



Heutagogical Opportunity?

Leading Learning Podcast
Transcript for Episode 427

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:00] Heutagogy might be the most important and powerful idea in learning that you've never heard us mention. Until today.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:12] I'm Celisa Steele.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:14] I'm Jeff Cobb, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:22] If you've tuned in before, odds are pretty good that you've heard us talk about andragogy.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:27] And odds are pretty good that you've also heard us talk about self-directed learning.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:32] But we are absolutely, 100-percent sure you have never heard us talk about heutagogy, and that's a gap we want to address in today's episode, number 427.

Celisa Steele: [00:00:43] Because, despite our lack of use of the term hithertofore, we are proponents of and believers of heutagogy.

Jeff Cobb: [00:00:52] And we want to make sure that you are going to be a believer too. So let's dig into this term and figure out what heutagogy is. Celisa, you were the one who uncovered this gem for us.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:04] It's a term that was coined by Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon, and it was used in an article that they published in 2000, and that article was called "From Andragogy to Heutagogy." They define, in that article, heutagogy as "the study of self-determined learning."

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Jeff Cobb: [00:01:21] As that title suggests, the authors are definitely building on the work of Malcolm Knowles and crediting him with the shift in 1970 away from pedagogy, which has that kid focus, to andragogy, which is for adult learners.

Celisa Steele: [00:01:40] So why heutagogy? There's a cynical view of that, which is just that, hey, a new word gets attention. You coin a new word, and that's going to help you get out there and get your article published. That's the cynical take on it.

Jeff Cobb: [00:01:53] It's an important thing to do if you are a researching academic sort. You have that whole "publish or perish" hanging over you. But I think we can take a little bit more generous view and say basically what Hase and Kenyon say is that, while andragogy was a good step, it just wasn't far enough. It's still too focused on a teacher-student relationship and too grounded in a reality that's no longer true. You can think about how much the world has changed or had changed since Knowles published *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* in 1970.

Celisa Steele: [00:02:33] Right. So you have Knowles publishing *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 1970. Hase and Kenyon, it's 2000, so 30 years later, where they're publishing "From Andragogy to Heutagogy." As you said, a lot changed in those 30 years. Well, it's been not quite 30 years since Hase and Kenyon put out their article, but here we are in 2024. So it's been 24 years. We can think about how much has changed even since 2000. COVID, generative AI, the decline in the trust of expertise—those are just a few that I can tick off fairly readily about things that have changed in the world in which we work and live.

Jeff Cobb: [00:03:11] Even before that, in 2000, what had happened with technology since Knowles was writing, lifespan, what work and jobs and careers looked like even then and certainly what they look like now—just a lot had changed since his initial idea of andragogy was put out there.

Celisa Steele: [00:03:29] In short, I think that we believe that Hase and Kenyon were really on to something with this idea of "Let's move beyond andragogy," and we'll go along with what they call it, heutagogy. One of the things that they point out is, given all that's changed and given the pace of change, the accelerating pace of change, is that andragogy is still probably too focused on formal learning. Hase and Kenyon point to what they call "the value of everyday, unorganized experiences and the process of reflection." That's what we might call informal learning.

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Jeff Cobb: [00:04:04] Yes. Hase and Kenyon say that “heutagogy looks to the future in which knowing how to learn will be a fundamental skill given the pace of innovation and the changing structures of communities and workplaces.” I can hear echoes in that of Alvin Toffler, of Peter Drucker. People have been thinking about this type of thing before, but Hase and Kenyon formalized that a bit.

Celisa Steele: [00:04:29] Yes, and I think that part of what they’re doing in their formulation of heutagogy is forefronting learners’ motivation and effort and ability, and it downplays the teacher or the instructor—and possibly even the learning business if it’s less important what’s going on in a formal sense. A lot of learning businesses are really focused on creating and delivering what falls under that formal learning umbrella—courses, seminars, and conferences. It, to some extent, perhaps threatens what a learning business does. Or maybe not.

