# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH PARADIGM SHIFT FROM PEDAGOGY TO ANDRAGOGY

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## Abstract

*Academic excellence refers to the growth of an individual with regard to his or her academic or intellectual skill. Learners from higher education form the workforce of the nation, and hence would need to be equipped with the skills relevant to the felt needs of the society. However, there exists a large skill gap between what the employers look for in potential employees and the skills which higher education cultivates in the learners. This gap must be bridged, and the roadmap may be through changing the approach to curriculum transaction in higher education. Learners in higher education are adult learners, and learn most effectively when learning is self directed, stems from their own experience and is relevant to their life. Hence, a shift from pedagogy to andragogy might lead to more effective learning outcomes. This paper explores this paradigm shift from pedagogy to andragogy in higher education.*

***Keywords****: Higher education, Andragogy.*

In 1859, Charles Darwin wrote that evolution requires one to adapt or die. Those who don't adapt become extinct. To stay competitive and make timely decisions one must evolve, adapt and learn. We have moved rapidly from Information age to the Knowledge age. Today, it is not technology that we lack. We must learn to make optimal use of technology to capitalize on the brain power. Faced with a bombardment of information, we must learn how to organize information so we can retrieve it again, and grasp new concepts that will make a positive difference in life. Individuals with the *best* and the *least* (not necessarily the most) information will ultimately gain and maintain the advantage. We must separate the nice-to-know from the need-to-know. If we want to achieve academic excellence in higher education, we must focus on the learner and his/her needs in the context of the educator, the content and the social set up where the learning will be ultimately put to use.

Academic excellence refers to the growth of an individual with regard to his or her academic or intellectual skill. Academic excellence means sustaining an environment in which student learning is fostered inside and out of the classroom through a pervasive atmosphere of high

expectations leading to student mastery of a significant body of general and specialized knowledge; the ability to find, analyze and effectively use relevant information; and the development and employment of fundamental academic skills (reading, writing, critical thinking problem-solving) in all areas of college life, so that the joy of learning permeates every aspect of campus culture.

It is a ironical that though Indians are considered to be extremely talented academically and found to excel in academics abroad, the system of education in India is sorely criticized, in India and leaves much to be desired. There are many reasons and explanations for this phenomenon. One of these could be the adoption of totally teacher centered methods of teaching and evaluation, right from the time the child enters school, till he/she completes his professional education. Most of the learning in an educational setting is passive, and assessment tests only the ability to recall the rote memorized information. This continues to higher education as well. It is the experience of the author that when asked "How much of what you learnt in your course are you actually using in your job?" to young professional working in different fields, who have undergone long years of professional training, the answer is a resounding "Very little." Hence, to ensure academic excellence in higher education, a shift from Pedagogy to Andragogy is much desired. A shift of orientation to focusing on the use of the principles of adult learning, could pave the way for achieving academic excellence in higher education.

*Pedagogy* (pèd-e-go´jê) literally means the art and science of educating children and often is used as a synonym for teaching. More accurately, pedagogy embodies *teacher-focused education*. In the pedagogic model, teachers assume responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, and when it will be learned. Teachers direct learning.

In an attempt to formulate a comprehensive adult learning theory, Malcolm Knowles, in 1973, published the book The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species. Building on the earlier work of Lindeman, Knowles asserted that adults require certain conditions to learn. He borrowed the term andragogy (and-rè-go´jê) to define and explain the conditions.

**Andragogy**, initially defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn," has taken on a broader meaning since Knowles' first edition. The term currently defines an alternative to pedagogy and refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages.

The andragogic model asserts that five issues be considered and addressed in formal learning. They include (1) letting learners know why something is important to learn, (2) showing

learners how to direct themselves through information, and (3) relating the topic to the learners' experiences. In addition, (4) people will not learn until they are ready and motivated to learn. Often this (5) requires helping them overcome inhibitions, behaviors, and beliefs about learning.

According to Jonathan Green, the differences between andragogy and pedagogy are:

| | **Andragogy** | **Pedagogy** |
|---|---|---|
| *Demands of learning* | Learner must balance life responsibilities with the demands of learning. | Learner can devote more time to the demands of learning because responsibilities are minimal. |
| *Role of instructor* | Learners are autonomous and self directed. Teachers guide the learners to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. | Learners rely on the instructor to direct the learning. Fact based lecturing is often the mode of knowledge transmission. |
| *Life experiences* | Learners have a tremendous amount of life experiences. They need to connect the learning to their knowledge base. They must recognize the value of the learning. | Learners are building a knowledge base and must be shown how their life experiences connect with the present learning. |
| *Purpose for learning* | Learners are goal oriented and know for what purpose they are learning new information | Learners often see no reason for taking a particular course. They just know they have to learn the information. |
| *Permanence of learning* | Learning is self-initiated and tends to last a long time. | Learning is compulsory and tends to disappear shortly after instruction. |

Thus, adult learning differs greatly from the way children learn. Four keys to adult learning are:

- Let adults direct themselves in the instructional process
- Integrate new information with previous experiences
- Make sure the information is relevant
- Make sure the information is readily useable for the learner

According to Ron and Susan Zemke, a variety of sources provides us with a body of fairly reliable knowledge about adult learning. This knowledge might be divided into three basic divisions: things we know about adult learners and their motivation, things we know about designing curriculum for adults, and things we know about working with adults in the classroom.

