Theme 3: Praxis in Distance Education Research

This theme includes chapters that focus on research on distance education practice. A variety of perspectives on current and future practice and methodologies provide for interesting reading. This ranges from open education resources to self-directed learning, facilitator support, and Michael Moore's three types of interaction.

Chapter 8:

Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Methodologies in Distance Education Research: A Meaningful Self-Directed Learning Approach

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Introduction

Everybody will agree that Covid-19 has had a significant, more often than not devastating, impact on the world as we know it and has affected every aspect of how we do things, including teaching and learning. Although, one could argue that in some regards these challenges in the education sector brought about by Covid-19 have only accelerated the inevitable given that we had already been living in a digital and globalised world for some time, which required almost everyone to do things differently. Therefore, it is critical to examine distance education (DE) in South African colleges more than ever before. We must consider how distance and even content contribute to meaningful learning and how these are contributing to oppressive educational settings devoid of contextual affluence. This chapter is thus intended to shed light on how DE can be oppressive and how in turn facilitators can contribute to anti-oppressive education that is meaningful and enhances students' SDL abilities.

Defining education over a distance is not as apparent as it may seem, as the word distance could comprise various meanings. In simple terms, DE occurs with a distance between the facilitator and student (Witta 2009). However, the term *distance* may relate to the separation between a facilitator and a student in terms of intellect, time, and physical space (Simonson et al. 2015), which might mean that they are in separate rooms or places. Furthermore, this kind of teaching may occur via various media, including printed artefacts for non-verbal communication and media for verbal communication (Simonson et al. 2015). Thus, the working definition of distance learning in this

chapter is when facilitators and students work together to engage with academic material as part of a course and finish a module across a distance using information and communications technology.

That said, the purpose of this chapter is to establish guidelines for the DE facilitator in terms of providing possibilities for critical reflection and interaction rather than fearing a loss of control and, instead, become an anti-oppressive facilitator. This anti-oppressive facilitator must be committed to fundamentally altering learning, teaching, and assessment practices to contribute to meaningful self-directed distance learning.

Self-directed learning in distance education: Teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies for humane and non-oppressive education

In the following paragraphs, the authors will present a short introduction to what self-directed learning (SDL) is about and then shift the focus to the critical constituent that is SDL in DE, considering purposefully selected teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies for humane and non-oppressive education. The purpose of this chapter is thus not to provide a historical overview of SDL; rather, SDL is the lens through which we view teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies in DE. Initial research to comprehend SDL took place 150 years ago in the United States and Great Britain. Two of the most prominent scholars who laid the foundation for such research is Craik in 1840 who researched self-education and Smiles in 1859 who focused his work on 'self-help' and its significance for personal development.

Different terminologies are presented for SDL in research, such as self-education, andragogy, independent study, autonomous learning, self-planned learning, adults' learning projects, and independent study. Nonetheless, each terminology accentuates the individual student's responsibility, accountability, and autonomy in the learning process (Guglielmino 2013; Du Toit-Brits and Blignaut 2019).

Undoubtedly the most used explanation of SDL is that endowed by Micheal Knowles (1975: 18) where he describes SDL as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Knowles (1975) is acknowledged as the leading mentor in SDL, andragogy, or adult learning. In his research he asserted that as adult students mature they can (a) develop and mature into more SD individuals, (b) comprehend why they want to acquire information, (c) learn experientially, and (d) approach learning as problem-solving. His research focuses on learning contracts, instructor facilitation skills, and student skills and capabilities. In consonance with Knowles (1975), we believe

that as students mature, they shift from a self-dependent individuality toward one of self-direction, autonomy, and independence that constitute both a process and a desired outcome, and our role as facilitators is to facilitate this process.

Other researchers in SDL, such as Brockett and Hiemstra, researched traditional teaching and learning instead of non-traditional teaching and learning (Brockett and Hiemstra 1991). Their findings delivered important teaching and learning materials supporting adult facilitators to comprehend and involve their students in SDL. Then there was Brookfield (1986) who argued that SDL is a transformative teaching and learning activity rather than an instrumental approach as seen in the work of Knowles (1975, 1992), Hiemstra (1991), and Brookfield (1984, 1986) who state further that SDL also referred to internal transformation of perspective where he proclaimed that 'authentic' SDL originates from the inner change of meaning, autonomy, and attentiveness to self-control from the SD individual.

