Thought Seeds in Anthrogogic Learning Contexts

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Abstract

This paper reopens and re-examines the argument that there are clear differences between pedagogy and adult learning, against the backdrop of NEP 2020. It introduces two new paradigms: 'anthrogogy' and 'thought seeds' by tracing the former to andragogy and developing the latter from tasks. The paper defines a thought seed, outlines its characteristics, and then goes on to examine the differences between tasks and thought seeds. Moving from a theoretical argument to practice, the paper further briefly scrutinises these contrasts through some critiques of tasks meant for higher education learners and demonstrates how they can mature into thought seeds.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education in India is teaching adults on how to teach children or young adults in classrooms. NCF 2005 position paper on teacher education and the NCFTE 2009 document acknowledges that there needs to be a difference between teaching adults and children. Adult learners are seen as autonomous and self-directed, with a vast amount of life experiences and knowledge; as pragmatic and goal-directed, who therefore, responds better to problem solving and task-oriented learning than children. The emphasis, therefore as the document states, has to be on developing professional knowledge and capacities through a variety of self-directed tasks including case studies, projects, seminars and research activity. (NCFTE, 2009)

ANTHROGOGY AND PEDAGOGY

The term 'adult education' in India, refers to adult literacy development

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courses though the National Education Policy does recognise that 'pedagogical' approaches to adult learning are completely different from that of teaching children (NEP, 2020) but does not take the argument further into implementation. Here the term 'pedagogy' is used 41 times and refers to adults and adult learning but does not outline how this teaching or learning of adults is different from teaching children though the word 'adult' figures 31 times in the document. Even where adult learners are referred, their learning is associated with the term 'pedagogy' which is oxymoronic in its comprehensible output. The term pedagogy alludes to children and cannot be applied to adult learning, whether it is literacy or higher education. More than half a century ago, a vehement proclamation stated that, "the biggest obstacle to the achievement of the full potential of adult education has been that it has been tied to and..has been hamstrung by the concepts and the methods of the traditional education of children" (Knowles, 1968: 350–351).

Based on this theory, adult learning is commonly characterised by five principles: self-concept, adult learner experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles, 1984) and conceptualised as 'androgogic' and not pedagogic in its orientation. However, the term 'androgogy' or 'andragogy' is sexist in orientation and needs to be replaced by a term that is not just gender neutral but also humane, hence the term anthrogogy (Trott, 1991) is better suited for the purpose.

This term as used in this paper adapts from the principles that come from andragogy but is more humane and applies to and from the level of homo sapiens as a species that cohabit the planet in the solar system and expects teachers to function in the same manner in all aspects of life as a form of 'restorative justice' principles.

It is very important to look at all adult learning or teaching as anthrogogic, and therefore orientated toward a peaceful cohabitation with all life forms in a clean and green manner, particularly in the context of the global village, climate change, the great garbage patch/es in the ocean, micro plastics, deforestation, human trafficking etc. The NEP 2020 has expressed the need for this stance and lifestyle uniformly throughout the document, with many abstractions. For example, in section 9.1, it states: "Higher education plays an extremely important role in promoting human as well as societal well-being and in developing India as envisioned in its Constitution—a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all" (NEP, 2020) and goes on to outline these lofty ideals that are worth exploring and developing but the means to achieve them or even an attempt to define them is not

conspicuously found in the document. The means to develop these qualities in children could be done through pedagogic practices but to bring them upfront in adults is not that easy as they come from pluricultural backgrounds and have schemata of their own. The experiential processes of learning will have to take into account these foundations that create the individual that we attempt to view as an 'adult'. While these complications stare at us, all references to adult education in the NEP 2020 and NCFTE 2009 stay with the term pedagogy conspicuously. All arguments with reference to language teaching that are subsumed under the umbrella of NEP 2020 are also a victim of this confusion, misidentification, misunderstanding and misdirection.

