

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE INDOMITABLE LISA MARIE BLASCHKE: CHAMPION OF HEUTAGOGY (SELF-DETERMINED LEARNING)

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ABSTRACT

This interview with Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke traces the journey of a Wisconsin farm girl who first dreamed of becoming a journalist. Upon graduating with a technical writing degree in medicine, Blaschke eventually became a corporate manager of a technical firm which, in turn, led to a career as an educator and program manager in the field of distance education. Today, Blaschke balances a blended career in the corporate and academic worlds. During this candid interview, Blaschke discusses her educational and experiential background, as well as her interests, goals, accomplishments, challenges, and research in distance learning. Drawing from her observations and experiences in the corporate and academic fields, Blaschke identifies the value and power of learner agency in any learning environment. In this interview, she discusses this insight and how it has inspired her to champion the learning approach known as heutagogy (self-determined learning). She also reflects on changes in the field of distance learning over the span of her career, offers some pearls of wisdom, and then shares her current and future plans as she moves into semi-retirement. In documenting the trials and tribulations of her epic journey through corporate and academic life, this interview highlights how determination, resilience, tenacity, and grit have been integral to Blaschke attaining her goals and achieving her dreams.

Keywords: Distance education, heutagogy, hyflex learning, learner agency, Lisa Marie Blaschke, online learning, women researchers



“Believe in yourself; just keep going, keep working at it. If you set your mind to it, and you keep working towards your goals, you can achieve them.” – Lisa Marie Blaschke, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke is renowned in academic and corporate environments for promoting heutagogy (self-determined learning; Hase & Kenyon, 2001; 2013) and hyflex learning. What is perhaps less known about Lisa Marie, however, are the paths that she has traveled, the achievements that she earned, and the challenges that she addressed in her desire to help others become lifelong masters of their own learning.

Lisa Marie grew up on a farm near a small town in Wisconsin, USA. Intent upon becoming a journalist, she began attending the University of Minnesota in 1982. In 1987, she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in the emerging field of technical communications, focusing primarily on the topic of medicine. Unfortunately, she was not able to transfer much of what she learned at university to her first career, which was in banking.

Lisa Marie eventually began working in the corporate world as a technical writer and trainer before transitioning into a management position, whereupon she discovered a wealth of new skills that she wanted to share with others. Upon contacting a university with the offer to teach as a visiting educator, she learned that she needed at least a Master's degree to do so. This news prompted Lisa Marie's return to university in 2000. This time, she joined a joint Master's program offered by the University of Maryland in the US and Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg in Germany. There she learned about the foundations, the business, and other aspects of distance education while earning a degree in the management of distance learning, which she completed in 2004.

In 2010, an article that Lisa Marie and Dr. Jane Brindley published in a reflective journal won a Best Paper Award. That prompted Lisa Marie to return to university to earn a PhD that year. Undeterred by academic, career, family, and even life-threatening health challenges, Lisa Marie staunchly resolved to complete the degree. After working on her PhD for a few years, she was informed that she required a different Master's degree. She promptly enrolled in a Master of Business Administration program in educational management, which was completed in 2014. In 2018, Lisa Marie finished her PhD in distance education.

The following interview captures the trials and tribulations of Lisa Marie's epic journey through corporate and academic life, exemplifying that determination, resilience, tenacity, and grit are integral to reaching her goals and achieving her dreams.

INTERVIEW WITH LISA MARIE

In the following interview, questions asked by the interviewer, Dr. Norine Wark, are italicized. Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke's responses are presented in regular font. Sections of the interview are divided into: educational and experiential background; initial interest in distance education; goals, accomplishments, and challenges; research interests; the past, present, and future of distance education; interesting memories; pearls of wisdom; current activities; future plans; and final thoughts.

Educational and experiential background

What is your current institutional affiliation?

Currently, I do not have an institutional affiliation. I'm semi-retired, working as a Learning Consultant.

What is your educational background?

After graduating from high school, I went to the University of Minnesota from 1982 to 1987. At that time, I wanted to be a journalist, which was my first area of study. I soon found that there was no money in journalism; I needed to pay back my student loans, so I switched my major to technical communication, which was an emerging field about better communicating technical information. I graduated in 1987, with a Bachelor of Science in technical communication.

I didn't return to university again until many years later, because I wanted to teach and to share what I had learned from the work world. In the US, I had transitioned into management very quickly; I think I was a technical writer, technical trainer, for about two years before I began managing a technical communications team. I then moved to Germany to work for a computer software company called SAP. They were very small at the time – about 1000 employees. This is a long way to answer your question. What you want to know is what degrees I had, but I think I need to tell you the path I took to get there, because there's a big gap between 1987 and 2001, when I started my master's degree at University of Maryland and [University of] Oldenburg. When I moved Germany to work for SAP, I also moved quickly into management. At that time, SAP was hiring many, many people and very, very quickly. During the hiring process, I began to realize that I needed to have people who were ready to hit the ground running—and that wasn't happening. I was learning a lot about what it was like to be a manager within an international company, so I contacted a university and said, "I would be really excited to share my experiences with you and to teach, maybe be a visitor within your classrooms." They said, "Well, unless you have a master's degree, we won't even look at you as an as an option for coming to speak at our institution."

