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## TOWARDS THE ESSENCE OF ANDRAGOGY – A HERMENEUTICAL READING OF GRUNDTVIG, KNOWLES, LINDEMAN AND SAVIČEVIĆ

### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to search for the essence of andragogy through a critical examination of andragogy theorists and thereby increase the theoretical understanding of andragogy. Systematic reviews in 2013 and in 2021 led us to probe more deeply into andragogical writings in search of the essence of andragogy. Writings by four classic theorists representing different andragogical approaches – Grundtvig, Knowles, Lindeman and Savičević – were selected for hermeneutic text interpretation. Based on the results, we formulated, as constituting the essence of andragogy, three intertwined principles: 1) lived experience, 2) reciprocal interaction, and 3) “power with”. Each principle expresses the qualities that describe its nature. These three principles are necessary and sufficient conditions for the andragogy to be present. If one of these principles is lacking, the wholeness of andragogy is absent, and the phenomenon does not exist.*

**Keywords:** *andragogy, theory building, hermeneutical interpretation*

### V ISKANJU BISTVA ANDRAGOGIKE – HERMENEVTIČNO BRANJE GRUNDTVIGA, KNOWLESA, LINDEMANA IN SAVIČEVIČA – POVZETEK

*Namen prispevka je iskanje bistva andragogike prek kritičnega preučevanja del teoretikov andragogike in poglobljenega teoretičnega razumevanja področja. Sistematična pregleda iz let 2013 in 2021 sta nas v iskanju bistva andragogike spodbudila k bolj poglobljenemu branju andragoških del. Za hermenevtično branje in interpretacijo so bila izbrana besedila štirih klasičnih teoretikov Grundtviga, Knowlesa, Lindemana in Savičevića, ki predstavljajo različne andragoške pristope. Na podlagi rezultatov smo oblikovali tri med seboj prepletena načela, ki predstavljajo bistvo andragogike: 1) življenjska izkušnja, 2) vzajemna interakcija in 3) »moč z« (ang. power with). Vsako od načel izraža lastnosti, ki opisujejo njegovo naravo. Ta tri načela so nujni in zadostni pogoji, da lahko govorimo o andragogiki. Če manjka eno od načel, ne gre za andragogiko, fenomen ne obstaja.*

**Ključne besede:** *andragogika, razvijanje teorije, hermenevtična interpretacija*

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## INTRODUCTION

This study is motivated by a theoretical curiosity towards andragogy. Its aim is to search for the essence of andragogy through a critical examination of the work of four andragogy theorists and thereby increase the theoretical understanding of andragogy. As adult educators and andragogy practitioners, we have been interested in andragogy for over twenty years. Ten years ago, we understood that we need to return to the roots of the phenomenon. First, we read familiar andragogical texts with fresh eyes and soon realised that more systematic research is needed. Hence, we started with a systematic scientific literature review.

Using “andragogy” as the keyword, this systematic review was conducted in two phases, in 2013 and 2021 (Malinen & Piirainen, 2018). A total of 213 titles and abstracts were identified in the first phase and 251 in the second phase. First, it is noteworthy that researchers have shown increasing interest in andragogy during the last decade. After the 2013 data screening process, 42 of the 213 articles remained for quality assessment. The analysis showed that the most widely used theoretical foundation – in 30 of the 42 publications – was Malcolm Knowles’ interpretation of andragogy. Furthermore, the researchers who had based their empirical research design on Knowles’ interpretation mainly drew on his six well-known assumptions about adult learners. However, these assumptions constitute only a fraction of Knowles’ interpretation. The theoretical foundation of the remaining 12 studies was either the Transformative Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Action Learning Theory, or critical pedagogy. Another finding was that the study designs and methodological choices were mainly surveys with big data. A few studies had been implemented as action research or quasi-experimental research. Qualitative studies, which were clearly in the minority, were based on, for example, grounded theory methodology, or a phenomenological or narrative methodology. Empirical research interests focused on such domains as e-learning, storytelling, self-reflection, motivation, and learning style. The theoretical papers, in turn, focused on the conceptual differences between andragogy and pedagogy.

This systematic review prompted us to probe more deeply into andragogical writings and to search for the essence of andragogy. The need for a theoretical examination of andragogy of this kind has been regularly pointed out in andragogical papers (e.g. Holton III et al., 2009; Loeng 2018; Rachal, 2002, 2015; Savićević 2012; St. Clair & K  pplinger, 2021). Hence, this study, which is based on the work of two well-known andragogical scholars, Malcolm Knowles and Du  an Savićević, and two others less directly linked to andragogy, N. F. S. Grundtvig and Eduard Lindeman (see Fischer & Podeschi, 1989; Warren, 1989). The four represent different perspectives, different cultures and different eras. Grundtvig (1783–1872) was a Danish theologian philosopher-poet, who sought to clarify the relationship between religion, history and poetry and their relationship to people’s lives (Warren, 1989), and whose writings centre around the concepts of the living word and living interaction. Lindeman (1885–1953) is generally recognized as a giant in the field of adult education. Some even refer to him as “the father of modern adult education” (Warren,

1989). Knowles (1913–1997) is the best-known modern interpreter and advocate of andragogy. Knowles' interpretation was influenced by the work of Lindeman and Savićević. In turn, Savićević (1929–2015) was a well-known European professor of andragogy, who contributed significantly to the clarification of the concepts of andragogy and lifelong learning. Why select these four theorists? First, the writings of all four are acknowledged classics. Second, they represent different geographical areas, languages, and eras. Third, their ideas seem to have profound interconnections that deserve to be clarified.