A) **Motivation to Learn:**

- Adults who are motivated to seek out a learning experience do so primarily because they have a use for the knowledge or skill being sought. Learning is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

- Increasing or maintaining one's sense of self-esteem and pleasure are strong secondary motivators for engaging in learning experiences.

B) **Curriculum Design:**

- Adult learners tend to prefer single concept, single-theory courses that focus heavily on the application of the concept to relevant problems.

- Adults need to be able to integrate new ideas with what they already know if they are going to keep - and use - the new information.

- Information that conflicts sharply with what is already held to be true, and thus forces a re-evaluation of the old material, is integrated more slowly.

- Information that has little "conceptual overlap" with what is already known is acquired slowly.

- Adults tend to take errors personally and are more likely to let them affect self-esteem. Therefore, they tend to apply tried-and-true solutions and take fewer risks.

C) **The Learning Environment:**

1. The learning environment must be physically and psychologically comfortable; long lectures, periods of interminable sitting and the absence of practice opportunities rate high on the irritation scale.

2. Adults have expectations, and it is critical to take time early on to clarify and articulate all expectations before getting into content. The instructor can assume responsibility only for his or her own expectations, not for those of students.

3. Adults bring a great deal of life experience into the classroom, an invaluable asset to be acknowledged, tapped and used. Adults can learn well -and much - from dialogue with respected peers.

4. The instructor has to protect minority opinion, keep disagreements civil and unheated, make connections between various opinions and ideas, and keep reminding the group of the variety of potential solutions to the problem.

Thus, adults want their learning to be problem-oriented, personalized and accepting of their need for self-direction and personal responsibility. Hence, for adult learning to

succeed, we must unlearn our teacher-reliance. This can be done by adopting the principles of active learning .

Teachers in Higher education need to be guided to adopt a meaningful set of active learning strategies, to ensure engagement of the learners in learning. The model by L. Dee Fink below offers a way of conceptualizing the learning process in a way that may assist teachers in identifying meaningful forms of active learning.

**A Model of Active Learning**
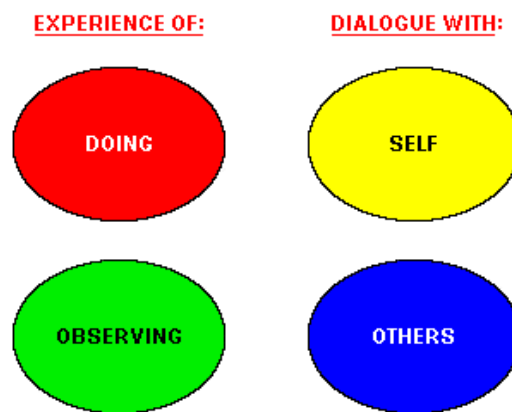


**Explanation of the Components**

This model suggests that all learning activities involve some kind of experience or some kind of dialogue. The two main kinds of dialogue are "Dialogue with Self" and "Dialogue with Others." The two main kinds of experience are "Observing" and "Doing."

**Dialogue with Self:**

This is what happens when a learner thinks reflectively about a topic, i.e., they ask themselves what they think or should think, what they feel about the topic, etc. This is "thinking about my own thinking," but it addresses a broader array of questions than just cognitive concerns. A teacher can ask students, on a small scale, to keep a journal for a course, or, on a larger scale, to develop a learning portfolio. In either case, students could write about *what* they are learning, *how* they are learning, what role this knowledge or learning plays in their own life, how this makes them *feel*, etc.

**Dialogue with Others:**

This can and does come in many forms. In traditional teaching, when students read a textbook or listen to a lecture, they are "listening to" another person (teacher, book author). This can perhaps be viewed as "partial dialogue" but it is limited because there is no back-and-forth exchange. A much more dynamic and active form of dialogue occurs when a teacher creates an intense small group discussion on a topic. Sometimes teachers can also

find creative ways to involve students in dialogue situations with people other than students (e.g., practitioners, experts), either in class or outside of class. Whoever the dialogue is with, it might be done live, in writing, or by email.