So, I went back to school in 2000, and I got my master's degree in distance education and e-learning through the University of Maryland. They had a partnership with Oldenburg, and offered an international master's program developed by Ulrich Bernath and Gene Rubin that taught people how to be managers of distance learning programs. You learned about the foundations of distance education, the history, the business of distance education, and different aspects of distance education, like the training and learner support, and the role that it plays. I completed that degree in 2004.

Then I started to teach in the University of Maryland/Oldenburg program, starting as a teaching assistant and then moving into teaching soon afterwards. While teaching was when I decided to do my PhD. I'm going to be really honest. Someone once told me that the only way you're going to be recognized within academic circles is if you have a doctorate or a PhD. To get those creds [credentials], you have to go through that process. My argument had always been that you don't absolutely *need* to have a PhD. We had done things when I worked for SAP in the mid-90s, where we were looking at learning design, and we were moving masses of Training and Documentation into an online information object-based environment. We were doing all these exciting things that hadn't even happened in academia yet. Cutting edge stuff. When I spoke with my colleague, Peter [Shea], about my thinking, I said, "Why get a doctorate? What difference does it make? I have all this great experience!"

And he [Peter] said, "Because when you study for a PhD or a doctorate, you must do it with rigor. And that's something that isn't always the situation within a work environment."

I thought, "Okay, I'll buy that." And so I decided to pursue my PhD.

Around that time, Jane Brindley and I had published a paper in a reflective learning journal. That was when I was first introduced to this idea of heutagogy (which I'll go into later). That first paper was the start of my publications-based PhD, the first paper that I wanted to include in my doctoral work. When Jane and I won the [Best Research Paper] award, her husband, Ross Paul, who was President of University of Windsor at the time, said to me, "Heutagogy? What the heck is heutagogy?", and I said, "Ross, I am going to write you a paper and explain to you what heutagogy is." So, I wrote a paper about heutagogy for Ross. It was a literature review, looking at all the research that had been done on heutagogy. I think that was in 2010. The article was later published in IRRODL [International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning] in 2012, and it became the cornerstone of my PhD work. I started the PhD around 2010-2011 through the University of Oldenburg. By 2014, I had all of my publications together and was ready to submit. Everything was on track: I had been assured I would be accepted into the Oldenburg doctoral program, and Stewart Hase, Chris Kenyon, and I had just published our first book together (Blaschke, Kenyon, & Hase, 2014), and I was very excited!

On the day that I received our published book in the mail, I also got a letter from University of Oldenburg, rejecting my application to their doctoral program, the reason being my US master's degree was not comparable to a German master's, even though the program had been done in conjunction with the University of Oldenburg. I went from extreme euphoria to crashing through the floor in the space of about five minutes. I was a wreck for the rest of the weekend and I thought, "Well, *what* am I going to do now?" I met with my advisor, and we looked at the different options. In the end, it was decided that I should complete a master's degree in Germany that would be recognized by the German Department of Education. So, although my PhD was technically finished, except for bringing all the pieces together, I needed to first go back and get a master's degree at a German university. I did this through the Center for Lifelong Learning at the University of Oldenburg, and was able to use much of my prior learning toward the degree (they have a PLAR [prior learning and assessment recognition program] there). Two years later, in 2016, I had my MBA in educational management, and then it was on to finishing the PhD in 2018.

That was my journey through academia. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in technical communication, I have a Masters of Distance Education and E-learning through the University of Maryland, and then the publications-based PhD, which spreads from 2010 to 2018, with an MBA somewhere in there around 2014 to 2016.

That's a long answer to a question that's usually probably very short.

Thank you very much for that. I think you've partially answered the second question in your first question. But I would still like to ask you the second question, to make sure we capture other elements. So, what was your experiential background before you became involved in the field of distance education?

As I mentioned, I started out as a tech writer and a trainer for a bank in the United States. I was at a conference presenting our approach to creating documentation and training within our organization, which involved our users making decisions about what needed to be documented and how it needed to be documented, ultimately taking on a trainer's role. At the time, it was a unique solution. Someone from SAP saw me there and then later interviewed me for a position to come to Germany and work for SAP. At the time, nobody in the States knew what SAP was. People were saying, "SAP? Why would you work for a company called *sap*?" But it was exciting times.

