

Considering Heutagogy as An Innovative Approach for Skill Development

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Abstract

During the opening days of the independence Gandhiji predicted that it was “only through imparting education through crafts can India stand before the world”. Successive governments in India tried to take the Gandhian dictum ahead, and concentrated on education as a tool to develop human resource of the country. While the initial focus was on literacy and enrolment, the target gradually shifted to quality education and imparting skills. The Honhaar Bharat programme (2010) and Skill India (2014) may be seen as part of the continued education and human resource policies being followed by the successive governments since independence. Also, under focus are the moves in organizational learning from courses to resources, and a proliferation of new ways to access learning in the workplace. Increasingly, it’s not about ‘the course’, taken through a single medium (classroom or desktop PC), but about a learner--journey encompassing multiple modes and channels. With the downgrading of the course as the default unit of instruction, we also see less prominence for the role of instructors. The recent approaching method of the self-determining learning--*heutagogy* can be used as an innovative approach for learning, especially for skill-based learning. It can be exercised even through social media. Researches also indicate that the use of social media can support self-determined learning. *Heutagogy* applies a holistic approach to developing learner capabilities, with learning as an active and proactive process, and learners serving as the major agent in their own learning, which occurs as a result of personal experiences.

Introduction

‘We live in a rapidly changing world that requires people to have the ability to adapt much more quickly than in previous times, where events moved much more slowly. Education is not immune from these changes even though it is an inherently conservative system. In the face of significant innovation in educational practice and as espoused in self-determined learning (heutagogy) and other perspectives, there are new skills to adopted by learners and learning leaders alike.’ Stewart Hase (2014)

With these words, Stewart Hase delineates the proposal for heutagogy, an emerging theory of learning that takes up self-determined study, where *‘people have the agency with respect to how, what and when they learn’*. Hase argues that people are naturally inclined to self-determined learning from birth, and that the principles of heutagogy are focused on creating optimal experiences and environments in which this can be supported.

Heutagogy attempts to challenge some ideas about teaching and learning that still prevail in teacher-centered learning. One challenge is the need for “knowledge sharing.” In most anyone’s formative learning the result was one of “knowledge hoarding”; sharing answers was not encouraged or even allowed. Heutagogy stresses the importance of knowing how to learn. Developing this is fundamental “life skill” is essential given the pace of technological innovations, changing structure of communities and workplaces.

Heutagogy recognizes the need to be flexible in the learning. The instructor or facilitator provides resources but the learner negotiates the learning and designs the actual course. The learner determines what is of interest and relevance to them and then negotiates further reading and assessment tasks. As India impending towards the skill development and moving progressively towards becoming a global knowledge economy then to meet the rising aspirations of its youth is the need of the hour. This can be partially achieved through

focus on advancement of skills that are relevant to the emerging economic environment. The challenge pertains not only to an enormous quantitative expansion of the facilities for skill training, but also to the much more important task of raising their quality. The skill development of the working population is a priority for the government. This is evident by the exceptional progress India has witnessed under the National Policy on Skills (2009) over the years. The objective of the policy is to expand on outreach, equity and access of education and training, which it has aimed to fulfill by establishing several industrial training institutes (ITIs), vocational schools, technical schools, polytechnics and professional colleges to facilitate adult learning, apprenticeships, sector-specific skill development, e-learning, training for self employment and other forms of training. The government therefore provides holistic sustenance through all its initiatives in the form of necessary financial support, infrastructure support and policy support.

In spite of the vigorous stress laid on education and training in this country, there is still a scarcity of skilled manpower to address the growing needs and demands of the economy. As an immediate inevitability that has urgently arisen from the current scenario, the government is dedicatedly striving to initiate and achieve formal/informal skill development of the working population via education/vocational education/skill training and other upcoming learning methods. The recent approaching method of the self-determining learning can be used through social media. Recent research also indicates that the use of social media can support self-determined learning.

Mobile learning: Madhuri Dubey (2015) delineated that Mobile learning happens in two ways – through mobile learning apps that are free or purchased, or by accessing learning through the Internet on a mobile device. Mobile learning is an easy and cost-effective option to share information and knowledge at the most learnable moment. This is particularly relevant for training providers imparting skill based vocational training. Devices like tablets, feature phones and smartphones can transform the learning experience if you follow the 5 best practices of effective, m-powered learning. Match content with medium Cochrane and Bateman's (2010) research showed that mobile learning supports collaboration, data and resource capturing and sharing, and reflective practice. Use of mobile learning was also found to increase learner-learner and learner-external interaction, as well as reflective practice (learning journals).

Virtual Philosopher: Hornsby and Maki (2008) report on an asynchronous learning tool meant to build learners' skills in developing, reflecting upon, and transforming thinking processes and logic. The online tool provides active learning activities built around various scenarios that the learner works through in a process of self-discovery. Through these scenarios and the responses provided by students, the Virtual Philosopher identifies flaws in the learner's thought processes, forcing the learner to evaluate and re-evaluate why she or he thinks in a certain way. According to Hornsby and Maki (2008), the asynchronous environment "seemed to reinforce deeper learning" and promotes problem solving and critical analysis (para. 30).

Twitter: A recent study by Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2010) showed that students who used Twitter (as compared to those who did not) were more actively engaged in their learning processes and had higher GPAs. Junco et al. (2010) also found that the use of Twitter boosted student-student and student-instructor interaction, as well as promoted active learning.