Considering the arguments we made in the preceding paragraph, the authors' outlook is that a critical reflection process is needed for SDL that leads to transformational learning as it is seen as an indispensable constituent of SDL. Therefore, SDL students need to be involved in critical reflection and transformational SDL to encourage emancipatory learning. This is supported by the research of Merriam and Bierema (2013). The latter arguments in this paragraph are supported by Freire (1993) who argues that critical reflection and SDL are essential for students to emancipate themselves and employ constructive social learning actions.

When we look at more recent research on SDL, Baez (2019) and Morris and Rohs (2021) contend that SDL can be seen as a process that supports students in being responsible for the preparation, taking on, and assessing features of their learning process. Du Toit-Brits (2018a, 2020), Huang et al. (2020), and Tadesse and Muluye (2020) concur, stating that students must be inspired and motivated to engage in SDL, and as a result of their engagement achieve high-quality learning outcomes and SDL skills through personally meaningful, thought-provoking and enjoyable experiences, grounded in the sense of control and personal autonomy. Therefore, SDL skills like self-discipline, self-confidence, independence, autonomy, being goal-oriented, persistence, and self-motivation must also be embraced in distance education, where students should take up a central role in their learning.

Given all that we have mentioned so far, another fundamental constituent of SDL is the concept of personal responsibility, where individual students take ownership of their learning (Morris and Rohs 2021). As a result, accepting responsibility for one's learning and comprehension becomes a realistic option for initiating the learning process. We based the latter argument on humanism

(see the section on Humanism), where the individual student is autonomous, self-directed, and responsible for aiming for learning outcomes to achieve self-actualisation. We are thus of the opinion that students cannot be autonomous and in control of their learning process if they are not accountable for their learning. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) support the above argument, stating that for students to take more control of their learning, the facilitator of adult students should guide them in taking more responsibility for their learning, which is a pivotal aim of adult education. Therefore, we argue that SDL can be viewed as a process in which students take up the primary responsibility for preparing, employing, and assessing their learning process. For students to take up the primary responsibility of their learning, they need the guidance of an SD facilitator who must facilitate their learning process. Thus, students' self-direction will depend on a student's desire to take responsibility for learning.

As seen at the beginning of this section, SDL is a process in which individuals take the initiative for their learning: the notion is that students can regulate their learning requirements and establish suitable ways to attain their learning goals. As can be seen from the SDL body of scholarship, SDL has been recognised as a primary adult education instrument and was initially adopted for adult learning (Tadesse and Muluye 2020). To ascertain a DE environment in which students can discover their SDL capabilities and skills, autonomy and direction in learning are needed in which facilitators can allow students to be self-directed. Now, more than ever, SDL again needs to be recognised as an adult education tool required for DE.

Self-directed learning as a crucial tool in distance education

Everybody participating in the education system has learned how adaptable learning environments can be over the past two years. 'Emergency' remote learning had to be started quickly in schools and higher education institutions (HEIs), and challenges surfaced with its implementation (Lockee 2021). In addition, the escalation of DE and the lockdown requirements have made SDL a formidable—and occasionally an indispensable and crucial—tool and style of learning where students can commit to learning in their own time (Voskampa, Kuiperb, and Volman 2020).

Mounting the tools and instruments to participate in SDL could demonstrate the importance of SDL to students' future success. During this time, it became clear that 'resilience', 'adaptiveness', 'self-direction', and 'self-regulation' are indispensable elements and influences in learning. With the purpose of HEIs being to get students ready for the 21st-century challenges, HEIs and DE per se

need to address SDL skills and abilities such as: (a) managing learning tasks without having them directed by others; (b) self-management; (c) goal-setting; (d) decision-making; (e) adaptability; (f) initiative; (g) responsibility; (h) critical thinking; (i) problem-solving; and (j) collaboration. These purposes acknowledge the importance of students' autonomy and authority in DE institutions' learning process where SDL is seen as a crucial tool (Brookfield 1984; Voskampa, Kuiperb, and Volman 2020).