I think the company has nearly 100,000 employees now. At that time, there were about 1,000-1,500 employees. Recently, when driving around the SAP campus, I showed my visitors the building where it all started. I told them how we would lunch with the board of directors and that SAP was more like a family than big business. If you had an idea, you could talk to the board about it. You could bump into them in the hallway, or in the café, in the coffee corner, and just pitch your ideas. We were able to do a lot of things that are probably a more challenging now. Once a company reaches a certain size, things start to slow down and there's more bureaucracy. It was exciting to be part of SAP at that time and to be involved and at the level of management where I was working with the board of directors and trying out new things. In academia, exploring new idea can be more challenging because you need all the approvals first. We didn't need as many approvals [in SAP] in order to make things happen, and we also had more funds than you usually do in academia. It was a very, very good time.

I left SAP in 2003. We had adopted our son from Russia in 2000, and then our daughter was born a year later. And so, I became a "stay-at-home mom." I use quotation marks here because I was at home and I was a mom, but I wasn't your traditional stay-at-home mom: I was doing some work for SAP, I was working on my master's degree, and at the same time raising two little kids. I was juggling a lot at the time.

Around 2007, I started to work for University of Maryland in their Master of Distance Education and E-Learning program, and then after about four or five years became the director of the program in Oldenburg. I was then with the Center for Lifelong Learning until 2020, when I left to join a startup called Learnlife in Barcelona, where they use self-determined learning in the K through 12 sector. About a year ago, I decided that maybe it was time to slow down a little, although I haven't really. I call myself semi-retired because I guess I'm too afraid of full retirement. But I am enjoying my free time, and now I'm choosing to do the things that I like to do. It's a good phase to be in.

Initial interest in distance education

What initiated your interest in the field of distance education?

Initially, it was my experience at SAP. I saw the work that we were doing as the future. Globalization was happening in the 1990s, and as we became more global, language and translation became a huge issue. Production of all this documentation, all this knowledge, and then translating it into all of these different languages was a huge expense. That was the driving force behind taking information objects and creating a design where we could reuse information objects across the entire knowledge spectrum—whether it be training, marketing, or online documentation—that you'd be able to reuse and parcel out. Because at the time, we were producing giant trainer and user handbooks. By moving these into the online environment and using an information design where we could categorize different types of information... well, it was like a giant jigsaw puzzle, organizing all the different pieces of information.

I knew of online learning, but I had no idea that there was a long history to distance learning. I'd taken a distance education course in journalism when I was a senior in high school. That was your typical course: you prepared your assignment, put it in the mailbox, and sent it to the institution, and then three weeks later, you got a response from your teacher. It was not anything like it is today. But to me distance learning wasn't what I was doing at SAP. We were doing stuff that was, for me, groundbreaking. If I was going to get a master's degree, I wanted it to be in that area. I saw online learning as the future of what we were doing with knowledge, especially in the workplace.

Goals, accomplishments, and challenges

What are some of the goals that you've had over the years?

Oh, wow. I think one of my first goals was to be successful as a writer. I've always written from the time I was very young, until now, and have had a number of different writing roles. When I was in high school, I was the sports editor of the local newspaper, traveling all over Wisconsin and reporting on the different sports. People would say, "I had to take out a dictionary this week, because I didn't know some of the words you were using." It was always a challenge for me to find new ways to express myself. That was always a big goal—to have a successful career as a writer.

Another big goal was to become a mom; unfortunately, it didn't work out in the beginning. After many years, we decided to adopt, and that was probably... My ex-husband and I talk about this often. It was probably *the* thing where we have had the biggest impact on a person's life, more than anything we've done in our careers. It was a life-changing experience. And our son is such a wonderful, wonderful kid. Both my kids are wonderful. But that was a big goal for me; to have children. I remember telling people that I had done many projects when I worked for SAP, and then later within academia, but motherhood was the only position where I saw the fruits of my labour; the work that I put into it. I always saw the fruits of my labour. Being a mom is, and was, such a beautiful experience. It's something I have never regretted and never will.

Another goal was to travel the world. I grew up in—I don't want to say poor, but definitely lower middle-class conditions. There wasn't enough money to do a lot of traveling. I spent my vacations as a kid in the back of a station wagon traveling to different parts of the US. I wanted to see the world, but I had a lot of student loans to pay back, so I knew that wasn't going to be possible, which was part of the reason why I went to work for SAP. I thought, "Well, I'm going to get six weeks of vacation there, and hopefully be able to travel and see Europe."

And then, of course, the PhD was always one of my goals. When I was at university, I wanted to continue with my education, but was not accepted within the graduate communications program at University of Minnesota. My dear friend, who recently passed away, Fred Amram, managed to pull some strings to get me into a similar program, not the program I wanted to be in. He said, "Once you get your foot in the door, then you can do it." But I decided that I wasn't going to. I was very naïve at that age because I thought anything I did was going to be on my own merit; I didn't want anyone else helping me. I guess what I've learned over the years is you have to take those opportunities and make the most of them. It isn't about not getting in on your own merit. It's about what you do once you get there. I didn't get my master's degree until almost 20 years later. It took a long time to get there, but it was always a goal.

