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Andragogy and Classic Grounded Theory: Hidden Connections

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The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: It is valuable to glean significance from the way in which two seemingly diverse elements are connected with one another. In this research, this author critically compares and analyzes seemingly dissimilar elements in education—the theory of andragogy and the research design of classic grounded theory—in order to elucidate inherent parallels. As relationships and similarities made from heretofore unknown connections are uncovered, new perspectives develop. These new viewpoints, in turn, lead to the creation of new knowledge—one important objective of scholarly research. By examining several commonalities in andragogy and classic grounded theory, educational scholars, educators, and novice researchers will gain a more nuanced understanding of these concepts and of the complex world of education. Additionally, with this increased sensitivity, scholars would be able to ascertain additional nuances thereby bridging a gap, so to speak, between the two practices.

Study Design: Comparative analysis.

Conclusion: Connections discovered in this paper will help future researchers create new knowledge—the ultimate goal of scholarship.

Keywords: Andragogy; classic grounded theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In educational research, no doubt as in other fields of study, numerous terms exist—theory, model, method, design, methodology, and so on—to describe different elements, behavioral principles, or components. Often, terms might not be interchangeable. For example, a researcher cannot use the terms theory and methodology interchangeably. However, sometimes terms may be interchanged with one another without a substantial change in meaning [1]. For example, depending on the context, it might be acceptable to interchange the terms theory and model [1] or design and method without confusion of meaning.

Additionally, it is sometimes possible and even valuable to glean significance from the way in which two seemingly diverse elements are connected with one another. In this research, this author critically compares and analyzes seemingly dissimilar elements in education in order to elucidate inherent parallels. As relationships and similarities made from heretofore unknown connections are uncovered, new perspectives develop. These new viewpoints, in turn, lead to the creation of new knowledge—one important objective of scholarly research.

2. ANDRAGOGY

Though the term andragogy is nearly 200 years old—its first use was by Alexander Kapp in 1833 [2,3]—it was not until the mid-to-late 20th century [2,4,5] with Malcom Knowles when the term synonymously meant an adult learning theory [6,7], or “model of assumptions” [1 p. 43] that adults use to learn. In a general sense, it is an environment in which a learner directs him- or herself [8,2] in knowledge acquisition rather than an educator presenting all the information. Thus, the relationship between the adult student and the educator is a mentorship [2]. However, andragogy is a more nuanced environment than a self-directed user or someone being coached [9] in a particular topic.

According to Knowles [10], the andragogic paradigm of learning consists of several tenets students must practice and of which they must be aware: Adult learners must (a) be self-directed, (b) realize that their life experiences are important and valuable, (c) be ready to learn because of some aspect in their lives, (d) want to engage in real-world learning, and, (e) be motivated and ready to do the required work.

Additionally, learners need to be accustomed to learning in such an environment as it is very different from the traditional pedagogic model found in classrooms and online environments. These concepts are presented in turn in this section of the paper.

2.1 Be Self-Directed

In an androgogic environment, learning is student-centered [11]; It is up to the learner to determine what and how he or she learns and in what order the material is mastered. Additionally, learners must be self-reliant and confident in their investigatory skills to get the needed information. But, it isn't just being able to get the material that is necessary. According to Habibi, a learner needs to be “able and interested in accepting responsibility for his or her own learning” [12:92].

Having self-efficacy and being self-directed does not mean learning in isolation, however. Being self-directed means knowing where to get the answer to a problem; sometimes, the answer—especially in a real-world context where interdependencies exist—is with a peer, a group of learners [13], or with the course facilitator [4].

2.2 Life Experiences Are Important

Life experiences are highly valuable to a student in an androgogic environment. These previously acquired skills and knowledge help the learner form connections with the new information. Such connections aid in knowledge acquisition [14].

2.3 Be Ready to Learn Because of Some Aspect in Their Lives and be Motivated

Students are ready to learn because of some external or internal influence in their lives. Such influences could be gaining a job, the prospect of a promotion, or a longstanding desire to learn French and see Paris.

For an adult learner to be engaged in a task and sufficiently motivated to do it, a high level of meaningfulness must exist [15]. If a task has little or no meaning to the learner, he or she will not be fully engaged and thus not be ready to learn in the coached [9], andragogic environment. With increased motivation, the learner will achieve more than with minimal motivation [15]. Likewise, for something to be meaningful, an emotional connection with the subject or task must exist [15]. One way to achieve meaningfulness and a connection with the issue or assignment is to

have the adult learner understand why something is important to him or her.