The purpose of DE (or any education) is to develop students into continuing, 'inner-directed' self-acting students (Huang et al. 2020; Olivier 2020, 2021; Olivier and Wentworth 2021). The authors of this chapter believe that it is crucial in DE to promote a learner-centred approach in which students are seen as progressively independent, autonomous, and self-directed (Lockee 2020; Fahlman 2013). For SDL to flourish in DE, we need to rethink how we view the learning process in DE, focusing on how adult students participate and achieve their learning aims. We also believe that with SDL students need to implement an assortment of learning strategies, and, significantly, that students are equipped for distance learning, as it can permit them to be self-directed in their learning. In addition to implementing an assortment of learning strategies to endorse SDL further in DE, students need interactive learning guides, assistance, and learning environments that can empower them to plan their learning actions at suitable times and establish what to learn. As a crucial tool in DE, we further argue that SDL necessitates students to take responsibility for their learning, although distance facilitators cannot abandon their commitment to support students. We are further of the opinion that the next era of higher education will be dominated and transformed by DE (Waghid 2018) with collaborative technologies that will permit more SDL opportunities for students, open-access textbooks, e-books, learning repositories, social networking technologies, and open education resources (OER) (Huang et al. 2020).

Shifting of teaching and learning assumptions in distance education

To this end, it is proposed that SDL is required and essential in DE and the success of DE lies in SDL. Though higher education's emphasis on the student as a 'proto worker' has enlarged, the capability of transformative SDL to get students ready for the twenty-first century has come under the light. SDL should emancipate students into self-actualised adults living up to their full potential, focusing on thoughts of dedication and interdependency (Guglielmino 2013). With *dedication*, we imply that students need to be invigorated by concentrating and focusing on areas and issues

inside the communal setting, thus avoiding the 'academic ivory tower'. There has been movement in teaching and learning assumptions toward the use of DE as an effective tool for personal change and growth regarding SDL skills and mainly the medium over which societies grow and transform (Brandon 2020). With *interdependency*, we imply that individual learning only is ineffective to transform teaching and learning, which should rather happen through the communal involvement and skills in teaching and learning, guided and facilitated by an SD facilitator. As a result, students and facilitator can realise their power and capability to shift the meaning of teaching and learning towards a student-centric view where everyone contributes as investigators in this educational situation. Freire's (1974, 2003) opinion is that this collaborative partnership between students and facilitator empowers them to investigate challenges and redefine the challenges and their solutions. We believe that this transformative student-centric view of education is not about 'what is' but about 'what could be', stepping away from education's 'banking' view.

Consequently, the above argument indicates a need to understand the importance of the 'teaching event' in DE, which cannot only be in the facilitators' hands: the distance students need to share the learning responsibility and take accountability for the delivery's effectiveness. In addition, this chapter proposes that a shift in teaching and learning assumptions is required by both the distance facilitator and the student. In SDL-focussed DE, students need the facilitator to be present to guide them through their SDL journey. While that may be a slight overemphasis, it validates our opinion that for SDL to be operative, both facilitator and student need to acknowledge that their view of learning must change. In essence, learning ought to focus more on transforming SD students and their ability to use the content and the meaning of learning, rather than only knowing and comprehending learning content, to promote the usefulness of SDL approaches (Brandon 2020).

The usefulness of self-directed learning approaches

Considering what has been mentioned so far, one may argue that formal education, particularly DE, continues to be highly valued in communities. This chapter also suggests that DE and SDL endeavours can meet numerous challenges in keeping up with the continuously evolving knowledge. Due to the aforementioned information, giving back to students the responsibility of learning is more advantageous and valuable than other approaches. Students need to succeed as self-directed individuals and flourish in ways never thought possible when they know how to take responsibility (Du Toit-Brits and Blignaut 2019). Students have to develop self-directed learning skills during their

lives to manage the enormity of information and knowledge available to them (Guglielmino 2013). This 'act' of students taking ownership of their learning can let them become their own masters, as they decide what to do, how to do it, how long to study, or whether to re-study. Moreover, self-directed learners can construct a sense of self-confidence to achieve opportunities in life by taking ownership of their transformation to self-directed individuals with intellectual freedom (Mezirow 2000).

