

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING ON TEACHER TRAINING STUDIES PROGRAMS

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Abstract: *This article presents some aspects of self-directed learning, another way of learning and another approach than commonly shown us the teacher-directed learning, that we try to implement into our license, postgraduate and master teacher training studies programs. In the first phase of our study we proposed to students to open their minds and souls to fill-in in a survey concerning how self-directed they consider themselves to be, and, in the second phase we described the facts which we have been done for empowering students into self-directed learning.*

Keywords - *self-directed learning, personal survey, “My mirror”, “Let your passion shine”*

*“Life isn’t about finding yourself;
Life is about creating yourself”
Unknown*

Introduction

Obviously, the learning paths and methods are in this moment in the middle of all the discussions concerning the learning process in an interactive, authentic and visible way, for shaping the minds of learners, not to fill it.

A lot of educators, from kindergarten to the university level, try to implement adequate paths and methods in their curriculum for improving their teaching effort and to foster the efficiency of learning experiences of the learners.

Educational leaders indicate a sustained improvement in teacher training by means of new forms of learning – transformative, interactive, authentic and visible way – helped by a lot of learning methods. Transformative learning, based on interactive, authentic and visible learning

methods are concentrates on two pillars – educator and educable – but with the final goal, the educable!

From the field's literature there are a multitude of interactive methods but self-driven, self-directed, autonomous, self-regulated, self-taught or self-organized learning are often overlapping. Therefore, different concepts often refer to nearly identical issues or one and the same term is used by different authors to describe, in some case, considerably distinctive issues.

At the center of all these discussions, teaching and learning effort with different kind of methods are associated with the learners as individuals (Klein, 2009).

Overview of self-directed learning

The concepts of self-directed, self-organized and action-oriented learning, which are subsequently used interchangeably, emphasize the individual design of the learning process by the educable (Gnahs & Siedel, 2002). The learners are in the middle of decisions and of way of learning.

Definitions of self-directed or self-organized learning emphasize frequently the subject control for the educable in the self-directed learning in comparison to traditional teaching-learning forms.

Self-directed learning is any increase in knowledge, skill or performance pursued by any individual for personal reasons employing any means, in any place at any time at any age.

Self-organized as well as self-directed or self-driven learning are overall no unilateral expression of the initiative of educable, but rather mean a complementary relationship between the guidance of the learning process by the teacher on the one hand, and self-responsibility of the educable for the design of the learning process on the other hand.

The teachers have, in the context of traditional learning approach, a relatively strong role as a transmitter of knowledge, being the authority who choose what is learned, why it is to be learned, how it is to be learned, when, where and at what age.

In the self-directed learning, the teachers are not superfluous even with a maximum of self-control of the educable but, however, their roles changing profoundly.

In nowadays it's seems to be a transition from teacher-directed learning to self-directed learning but not so simple because the teachers are called to play the consultative and tutorial role. The teachers teach not only knowledge, but also train skills, form attitudes, help empower, show ways, advice and encourage the educable.

This partial change in function of teachers is not connected, as often highlighted, with sinking needs for support the educable. The opposite, so an increase in this demand is more likely to be expected, in case of an increase in the proportion of forms of self-organized learning in teaching and learning arrangements. This is partly due to an increasing demand for tutorial support during group and individual work phase.

Self-directed learning, however, is not only a target of educational effort but in the same time a requirement, as well as a method, of innovative teaching and learning process. Thus the skills that the learners need in order to manage their learning effectively and efficiently cannot simply be assumed as existed. Instead they must be developed systematically and thus the performance skills of the educable, as in the ability to plan their learning independently and specifically, to perform the learning process, create and evaluate, must be firstly created. The approach of this kind of learning involves designing the objectives, choosing the content and the channels of communication, assuming the regulations and evaluation awareness of learning process.

Self-directed learning opens up not only a greater range possibility for choice, but also leads to increased accountability of educable for their learning process. One must not only ensure an adequate understanding of the subject, but also the access to and the reception of facts.

How could our students discover their self-directed learning ability?

From the different sources of scientific information we have chosen the following personal survey, that we have proposed to our students from teacher training studies programs (license, postgraduate and master) to find their profile:

„Consider the following aspects of self-directed learning.

Rate yourself on the below 30 items.

