

# **Heutagogy and criticality: towards a symbiotic relationship**

Christine Adams and Ronald Barnett

## **Abstract**

*The world is in motion, is interconnected and is imbued with large, conflicting and often hidden forces (natural and human). It is a world of double indeterminacy, present in systems and their interactions (complexity) and in discursive formations and their interactions (supercomplexity). This double indeterminacy may exceed an individual's resources for action, there being no stable position of knowing or being. Pedagogies, therefore, are required that bring on individual's capacities autonomously to see into the world beneath its immediate appearances, and form anew their thoughts and their actions. Two paths open, and two literatures largely held apart, have to be brought together. On the one hand, a teaching approach is called for that turns on open pedagogical situations, in which learners have both autonomy and responsibility; and here beckons the idea of heutagogy. On the other hand, more than critical thinking, the engendering of criticality is required, which includes the three separate moments of (i) critical dispositions, (ii) a critical spirit and (iii) powers of critical action. Ultimately, in realising their full educational potential, heutagogy and criticality stand in a symbiotic relationship, with each entailing the other: heutagogy without criticality is aimless; criticality without heutagogy is groundless.*

*Keywords: adult education; criticality; dispositions; heutagogy; higher education*

---

*Received 15 February 2022; revised version received 6 March 2022; accepted 17 May 2022. Corresponding author: Dr Christine Adams, College of Science and Engineering, University of Tasmania, Australia (c.adams@utas.edu.au)*

---

## **Introduction**

Higher education and adult (or continuing) education have tended to constitute separate entities, both institutionally in society and in their associated literatures.

One of our aims here is to bring these two educational worlds together. We suggest that such a rapprochement is vital on a number of grounds.

Despite the considerably growth of postgraduate and post-experience education over recent decades, higher education remains largely a set of educational space with short-term horizons. If higher education is to become more of an educational space with a life-long horizon, a fundamental change is called for in its pedagogy. On the other hand, adult and continuing education has long—and quite legitimately—taken a close interest in its pedagogical processes, with its participants being adults in different phases of their lives and life stories. While it has contained genres of societal and even worldly critique (Freire, 1996; Mezirow, 2003), recent developments in the theory of critical thinking have rather passed it by.

*Both* imbalances—in higher education *and* in adult and continuing education—deserve to be rectified. For that rectification, our argument is that two associated literatures those of critical thinking (in higher education), *and* heutagogy (as an educational process in adult and continuing education), need to be brought together. Indeed, we try to show that the two sets of ideas are intertwined such that, ultimately, critical thinking calls for (at least) elements of a heutagogical approach *and* that heutagogy should open to critical thinking. There is, we argue, a *sybiotic relationship* between the ideas of critical thinking and heutagogy. However, we also argue that, on each side, a particular *supplement* is required: if its emancipatory impulse is to be realised, heutagogy has to embrace not critical thinking as such but *criticality*. If criticality is to be brought off, heutagogical principles have to nuance their interest in learner autonomy by allowing for a complex role for the educator, such that criticality stretches beyond self-reflection and self-critique to critique of the *Real* of the world.

The main body of our paper, accordingly, consists of an interweaving of the concepts of heutagogy and criticality, and their associated but largely separate literatures. We then address the implications of our argument for the role of the educator. In our penultimate section, ‘Heutagogy and criticality: each call for the other’, we draw together the strands of our narrative and set out the relationship between the two sets of ideas and present a diagram depicting that relationship. We conclude with a bald reaffirmation of our central thesis.

## **Education for a world of contingency and conflicting frameworks**

In a world in motion where entities are colliding and in which, therefore, knowledge claims are unstable and prone to ineradicable contestability, students require the capability of living purposively with indeterminacy. The motion of the world is present in both the human and natural worlds (Nail, 2019) and exhibits profound contingency, heightened by forms of entanglement *between* those two worlds. Furthermore, humanity's efforts to understand the world are unstable, both within epistemic communities and public understandings. It is less that a 'post-truth' age is presenting itself, and more that we live in an age where there are multiple circuits of interpretation, such that any knowledge claim is likely to be contested through conflicting frameworks. It is a world of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000). In turn, as the COVID-19 virus has demonstrated both in its emergence and responses to it, knowledges (plural) and the world interact more or less haphazardly.

This combination of ontological *and* epistemic instability takes on a heightened discursive unsettlement in a digital era, in which representations of the world play out amid a hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1981): ideas generally are, and perhaps *should be*, mistrusted. Moreover, judgements often need to be made and action taken—either by government, organisations or by individual professionals—without opportunities fully to work through the matters involved, or to assemble the necessary evidence (Blaschke, 2012). There are also fraught and contestable ethical dimensions in play and the relevant hinterland of judgements is continually widening as matters (for example, of climate change, global pandemics, national populism, geo-politics and social justice) press themselves forward.

With such change and indeterminacy affecting the social, political, economic, organisational, personal and collective spheres, frameworks and understandings require constant critique, adjustment and augmentation. Especially for graduates, who will frequently find themselves in situations of complex judgement, a willingness to shift from 'holding on to what we *knew* and the letting go to see the *new*' is incumbent. (Colville, Pye, & Brown, 2016, p. 4).