What are some accomplishments that you would like to share?

I think one of the first accomplishments, was when I worked for SAP. There were a lot more men than women in the organization. Within five years of working for SAP, I'd managed to move up to a position of working directly for a member of the board and had cost center responsibility. Now, I know that doesn't sound like a big deal but back in the day (1995), it was. There were hundreds of men who had cost center responsibility who could manage projects and make decisions about how money was going to be distributed and managed within the organization. At that point in time, when you got emails that were sent to upper level management, you'd see the three women that were listed, and then the names of over

a hundred men. It was a big deal to be at the table, and working as a woman in a high-tech environment with many “alpha males” was a real learning experience.

My aunt sent me a book at the time that was hugely helpful. It was called, *Games Mother Never Taught You* [(Harragan, 1977)] and was all about the games that are played within boardrooms and organizations, and that how they're played are very different from how women play games—they're much more competitive. There was a lot of good advice in that book. That was a major accomplishment: having a leadership role in designing and developing the information landscape that I believe SAP still uses.

I already mentioned the best research paper award that Jane Brindley and I won for our work [(Blaschke & Brindley, 2011)]. For me, the award signified that move from the work environment to academia. I knew that I could succeed and excel within a corporate environment, and I wanted to see if I could also do the same within an academic one. Receiving the Best Research Paper Award was a major stepping stone in transitioning from the corporate world into academia.

Other accomplishments... I would say the work that I have done with EDEN (European Distance and E-Learning Network, which is now EDEN-DLE [EDEN Digital Learning Europe]). I was elected to the management board, became a Vice President, and then a Senior Fellow. All of these were huge accomplishments for me. It was wonderful working with the EDEN organization, establishing and leading the Council of Fellows. The EDEN network was so important in furthering my academic career, but also in providing opportunities to engage in new and exciting projects.

As an instructor, I think the biggest accomplishment was when I won the Stanley J. Drazek Teaching Excellence Award in 2016. I had been nominated by my students, I think seven or eight times. For each time you were nominated, you had to go through a regimented process. You also described your teaching philosophy to show proof of your teaching excellence. I'd done this each time that I was nominated by my students. For me, it was about my students... It wasn't so much that the institution recognized excellence in my teaching, but it was something my students did, and they did it consistently over the years. So when I finally did win the award, it meant a great deal to me that my students consistently and persistently recommended me for the award. I think as a teacher, when your students do that, it means even more than if your institution gives you a teaching award. Those were the some of the biggest accomplishments.

What were some of the challenges that you faced?

I have already talked about being a woman in a high-tech environment and some of the challenges there, so I'm not going to go into that. After I'd left the corporate world, I remember having coffee with some of the ladies from the town that I lived in, with my son and all the other children. They were talking about the best kinds of potatoes you could make, whether they were the potato flakes that you got at this grocery store, or whether it was the potato powder that you got from this other grocery store, or whether it was real potatoes. I remember sitting there thinking to myself, “Oh, my goodness! A week ago, I was sitting in a boardroom talking about the future directions of the organization and what we needed to put into place to realize our goals. And now I'm talking about mashed potatoes.” It was a challenging transition.

And then, other challenges... Receiving My PhD was a huge challenge. I already mentioned that I needed to get a German MBA before I could move on to the PhD. On the one hand, I was getting recognition within my network and within the field for my publications. I was invited to give keynotes and to present my research at a number of distance learning

conferences, which was significant for me as a graduate student. Every time I would talk about my research, I would get feedback from my peers, so it was molding my research. Every time I would submit an article to a journal, it was almost as if it would split the readership. One reviewer would say, "This is a great article, we need this in academia, this needs to be published." Then the other reviewer would basically say, "Ah, this is [BS]." Then I would have to work at trying to find some common ground.

Although I was getting support from my professional network, I struggled a bit with my advisor. I hear stories from other grad students about the pivotal role that their advisor played in their PhD, and I wish I could have had that. But on the other hand, I had so many people within my network who were helpful and supportive and wanting me to succeed, and giving me good ideas on how to navigate the system. My problem was that I didn't play the academic game as well as I probably should have. Whether you're working in corporate, or whether you're working in academia, or whether you're learning within the school system, it's a game. And you have to learn what the rules are, you have to learn how the game is played. And if you want to succeed, you have to play the game the way that you're expected to. I think that you don't see a lot of people coming back to academia after many years of work experience, because they've already figured out how corporate works, or they've already figured out how academia works. It's challenging transitioning from one to the other. I did it, but I don't know if I would do it again, because it was a lot of stress.

