11-30-2017

Learner Responsibility: Questions and Implications

Jesse Fuhrman
Franklin University, jesse.fuhrman@franklin.edu

Learner Responsibility: Questions and Implications

November 30, 2017 | By Jesse Fuhrman
Instructional Design

Recently, I was discussing the issue of personal responsibility with a colleague. Specifically, we were discussing the responsibility of students to know where certain kinds of information is found within a course, or how a certain type of action is accomplished within a given learning management system. At what point is it no longer the responsibility of the course designer to create learning objects to convey this information? When does the student bear the responsibility to either already know or to learn this information on their own?

Certainly with younger students or students who are new to a school or institution, course designers should provide information on how to accomplish the basic tasks necessary to successfully complete a course. The question I ask is "To what degree?" along with the follow up "When do we stop?" Many of us in the education arena are familiar with the idea of scaffolding, or providing structured guidance and support. As we assist students with constructing their learning, it is clear that, in the early stages, structural support is necessary. Yet, at some point, the building that is being erected must stand on its own, without the supports that the architects and engineers began with.
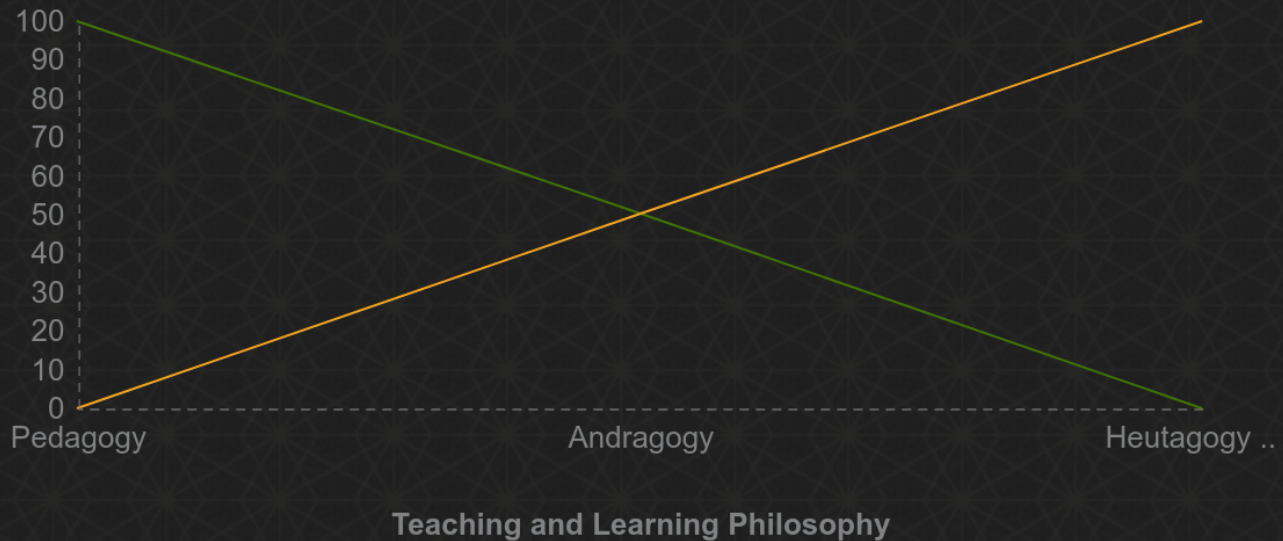
So it seems that the question then becomes, how do we reduce the structure, over time, such that while the learner begins with the structural support they need, that toward the end of their learning endeavor, they are able to do the work of learning without a net? This might be accomplished by slowly reducing the support given, and, as that support is taken away, students are given the tools needed to support themselves.

I don't think this is anything shockingly new here, but, at the same time, I don't think this is something that I'm seeing done much in higher education or in other industries, so I think another articulation of it might be in order.

One possible way to think of this slow reduction in support could be a transition in teaching and learning philosophy from the beginning to the end of an educational program or endeavor. Imagine that we start with pedagogy, a teacher-directed, if not teacher-centered, methodology for teaching and learning. At some point, we begin to shift to a more, but maybe not completely, adult methodology, andragogy. Yet, andragogy, at least in the way it often seems to be implemented, is still significantly designed and supported. To get learners to a place where they are taking full responsibility, as they must in a doctoral program or in the continuing education required by many professions with licensure, we must have a philosophy that can guide learning that is not just learner directed, but learner determined. For this, I believe we can turn to what Hase and Kenyon termed Heutagogy (2000).

Responsibility vs. Support

Learner Support   Learner Responsibility

Teaching and Learning Philosophy

(x-axis: Pedagogy, Andragogy, Heutagogy ..; y-axis: 0–100)

powered by Piktochart — make information beautiful

I will not go into the differences between these three teaching and learning philosophies. Some good comparisons have already been made here by Jon Andrews. Instead, I'll conclude with a thought on the implications brought about by the questions asked above.

In order to accomplish the kind of planned reduction of structure that would result in a move from a pedagogical approach, to an andragogical approach, and then finally to a heutagogical approach to learning, the individuals responsible for the design of learning experiences within a learning program must work together, keeping in mind the overall learning design of the program.

Too often designers, faculty, and trainers are focused on the immediate needs of a given course, training, or module. As modules and courses become obsolete and are updated, the design of the overall program and the course or module's place within that program is not taken into account. To create the learners that we truly want - learners who are curious and will take the time and care to seek out the learning they need and who are reflective enough to know what that is - we must work together to design learning programs that steadily bring and then push learners to that point.

References

Gerstein, J. (2016, June 14). Maker education: Pedagogy, andragogy, heutagogy [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://usergeneratededucation.wordpress.com/2016/06/14/maker-education-pedagogy-andragogy-heutagogy/

Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2000). From andragogy to heutagogy. In UltiBase Articles. Retrieved from http://pandora.nla.gov.au/nph-wb/20010220130000/http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/dec00/hase2.htm

About the Author

Jesse Fuhrman

Jesse Fuhrman earned his Master of Arts in Technologies of Instruction and Media from The Ohio State University.