive. A climate of trust is maintained, free from the fear of a "wrong answer", which is critically important for vulnerable learners.

Stage 4: Reflective interpretation and re-evaluation of knowledge

At this stage the focus shifts to the learner's internal work. The new content has already been absorbed at a surface level and enters a space of assessment: which elements align with previous experience, which challenge it, and what consequences may follow a shift in understanding or behaviour. The learner begins to formulate conclusions independently, without relying on external validation. The task of the andragogue here is to sustain the thinking process through short and precise questions, without offering ready-made solutions. Reflection is not an addition after instruction but part of the learning itself, the point at which knowledge becomes a personal position.

Stage 5: Mentoring follow-up and transfer into practice

The final stage extends beyond the learning setting. New skills are applied in professional contexts, early successes and early difficulties are examined. The andragogue remains a partner through consultation, feedback and continued support. Change is a process that unfolds over time.

Some researchers note that self-directed learning does not rely solely on the adult learner's autonomy. It also requires the presence of carefully structured support from the educator, particularly in the initial phase, when self-regulatory skills are still developing and confidence in choosing learning strategies is not yet secure (Rahaju, 2025). Within this context, the mentoring role of the andragogue becomes clearly defined. The educator accompanies learners through their first attempts to apply new knowledge, discusses difficulties with them, helps them interpret the reasons for unsuccessful outcomes, and supports them in perceiving change not as an immediate result but as a gradually unfolding process. In this way the outlined model gives internal structure to the facilitating and mentoring role of the andragogue. It enables the theoretical principles of andragogy to be translated into concrete practice that is responsive to the experience and vulnerability of adult learners, while maintaining high educational expectations and orientation towards growth. In this sense the educational role of the andragogue appears not as a single act of teaching, but as a continuous process of orientation, shared learning, reflection and supported application of what has been learned.

Conclusion

Working with adults requires a pedagogical approach that does not attempt to replace their experience, but integrates it as an active element of learning. This is precisely where the model developed in this study finds its place. It does not offer quick solutions, but a framework within which the learner may construct personal understanding, clarify goals, experience knowledge, evaluate it and apply it. The sequence of stages is not a methodological scheme, but a way of thinking about learning that allows the adult to be viewed not as a recipient of content, but as a partner with will, memory and responsibility. Observations arising from work in diverse non-formal learning environments suggest that when adult learning builds upon respect for biographical experience, clearly negotiated aims, experiential engagement, reflection and the possibility of subsequent application, learners do not merely acquire information: they strengthen confidence, expand their sense of personal capability and assume a more active role in their own development. One may reasonably infer that lasting outcomes in adult learning do not depend on the volume of delivered knowledge, but on the way in which it passes through the person until it finds a place in lived practice. Thus, the model is not a finished system, but a working foundation upon which different forms of training may be built. It provides support where the learner hesitates, and space where they are ready to take initiative. This makes it particularly appropriate for learning processes that unfold beyond formal institutional settings, where motivation is voluntary, pace is individual, and progress depends on the learner's capacity to find meaning in their own learning.

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