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From Andragogy to Heutagogy

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Abstract

In something of a landmark for education Knowles (1970) suggested an important change in the way in which educational experiences for adults should be designed. The approach, known as andragogy, contrasts quite sharply with pedagogy which is the teaching of children. This paper suggests there is benefit in moving from andragogy towards truly self-determined learning. The concept of truly self-determined learning, called heutagogy, builds on humanistic theory and approaches to learning described in the 1950s. It is suggested that heutagogy is appropriate to

the needs of learners in the twenty-first century, particularly in the development of individual capability. A number of implications of heutagogy for higher education and vocational education are discussed. [top](#)

Heutagogy

Education has traditionally been seen as a pedagogic relationship between the teacher and the learner. It was always the teacher who decided what the learner needed to know, and indeed, how the knowledge and skills should be taught. In the past thirty years or so there has been quite a revolution in education through research into how people learn, and resulting from that, further work on how teaching could and should be provided. While andragogy (Knowles, 1970) provided many useful approaches for improving educational methodology, and indeed has been accepted almost universally, it still has connotations of a teacher-learner relationship. It may be argued that the rapid rate of change in society, and the so-called information explosion, suggest that we should now be looking at an educational approach where it is the learner himself who determines what and how learning should take place. Heutagogy, the study of self-determined learning, may be viewed as a natural progression from earlier educational methodologies - in particular from capability development - and may well provide the optimal approach to learning in the twenty-first century.

The distinction Knowles (1970) made between how adults and children learn was an important landmark in teaching and learning practices in vocational education and training, and in higher education. Andragogy, and the principles of adult learning that were derived from it transformed face-to-face teaching and provided a rationale for distance education based on the notion of self-directedness. There is, however, another revolution taking place in educational circles that appears to go one step beyond andragogy, to a new set of principles and practices that may have application across the whole spectrum of the education and learning lifespan.

This revolution recognises the changed world in which we live. A world in which: information is readily and easily accessible; where change is so rapid that traditional methods of training and education are totally inadequate; discipline based knowledge is inappropriate to prepare for living in modern communities and workplaces; learning is increasingly aligned with what we do; modern organisational structures require flexible learning practices; and there is a need for immediacy of learning. In response to this environment there have emerged some innovative approaches that address the deficiencies of the pedagogical and andragogical methods.

The idea that, given the right environment, people can learn and be self-directed in the way learning is applied is not new and has been an important humanistic theme that can be followed through the philosopher Heider (Emery, 1974), phenomenology (Rogers, 1951), systems thinking (Emery and Trist, 1965), double loop and organisational learning (Argyris & Schon, 1996), androgogy (Knowles, 1984), learner managed learning (Graves, 1993; Long, 1990), action learning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998), Capability (Stephenson, 1992), and work-based learning (Gattegno, 1996; Hase, 1998).

The thrust that underscores these approaches is a desire to go beyond the simple acquisition of skills and knowledge as a learning experience. They emphasise a more holistic development in the learner of an independent capability (Stephenson, 1993), the capacity for questioning ones values and assumptions (Argyris & Schon, 1996), and the critical role of the system-environment interface (Emery & Trist, 1965).

Heutagogy is the study of self-determined learning and draws together some of the ideas presented by these various approaches to learning. It is also an attempt to challenge some ideas about teaching and learning that still prevail in teacher centred learning and the need for, as Bill Ford (1997) eloquently puts it 'knowledge sharing' rather than 'knowledge hoarding'. In this respect heutagogy looks to the future in which knowing how to learn will be a fundamental skill given the pace of innovation and the changing structure of communities and workplaces. The remainder of this paper explores the concepts mentioned in this introduction and their implications for vocational education and training, and education. [top](#)

Beyond pedagogy and andragogy

Our educational systems have traditionally been based on Lockean assumptions which assume that the individual mind is a clean slate at birth, the world is a buzzing confusion, and that concepts and causal relations are inferred from associations of stimuli (Emery, 1974). In this paradigm learning has to be organised by others who make the appropriate associations and generalisations on behalf of the learner. Thus, random individual experiences are taken to be totally inadequate as sources of knowledge, the educational process needs disciplined students, and literacy is seen to precede knowledge acquisition. Success is based on attending to narrow stimuli presented by a teacher, an ability to remember that which is not understood, and repeated rehearsal (Emery, 1974, p.2).