This type of a miscalculated and misdirected confusion stems probably from the fact that these policy documents do not make a distinction between the terms pedagogy and anthrogogy: when referring to adult or rather higher education (HE) learners the term 'pedagogy' is used as an umbrella term for indicating all forms of learning experiences particularly of higher education learners. The term 'pedagogy' referring to the teaching or learning of HE learners in the document is used 9 times (NEP 2020: 34, 37, 38, 38, 38, 38, 38, 39, 41) out of 41 times that it occurs in the entire document. The same term pedagogy serves the child and adult learning community with almost

similarly directed inferences and implementation possibilities. This is oxymoronic in its manifestation, understanding and recommendation when used together with teaching or learning in adults and not once has the term 'andragogy' been referred or used. Such a confusion has been percolating down many generations in the post-colonial Indian sub-continent; the policy document acknowledges that even non-literate adults possess experiential skills, knowledge and wisdom, but contradicts itself by requesting for a 'pedagogic' stand and space (NEP, 2020). The term 'adult education' is used 22 times in the NEP 2020 document but is used only to indicate adult learners working on their basic literacy skills with the conspicuous absence of adult learning principles being foregrounded and contrasted with the principles of learning in children. Such a conspicuous absence of explicitly stated learning principles of adults could be a systemic failure due to an improper comprehension of the needs, abilities, experience and integrity of the adult learning community as a whole. This confusion inadvertently created has led many researchers and teachers to adopt or adapt from pedagogic research and with little or no modification applied to HE and teacher education spaces, and that is how major theorists from education and linguistics like Vygotsky (1978), Halliday (1975, 1978, 1994) and

Bruner (1966, 1978, 1976) have sneaked into adult learning spaces.

Vygotsky's six domains or aspects of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) were construed with children in mind but have been extended, in the form of sociocultural theory, to adult education (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). In similar fashion, Bruner's three modes of thinking or representation, are with reference to children learning how to mean and learn (Bruner, 1966). More importantly, the notion of scaffolding, (Bruner, 1978) which is used very widely in the context of adult education, was an expansion of the work done with a preschooler to enable block reconstruction (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Added to this conundrum is the list of lofty attributes that are set out to be achieved through education as comprehended in the NEP 2020 as a series of abstractions for both adult and child, pre adult learners.

The various abstractions and attributes of learners as and when applied to adults and child learners as they occur in the NEP (and NCFTE and similar documents) and probably considered as the 'what' aspect: "righteous conduct, gender sensitivity, respect for elders, respect for all people and their inherent capabilities regardless of background, respect for environment, helpfulness, courtesy, patience, forgiveness, empathy, compassion, patriotism, democratic outlook, integrity, responsibility, justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity," (NEP 2020) are piling up in an IKEA godown like fashion in all similar documents but the modalities of making them concrete or tangible (the 'how' aspect) is elusive in the policy documents and as application in the discipline of teacher education. Tasks are seen as one of the modalities to ascertain this. But they are often pedagogical (giving explicit micro-instructions, of the 'do-this, dont-do-this' type). The NEP 2020 states that it aims at producing individuals with "courage and resilience, scientific temper through creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution" (NEP, 2020). In order to produce such citizens, who are humane in their orientation the term andragogy will not suffice and the new term 'anthrogogy' (Trott, 1991) needs to be used, explored, studied, learnt, and taught so as to make these principles concretely implementable. An anthrogogic perspective and its construed principles when tested and tried can avert further damage to the discipline of teaching or learning of adults. 'Anthrogogy' is defined in this paper as a set of multifarious learning principles that operate on the foundations of unity in diversity of experiential differences, with multilinguality and pluriculturalism as the venous network that acts as the propulsive force from within. These principles aim at treating an adult person (of the body) as a part

of the human species that has the potential of being humane as a default setting, and as those who can think for the well-being of the planet along with themselves. In this context, it is equally important to revisit the notion of a task because they are routinely used in teacher education courses and are usually pedagogic, if they anywhere seem anthrogogic, are so only by accident and not by reflective design.

TASKS AND THOUGHT SEEDS

Tasks in anthrogogic spaces tend to be too narrowed down in their focus as a 'mere' problem solving exercise. The way that adults and children solve problems are different; therefore, they operate at different levels and require different skill sets and a varied knowledge base. Problem solving exercises that are 'tasks' have a clear-cut solution/responses/criteria for evaluation (generic or in today's world, task specific) because "the essence of task-based teaching is to get the learner to make an effort to comprehend" (Prabhu, 2019: 320) or rather to 'do something'. The 'doing' for adults may be short timelines or long timelines (including lifelong) and tasks do not seem to address this as they aim at context specific 'doing' through 'problem solving'. Very often these problems, used as tasks (Prabhu, 1987; Prabhu, 2019; Candlin, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Skehan and Foster, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Bygate, 2001) are trivial in their applicatory significance when compared to real time/life problems that adults are routinely required to handle and resolve.

