Empowering Heutagogy for 21st Century Learning

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Abstract

Heutagogy a term which describes self-determined learning with principles deeply engrained in andragogy has recently gained popularity as a learning technique due to limited attention for a period of time. The core principle of heutagogical teaching and learning technique is to encourage learners to be self-determined and is grounded upon the development of learner’s individual capability with the primary goal of grooming learners to gracefully survive the complexities of the rapidly globalizing economies. The renewed attention towards heutagogy is partly due to the advancement of technology. With the learner-centric design, technological advancement greatly supports the heutagogical approach by sustaining the expansion of learner generated subject. Therefore, this article collates crucial commentaries and opinions from various scholars in the field. This article is built grounded on various relevant literatures and thoroughly defines the intriguing concept of heutagogy and andragogy to a certain extent. This article offers a foundation for further discussions and impactful research into heutagogy as an emerging learning technique and a theory which would revolutionize the education system while nurturing lifelong and mature learners who are academically and professionally prepared for the rapidly globalizing economy.

Keywords: Heutagogy; Self-determined Learning; Adult Learning

1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly resulted in colossal transformations in the landscape of learning techniques and the mode of delivery. The education was not spared in this which hit almost every economic sector. As governments around the globe brace through ways to curtail the spread of the virus, the learning modes such as face-to-face learning, virtual learning settings, distant learning and blended learning has evolved to embrace radical changes as learner and educators alike are required to work from home. Hence, the transformation in the design and content of e-learning courses in recent times. Fields of informal learning, experiential learning and social learning has also recorded unprecedented changes in tandem. Curriculum designers are catapulted to an uncharted role of being on alert constantly monitoring the learning processes and the mode of instruction and convert them effectively into proactive and effective methods in reference to the learning content design, the collation and curation of the learning material (Little & Knihova, 2014). If one expects this norm to be a one-off event that will fade away after the pandemic, one is mistaken! Learning will take a new approach, thanks to the pandemic which would prove to be an impetus to the change. As an apparent effect of the pandemic, the heutagogical approach is fast becoming an integral approach to drive the use of technology where the teaching and learning activities are conducted virtually.

2. Understanding Heutagogy

Heutagogy is known as a formula for self-determined learning practice which is deeply rooted in andragogy. This up-and-coming learning style has re-emerged as a learning style after a long period of limited awareness. First coined by Hase & Kenyon (2000) by borrowing the Greek word ‘heut’ which translates as ‘self’ as heutagogy employs a wholesome attempt to develop learner’s active and proactive capabilities where the learner assumes the major role in championing their individual learning progress derived from their prior experiences. Heutagogy celebrates autonomous learning among learners which stresses on the learner’s development in terms of their capabilities and learning capacity. Heutagogy stems from the word heuristic that means the method of teaching by empowering students to learn for themselves (Parslow, 2010). The world is increasingly witnessing a growing
number of autonomous learners on one end where it stresses on the importance of obtaining life-long learning experiences (Barnett, 2011). Dovetailing on the other end is, the educators who are entrusted with the responsibility of creating life-long learners who are able to thrive in situations where they are well equipped with the capacity to apply their acquired skills (Kuit & Fell, 2010, The World Bank, 2003). These two prong driving factor thrusts heutagogical learning to the forefront as it offers awareness into prospects of learning improvement depending on student’s requirements and momentum of the students’ learning desire. Furthermore, heutagogical approaches constantly attempts to address the concerns associated with constantly evolving technology, the pressing needs for immediacy and flexibility of learning be it in classroom or the professional background. Heutagogy draws special attention to the future in which the learner’s knowledge on how to learn will one day transform into a vital skill due to the rapidly advancing technology, community structures as well as workplaces explains Kenyon & Hase (2001). This technique greatly supports the expansion of the learner’s direction to embrace their individual learning channel as heutagogy accentuates learner-centric scheme. There are several considerations that needs special attention while designing a heutagogic teaching and learning process. Firstly, the design should be student centered where the context and the content of the curriculum is given priority to fulfil the student’s learning needs. Several authors have shared their thoughts on developing program elements that complements learner-centric education. For instance, the champions of heutagogical learning technique, Hase & Kenyon (2010) and Gilbert (1975) suggested that the curriculum should be based on a ‘learning contract’ where the learner define their individual learning platforms and outcomes. These contracts narrate what will be learned, what methods will be employed to make the learning and teaching effective what the assessments entails and how the assessment will be conducted. Secondly, Hase (2009) stressed that the learner is the key individual to drive a curriculum which is flexible solely developed by the student themselves facilitated by their teachers or their institutions. Flexibility in this instance means the curriculum adapts and progresses exclusively based on the learner’s requirements (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). When students are allowed to bring and share their personal or professional experiences as well as their prior learning experiences into the curriculum while working at the pace desired by the learners, educators are required to ensure that there is flexibility (Oliver, 2016). Since heutagogy takes into account the learner’s past experiences and the learner’s current practices, the learner passages into the growth process that encourages transformative learning which Canning and Callan (2010) describes as ‘spirals of reflection’. Canning and Callan also added that collaborative learning is also equally significant aspect in the heutagogical learning environment because, while learning in a collaborative environment, learners tend to work in a shared space in an attempt to develop a shared meaning while also reflecting the process on how they learned and ways to implement the learning into practice (Bhoyrub, 2010). Crotty (2014) highlighted that the fundamental purpose of reflection is to transform learner’s thoughts into action and the key importance of connecting the head and the heart in the learning process in order to avoid the learning process from being fragmented. Seconded by Kenyon and Hase (2001) and Hase (2009) who stressed that approaches such as team-based learning encourages communities of practice where the central focus of learning is placed upon the learning progression and the method the learning is done.