To clarify the status of these opening reflections, it is *not* that these features of the world to which we are pointing—of indeterminacy, uncertainty, contestability, and discursive conflict—are themselves *causing* pedagogical changes, but that they constitute an environment such that pedagogical conditions of openness, challenge, inquisitiveness, uncertainty, critique and (Marginson, 2013) self-formation have to be met if advanced education is going to be adequate to the character of modern society. We do not have space to argue the matter here, but we would contend that this combination of facets of our age is new and so calls for new

pedagogical ideas and arrangements. Our main interest here is higher education and our argument will be conceptual and social-theoretical. The past few decades have witnessed the emergence of mass higher education which will hover in the background of this paper. In effect, we are developing here a set of concepts that may serve as standards towards which higher education might aspire.

### **Open pedagogical situations for a world of contingency and contestability**

It is becoming commonplace to suggest that learning calls for educational processes to enable students to develop adaptabilities, and possess reflexivity and critical insight (Stoten, 2020). Such commentaries, valid as they may be, tend tacitly to endorse the presenting situation, in focusing on the near-at-hand, and not being much concerned with an inquisitiveness to peer beneath immediate appearances into the *Real* of the world (Bhaskar et al., 1998). Placing educational ventures in this very wide context conjures learners who develop qualities of persistence over time, and capacities to be agentic against long and wide horizons. Many of today's students will be alive in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.

It follows that for a student to become his or her own independent and resilient self, calls for a large assemblage of capabilities. These include (i) standing off from and sizing up the world, (ii) doing so in a self-monitoring and self-critical fashion, (iii) showing a capacity to tolerate the uncertain, the unstable and even the alien (Bengtson & Barnett, 2019), (iv) possessing—in this situation—the capacities for unfearful, self-propelled and autonomous forward motion, (v) having *some* degree of a unified personal plan and integrated pattern of wellbeing and (vi) an enduring conception of a life trajectory, even though that trajectory might change at any moment.

Being a student in the twenty-first century is, therefore, problematic. For example, it is said that graduates should be able to 'evaluate both sides of an issue, understand inherent bias, interpret data and appraise and discriminate the context of the problem' (Halupa, 2021, p. 430). However, this set of ideas is insufficient since, for any issue in any discipline, there are not just '*both*' but *multiple* 'sides of an issue'. In a world of ineradicable contestability - where the 'sides of the issue' keeping expanding - this *epistemic contestability* presents a challenge to education.

In turn, the idea of critical thinking has to be revisited and radicalised. The general situation just sketched suggests the cultivating in students of a capability *autonomously* to examine and to evaluate knowledge claims and approach a world

characterised by risk, open-endedness, malformations and *contestedness*, with the fervour of a reflective sceptic. Admittedly, scepticism may have awkward consequences. Bertrand Russell frequently used the terms ‘sceptic’ and ‘scepticism’ in describing himself, a scepticism that he held with such passion that, at times, it led to his paralysis (e.g., Russell, 1968, p. 18), so to scepticism has to be allied a will to go on.

Here, a vital distinction has to be made between *closed and open pedagogical settings*, while recognising that, in practice, no sharp break is evident. *Closed* pedagogical situations are those in which students are asked to complete a definite task in a bounded setting; for example, where students are presented with a particular situation and are asked to be critical of it, or are given a problem to ‘solve’ (and where, indeed, there is an assumed and a single solution to the problem). *Open* pedagogical situations position students as creators of their experience rather than being simply assimilators of it (Hegarty, 2015). In such situations, the task is much less specified and/or the setting is much less bounded, for example a geology or anthropological student in the field relying on their own resources to make progress *or* a student writing an interdisciplinary essay on a topic of their own choosing, *or* a teacher posing to a class an issue of value-conflict, and exposing a range of non-consistent views among the students present such that the students are encouraged to live with indeterminacy.

Given this distinction between closed and open pedagogical settings, if critical thinking is taken to mean the student responding critically to a call from an educator to apply her or his critical thinking skills to a situation in a relatively closed pedagogical setting, only a limited range of critical thinking capabilities will be encouraged. They will be limited to *skills* such as problem solving, analysis and logical inference and will fail to bring on the personal *dispositions* that constitute critical *being*. Such skills will be insufficient in preparing a student for a world of contingency and contestability.

What is educationally required is the use of relatively *open* pedagogical settings so as to elicit in students autonomously (*without a specific request from an educator*) a critical approach to situations as they present themselves. Only then will the student develop her/his *self-directed critical powers*. In such open settings, skills for critical thinking have to recede, to be replaced by *dispositions* for critical thinking so as to provide a personal and enduring ontological substrate in which those dispositions may come into play. Being *disposed* to be critical, the student will come to possess the resources to respond to situations with a critical eye. Without the *dispositions* to be critical, critical thinking skills are inert. A student

might have a battery of critical thinking skills but never use them, unless asked to do so (say) in an examination situation.

In essence, the issue here is that of an evocation of dispositions so as to enable critical thinking to *show itself in the world*; and in a world that is in motion and which is characterised by rival frames of interpretation and where there are no absolute points of view. Possessing such a state of being, students as graduates would have an autonomous drive and self-propulsion to examine claims about the world. They would be not only *capable* of forming judgements in a world of contestability and uncertainty but would *actually* form judgements and take action so far as practicable; and do so while understanding that a position of purity and neutrality is hardly, if ever possible under conditions of radical uncertainty (ethical, epistemic, institutional and personal). This is *doubly* an *ontological extension of critical thinking*, for what is at issue is (i) the student's *being*, in possessing a *critical spirit* in relation to (ii) *the world as it presents itself in open settings*.