Remember: this is not a test. There are no right answers. This is a personal survey for your eyes only, and for your use in deciding how to become more self-directed. Make your response useful by being as clear and accurate as you can.

A few points on how to identify your strengths:

- a) Events in your day will tell you a lot. Think about particular situations, remember what you thought and what you did, and then decide what it reveals.
- b) What activities do you eagerly pursue, activities that feel good when you are doing them. What are you doing when you're happy, when you are absorbed in the activity? These almost certainly reveal assets.

c) What dreams about the future have you had during your lifetime and what dreams do you have now? We are usually passionate about what we feel we can, or could, do well.

d) Note any patterns of repeated thought, feeling or activity and check out whether or not they reveal personal assets.

e) Trust yourself. This is a topic you know well, or can know well – the self in self-directed. If you have a friend to work with, you can interview each other. Allow time to reflect and dig.

Follow the items below!

The item on the left describes “1” - *Not self-directed*; the item on the right describes “10” - *Very self-directed*. Circle the number that most accurately rates where you stand on the scale.

1. Attribution: In my opinion, people succeed in life because...
They are lucky 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***They make it happen***
2. Self-talk: My thoughts about my potential for success are usually...
Negative 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Positive***
3. Influence: When I decide to do something, I am most strongly influenced by...
Other people 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***My own decisions***
4. Self-awareness: My knowledge about my personal strengths and capacities is...
Very limited 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Very complete***
5. Interests: I have a number of interests that I pursue regularly.
False 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***True***
6. Effectiveness: If I decided to make a change in my life, I would likely...
Be unable to do it 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Do it successfully***
7. Curiosity: In the course of a day or week I find myself asking questions and searching for answers...
Very seldom 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Very often***
8. Clarity: What I want to do next is usually...
A mystery to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Clear to me***
9. Learning: I find new ideas or skills that I want to learn...
Very rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Every day***
10. Creating: I have original ideas worth expressing...
Very seldom 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Very often***
11. Goal-Setting: In my day-to-day life, I...
Take things as they come 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ***Regularly set goals to achieve***
12. Challenge: I challenge myself to go into new activities and to reach new levels of performance...

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Often*

13. Planning: When I have a task to complete, I lay out a strategic plan for doing it efficiently and effectively...

Not in my lifetime 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Every time*

14. Determination: When I'm doing a project and the work gets difficult, I run into problems, or people hassle me...

I quit 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I persevere*

15. 15. Organization: When it comes to scheduling my time, prioritizing my work, and gathering the resources I need, I'm...

Hopeless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Skilled*

16. Support: When I plan and launch a project, I feel that those around me - family, colleagues, friends - will...

Ignore or diminish 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Support and encourage my work*

17. Learning: The special, personal ways that I learn best,

Are unknown to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I know and use*

18. Motivation: Can you motivate yourself to start new projects and to keep going until they are finished?

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Yes*

19. Openness: When new ideas, approaches, techniques or equipment come along,

I ignore them 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I find out about them*

20. Assistance: When I need guidance or assistance...

I struggle through on my own 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I ask for help*

21. Self-examination: When I'm messing up, and I'm feeling low...

I think about something else 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I try to figure out what's happening*

22. Process analysis: When a project I'm working on breaks down...

I quit 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I figure out what's going wrong and fix it*

23. Skills: I use a very effective procedure for learning new skills.

False 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *True*

24. Vision: I have a vision of my future that I want to make happen.

False 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *True*

25. Voice: Do you know your own ideas about things, your own feelings, the values that you consider important, the contributions that you want to make – in other words, do you know yourself?

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Yes*

26. Field: Is there a field of knowledge (eg. educational sciences), a field of activity (eg. writing), a profession (eg. professor) or work (eg. starting a business) that you want to be very good at?

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Yes*

27. Expectation: When I begin a project I usually expect to

Fail 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Succeed*

28. Strategy: When you want something to happen, do you think through a strategy to make it happen?

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Yes*

29. Celebration: When I achieve a goal, complete a project, or make a contribution:

I move to the next task 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I celebrate*

30. Pleasure: When I'm doing one of my projects...

It's grim, dull work 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I am happy and fulfilled*

The basic theme is to identify your strengths and play to them when you are deciding what to do.