**Observing:**

This occurs whenever a learner watches or listens to someone else "Doing" something that is related to what they are learning about. This might be such things as observing one's teacher do something (e.g., "This is how I critique a novel."), listening to other professionals perform (e.g., musicians), or observing the phenomena being studied (natural, social, or cultural). The act of observing may be "direct" or "vicarious." A direct observation means the learner is observing the real action, directly; a vicarious observation is observing a simulation of the real action. For example, a direct observation of poverty might be for the learner to actually go to where low income people are living and working, and spend some time observing life there. A vicarious or indirect observation of the same topic might be to watch a movie involving poor people or to read stories written by or about them.

**Doing:**

This refers to any learning activity where the learner actually does something: design a reservoir dam (engineering), conduct a high school band (music education), design and/or conduct an experiment (natural and social sciences), critique an argument or piece of writing (the humanities), investigate local historical resources(history), make an oral presentation (communication), etc.

Again, "Doing" may be direct or vicarious. Case studies, role-playing and simulation activities offer ways of vicariously engaging students in the "Doing" process. To take one example mentioned above, if one is trying to learn how to conduct a high school band, direct "Doing" would be to actually go to a high school and direct the students there. A vicarious "Doing" for the same purpose would be to simulate this by having the student conduct a band composed of fellow college students who were acting like (i.e., role playing) high school students. Or, in business courses, doing case studies is, in essence, a simulation of the decision making process that many courses are aimed at teaching.

**Implementing This Model of Active Learning:**

**The following activities are suggested for the teacher to use the model of active learning in higher education:**

1. **Expand the kinds of learning experiences that are created.**

   The most traditional teaching consists of little more than having students read a text and listen to a lecture, a very limited and limiting form of Dialogue with Others. Consider using more dynamic forms of Dialogue with Others and the other three modes of learning. For example:

   o Create small groups of students and have them make a decision or answer a focused question periodically,

   o Find ways for students to engage in authentic dialogue with people other than fellow classmates who know something about the subject (on the web, by email, or live),

   o Have students keep a journal or build a "learning portfolio" about their own thoughts, learning, feelings, etc. Five minutes could be kept aside each, at the beginning of the session to help students reflect on what they would like to learn, and at the end of the session to reflect on the individual learning outcomes.

   o Find ways of helping students observe (directly or vicariously) the subject or action they are trying to learn, Find ways to allow students to actually do (directly, or vicariously with case studies, simulation or role play) that which they need to learn to do.

   o Students could be encouraged to create blogs online, where they record their learning experiences and also interact with peers and teachers about the same.

All these activities could be designed as small group or individual activities, keeping in mind the Indian scenario where large classes are a norm.

2. **Take Advantage of the "Power of Interaction."**

Each of the four modes of learning has its own value, and just using more of them should add variety and thereby be more interesting for the learner. However, when properly connected, the various learning activities can have an impact that is more than additive or cumulative; they can be **interactive** and thereby multiply the educational impact.

For example, if students write their own thoughts on a topic (Dialogue with Self) *before* they engage in small group discussion (Dialogue with Others), the group discussion should be richer and more engaging. If they can do both of these and then observe the phenomena or action (Observation), the observation should be richer and again more engaging. Then, if this is followed by having the students engage in the action itself (Doing), they will have a better sense of what they need to do and what they need to learn during doing. Finally if, after

Doing, the learners process this experience by writing about it (Dialogue with Self) and/or discussing it with others (Dialogue with Others), this will add further insight. Such a sequence of learning activities will give the teacher and learners the advantage of the Power of Interaction.

Alternatively, advocates of Problem-Based Learning would suggest that a teacher start with "Doing" by posing a real problem for students to work on, and then having students consult with each other (Dialogue with Others) on how best to proceed in order to find a solution to the problem. The learners will likely use a variety of learning options, including Dialogue with Self and Observing.

3. **Create a dialectic Between Experience and Dialogue.**

One refinement of the Interaction Principle described above is simply to create dialectic between the two principle components of this Model of Active Learning: Experience and Dialogue. New experiences (whether of Doing or Observing) have the potential to give learners a new perspective on what is true (beliefs) and/or what is good (values) in the world. Dialogue (whether with Self or with Others) has the potential to help learners construct the many possible meanings of experience and the insights that come from them. A teacher who can creatively set up a dialectic of learning activities in which students move back and forth between having rich new experiences and engaging in deep, meaningful dialogue, can maximize the likelihood that the learners will experience significant and meaningful learning. The student could be involved in an activity, which is observed by peers. After the activity is done, the student could write his/her own reflections about the activity, solicit feedback from peers, as well as from the teacher.

Students could watch a film or read a story (Doing), critically evaluate the same(Dialogue with self), and then have a discussion with peers(Dialogue with Others), listen to a talk by an expert from the field(Observing) and then write a reflective report about the same(Dialogue with self)

First and foremost, education is about students. It is about student aspirations and dreams, and a foundation for success. The hallmark of academic excellence is empowering the individual to deal with challenges faced in the future. Adopting principles of Andragogy and the strategies of active learning can be a step forward in this direction.

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