Similarly assuming that the adult teacher may lack the ability to carry out task-based teaching in the classroom, explicit instructions are given about what has to be said by the teacher to the students, what has to be done, etc. The processes that have to be followed by the teacher are detailed explicitly. For example, for a task on drama games II, "acting out the word", the instructions to the teacher titled 'process' begins with something as simple as: "call a student to the front of the class to perform: ask her to choose a word card, read it silently", even instructs the teacher to state: "she must then act out the word" and ends with "the other students will have to guess the correct word". (Baruah, 2016). These explicit instructions are like hand holding that some teachers in India need, for they may not have the professional knowledge or the linguistic capability to handle the activity: but the book assumes that through such hand holding, the teacher will also grow. The ability of 'self-learning' and 'independent thinking' (Yashpal: 1993) cannot happen miraculously if thinking opportunities are not included as part of teaching/learning endeavours, in the form of materials, methods, guiding principles and conscious implementation plans. This certainly cannot happen when the teaching/learning orientation is pedagogic. Further, the possibilities

of consensual 'knowledge co creation' will be replaced by puritanically prescriptive 'scaffold' disguises that are actually crutches or orthopedic braces strapped onto minds that aim at convincing these adults that they are dependent on the systemically driven institutions that rely on other 'authoritative' constrictive thoughts that didactically jail the individuality of these freely think-able-worthy adults. Such tall recommendations are not productive in a pedagogic orientation unless it is modified suitably addressing the reality of adult learners and through this the breaking of fresh ground. Such a breaking will facilitate thought seed germination in anthrogogic spaces. This kind of ground breaking exercise can be possible only with the conscious inclusion of thought seed balls in the learning materials in teacher education courses. In order to reforest thoughts and humane thinking into the education system of adults particularly, there is a need of including thought provoking 'seed balls' into the anthrogogic spaces.

The idea behind the term 'seed ball' is Japanese in its origin and is agricultural in its discipline. The ideation of the seed ball concept is simple, yet profound. Seed/s encapsulated in a thick protective jacket of muddy clay, creates a seed ball. Such seed balls, when dispersed across the ground are activated with a rain/wetting/flooding event enough to soak through the muddy clay to germinate the seed. "And that's it.

But that's not all." (Bradley, 2010), The 'not all' and 'that's it' are both important because of the potential that seeds hold within their tiny-ness of recreating a whole forest. So, the seeds in the seed balls are a 'that's it' in terms of effort that is needed to create or toss them into probable fertile grounds. When conditions are favourable the 'that's not all' will be activated as seeds germinate. The original idea of the seed ball/bomb is attributed to Masanobu Fukuoka (1975). This idea of the seed ball became a thought seed in anthrogogic learning spaces. Adult learners come with their own fertile ground of thinking/culture/upbringing/ past/schemata, tools of learning, strategies, patterns of work, pace, awareness of their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and goals. Thought seeds that act like seedballs when included in adult learning spaces at a module/topic/ timetabled classroom hour level stand a very high chance of germinating, all the while allowing for freedom of individualities and expression at their own pace and convenience, and conduciveness. The NCFTE document reiterates that the objectives of teacher education programmes can be achieved only by providing learning opportunities amongst others to the teacher candidates to develop a deep sense of understanding the self and others, one's beliefs, assumptions, emotions and aspirations; develop the capacity for self-analysis, self-evaluation, adaptability, flexibility,

creativity and innovation. None of these things are possible with the tempering or garnishing of a few tasks that are often reflective only by chance. Thought seeds would provide and facilitate, and enable/achieve these objectives. The lists of what seems like grammatically sub categorised yet abstract terminology 'catalogues' in both NEP and NCFTE cannot become objects in tasks but function as seeds in a seedball that could germinate whenever conditions are made available and favourable for germination.

WHAT IS A THOUGHT SEED?