For students to succeed in DE, various SDL skills are required, such as planning their learning pace, monitoring their learning progress, and successfully discovering and implementing various learning resources. Therefore, DE is an ideal environment in which to generate learning opportunities to develop SDL skills (Guglielmino 2013) and empower students by strengthening their SDL skills. That said, the teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities to develop and strengthen SDL skills are foregrounded by specific and carefully selected teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies for DE.

Methodologies regarding teaching, learning, and assessment in distance education

A method, or rather methodologies in the case of this chapter, briefly resembles how teaching, learning, or assessment occurs within the educational space which could happen in many settings. In the case of this chapter, the setting is education that happens over a distance. In other words, where there is a distance between the facilitator and student enrolled for a module where technology is central to bridge the gap (between the facilitator and student) or used as a tool to facilitate learning. This section will therefore discuss teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies related to teaching, learning, and assessment.

Teaching methodologies

A teaching methodology includes the selection of the most appropriate method to achieve a teaching goal (Monclús-Guitart et al. 2009). It is argued that a facilitator usually defines such a goal in a particular module for students to obtain the necessary knowledge and skills they need to master the module as part of a particular curriculum (Monclús-Guitart et al. 2009). Additionally, teaching

methods, or more precisely, various ways thereof, collectively refer to teaching methodologies that operate on a continuum from teacher-directed to student-directed (Jacobs 2016). Some of these teaching methods are regarded as traditional, whereas others are regarded as contemporary or modern.

On the one hand, old-fashioned or outdated teaching methods include telling students what to do, using scaffolding, questions, and answers to engage in discussions and demonstrating something to students (Jacobs 2016) instead of allowing them to take an active role in the learning process. On the other hand, modern teaching methodologies (that are focused on the student), which we see fit for the twenty-first century and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), include project-based learning, cooperative learning, discussions, role-plays, experiments (Jacobs 2016), case studies, flipped classrooms, gamification (Safapour, Kermanschachi, and Taneja 2019), and problem-based learning (Ali 2019), among others. These modern methods are to be used to teach all functions based on less interactive to more interactive settings. Therefore, DE must select the most appropriate method to convey content or facilitate a particular module's content.

Learning methodologies

Learning methods include learning through teaching, digitally created visual boards discussed online, and brainstorming through mind-mapping, among others. It is important to remember that some of these learning methods (influenced by the teaching and assessment methods) might require a high-tech or low-tech approach. Contextual education, which is not oppressive to or exclusive of anyone, will consider these elements since every distance student needs to be reached.

However, access to technology to facilitate learning and communication online is unequally spread (Pashapa and Rivett 2017), especially in South Africa. Therefore, not all distance students in South Africa have access to high-speed internet, advanced devices, and stable connectivity. These aspects should be a key consideration in devising strategies for learners or students to engage with learning content. Awareness of the digital divide among students is therefore essential (Lembani et al. 2020) as it may highlight students' circumstances, technological access, and digital literacy levels for a facilitator. Knowing and understanding these contexts in which students find themselves could promote a more humane approach to education while contributing to meaningful learning for distance students. A facilitator should also be mindful of providing learning opportunities to students in real life and some that they can do on their own to promote SDL. For example, from

personal experience, students who could not log onto a life session were more productive and engaged in response to guiding PowerPoints with voice-overs where scaffolding was built into the guiding and progression occurred gradually, making learning more accessible. The key here is to have options available for students to choose how and when to engage with learning content.

Assessment methodologies

Assessment methodologies can be direct or indirect. The difference between these two is that a direct method establishes how students have demonstrated what they know, what new behaviours they acquired or rather how their behaviour changed due to the learning that took place and how they think or how their mental processes have changed due to the learning that took place (Fredonia 2021). Direct assessment methods are twofold, as the evidence collected to assess can either be done through observation or documents to arrive at a conclusion or award a mark for the work delivered. Observations as a direct method of assessment can occur through debates, discussions in groups, student presentations, and performances (Fredonia 2021). Evidence through documents include projects such as art sculptures or portraits, research projects, tests, essays and exams, to name a few (Fredonia 2021). Direct methods of assessments, in our opinion, are linked to assessment for and of learning. It comprises both the opportunity to assess the learning process that occurred or that occurs through engagement with the content and to judge achievement after completing a module.