Brookfield (1992) proposed that building a formal theory should satisfy five criteria. The first, the criterion of assumptive awareness, asks if the assumptions underlying formal theoretical elaborations are made explicit. In the case of andragogical theory, assessment of its underlying theoretical roots and foundations is a matter of immediate urgency (see, e.g., St. Clair & Käpplinger, 2021). The second, the criterion of discreteness, refers to the extent to which a body of theoretical ideas is seen to refer to a phenomenon that is discrete, distinct, and separate by concentrating on specific aspects of practice which are observable across diverse contexts. The third, the criterion of comprehensiveness, refers to the extent to which any formal theory accounts for all aspects of the phenomenon studied. Many theoretical perspectives surround the theme of andragogy, but a more comprehensive theory continues to be lacking. These criteria are naturally followed by the fourth criterion of re-formulative consistency, which refers to the extent to which a theory changes over time in response to new research, to critical analyses, and to the theorist's own interpretive leaps forward. Finally, the fifth criterion of connectedness demands that theoretical assertions can be understood by practitioners, in this case practitioners in andragogical contexts.

## HERMENEUTICAL TEXT INTERPRETATION

This study is a particular form of textual analysis (Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 156–165). Interpretation of textual sources – in this case, andragogical texts – is needed in order to specify concepts and to re-construct theoretical formulations. The hermeneutical text interpretation process consists of three intertwined phases: 1) reading, 2) understanding, and 3) re-structuring. According to Ricoeur (1991, p. 113), a hermeneutical reading is a dialectic of two activities, explanation and understanding. To explain is to reveal the structure, i.e., the internal relations of dependence that constitute the text. To interpret is to follow the path of thought opened by the text, to place oneself en route toward the orient of the text (Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 112–122.). Ricoeur considers this dialectic in two different ways: as proceeding from understanding to explanation, and as proceeding from explanation to understanding. The relation between explanation and understanding, and between understanding and explanation is the “hermeneutical circle” (Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 162–167). The text is a whole, open to several readings and to several constructions. In this sense, problems of interpretation are due to the text itself, which is more than a linear succession of sentences (see Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 158–159). Interpretations are always open to change and criticism, especially on account of two basic characteristics. First, an interpretation is

always “wholly interpretative”: it is possible to argue for or against it, to oppose it, to arbitrate between interpretations of it, or to seek alternatives (Palonen, 1988, p. 15; Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 157–159). Second, an interpretation is “inexhaustible”: no interpretation provides an all-sufficient conception of a phenomenon (Palonen, 1988, p. 15; Ricoeur, 1991, pp. 159–160). Andragogy and the andragogical texts under interpretation are complex and multidimensional phenomena. Consequently, our interpretation is also “wholly interpretative” and “inexhaustible”. It offers only one conceptual “lens” – and a necessarily selective one, owing to the qualities of interpretation – for viewing andragogy, which is carried out from a specific perspective with specific aims and specific analytical tools (see Salner, 1989).

Interpretation is always prejudiced (Gadamer, 1988). Hence, andragogical texts are not “pure” objects of research that are independent of us as researchers and our research process. The researcher is always part of what is being studied (Denzin, 1989, p. 31). In our case, we have been working on the hermeneutical circle in constant dialogue with selected andragogical texts and – of course – with each other. We have brought our prior experiences, our own perspectives and understanding to the texts under study, and thus the resulting interpretation is a creative process in which our prejudgments have been expanded through interaction with the texts and each other (see Gadamer, 1988). It is also important to remember that a text is autonomous in relation to the subjective intentions of its author. Although the text puts questions to the interpreter and thus has the power to trigger new knowledge and assumptions about it, the text also constrains the interpreter (Ricoeur, 1991). To sum up, in this study, andragogical texts were interpreted in dialogue between the four theorists, their texts, and the researchers. The aim was to discover concepts and structures and thereby achieve a better understanding of andragogy as a phenomenon. Interpretation was present in all phases of this study from the selection and the re-construction of sources to text interpretation and theory generation (Palonen, 1988, p. 13, 191; Siljander, 1982, pp. 5–6). The most essential distinction in these processes is that between the “already understood” and “understanding better” (Palonen, 1988, pp. 14–15). From this standpoint, this research offers one suggestion for a theoretical formulation of andragogy, that is, for a re-construction of the essences of andragogy.

We sought to increase the objectivity of our interpretation of the selected texts by leaning on certain remarks by Ricoeur (1991, p. 157). First, we fixed meaning by reading the chosen theorists’ writings many times to understand their meanings from an andragogical perspective. Second, we tried to dissociate the texts from what we understood to be the mental intention of the theorists (cf. Siljander, 2011). After reading we extracted the texts for analysis: Grundtvig (1836/1991, 1838/1991, 1840/1991, 1847/1991, 1854/1991); Knowles (1980, 1989, 1990, 2002, 2019); Lindeman (1926, 1932, 1935, 1938/1987, 1944, 1945, 1951/1987); Savičević (1999, 2008, 2012). We then arranged the texts in table format to facilitate analysis of the similarities and differences between the theorists. Gradually, three principles of andragogy began to emerge. Based on the hermeneutical text analysis and re-construction process, we concluded that three intertwined principles

constitute the essence of andragogy: 1) lived experience, 2) reciprocal interaction, and 3) “power with”. Each of these principles is informed by qualities describing its nature. The origins of these qualities are manifested in the original texts. In the following section, the citations from the four theorists’ writings are presented in italics. Finally, we re-constructed a holistic description of the essence of andragogy.