But the biggest challenge for me was at the end of 2017. I had completed about 20 pages of my PhD dissertation introduction (plus the five publications), and I had told my family, "I'm clearing my plate, I'm taking the rest of the month off and I'm going to focus on getting this PhD dissertation done, because I want it done before the end of the year." I told my mom I was going into my writing cave. And I did that. Three days in, I woke up, and I couldn't move my arm. I was in horrible pain. It turned out that I was in the beginning of septic shock. Within 48 hours, I was having heart failure. They never determined what the source of the infection was, but it attacked every organ in my body. The doctors told my children that there was a very good likelihood I would not survive. Someone told me that when the doctor told them, my daughter said, "You don't know my mom." They called my family, and my mom and my sister were on the next plane to Germany. I spent two weeks in the ICU [Intensive Care Unit], then got sepsis again while in hospital. They didn't think I would survive. But I came through it. After six weeks in hospital, I was out.

I had a lot of cognitive problems after that. I couldn't put sentences or words together. Before, I had been one of those people who could compose things in my head, like my IRRODL article. Gee, that thing was in my head for so long, and then I wrote it. And now it would take me hours to formulate a paragraph, because the words made no sense. For me, writing had always been like a puzzle, putting all the pieces together, and then you knew when it was the right fit. And here I was, having been able to do this my whole life, now not being able to do it. Stewart Hase was so supportive; Don Olcott was so supportive—both telling me keep writing, keep doing it, just keep moving forward, and that's what I did. I kept putting one foot in front of the other, and it was baby steps. Cognitively, as I said, it was challenging to put words and sentences together. I couldn't remember things. You know how you walk in the kitchen, and you can't remember things? I walked into my kitchen, and I couldn't remember where my silverware drawer was. It was ...oh, it was horrible. It was absolutely horrible. But then I kept telling myself, "You're alive, and that's all that matters." I kept pushing forward again, and again, and again, one baby step at a time.

Eight or nine months after this...it was in November of 2018, when I defended my dissertation. I wasn't euphoric. I was relieved when it was over because I had fought so

hard. To get there was such a long battle and then not knowing... I remember lying in my hospital bed, and there were two things I was worried about. One was, "What are my kids going to do without me? I can't leave my kids." The other was, "I got this far, and I didn't get my PhD." And so it was almost anticlimactic when I got the PhD because I'd worked so hard and when I finally got it, I wondered why I put so much effort into it. But I think it was because I'd set that goal for myself, and I really wanted to achieve it.

So, when we talk about challenges, we have challenges that are maybe not as important as we think they are. And then we have challenges that change our lives. For me, having sepsis changed my life, because it made me appreciate everything in my life. I wake up every day, thankful that I am still there, thankful that I can smell fresh bread in the morning when I walk past the bakery, that I can feel the wind on my face, that I can take one step, and two steps, and three steps, and continue to walk. Now it's 2023. I had sepsis in 2017-18. After five years, the research says that you...are not going to die from sepsis or from the the after effects of sepsis, whereas most people do die within the first year of septic shock. So, I'm very happy that I'm here and to have this interview with you.

Research Interests

What are some of the specific research interests that you've had and have they changed over the years?

My first research interest was collaborative online learning. I worked on research together with Jane Brindley and Christine Walti (Brindley, Blaschke, & Walti, 2009). We looked at how students learn within collaborative learning environments. Do we have to motivate them extrinsically? If we give them a grade, do they put forth as much effort as when we don't give them a grade? Interestingly enough, the research showed that there was no significant difference. In comparing the cohorts, students would work as hard when they were extrinsically motivated by a grade than when no grade was given. So that got me thinking more about intrinsic motivation and about what is it that drives us to learn.

Then, as I said, I worked on the reflective learning journal article with Jane (Blaschke & Brindley, 2011). That was when I started to get interested in heutagogy, which is partially true, but not entirely, because I was always... impressed by people who would come into that [SAP] environment that was quickly changing and complex, and they would hit the ground running. Then there would be other people who needed tremendous amounts of time and resources to be ramped into that work environment, and then struggled whenever they were confronted with change or complexity. So, what was it about that first set of people? And that second set? What was it that made some excel, while others did not? When I read about heutagogy, I thought, "This is the difference between the people who need to be told and who are passive employees, and those who are active and who come in and hit the ground running, start building their network from day one, and are able to excel within that work environment." So, when I read the articles that Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon wrote, I thought, "This is it! This is exactly what we need within academia." And so right after that, I started to try to implement it within my courses, to try to get students to be more self-directed, to be more self-determined; to make decisions about their learning, and to take responsibility for those decisions, and to also assess whether or not they've learned and how they've learned. So, that has been the central part of my research for the last decade, if not longer – that is, looking at self-determined learning, and how can we realize it within learning environments, whether it is the K through 12 environment, which which I was able to experience at Learnlife, or whether it's the higher ed environment, which I was able to experience with University of Oldenburg and

University of Maryland. It isn't just, "How do we get them to succeed within the work environment?" but also, "How do we get them to succeed in life after that?" Dave Cormier (2022) gave a podcast a few months ago, where he talked about how we can't give solutions anymore as teachers, we can only help them [learners] to find the solutions. We are there to help them create solutions that may work or may not work, to be able to find solutions for themselves. And for me, heutagogy, self-determined learning empowers them and gives them the agency to be able to make those decisions [Figure 1]. So that is a specific area of research that I've been working on most recently. Stewart Hase and I've been working on the human agency aspect and how to empower learners to be agents of their own learning. And how do we empower teachers? How do we empower organizations to be agents and to create environments where human agency can thrive? And so, that's been the area that I've focused on most within my research, and of course, technology—using technology to support that agency within teaching and learning.