Indirect assessment methods include the methods employed to see how students reflect on the knowledge they acquired, the new behaviours they learned or the way they think about the content (Fredonia 2021). These can be in the form of rubrics, surveys, reflection activities, to name a few. For example, students could be given rubrics to rate themselves before and after learning a particular skill. Moreover, surveys could include Likert scales in which students indicate their confidence in using the skill after having learnt it or their likelihood to use the skill again in the future. Lastly, reflection activities could include what they have learned, what they still need to learn, and what they believe they have mastered so far. Thus, indirect assessment methods, in our opinion, are related to assessment, as learning focusses on the student, their experiences, the learning processes and their metacognition (thinking about thinking) to improve learning and focus on weaknesses, to name a few.

The connectedness of teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies

Recognising that teaching, learning, and assessment methods are interconnected is pivotal. That said, the argument that methods used to assess are also the methods to teach (Dewald et al. 2000) is already two decades old but still valid because they cannot be treated separately. Thus, teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies must link with, or instead align and focus on, the student and how best to support the distance student. By highlighting teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies, we are first trying to establish the importance of knowing about the various options available and second that the most appropriate methodologies that are chosen for distance education should be those that will promote meaningful learning experiences. Facilitators, therefore, should not select assessment methods after teaching and learning occurred but these should be selected in accordance with the teaching and learning methods. Students cannot escape assessment methods chosen randomly according to the facilitator's work. They can, however, escape substandard facilitation not promoting learning, but this leaves them stuck having to participate in poorly planned assessments. Therefore, integration of teaching, learning, and assessment cannot be overemphasised. We believe that this can be achieved by being aware of the contexts of students and not following a one-sise-fits-all teaching approach. Instead, an inclusive approach should be followed for DE teaching, learning, and assessment. The idea of the separation influences our stance regarding inclusivity and context between facilitators and students, which is not supported by video conferencing during facilitation. This challenge necessitates that facilitators offer students individualised learning experiences, which can be done through humane education that is free from exclusion and oppression.

Humane education free from exclusion and oppression: promoting emancipation

In this sub-section, we discuss humanism in education, that is, education that does not oppress anyone and how such education can contribute to action and reflection on teaching and learning to increase emancipation through education and ultimately provide more contextual learning in distance education.

Humanism

Humanism is complex and has a rich history that stretches as far back as 1589 (Copson 2015). Without going into much detail about humanism, it is defined in the bylaws, according to Humanists International (2021) as:

> ...a democratic and ethical life stance that affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.

This basic definition is sufficient to get a glimpse of what humanism is but can never illustrate humanism in its broadest sense. Nevertheless, it is vital to understand what humanism in its basic form refers to, since this section deals with humanism from a DE perspective. The humanistic theory is often used in education as an approach to teaching and learning and describes how learning occurs.

Advocates of this theory argue that it is concerned with what children need in terms of their holistic development, which includes how they develop in terms of their emotions, mental processes, and their ability to interact with others on a social basis (Duchesne and McMaugh 2016). It is also argued that the focus of this theory from an educational psychology stance is orientated on a person's personal best interest and helping them progress to this point in their development (Crain 2015). Lastly, education based on humanism highlights the learner's inner world and emotions, with how they feel and think at the centre of their overall growth (Khatib, Sarem, and Hamidi 2013). Thus, DE (in the case of this chapter) which is founded on humanism emphasises the human being and elevates the individual above all else, or, in other words, humanising people. (cf. Firdaus and Mariyat 2017). That said, optimum learning is epitomised by understanding the self, self-actualisation, and self-realisation (Firdaus and Mariyat 2017), all important for SDL. After all, the type of DE founded on humanism is one that liberates the individual, thereby having a better quality of life or making a quality life for themselves. This notion corresponds with Freire's notion of what education should be reflected in his book on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—that is, education that does not oppress, education that is critical of systems of oppression, and education that gives students a voice (Freire 1993). Therefore, as mentioned in the previous sentence, humanistic

education is connected to education that is free of oppression, which is discussed in the following sub-section.