### **The centrality of dispositions**

What is central here, then, are *not* skills of critical thinking—whatever they are taken to be—but the formation of *dispositions* for *being critical*; in short, *a critical spirit*. Although necessarily imprecise, both theoretically and in practice, dispositions are relatively enduring tendencies of individuals to engage, act and behave in some way with the world around them (Shum & Crick, 2012). For example, a student may be disposed to be curious by consistently and autonomously generating questions and investigating problems, not waiting to be prompted to attend to a task set by an educator.

Dispositions may serve in generating intentions and may enable students to take ownership of their learning and the challenges they face in navigating a complex world (Conley & French, 2014).). They are necessary if students are to become agentic and to acquire powers as purposive citizens in a world of conflictual and fast change. In particular here, dispositions provide a will and an orientation towards being critical, and critical thinking skills are resources that the student can then deploy in being critical. *Both* dispositions and skills are necessary elements in the capacities of critical thinking, *but* it is the dispositions that are primary for they propel the student as a graduate forward in taking up a critical stance in the world. The dispositions are ontologically prior to the skills, even if pedagogically the skills can help to forge the dispositions. They are gateways and precursors to critical thinking (Bell & Loon, 2015). In possessing dispositions of critical thinking, in

being *disposed* to think critically, skills of critical thinking will emerge and be adopted, but a student requires the appropriate critical thinking dispositions in order to use those skills (Tishman, Jay, & Perkins, 1993). It follows that the matter of dispositions becomes a concern for higher education, not least in determining a suitable open pedagogy.

It cannot be assumed that students present with the dispositions of and for critical thinking, even in higher education. Such dispositions of the kind being advocated here have continually to be nurtured, both interpersonally in the pedagogical relationship and in the pedagogical setting, for which the educator has the primary responsibility.

### **Heutagogy as a pedagogical approach for evoking critical thought**

Heutagogy is an open and suitable pedagogical approach which can evoke dispositions for critical thinking by placing enhanced *pedagogical responsibility* onto students' shoulders as they come to interrogate their own learning progress and accomplishments. It is a form of double-loop learning at the individual level (Hase & Kenyon, 2000) in which students become the agents of, and reflexive towards, their own learning through their inquiries and the structuring of their learning. It is an approach that has to find its place in a broad ecology of teaching and learning (Canning & Callan, 2010).

In heutagogical learning environments, students are accorded a large measure of space to initiate their study paths and are invited to discuss and critically evaluate their own learning aims, desires, beliefs, values and challenges. This would not be necessarily in isolation from educators, peers and others, but students here would be 'the major agent in their own learning, which occurs as a result of personal experience' (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p. 112). In these learning environments, students are encouraged to reflect upon their decisions, attitudes, preferences, and their origin and how they can be justified (Glassner & Back, 2020).

We suggest that heutagogy contains *five* necessary and linked *reflexive* components within a student's learning journey: (i) self-organisation; (ii) self-propulsion, (iii) self-reflection; (iv) self-interrogation and (v) self-direction. The self-propulsion is given structure through the self-organisation and critical self-reflection, and the self-direction imparts an orientation and a unity to the journey. Moreover, that unity and direction are aided through that fourth component of self-

interrogation, *but* this very component is given little attention in discussions about heutagogy.

Given the challenges of ‘being’ in a supercomplex world, the heutagogical approach encourages self-monitoring, self-criticality, an opportunity for self-propulsion and autonomous forward motion, and a will and perseverance to navigate new and contentious situations. This differentiates heutagogy from more traditional pedagogies in that it places (a significant measure of) power in the hands of students and encourages their independence in scrutinising and interrogating not only their experiences but also their own responses to those experiences.

Heutagogy has an implicit epistemological theory, for it presupposes that knowledge has the form of an open and interconnected *single* network, with learning characterised as moving through and across the network—both purposefully and serendipitously—and spontaneously engaging with existing conversations without prompting from the educator. It is a pedagogical method that generates an open learning space, freed—for example—from the bounds of disciplines. Its intent is to help students in questioning representations of reality that they encounter (Blaschke, 2012), and to form their own continuing processes of critical *thought* (not mere critical thinking skills) coupled with critical action deriving from such critical thought. In short, heutagogy has an inner orientation towards the formation of *criticality*, in its fullest form (Barnett, 1997). It is especially helpful in cultivating the required dispositions for fast change, to understand oneself and act critically, and to generate energy for future-focused activities, especially but not limited to those requiring critical thought.

As a self-directed learning approach, heutagogy encourages students to become empowered to take increasing responsibility for their own learning. To make the point explicitly, open pedagogical situations, of the kind associated with heutagogy, can and should prompt *not* critical thinking as such, but rather the formation of the *dispositions* of criticality and of enduring critical thought so as to elicit autonomous critical action. It is an education for critical being.

