SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

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Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, the student will be able to:

- identify what it means to be a self-directed learner
- recognize the goals of self-directed learning
- evaluate the learning process of self-directed learners
- distinguish the difference between different SDL models
- understand the multiple dimensions of self-directed learning
- formulate their own definition, meaning, and opinions of SDL

“Taking responsibility for one’s own learning tends to increase self-esteem and produces an inquiring mind on everything one does.”

(Knowles, 1975)
What is Self-Directed Learning?

- There is no single definition for the term; but based on several readings, one can agree that self-directed learning is a phenomenon in which the learner takes control of their own learning experience.

- Self-directed learners “assume ownership for their own thoughts and actions” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p.24) and are active facilitators in their own education.
Goals of Self-Directed Learning

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) the main goals of self-directed learning can be grouped as follow:

- to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning
- to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning
- to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning
SDL Goals Continued...

**Goal One: To enhance the ability of adults to be self-directed:**
- is grounded in humanistic philosophy; which posits personal growth as the goal of adult learning and has stemmed primarily from the work of Knowles (1980) and Tough (1979). This goal assumes that learners actively seek the help and guidance of educators and are proactive in their education. It also assumes that the role of educators is to assist learners in planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning.

**Goal Two: To foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning:**
- is founded primarily on the work of Brookfield (1985, 1986) and Mezirow (1985). The underlying notion of this goal is that adults need to reflect critically and have a clear understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for their needs, wants, and interests. This goal assumes that reflection enables learners to modify their learning goals by becoming “critically aware of what has been taken for granted about one’s own learning” (Mezirow, 1985, p.17).
Goal Three: To promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning:

is in essence an extension of Goal One; because while it values autonomous learning, it also promotes social learning as a critical component of self development. Supporters of Goal Three often criticize Goal One because they believe the goal is too narrow and focuses only on instrumental learning. However, in addition to instrumental learning, Goal Three focuses heavily on the sociopolitical assumptions under which adults learn and function in. Collins (1996), an advocate of Goal Three, suggests that “participatory research methods should be used to foster democratic and open dialogue about self-directed learning, and ethical and political concerns about self-directed learning should be a part of this dialogue” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006, p.109).
SDL as a Process

- Self-directed learning is the process by which adult learners plan, carryout, and evaluate their own learning experiences. Critics argue that this process is a natural part of adult life. The models discussed in the next few slides represent a mixture of conceptual, empirical, and experimentally derived views of the SDL process.
Overview of SDL Models

- The most prominent models of SDL have been divided into the following three categories:
  - Linear Models
  - Interactive Models
  - Instructional Models
Linear Models

- Linear models, such as those proposed by Tough (1971) and Knowles (1975), suggest that learners move through a series of steps to reach their learning goals in a self-directed manner.

- Many of these frameworks were early models and were based mostly on the traditional teaching process.

- Tough proposed the first comprehensive description of self-directed learning, which he called self-planned learning. His self-planned learning model consists of thirteen steps that he believed adult learners use in making key decisions such as what, where, when, and how to learn.

- Tough's research become the basis for many other research studies and SDL models around the world.
Malcolm Knowles

- Malcolm Knowles is one of the most well-known pioneers of self-directed learning.

- Knowles's (1975) description of self-directed learning consists of six major steps:
  - 1. Climate setting
  - 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

- In his work, he outlined multiple resources for both learners and teachers to accomplish the tasks listed above; of these, learning contracts and evaluation have been the most useful.

- Knowles's research on SDL established a theoretical foundation for future scholars to build upon.
Interactive Models

Unlike linear models, interactive models reject the idea that the learning process is well planned and sequential. In addition, they place emphasis on two or more factors; such as opportunities, personality traits, the cognitive process, learning context, and more.

Interactive models suggest that these factors interact collectively to “form episodes of self-directed learning” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.111).

Three prominent interactive models of SDL include:

- Spear’s (1988) Model
- Brockett & Hiemstra’s (1991) Model
- Garrison’s (1997) Model
Garrison is the most recent scholar to propose a multidimensional and interactive model of self-directed learning.

His model is grounded in a collaborative constructivist perspective; which integrates self management, self monitoring, and motivational dimensions to reflect a meaningful and worthwhile approach to SDL.

The first dimension acknowledges the social aspects of SDL, while the other two dimensions emphasize the cognitive aspects of SDL.
Instructional models of SDL are frameworks that instructors in formal learning environments can use to integrate self-directed methods into their programs and activities.

Two prominent instructional models of SDL are those of Grow (1991) and of Hammond and Collins (1991).
Grow’s Staged Self-Directed Learning Model (SSDL)

- Grow’s SSDL Model is grounded in Hersey and Blanchard’s (1988) situational leadership model and is one of the most well-known models of SDL today.

- His model outlines how teachers can help students become more self-directed in their learning.

- Grow’s model consists of the following four stages:
  1. Dependent learner: low self-direction; need an authority figure to direct them
  2. Interested learner: moderate self-direction; confident but largely ignorant of the subject matter
  3. Involved learner: intermediate self-direction; have skill and basic knowledge; view themselves as being able and ready to explore a specific subject area with a good guide.
  4. Self-directed learner: high self-direction; willing and able to plan, execute, and evaluate their own learning with or without the help of an expert.
Hammond and Collins’s SDL framework is the only model that explicitly addresses the goal of emancipatory learning and social action as a central component of SDL.

Their framework outlines seven components that assist learners in formal settings to engage in self-directed learning.

In their model, learners take the initiative for:

- Building a cooperative learning environment
- Analyzing and critically reflecting on themselves and the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated
- Generating competency profiles for themselves
- Diagnosing their learning needs within the framework of both the personal and social context
- Formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals that result in learning agreements
- Implementing and managing their learning
- Reflecting on and evaluating their learning
Self-Direction as a Personal Attribute

- Recent literature has focused on SDL as a personal characteristic of the learner.

- This viewpoint suggests that adults who possess this characteristic voluntarily take responsibility for their own learning and have a positive self concept.
Two instruments, the OCLI and the SDLRS, have been widely used to assess aspects of self-directedness as a personality trait.

The Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (OCLI) is a twenty four item Likert scale that has been used to measure variables of self-efficacy, self-concept, personal responsibility, and more. These variables are then used to determine one’s self-directness as a personality trait.

The Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) is the most frequently used quantitative measure in self-directed studies. This measurement tool identifies the psychological qualities needed to be ready for self-directed learning and allows the learner to score themselves on these qualities. Some of these qualities include self-discipline, independence, initiative, and persistence.
Recent Applications, Research, and Theory of SDL

- Recent research on SDL indicates that experts remain interested in the concept’s applicability to life long learning, human resource development, and online learning.

- Studies also demonstrate that a growing number of professions are recognizing the importance of developing practitioners to be life long learners.

- The role of SDL in HRD is increasingly drawing attention to organization leaders; organizations are discovering ways that SDL can enhance the workplace by using SDL to address the needs of the organization.
Summary

- Self-directed learning is a phenomenon in which the learner takes control of their own learning experience.
- The three major goals of SDL are that of enhancing the ability of adults to be self-directed in their learning, fostering transformational learning, and promoting emancipatory learning and social action.
- Models of SDL are divided into three major categories: linear, interactive, and instructional.
- There are two primary measuring tools for SDL; they are the OCLI and the SDLRS.
- Recent studies reveal that SDL is one of the most researched topics in adult learning and many professionals are highly interested in learning more about the benefits and applicability of SDL.
“Learning makes me younger.” - Anonymous

References


