

Self-Directed Learning

Self education is one the most overlooked methods of self-improvement and development. In fact, Self-directed learning has been a high-interest topic within the field of adult education for the last decade. It is a process in which people take the primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own leaning experiences. Self-directed learning activities integrate self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation to achieve personal goals.

The explosion of knowledge means that almost all professionals are self-directed learners. Many adopt an informal leadership taking charge of their career and always seeking opportunities to advance themselves. At professional meetings tens of thousands of people converge in the hotels of a city for a week each year to get the latest information and up to date information in their fields. Professional associations conduct workshops throughout the world and prepare self instructional materials so that their members can keep abreast of new developments.

Although the overall knowledge of self-directed or self-planned study is still being researched, there is sufficiently high agreement among studies to draw the following conclusions:

- ❖ Participation in self-directed learning is almost universal. Studies report tat 70 percent (Penland, 1977) to 100 percent (Coolican, 1974, 1975) of all adults conduct at least one learning project each year.
- ❖ The typical adult spends about one hundred hours on each learning project, conducting five projects per year, for a total of five hundred hours per year. This means that self-directed projects are, on the average, of longer duration that the typical college course bearing three credits hours.

Almost three fourths of learning projects of adults are completely self-directed; about 15 percent involves group learning, 10 percent are one-to-one learning situations and 3 percent utilize completely preprogrammed instruction, and television. Only 20 percent, of all learning projects are planned by a professional who is paid or institutionally designated to facilitate the learning. (Tough, 1978)

In discussing Self-Directed or Self-Regulated Learning, it is important to discuss Andragogy-the art and science of helping adults learn. It is a shift from Pedagogy-the learning processes of children, o the effective methods of teaching adults. This model or theory of adult learning is attributed to Malcolm Knowles (1968) and is based on the following assumptions about the adult learner:

- ❖ As people mature, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being,
- ❖ An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich source of learning

- ❖ The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role
- ❖ There is a change in time perspective as people mature-from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning
- ❖ Adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones

The following are among suggestions writers have made about how adult educators can best facilitate self-directed learning:

1. Encourage learners to appreciate that they can act on their world individually or collectively to transform it
2. Negotiate a learning contract for goals, strategies, and evaluation criteria with learners
3. Be a manager of the learning experience rather than an information provider
4. Provide examples of previously acceptable work
5. Teach inquiry skills, decision making, personal development, and self-evaluation of work
6. Help learners locate resources
7. Help learners develop feelings of independence relative to learning
8. Use techniques such as field experience and problem solving that take advantage of adults' rich experience base
9. Develop high-quality learning guides
10. Encourage critical thinking skills by incorporating such activities as seminars
11. Create an atmosphere of openness and trust to promote better performance.

The following are among suggestions for institutions and employers:

1. Meet regularly with panels of experts who can suggest curricula and evaluation criteria
2. Obtain the necessary tools to assess learners' current performance and to evaluate their expected performance
3. Recognize and reward learners when they have met their learning objectives
4. Promote learning networks



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