

# A move towards heutagogy to empower theology students

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Society is transforming from the industrial era to an information based, network society. There is widespread consensus that due to this revolution in society, education needs to make a paradigm shift in order to stay relevant to the changing needs of society. Although this paradigm shift is promoted widely in academic literature, it seems as if in practice there are stumbling blocks preventing higher education to make positive strides into a new direction within the South African context. This research highlights some of the hurdles that Open Distance Learning higher education in South Africa is experiencing and also suggests a possible way forward to overcome these obstacles through the implementation of self-determined learning (heutagogy). In order for heutagogy to be implemented successfully, student support is of the upmost importance both in the curriculum design and the actual teaching and presenting of courses.

## Introduction

The enormous changes that the development in information and communication technology (ICT) brought to society over the past decade or two constitute a reformation that has huge implications for the higher education industry in South Africa. Although South Africa and most parts of Africa are yet to experience the full impact of the so-called fourth revolution, which is the transformation to a technology based, network society (Warschauer & Matuchniak 2010:179; Jarcho 2014:6), it is already clear that educators need to embrace this opportunity for change and development if higher education intends to keep its positive and lasting influence on society. In the network society, educators have to implement technology as part of the blended learning approach and focus on student-centred education. Students must develop into life-long learners who will be able to use technology and the network opportunities of society effectively and manage their own learning to improve their knowledge, skills and capabilities in order to adapt to both expected and unexpected changes and challenges in academic life and their careers beyond formal education. Technology, as the communication method that is added to the educational tool kit by the fourth revolution, could have a positive influence on education, if implemented in such a way that it fully relates to the educational outcomes of the courses or programmes (Bernath *et al.* 2008:1) and fits in with the blended learning approach of higher education institutions. Keeping in mind that the previous revolutions also had radical consequences for education (Oliver 2014:2) and proved to be beneficial for the expansion and increased quality delivery options of education, it is important to speed up the current paradigm shift. The huge influence that the development of the printing press (the teaching tool added by the third revolution) had on the structure and delivery of education throughout the industrial era serves as example to emphasise the urge for change in higher education. The printing press did not replace the older communication tools used for education, such as language or writing, but was added on to expand the educational tool kit. In the same way, the current expansion of communication tools increases the array of choices available to the educational sector to provide effective education.

The move away from structured, paced, controlled and mass education that provided a workforce for the industrial era towards an educational system that is aligned with the technology driven network society and the individual needs of students is currently lacking momentum and drive (O'Brien *et al.* 2013:50). At the turn of the century, Passmore (2000:1) already lamented the low impact that technology has on education and it seems as if this problem is gaining momentum to such an extent that universities are experiencing a crisis (Stanley 2015:1). The Canadian educators heading the Educational Technology and Mobile Learning (2016) webpage, state that technology is an 'essential force shaping much of our teaching and pedagogical practices', urging educators to develop key digital skills in order to provide effective education.

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However, the problem is not only about the use of technology, but also regarding the total concept of higher education, including the issue of student-centredness. Schweisfurth (2011:425) cautions about the high level of failure when implementing student-centred education in developing countries. She concludes that this concept is doomed to fail if educator capacity is limited or educators are not fully committed to this way of teaching due to the fact that they have not experienced this kind of education themselves. A lack of resources and high educator-student ratios are further complicating the situation in Africa (Modisaotsile 2012:1; Africa-America Institute 2015:10).

The 2016 NMC Horizon report calls the problem of keeping higher education relevant for the world which we live in, a 'wicked challenge' (Johnson *et al.* 2016:32). The issue of relevance is confirmed by a white paper from the San José State University (Qayoumi *et al.* 2013:5) that includes research findings about American graduates' ability to succeed in the workplace. Although 72 per cent of educational institutions were convinced that graduates are able to make a success of their careers, only 50 per cent of the graduates felt up to the task and less than 40 per cent of employers agreed that graduates are adequately prepared for their jobs. Griesel and Parker (2009:1) did research from the perspective of employers on South African graduates and in this case the results were surprisingly positive. The study showed that employers in general value the contribution of higher education and that 'there may be more of a common language between higher education and employers than is generally perceived' (Griesel & Parker 2009:1). The gaps between employer expectations and higher education outcomes should be bridged through work integrated learning and life-long learning opportunities.