## THE FIRST PRINCIPLE: LIVED EXPERIENCE

The first principle – lived experience – refers to the learner’s experience. This concept seems to be at the core of the writings of Grundtvig, Knowles and Lindeman. While Savićević does not use precisely this word, the idea of lived experience is implicit in his writings.

Grundtvig’s philosophy is known for his concepts of “*living interaction*” and “*living word*”. The word “*living*” can be seen as parallel in meaning with the word “*lived*”. Grundtvig emphasizes “*living*” or lived experience throughout his writings, although he also uses words other than lived and sometimes also uses them metaphorically. For Grundtvig, one’s life history as a whole is the basis for all learning, development and education. Grundtvig (1836/1991) refers to “the single person’s own life”: “*Furthermore it must be added that to be genuine, ‘enlightenment’ must originate mostly from the single person’s own life or at least be tried to see if it fits*” (p. 42). He continues:

*I maintain that if the school really is to be an educational institution for the benefit of life, it must first of all make neither education nor itself its goal but the requirements of life, and secondly it must take life as it really is and only strive to shed light on and promote its usefulness. For no school can create a new life in us, and it must therefore neither destroy the old one nor waste time developing rules which a different and better life would supposedly follow, if such were to be found. (Grundtvig, 1838/1991, p. 82)*

Grundtvig’s “lived” is very holistic, and includes sensations, emotions and tones:

*but the ‘sentiment’ which forms his own life, ‘the eye’ through which he conceives of its events, and ‘the tone’ in which he expresses his experience, all of them he needs from his youth to bring with him into life, and that is one of the main reasons for a Folk High School. (Grundtvig, 1836/1991, pp. 42–43)*

Briefly, “lived”, for Grundtvig, refers to one’s life history as a whole, while enlightenment for life is at the core of his philosophy. This happens through a kind of awakening process:

*an institution of enlightenment that is by which the People gradually would be awakened to self-consciousness, and where the leaders were learning just as much from the youth as they learned from them, such a living interaction and mutual teaching whereby a bridge was laid across the yawning abyss [...] (Grundtvig, 1840/1991, p. 57).*

To realise this gradual awakening to self-consciousness and enlightenment for life requires a certain kind of environment:

*As I say, I would prefer to end now, but I dare not to do so before I have expressed as kindly and frankly as I can, my convictions concerning the school curriculum for life which appears to have the voice of the people behind it even though it assuredly has both the nature of the people and the experience of history against it. (Grundtvig, 1838/1991, p. 90)*

For Knowles “the role of the adult’s experience” is one of the basic characteristics of adult learner. He writes:

*Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths. By virtue of simply having lived longer, they have accumulated more experience than they had as youths [...]. The fact of greater experience also has some potentially negative effects. As we accumulate experience, we tend to develop mental habits, biases, and presuppositions that tend to cause us to close our minds to new ideas, fresh perceptions and alternative ways of thinking [...]. There is another, more subtle reason for emphasizing the utilization of the experience of the learners; it has to do with the learner’s self-identity [...]. To adults, their experience is who they are. They define who they are in terms of the accumulation of their unique sets of experience (e.g. occupations, work, travelling). Adults are what they have done. Because of this they have a deep investment in its value. The implication of this fact is that in any situation in which adult’s experience is ignored or devalued, they perceive this as not rejecting just their experience, but rejecting them as persons. (Knowles, 1990, pp. 58–60)*

Knowles compares adults with youths: adults have more experience than youths. He also emphasizes the potential negative effects of more experience: adults tend to close their minds owing to their mental habits. Furthermore, Knowles reminds us that adults’ experience is related to their self-identity: if adults’ experience is ignored or devalued, they are rejected as persons. Knowles (1990) encourages us to analyse our experiences: “Experience is the richest resource for adult’s learning; therefore the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience” (p. 31). Through the analysis of experience “learners discover for themselves the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be” (Knowles, 1990, p. 58).

Lindeman puts adults’ lived experience at the heart of his writings. He says that “adult experience is already there waiting to be appropriated. Experience is the adult learner’s living textbook” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 10). This metaphor of a living textbook encapsulates the role of life history in adult education. What, then, is written in the pages of this textbook that await appropriation? Lindeman has a holistic, flowing view of adult development and growth:



*Growth should be a process of integrating emotions with thought, an evolving capacity for feeling more deeply and thinking more clearly. Educative experience spans the whole of life. And experience proceeds from any situation to which adjustment is made with accompanying mental release. Experiences can never happen twice for we move forward into time as changing organisms; education, by the same token, can never stop without abandoning personality to the barren existence of instinctive, habitual responses. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 172)*

Lindeman connects this kind of growth process to creativity and freedom:

