

Д. Камерон

A PERSONAL FRAMEWORK OF ADULT LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION



КАМЕРОН Деррик – бакалавр образования, магистр искусствования, доцент кафедры английского языка и лингвистики колледжа Аль-Кунфудха; Университет Умм-Аль-Кура. Мекка, Аль-Кунфудха, провинция Мекка, Королевство Саудовская Аравия; e-mail: dicam.ops@gmail.com

CAMERON Derrick I. – Bachelor of Education, Master of Arts, adjunct lecturer of English and Linguistics at Al-Qunfudhah University College of Umm Al Qura University. Makkah Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; e-mail: dicam.ops@gmail.com

This article discusses the lack of a unified framework of adult education and of adult language learning and instruction specifically. Despite this current state of affairs in the fields of education and adult language instruction, it is possible to derive context-specific frameworks for divergent adult educational needs. The article first distinguishes younger learners from adult learners then proposes Malcolm Knowles' six assumptions of adult learning as a foundation for formulating context-specific frameworks of adult instruction. Inspired by Knowles' six assumptions, the author articulates his own framework of adult learning specific to language instruction. This framework is a result of synthesizing both past professional experience as well as extensive reading into applied linguistics and adult education theory.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE; ADULT EDUCATION; ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNER; ANDRAGOGY; MALCOLM KNOWLES' ADULT LEARNING THEORY

Ссылка при цитировании: Cameron Derrick I. A Personal Framework of Adult Language instruction. *Teaching Methodology in Higher Education*. 2020. Vol. 9. No 32. P. 69–73. DOI: 10.18720/HUM/ISSN 2227-8591.32.06

1. Introduction. The matter of adult-specific language instruction is a complex one since there is no unified framework of adult education, let alone adult ESL/EFL education specifically. According to Glowacki-Dudka and Helvie-Mason [4], adult education resides at the margins of the education field, and adult ESL/EFL shares this position [11: 440], perhaps lying at the periphery of adult education itself. Indeed, adult learners and their instructors warrant greater consideration than this. However, adult language learners require even more immediate attention since their position as a distinct population of learners within the field of ESL/EFL has yet to be definitively established. This article discusses my attempt

to produce my own understanding and framework of adult language education in light of both the current theories in adult education as well as my own teaching experiences, and readings into applied linguistics.

This short article considers the special needs of adult language learners, and it is an invitation for all instructors to reflect upon their own understanding of the philosophy of adult education. I take the perspective of a foreign language instructor since that is my professional context. However, as revealed below, there is a common launching point from which we can all reflect upon our beliefs, perspectives, and methodologies as instructors of adult students.

2. Separating the Adult Learner from the Younger Learner. When an adult instructor joins a class of adult learners, he is «an adult among adults» [14: 27]. As such, the instructor must acknowledge that the adult learners with which he interacts have many of the same concerns, life-stressors, and motivations as he. This is not to downplay the life challenges that younger learners need to contend with, rather it is an acknowledgement of the distinct nature of the adult condition. Adult learners understand that their status as ‘student’ differs from that which they enjoyed in their childhood and adolescence. They report that they learn differently than when they did as a youth, have greater cognitive ability and motivation, and are likely to take greater responsibility for their own learning processes [15: 1134-1135]. Moreover, adults must also submit to the trials of the adult condition including coping with negative life experiences [3] dealing with learning anxiety [5, 1], and juggling multiple social roles [10: 51]. Life is not perfect, and the adult learner must carry the load of not only his own learning responsibilities but also those that may be requiring more immediate attention.

In contrast, children and adolescents are dependent on their families (or others) for care and their primary activity in life is to grow to maturity and acquire the learning and skills necessary for adulthood [10: 11]. Arguably, the social role of the child or adolescent is one of ‘student’ in the societies of developed countries where youths have the luxury to dedicate their time to study and play. However, adults find themselves further down the path of life and need to consider developing other aspects of their lives besides taking on additional education. According to Erikson (1963), adult development focuses upon establishing social roles (i.e. that of a parent, spouse, employee, etc.) while finding a mate in young adulthood and caring for others (i.e. children and/or older parents) in one’s middle age [10: 11]. With this understanding, even young

adults who are embarking on their first post-secondary careers have just begun the process of developing an adult social role, and they must necessarily be considered adults, although emergent. On the other hand, older adults that have reached other points along the adult continuum have to manage the demands of several social roles simultaneously, even that of ‘student’ once again.