These brief notes on the problems of implementing technology and the much needed focus on student-centred learning confirm that higher education in South Africa will have to take note of the stumbling blocks, embrace the challenges and opportunities and develop higher education that is fit for use in the African context. As already mentioned, blended learning (Unisa 2008) and student-centred learning (Unisa 2012) are two key concepts that should be focused on in the move towards a new higher education model that serves the network society. This current research report only focuses on the second<sup>1</sup> of these aspects, namely the provision of student-centred learning through heutagogy or self-directed learning within the Open Distance Learning environment.

The first part of the article will focus on identifying some hurdles that are currently straining the momentum of the paradigm shift towards self-directed learning. Knowledge about these factors can create an awareness of the challenges and opportunities that are currently looming everywhere. This, in turn, could encourage educators to start accepting

1. The issue of the use of technology in theological education was addressed in an earlier study (Oliver 2014).

the challenges and experimenting with student-centred learning practices that could enhance their service delivery to stakeholders such as students and the corporate world. Higher education, and more specifically distance education, is changing from a teacher-centred to a student-centred model. Students are encouraged to manage their own learning (self-determined learning) and to make the best use of the opportunities provided by the technology based network society to enhance their knowledge, skills, capabilities and competencies to equip themselves as life-long learners adaptable to the changing world around them. The second part of the article will focus on how educators could focus on implementing heutagogy to provide support to their teaching and assessment methods on the one hand and to enhance student success on the other hand.

The theoretical approach that is used, will be explained next. Thereafter, some of the general stumbling blocks barring the way towards introducing self-directed learning into higher education are briefly discussed. A discussion on the implementation of heutagogy into the curriculum of theology students at the University of South Africa as an open distance education institution will form the last focus point of the article.

## Theoretical approach

Redesigning the theology courses at the University of South Africa, in an effort to streamline the Programme Qualification Mix (PQM), forced educators in theology to move beyond their subject specific focus areas and to take notice of the major theories that underlie teaching and learning. The oldest and best known of these theories, pedagogy, is a teacher-centred theory that provides structured and paced learning that transmits information and skills from a master to a student. This theory formed the backbone of education during the industrial era. From this, andragogy was developed to focus on the need of adult learners (Knowles 1970). This learning theory is based on transaction that addresses immediate, practical needs of context-dependent students. Expanding on this learning theory, heutagogy was developed in 2001 by Hase and Kenyon of Australia to account for the changing circumstances and provide effective education in the twenty-first century. The fourth and last theory noted in this regard is academagogy, a student-centred approach to teaching that encourages students to become life-long, self-directed learners. It enables educators to select and use the most appropriate learning style and teaching theory in which to present both study material and assessment tasks for each required learning experience and activity (Winter *et al.* 2009:992) in a course or programme. Academagogy is a mesh of pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy that allows for flexibility and interaction with students (McAuliffe *et al.* 2008:13). A few words are added here to explain these two concepts in more detail and to support the idea of how heutagogy can be implemented into the curriculum.

Academagogy is best explained as an umbrella concept that can be used in diverse student environments and disciplines.

It provides educators with choices when linking content to teaching styles and assessment methods. It allows for the transformation of knowledge into application and impacts on behavioural change (Murthy 2011:289–290), which is a major positive outcome for students, especially in theology where positive behaviour and sound values are part of the desired outcomes. Students are encouraged to build upon their prior knowledge and experience to develop confidence as independent thinkers (McAuliffe & Winter 2013:79) capable of managing complex thought processes and applying their knowledge and skills in day-to-day tasks and challenges. Unlearning and re-learning form integrated parts of this learning process and the emphasis is on active engagement with technology (Dunlap & Lowenthal 2011:2). A product (course or programme) that is based on this theory must be flexible enough to accommodate both pre-millennium and millennium era<sup>2</sup> students.