*Intelligence, power, self-expression and freedom come to have meaning only when we see them as cooperating parts of a functioning whole: the integrated personality [...] [;] we experience these aspects of personality as concurrences, as forces which flow into each other at moments of creativity. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 84)*

He reminds his reader of the primary importance of the learner: “*the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience. If education is life, then life is also education. Too much of learning consists of vicarious substitution of someone else’s experience and knowledge*” (Lindeman, 1926, pp. 9–10). The adult’s living textbook cannot be replaced with anyone else’s, such as a teacher’s, experience or knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, Savićević does not use the term experience or lived experience as such. He writes about self-instruction and lifelong education, arguing that “*lifelong education influences changes of the environment (family, working, cultural), as well as personality. Such changes are interdependent. Education and self-instruction, besides their presence throughout the whole life, should be an internal part of life*” (Savićević, 1999, p. 179). For him, self-instruction as an integral part of the concept of lifelong education means that “*an individual never stops changing*” (Savićević, 1999, p. 179). Furthermore:

*Self-instruction enlarges the possibility of the engagement and development of personality, social forces can be recognized, a readiness and knowledge to manage them in life have been created, and a greater level of maturity and life self-regulation have been attained [...] [;] within the framework of education, self-instruction has an essential importance in the creation of a view of the world. (Savićević, 1999, p. 188)*

The re-construction of “lived experience” seems to have at least *four fundamental qualities*: lived through, indivisible, awakening and growing adult. First, *lived-through experience* refers to experiences which one has already *lived through* or passed, and not to someone else’s experiences. Lived-through experiences are a resource or a living textbook for learners, as underlined by the theorists. Lindeman (1926) even argues that “*in adult education the curriculum is built around the student’s needs and interests*” (p. 8).

Second, *indivisible* refers to the holistic quality of lived experience as a wholly bodily experience. Thus, sensations and emotions are an integral part of experience. In Lindeman’s

(1926, p. 49) thinking, we are not fractional personalities, but dwell in experiences (cf. Polanyi, 1964, pp. x–xi). This means that lived experiences are a natural and fundamental part of (adult) life and that they inform daily routines. As noted earlier, Knowles (1990, pp. 58–60) reminds us of the potential negative effects of lived experience. Lindeman (1926) has also noticed the limiting power of lived experience: “*The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings. Adulthood, maturity, defines its limits. The concept is inclusive*” (p. 6). On the basis of these two qualities the notion of the “private mixtures” of lived experiences resembles the Husserlian concept of the life-world, the world of the natural attitude one’s everyday life, i.e., the world one finds oneself in without thinking about it, just as the world of things surrounds us without our making a conscious deliberate effort to notice it (see Dilthey, 1985, p. 223).

The third quality of “lived experience” – common to all four theorists – is some kind of *awakening* process. When, in the natural course of day-to-day life, we experience things, we “believe” in them and attribute real existence to them. Lived experiences are taken for granted and we do not consider them critically. Therefore, “awakening” is needed; we need to open our eyes to our continuous process of development. In Grundtvig’s (1936) words, “*people would gradually be awakened to self-consciousness*” (p. 57) and Savićević’s (1999) words, “*to ‘awaken’ an individual to accept the fundamental responsibility for personal development*” (p. 179).

The fourth quality of “lived” experiences follows quite naturally from the preceding three. It is a kind of (adult) overall growth process, perhaps a kind of *growing adult* process. It includes such processes as broadening one’s perspectives, managing one’s personal development or growing into freedom. Grundtvig writes about “*Enlightenment for Life*” and self-consciousness. Lindeman (1926) asserts that “growth is the goal of life” (p. 202). He uses expressions like “*the quest for life’s meaning*”, referring to individual changes towards self-mastery and growing into freedom (Lindeman, 1926, p. 11, 70). Savićević (1999, p. 179), in turn, writes about the creation of personality and the creation of human happiness. Knowles (1989, p. 132) argues that learners progress towards greater self-actualisation and self-direction.

To sum up, lived experience is at the core of andragogy. Lived experience is indivisible and lived through and constitutes the basis for a process of awakening and growing into adulthood. “Awakenings” are a crucial part of adult life that generate a kind of personal growth, a kind of becoming. Is it a more and more adult becoming? Or is it a more and more human becoming?

## THE SECOND PRINCIPLE: RECIPROCAL INTERACTION

The second principle – named here as reciprocal interaction – seems to be another core element of andragogy for Grundtvig, Knowles, Lindeman and Savićević, although the concepts they use in their writings on interaction differ.

Grundtvig writes about interaction using his “own”, familiar word “living” in different combinations, for example, “living tool”, “lively talk”. Grundtvig’s ideas about mutual teaching and dialogue are captured in the following citations:



*Certainly it is easy to say that both firstly and lastly it is the mouth which must be used, partly because it is the only living tool for the spirit on earth, and partly because we never will get more in common with the People than that can be therein and by itself be passed on from the mouth to mouth as well, and it is easily said that only to the same degree as the speech becomes dialogue partly between old people and young ones, and partly between youngsters themselves, only to the same degree the enlightenment will succeed [...]. Coming now to the question of what should be communicated to the youth at the Folk High School by means of as lively talk as can be made [...]* (Grundtvig, 1840/1991, pp. 58–60).