Write these headings in your journal and fill in as many items as you can. Generally, begin with the most important or strongest items. Start your list and keep adding ideas as you think of them or discover them.

A. Knowledge: What do you know a lot about?

Your knowledge may be about anything; it can come from any source, such as, experience, authorities, work, reading, a course, television, a pod-cast, experiments, study, a speech or a conversation. Examples: healthy diets, bringing up children, building with stone, local history, karate, musicals, animal diseases, surviving on the streets, welding robotics, hunting.

B. Skills: What do you know how to do well?

These may include skills developed and used at work, around the house, in sports or games, at your hobbies or recreational activities, or in anything else that you do. Examples: pupils training, laboratory experiments, finding bargains, swimmer-competitor, reading fast and remembering, managing household finances, dog training, chairing a committee, watercolour painting, laser technology, growing things, day-trading stocks.

C. Your Strengths: Identify any personal characteristics that contribute to your success and productivity.

Examples: I'm very disciplined about pursuing my goals, I take charge, Generally positive about things, My faith sustains me, I'm a good communicator, I play to win, I'm careful; I like to think things over before I make my move. I'm sensitive to others.

D. Your Abilities: What kinds of things do you have a talent for, or believe you have, if given the chance to use it?

Examples: I have the ability to fix things. I relate easily to other people. The only thing I've ever thought about doing is soccer. I seem to be able to help disturbed people. I think I could run a large organization if I had the opportunity. People tell me that I'm a natural at music, especially singing. I thrive in the outdoors. Don't worry about overlapping entries between any of these or other categories.

E. Your Interests: What kinds of things do you like to do; what have you dreamed of doing; what is your vision?

Examples: I have always dreamed of having a small shop selling children's clothes that I design and make (maybe not all of them) myself. I've never traveled beyond this continent. I'd love to travel to some exotic place and work there. I want to make a lot of money and live a rich lifestyle. I want to meet a partner to love and be loved by. I'd like to make a difference by helping others, Spiritual. I need, I want, to be more spiritual.

F. Your Experience: The things you have done in your life.

What have you done that equips you for future tasks you choose to pursue, or has opened the doors of possibility to you? What experiences were compelling, exciting? What have you done that you might build on? Examples: I canvassed in a political campaign. Army cadet corps. During college, I worked in a research laboratory. High school football. I teach history. A group of us taught old people computers. I spent 30 days in jail for drunk driving. Greg and I hiked a quarter of the Appalachian Trail. I wrote a column in the local newspaper years ago. I volunteered in a nursing home.

G. Your Category: A category you want to add to this profile.

If there is any other kind of data you want to add to your profile, add it here. Include anything that prepares you for action or would support you when you take action. Examples: Sculpture is one of my hobbies and is a separate category of assets that I have to work with. It includes such items as modeling in clay, sharpening tools, shaping wood, creating ideas, a shop and equipment, mounting an exhibition, developing a portfolio, and so on. If there is a category that has equipped you with a number of resources, add it here. Someone suggested, "Why not a category of questions I want to answer?" Why not?

Identify and use your strongest abilities

In each category, look over the list you have written down, identify the features that you consider to be your strongest, and mark them with a highlighter. These are the key assets you can depend on whenever you are preparing to take action. When it is time to act, these key features will outline the productive resources at your disposal, what we could call your "productive personality."

Identify any themes that stand out, and with those in mind, name several activities that you might pursue. Name three to five in your journal and then select one activity that you find especially attractive.

Here is one example: Bill sees that one of his interests is "Helping others" (E), and that he is "Sensitive to others." (C) He also notes that he "Relates easily to other people."(D) Taking these together, Bill sees the theme of working with others clearly outlined. When it comes to action this

will be a serious guide to his choices. The possible activities he worked out included...

Taking a course in interpersonal relationships

Working as a volunteer in a local NGO

Becoming a group leader in a spiritual study group at church

Asking a counselor for guidance on improving his relationships at work

Devoting time to improving his relationship with his children

Bill decided that working with a group at church was the most attractive choice for him right now, but he also realized that all five of the activities seemed interesting to him. Looking at his profile again, Bill found three other themes and cited them in his journal for future reference.

A summary of work with your profile

1. Identify the features in each category of your profile that are your strongest. Three to five strong features is a useful guide to your choices.