### **Critical thinking for being in a world in motion**

In a pedagogy for a world in motion and where critical thinking is deliberately orchestrated in that context, it is evident that an elaboration of the very idea of critical thinking is required (Davies, 2019). In the first place, critical thinking may be viewed as a combination of careful judgement, creative thinking and decision



making (Facione, 2011). It is a *form* of judgement that calls for carefulness in evaluating the presenting situation. Being fully critical requires not only a distancing from what is or appears to be the case, but *also* an imagination in glimpsing a different claim to knowledge or practical action. It is a form of decision-making, in that the autonomous critical thinker is so by virtue of a capacity to commit to an alternative point of view and/or action in the world, yet all the time sensitive to the precariousness of whatever thought or action or even justification that is then entertained.

There is, though, still more to be drawn out here. As we have been implying, the idea of critical thinking has itself to be critiqued, since it is often taken to mean ‘critical thinking skills’. An unduly performative orientation is given to the matter. However, and as indicated, critical thinking skills, while necessary, are insufficient in coping with the world of (ontological) contingency and (epistemic) contestability, especially when such critical thinking is characteristically formed within relatively closed pedagogical situations.

A world of contingency and complexity, and which is in motion, calls for the capacity *autonomously* to explore phenomena that are naturally experienced (and not artificially and intentionally presented in a pedagogical situation), and being evaluative of them. It opens itself to serendipitous educational settings, to spaces that permit cognitive *and* experiential strangers coming into view. In this way, entirely new possibilities of thought and action may be envisaged and serve as *standards* against which contemporaneous frameworks may be judged. For example, in a changing world, the meanings of justice or democracy or freedom continually have to be kept under review and new standards developed against which practices may be assessed. Pedagogies with such educational interests can encourage the formation of reflective students who have a concern to promote oppositional or counter-values about value frameworks in the twenty-first century. This critical *thought*—not critical thinking *skills*—will help students agentially to discern possibilities in thought and action, to question what counts as improvement and what is felt to work, and to conjure alternative and justifiable representations of and practices in the world.

The challenges of interacting with the world necessitate students being persistently disposed to interrogate key issues, and even to discern hidden features of the world (and so not merely critique the world as it presents itself). As students, on their own account, sift data and experiences that present to them, dispositions are required not in simply accommodating to the world, but in coming to a forensic critique *of* frameworks (not just in being critical *within* frameworks). Here, a pedagogy that takes on heutagogical characteristics is invaluable. In a heutagogical

pedagogy, sensitive to the considerations just sketched, students may feel emboldened to ask penetrating questions, and sense how such questions can be framed and the tone to employ and perceive where to pose their enquiries (Davidson & Goldberg, 2010, p. 63).

### **Dispositions for a critical spirit**

In sight here is a *critical spirit*. Having a critical spirit does not mean that a student characteristically adopts an explicitly negative or hostile stance towards matters, but rather approaches situations in a searching, inquisitive and an evaluative mode of being and a concern to place experiences in the widest context. It is about thinking by the self or in collaboration with educators and other students, thus having a will to learn, share, engage, question, and contemplate new understandings or matters that may be in conflict with one's current understandings (Facione, 2011). A critical spirit is about bringing critical perspectives to problems, issues and questions: it is a matter of being persistent, resilient, having fortitude and possessing a 'will to go on' (Barnett, 2007).

The dispositions that are *pari passu* with a critical spirit energise a student's capacity for critical thought. In turn, a goal of orchestrating a heutagogical environment is that of creating a genuine openness or will in students to press forward when faced with ambiguous, difficult or complex situations, discomforting though that will be at times. Enabling such a will to learn (Barnett, 2007) asks of students that they interrogate their own values and beliefs. This will be integral to the critical spirit, so as to maintain a resilient engagement with complexity.

By fostering the dispositions that accompany a critical spirit, a maturity in critical thought may emerge including a judicious inclination to address complex—and indeed insoluble—problems (Giancarlo & Facione, 2001). Heutagogy encourages this willingness to grapple with, persist with, and make some sense of the complexities of personal and professional life (Hamby, 2015). Heutagogy thus responds to the idea that instinctively humans wish to learn and explore, and test hypotheses using one's senses, experiences, reflections, context, and memory (Agonács & Matos, 2019).

It is fair to say that heutagogy imposes large burdens on the student and redefines the power balance between educators and students. It looks to students to hold themselves ready to scrutinise and to evaluate critically all knowledge claims that come their way. In this pedagogical environment, students are tacitly

encouraged to mount their own internal conversation (Archer, 2003), and crucially form their own inner questions not only to what they encounter but also to their own responses thereon (Blaschke, 2012). Ultimately, they may become confident in their ability to discard claims that are insufficiently supported by reason or evidence, *including their own claims* (Davies & Calma, 2021). While not at all relinquishing pedagogical responsibility, the educator has to cede considerable learning space to her/his students if such educational aims are to be realised. Educational authority is retained while, to a large degree, educational power is shared (between educator and students).

Heutagogy is appealing for both its epistemological benefits and its ontological properties. From an *epistemological* perspective, it may help students to cope with the surfeit of data and experiences and to judge the validity of the ideas and the legitimacy of situations encountered. It widens the epistemic landscape within which students conduct their work. It has epistemic warrant written into it. *Ontologically*, it may help to move students into a different place where they are able to withstand the chaos of an age of fast change and so see themselves in an ontologically wider context: the world and its interconnectedness appears ever-larger (Cutright, 1997). Ultimately, they may feel able to put their critical thought into action, into critical *action*. Heutagogy is a pedagogical mode conducive to the student acquiring new powers, and rationally-based powers at that.