Jeff Cobb: [00:05:06] Yes. We’ve raised this possibility before, and I think we definitely can talk about it more in this episode. But, if you think about it in the extreme, we really can’t ever teach others. It really comes down to the learner in the end. And we’ve talked before about concepts of learner responsibility and what the behavior, what the motivation of the learner has to be if learning is actually going to happen. Really, what a teacher can do and what a learning business can help to facilitate through providing structure, instructors, and that sort of thing is stimulate and encourage others to learn.

Celisa Steele: [00:05:45] Yes. I think, as we’ve already begun to allude to in our conversation so far, really heutagogy is a new name, an umbrella term for a lot of other ideas floating around. And Hase and Kenyon do give due to some of those other ideas that they’re building off of when they formulate heutagogy. Things like systems thinking and organizational learning and learner-managed learning and action learning and work-based learning. There are a lot of these various trends that they believe are tributaries flowing into the way that they describe and define heutagogy.

Jeff Cobb: [00:06:22] Yes, the classic “standing on the shoulders of giants” sort of thing and taking some of this thinking and, again, putting some structure, putting some formalization around it. Of course, heutagogy does build on andragogy. I’ll dip into a little bit of what they say about that in the paper. They say that “Knowles’ definition [of self-directed learning] provides a linear approach to learning and sounds like the chapters of a train the trainer guide”—very, very much rooted in traditional concepts of training and education. On the other hand, “Heutagogy takes account of intuition and concepts such as ‘double loop learning’ [Chris Argyris] that are not linear and not necessarily planned.”

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Celisa Steele: [00:07:06] “It may be that a person doesn’t identify a learning need” per se. They might not be super clear on what their learning need is, but they can identify “the potential to learn from a novel experience.” Again, this is this idea of you want to have learning that is as adaptable and applicable in as many situations as possible, and that’s where heutagogy is focusing. As they describe it—they being Hase and Kenyon in this article—they talk about it as including “aspects of capability, action learning processes such as reflection, environmental scanning as understood in Systems Theory, and valuing experience and interaction with others.” In essence, heutagogy “goes beyond problem solving” because it enables productivity. Or actually, “proactivity” is what they say, not productivity. Both, I think, are actually true, but it is this focus on what can be done with learning, which may be greater than any sort of learning objectives anyone might ascribe to a particular course.

Jeff Cobb: [00:08:17] I don’t know that their language necessarily mirrors this; maybe I’m adding my own gloss on it, but I’m thinking about proactivity and thinking about how they’re treating learning. We’ve talked before about how a great deal of learning can be unconscious. A great deal of learning doesn’t necessarily have intentionality behind it. This is another one of those approaches that gives us some language and some tools for helping to raise things to consciousness, helping to raise things to intentionality. Potentially, this is a point of leverage that we can use in engaging with our learners and helping them understand themselves as learners better and how they can learn better, even when they’re not in that classroom or that conference situation. We all box ourselves in so much and see ourselves as not really learning unless we’re in those formal learning structures. This is an approach that says, yes, you’re learning in those structures, obviously, but there’s so much that they can happen on a self-directed basis.

Jeff Cobb: [00:09:22] At Tagoras, we partner with professional and trade associations, continuing education units, training firms, and other learning businesses to help them understand market realities and potential, to connect better with existing customers and find new ones, and to make smart investment decisions around product development and portfolio management. Drawing on our expertise in lifelong learning, market assessment, and strategy formulation, we can help you achieve greater reach, revenue, and impact. Learn more at tagoras.com/more.

Celisa Steele: [00:09:58] And so all of this points to a potential opportunity for learning businesses. A potential heutagogical opportunity...

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:06] Heutagogical opportunity!

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Celisa Steele: [00:10:07] ...for learning businesses.

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:08] You heard it here first.

Celisa Steele: [00:10:10] I think, just as you were describing, Jeff, if a learning business can really support learners in being self-directed, there's a lot of potential opportunity because that very much could distinguish you from other learning providers that are just providing the course or the conference or that construct but aren't necessarily helping to develop your capability to learn.