An alternate view is proposed by Heider and assumes that people can make sense of the world and generalise from their particular perceptions, can conceptualise, and can perceive invariance (Emery, 1974). Thus, people have the potential to learn continuously and in real time by interacting with their environment, they learn through their lifespan, can be lead to ideas rather than be force fed the wisdom of others, and thereby they enhance their creativity, and re-learn how to learn.

Rogers (1969) suggests that people want to learn and have a natural inclination to do so throughout their life. Indeed he argues strongly that teacher-centred learning has been grossly over emphasised. He based his *student-centred* approach on five key hypotheses:

- We cannot teach another person directly: we can only facilitate learning;
- People learn significantly only those things that they perceive as being involved in the maintenance or enhancement of the structure of self;
- Experience which if assimilated would involve a change in the organisation of self tends to be resisted through denial or distortion of symbolisation, and the structure and organisation of self appear to become more rigid under threat;

- Experience which is perceived as inconsistent with the self can only be assimilated if the current organisation of self is relaxed and expanded to include it; and
- The educational system which most effectively promotes significant learning is one in which threat to the self, as learner, is reduced to a minimum".

Rogers (1951) also suggests that learning is natural "like breathing" and that it is an internal process controlled by the learner. Emery (1993, p79) comments further on "learning to learn" and on the concept of learning as practiced in the current institutions of learning at the time. He said: "in learning to learn we are learning to learn from our own perceptions; learning to accept our own perceptions as a direct form of knowledge and learning to suspect forms of knowledge that advance themselves by systematically discounting direct knowledge that people have in their life-sized range of things, event and processes".

A major contribution to the paradigm shift from teacher-centred learning to heutagogy was made by Argyris and Schon (1996) in their conceptualisation of double loop learning. Double loop learning involves the challenging of our 'theories in use', our values and our assumptions rather than simply reacting to problems with strategies found in single loop learning. In describing learner managed learning Long (1990) suggested that learning 'is an active process in which individuals either seek out education and experiences or obtain feedback and do evaluation as they move through life's experiences.' (p 36). This is more than self-directed learning as Knowles (1970) defined it in that it recognises the value of everyday, unorganised experiences and the process of reflection.

Action Learning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, for example) recognises reflection and, therefore, the prospect of double loop learning in processes designed to facilitate learning. The teacher here takes a back seat and becomes a learner like everyone else, enabling people to become learners as well as to find solutions or, even, pose questions.

One of the most recent models to challenge traditional concepts of learning and which looks at outcomes as well as process is that of Capability (Stephenson and Weil, 1992). Capable people are those who: know how to learn; are creative; have a high degree of self-efficacy; can apply competencies in novel as well as familiar situations; and can work well with others. In comparison with competencies which consist of knowledge and skills, capability is a holistic attribute. Developing capable people requires innovative approaches to learning consistent with the concept of heutagogy. Work-based learning (Graves, 1993; Hase, 1998) and contract learning are two examples of processes designed to enable people to become capable. These processes focus on the need to learn how to learn and are learner, rather than teacher, centred. Helping people to become 'capable' necessitates new approaches to management.

We have left Knowles' major contribution to this evolution of how learning is understood until last because it is important to make a distinction between the idea of self-directed learning and heutagogy. It is not that heutagogy is a departure from andragogy but, rather

an extension that incorporates self-directed learning. The notion that pedagogical approaches to learning were perhaps inappropriate for adults was an important leap forward. Andragogy, or approaches to teaching adults, quickly became a part of the lexicon of educators, trainers and academics.