Anti-oppressive education

Anti-oppressive education in this section refers to education that is not oppressive to anyone and non-exclusive to anyone. Such education is mindful of people who may have been excluded and aims at education about those enrolled for a module or a course at a DE institution. In our opinion, such education is epitomised by the phrase, 'nothing for us without us'. We have used Kumashiro's (2000) notion of anti-oppressive education for this chapter. His notion is broken up into four fundamental tenets, namely: (1) education should be for individuals who are 'othered' concerning what is considered or recognised as normal; (2) education should be about those who are typically 'othered'; (3) education should criticise hostility and privilege; and (4) education should reform both the individual student and the community.

When it comes to 'education for the other', it is all about facilitators making the lives of those who are marginalised better. Miller (1995) contends that facilitators' behaviour toward learners or students may be influenced by types of bias, especially towards race and ethnicity. That being said, an educational institution's physical or virtual setting might be disconnected from the reality of the distance student. The implementation of curriculum as a guide to integrate and welcome all types of diversity can therefore help facilitators enhance the learning experiences of distance students.

Education's focus on individuals who are 'othered' requires educating all students about the other, which includes every student, as all people suffer some form of 'othering' or marginalisation. Lack of inclusiveness suggests that some students have important but concealed information in the hidden curriculum, which implies that all students should be included in teaching and learning to refrain from education that oppresses some while privileging others (Kumashiro 2002). A pedagogy that fits well here is one that is socially just. Such a pedagogy can aid in creating an awareness among students and the facilitator of each other's backgrounds, what they know and do not know, as well as their mother tongue to have an appreciation of diversity and to be able to know what diversity is (Kumashiro 2000). Providing students with contextualised education is essential to promote inclusivity of the other and each individual so that they may see themselves in the education they receive (Gay 2018).

Offering education that criticises alienation and privilege allows students to become aware of

how they are all part of a social system where they are alienated in particular ways and benefited in particular ways. Self-reflection becomes vital in this endeavour, as students have to reflect on their own lives to realise how the benefits they enjoy may oppress their peers or fellow students, including the way they argue and the reference points they use to form arguments. Another way to challenge student knowledge is by comparing it to information gained in their modules. Doing so will help students see how what they think they know affects other people's lives, but it will also help them realise that learning and unlearning together is critical to reducing privilege and alienation among themselves (Blignaut 2021).

Reforming the individual and society through education entails educating students on issues their fellow citisens experience (Kumashiro 2000). Such education may result in instances where individuals (students and facilitators) feel exposed regarding their prior assumptions or ideas. Although they may feel vulnerable, they could also experience a profound enlightenment and learning curve in understanding the assumptions their knowledge comprises, enabling the facilitator and fellow students to have an in-depth understanding of each other. Consequently, such education, in our opinion, leads to self-discovery through self-reflection (an essential part of curriculum as praxis, discussed in the following section) in terms of thinking about the self and about others. This can promote SDL and how one deals with people of diverse backgrounds. Moreover, education in this sense liberates the student from an education system that is perhaps against them based on who they are. Finally, such education facilitates action and reflection (Grundy 1987) on what occurs in reality and how one responds to it, emphasising curriculum relevance as praxis in distance education.

Curriculum as praxis: education based on emancipation to contribute to meaningful distance learning

Other approaches to curriculum design as well as teaching, learning, and assessment exist, such as curriculum as product and curriculum as practice, but we will concentrate on curriculum as praxis (Grundy 1987). The curriculum as praxis focusses on emancipating the individual through education with its critical inclination (Grundy 1987). Education in this sense is connected to Freire's literacy programme, which is guided by three key ideas (Grundy 1987). These ideas include that (a) education should be relevant to students, (b) with a critical foundation, while (c) promoting active participation in the learning process (Grundy 1987). Relevant education, in our opinion,

comprises meaningful learning. That said, making students part of the learning process through action and reflection gives meaning to the education they receive. Meaningfulness, in this case, can be established at the beginning of a module/course through a bargaining process between facilitator and students to contribute to education that emancipates students (Grundy 1987).