Heutagogy is the study of self-determined learning whereby students ‘transform their mental abilities into academic skills’ (Blaschke 2012:56) through teachable processes to show personal initiative, perseverance and adoptive abilities (Zimmerman 2002:65, 70). This is a learning theory that focuses on learners’ individual development of their competencies, capacity building as well as their individual interests and immediate needs (Hase & Kenyon 2001). The fact that students are able to learn in a self-directed way is by no means new. Heutagogy pulls together a number of other educational theories and approaches, including that of Argyris and Schon (1996) who made the initial paradigm shift with their conceptualisation of double loop learning.

Heutagogy enables students to move ‘beyond curriculum bounded knowledge and skill acquisitions towards building their capacity and capability’<sup>3</sup> (Hase & Kenyon 2007:113). Students take responsibility for their own learning (Canning 2010:59) while educators function as knowledge and skills brokers and no longer as gatekeepers to or resources and masters of knowledge and skills. Students set their own learning goals, in line with the course or programme outcomes, and manage their own learning, again within set goals and guidelines. They are encouraged to communicate and collaborate with others in order to eliminate isolation and silo thinking, two dangers of Open Distance Learning that usually have a negative impact on student performance. Key elements of this learning theory are reflection, sharing, connecting, collaborating, exploration of new and unknown areas of knowledge and skills as well as the creation of new knowledge and understanding.

The use of academagogy and heutagogy implies that the one-size-fits-all, mass production model that education became

2.Those born before 1980 are called the pre-millennial generation and they are used to a paper-based, paced, pedagogical education while the younger generation, born after 1980, is called the millennium generation who are familiar with the digital, network world.

3.Competency is the proven ability in acquiring knowledge and skills while capacity can be seen as a learner’s ‘confidence in their competency and as a result the ability to take appropriate and effective action’ in both familiar and unfamiliar and changing settings (Cairns 2000:1).

used to during the industrial era can no longer be used. Implementing heutagogy can open up choices for specialisation or the focus on specific areas while still providing general rules and guidelines within the programme or course that regulates student choices (through the use of academagogy by educators) to stay in line with the set outcomes. This could ensure that high standards are upheld while enabling students to regulate their own life-long learning paths.

The focus now turns to the identification of a few stumbling blocks that are preventing higher education in South Africa from gaining momentum in the move towards implementing self-directed education to empower students to become positive change agents in the technology based, network society of the twenty-first century.

## Obstacles in the path of implementing heutagogy in higher education

### Failure to understand the bigger picture

Failure by educators, students and the public in general to understand and buy into the bigger picture of the goal and intended outcomes of education (Global Partnership for Education 2015) is currently a major stumbling block that prevents positive development and alternation in higher education institutions (Butler-Adam 2016:2). The South African academic society should focus on proclaiming the main goal of education. This goal must be introduced and promoted actively to the whole of society. People, both inside and outside the educational system, must be informed and constantly reminded about the purpose and intended results of education. The key objective of learning is to create people who are capable of doing new things and do things differently, not just repeating what previous generations did and also to form minds that are critical and able to verify information (Piaget 1964:499 in Duckworth 2014). The result of true learning is change (Buscaglia n.d.). This change occurs at different levels: in the way how people think (critical/analytical/evaluative/creative, etc.), their values, perceptions and behaviour, and also with respect to empowerment – enabling the student to transfer the insights, understanding, knowledge and skills gained to others in order to spread the culture of positive change and development. The way to measure if learning did take place, is to assess the levels of change taken place.