Knowles (1970, p7) defined self-directed learning as:

The process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Knowles' definition provides a linear approach to learning and sounds a little like the chapters of a train the trainer guide. Heutagogy takes account of intuition and concepts such as 'double loop learning' that are not linear and not necessarily planned. It may well be that a person does not identify a learning need at all but identifies the potential to learn from a novel experience as a matter of course and recognises that opportunity to reflect on what has happened and see how it challenges, disconfirms or supports existing values and assumptions. Heutagogy includes aspects of capability, action learning processes such as reflection, environmental scanning as understood in Systems Theory, and valuing experience and interaction with others. It goes beyond problem solving by enabling proactivity.

Heutagogy, capable people and capable organisations

The concept of capability was developed in the UK in the mid 1980s as a response to the need to do improve the capacity of British organisations to compete in a shrinking marketplace. It had been recognised that globalisation and all its sequelae were creating a different kind of workplace where people needed to be more than just competent in order for them and their organisations to survive in a very turbulent environment. There was no longer any certainty about one's job, chosen career, place of work, abode, relationships and economic circumstances. Turbulence and rapid change characterised an environment that was, and still is, dominated by economic forces beyond any individual's and most organisation's control.

The world is no place for the inflexible, the unprepared, and the ostrich with head in sand, and this applies to organisations as well as individuals. Capable people are more likely to be able to deal effectively with the turbulent environment in which they live by possessing an 'all round' capacity centred on self-efficacy, knowing how to learn, creativity, the ability to use competencies in novel as well as familiar situations and working with others.

Research and theorising about capability would suggest that there is a need to develop an understanding of how to develop capable people (e.g. Graves, 1993; Stephenson & Weil, 1993; Stephenson, 1994) and how to enable capability to express itself in organisations

(e.g. Cairns & Hase, 1996; Hase & Davis, 1999; Hase, 1998; Hase, Malloch and Cairns, 1998). Both of these needs require a heutagogical approach.

An example of the need to shift to a heutagogical approach can be found in what could be called the 'myth of flexible delivery'. Since Knowles and the rise of concepts such as instructional design there has been a rapid rise in the use of distance education in both the higher education and vocational education sectors. This has been important for reasons of equity and access. However, there is a myth that the carefully crafted print based materials somehow enable self-directed learning and enabled 'flexible learning'. The delivery is certainly flexible, but not the learning. Any examination of distance education materials and, the various forms of just in time learning found in VET, are teacher-centred, not learner-centred. The recent emphasis on competency based curricula and training is a good example of the importance attached to single loop learning as opposed to developing people who will be able to manage their own learning.

A heutagogical approach recognises the need to be flexible in the learning where the teacher provides resources but the learner designs the actual course he or she might take by negotiating the learning. Thus learners might read around critical issues or questions and determine what is of interest and relevance to them and then negotiate further reading and assessment tasks. With respect to the latter, assessment becomes more of a learning experience rather than a means to measure attainment. As teachers we should concern ourselves with developing the learner's capability not just embedding discipline based skills and knowledge. We should relinquish any power we deem ourselves to have.

The issue of enabling capability is no less interesting and challenging, and confronts the issue of power more directly. Managers and supervisors in organisations need to be capable people themselves in order to facilitate the capability of others. Highly controlled managerial styles usually reflect high levels of anxiety or the need for power on the part of the manager. As a recent study of a number of Australian organisations has shown (Hase, Cairns & Malloch, 1998), a most important characteristic of a capable organisation is the capacity for managers to empower others, to share information, and develop capability. These are not new concepts of course and are endorsed by many contemporary management writers. It is perhaps surprising that many managers continue to ignore the evidence of the success of such approaches to people in organisational management.