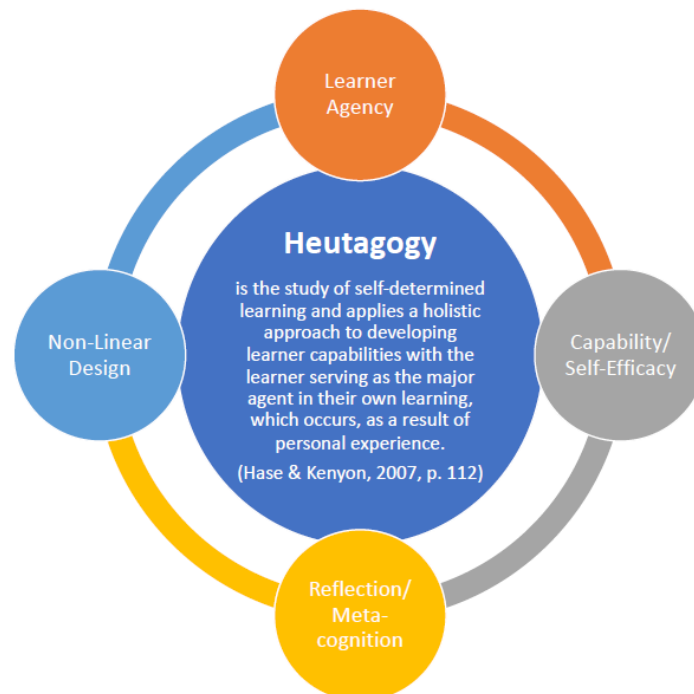


Figure 1. Definition and elements of heutagogy. Adapted from Hase & Kenyon (2001, 2007, 2013).

The past, present, and future of distance education

What was the state of distance education, or online learning when you entered the field as compared to the field today?

When I first started – it's funny because I think about people like Jane Brindley and Susan [Bainbridge], who you've worked with. When they talk about how it used to be, and I talk about how it used to be, they were just different worlds. As I said before, I didn't realize there was such a rich history of distance education, e-learning, until I really studied it and took a deeper dive into it. And even now, with the pandemic [COVID 19], you've got a number of people who think there was not any distance education, or e-learning, or online learning, until the pandemic. For me...back in the day, I remember I would turn assignments in on a floppy disk; it would be one of those floppy disks, the ones that were paper thin. You saved your assignment onto that, and then you'd put it in the mailbox and

send it to your professor, who would then review it and send it back with handwritten comments. The Internet was very new, very rudimentary, like email...and wikis, my God, that changed everything. When we got social media and Web 2.0, it changed the whole game. We had interaction, we had threads, we could post things, and we had asynchronous communication and some synchronous communication. But with Web 2.0, we could co-create things, we could do things together. I remember the first time when I opened up Google Docs, and we could collaborate together on something. It was so exciting, because all of this stuff we'd done before, it was mostly asynchronous. It sped everything up.

I talked a bit about the things that we did with technology, the work that Stella Porto, Gila Kurtz, and I did. I remember – it was probably around 2006 or 2007 – we pitched a book where we said, we'd like to have a living book. And at that time, there wasn't Wikipedia. We wanted to have a living, online, interactive book that would continue to grow, as technology changed within distance education and e-learning. At the time, the proposal was turned down, and we didn't have the energy (or resources) to pursue it further. But it would have been groundbreaking at the time. We were thinking a lot about different ways that we could use Web 2.0 to support us in creating these environments where students could create things, and could collaborate, and not have that one-on-one relationship with the instructor.

That was where I started to see all the opportunities for self-determined learning. Of course, Knowles has had a huge influence on distance education in terms of the self-directedness of the learner and how important that is in order for them to succeed in an online or distance environment. For me, moving them [the learners] along that PAH (pedagogy-andragogy-heutagogy) continuum is one of the most important areas of our research; moving them from this traditional pedagogy of chalk and talk, and getting them to self-directed learning or the andragogy from Knowles, then into the heutagogy. Moving them along that continuum, to get them to be more self-directed and self-determined in their learning has become, for me, one of the drivers of my teaching. The technology isn't so important unless it helps me to achieve my goal, which is to help learners become more independent and to become agents of their learning. If a technology helps me in doing that, then I use it. But if it doesn't, then I don't. I think that's a good ground rule to use: if a technology helps and supports you and your pedagogy, and it supports the learner in their learning, then use it. But if it detracts them and creates cognitive overload, don't even touch it. It's not helpful to learning.