Jeff Cobb: [00:10:35] Yes. I think that truly learner-centric approach is a real fit for many learning businesses. Associations, of course, have their memberships, their communities, and thinking about people operating and learning within that community—not so much within a classroom or a conference per se—and thinking about how you can leverage that. Even if you're in an academic continuing education unit, you've got a little more latitude, a little more freedom than you do if you're within the confines of that accredited degree path structure that the rest of the institution has to operate within. How do you take advantage of that and start being that facilitative structure around the learning needs of your learners that they can potentially take hold of themselves and direct themselves in?

Celisa Steele: [00:11:20] We've talked about developing pathways and trying to help smooth the path for your learners by making it clear what a next step might be. All of that is great, and we do believe that is a value that a learning business can provide. But this is about going beyond pathways. This is really about how do you help someone almost create their own pathway, which might be something that you never imagined. But, again, you're helping to facilitate and equip them with the skills that are going to actually allow them to identify "What is the right pathway for me?" and figure out how to get where they would like to be.

Jeff Cobb: [00:11:56] Yes, I think there's a comparison to how creativity works in here—you'll often hear that creativity and innovation work best within constraints. You provide a framework within which people can operate, but then they're driving the bus. But you're also providing them with a launch pad because they get used to being creative within these structures and can ultimately.... Picasso goes from being the classic painter to, well, being what he's known for today. I can think of an analogy in learning. We need to set these guardrails up. Pathways are valuable. But then how are we empowering people to go off the path and go where they need to go with their learning?

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Celisa Steele: [00:12:33] One point that I find particularly interesting from the Hase and Kenyon article is that they really focus on capacity. Again, if we think about pathways and certifications, they're arguing that it's really not about competency. It's about capacity. And so this is a quote from their article: "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."

Jeff Cobb: [00:13:20] Yes, I like that. We have an article that's from quite a while back, but it's still one of the most popular articles on our Mission to Learn site. It's about 15 ways of the self-directed learner, and a lot of this language from Hase and Kenyon reflects that. It's similar sort of language. What are the attitudes and the behaviors of that sort of learner? And then, again, back to learning businesses, how can we help people unlock those and actualize them?

Celisa Steele: [00:13:44] I think that one of the challenges in unlocking that will be a willingness to relinquish some control and some power. If the idea is about letting that learner be self-directed, that means you don't really know where they're going. You don't really know what they're going to do with the materials that you put out there. And so it's a little bit at odds with the way so many organizations are created. We want to have a bit of control and even some power and say in what people are going to do and how they're going to make use of our products and services. And this suggests that we might have to let go of that.

Jeff Cobb: [00:14:20] Yes, it doesn't lend itself very well to smile sheets or standard approaches to assessment or certification, but this is fertile ground for talking about how we might use some alternative approaches to those things. How will we measure impact if this is the sort of environment that we're supporting for our learners? I don't think that's impossible. I think there are valid ways to do that, but it is going to require learning business leaders to think a bit differently.

Celisa Steele: [00:14:48] And we've been focused a lot on the idea of personalized learning. What can we do to get there? I think this takes it one step further. This is individualized learning. It is that individual learner getting to say, "Okay, this is what and how I learn."

Jeff Cobb: [00:15:12] Heutagogy might be the most important and powerful idea in learning that you've never heard us mention. Until today. If your learning business embraces heutagogy, it

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will be well positioned to lead learning in the field, industry, or profession you serve because you'll have enlisted the help of all your learners.

Celisa Steele: [00:15:31] At leadinglearning.com/episode427, you'll find show notes, a transcript, and options for subscribing to the podcast. If you haven't yet, please do subscribe.

Jeff Cobb: [00:15:42] And we'd be grateful if you would take a minute to rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen, especially if you enjoy the show. Celisa and I personally appreciate those reviews and ratings, and they help the podcast show up when others search for content on leading a learning business.

Celisa Steele: [00:15:59] And please spread the word about Leading Learning. You can do that in a one-on-one conversation or an e-mail to a colleague, or you can do it through social media. In the show notes at leadinglearning.com/episode427, you'll find links to connect with us on LinkedIn, X, and Facebook.

Jeff Cobb: [00:16:15] Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

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