Learner-generated content (active media use): Active use of social media in creating learner-generated content seems to contribute to development of skills of self-directedness. Initial research findings by Blaschke, Porto, and Kurtz (2010) indicate that active use of social media, for example, development of learner-generated content, supports cognitive and metacognitive skill development, whereas passive use (consumption) is less effective in supporting development of these skills.

Lisa Marie Blaschke (2012) cited these examples which point up how social media has the potential to support elements of a heutagogical approach, such as creation of learner-generated content, active engagement in the learning process and with instructors and other learners, group collaboration, and reflective practice through double-loop learning.

Since most skill based vocational training is practice oriented, it would make sense to include videos that demonstrate the procedure of doing things. The video clips should be short in duration, dealing with a meaningful chunk of learning. It doesn't make instructional sense to load it with long pieces of text since reading on a mobile device is not always comfortable.

Collaborative learning is also a critical component of the heutagogical classroom. When learning collaboratively, learners work together in a collaborative space to create shared meaning and to reflect and think about how they learned and how to apply it in practice (Canning & Callan, 2010). Kenyon and Hase (2001) and Hase (2009) recommend team-based approaches to learning such as communities of practice, where the focus of learning is primarily on the learning process and how learners learn. Knowledge sharing should be strongly encouraged and can be achieved by encouraging learners to share resources and information (Ashton & Newman, 2006).

To implement a self-determined learning environment, instructors need to alter their teaching approach, primarily by placing value on learner self-direction of the learning process. They would also need to accept the heutagogical approach as one that is unconventional, where the instructor becomes a facilitator in the learning students' learning process (Cristiano, 1993). Instructors not only must change their approach to teaching and learning, but also ensure that they explain this type of learning to their students from the very start of class. Instructor expectations of learners should be clearly stated: learners are responsible for knowledge creation and deciding upon the learning path (Ashton & Newman, 2006; Schwier, Morrison, & Daniel, 2009). Empathy helps create a comfortable learning environment for learners unaccustomed to self-determined learning, and, as with self-directed learning, it is important to create a climate of mutual trust and respect with a clear delineation of instructor and learner roles and one that supports dialogue (Knowles, 1975). Ongoing guidance and feedback, as well as sharing of resources, support students along their learning journey, and learners will require ongoing instructor guidance and support throughout the learning process if they are to develop the capability of self-direction (Collis and Moonen, 2001, as cited in Ashton & Newman, 2006).

Considerations in designing self-determined learner experience

When designing a self-determined learner experience, certain considerations should be made. A heutagogical approach to learning and teaching is characterized first and foremost by learner-centeredness in terms of both learner-generated contexts and content. Course design elements that support learner-centeredness in a heutagogical approach are presented below.

- *Learner-defined learning contracts*: Learning contracts support students in defining and determining their individual learning paths. These individualized contracts, such as those used at distance education institution Empire State College (see www.esc.edu), define what will be learned (e.g., scope), how it will be learned (e.g., teaching and learning approaches, learning activities), and what will be assessed and how it will be assessed (Kenyon & Hase, 2010; Gilbert, 1975; Cristiano, 1993).
- *Flexible curriculum*: In a self-determined learning environment, the learner is the driver in creating flexible curriculum, which is defined by the student: learners create the learning map, and instructors serve as the compass (Hase & Kenyon, 2007; Hase, 2009). Flexible curriculum in this sense is negotiated action learning, which adapts and evolves according to learner needs (Hase, 2009; Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Learners negotiate "how, when, where and to what upper (rather than minimal) level they want to take their learning" (Hase, 2009, p. 47).
- *Learner-directed questions*: Learner-directed questions and the discussion that results from these questions are what guide learners and serve as mechanisms for helping learners make sense of course content, bring clarity to ideas, and promote individual and group reflection (Kenyon & Hase, 2001; Eberle, 2009). Guiding learners to define self-directed questions is one of the biggest challenges facing developers of

heutagogical courses, as designers must be “creative enough to have learners ask questions about the universe they inhabit” (Kenyon & Hase, 2001, para. 29).

- *Flexible and negotiated assessment:* In heutagogy, the learner is involved in designing his or her assessment. Negotiated and learner-defined assessment has been shown to improve the motivation of learners and their involvement in the learning process, as well as make learners feel less threatened by instructor control of their learning process (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p. 115; Hase, 2009; Ashton & Elliott, 2007; Canning, 2010). One way of incorporating negotiation into the assessment process is through the use of learning contracts (Hase, 2009). The assessment should include measurable forms of assessing understanding of content, including whether the learner has achieved the competencies desired. Rubrics can also be used effectively in guiding learners in their self-assessment process, for example by assessing “discussion skills, quality of work, outcomes, collaboration, academic soundness and knowledge of material” (Eberle, 2008, p. 186).

Conclusions

Creating competent and capable learners is “critical to life in the rapidly changing economy and cultures that characterize postmodern times” (Anderson, 2010, p. 33). By incorporating heutagogical practice, educators have the opportunity to better prepare students for the workplace and for becoming lifelong learners, as well as to foster student motivation by cultivating students who “are fully engaged in the topic they are studying because they are making choices that are most relevant or interesting to them” (Kenyon & Hase, 2010, p. 170). Distance education has a particular affinity to the heutagogical approach, due to distance education’s inherent characteristics of requiring and promoting learner autonomy, its traditional focus on adult learners, and its evolutionary and symbiotic relationship with technology – all characteristics shared with this emerging theory. Because of this affinity, distance education is in a unique position to provide a sustainable environment for studying and researching this teaching and learning method – and for assessing and evaluating the theory’s appropriateness as a theory of distance education.

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