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Self-Determined Approach to Learning:
A Social Science Perspective

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Abstract

Over recent years the higher education sector has been encouraged to find different, effective and flexible ways of teaching. This enthusiasm is apparent more than ever before, as the current British Conservative government have produced a white paper on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The Teaching Excellence Framework intends to measure and improve the quality of teaching and learning within the higher education sector. With this proposed framework being introduced, universities will have to think of new ways of teaching and learning. This paper examines the pedagogical approach to self-determined learning within the dynamic of the tutor and the learner. In the paper, the authors argue for a fundamental rethink of how students learn in the higher education sector. Moreover, the authors call for a greater emphasis on a self-determined approach to learning and the integration of heutagogy, as this approach challenges the pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.

Keywords: Heutagogy, Self-Determined, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), Pedagogy

Public Interest Statement:

Since the introduction of tuition fees in the United Kingdom the structure of the higher education sector has changed. In the general public's eye, higher education institutions have two key functions, firstly to undertake research in different discipline areas, and secondly, to teach students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. More importantly, central government has perceived universities as institutions that provide knowledge exchange to the learner and provide solutions to problems that occur in society. Last November the newly elected Conservative Government introduced a new policy on providing excellence in teaching and learning. This new policy has been termed the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF), which aims to provide the best student experience at higher education institutions. In the past it has been felt that governments have focused too much on research excellence and not enough on teaching excellence standards. Therefore, this new social policy will provide added pressures on institutions to implement excellence in teaching and learning. This paper explores the current teaching and learning environment and, more importantly, suggests solutions to provide teaching and learning excellence in the sector. The authors introduced a pedagogical approach of self-determined approach to learning within the context of heutagogy.

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1. Introduction

Since the introduction of tuition fees in Britain, the higher education sector has come under increased scrutiny. British universities today are major global businesses that are competing with each other to attract the best students and to attract funding. Students will now shop around to find the best university to attend. The access to information is more diverse than ever before; students have access to university league tables in terms of university ranking and subject discipline areas (Halsall and Snowden, 2017)

In today's university sector, the 'Student Experience' is crucial to the university's reputation, but even more crucial to the learner. Back in February 2014, Peter Scott (a Professor of Higher Education Studies at the Institute of Education) observed in *The Guardian* newspaper that the phrase 'Student Experience' is the buzzword of the moment. Scott (2014) provides a useful analogy of what the term actually means:

> "It is part of market-speak. If students are 'customers' rather than … well, just students, their 'experience' must be the main focus of the 'business'. And, if institutions are jostling in a competitive market, that experience can no longer be realised just through professional and personal (and maybe private) relationships between students and their teachers. Instead, it becomes a goal that must be managed corporately."

This new buzzword 'Student Experience' has allowed central government and the higher education sector to reflect on how we measure teaching and learning experiences (Temple, et al., 2014). For many years, in the higher education sector, there has been a feeling of an imbalance between how the university sector measures the quality of research and teaching. In the past, too much has hinged on the quality of research. In May 2015, the new British Conservative Government implemented plans (the Teaching Excellence Framework) to balance out research and teaching. As it stands, there is currently no procedure in place to reward teaching quality and champion the best student experience. The Times Higher Education supplement (2015) has noted that the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a proposed framework that all English universities will have to follow in order to allow the government to monitor and assess teaching quality. The TEF, which was published as a green paper in November 2015, has five core aims:

1. "Ensure all students receive an excellent teaching experience that encourages original thinking, drives up engagement and prepares them for the world of work
2. Build a culture where teaching has equal status with research, with great teachers enjoying the same professional recognition and opportunities for career and pay progression as great researchers
3. Provide students with the information they need to judge teaching quality
4. Recognise institutions that do the most to welcome students from a range of backgrounds and support their retention and progression
5. Include a clear set of outcome-focused criteria and metrics"

(Times Higher Education, 2015)

In the government's green paper (2015), titled *'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'*, this new framework goal is to acknowledge and reward excellent teaching. The rationale for this new framework is summed up on page 19 of the report when it says:

> "[...] insufficient, inconsistent and inadequate information about the quality of teaching, means it is hard for prospective students to form a coherent picture of where excellence can be found within and between our higher education

providers. It is important that we move to a position where all students can take advantage of the best opportunities and feel confident that their decision will provide them with good value for money."