### The lasting legacy and effect of the industrial era on educational systems

The main and often only teaching theory that pre-millennium educators and students were exposed to is pedagogy. This means that both educators and students in this category would most likely find it difficult to transfer to other types of education like self-directed learning. Younger educators and students would most probably have engaged with some aspects of andragogy and self-determined learning but in general the formal educational systems in South Africa, both at basic and secondary level, are still functioning according to

the industrial era model of structured and paced pedagogy (Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity [CREATE] 2011). This means that if higher education is moving towards self-determined and life-long learning, both educators and students will have to be equipped and guided to embark on this alternative road. They must be informed, motivated, trained, supported and encouraged to take up the challenge of implementing a different educational model. Educators should be encouraged to make the paradigm shift themselves in order to be committed to walk the road with their students, meaning that they will have to implement self-determined learning in their own lives and see themselves as life-long learners before they are able to lead others.

The industrial education model makes students passive learners who are used to being spoon-fed with all relevant and important knowledge and skills by the hands of expert coaches. Students are therefore passive participants who expect to be taught and be provided with all relevant information pre-packed and ready to use. Information is usually filtered, compacted into focused study guides and lecture notes that are ready to be memorised for assessment through tests and exams (and then to be permanently discarded thereafter). This method of education is not learning, as there is no change or development involved and it should rather be labelled 'obtaining a qualification'.

Linked with this attitude towards education, and maybe as a result of it, the majority of students tend to be satisfied with mediocre results, striving to achieve just enough to comply with minimum standards to pass a course and programme. Often the majority of students lack the motivation and skills to reach for the upper level of achievement (Hase 2009:44). Surface learning has no real impact on students' behaviour or intellectual development and, therefore, graduates are struggling to transfer competencies into capacities (Hornsby & Osman 2014).

The revision of the theology courses at Unisa provided educators with an opportunity to implement self-directed learning into the curriculum to ensure that the goal and vision of education is promoted and to bring change to the teaching methods. The focus now shifts to how heutagogy was brought into the curriculum, firstly, by activating a mind shift and change of operations by some of the educators and, secondly, by implementing self-directed learning in a number of honours courses with low student numbers to allow for full student-centred support.

## Implementing heutagogy

### Educators became students and implemented their experiences

In 2012 the University of South Africa decided to provide educators with an opportunity to be exposed to self-directed, student-centred learning in order to promote the Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) concept that the university is aiming to implement in the near future. A number of

educators availed themselves of this opportunity and experienced as students how the University of Maryland University College implements the use of technology and self-directed, student-centred learning through a year-long online certificate course.

Inspired by this experience and built upon the preliminary work done on course development through this programme, the course content and structure of some honours courses at Unisa were altered to introduce self-directed learning. The principles of academagogy were used to carefully select content, tasks, activities and assessment methods that are fit for purpose and also link well with the intended learning objectives and assessment outcomes of each part of the courses. Educators decided where the principle of pedagogy was really needed, where andragogy could be used and also which parts of the course could and should be constructed to incorporate heutagogy, all in the best interest of the students. Students were informed about this underlying strategy and introduced to the change to self-directed learning through tutorial letters and information on the Learning Management System (LMS) of the university. The staged self-directed learning model of Grow (1991) and other material was used to provide information that helped students to understand the main goal and expected results of learning as well as achieving this through blended and student-centred learning. Due to the fact that these courses had low student numbers, educators could provide effective support and motivation to guide students with the initial changes and adaptations.

One of the major changes introduced to promote heutagogy is providing students with choices, ensuring that students are able to choose specific focus areas for development and specialisation within a more open and flexible curriculum. Students were given choices regarding topics they wanted to study under the umbrella theme of each module. Prescribed material was replaced with recommended works on each topic and students had the option to use other relevant and available sources. Students could decide which media to use for study purposes and assessment tasks, while educators provided examples and guidelines on possible options to use for each task.