Self-evidently, heutagogy is a deliberate departure from pedagogy as ordinarily practiced. Within heutagogy, the role of the educator as such is *displaced*, the student being given much autonomy to determine and direct his/her own learning path and process. This implies that learning could eventuate at any time and any place, and in a non-linear manner, so as to respond to a world of contingency, with students utilising their learning spaces and negotiating with an educator how, what and when they learn (Hase & Kenyon, 2013). Such autonomy gives students choice and promotes personal resources in being agentic. By adopting a heutagogical approach to learning, a critical spirit *may*—though not necessarily—be invoked, disposing one towards critical thinking by navigating multiple and conflicting belief systems (Burns, 2012; Yu et al., 2013).

### **The educator's role in heutagogy for critical thinking**

The role of the educator is *not* 'to let learn' (Heidegger, 1968, p. 15) but to guide students 'to look at the learning context afresh and take decisions in that context' (Luckin et al., 2011, p. 78). Essential to this is a dialogical relationship between

educator and students. Dialogue enables an educator to be ‘with’ students, be attentive, listen to their voices and raise their curiosity. This relationship offers students freedom to wander, to become lost and make mistakes, to activate their learning in areas specific to their interests and/or needs, and to find their passions (Jones, Penaluna, & Penaluna, 2019).

At the same time as giving students freedom, the framing of open pedagogical situations to invoke a will spontaneously to go on learning through life is a key part of the educator’s role when deploying a heutagogical approach. In proposing heutagogy be adopted where criticality is a central educational aim, the educational setting also has to be framed to elicit in students—over time—autonomous dispositions of a critical spirit. This is not always easy for an educator, not least in a marketized environment in which students may lack inclinations for persistent application in wrestling with open-ended material and in taking up an independent stance (Hase & Kenyon, 2013). Having self-confidence in one’s capability to create such openness in the educational situation, without feeling a loss of control, may challenge some educators. This requires being prepared to move into the background but without abandoning the student (Glassner & Back, 2020) *or* the educator’s responsibilities in making judgements about the student, especially in higher education.

The open pedagogical spaces that characterise heutagogy have to be envisaged, designed and created by educators to entice students into strangeness and even darkness (Lysgaard, Bengtsson, & Laugesen, 2019), and yet still to have the will to go on if critical thinking is to be developed. Central to an educator’s role in engaging with the student is having a *tacit learning contract* that takes into account what the student wants to achieve. Agency comes from a robust pedagogical relationship where the student’s aims are discussed; where a student identifies hoped-for outcomes of the learning experiences and where both parties explore and agree upon how learning will be assessed and by whom. When an educator and student form a tacit learning contract in an empathetic climate, where students are invited to share their inner world (such as their hopes, feelings, challenges), the critical spirit may more surely emerge (Glassner & Back, 2020).

Heutagogy asks educators to encourage students to work at the edge of their capabilities. Vygotsky and Cole (1978) called this the ‘zone of proximal development’ which calls for some scaffolding to enhance a student’s pre-existing capabilities ‘beyond what they would be on their own’ (Ritchhart, 2004, p. 45). Asking students about their understanding of a situation using probing questions and encouraging experimenting through trial and error are key heutagogical approaches. They are important to a tacit learning contract with autonomy and

student agency in mind and may further inspire a student to bring critical perspectives to problems and novel situations.

As noted, educators may also encourage double-loop learning to further autonomy, agency and the critical spirit (Argyris & Schon, 1974). This invites students to interrogate their own frames of thinking and to question their own inner values and assumptions (Eberle, 2009). Double-loop learning may promote the ‘critical spirit’ as it necessitates students being psychologically and behaviourally engaged in reflection on what they have learned in identifying the factors that contribute to their learning effectiveness (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

### **Heutagogy and criticality: *each call for the other***

In this paper, we have been attempting to draw together two literatures that normally stand apart from each other, the one focused on heutagogy as a pedagogical approach and the other concerned with critical thinking (the former emerging out of adult and continuing education and the latter emerging out of higher education). Our concern has been the relationship between these two sets of ideas. We have sought to show that, in the context of educational situations, heutagogy and critical thinking each implicates the other such that each is deficient without drawing in the other. In this penultimate section, we seek summarily to state the nature of this relationship—between heutagogy and critical thinking—as we see it.

Heutagogy is an educational praxis (theory plus a set of practices) that not only brings the learner into the centre of the pedagogical situation but places considerable responsibility on learners. The logic of this principle is that the learner is commanded not only to chart their learning paths but to maintain a watchful eye on themselves, adjusting that learning accordingly. Heutagogy, accordingly, calls for a learning in which learners not only learn but learn about their own learning in a self-monitoring—and so reflexive—process. Here, critical thinking makes its entrance. For it follows that, if the learner is to be able to self-steer in the way that a heutagogical approach to education requires, then that self-watchfulness has to be accompanied by critical thinking. But this cannot be critical thinking *simpliciter*. To construe this relationship correctly—to understand how the critical impulse has to play out in a heutagogical situation—we have to draw on the full range and power of the idea of *criticality*.