The above description on the current climate of the higher education sector in Britain has demanded a new emphasis on the way universities undertake teaching and learning in respect of pedagogies. Hence, the authors of this paper critically identify the contemporary debates on the pedagogical approach to self-determined learning. This paper is divided into two sections: the first section explores the current issues and debates on the principles of heutagogy; the second section examines the teaching and learning debates on mentor assisted learning.

2. The Principles of Heutagogy

Blaschke (2012) has observes that the term heutagogy is sourced from the Greek for 'Self'. The concept of heutagogy is developed from the study of self-determined learning and has become a popular approach to use in the higher education sector (Halsall et al., 2016; Snowden and Halsall, 2014; Hase and Kenyon, 2013; Canning, 2010). According to Canter (2012), the idea of heutagogy was pioneered by Steward Hase of Southern Cross University. The premise of heutagogy is that the learner is motivated to research their own subject interest and their personal philosophy. Hence, the ultimate goal is to contemplate within themselves and the students they work with. Bhoyrub et al. (2010, p. 324) have noted that:

"[...] learners are seen as only facilitated toward learning, rather than being directly taught. This facilitation reduces the opportunity for the learner to experience being under threat, subsequently allowing a relaxation of ego boundaries and hence being more open to learning. Effective learning environments can consequently be seen as those that minimise threat to the self and that promote differentiated perception of experience[…]"

Therefore, it is the notion that their learning experience is influenced by their professional practice. Blaschke (2012) has provided a useful theoretical discussion on the guiding principles of heutagogy. In her work the central theme in heutagogy is 'double-loop learning'. This theme, 'double-loop learning', allows the learner to "consider the problem and the resulting action and outcomes, in addition to reflecting upon the problem-solving process and how it influences the learner's own beliefs and actions" Blaschke (2012, p. 59). Double-loop learning takes place when the learner critiques personal values and conjecture. As Blaschke (2012, p. 60) notes:

"When learners are competent, they demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge and skills; skills can be repeated and knowledge retrieved. When learners are capable, skills and knowledge can be reproduced in unfamiliar situations. Capability is then the extension of one's own competence, and without competency there cannot be capability. Through the process of double-looping, learners become more aware of their preferred learning style and can easily adapt new learning situations to their learning styles, thus making them more capable learners."

A heutagogical approach to teaching and learning from an international perspective has become popular in several subject disciplines. More recently, Snowden and Halsall (2016) have adapted this approach to the social science discipline and have recommended a greater emphasis on applying heutagogical principles in the higher education sector. Nursing, engineering and education studies have discovered that heutagogy is plausible because this approach to learning is adaptable to the work place. Particularly in the UK, the personal development plan (PDP) is a crucial tool in any undergraduate and postgraduate

degree. A key element of the PDP is that students in an undergraduate degree must engage in experience in the work place, by undertaking a work placement in a particular field they are interested in. In the QAA Youth and Community Benchmarking Statement it states that integrating a work placement provides a "critical and reflective practice" and creates a sense of "professionalism through a variety of placements" (QAA, 2009, p. 15).Moreover, research carried out by Crebert et al. (2004) in Australia has noted that a work placement provides the students with strong "linkages between curriculum content and 'real-world' examples" and "developing generic skills in the university context" (Crebert etal.,2004,p. 162).

Current pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, in respect to students having expertise in the work environment, are closely aligned with heutagogy. For example, research carried out by Bhoyrub et al. (2010) argues that heutagogy enables a learning framework for the tutor and the student. In their article, Bhoyrub et al. (2010, p. 322) have examined nursing students and they argue that this learning framework is the best approach to use, as nurses are in ever-varied surroundings that cause 'unpredictability' and 'uncertainty'. Bhoyrub et al. (2010, p. 326)conclude that when it comes to teaching nurses:

> "Heutagogy, therefore, is a potential-packed approach to clinical learning that provides an alternative lens from which to both view and construct practice-based educational components of pre-registration courses pertinent to each branch. In many ways when used as a framework to place around practice based nurse education, heutagogy makes sense of the necessary uncertainties that defines nursing."