And furthermore:

*All good educators know this. In their presentation of the general condition for human living and the sound use of human life they will make the students aware of the fact that when the human heart, which is the source of human living, is not there, all human education (enlightenment) is out of the question [...]. For they are not to jump out of their skin but are to save it as far as possible and to live within it. In order to do this they must be more familiar with themselves, their people, and their mother tongue than our youth has been awakened, helped and shaped to be in any school up to now.* (Grundtvig, 1854/1991, p. 108)

Grundtvig's "lived" interaction is holistic, embodied. He describes interaction with the bodily words "mouth", "heart", "skin", and even "mother tongue". People bring to dialogue their being and life histories as a whole.

Knowles (1990) underlines his view that andragogy is about helping adults to learn, "[t]o help the learners become aware of the 'need to know'" (p. 58). Knowles (1989) emphasizes the mutuality of responsibilities throughout the learning process: "mutuality of responsibilities in defining goals, planning and conducting activities and evaluating is obvious" (pp. 82–85). The designing and conducting of "learning experiences happens also through interaction; an adult educator and an adult learner together define the substance of the basic unit of learning" (Knowles, 1989, pp. 82–85). Another essential element for Knowles (1980) is an educative environment:

*Even more importantly, the psychological climate should be one which causes adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported: in which there exists a spirit of mutuality between teachers and learners as joint inquirers; in which there is freedom to expression without fear of punishment or ridicule. People tend to feel more 'adult' in an atmosphere that is friendly and informal, in which they are known by name and valued as unique individuals.* (pp. 46–47)

Furthermore, Knowles (1990) refers to humanistic psychologists' definition of a "safe, caring, accepting, trusting, respectful, and understanding psychological climate" (p. 123). However,

he adds *the conditions of mutuality and informality* to the list and names it “*An Atmosphere of Adulthood*” (Knowles, 1990, p. 123).

For Lindeman (1935), “*effective education is a social process*” (p. 47). “*The social process is essentially a ‘contact between minds’. The ‘community of me and you’ represents the beginning of society. Minds which interact remain forever functions of separate organisms; the relations between them constitute social phenomena*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 154).

This social process happens in discussion, which is a teaching method for adults, discussion by questioning and being critical in live teaching situations. Lindeman (1926) states that “*discussion is more than talk*” and “*words become habits – whereupon they lose their teaching function*” (p. 8). Lindeman describes discussion in detail. One essential feature of Lindeman’s (1926, p. 8) definition is that learning is achieved via the route of situations, not subjects. “*The best teaching method is one which emerges from situation-experiences*” and “[d]iscussion brings the learning situation into alignment with the living situation to the actual experiences” (Lindeman, 1935, p. 47).

Another essential element in discussion is creative mood. “*The creative mood is more than an attitude of expectancy*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 93). “*The rigidities of adulthood need loosening before anything creative can happen in the sphere of social control*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 92). Lindeman (1926) also describes the key questions for creative discussion, which reveals underlying assumptions: “*What situation have we here? What sort of problem does it show? What new information does it involve? and What action will set us on towards a solution?*” (p. 193). Lindeman (1926) concludes that “*to add a new quality to experience, we stand in the presence of creation*” (p. 166).

The third essential element concerns the teacher’s role. Lindeman (1926) requires that teachers exhibit holistic presence and courage:

*When discussion is used as method for adult teaching, the teacher becomes group chairman; [...] nor is he the oracle who supplies answers which students carry off in their notebooks [...] whatever he brings to the group in the form of opinions, facts and experiences must be open to question and criticism on the same terms as the contributions of other participants. (pp. 185–189)*

In a previous passage, he writes, “*Brave the teacher who dares to reveal his special subject in the context of the whole life and learning*”, and “*happy the student whose teacher knows more than his subject*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 173). To sum up, the purpose of discussion is the same as the purpose of adult education: “*to give meaning to the categories of experiences, not to classifications of knowledge*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 195).

Savićević’s three key concepts are a dialectic process, a co-operative relationship, and the fundamental responsibility for personal development. His idea of interaction is crystallised in these two sentences: “*education and self-instruction are two sides of one integral process notwithstanding the level at which they appear*” and “[t]heir interdependence is indisputable

*and for that reason we observe them as a dialectic process*" (Savićević, 1999, p. 180). Self-instruction and education are interdependent and form a dialectic process between society and human life. He claims that humans become autonomous through self-instruction in a co-operative relationship. He also argues that responsibility for personal and social development play key roles in change:

*a basic feature of humans as social beings is their striving for new knowledge. During the process of labour and social and individual life they try to recognise more completely the secrets of nature and society. In such a process people may improve and promote themselves.* (Savićević, 1999, p. 180)

Savićević (1999) also reminds us that *"self-instruction has historical roots in the desire of humanity to exceed itself and change the existing realities and the world in which it lives"* (p. 180). He proposes that traditional authority should be replaced by a co-operative relationship: *"The traditional authority in education and teaching, which belonged to a teacher [...] should be replaced with a co-operative relationship which is more intensive if the level of education and age are higher"* (Savićević, 1999, p. 183).

Savićević (1999) asks a crucial philosophical question:

*how to 'awaken' an individual to accept the fundamental responsibility for personal development as well as for the development of society on which it depends. Such responsibility cannot be realized without acquiring knowledge as a basis for choices among alternatives during social and personal development.* (p. 179)

The idea of humans as social beings is the basis for reciprocal interaction and dialectic development between society and human life.

