Law and management of self directed learning for adults

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Abstract

   An estimated 70 percent of adult learning is self-directed learning (Cross 1981). Self-directed learning has been described as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others," to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles 1975).

   Mocker and Spear (1982) included self-directed learning in a descriptive model of lifelong learning based entirely on the locus of control for decision making about the objectives and means of learning. The model is a two-by-two matrix of learner and institution; the self-directed learning situation occurs when learners--not the institution--control both the learning objectives and the means of learning. The following situations occupy the other cells of the matrix: (1) formal learning, in which institutions, not learners, control objectives and the means of learning; (2) nonformal learning, in which learners control the objectives and institutions control the means; and (3) informal learning, in which institutions control the objectives but learners control the means of learning(lowry,1996).Self directed learning is very significant for adults and represent a very practical learning method for them, therefore this paper discusses the following issues: the concept of self directed learning, the importance of self directed learning for adults, educators role in self directed learning for adults.

Limitation of the study
This study is limited to discuss the low and management of self directed learning for adults only.

The concept of self directed learning

   Self-Directed Learning (SDL) 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 **(**gibbons, 2008). Self-directed training includes the learner initiating the learning, making the decisions about what training and development experiences will occur, and how. The learner selects and carries out their own learning goals, objectives, methods and means to verify that the goals were met.

   Probably the most important skill for today's rapidly changing workforce is skills in self-reflection. The highly motivated, self-directed learner with skills in self-reflection can approach the workplace as a continual classroom from which to learn.

   Supervisors and employees who work together to accomplish formal, self-directed learning in the workplace also accomplish continue learning for continued productivity and learning (McNamara).within the divers theoretical perspectives regarding SDL ,there is an agreement across the literature that the independence of the learner bear much of the responsibility for their own learning ,rather than engaging in a practice prescribed by the facilitator(Grover,2015).

   According to Malcolm Knowles (1975: 18) self directed learning is a process:
... in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.
Knowles puts forward three immediate reasons for self-directed learning. First he argues that there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). 'They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They

also tend to retain and make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners.' (Knowles 1975: 14)

A second immediate reason is that self-directed learning is more in tune with our natural processes of psychological development. 'An essential aspect of maturing is developing the ability to take increasing responsibility for our own lives - to become increasingly self-directed' (Knowles 1975: 15).

A third immediate reason is that many of the new developments in education put a heavy responsibility on the learners to take a good deal of initiative in their own learning. 'Students entering into these programs without having learned the skills of self-directed inquiry will experience anxiety, frustration, and often failure and so will their teachers (Knowles 1975: 15).

The importance of self directed learning for adults:

Brookfield said that Self-directed learning focuses on the process by which adults take control of their own learning, in particular how they set their own learning goals, locate appropriate resources, decide on which learning methods to use and evaluate their progress. Work on self-direction is now so widespread that it justifies an annual international symposium devoted solely to research and theory in the area. After criticisms that the emphasis on self-directed learning as an adult characteristic was being uncritically advanced, that studies were conducted mostly with middle class subjects, that issues concerning the quality of self-directed learning projects were being ignored and that it was treated as disconnected from wider social and political forces, there have been some attempts to inject a more critical tone into work in this area. Meta-analyses of research and theory conducted by Australian, Canadian and American authors have raised questions about the political dimension to self-directedness and the need to study how deliberation and serendipity intersect in self-directed learning projects (Collins, 1988; Candy, 1991; Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991). There has also been a spirited debate concerning Australian criticism of the reliability and validity of the most widely used scale for assessing readiness for self-directed learning (Field, 1991). At least one book, developed in the South African adult educational experience, has argued that self-direction must be seen as firmly in the tradition of emancipatory adult education (Hammond and Collins, 1991) (Brookfield, 1995).