Another study by UK academics, Canning and Callan (2010) highlights the importance of the heutagogical approach. In their article they examine three institutions that have adapted the heutagogical framework in teaching and learning. Their research discovered that the heutagogical approach enables the student to control their own learning, reflect, and expand professional development. The key to the success of the heutagogical approach relies on reflective practice because it helps the student to control their learning and reflect on what they have learned thus allowing application to a practical situation. Canning and Callan (2010, p. 80) conclude their work:

> "A multi-layered approach of blended and flexible learning and approach to heutagogy provides a foundation for emerging shared meaning. This is enabled through supporting creative possibilities for unfolding new knowledge from a range of ways of knowing rather than purely relying on discursive reasoning."

3. Mentor Assisted Learning

A key element of successful heutagogical approaches to learning is mentorship (Snowden and Halsall, Forthcoming). This section of the paper explores the notion of mentoring and its relationship with heutagogy. Mentoring has a long, historical tradition, with many authors citing the origins and source to the character, Mentor, who advised Telemachus the son of Odysseus in ancient Greece, with the legend stating that the Goddess Athena disguised herself as Mentor when visiting Telemachus, providing support and guidance in order to prepare him to take the Kingdom's throne. The notion here described in the ancient Greek tale is that of a mentor as a wise, kindly elder, trusted educator and guide, who supported, protected and nurtured the young Telemachus. It is this functional interpretation of the mentor that has dominated the core defining features of heutagogy since its value to learning was recognised in the late 70s. Conversely, this approach to mentoring does not accommodate what has developed into a multi-faceted, complex and context specific interpretation of what a mentor is, and what a mentor does. Defining mentorship is exceptionally intricate, due in part to the multi-faceted nature of the role and the plethora of definitions that have attempted to define the role in a precise way. However, what is clear is

that the definitions, and consequently the role of the mentor is context specific. This can be seen in the contrasting role of the mentor. For example, in health care education, specifically nursing, where the mentor is someone who assesses competence and fitness to practice determined by a pass/fail judgment (NMC, 2013), or that of an aspirational mentor such as a key figure in a person's life who has provided motivation or inspiration (e.g. Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, or a School teacher), and that of a peer mentor, someone who supports an individual in an educational setting.

Mentoring, should and does reflect the social context of implementation (Kram, 1983), which in part explains the plethora of definitions and the complexities of attempting to provide such definitions. However, for the purpose of clarity, we suggest that the mentor is someone who provides an intervention that supports those individuals with less experience within any given context in their personal, social and professional development.

Nonetheless, it is clear when reviewing the literature that there are two commonly occurring facets: relationship and reciprocity. Mentoring is based upon a relationship; this can be either within a dyad or between one mentor and a group of mentees, and the notion of reciprocity where an exchange element exists between the people involved in the relationship. It is a term that is used interchangeably, often confused with the process of coaching, and is not consistent across studies or within practice (Terrion and Leonard, 2007; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2009; Andrew and Clarke, 2011) and compounded by the observation that the length of the relationship is not consistent - it may or may not be predetermined. Recently, the UK has seen many universities adopting a different approach to mentoring: Peer Mentoring. Peer mentoring has emerged as a strategy to enhance development, retention and to ease the transition of students into university. Whilst Andrews and Clarke (2011) allude to the complexities of defining the peer mentor, Terrion and Leonard provide a useful definition of the 'peer' mentor as a person who provides an assistive relationship in which two individuals of similar age/or experience work together, either informally or formally, to fulfil some kind of informational and/or emotional need" (2007, p. 150); subsequently, moving away from the hierarchical nature of the relationship that underpins traditional mentoring. Whilst the peer mentor still holds a higher level of experience and knowledge than the mentee, they are typically more approachable, find it easier to empathise, and have a greater ability to provide psychosocial and task orientated support, and, we suggest within heutagogical curricula, hold distinct experience and knowledge of the field of learning being explored.

It is widely accepted that mentoring is a strategy for success in a variety of contexts, frequently linked to enhanced performance and productivity, goal attainment, smoothertransitions in life events, and distinctly enhances the learning experience for all participants, (Kram and Isabella, 1985; Roberts, 2000; Stringer, Cawyer, et al., 2002; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2009; Lennox-Terrion, 2010; Andrews and Clarke, 2011; Snowden and Hardy, 2014), there is little doubt that peer mentorship contributes positively to the undergraduate's experience in higher education.