The other side, so to speak, of motivation is encouragement; learners must be encouraged learn and to want to learn in a warm, inviting environment established by the facilitator through a caring, mutual respect, and shared trust [16]. Though such an environment is needed in all educational settings—online or face-to-face—it is even more important in an andragogic environment.

2.4 Want to Engage in Real-World Learning

In this type of educational environment, learners are adults. As such, their needs are different from traditional learners. These adult learners are more interested in real-world, practical solutions to problems than abstract, textbook answers that may not be useful in the real world. Since a practical (i.e., real-world) solution is more valued than a theoretical one, the mnemonic idea of “P over T” (or “P/T”) could be used to show such a relationship in this environment.

2.5 Be Accustomed to Learning in Such an Environment

In order for learners to thrive in an andragogic environment, they must have had previous experience in such a situation. Additionally, they must be (somewhat) comfortable learning in such an educational situation. Not to have such an experience could certainly result in extreme frustration and dissatisfaction with the course.

Though the aforementioned elements are seemingly isolated, in reality, each plays an important, highly interconnected role [15] in an androgogic environment. With one or more foundational elements missing, just as with Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs [17], things will fail [15].

Clearly, an androgogic environment is complex [15]. In examining each of the aforementioned tenets, it is not difficult to see that the central component is meaningfulness. As Chametzky [15] stated, “Such an intertwined relationship is strengthened by meaningfulness. This statement is logical because without motivation, a person may not have the motivation or desire to engage in doing a task. Without meaningfulness and commitment, a person is not sufficiently motivated to engage with the coursework. And

without engagement, educational growth cannot occur” [15;76].

3. CLASSIC GROUNDED THEORY

In this section of the paper, this researcher will discuss what classic grounded theory is and then will present an overview of its data analysis process. With the outline of this procedure, the reader will gain useful insights into the research design that will, in turn, help elucidate heretofore hidden connections with the theory of andragogy.

Classic grounded theory is a research design that researchers use when they wish to develop a theory to explain why people behave as they do [18,19]. Simply and succinctly stated, classic grounded theory is “the discovery of theory from data” [20;1]. It is important, before this discussion ensues, to mention that this researcher will only be speaking about classic grounded theory [20] rather than any of the “remodeled” [21;9] types of grounded theory designs that have subsequently developed.

Classic grounded theory is a rather challenging research design—despite what Glaser [22] said—because of its repetitive and non-sequential nature [22;18;23]. Though the process of analysis is well documented [20;18;19;22], as a researcher analyzes his or her data, one or more of the non-linear, iterative steps might need to be done out-of-order. Thus, because of these possible modifications and the imprecise nature of the classic grounded theory design, novice researchers who use this method are often frustrated. Their frustration is often increased because of the inherent “epistemological anarchy” [24;43], though confusion may be educationally valuable [18;25]. It is challenging for novice researchers to master this research design because they do not realize that it requires experience. Yet, in spite of this seeming complexity, the process of doing a classic grounded theory study is highly rigorous and easily understandable.

As soon as a researcher begins gathering data, his or her detailed analysis starts. As the researcher studies the data, he or she asks him or herself several questions: What is the main concern of the participant? “What is this data a study of” [18;57]? And, “what is actually happening in the data” [18;57]? The purpose of these questions is to help the scholar stay focused in the data rather than develop preconceptions about the data.

In classic grounded theory, analysis takes the form of words or short phrases (called codes) that explain what is going on in the data. As codes are constantly compared [26] with one another, connections develop [19;27] through the process of writing notes (called memos). “Memos are the conscious manifestation of the preconscious thought” [28;13] [22]. As the codes and comparisons become increasingly conceptual, categories (and properties of those categories) emerge.

During this early stage of data analysis, because the researcher does not yet know what the single overriding concept (called a core variable or category), he or she codes all data. For this reason, the term for this type of analysis is open coding.

Eventually, as categories are compared with one another, an overriding concept develops. This concept answers the question of how participants resolve their main concern [29]. At this point, when the researcher discovers the core variable, coding is selectively done only for the core concept in order to achieve data saturation. This type of coding is called selective coding.

Throughout the information gathering process, a researcher using the classic grounded theory research design utilizes the data in a very specific manner. The codes, grounded in data, direct and influence the researcher as to “what [additional] data to obtain and where to get it” [29;104] [18]. This guidance is referred to as theoretical sampling [20].