The re-construction of reciprocal interaction seems to have at least *four fundamental qualities*: "living word", mutual connection, curious togetherness and responsibility. What is an andragogical way of interaction? The first, *"living word"*, refers to the holistic sense of being alive, here and now. "Living" also refers to bodily presence with sensations, to "lived through" experiences, involving ways of integrating the experience and knowledge of head and heart. "Living word" describes the individual's lived experiences, their own perspectives. The plurality of these "living words", first-person perspectives and "lived through" experiences constitute the foundation for interaction.

The second, *"mutual connection"*, refers to invisible and silent connections to others, to individuals orienting to each other. Mutuality is a type of interdependence loaded with respect and an intentional awareness of being-in-the world with others. It is a mental, wordless "place" which has little to do with one's physical surroundings. Grundtvig's (1854/1991) definition is near to this original meaning: *"living mutual contact is there where the heart is a part of awakening"* (p. 108). Knowles (1990), in turn, terms *"the conditions of mutuality and informality"* as *"an Atmosphere of Adulthood"* (p. 123).

Third, individuals' orientation towards each other is loaded with *curious togetherness*. Curiosity is a driving force for interaction. It is a quality of energy that serves the study of one's own and others' experiences – “living textbooks” – without preconceptions, through questioning and critical appraisal. For curious orientation to take place, “*loosening the rigidities of adulthood*” and “*add[ing] a new quality to experience*” are necessary; then “*we stand in the presence of creation*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 166). Savičević (1999) uses the concept of “*co-operative relationships*”, which vary by level of education and age (p. 179), and Knowles (1989) writes that “*learning experiences happen also through interaction*” (pp. 82–85). To sum up, situation-experiences laden with curiosity and creativity “*can enlighten the learners*” (Grundtvig, 1854/1991, p. 108).

Fourth, two kinds of *responsibilities* are present throughout the learning process. Each individual is responsible for their own personal learning and development. As Savičević (1999) writes, it is important to “*awaken an individual's fundamental responsibility for personal development as well as for the development of the society on which it depends*” (p. 179). This responsibility “*need[s] knowledge as a basis for choices among alternatives during social and personal development*” (Savičević, 1999, p. 179). Responsibilities to others refers to helping each other and bearing with each other throughout the whole situation or process. Lindeman (1951/1987) writes about participants' responsibilities as mutual: “*he [who] brings to the group in the form of opinions, facts and experiences must be open to question and criticism on the same terms as the contributions of other participants*” (p. 128). Knowles (1990) even writes that some responsibilities are mutual: “*mutuality of responsibility in defining goals, planning and conducting activities and evaluating is obvious*” (p. 57).

To summarise, a living connection and an orientation towards otherness are at the core of reciprocal interaction, which emerges both in a living connection to otherness and in a curious, responsible orientation towards togetherness. It is important to notice that this kind of reciprocal interaction can emerge anywhere and at any time.

### THE THIRD PRINCIPLE: “POWER WITH”

We have named the third principle “power with”, a term that both Lindeman and Savičević have used in their texts. All four theorists write – although again using different concepts – about power and humanity. Power is present in, for example, Grundtvig's “*folkelig culture*”, Lindeman's “*power with*”, Savičević's “*world interconnections*”, and Knowles' self-direction and self-actualisation.

For Grundtvig the idea of “power with” is obvious in his writings about natural equality, human friendship, the mutual freedom of adults in the community and the creation of a “*folkelig*” culture. For Grundtvig “power with” emerges in the idea of living word and living society. Grundtvig (1838/1991) has a whole-hearted trust in every human being's educational potential, “*as everything human on this earth must be at first, but yet real, with the capacity for total perfection*” (p. 90):

*The same educational ability is to be found in the poor man's cabin as in the rich man's mansion. This natural equality, which is now to be found really only in the Nordic countries where no foreigner has forced his way in and enslaved the former inhabitants, we cannot cherish enough since it is capable of giving our love of the fatherland a greater depth and the education of the people a greater truth than would otherwise be possible. (p. 87)*

Grundtvig uses the term “*folkelighed*”, meaning community life, which all people share. “*Folkelighed*” is bound up with the preservation of identity, of a nation's literature, poetry, and way of life (Lawson, 1991, p. 14). Freedom and true friendship are essential for a “*folkelig culture*” to emerge. Grundtvig (1836/1991) writes, “*the freedom of the People and the living activity in all beneficial directions must develop just as quietly and gently, refreshingly and completely from the free voice of the people as did the People's equality*” (p. 33).

Grundtvig (1847/1991) suggests that “*who[ever] creates a Folk High School open to all, must necessarily think of the advances to all of the people and all of the country*” (p. 95):

*I call this a 'high school', not as a matter of pride or conceit but to indicate that this must be, in a decent manner, a free school for adults. It must strive to awaken, nourish, and clarify a higher concept of human living in general than is commonly held, and specifically of the life of the Danish people and the Danish citizen. (Grundtvig, 1854/1991, p. 107.)*

The idea of “power with” is present in Knowles' description of adults' active participation in educational processes. For Knowles, it is important that all one's “fellow citizens” can participate according to their needs. Thus, the aim is “*to deliver adult educational services to our undereducated fellow citizens at their convenience in terms of time, place, and pace, as well as in terms of their needs to perform life roles effectively*” (Knowles, 2019, p. 97). Adult learners should have power “*in defining [their] goals, planning and conducting activities and evaluating*” their learning process. Knowles (1989) trusts adults' ability to assume different life roles, such as “*learner, friend, family member, citizen, worker and leisure time-user*” (pp. 82–85). Knowles (2002) dreams “*of new kinds of community learning centers in every part of our country and other countries as well. These are the new forms of education that are emerging from a society in the process of transformation.*” (p. 4).