It is a catalyst (written, spoken, a picture, a meme, a video, an advertisement etc) usually followed by a series of statements and questions which will persuade the teacher/learner to build a thinking platform, process information divergently and go meta over the 'apparentness' found in the trigger. Thought seeds are usually rhetorical in function and do not expect ready answers. They have the quality of generating more such thought seeds in the minds of those who engage with them. The major features are presented in the form of a Table below.

Table 1
Features of Thought Seed

Task	Thought Seed
applicable only in classroom contexts and focuses only on that particular text as discourse	applicable to life and life experiences and often can be used outside the classroom context outside institutionalised spaces
relates only to the problem that the task seeks to address	usually considered as an eye-opening exercise and has a lingering quality attached to it
aim at problem (problems are minor) solving (solutions are limited and often predetermined)	aim at building a thinking platform that is divergent or lateral, pluricultural, multimodal, multidirectional, multidisciplinary and multi 'verse' in orientation and tap the knowledge capital of the person concerned
solution oriented whether focusing on content or language	inspire thinking and can have a range of possibilities
needs completion immediately or with a deadline, may not be reflective have a right or wrong perspective answers are usually very important for completion focus on end product, although some attention paid to process	no need to complete after much deliberation-on going – EQ component – reflective, ideational, have an honest/dishonest perspective often rhetorical in orientation, the 'responses' where required are 'think aloud sessions that are scribed' for tracking changes in thinking focus only on process; focus is on seed sowing and not harvest reaping

the scaffolding provided in the prompt is usually positivist in its orientation	scaffolding questions are to enable thinking from a constructivist paradigm
responses are specific and expected to be uniform across task takers	responses are optional, and the actual prompt is only a catalyst
responses may not take intrapersonal factors into account	Responses are subjective, personal and idiosyncratic
criteria present for evaluation	no criteria for evaluation
limited in their scope	have possibility of producing more thought seeds
very frequently the focus is on the apparent and the explicit; sometimes critical thinking	will always prod learners to apply critical thinking and help them go meta over the apparent and explicit triggers
in the language classroom, skill oriented	aim to develop language potentiality
have a very short shelf life (once done, it may not be remembered)	stays with the learner or teacher and allows for rumination.
Can be at the beginning, middle or end of a module	Will usually be at the beginning or at the end of a module

A few tasks are analysed below using some of the features of thought seeds and their suitability for anthrogogic learning spaces.

Task 1

Take a look at your quarterly or half-yearly examination paper. State for yourself, the objectives for one or two questions. If it tests only memory and reproduction, think of what higher order skill (like analysis or evaluation) you can test for that area. Think of how you could set this as an open book examination question. If you are able to do it, try it out in your own classroom.

(Durairajan, 2015:114)

Critique of Task 1

This task is anthrogogically reflective and majorly rhetorical and does not underestimate their world knowledge and content specific knowledge. But it is not yet a thought seed because it is limited in its scope and though it transcends time, there is no connection of any kind to the outside world, and cannot stand alone bereft of this particular context. There is some amount of metacognition requirement assumed here but again falls back heavily into contextual space.

If this task were to be a thought seed in an anthrogogic paradigm

without tampering too much with the task demands that aim at kindling thoughts on the criteria of evaluation it could be metamorphosed into the following:

Task 1 metamorphosed into Thought Seed 1.

Preamble: All of us are familiar with search engines such as google. We have used it often for searching many things and it usually responds within microseconds. Now, in such a time and place where Google is freely available, what is the place for memory and do you think memory-based questions are required in the examination papers anymore? Can we as teachers do something about it? When was the last time we jogged our memory for a content related answer or did we ask google? What is the place of memory as a device in human lives? What do we do with what is stored in our memory? How do we use the concepts stored in our memory? Think deeply and reflect whether all/most/some examinations need to be open book. Honestly reflect on how memory functions for you and for others. Is it justified on our part to ostracize people for poor memory? What happens if you have a student in your class or a relative who has a physiological memory problem? Could open book/

source examinations bring back justice? Think.

Task 2

(During a telephonic phone interview conducted on August 14, 2020, with a retired Professor, English and Foreign Languages University stated that the following task item created by her, and not taken from any published source, used by her for a final take home examination for a doctoral level course on Language Testing, offered at the English and Foreign Languages University, 2012 could be taken for analysis)

Given below are case studies of two students: read them, and then answer the questions that follow.