After the core variable and resulting categories and properties have been saturated, the scholar may wish to connect all the heretofore isolated, perhaps abstract, categories together with concepts that are highly conceptual. These theoretical codes, though not required, help the researcher tie the fractured elements [24] [30] together and explain the connections [18] “between hypotheses derived through open and selective coding” [30;108].

The aforementioned discussion is, admittedly, highly simplified. It is not easy to present the complexity of classic grounded theory solely in a textual format (though scholars [31,30] have tried). However, with a rudimentary understanding of the non-linear, iterative, complex data analysis that occurs in the research design, it is time to turn our attention to the relationship between andragogy and classic grounded theory.

4. THE COMPARISON

It is now time to discuss the relationship between the theory (or suppositions [1]) of andragogy and the classic grounded theory research design. I will start with a personal observation (as unscientific as that might be) from my experiences of working with doctoral students who have studied different research methods and designs: similarities exist among research designs. I am not at all stating or implying that one research design is another. As the expression goes, the devil is in the detail.

For example, when a researcher conducts a case study, it is possible to use pattern matching [32] to explain what is happening in the data. Such iteration is reminiscent of what is done in grounded theory. Or, it is possible to constantly compare [26] and conceptualize the themes found in a case study, but stop short of calling them categories or a core variable (as in grounded theory). In grounded theory, it is important to understand what is going on—the behaviors of participants as they address and deal with their main concerns—much the same way as an ethnographer studies an environment from an emic perspective [33;34]. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that methodological overlapping exists. However, certain commonalities have not yet been uncovered.

In this part of the paper, therefore, I will uncover some heretofore undiscovered parallels between andragogy and classic grounded theory. These commonalities are as follows: (a) having direction and being (self-) directed, and (b) having experience and real-worldness (sic). These concepts do not exist in isolation; each idea is intricately linked to others. By examining each of these parallels, educational scholars, educators, and novice researchers will gain a more nuanced understanding of these concepts and of the complex world of education. Each component will be discussed in turn.

4.1 Having direction and being (self-) Directed

The concepts of having direction and being (self) directed may seem, at the outset, to be polar opposites: One seems internally driven while the other externally driven. Yet, each is the yin to the other's yang; Individually, they are incomplete but together they form a complete unit. If a person has direction, then he or she is able to be at least somewhat (self-)directed. In other words,

if an external force exists to guide the person, and he or she wants to accomplish a given task, it will be successfully completed. If either having direction or being (self-)directed is absent, then the final objective becomes increasingly difficult to accomplish.

4.1.1 Andragogy

In an andragogic environment, it is vital that a learner is self-directed and ask questions in order to acquire the necessary knowledge. Active learning is vital in this environment. Additionally, he or she needs to be confident that he or she can reach the end goal. One way to achieve this confidence is through motivation. Without a strong sense of internal or external motivation, there is little possibility for a learner to want to learn. While not in the foreground, internal or external motivation (or both) is a driving force in being (self-)directed.

When a person is self-directed, as he or she makes progress in the given task, a cyclic process takes place. The more he or she progresses, the more motivation he or she has. With increased motivation comes a sense of increased self-directedness. This increase in self-directedness happens because this person feels that whatever he or she was doing must have been correct so he or she will continue to do it. With self-directedness, progress increases. The cycle repeats until the project is complete.

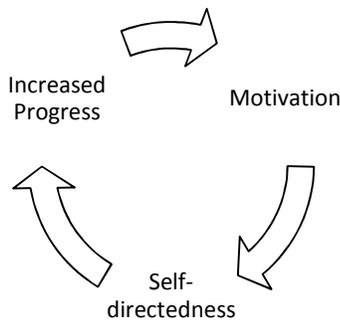


Fig. 1. Cycle in andragogy

Having direction does not mean or imply that a learner works in isolation. One important aspect of an andragogic environment is the idea of co-construction. By collaborating [35] with the course facilitator [36], a learner is able to develop his or her goals vis-à-vis the course objectives. Additionally, if a learner is insecure about a chosen topic, it would be rather valuable to discuss those issues with the course facilitator.

4.1.2 Classic grounded theory

With classic grounded theory, a researcher also needs to be self-directed. Allow me to explain this statement that seemingly validates preconception and thus goes against the tenets of classic grounded theory. The researcher needs to know the research design well enough to adhere to Glaser’s (2012) aphorism of having “trust in the method” [37;114]. Additionally, as he or she learns to write (and becomes comfortable writing) memos, he or she “will no doubt find his own useful aspects of memoing as he pursues his personal style. This will help his growth in trusting his own personal creativity” [38;8]. This development of individuality allows the researcher to be and become increasingly (self-) directed as well as comfortable enough to be directed by the data. Finally, a researcher needs to be self-directed (aided by some internal or external motivational force) to achieve his or her desired end result (either a published article or a successfully completed doctoral dissertation).