Fully understood, ‘criticality’ is a compound of the triple moments of critical thought (or critical reason), critical spirit (which energises the relevant

dispositions) and critical being (ultimately expressed in critical action) (Barnett, 2015). When fully enacted in a heutagogical setting, the learner is called upon to display all three moments. Ultimately, she or he is required to exert powers of critical reason by examining *self* and one's learning achievements *and* shortcomings (which ultimately becomes *self-critique*). Bringing to bear the relevant dispositions by scrupulously examining one's own learning (dispositions of integrity, fearlessness, courage, honesty and persistence and so forth) is a second key moment. Third, the student would be willing and able to act accordingly, not only to relay to the world the immediate manifestations of their modified learning (their texts change; their utterances change; their demeanours change), but also to carry over their own self-understandings into (modest) efforts to transform the world (they become active critical citizens). Taken up into the being of students, this criticality forms a *critical spirit*, both individually in the body of a student and collectively among a body of students. Criticality, accordingly, is situated both epistemologically and, crucially, ontologically.

So, fully understood in an educational situation, *heutagogy implicates criticality*. The reverse also holds: *criticality implicates heutagogy*. If educators believe that part of their responsibilities lies in sponsoring the development of criticality in their students, a heutagogical approach is called for in framing the pedagogical situation. Criticality—as set out here—cannot be developed unless the student is given pedagogical space and responsibility to orchestrate, monitor and evaluate themselves. And so criticality, taken seriously, must lead the educator towards setting up heutagogical settings in which students are given *pedagogical responsibility*, not only to frame much of their learning for themselves, but then to monitor themselves and to have the courage and tenacity to engage in a never-ending process of self-critique.

Our main conclusion then is bifold: heutagogy implicates criticality (but *not* simply critical thinking as such); *and*, in educational settings, an interest in criticality implicates heutagogy (or, at least, heutagogical principles, with educators still present but as enticers of a criticality among their students). The relationship between the two—heutagogy (as an educational process) and criticality (as an educational goal)—is symbiotic, with each entailing the other. Diagrammatically, this relationship takes the form shown in Figure 1, which depicts heutagogy and criticality each with its own *conceptual cluster*:

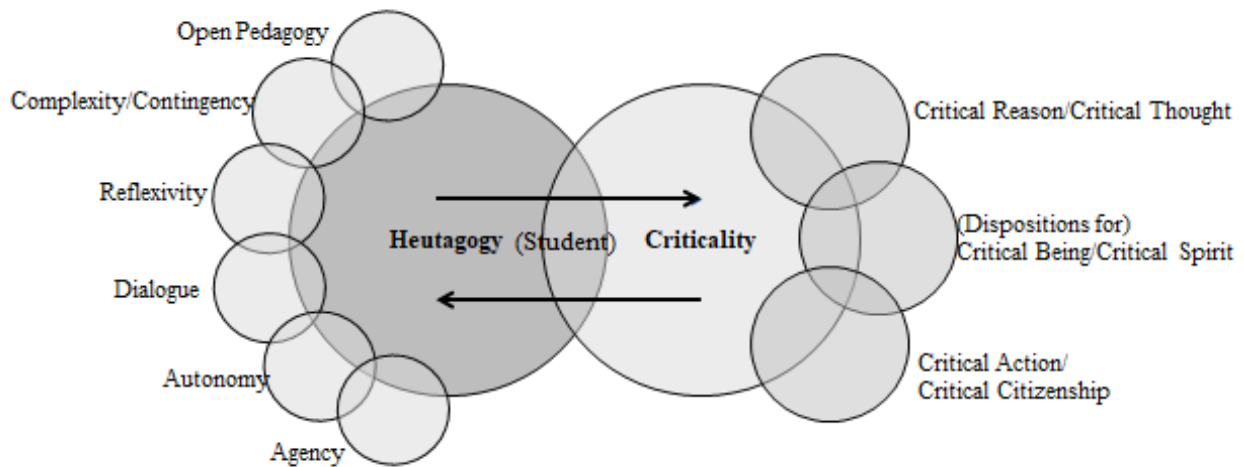


Figure 1: *Heutagogy and Criticality and their conceptual clusters: a symbiotic relationship.*

As Figure 1 intimates, this symbiotic relationship stands differently across educational settings. *Higher education* in particular has long prided itself that at its heart stands the idea of students becoming self-critical (even if now fading from view somewhat). It follows from our argument that, to the extent that criticality is understood to be a necessary feature of a higher education (when fully realised), to that extent higher education will be led to take on heutagogical characteristics. The university educator has to stand back and give both space and responsibility to the students for their learning.

Heidegger (1968), in elaborating his conception of being, spoke of ‘being-possible’. In turn, we may speak of ‘*learning-possible*’: *unless* learning opens into its own possibilities - that is, self-critique and the formation of a critical spirit - we cannot be in the presence of the learning associated with the concept of higher learning. Thus, the educator who starts with an interest in criticality *has* to be willing to embrace heutagogical principles and adopt pedagogical techniques that prompt learners to take a large measure of responsibility for their own learning. Criticality may begin the educational process but has to be followed in its wake by at least a degree of heutagogy. Higher education, across the world, is characterised by a tight regulatory and audit culture and so any move towards heutagogical principles will have to be negotiated within that milieu.