The bargaining process of giving and taking, and acting and reflecting, is not absent of dialogue and purposefully discussing education in students' interest (cf. Freire 1993). Dialogue is thus central to this endeavour whereby a facilitator gets to know their students. At this point, contexts and backgrounds of students are established, which is essential information to be used in planning teaching, learning, and assessment. Thus, to encourage SDL via distance education that allows for action and reflection, their reactions are analysed to help develop an appropriate learning environment and enable a facilitator to gather information to assist them with goal setting (Blignaut and Du Toit-Brits 2021). Most importantly, engaging with students on this level also helps a facilitator gather information to identify suitable platforms to search for sources and select suitable sources they can use in the learning process (Blignaut and Du Toit-Brits 2021). Lastly, with such information generated, the facilitator can identify suitable strategies for learning and make informed decisions on assessment methods that will work with the group of students to illustrate what learning occurred (Blignaut and Du Toit-Brits 2021).

In conclusion to this section, a student made free through socially just education can promote SDL in the sense that, by recognising such education, facilitators can motivate students to engage in learning and work in a goal-oriented manner in the learning process and encourage students to take primary responsibility of their learning, which are aspects that enable a person to be self-directed in their learning.

Proposed solutions for humane and non-oppressive distance education

This section comprises a brief discussion regarding the facilitator as a role-player responsible for promoting SDL in their modules by offering humane and non-oppressive education.

The distance education facilitator becoming an anti-oppressive, self-directed facilitator

For distance facilitators to reform themselves and their practices to reflect the practices of an anti-oppressive facilitator, we propose that the distance student should be placed at the centre of all teaching, learning, and assessment aspects. Nothing in terms of education can occur for them without them. Such education demands a flexible facilitator who is cognisant of their students' varied intelligences and the diverse settings from which they emerge. Moreover, we argue that such a facilitator would be open to non-normative viewpoints and understandings, which will require them to approach education from multiple realities rather than one reality they initially accepted as the truth.

Each individual (even the facilitator) meets each other with backgrounds that privilege them somehow and disadvantage them in some other way, making it vital to acknowledge the other and each other in this endeavour. Facilitating these students happens in the form of a give-and-take relationship that always requires reflection and action upon what was reflected on to contribute to meaningful learning. Simultaneous unlearning and re-learning are highly valuable in this type of DE. Being present when students are expected to engage with content, interacting and engaging with them while asking for their opinions and how they want to learn and engage with content go a long way. In collaboration with SDL, reflection and dialogue must be central to anti-oppressive instruction in DE institutions to better understand the authority dynamics embedded in education and the community to democratise the process of knowledge and skill creation within the learning environment. In conclusion to this section, we provide some recommendations as a way forward to start thinking about how DE can be more humane and non-oppressive to promote SDL.

Recommendations and conclusion

Our recommendations are guidelines for the DE facilitator on how they can offer their students a module that is humane and non-oppressive to contribute to the self-directedness of their students. Our guidelines include the provision of more learning openings for critical reflection and engagement and instead of being afraid of losing control, becoming an anti-oppressive facilitator with a deep commitment to change learning, teaching, and assessment methodologies that contribute to meaningful SDL. Distance environments need to support individual student needs and promote the distinctiveness of each student where creativity and intellectual freedom are encouraged. In these distance education environments, the facilitator needs to listen to students as they would to their peers, show appreciation for their life experience, and allow for SDL to take place. The distance facilitator needs to 'co-create' the learning environment with students grounded on students' needs to support students in grasping their possibility for success and accomplishment in their field. Finally, learning environments in distance education need to confront adult students at their different intellectual capability levels. DE also needs to promote active participation in learning where facilitators and students cooperate similarly in learning responsibilities, where a learning atmosphere is created in which students are willing to learn.

In conclusion, this chapter discussed SDL concerning promoting education and how it can be better achieved through education that is focussed on the human being and non-oppression. These elements can be seen as pivotal for education to free students from their backgrounds and how they think. Such education can promote higher-order thinking, questioning what they learn and ultimately contributing to understanding from multiple perspectives by unlearning and re-learning together from within a contextually rich education while promoting SDL.

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