Chapter 4
Assessing Online Learning Pedagogically and Andragogically

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ABSTRACT

Online learning occurs among traditional age students as well as among non-traditional age students. Because traditional age students learn differently from non-traditional age students, especially in the virtual environment, educators are required to employ either pedagogical or andragogical assessment methods accordingly. Using pedagogical assessment methods may not work for non-traditional age learners. Likewise, trying to apply andragogical methods to traditional age students may not work for younger learners. Available assessment methods such as objectively-scored tests, subjectively-rated tests and criterion referenced tests will be discussed as well as a new form of assessment—learner self-evaluation. To use the proper tests to assess online learning, educators are required to possess both pedagogical and andragogical knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The primary reason we say that we know more about how children learn than about how adults learn is that pedagogy (the art and science of teaching children) preceded andragogy (i.e., the art and science of helping adults learn, as defined by the father of adult education, Malcolm Knowles). Why do teachers need to know how learners, whether children or adults, learn? It is commonly argued that if teachers don’t know how learners learn, how can we expect teachers to access learning.

Once learning is successfully assessed, teachers can identify the gap between learners’ present
Assessing Online Learning Pedagogically and Andragogically

level of knowledge and the desired level. In other words, a gap is successfully identified so that teachers know exactly how to teach learners and what to help learners learn in order to close that gap. Without identifying that gap, instruction on the part of teachers will be aimless.

Learning can be categorized as organized learning and unorganized learning. Organized learning can occur in the traditional classroom or a traditional lab or even on the Internet. Likewise, unorganized learning can occur in the same aforementioned places. Because of the wide utilization of the Internet, learning can occur anywhere, anytime in today’s so called information age. It is no exaggeration to claim that nearly every course imaginable is available via the Blackboard program or WebCT program in North America. Although some instructors may not use cutting edge technology to deliver their courses, most universities choose to make their courses available online in order to provide the needed convenience and flexibility desired by learners. While education is being delivered electronically, instructors have common concerns, for instance, how do we teachers assess learning?

Can we use the same assessment and evaluation methods to assess learning of children and adults? Are there different assessment and evaluation methods that teachers can follow when teaching primarily adult learners? Because of the web 2.0 technologies and economic downturn in the United States of America, 47% of students are returning students (adult learners who have worked for some time and now have decided to retool their knowledge by attending universities) on campuses. We are experiencing what we call the graying of American campuses. Since these returning students may know how to assess their own learning, what would be the role of faculty members who help them learn especially in an online environment? More than likely instructors would assess learning using the traditional assessment and evaluation methods in their repertoire. We have to understand there are other innovative, andragogical assessment and evaluation methods that we can use when assessing adult learning. It is true that we have to assess learning pedagogically when assessing learning on the part of children. However, if we use the same assessment and evaluation methods to assess learning on the part of adult learners, we will more than likely frustrate adult learners who may already know how to assess their own learning.

According to Rogers (1951, 1961, 1969), adult learners know exactly how to assess their own learning and whether learning has illuminated any areas of confusion. Based on this school of thought, Knowles (1970) began to encourage “self-evaluation” in the field of adult education. Other prominent scholars such as Patricia Cranton also encouraged “self-evaluation” in the field of adult education. Can this method be applied to assessing learning on the part of children? It will all depend on the maturity level of children. If we turn to written references for the answer, most books address the assessment of learning pedagogically. When it comes to assessing learning online, most instructors would utilize the same pedagogical assessment and evaluation methods, leaving adult learners wondering why they have been treated as traditional age learners.

Some reasons why instructors are so dependent on pedagogical assessment and evaluation methods can be as follows:

1. Instructors have never heard of andragogical assessment and evaluation methods.
2. Instructors are accustomed to using pedagogical assessment and evaluation methods.
3. Instructors may not believe in the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy.
4. Instructors may assume that all learners, whether young or old, acquire knowledge the same way.
5. Instructors may believe that learners learn the same way whether in an online learning environment or in the traditional classroom setting.