Having direction is also necessary with respect to the research design. If a researcher is not theoretically sensitive and does not understand where to gather additional data in light of previously gathered information, problems will ensue. Because each classic grounded theory study is different, in terms of data and where a researcher finds it, it is vital that he or she not have any preconceptions [18,22] when trying to be theoretically sensitive. If a researcher is influenced by something other than the data, the results will be insignificant, forced data and will not be part of a classic grounded theory study.

A researcher gains direction from the data and his or her memos. It is through the comparing of codes and writing memos that the researcher is able to ask him or herself about the main concerns of participants and what is happening in the data [18]. Only with reflection on these issues could he or she have possible direction for additional inquiry.

4.2 Experience

Experience plays vital but somewhat different roles in the areas of androgogy and classic grounded theory. The term experience is used, not in the Buberian sense where interaction is between two people or between a person and an object [39], but rather in the everyday sense of the life occurrences and opportunities that a person has Before the discussion of what

experience means in each of the two areas, it is valuable to understand the two types of experience that exist: Self-focused and other-focused [40].

Self-focused experience is what a person has done in his or her life; It is the incidences upon which he or she draws throughout life. A good example of self-focused is playing with fire. Pyromaniacs notwithstanding, all people learned, after being burned by touching fire as children, not to play with it.

An other-focused experience is what another person has faced and how that knowledge might be valuable to someone else. Parents of young children demonstrate this idea to their children when they talk about their lives. The objective is to have the children learn and hopefully assimilate the other-focused experiences of their parents as their own. A different type of other-focused experience exists when someone uses a common, everyday experience and relates it to something that is not common. Fearful living in a war-torn country is not an experience many people have. However, if someone has had that experience, he or she might offer a common analogy of being in a haunted house for Halloween where the visitor does not know what will be coming. In this part of the paper, I will discuss how each type of experience and how both manifest themselves in andragogy and classic grounded theory.

4.3 Andragogy

An important concept in andragogy is the experience that a person brings to his or her current learning situation. In this environment, knowledge obtained from prior experience [41] forms a link [15,42] with new information. Such a connection allows the learner to acquire and assimilate the new knowledge more easily.

Since a person's individual experience is unique, it stands to reason that such familiarity is self-directed. The experience of the facilitator or other students is potentially irrelevant to the adult learner as it is he or she who needs to have those connections to previously acquired information. I say potentially because it is possible that other-directed experiences could be valuable to help a learner make connections between new information and similar past experiences. For example, imagine a scenario where a course deals with gravity and feelings of being out of control. A student believes that he or she has no previous experience on which to

draw. A facilitator might explain that while the student might never have been in an aircraft that has precipitously dropped from the sky, it is reasonable that he or she has been on a roller coaster making a steep drop. In both situations, gravity and feeling out of control are common experiences.

4.4 Classic Grounded Theory

Initially, it is reasonable to think that experience might not exist in classic grounded theory because it is nothing like what is taught in (qualitative) methodology research courses. As such, the researcher feels understandable anxiety. Learning (and by extension doing) classic grounded theory requires experience. However, experience is important and manifests itself in a different manner from the way it does in an andragogic environment. With this research design, a more nuanced, bidirectional perspective of experience exists. Depending on what aspect of research is taking place, experience could be either self-directed or other-directed. Each viewpoint will be discussed in turn.

Self-directed experience comes into play during the data analysis stage. A researcher can draw on his or her past experiences even if they are outside the substantive area of the study [19]. Further, by reading in many different areas [18,19], the researcher develops a heightened sensitivity as coding takes place and as categories become saturated. Additionally, if a researcher is well-versed in reading, he or she will be able to develop "multifaceted variables" [29;83] more easily. However, the researcher is admonished from using the self-focused experience to say, "Oh, I know what is going on in the data" and then pigeonhole or force codes into specific categories even if they do not belong there. To do so would be preconception and data manipulation.