1. Saraswati is a first-generation learner who was given a take home examination (not as difficult as this one, but similar) as part of a Master's Programme. She read the paper and then went to her teacher and said that she would not be able to finish the work in the stipulated time because she would have to think of all her answers in her mother tongue and then translate them into English; she also said, very honestly, that she would need the help of a bilingual dictionary for this purpose. The course instructor gave her an extra day for this purpose, but was taken to task by the authorities for having been partial and biased.

2. Partho Sharma is a student of linguistics who has registered for a Master's Programme. He usually reads all prescribed texts or articles and actively participates in class discussions. He has a problem, however, with taking memory based or open book examinations; he forgets all that he has studied and lands up handing in blank sheets of paper. He approached his instructor, who understood the problem and empathised with him. She therefore decided to give him a take home examination, but to be fair to all other students, extended the offer to all 20 of them. Most of them did well as a result and said that it was the first time that they 'took an examination' without tension. Partho got an A grade, along with two others.

Questions

1. Imagine that you had to provide theoretical justifications for the stances taken by the three teachers or course instructors. Write a two–paragraph justification per case explaining your position.

2. In case you disagree with all the stances (or one or more of them) either provide an explanation as to why you disagree, or a theoretical justification for the stances you agree with and an explanation for the stances you disagree with.

Critique of Task 2

The case studies are realistic and plausible, and the tasks are anthrogogic. The two studies discreetly also bring in awareness of inclusivity with a small 'i' into examination space. The tasks are closer to thought seeds because there is no right and wrong answer and stances taken, as long as they are justified, are acceptable.

However, since the tasks stop there, they are limited in their perspective. The tasks will only enable the examiner to know whether theoretical articles or books prescribed have been read, and whether relevant arguments have been appropriately used. There is no migration across time or space or going beyond the here and now to stand back and get a meta view.

Thought Seed for or from Task 2

Do you agree with the decisions made by the teacher? Why or why not? What is the kind of teacher mentality that made such a task modification possible? What kind of teacher would that student have become having experienced this in class? What kind of teacher education would have inspired that teacher to do this, in terms of perspective, curriculum, syllabus etc? Where do you think such perspectives will originate? Policy, planning, or pedagogic or anthrogogic practices? Will the teacher's sense of plausibility have any role to play?

In contrast to the two teacher education tasks critiqued above,

a post-graduate course 'Language and Media' was interspersed with many thought seeds. One point of discussion was representation of menstruation related products in advertisements in the media. The following thought seed was used as a catalyst. The responses, if any, were voluntary and the students were free to record them in an online diary if needed and the choice to share them with the instructor was also left with the students.

Thought Seed

A picture of a menstruating woman with bloodied jeans was used and the following questions were stacked as thought seed/s.

How does a biological phenomenon get treated in the media? Why does the advertisement of a sanitary napkin show blue or green stuff? Similar biological phenomena like hunger gets a glorious advertisement, say for example McDonald's, why is that? Think critically, why certain physiological phenomena are "good" while certain need to be hidden. Record responses as they come in the diary if needed. Also watch the First Indian movie on this theme, Padman. Add from that too if it inspires you.

Critique: A variety of thinking paradigms are activated in the thought seed above, and encourages the students to draw from a variety of experiences and takes them to unexplored connections and leaves them there to germinate. It also uses multimodal trigger questions and leaves the whole exercise open to adult interpretation by being anthrogogic.

The students responded in a variety of ways. Some considered this thought seed as an eye opener and novel way of defining 'biological phenomena' while others were silent. Some others confessed that they had even tried out a few of such thought seeds with their family and friends that were not a part of this course and came back to the instructor with positive feedback. A few of them went to the extent of creating similar thought seeds as a part of their responses or answers in the end of semester examination. A few students confessed that they were feeling at a loss either because they were never taught or thought this divergently nor were they able to make these connections quickly, proving the stand that their mind ground is not yet ready to germinate, while many others, going by their sharing and creating responses, were already in the process of reforestation of their mind grounds. Thus thought seeds are essential in anthrogogic learning spaces and need to be explored to make learning (modules) anthrogogic and align them as learning practices with the NEP 2020 and NCFTE 2009 policy level abstractions.

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