### Changes in teaching needed to implement heutagogy

In order to implement self-directed learning, educators need to have an open mind regarding their areas of speciality. When allowing students to bring personal experiences, prior learning and the use of multimedia into the curriculum while working at their own pace and time (within the set limits of the university systems), educators have to ensure a measure of flexibility. Students must be allowed to explore, experiment and interact with different, controversial or disputed viewpoints in order to attain the set learning outcomes and expected changes in understanding, insight, actions and knowledge. Course content must be opened up



which implies that educators can no longer restrict students to only use carefully written study guides and handpicked text books as sole course content. The challenge for educators is to provide guidance to all students in their choice of resources and within the broader timeframe set for the module. Opening up the prescribed list of resources and adding flexibility also led to challenges for educators regarding assessment of learning outcomes. One way of dealing with this challenge is to implement alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, continuous assessment tasks, projects, online tests and exams, take-home exams and evidence based assessments. Another option is to introduce learning contracts (Hase 2009:48) with students on specific goals and outcomes and levels of achievement which, in the South African context, is also a new and unfamiliar learning experience. Using blended learning and introducing self-directed learning also require full student support to ensure a successful transition to this new learning experience.

### Providing student support

Increased flexibility (through blended, student-centred learning) brings with it increased responsibility and commitment required from students (Asthon & Newman 2006:826). Not all students, even at post-graduate level, are able or willing (Hill 2013) to study in an environment where they must take control of and manage their own learning. This is mainly because they are used to structured and paced pedagogy and fail to see the importance of creating their own pathway to life-long learning. They lack the technical skills, practical experience and confidence to study in an unfamiliar instructional, technologically designed environment. Students are therefore in need of support to assist them from being dependent passive learners to become self-directed, life-long learners (Grow 1991). Much more than just subject specific content must be offered to support this development.

The challenge is to provide support that is 'ensuring success, promoting persistence, and avoiding drop-out ... by providing support systems that are flexible, accessible, and readily available when needed' (Moisey & Hughes 2008:319). Not surprisingly, this support normally does not involve academic support only. More often than not, the support needed is much bigger outside of the academic or subject specific context. This implies that the teaching and learning strategies must be expanded to include more than discipline focused content, especially when self-determined learning is introduced at the lower National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels such as undergraduate modules and programmes. Students need to be informed about and guided to understand teaching and learning theories, different learning styles, how to learn effectively, sources of learning, critical and analytical thinking skills as well as writing skills and how to do true reflection. This will enable them to develop confidence through active participation in the learning process, and to take responsibility for their learning.

Understanding what learning is all about forms an important part of the supportive content. The promotion of knowledge sharing and not knowledge hoarding (Canning & Callan 2010:74) must be emphasised in order for students to understand that 'the acquisition of knowledge and skills does not necessarily constitute learning' (Hase 2011:2). Learning only occurs when students connect new knowledge and skills to previous experiences, integrate it fully in terms of values and behavioural patterns and are able to actively use the knowledge in meaningful and novel ways. The work of Piaget (Atkinson 1983) on assimilation and accommodation underlines this issue, and the impact of un-learning and re-learning as a coping strategy in a fast changing world is also linked to effective learning processes. Each and every support mechanism should provide part of the scaffolding that will enable students to become active, self-directed learners.

Scaffolding (Rosenshine & Meister 1992:26) presents students with various cognitive strategies and independent practice opportunities, regulates difficulty levels and ensures the provision of constant and detailed feedback and feed-forward opportunities. Scaffolding principles can also be used to create study material in such a way that it is slightly too difficult for the specific level in order to encourage the notion of 'cognitive stretch' (Fox & Helford 1999:162), linked also with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. The aim of scaffolding is to get students interested and motivated to move up through the levels of being dependent students to interested students that start to explore for themselves, then advancing to become involved in their studies and finally to motivate them to become self-directed learners.

### Using blended learning as foundation for heutagogy

Students seem to be more strategic in their learning and expect higher education that is professionally developed, pedagogically sound, interactive and engaging (Folley 2010:99). Together with the support that technology and networking are providing, it seems a logical move to implement heutagogy by placing the control of the learning process in the hands of students and make it more flexible. By letting go of control over the learning process also provides students with more choice regarding content and focus areas within the curriculum. It enables educators and students to make full use of multimedia to enhance learning outcomes while learning can take place anywhere and anytime. Activities and assessment tasks can be structured in such a way that the level of change and development in students' thinking, behaviour and actions can be monitored. Self-directed learning thus incorporates all four aspects of the blended learning approach (time, place, media and activity – Littlejohn & Pegler 2007:75–76) and these sectors can be structured with flexibility in mind, overlapping, expanding or decreasing when and where necessary.