Heutagogy, as a framework for self-determined learning, clearly re-configures the contemporary learning landscape, incorporating a distinct shift from lecturer led to student led learning, determining how, what and when learning takes place. Alred and Garvey (2000) appraise the literature concerning mentoring in the context of knowledge productivity and suggest that the successful learning landscape must be one that places the learner at the heart of an authentic learning process., The key features or functions of this landscape can be seen to be:

- "The acquisition of subject matter expertise and skill directly related to the scope of target competence.
- Learning to solve problems by using domain specific expertise.

- Developing reflective and critical thinking skills conducive to locating paths leading to new knowledge and its application.
- Securing communication skills that provide access to the knowledge network of others and those that enrich the learning environment.
- Procure skills that regulate motivation and affections related to learning.
- Promote stability to enable specialisation, cohesion and integration.
- Causing creative turmoil to instigate improvement and innovation."

(Alred and Garvey, 2000, p. 264)

Having a direct association with the self-determined learning, in order to ensure the learner remains at the centre of the learning process, engaged within the learning community and presented with real world learning, the mentoring relationship enables the knowledge production of the individual to be enhanced and personalised, developing reflective and critical thinking skills conducive to the production of new knowledge

It is when considering the notion of 'inside knowledge' and the 'inter-relationship' with 'heutagogy' and 'mentoring' that the real impact upon learning is demonstrated. Stringer-Cawyer et al. (2002, p. 225) suggest that the process of mentoring facilitates socialisation, as mentees learn the 'ins and outs' of the community context and adapt to the processes, values, social knowledge and expected behaviours inherent within the community. Early and rapid access to this inside knowledge enables the student to learn more effectively, providing a student centred and realist approach to learning and skill development, learning knowledge and skills appropriate to their needs.

Significantly, this is also linked to Bandura's (1997) notion of modelling as the mentor provides a model of positive behaviour reflecting success and experience. Bandura emphasises the importance of observation and modelling for the development of behaviour and suggests that:

> "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them of what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling, from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action." (Bandura, 1997, p. 22)

Modelling is viewed as a powerful transmitter of values and attitudes; the mentor provides a role model that transmits a series of values and attitudes that are linked to successful learning, enabling the mentee to access the 'inside knowledge' that the mentor possesses in terms of specialist, real world knowledge, experience and successes.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertion concerning knowledge productivity is rooted in their observation that learning is viewed as a form of participation and that the learner should be at the centre of the learning process. The central tenet of 'situated learning' is that learning and the production of knowledge is generated by the experience, as illustrated by Lave and Wenger, who assert that:

> "Learners inevitably participate in communities […] and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move towards full participation in the socio cultural processes of the community. A person's intentions are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio cultural practice. This social process includes indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skill." (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 29)

This places emphasis upon the role of engagement described by Lave and Wenger (1991) and the notion of 'situated learning'. Lave and Wenger assert that learning is socially constructed but distinctly takes place within an authentic context. As students engage in authentic discussion and activities over a period of time a community of practice is formed, where the student is fully engaged with the practice of the community.

Alred and Garvey's notion of the 'learning landscape' (2000) provides a scaffold to illustrate the context of knowledge productivity within a community. This scaffold, we suggest, represents the social and cultural influences that shape the learner, and illustrates the shift to a social and holistic model of the learning landscape that is driven by the student and is delivered within a heautagogical curriculum. In order for this landscape to succeed in knowledge production, clearly the student needs to be at the centre of the learning process and engaged within the community. It is this process, Alred and Garvey (2000) suggest, that learning in, and through the mentoring relationship enables the knowledge production of the student to be enhanced. It is the mentor that aids and facilitates this learning, enabling the mentee to participate in academic life much earlier, choosing, and attaining the "subject matter expertise and skill and in developing reflective and critical thinking skills conducive to new knowledge" (Alred and Garvey, 2000,p. 264) that meets their needs and aspirations.

It is when considering the notion of 'inside knowledge' that the real impact upon learning begins to materialise. Stringer-Cawyer et al. suggest that the process of mentoring facilitates socialisation, as mentees learn and adapt to the processes, values and social knowledge available within the institution (2002,p. 225). Early access to this inside knowledge would help the student to learn more effectively and to establish a stronger sense of belonging and participation within the learning community and the development of the confidence to select learning. The peer mentor, by virtue of their 'inside knowledge' is able to translate the curriculum, socially constructing and offering guidance in choosing what, and how to learn.