Correspondingly, heutagogy has been for some time a watchword for adult education and it follows, too, from our argument that such an interest has to bring

on a concern for the learners to acquire a criticality in relation to the world, with all of its personal demands. Ultimately, being (only) self-directional in their learning, and even learning about their learning, will *truncate* learning. Being fully autonomous in one's learning calls for the powers and virtues of critiquing not just one's position, understandings and actions, but of identifying alternative possibilities in the Real of the world, and then being prepared to give practical rein to those alternative thoughts and actions. Here lies the full realisation of transformative education, where heutagogy is coupled with criticality in all of its moments.

It follows that the balance of the relationship of heutagogy and criticality alters according to the praxis of the two educational situations. (1) The adult educator has a primary interest in process and so starts with heutagogy; but then—on the argument here—has to lead on to criticality. (2) The higher education educator starts with a complex interest in helping to form disciplinary understanding and skills within the student in which critical thinking is a necessary feature, and this interest has logically to lead to criticality which, in turn, leads to heutagogical principles being incorporated into the pedagogical process. In practice, therefore, the balance of the relationship—heutagogy and criticality—will *vary* across the two settings, with heutagogy being the stronger in the one (adult education) and criticality being the stronger in the other (higher education); but *both* heutagogy and criticality are intertwined in *both* milieux.

It follows that the balance of the relationship can and will legitimately vary across educational settings; a relationship that is open to empirical investigation. An educational setting that is largely inspired by heutagogical principles - say, in adult education - will incorporate greater or lesser elements of criticality; and an educational setting that is largely inspired by a wish to develop in students a critical spirit will incorporate greater or lesser elements of heutagogy.

We may note, however, that the logic of the movement is stronger in the latter than in the former setting. A drive towards criticality *logically* entails a movement towards heutagogy; a drive towards heutagogy has only a *propensity* towards criticality, albeit a strong propensity. Criticality *requires* something of a heutagogical approach; heutagogy does not logically require a move towards criticality but its potential is realised more fully to the extent that criticality is present.



## **Conclusions**

The world is moving, it may plausibly be suggested, from a state of cognitive capitalism to a state of algorithmic capitalism (Peters, 2013), in which learning becomes heavily computerised. In the process, learning is open to the manipulation of imaginaries, ideologies and tropes, and the room for independent thought draws in. In such a context, learning and education are in peril and in such a context too, new thought has to be given both to the basic educational aim and pedagogical approach. Respectively, *both* critical thought and heutagogy may be seen as offering responses. First, education should retain firmly in its sights the idea of the student as being self-critical, and able to carry those critical powers into the world. Furthermore, the pedagogical approach should reflect heutagogical principles, in which students are given considerable learning space and responsibility. Neither heutagogy nor criticality are sufficient in themselves: both need to be brought together; and bringing them together in their most radical forms produces a transformatory agenda for education.

Combining an interest in heutagogy *and* in criticality is key in helping the formation of reflective students such that they come to be agentic, purposive citizens who think autonomously in a world of ambiguity and complexity. The dispositions of a critical spirit call for a will to go forward, to persist and to have courage and to be resilient; and the cultivation of such dispositions calls for pedagogical situations characterised by openness. Ultimately, there is a symbiotic relationship here: heutagogy brings criticality forward, and criticality demands a pedagogy of heutagogy.

## **Author biographies**

*Christine Adams* is a Lecturer in Work Integrated Learning in the College of Science and Engineering, University of Tasmania, Australia. She is a teaching and learning scholar, an active member of the ISSOTL International Collaborative Writing Group. Her research explores creating sustainable, consistent and quality assured work integrated learning and supporting individuals to build a sense of identity, to be excited about learning yet not fearful of failure. Her intention is to create learning experiences that act as ‘stimuli’ for behavioural awareness and change.

*Ronald Barnett* is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at University College London Institute of Education, where he was a Pro-Director and Dean. He was Chair of the Society for Research into Higher Education, was awarded the inaugural prize by the European Association for Educational Research for his ‘outstanding contribution to Higher Education Research, Policy and Practice’ and is President of the Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Society. He has produced 35+ books and hundreds of papers, and has given 150 invited talks across the world. He has been cited over 25,000 times and described as ‘the master scholar of the university’.

## References

- Agonács, N., & Matos, J. F. (2019). Heutagogy and self-determined learning: A review of the published literature on the application and implementation of the theory. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 34(3), 223–240.
- Archer, M. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Barnett, R. (2015). A curriculum for critical being. In *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education* (pp. 63–76). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barnett, R. (2007). *A Will to Learn: Being a Student in an age of Uncertainty*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Barnett, R. (2000). *Realising the University in an age of supercomplexity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Barnett, R. (1997). *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bell, R., & Loon, M. (2015). Reprint: The impact of critical thinking disposition on learning using business simulations. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 13(3), 362–370. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2015.10.003>
- Bengtsen, S. S., & Barnett, R. (2019). 1. Higher Education and Alien Ecologies: Exploring the Dark Ontology of the University. *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education*, 1(1), 17–40. <https://doi.org/10.3726/ptihe.2019.01.02>
- Bhaskar, R., Collier, A., Lawson, T., & Norrie, A. (1998). Critical realism. In *Proceedings of the Standing Conference on Realism and Human Sciences, Bristol, UK* (Vol. 4).
- Blaschke, L. M. (2012). Heutagogy and lifelong learning: A review of heutagogical practice and self-determined learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(1), 56–71. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v13i1.1076>
- Burns, J. (2012). Critical care in the age of the duty hour regulations: Circadian-based scheduling, standardized handoffs, and the flipped classroom? *Critical care medicine*, 40(12), 3305–3306. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CCM.0b013e31826bf117>