2. Search your profile for the themes for action that are suggested, especially by the key features you have highlighted. One of Bill's themes, for example, was relationships.

3. Identify three to five activities you could pursue following the theme that interests you the most.

This is a lot of work, but when you are finished, you will be well prepared to move forward in self-directed activities. And it is about a subject we all know well - ourselves."

<http://www.selfdirectedlearning.com/index.php/becoming-self-directed/activity-2-how-self-directed-are-you>

What we have been done, as educators, to value their opportunity to learn in a self-directed way?

After the completion of the survey we demanded to our students to keep a journal entitled „*My mirror*” on which they fill-in almost daily for *discover and to create themselves*.

It's not a diary, it's a book for recording ideas and plans, and its purpose is to support their efforts to be more self-directed in learning.

Here are a few of the reasons that we explain of students why it is important to drive the journal:

✓ It's a great place to work through the activities in this study program, which make perfect journal entries because they are all focused on your personal progress as a self-directed learning entrepreneur.

✓ You can watch your own progress in your journal, page by page, and check it out by looking back at any time.

✓ You will never lose another great idea again. They come and go like dreams, unless we catch them as you will by getting them down in your journal.

✓ You won't have to go searching for missing papers any more either. Everything about your self-initiated projects will be in one place and easy to access.

✓ Being productive in learning activities you choose is the best way to become self-directed. Self-directed activity is an excellent method of learning anywhere, any time, at any age – in your own special way.

✓ This will be your most important textbook, and you will be its author. It will contain ideas you find and record because they are important to you. Your selections will accumulate into a body of knowledge that will give you real power in your field(s) of interest.

✓ This will be your planning book for all of the activities you pursue. It will also be the record of what you do, what you decide to change, and what you learn when you put your plan into action.

✓ Your journal will be the private place where you study the process that you followed as you worked through your project, and where you study yourself as a performer. Such studies will lead you to changes that will greatly improve your learning efficiency.

✓ Your journal will be the companion you can talk to at any time about what you are thinking and doing. People's eyes may glaze over when you talk about your special interest and passion.

As a consequence of completing the journal, the following requirement arised:

A. In a six-week period, think about and choose a theme in the educational field to subscribe under the umbrella „*Let your passion shine!*”. In that period students had all the desired assistance from the educator/professor or assisstant professor/ in designing, organizing, deploying, controllng and evaluating their own project, with a title and content to represent it but which to fit in the educational field, being at the same time a project based learning

Thus were born projects such as:

Community - educator interrelation

Educational alternatives at the level of the primary cycle

Children's Group management in the kindergarten

Developing students creativity through fine art

The drawing as a reflection of multiple intelligences

Logic and argumentation

Carl Gustav Jung and his key concepts

School and computer science revolution

Practical laboratory applications with the PowerPoint software

The advantages and disadvantages of using IT in physics lessons

Dog and puppy - affiliation to literary specie

The study of French language in gymnasium education

Healthy eating, healthy body, healthy mind

Nature's friends

Consumer protection

The monarchy

Romanian ethnic-traditions

Interactive learning of Byzantine iconography

Ethics in education

Negotiation and mediation of the conflicts between high school students

Photo, art of the message

Interactive sports teaching methods

Etc.

B. Starting with the seventh week they have had to presents their thoughts from the project, in PowerPoint or Prezi, in such a way to persuade the audience formed by their colleagues (their peers) and educators. Each of these participants asked questions and appreciate the quality of the presentation - both, in terms of face to face communication and technological performance.

C. Then each presenter and each participant (classmate or professor) completed a rating scale based on which students received marks. In this way, we also had the intention to increase their conscience on self-evaluation, inter-evaluation and evaluation made by the educators.

The students was excited on this way of learning, they achieved a lot of confidence in themselves and, in the meantime, they had obtained good marks.

Conclusion

Forms of self-directed and self-organized learning have, as opposed to traditional methods, the potential to lead, on both cognitive and emotional-motivational level, to improved learning outcomes. They allow the promotion and strengthening of academic performance in broad sense. In addition to a specific support of context-learning success of the educable, for example they lead also to the strengthening of their independence, self-responsibility and project base learning competence. Undergoing self-organized and action-oriented learning is, in a constantly changing world, a vital foundation for the lifelong learning and an important part of individual life biographies in the knowledge society.

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