## Results from implementing self-determined learning

The change to self-directed learning in higher education cannot happen overnight and will not be successfully implemented by all educators and all students at the same pace. By implementing academagogy to rework the honours modules in one discipline, namely Theology, at the University of South Africa proved, however, that with dedication and committed educators, such a move is possible and delivers positive results.

The first step towards implementing heutagogy in higher education is to get educators to buy into the concept and then to experience self-directed life-long learning for themselves.

Developing courses with the help of academagogy to ultimately implement heutagogy is time consuming and stressful. Educators need to study and apply educational theories and practices that are in a totally different field of specialisation (in this case combining Theology and Curriculum Studies). Through using the umbrella of academagogy to develop course content and support strategies that include pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy when and where necessary, ensures that all parts of the curriculum can be taught successfully and most students are able to achieve a measure of self-directed learning success.

It is difficult to change the legacy of the industrial era's educational system. Students lack motivation and skills to succeed and constantly rely on the support and availability of educators. A safe space must be provided where students can practise, experiment and communicate with each other.

By stressing and promoting the main aim of learning that students must be empowered to do things differently and to do new things, the majority of the students bought into the different concept of learning. Building on this foundation, students used the blended learning approach successfully and made good use of the opportunity to choose their own learning paths according to their interests and focus points.

Finally, the effort is well worth it. Both educators and students gain from the experience, are at different stages of the path towards becoming self-directed life-long learners, and the throughput rate in these modules is very high. Students who were sceptical and negative at the start of the courses are often those who provide positive feedback at the end of the year, with some students already commencing with Master's and Doctoral studies after completing the Honours degree.

A few recommendations are listed that could help to expand the notion of heutagogy in higher education in general:

- The need to adapt higher education to be relevant in the technology based, network society through blended learning and student-centred education must be stressed and incorporated in university policy documentation.

- Educators and university management who are committed to this shift in teaching strategy must actively promote the main goal and expected results of learning to a wide audience, including their peers, students and the public sector.
- Students should be motivated and guided to become life-long learners who expect their education to be a journey of discovery that will challenge, develop and change their views, values, thinking patterns and actions in a positive and enriching way.
- Students must take responsibility for their learning and manage both the content and the process of their learning paths through responsible choices.
- Students must communicate with and learn from others, work cooperatively and contribute to knowledge creation.
- Students should learn to manage the following key processes: goal setting, time management, learning strategies, self-evaluation, self-attributions, seeking help or information, self-motivation, self-efficacy and task interest (Zimmerman 2002:64).

## Conclusion

The fourth revolution society that is developing must adapt in order to provide effective higher education for the next generation of students in the African context. Education should enable students to become life-long learners, able to adapt to change, willing to respond to challenges and capable of making a positive difference in their communities.

Through increased student responsibility, a variety of choices at all levels of the course and higher levels of flexibility, students should be able to develop a new paradigm regarding their education, by setting their own goals, managing their own learning, learning to network with others and using technology effectively to develop into life-long self-directed learners. This cannot happen overnight and certainly not without full support.

Incorporating heutagogy suggests a possible way forward to assist both educators and students in theology to make the paradigm shift to embrace the network society and move into a new approach to education, fit for life-long learning through student empowerment. Students who study theology should eventually be able to become much more than just theologians. By successfully making self-directed learning part of their lifestyle, these students can become competent graduates who are able to transfer knowledge and skills towards the betterment of their (faith) communities. The next generation of theology students should become positive change agents who are able to transfer knowledge and skills to others and become advocates for positive change as a result of effective learning.

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