Self-efficacy is essential for student success in this context. The belief that one can succeed is clearly linked to positive performance. Bandura and Locke (2003) emphasise the importance of self-efficacy: "Self-efficacy beliefs…affect whether individuals think in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways, how well they motivate themselves and persevere in the face of difficulties, the quality of their emotional well-being and their vulnerability to stress and depression" (Bandura and Locke, 2003, p. 87). Embracing a culture of success should aid students successful learning, as illustrated by Margolis (2005) who suggests that self-efficacy is essential and that those students with strong self-efficacy are characterised by higher motivation, greater effort, persist longer and consequently achieve more. Roberts (2000) also suggested in relation to self-efficacy, that the mentor enablesthe mentee to discover latent abilities, growth in confidence, personal growth, increased awareness, increased effectiveness, self-actualisation and resonation. Distinctly, the mentor provides a model of positive behaviour that reflects success and experience, acting as a powerful transmitter of values and attitudes, which reinforce successful learning. Mentors contributed to the 'self–efficacy' by procuring skills that Alred and Garvey (2000) suggest enhance learning and the production of knowledge.

Engagement with the process of mentoring within the context of learning enables the student to rapidly inhabit and navigate the inside knowledge that the mentor has developed. Distinctly, the mentor is able to translate reality, and help the mentee inhabit their own internalised patterns of reasoning, enabling the development of a learning landscape and space to learn. The peer mentor is able to facilitate co-reflection, enabling the mentee to articulate what they did, their learning and knowledge preferences and how these can be interpreted, constructed and applied within the real world. For this landscape to succeed in knowledge and skill acquisition, the learner needs to be at the centre of this process and engaged within the community. It is this process that learning in, and through the mentoring

process enables the skill, knowledge and role of the individual to be enhanced and represents the social and cultural influences that shape the learner, and illustrates the shift to a social and holistic model of learning.

4. Conclusion

This paper presents the argument that a self-determined learning approach that involves an expansion and re-interpretation of Andragogical principles - a shift in thinking towards heutagogy- will enhance the learning experience for students and student communities in response to an ever-changing higher education and societal landscape. The case for the application of heautagogical principles, where the learner is able to develop space, and promoting the learner as an 'architect' of learning, producing dynamic curricula that are community and group focussed, have been presented.

Nevertheless we do not advocate that students are given a *tabula rasa* on entry to university, as this is unlikely to provide the response society demands from its graduates in this dynamic and ever changing world. Indeed, Canning and Callan (2010) suggest that there are two pre requisites for a heautagogical approach: "emotional literacy and emotional identity"(2010, p. 76) both of which develop in learners by effective mentorship and we assert that mentoring should form a central tenet of the heautagogical curriculum.

We conclude by placing emphasis upon the case for the adoption of a self-determined approach - heutagogy- to the curriculum. University education requires educators to be responsive to the needs of the students and its community, in an ever-increasing performance driven and consumerist culture. Heutagogy, we propose, is an approach that can be adopted to enhance the curriculum. A shift in thinking and practice towards a heutagogy will enable the learner with the support of effective mentorship, where the learner is viewed as an architect of learning, enabling them to learn about the nature of understanding and their role in making knowledge that inspires them to work for professional and social change.

Distinct within this approach, learning involves the whole person, introducing a holistic dimension to the process that promotes a greater sense of identity and self-confidence for the learner. This aids participation within the community and, consequently, encourages the learner to become more successful in learning what is important to them and the community in which they belong. Holism should underpin the delivery of the curriculum and form the central tenet of pedagogical practice. We urge educators to place greater emphasis on a self-determined approach to learning and the integration of heutagogical principles within the curriculum, responding to the challenge of Barnet:"The 21st century is calling for human beings who are themselves flexible, able to respond purposively to new situations and ideas" (2014, p. 9), where those curricula that develop graduates that are "inflexible, unable to respond to strangeness—to the challenges and new experiences that the world presents—is short-changing its students" (Barnett, 2014, p. 62).

This approach, the importance of which is emphasised by the emerging TEF, provides the Social Sciences with a dynamic and innovative approach to learning that enables the graduate of today to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

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