For Lindeman (1951/1987) “power with” is the core of social philosophy. And as he stated earlier, “*the beginning of society is [the] community of 'me and you'*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 154). “Power with” and freedom form an essential pair of concepts for Lindeman (1926): “*We do not acquire freedom – we grow into freedom*” and “*freedom can never be absolute*” and in the beginning “*none of us is self-determined*”, but always related with others, otherness (pp. 68–70). Lindeman (1926) combines citizenship with freedom and creativeness: “*dynamic freedom stirs the personality in the direction of radical, causative, originative activity. The function of freedom is to create*” (p. 78). And further: “*When the function of citizenship loses its creativeness it also loses its meaning*” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 127).

Lindeman writes a lot about social action groups. He argues that “*all successful adult education groups sooner or later become a social action group*” (Lindeman, 1945, p. 12). He says that “*adult education is the laboratory for democratic experience and bears two democratic struggles: a) learning methods and b) tool[s] for social movement*” (Lindeman, 1945, p. 10). Lindeman (1926) also applies the idea of “power with” to working life: “*production was seen as becoming more participatory and collaborative, so that managers’ ‘power over’ workers was transposed into ‘power with’ them*” (p. 27).

Lindeman (1945) sees culture as “*a root for adult education and [the] emergence of new social forms, which are various in different countries*” and it “*cannot transform to other cultures*” (p. 11). Lindeman (1932) solves this through “*internationalism*”, “*an inventive correlation of superiorities to mean capacity to produce a certain variety of goods to create a qualitatively distinct set of cultural objects and values*” (p. 71).

In sum, Lindeman’s (1926) world view is holistic:

*Stimuli or causes are somehow related to responses or effects in us as well as in the universe of which we are parts. We can therefore be free only within the scheme of nature. Successful human adjustment is never wholly to or against nature, but always partially with [nature], we cannot be free from ourselves or the natural objects which surround us, and consequently the only freedom worth talking about is freedom-with. (pp. 68)*

The philosophy of lifelong education for Savićević is oriented towards people and their human essence. Lifelong education is profoundly informed by “power with” relations, which also raises the average level of education, culture, and society.

*Understanding lifelong education as an educational philosophy, as a concept, it is oriented, or we want it to be oriented, towards people, towards their human essence and towards their development, but not towards the creation of a ‘usable’ person, as a worker only. Lifelong education is an essential factor in the creation of human happiness. When education is democratized, it becomes education for everybody. Lifelong education is not only for social, economic, and political benefits. It should contribute to the development of human potential and to the creation of human happiness [...] As such [lifelong education] is both the final aim of social development and the most important active element in it. (Savićević, 1999, p. 166, 180).*

Savićević (1999) reminds us of the consequences of the traditional organisation of teaching:

*Educational institutions are not aware how much the traditional organization of teaching and the traditional relation of lecturer and student contribute to the acceptance of a passive observing position of a learner and how much it will reflect afterwards upon the performing of social and working roles. (p. 180)*



Savićević (2008) also writes about groups: “new social groups, which are important to see and reflecting for learning and education in power with relations, are women, ethnic and racial groups, elderly, migrants, displaced persons and the poor” (p. 363). For him, adult education is a tool for a free and democratic society: “It is impossible to build a free and democratic society without accomplished issues for adult education” (Savićević, 1999, p. 180). For Savićević (1999), “the complete human environment – work, education, society and family – fulfils the function of education” (p. 180).

Savićević, like Lindeman, has a holistic perspective on other cultures and civilizations. He writes about “world interconnections” (Savićević, 2008):

*Learning activities are interconnecting at local, regional and global levels [...] learning could help man and mankind in complete understanding of other cultures and other civilizations in meaningful management of the increased number of problems, in respecting the elements of global views and in respecting the elements of global systems. (p. 364)*

The re-construction of “power with” seems to have at least *three fundamental qualities*: equality, creation of culture, and understanding of other cultures. First, these theorists write about equal participation in different situations. Equality is a necessary condition for “power with” to be realised. Furthermore, freedom is a necessary condition for equality. According to Grundtvig, if one is not free, one can never enjoy true fellowship (Warren, 1989, p. 216). Lindeman (1951/1987, p. 128), in turn, highlights the equality between learners as members of organisations, cultures, and societies. Savićević (2008, p. 363) reminds us that when participating in learning and education, all social groups (e.g., elderly, migrant, poor) are equal.

Second, “power with” relations are essential in the creation of culture. How does the creation of culture take place? Grundtvig’s (1840/1991) “*folkelig*” culture and its creation of culture happens as a combination of history and poetry, which “in my eyes [...] opens the brightest prospects” (p. 61). Lindeman (1951/1987, pp. 128–129) argues that creating cultures happens through social action in local communities and environmental institutions (e.g., education, economic life). For Savićević (1999), in turn, “the person [...] is the one who creates everything and from whom everything is being created. As such he is both the final aim of social development and the most important active element in it” (p. 166). Knowles (2002, p. 4) connects societal transformation with the new forms of education.