What do you perceive the future of distance education, or online learning, to be in the coming decades?

Every Distance Education scholar that I have respected over the years, when they have been asked this question—whether it be, Otto Peters, whether it be Terry Anderson, whether it be Alan Tate or Börje Holmberg, any of those people—nobody would venture an answer to that question. They would say that the future is too difficult to predict. What I *can* say is what my *hope* for the future of distance education, and online and distance learning, because I think predicting the future can be dangerous.

I hope that distance education continues to evolve to become more open and inclusive. When we think about what Otto Peters said, his original ideas of distance education having a special humanitarian goal, I would love to see that continue to happen. Instead, I see the divide getting bigger. I see a lot of things happening where there are divides that aren't just digital divides; they're learning opportunity divides. I would like to see us decrease that divide, and when we use technology, we use it in a way that will be more inclusive.

I also hope that we will not use technology for policing and controlling students. From the work that I have done in the last two decades in distance education and e-learning, I have never found policing students to be a conducive learning experience. When learners are controlled, there's no trust, there's no respect, or little respect. I feel very strongly about the fact that we shouldn't be controlling our students and creating these policing environments, but rather we should be giving them opportunities to make decisions about their learning and to be empowered and have agency within their learning. But when we do things, like control them with ridiculous software like Proctorio (and I'm not going to digress and go into what Proctorio is doing to Ian Linkletter, which is a scandal the way that he's being treated)...we need to move away from technology as being a force that controls. It needs to be what enables us in our teaching or learning, and not what controls us.

If we can move to that place, where there's more agency for learners, where we try to come up with ways to use these technologies to enable and empower people...we've succeeded. I just saw today, and I'm going to read this quote; it's actually a retweet by George Siemens, where David Wiley, the OER [open educational resources] guy, talks about ChatGPT. He said, "By definition, our lack of imagination is the only limit on our ability to use these tools in novel ways." And to me, that isn't just for ChatGPT, or generative AI; that's for *any tool* that has influenced DE [distance education] in its history. We need to be creative. We need to recreate and to come up with new ways of doing things. This is why distance education will always be in a battle, in a way, with traditional higher education, because tech drives the evolution of distance education, and tech always translates to change. This doesn't work in higher ed, where education in general doesn't like change.

Interesting memories

Are there some interesting memories about the field of distance education? Now online learning that you would like to share?

Oh, wow. I was at the EDEN research workshop in Oldenburg where I was in the final year of my graduate studies. I'd only met my professors online, and here I was, with Otto Peters, Börje Holmberg, Desmond Keegan, Tony Bates, Terry Anderson; I think Karen Swan was there even, and Jane Brindley, Ross Paul. All of these people who were pioneers in distance education decades ago.

A couple of things I did while I was there were: I managed to spill wine on Jane Brindley because I was waving my hands around in an excited way, something that never happens when you're online. But we became fast friends after that, so thankfully, it didn't turn out badly for me. When I met Desmond Keegan, I was at a table with a bunch of my fellow graduate students. We had these name tags, where one side of the name tag said "lunch ticket" and the other side of the name tag said the name of the person and their affiliation. Well, Desmond Keegan was standing there with us, and we're animatedly talking about transactional distance and Michael Moore and what have you, and I turned to Desmond Keegan, and I said, "I'm sorry, I haven't met you before. What was your name again?" And I swear, I got kicked by all the graduate students under the table. They were like, "That's Desmond Keegan! How can you say that?" But he was so humble. He said, "These tickets are ridiculous." So, he turns the ticket around, and I, of course, nearly fell over from embarrassment. I wanted to crawl under the table, but as I said, he was so approachable, and so kind and supportive. That research workshop was hugely influential on me. Terry Anderson's final keynote is what created that drive in me to be a researcher. I got bit by the research bug while he was presenting, and I thought, "This, *this* is what I want to do.

I want to do research, and this is the area I want to do research in." In terms of interesting memories that would probably be the top, my most interesting memory.

Pearls of wisdom

Are there some pearls of wisdom that you would like to offer to others?

A couple of things. I'm teaching a course right now for the Inter-American Development Bank, and one of my students contacted me, saying, "What do I need to do to become an online instructor? I really love this. I'm really excited about online learning."

I basically told her, "Start by building your network and embrace the opportunity to reach out to people, contact people, get in touch with them. If there's people who are interested in a topic that you're interested in, connect with them on Twitter, connect with them on LinkedIn, find a way to meet them at conferences."