Wu, Wu, and Le claim that an adult’s continuing education «may be more important than a child’s education since a person’s time in adulthood is usually longer than in childhood» [15: 1133]. This statement may seem hyperbolic but Wu, Wu, and Le are attempting to articulate something of great importance. They argue that adult education, including adult language education, is an integral part of cultivating and mobilizing the adult population of a society for the betterment of all. Since adults wish to lead a long and productive life, quality adult education of all kinds must be available to those who seek it. Considering the increasing importance of lifelong learning, professional training, adult foreign language education, and the need to re-educate for new careers during adulthood, adult education theory should be playing a much greater role in directing educators than it is currently. At least in the field of language education, there is growing interest in adult-specific techniques, but there is still much work to be done. Firstly, it would be of great service to all adult educators, including language instructors, to revisit the foundational tenets of adult education in order to form a solid theoretical foundation from which to build upon.

3. A Framework for Andragogy and Beyond. Merriam and Bierema remind us that adult education is a human activity that reaches back thousands of years and is recorded in many cultures [10: 44]. For example, within the Western tradition, we may refer back to Plato’s Academy, Aristotle’s Lyceum, and the teaching methods of the early Christian

Church beginning with those of Jesus. In Asian traditions, the Buddha and Confucius stand as prime examples of adult educators in their time. However, it was not until the 20th century that adult educators began to question what set adult education apart from the education of younger learners, and whether or not the distinction existed and needed to be defined. Following in the footsteps of such adult educational theorists as Eduard C. Lindeman and John Dewey, Malcolm Knowles spent a lifetime dedicated to refining a framework for adult education. For the purpose of this article, I will concentrate on the seminal work of Knowles and his andragogical model.

Knowles' andragogical model is posthumously expressed as a list of six assumptions, succinctly condensed below:

1. «The need to know.» In order for adults to commit their energies to an educational enterprise, they need to know why it is necessary for them to learn the proposed material.

2. «The learners' self-concept.» As an individual progresses from adolescence to adulthood, he develops a self-concept that is increasingly independent and self-directing. An adult learner has a psychological need to be treated as such.

3. «The role of the learners' experience.» Each adult learner brings with him his own unique life experiences, and these experiences have the potential to affect an adult's learning – both in a positive or negative manner.

4. «Readiness to learn.» Adults become committed to a learning task when they are prepared to take on the responsibilities of another social role.

5. «Orientation to learning.» Adults are interested in learning those things that will be of immediate use to them. Thus, adult learners are more «problem-centered» than «subject-centered» in their educational pursuits.

6. «Motivation.» Adults are more likely affected by internal rather than external motivation [9: 63-67].

Although Knowles' model has had enduring effects upon adult education theory and practice [2: 11], it must be noted that adult education practitioners and theorists do not necessarily acknowledge all of the above six assumptions, and others have reservations as to whether the newer assumptions are as valid as the original ones. For example, Merriam and Bierema [10] list the assumptions according to their date of publishing, conspicuously separating the original four assumptions (Assumptions #2,3,4,5 above, in Knowles, 1980 [6]) from the other two which had been added in subsequent works (Assumption #6 in Knowles, 1984 [7]; Assumption #1 in Knowles, 1989 [8]). Furthermore, they comment that the assumptions are repetitive in their content, hinting that they could be consolidated into a smaller number.

In my earlier attempts to relate Knowles' andragogical model to current adult ESL/EFL research and my own teaching practices, I had initially concluded that the six assumptions as listed above may be consolidated into a more manageable number as well. Upon reflection, however, it appears that the reported redundancy amongst the assumptions is not a weakness but a subtle strength. The interconnectedness of the assumptions is purposeful, and the effect provokes inquiry upon one's own professional practice as an adult educator. Knowles' model has become foundational to the field of adult education due to its ability to elicit reflection and interpretation rather than simply laying out an uncompromising framework for all to follow. Additionally, the model may help the adult educator come to a deeper understanding of his students' needs and how best to serve their particular educational interests. By extension, Knowles' andragogical model may be used as a foundational tool to generate andragogical frameworks that are context-specific, including the adult language classroom.

4. A Personal Framework for Adult Language Learning. Williams and Burden call upon all adult instructors to be «reflective practitioners» and take the time to question the assumptions, beliefs, and values that drive one's teaching practice [13: 55]. Since there is yet no unified theory of adult education, let alone a foundational framework for adult language instruction in which to rely upon as a standard, it is the responsibility of each adult educator to consider how best to serve their adult learners in their particular context. We, as adult educators, need to take it upon ourselves to identify and articulate our own unique (yet enlightened) philosophical stance on the matter [12: 19]. This has been my intention with this short article, and I can briefly offer my own set of assumptions that currently drive my own professional practice as an adult ESL/EFL instructor. These assumptions, inspired by Knowles' aforementioned framework are a result of reflection upon my experience as both a language instructor as well as a student of applied linguistics and the philosophy of adult education:

(1) Adult learners are distinct from younger learners, and as adult educators, we must appreciate that when we stand before a classroom, we are an adult among peers.

(2) Adult language learners (ALLs) are put at a significant disadvantage due to the nature of their object of learning. The inability to express satisfactorily their personality and ideas in the target language causes varying degrees of stress to which instructors must be sensitive.