3. Essentials of Heutagogy

As Hase & Kenyon (2013) described, heutagogy is a pedagogy that expedites self-determined learning where learners are empowered to conduct a research on their learning interest and direct their attention and efforts on these interests. Via this approach, the learner and their stand in the society becomes the crux of learning. Individuals or students assume a direct and continuous role in what is to be learnt, how the learning is executed and when the learning would take place. This promulgation of heutagogy to become fundamentally crucial element in transformational learning perspective, that would eventually see preparing the students for the intricacies of future workplace. Duckworth et al., (2007 opined that when an individual appreciates their individual learning flow, the learner gains complete control and autonomy over their methods of learning, the environment, the curriculum as well as the learning materials and this sense of autonomy is tremendously crucial for self-motivation, increasing the learner’s persistence and their perseverance to pursue their learning process.
In the heutagogic learning landscape, Oliver (2016) commented that the learner is presented with a variety of options to ensure that learners are able to choose their desired focus area for their individual development and specialization from a flexible curriculum. However, educationists opined that heutagogy is a crucial response to address vital issues that learners encounter in their daily work scenario and by understanding their workplace needs and designing their desired learning patterns (Bhoryrub et al., 2010; Ashton and Newman, 2006). Students should be allowed to explore, experiment and have the opportunity to interact with myriad of contrasting and disputed viewpoints to achieve the learning outcomes and the anticipated changes in the learner’s comprehension, actions and knowledge. Additionally, Eberle (2009) suggested that questions that arises from the learners and the insightful discussions that occurs based on the questions are instrumental in aiding learners to comprehend their learning contents, provide precision to the ideas while also opening channels to self and group reflections. Previously, Schön (1983) recommends that reflective learning and practice enable learners to transform themselves to be lifelong learners because, as a person who practices a certain subject seeks to search deeper pertaining issues in his or her individual practices, the learner embarks in a journey of self-education. The heutagogic learning technique is wholesome in its approach that it counts upon the learner’s previous experiences and these learning experiences effects how the learner learns.