Self-directed experience also comes into play when the researcher experiences what he or she has read about in the classic grounded theory literature: Namely, a "drugless trip" [18;24] or a "drugless high" [43;149]. While he or she may have a conceptual understanding about what that experience might be like, until he or she experiences the exhilaration of coding, memoing, and finding what were previously hidden connections, the researcher will not fully understand the concept. When such a feeling does happen, he or she will feel as if he or she is running on a treadmill and not able to stop; The

analysis of the data causes a euphoria that must be experienced.

In classic grounded theory, when a researcher remains open to whatever is in the data, he or she demonstrates the idea of other-directedness. One way to understand other-directed experience is via the main concerns of participants. When a researcher asks a grand tour question [44], it is up to the participant to speak about whatever is important to him or her—even if it is not what the researcher anticipates. It is vital that the researcher respect that what is important to the participants is grounded in real experiences and real-world information.

It is not difficult to see that things are considerably more complex in a classic grounded theory environment than in an andragogic one. The concept of experience in a classic grounded theory design is clearly bidirectional. In fact, to acknowledge anything else discounts and negates what a researcher attempts to accomplish in his or her study. Indeed, some researchers [28,18,19,20,22,45] might rightfully argue that discounting participants' experiences is tantamount to not conducting a classic grounded theory study.

5. WHAT DOES ALL THIS INFORMATION MEAN?

Substantial time has been spent discussing the nuanced ideas of (a) having direction and being (self-) directed, and (b) experience and real-worldness in an andragogic environment and within the classic grounded theory research design. The ideas of self- or other directedness and experience might seem nebulous for some researchers. It is, after all, the antithesis of positivist thinking in which many researchers (including Glaser, in fact) were trained. Yet, these ideas are important. It is now time to discuss what these new perspectives might mean for researchers, students, and educational scholars.

A well-known pronouncement among researchers using the classic grounded theory design is that everything and anything may be used as data [43]. Given the aphorism that "all is data" [43:1], it is reasonable to say that observations are possible sources of data in classic grounded theory studies. With observations—as with verbal interviews—what is seen or said can be highly valuable. It is equally

plausible that what is not explicitly said is important, too.

Allow me a moment to elaborate on this point. Glaser spent significant time in Paris at the University of Paris, in the 1950s [46]. As such, he knew about French literature and film. One popular French novelist and, to a lesser degree, film maker during that time was Marguerite Duras. It is reasonable to presume that at the University of Paris, because Glaser was trained in writing textual analyses, he read or at least heard of Duras.

Reminiscent of Duras' comment that "C'est par la manque qu'on dit la chose" [Translation: It is through the absence of something that one says the thing.] [47], Glaser (1998) stated, "to expect something that is not said or pointedly left unsaid is to accept it as probably not important" [22:48]. The italics of the word "probably" (present in the original text) allows a researcher open to the real possibility that what is not said or seen can be as valuable as what people are not doing or saying; It all holds significance [47].

Thus, the invisibility and importance of having direction, self-direction, experience, and real-worldness are noteworthy regardless of the milieu in which it occurs. As an experienced or notice researcher, everything is valuable. By being open to these new, and heretofore hidden perspectives, the scholar opens him or herself to discovery. Such discovery is the purpose of classic grounded theory and of an andragogic learning environment.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Important implications of the aforementioned analysis exist for future researchers. With the heretofore unstudied subtleties and nexus of andragogy and classic grounded theory, scholars can better understand crucial nuances in the theory and research design. Additionally, with this increased sensitivity, scholars interested in andragogy or classic grounded theory would be able to ascertain additional nuances thereby bridging a gap, so to speak, between the two practices. These new bridges would, in turn, lead to new knowledge—the ultimate goal of scholarship.

7. CONCLUSION

On the surface, numerous differences exist between andragogy and classic grounded theory. By deconstructing the ideas of direction and experience, this researcher was able to uncover

nuanced relationships that may be highly valuable to educational researchers and students of andragogy and of classic grounded theory design. Indeed, this exercise of deconstruction could be valuable to any scholar—educational or not—interested in either or both of these areas.

By presenting these new perspectives and insights, with respect to Roland Barthes, a famous 20th century French philosopher and theorist, this researcher has unveiled and discovered (Barthes, as cited in [48;185] an important bridge between two seemingly disparate concepts in education. With the veil pulled away, it is now possible to make additional connections and discover further nuanced relationships.

If researchers examine the purposes of andragogy and classic grounded theory, it is not difficult to see that learning and discovery are fundamental. With these essential tenets, this researcher has demonstrated that parallels, connections, and similarities exist between a theory and a research design. New and nuanced insights that have come to light. Discoveries have been made.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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