(3) ALL instructors must cultivate a safe environment for learning that includes empathy, mutual respect, encouragement, and support. The goal of every instructor should be to build a 'community of learners' in the classroom.

(4) ALLs require instruction that is relevant to their communicative goals beyond the classroom. ALL instructors must devise instruction that incorporates choice, appropriate degrees of self-direction, and opportunities to practice with authentic materials and language.

(5) ALLs derive internal motivation from meaningful learning activities that they perceive as beneficial to attaining their learning goals. ALL instructors must help ALLs recognize that they can and are learning something meaningful.

(6) ALLs require the opportunity to go 'beyond the language' to discuss and explore those issues that affect their feelings and learning process.

5. Conclusion. These assumptions currently lead my practice as an adult language instructor, and they will undoubtedly be revised, rewritten, and amended over time. It is a work in progress that may never be finished, but that does not mean that the efforts are in vain. The point of this endeavor is the process of attempting it, and the concentration and reflection that it requires. I welcome (and even challenge) all adult educators to consider a similar exercise. You may be surprised where the journey may take you.

REFERENCES

1. **Carter S.J., & Henrichsen L.E. (2015).** Addressing reticence: The challenge of engaging reluctant adult ESL students. *Journal of Adult Education*, 44(2), 15-20.

2. **Cranton P. (2012).** Planning instruction for adult learners. Toronto: Wall & Emerson.

3. **Finn H.B. (2015).** A need to be needed: The intersection between emotions, apprenticeship, and student participation in an adult ESL

literacy classroom. *Journal of Research & Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary & Basic Education*, 4(1), 36-47.

4. **Glowacki-Dudka M. & Helvie-Mason L.B. (2011).** Adult education at the margins: A literature review. In Merriam, S. B., & Grace, A.P. (Eds.), *The Jossey-Bass reader on contemporary issues in adult education* (pp. 56-66). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

5. **Hilleson M. (1996).** «I want to talk with them, but I don't want them to hear»: An introspective study of second language anxiety in an English-medium school. In Bailey, K. M., & Nunan, D. (Eds.) *Voices from the language classroom: Qualitative research in second language education* (pp. 248-275). New York: Cambridge University Press.
6. **Knowles M.S. (1980).** *The modern practice of adult education: from pedagogy to andragogy*. Chicago: Follet Pub. Co.
7. **Knowles M.S. (1984).** *Andragogy in action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
8. **Knowles M.S. (1989).** *The making of an adult educator: An autobiographical journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
9. **Knowles M.S., Holton E.F., Swanson R.A. (2012).** *The adult learner*. Retrieved from <http://www.ebilib.com>.
10. **Merriam S.B. & Bierema L.L. (2013).** *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
11. **Orem R.A. (2001).** English as a second language in adult education. In Wilson, A. L., & Hayes, E. (2000). *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 438-463). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
12. **Spencer B. & Lange E. (2014).** *The purposes of adult education: An introduction (3rd ed.)*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing Inc.
13. **Williams M. & Burden R.L. (1997).** *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
14. **Wlodkowski R.J. (1999).** *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
15. **Wu, Wu R. & Le V.T. (2014).** Challenges of adults in learning English as a second language: Focus on adult education in China. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 5(5), 1132-1138. doi:10.4304/jltr.5.5.1132-1138

Камерон Д. Авторская концепция обучения языку взрослых. В статье говорится об отсутствии единой системы взглядов на организацию образования взрослых, в частности в области изучения и преподавания иностранных языков. Несмотря на настоящее положение дел в области образования и обучения языкам взрослых, можно разработать контекстно-ориентированную систему для различных образовательных потребностей взрослых. В статье сначала показывается различие между младшими учащимися и взрослыми учащимися, а затем в качестве основы для формулирования контекстно-ориентированной системы обучения взрослых языкам предлагаются шесть постулатов теории Малькольма Ноулза об обучении взрослых. Исходя из шести положений Ноулза, автор формулирует собственную концепцию обучения взрослых, специфичную для обучения языкам. Эта структура является результатом прошлого профессионального опыта автора и его знаний в области прикладной лингвистики и теории образования взрослых.

АНГЛИЙСКИЙ КАК ВТОРОЙ ЯЗЫК; ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ДЛЯ ВЗРОСЛЫХ; ИЗУЧАЮЩИЙ ЯЗЫК ВЗРОСЛЫЙ; АНДРАГОГИКА; ТЕОРИЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ВЗРОСЛЫХ МАЛЬКОЛЬМА НОУЛЗА

Ссылка при цитировании: Камерон Д. Авторская концепция обучения языку взрослых // Вопросы методики преподавания в вузе. 2020. Т. 9. № 32. С. 69–73. DOI: 10.18720/HUM/ISSN 2227-8591.32.06