

Module 4: Self-Directed Learning

Outline / Overview of Chapter 4 of the Text

Self-Directed Learning

1. Up to 90% of adults are engaged in some form of self-directed learning.
 - a. A large portion of self-directed learning is considered informal learning.
 - b. In self-directed learning (SDL), the learner takes control of their own learning.
 - i. They decide when and how to learn.
 - ii. It does not always mean the learner is sitting in a classroom.
 - iii. SDL shapes us as individuals.
2. All adults have the capacity to be self-directed learners, but some factors may affect their ability to choose SNL
 - a. Willingness
 - b. Motivation
 - c. Life circumstances
 - d. Etc.

The Nature of Self-Directed Learning

1. Defining SDL
 - a. Self-directed learning has been studied and practiced for over 50 years.
 - b. It has been described as a personal attribute (for individuals) as well as a process (a way of instruction).
 - c. Malcolm Knowles (1975) described and studied SDL
 - i. “individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others”
 - ii. Created a six step process for adult learners (which could be used by the adult learner or the instructor of the adult learner).
 1. Climate setting – creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support
 2. Diagnosing learning needs
 3. Formulating learning goals
 4. Identifying human and material resources for learning
 5. Choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies
 6. Evaluating learning outcomes
 - d. Allen Tough (1978) also studied SDL from the perspective of learning projects.
 - i. He defined it as “deliberate efforts to build knowledge, develop a skill, or make changes.
 - ii. In his definition SDL projects take a minimum of 7 hours to complete (become a learner of that project or topic).
 - iii. He, like Knowles, had a similar step-wise process for SDL, which included:
 1. Setting goals and timetables
 2. Determining pace
 3. Assessing the current level of knowledge or skill

4. Learners evaluate their own learning to determine what might be hindering their learning. They will adjust their learning instead of the instructor adjusting.
2. Specific Types of SDL
 - a. Synergistic SDL
 - i. This is not mandated learning. It is optional and inspired by opportunity (good or bad)
 - ii. The individual is “unconsciously incompetent” because they had no previous knowledge about the topic.
 - iii. Example: High Blood Pressure Diagnosis - before being diagnosed, the person may have no understanding of the health issue. Upon diagnosis, the adult learner takes the responsibility to actively learn more about it... in order to better their health by researching or talking with someone who has the same diagnosis.
 - b. Voluntary SDL
 - i. Is learning in order to help you achieve a goal
 - ii. The individual is “consciously competent” in knowing what they need to do in order to obtain the goal.
 - iii. Example: Using the Blood pressure analogy again – say you have made progress in learning about this issue, but now you want to take steps to lower you blood pressure and learn new cooking methods and exercise routines to meet your goal.
 - c. Scanning SDL
 - i. Is the ongoing process of searching and learning
 - ii. The individual chooses to keep up on a topic that they know about
 - iii. Example: keeping up to date on your academic field or, as in the blood pressure example, the individual keeps up with recent research on the topic to make sure their understanding on the condition is up to date with the research.

Goals of SDL

1. There are 4 goals that are likely to motivate learners according to Caffarella (2000)
 - a. Aspiration to gain knowledge or develop a skill
 - b. Become more self-directed in learning
 - c. Inspire transformational learning – for critical reflection
 - d. Emancipatory – ex: supporting social justice and political action

Myths of SDL

1. SDL is an all-or-nothing concept –
 - a. The mistaken notion that you are either a self-directed learner or you are not,
2. Self-direction implies learning in isolation –
 - a. The incorrect notion that a learner is secluded and has little to no interaction with other learners.
3. SDL is the best approach for adults –

- a. The assumption that the only way an adult learns is via SDL
- 4. SDL is limited to white, middle-class adults –
 - a. The incorrect notion that SDL reflects a dominant culture.
- 5. SDL is not worth the time required to make it work –
 - a. The incorrect notion that SDL is not valued.
- 6. SDL activities are limited primarily to reading and writing

The Process of Self-Directed Learning

1. While there are several models that demonstrate the process of SDL, we will focus here on Grow's model (1994). It is a table in the textbook on page 70, but is summarized below
 - a. Stage 1
 - i. Learner Status: dependent and lacking self-direction
 - ii. Educator Role: authority, direct learning, coach, and teacher centered
 - iii. Teaching Strategies: providing material, giving few choices, lecturing, drilling, helping make connections, giving feedback, tutoring.
 - b. Stage 2
 - i. Learner Status: Interested and Confident
 - ii. Educator Role: Motivator and guide
 - iii. Teaching Strategies: inspire learning, helping set learner goals, developing learning strategies, lecturing with discussion, providing supervision
 - c. Stage 3
 - i. Learner Status: Involved, engaged, possess knowledge and self-efficacy
 - ii. Educator role: facilitator and partner
 - iii. Teaching Strategies: applying the material, facilitating discussion, and applying learning to real world problems, group projects, critical thinking, and collaborative learning.
 - d. Stage 4
 - i. Learner Status: self-directed and able to plan, execute, and evaluate learning
 - ii. Educator role: consultant, delegator, mentor
 - iii. Teaching Strategies: encouraging independence, learning through discovery, offering expertise, providing autonomy, building opportunities, coaching.

Assessing Self-Directed Learning

1. Self-assessment begins with goals that are attainable and appropriate.
 - a. Self-directed learners have a sense of responsibility for their learning goals and set criteria for their learning.
2. Costa and Kallick's Criteria for Self-Directed Learner Assessments (table 4.2 in the text on page 75)
 - a. Self-Managing
 - i. Draws from prior knowledge
 - ii. Displays internal locus of control
 - iii. Manages time effectively
 - iv. Produces new knowledge through their own research
 - v. Uses clear and precise language

- vi. Balances solitude and togetherness
- b. Self-Monitoring
 - i. Seeks perspectives beyond self and others
 - ii. Generates new and innovative ideas
 - iii. Pursues ambiguities and possibilities to create new meaning
 - iv. Manages self in relation to the group
 - v. Evaluates and corrects work to improve quality
- c. Self-Modifying
 - i. Explores choice between self-assertion and integration with others
 - ii. Seeks feedback
 - iii. Reflects on and learns from experience
 - iv. Continues to learn new skills and strategies
 - v. Thoughtfully receives feedback and acts on it.

Critiques of Self-Directed Learning

1. Some researchers critique SDL for several reasons. Some believe...
 - a. That SDL assumes all adults desire self-direction. Not all adults are desirous or capable of SDL. We need to keep in mind that there are varying levels of readiness with regards to SDL.
 - b. Brookfield (1984) raises concerns about our ability to facilitate SDL's goal setting with questioning the validity or worth compared to other options.
 - c. Not all adult learners have the means to engage in SDL and some cultures may be averse to the learning technique.
 - d. Is SDL is relevant? Research has started to omit SDL is an area of research. Some researchers are advocating for more research in the area of SDL.

Resources:

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. John Wiley &

Sons.