4. Pedagogy, Andragogy and Heutagogy
Canning (2010) and Chacko (2018) observed that heutagogical learning design is viewed upon by scholars as an educational evolution beginning from pedagogy to andragogy and subsequently to heutagogy. This evolution is complemented likewise with learners showing progress in terms of maturity in thinking as well as attitude and self-sufficiency in learning. We are all familiar with the learning we did in our childhood and schooling days. During these phases, the child learns in a protected environment guided by the teacher who predominantly decides almost every aspect of the student’s learning experience due to the fact that the child has no previous knowledge on what is being taught (Chacko, 2018). In this scenario, Chacko adds that the teacher guides the student from the previous knowledge obtained by the teacher. Hence, in whichever method the teacher conducts the lessons and whatever the teacher says is typically accepted by the learner in a no question fashion. This way of teaching and learning is commonly known as pedagogy which describes a method which was widely used by teachers during childhood. According to Canning & Callan (2010), mature learners are less reliant on their teachers and they take charge on their course of learning while on the other hand, teacher’s roles are rather significant for less matured learners as they are heavily reliant upon their teacher’s guidance.
Hase (2009) distinguished the major differences between andragogy and heutagogy by narrating the role of the learner and teacher in each learning technique. In the andragogical learning technique, the teaching and learning methods are predominantly designed and executed by the teachers who cater according to the needs of the learner whereas in heutagogy, the learner decides when he wants to study, what he wants to study, where he want to study and what he aims to achieve as his final output. In simpler words, the learner has the autonomy to decide the learning course and the outcome of the study.

Commenting on heutagogy, Hase & Kenyon (2001) adds that although andragogy has long been used as an approach to expand methodologies involved in educational systems and has been accepted almost globally it still has remoteness towards teacher-learner bond. Conversely, as a self-determined learning, heutagogy is considered as a shift from the earlier traditional teaching methods paying particular attention on capability development which is deemed as a crucial approach to teaching and learning in the twenty-first century. Next, heutagogic learning design should emphasize on negotiated and flexible assessment as the learner is predominantly involved in designing and determining their own assessment styles. This is due to the fact that in a pedagogical or andragogical learning environment, the learner usually feels vulnerable as the instructor or the teacher has a firm control on designing the assessments and determining the learning process (Canning, 2010; Hase, 2009).

5. Capability and Competency building via heutagogy
Heutagogy embraces capacity and competencies as its core attributes. According to Gardner et al., (2008) competencies are recognized as the learner’s ability to acquire knowledge and skills that are essential for their educational requirements while capability discusses the learner’s confidence on their competencies upon which they are capable in formulating appropriate actions in arriving at solutions to the problem at hand once a predicament is detected regardless of the settings. Hase & Kenyon (2000) points that heutagogy highlights the importance of self-determined learning technique as a reaction to the current changes in higher educational settings which requires the accentuation of the learner’s capability and competencies. This is also echoed by Bhoryrub et al, (2010) who added that heutagogy, which prioritizes learner’s capabilities and competencies navigates educators to comprehend the needs of the learners and addressing them appropriately according to the complex and drastically fluctuating economic environments.

In previous literatures, Mezirow (1997) mentioned that learner’s cognitive development is paramount for self-reflection which then translates into cognitive development that is in tandem with the learner’s autonomy and maturity. In order to add deeper understanding on learner’s capability, Gardner et al., (2007) listed the attributes that capable individual exhibit in general. Capable individuals possess high self-efficacy in identifying appropriate learning methods and the ability to reflect on their individual learning process. Additionally, capable individuals communicate their thoughts and ideas while possessing exceptional teamwork skills by developing constructive synergy to work well with others either in an educational or professional background. Besides, capable people are creative especially when it applies to utilizing their competencies in unusual and new settings which makes adapting less painful.

Hase & Kenyon, (2000) and Gardner (2007) added that predominantly, capable individuals possess positive values which creates a positive environment while working together, hence enabling them to view a predicament as an opportunity to learn and improve. In general, higher education institutions have been portraying signs of reluctance to accept heutagogy as a learning concept. This may be due to the inconvenience of employing a full-scaled educational framework which predominantly involves the application of heutagogic practices in their teaching and learning exercises. According to Hase and Kenyon (2007) when the assessments are learner-defined and negotiated, the learners feels motivated and hence, the learning and teaching process becomes a proactive activity. Hase (2009) reiterated that learning contracts effectively incorporates negotiations as it involves thorough understanding of the learning contents which includes a reality check if the intended competencies have been achieved. Another crucial attribute of heutagogy is that this method of learning is a reflective practice of learning skills closely related to the art of knowing how to learn explains Hase (2009).