Third, understanding other cultures demands participation in learning activities and situations from a diversity of perspectives (e.g., different religions and nationalities). Why is understanding other cultures so important for these theorists? Grundtvig’s (1838/1991) idea of freedom and education concerns all humanity: “what we all are in need of, but the proposals for these things all have the same fundamental flaw in them as Plato’s Republic, where the guardians of freedom and education themselves swallow up both” (p. 93). Knowles (2019), in turn, writes:

*I don't discount the fact that there are cultural differences that need to be taken into account in interacting with people from different cultures. But my current perception is that these differences are more in terms of customs than in fundamental processes, such as learning. I honor their customs and am willing to adapt to them, but I accept and respect their basic humanity. (p. 45)*

Lindeman uses the concept “internationalism”. He writes that “we simply cannot have this good life any longer unless the whole world is moving in the same direction” (Lindeman, 1951/1987, p. 130). Savićević uses the concept “world interconnections”. He argues that “learning could help man and mankind in complete understanding of other cultures and other civilizations” (Savićević, 2008, p. 364). Learning leads to social development and human happiness.

To sum up, the essence of the “power with” principle is equality, the creation of culture and understanding of other cultures. Andragogy, when “power with” is actualised, can create equality between and give a voice to different human beings, organisations, cultures, and societies. However, equality is not possible without “freedom-with”. Understanding of other cultures can minimise conflicts between societies and create well-being.

## THE ESSENCE OF ANDRAGOGY: THE PRINCIPLES AND THEIR QUALITIES

To summarise, our re-construction comprises three principles and their qualities (see Table 1). The phenomenon re-constructed here as andragogy applies to all human beings in reciprocal “power with” situations in different groups, cultures and societies. It should be noted that this re-construction is not linked to any specific context; rather, any context can be seen from an andragogical perspective. Furthermore, these principles and their qualities are intertwined. If one principle is missing, the wholeness of andragogy is also missing, and we can no longer speak about andragogy.

**Table 1**  
*Re-construction of andragogy: the principles and their qualities*

Principles of andragogy	Qualities of principles
Lived experience	Lived through Indivisible Awakening Growing adult
Reciprocal interaction	Living word Mutual connection Curious togetherness Responsibility
“Power with”	Equality Creation of culture Understanding other cultures

These principles are necessary and sufficient conditions for the realisation of andragogy. If we accept this re-construction of andragogy, it entails a profound transformation in the perspective on education in any context and at any human age.

## CONCLUSION

For the purposes of this study, we selected four theorists representing four different approaches to andragogy: the *Folkbildung* of Grundtvig from Denmark, the andragogical approach of Knowles from North America, the social theory of andragogy developed by Lindeman, also from North America, and the andragogy theory of Dušan Savićević from Serbia. This selection yielded sufficient variation and breadth for hermeneutical interpretation.

We consider the hermeneutical process reported here, i.e., the analysis, interpretation, and re-construction of writings by these four theorists, to have been fruitful. To enhance the trustworthiness of our study, we followed Ricouer's (1991) four trains of objectivity: 1) fixation of the meaning of andragogy in the form of three principles and their qualities derived from 2) dissociation from the authentic writings of the selected theorists' texts; 3) putting aside non-ostensive references and discovering the universal range of andragogy; and 4) awareness of the limitations of the study. We were only able to use writings of these four theorists that have been published in Finnish, Swedish or English. Consequently, other influential theorists (e.g., Alexander Kapp, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Serguey Zmeyov, Jost Reichmann, Franz Pöggeler) could not be included.

This re-construction of the essence of andragogy forms the proposition outlined here for a theoretical formulation of andragogy. This proposition should, however, be researched and validated further by scholars who have not been party to this research process (cf. Brookfield, 1992). While we do not present direct implications for practice, practitioners working in different andragogical contexts should evaluate the practical consequences and transferability of this proposition for themselves (cf. Brookfield, 1992). However, a larger purpose having to do with improving some aspects of andragogy underlies all formal theorising. The purpose of theory is essentially the pragmatic one of helping practitioners to enhance and refine their understanding and praxis. If our conceptualisation is deemed useful, it should enable practitioners to better understand andragogy and to develop their own andragogical practices.

As mentioned earlier, more refined, alternative theoretical interpretations are always possible. Reformulation is in any case needed to further develop the theory of andragogy. Here, we have focused on a re-construction based on the writings of four theorists. We intend to continue our andragogy project in at least three directions. First, we aim to probe deeper into the philosophical understanding of andragogy by addressing the question "Wherein are the philosophical roots of andragogy?" Second, the present findings offer us a clue that andragogy and experiential learning theories have something in common. This connection merits careful research. Third, methodological diversity – especially more qualitative research – is needed. We challenge scholars to engage more in

phenomenon-based research. Our goal is to strengthen andragogy as a scientific approach by deepening and broadening its theoretical foundations. While a single theory that explains andragogy in its entirety may never emerge, we are hopeful that this process will stimulate further inquiry and research.

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