- Canning, N., & Callan, S. (2010). Heutagogy: Spirals of reflection to empower learners in higher education. *Reflective Practice*, 11(1), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940903500069>
- Colville, I., Pye, A., & Brown, A. D. (2016). Sensemaking processes and Weickariouslying. *Management Learning*, 47(1), 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507615616542>
- Conley, D. T., & French, E. M. (2014). Student ownership of learning as a key component of college readiness. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(8), 1018–1034. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213515232>
- Cutright, M. (1997). Dimensions of the Community College: International, Intercultural, and Multicultural Perspectives. *Community College Review*, 25(1), 83–85.
- Davies, M. (2019). New Directions in the Teaching of Critical Thinking. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 51(5), 18–27.
- Davies, W. M., & Calma, A. (2021). Critical thinking in business education: current outlook and future prospects. *Studies in Higher Education*. Online first. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1716324>
- Davidson, C. N., & Goldberg, D. T. (2010). *The future of thinking: Learning institutions in a digital age*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Eberle, J. (2009). Heutagogy: What your mother didn't tell you about pedagogy and the conceptual age. In *Proceedings of the European Conference on e-Learning* (pp. 181–188).
- Facione, P. A. (2011). Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts. *Insight assessment*, 2007(1), 1–23.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (revised). New York: Continuum.
- Giancarlo, C. A., & Facione, P. A. (2001). A look across four years at the disposition toward critical thinking among undergraduate students. *The Journal of General Education*, 29–55.
- Glassner, A., & Back, S. (2020). *Exploring heutagogy in higher education: Academia meets the Zeitgeist*. London: Springer Nature.
- Halupa, C. (2021). Reaching “Creating” in Bloom's Taxonomy: The Merging of Heutagogy and Technology in Online Learning. In *Research Anthology on Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Students* (pp. 15–35). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3022>
- Hamby, B. (2015). Willingness to inquire: The cardinal critical thinking virtue. In *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education* (pp. 77–87). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (Eds.). (2013). *Self-determined learning: Heutagogy in action*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2000). From andragogy to heutagogy. *ultiBASE In-Site*.
- Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2007). Heutagogy: A child of complexity theory. *Complicity: An international journal of complexity and education*, 4(1), 111–119.
- Hegarty, B. (2015). Attributes of open pedagogy: A model for using open educational resources. *Educational technology*, July-August, 3–13.
- Heidegger, M. (1968). *What is called thinking?* Evanston and London: Harper and Row.
- Jones, C., Penaluna, K., & Penaluna, A. (2019). The promise of andragogy, heutagogy and academagogy to enterprise and entrepreneurship education pedagogy. *Education + Training*, 61, (9), 1170–1186  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-10-2018-0211>
- Luckin, R., Clark, W., Garnett, F., Whitworth, A., Akass, J., Cook, J., & Robertson, J. (2011). Learner-generated contexts: A framework to support the effective use of technology for learning. In *Web 2.0-based e-learning: applying social informatics for tertiary teaching* (pp. 70–84). IGI Global.  
<https://doi.10.4018/978-1-60566-294-7>
- Lysgaard, J. A., Bengtsson, S., & Laugesen, M. H. L. (2019). *Dark pedagogy: Education, horror and the Anthropocene*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot Cham.
- Marginson, S. (2013). Student Self-formation in Higher Education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18 (1), 6–22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313513036>
- Mezirow, J. (2003). Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of transformative education*, 1(1), 58-63.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344608322678>
- Nail, T. (2019). *Being and motion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peters, M. A. (2013). *Education, science and knowledge capitalism: Creativity and the promise of openness*. Oxford: Peter Lang Incorporated, International Academic Publishers.
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
- Ritchhart, R. (2004). *Intellectual character: What it is, why it matters, and how to get it*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Russell, B. (1968). *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell-1972-1967* (Vol. 2). London: George Allen and Unwin.

- Shum, S. B., & Crick, R. D. (2012, April). Learning dispositions and transferable competencies: pedagogy, modelling and learning analytics. In *Proceedings of the 2nd international conference on learning analytics and knowledge* (pp. 92–101).
- Stoten, D. W. (2020). Practical Heutagogy: Promoting Personalized Learning in Management Education. *Adult Learning*, 31(4), 161–174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159520905364>
- Tishman, S., Jay, E., & Perkins, D. N. (1993). Teaching thinking dispositions: From transmission to enculturation. *Theory into Practice*, 32(3), 147–153.
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.
- Yu, D., Zhang, Y., Xu, Y., Wu, J., & Wang, C. (2013). Improvement in critical thinking dispositions of undergraduate nursing students through problem-based learning: a crossover-experimental study. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 52(10), 574–581. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20130924-02>