6. Role of educators in Heutagogy
The educator’s role in heutagogy learning and teaching method is akin to that of andragogy. In heutagogical approach, the role of the educator is limited to facilitating the learning progress by allocating basic guidance and
essential resources to the learning while renouncing the of the learning process completely (Eberle, 2009). Previous teaching and learning methods are deemed obsolete particularly in the effort of preparing the future workforce for the world-of-work where a prudently thought-out self-determined technique is necessary in a scenario where the onus is on the learner to display the depth of knowledge that the learner has gathered while the educators assume the role of mentors who guide the learners to educate themselves (Peters, 2004; Kamenetz, 2010). In order to implement a healthy self-determined learning landscape, teachers or facilitators should modify the teaching approach by adding value on the learner’s learning direction.

Teachers would need to embrace the heutagogical approach where the teacher or instructor act as a facilitator in the student’s learning process says Cristiano (1993). Instructors are needed to rethink and re-evaluate their teaching patterns and at the same time, keep their students well-informed on the heutagogical learning concept right from the beginning of the class. Educators must be able to clearly define and explain to the learners that the heutagogical learning atmosphere varies tremendously from the traditional learning practice which the students are familiar to. Educators should dictate their expectations clearly to the learner as the learners are entirely accountable for knowledge creation and the learning outcomes (Schwier et al., 2009; Ashton and Newman, 2006).

Knowles (1975) advised that distinct demarcation of the roles assumed by the learners and the function of the instructor in this learning arrangement are needed. Besides understanding each other’s role in this learning technique, continuous guidance and supporting the students throughout the learning journey while providing constructive feedbacks are also vital components of this learning approach in order to develop the desired capability throughout the learning journey (Ashton and Newman, 2006).

7. Challenges in applying heutagogic learning technique

This method to learning, according to Halsall et al., (2016) is not without challenge as there is a propensity for instructors or facilitators to hinder the development of space, for instance, a situation where the instructors strictly determine what the student need to learn, when to learn and how to learn within a rigidly structured and confined syllabus. McAuliffe (2008) reasons that while pedagogic and andragogic learning methods still do contribute tremendously in a student’s learning environment, the exclusion of the role of the teacher from the teaching and learning process paints an image that heutagogy as a learner guided assessment is still at an infancy stage and impractical to be implemented at this period of time as they stressed that it is not possible or worse, not feasible to be practiced.

Echoed by Kenyon & Hase (2001), empowering learners to manage their course of self-directed learning remains the greatest challenge for program developers to design a well-defined heutagogical course as they are expected to be creative when it comes to prompting the learner to question the ‘universe’ they live in. Knowles (1975) stated that, similar to andragogy’s self-directed learning, heutagogy also requires ample of empathy as empathy greatly aids in creating a conducive learning atmosphere for learners who have yet to familiarize themselves with self-determined learning which is important in developing an environment of respect and mutual trust.

8. Conclusion

Canning (2010) dictates the possibilities of developing strategies to nurture mature learners to emerge as self-directed learners by introducing them to reflective practice with a combination of both andragogical and heutagogical learning techniques to incorporate the learner’s individual interests and unique experiences. Canning opines that the robust emotional energy plays a crucial role in adult learning both positively and negatively and how this energy is capable of affecting the entire learning experience. This leads to a conclusion that learner’s confidence and their self-belief stimulated in the student via their reflective practices provides them with the motivation and the aspiration to transform themselves into agents of change while creating opportunities to learn in an open culture.

In its entirety heutagogy is a framework for learning which act as a harness and manages this particular self-motivated and complex concept of learning by providing a twenty-first century approach to teaching and learning which is linear with the demands of the society. Chacko (2018) concluded that heutagogical learning methods are suited for professionals who transform into autonomous learner who is greatly motivated to hone their skills and determine the learning strategies and how to get self-assessed to keep track of their improvements along the line,
exposure to these methods during the early period of education enhances the learning experience interesting and the same time, breaks the monotonous teacher control learning and prepares the learners for further learning in the future.

References