The reasons for this lack of change might be found in the way in which managers are trained or maybe not trained. There is a heavy emphasis in our management schools and in organisations on the technical aspects of management. The plethora of short management training programs attests to the simplistic approaches we take in addressing management deficiency. A heutagogical approach would develop the capability not just the competency of managers. We might then see more innovative approaches to fully enabling people to express their capability (and further develop it by doing so) such as that found recently in a major mining and construction company (Davis & Hase, 1999) and in other Australian commercial and government organisations (Hase, Cairns & Malloch, 1998). [top](#)

Higher education and vocational education and training: some Implications for distance education

In Australia in recent times interesting questions have been asked about how a university education should change participants. This is not a liberal - utilitarian debate but rather a concern that universities should do more than merely develop competent people. Similarly vocational education and training is increasingly being asked to become more involved with the real needs of people at work. Again the emphasis is being placed on developing people who can cope with a rapidly changing world, a flexible workplace and uncertainty.

On a larger scale John Ralston Saul in the 'Unconscious Civilisation' (1997) addresses issues raised by economic rationalism and its grip on the way in which we understand our lives. He proposes that there is an almost childlike way in which society avoids the reality of its situation, choosing instead to believe a fantasy perpetuated by a corporatist ideology. Legitimacy lies with conformist specialist groups who negotiate between themselves, supposedly for the common good. Saul suggests that corporatism places us in the grip of self-interest or, perhaps more accurately, makes us unable to make disinterested decisions at either a conscious or unconscious level. In either case, consciously or unconsciously, a person is striving, at worst for power and personal gain, or at best for continued survival in a competitive and corporate environment. Saul stresses that we are in fact losing the struggle for democracy and individualism despite increased access to knowledge, information and education. Instead we are succumbing, 'to the darker side within us and within our society' (1997, p36).

Our education systems and particularly post compulsory education need to develop people who can examine these sorts of questions, who can be proactive rather than simply reactive in their thinking, and who can be more involved citizens. This will only occur by changing the way in which we help people learn. There is a need to go beyond the possible self-interest of the academic and the teacher, to move beyond the status quo and the interests of dominant institutions.

Heutagogical approaches to education and training emphasise: the humanness in human resources; the worth of self; capability; a systems approach that recognises the system-environment interface; and learning as opposed to teaching. Heutagogy addresses issues about human adaptation as we enter the new millennium.

For example, work based learning models currently exist that demonstrate how to integrate human resource development and human resource management (Hase, 1998) that are heutagogically sound. These models challenge our ways of thinking about learning and the learner by: having teachers think more about process than content; enabling learners to make sense of their world rather than make sense of the world of the teacher; forcing us to move into the world of the learner; and enabling teachers to look beyond their own discipline and favourite theories.

If handled well, the current enthusiasm for providing courses using the internet and intranets may provide superb opportunities for the use of a heutagogical approach. It will not be enough to simply place print based materials onto a server. Rather electronic delivery offers the hope of increased learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction through chat rooms and email lists. It also provides opportunities for learners to access and browse a variety of resources, the identification of current learning and then focus on areas of need and interest. Email and chat rooms will enable easier negotiation of assessment items and even learning contracts so that control for learning is passed on to the learner in a guided way as self-efficacy is increased.

Action Learning and Action Research methods are consistent with a heutagogical approach to capturing tacit and ecological learning by focusing on what is happening to the learner rather than what is happening to the teacher. What is very useful about these approaches is that they provide a framework and identifiable techniques that develop aspects of capability and the capacity for lifelong learning. [top](#)

Conclusion

The usual meaning currently given to ‘flexible learning’ is that ‘students’ are able to undertake a course of study face-to-face or by distance education. Distance education can prove to be even more flexible by offering web-based delivery in the place of print materials. However, no matter what way a course is delivered, and no matter how strong the claims for andragogy, the learning is very much teacher-directed as opposed to student-directed.

We suggest that a shift in thinking towards heutagogy will enable the control of learning to shift more appropriately to the learner. Furthermore it will enable a far more creative approach to learning, no matter what the context. [top](#)

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