For me, the network has been my critical support throughout my academic career. These were the people who were there through all my trials and tribulations, people who were not just supportive, but critical. And I don't mean in a negative way, but who would provide feedback in a way that helped me grow, not in a way that held me back. Those are the kinds of people who I try to keep in my network: the people who I can trust, who support me, who are critical and help me to grow. There are a number of women in my network, but there are also a number of men who have been very supportive and have been fabulous promoters of women within distance education.

Another pearl: believe in yourself; keep going, keep working at it. If you set your mind to it, and you keep working toward your goals, you can achieve them. Remember when I told you about the book coming out and getting the rejection letter from University of Oldenburg on the same day? Later that day, I was folding laundry, and my head was spinning. I thought, "What *am* I going to do?" I was folding my daughter's t-shirt, and on the t-shirt was a quote, which was attributed to Einstein (I don't know if it's true). "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving." So that's what I did. I picked myself up, and I kept moving. And that has helped me through. So, a pearl of wisdom is to build your network, make sure you have a strong network of people that you can trust, and that support you, and who not just support and nurture you, but challenge you. And to pick yourself up and keep moving.

Current activities

What are you currently engaged in?

Since I left Learnlife last year, I've been mostly doing educational consulting, talking about heutagogy and self-determined learning. I was at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore last year, and I've been doing a couple of lectures for different institutions within Europe. One of the more recent ones was with Mary Immaculate College in Ireland.

I'm leading workshops and designing courses. I'm also teaching online again, for the Inter-American Development Bank, helping not just teachers, but individuals, become online teachers. It's a six-week training course, which I've been really enjoying.

I've also been doing a bit of writing. I've recently finished a chapter on pursuing my PhD, motherhood, and the challenges. Also, I recently had an article published on Leadership 2030, together with Don Olcott and Deborah Arnold. That was another one of those great experiences where we challenged each other and built on each other's ideas to create that

work. Basically, the kind of work that I'm engaged in right now are things that I want to do and things where I feel I can make a contribution.

Future plans

What are your future plans?

I will keep talking about heutagogy and self-determined learning, learner agency, and how to empower learners. I am trying to get people to understand that it isn't just about getting them [learners] to consume information and knowledge, but to give them agency, empower them to make decisions about their learning, and building on those skills that they're going to need for lifelong learning. Because the world that our kids face now is very different than the one that I faced many years ago. It's much more complex, much more frightening. I've had conversations with my kids, where they've said, "We don't know what's going to happen. We are worried about climate change; we are worried about all these issues that are facing us. But you know, no one seems to take these issues seriously. So, our generation is going to have to." I think if we are going to give such complex and challenging problems to our kids, we have to also give them the skills to be able to solve them, too. And if we teach them that learning is what they are told, then I think we're doing them an injustice. So, I will continue to talk about learning agency, I will continue to talk about how important it is in building lifelong learning skills. I'm also talking with Stewart about writing a new book to follow up on *Unleashing the Power of Learner Agency* (2021). It would be more about how to implement it: how do we create holistic experiences for heutagogy, self-determined learning, to thrive? So that's one of the things that is on my list of things I want to do.

Final thoughts

Is there anything else that you would like to address?

There's a lot of topics that could and should be addressed, but I've taken a lot of your time already and I wouldn't know where to begin. I mentioned before the importance of support networks—networks that include not only women, but also men who support women. I think women are still at a disadvantage in the field, as we attempt to do and to be everything in the roles that we play within our homes and within our professions. So, we need to have a nurturing and supportive network and not just build a network where you are supported, but also where we support each other as well. There's been a huge assault on our civil liberties, particularly in the US in the last year. We need to band together to create these networks of support. This community, the network of women within the field, has been so instrumental in defining and shaping me and my ideas. I can't thank them enough because of the impact that they've had on my development. And I think the book that you and Susan [Bainbridge] have written will have, if it hasn't already, a major impact, primarily because it's given women a huge voice. Now, others can see the important role women have played within distance education, in the history of distance education. So, thank you for that, and thank you also for giving me an opportunity to share my voice today.

CONCLUSION

Upon reading Dr. Lisa Marie's candid interview, it is obvious that she is an extraordinary individual. Her contributions to the corporate and academic worlds are remarkable and inspiring. The educational approach that she promotes, heutagogy (Figure 1), encourages educators and learners in both worlds to return the power of learning to the learner, so

that individually and collectively, humankind can achieve its true potential.

Lisa Marie continues to champion her heutagogical beliefs and practices as she transitions into semi-retirement. She remains busy with teaching and international speaking engagements. She also plans to write more articles on self-determined learning and is currently engaged in co-authoring another book on the topic with Dr. Steward Hase. A list of her publications is included in the Appendix at the end of this article.

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APPENDIX: DR. LISA MARIE BLASCHKE PUBLICATIONS

Note: Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke's conference presentations and other activities are found in her portfolio: <http://lisamarieblaschke.pbworks.com/>

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