Roberson and Merriam noted that Medical advances and lifestyle changes have resulted in older adults living longer and healthier lives. Nevertheless, older adulthood, as other life stages, requires change in work, family, and health. Self-directed learning (SDL) is one way of negotiating these transitions. She did a study to understand this process of learning. This study employed a general qualitative design incorporating in-depth, semi-structured interviews for data collection. The sample of 10 purposefully selected adults from a rural area reflected diversity in gender, race, education, and employment. The age of the participants ranged from 75 to 87. Data analysis guided by the constant comparative method revealed the following process: Self-directed learning begins with an incentive to learn plus an interest, leading to accessing resources; with systematic attention in their learning, some projects ended whereas others remained ongoing. There is also a catalyst, usually another person, interspersed in this process. The findings indicated changes in late life; especially those related to time, family, and loss are integral to the process of self-directed learning. Also, the rural setting of the participants was seen as a positive environment for learning. However, Brookfield contended that

A number of important questions remain regarding our understanding of self-direction as a defining concept for adult learning. For example, the cross-cultural dimension of the concept has been almost completely ignored. More longitudinal and life history research is needed to understand how periods of self-directedness alternate with more traditional forms of educational participation in adults' autobiographies as learners. Recent work on gender has criticised the ideal of the independent, self-directed learner as reflecting patriarchal values of division, separation and competition. The extent to which a disposition to self-directedness is culturally learned, or is tied to

personality, is an open issue. We are still struggling to understand how various factors - the adult's previous experiences, the nature of the learning task and domain involved, the political ethos of the time - affect the decision to learn in this manner. We also need to know more about how adults engaged in self-directed learning use social networks and peer support groups for emotional sustenance and educational guidance. Finally, work is needed on clarifying the political dimensions of this idea; particularly on the issues of power and control raised by the learner's assuming responsibility for choices and judgments regarding what can be learned, how learning should happen, and whose evaluative judgments regarding the quality and effectiveness of learning should hold sway. If the cultural formation of the self is ignored, it is all too easy to equate self-direction with separateness and selfishness, with a narcissistic pursuit of private ends in disregard to the consequences of this for others and for wider cultural interests. A view of learning which views adults as self-contained, volitional beings scurrying around engaged in individual projects is one that works against cooperative and collective impulses. Citing self-direction, adults can deny the importance of collective action, common interests and their basic interdependence in favour of an obsessive focus on the self (Brookfield, 1995).Massive open online courses (MOOCs) has emerged as aself directed learning method, massive open online course is a model for delivering learning content online to any person who wants to take a course, with no limit on attendance (educause library).

Self-directed learning programs hold numerous advantages over traditional forms of classroom instruction for employees in the workplace, whether they are leaders, managers, or individual contributors. Bouchard (Self-directed Learning in Organizational Settings (working paper), Concordia University, and Montreal, Canada) explains, "Over the years, it has become increasingly clear that traditional approaches to program design and delivery in the workplace and in associative organizations present some important weaknesses. Problem areas include: coping with the short life span of useful knowledge; passing down acquired competencies to succeeding cohorts; accommodating the demands of productivity while providing for a continuity of learning; and! enabling learners to pursue activities that correspond to their learning styles and needs" (p. 1), (McNamara)

Self-directed learning programs :
- Are more effective in development because learning accommodates employees' learning styles and objectives
- Save substantial training costs because learners learn to help themselves and each other with practical and timely materials
- Achieve increased employee effectiveness in their jobs as they learn to learn from their own work experiences and actually apply their learning in their places of work (McNamara).

Educators roles:
Lowery (1998) has assembled a sizable list of suggestions to assist in modifying style and content of both instructional methodology and institutional environment in order to better enable self-directed learning to take place. A partial list of her suggestions is cited below. The reader is encouraged to review her entire work for the complete list and more elaboration.

For adult educators:
- Teach inquiry skills, decision making, personal development, and self-evaluation of work.
- Help learners develop positive attitudes and feelings of independence relative to learning.
- Recognize learners' personality types and learning styles.
- Use techniques such as field experience and problem solving that take advantage of adults' rich experience base.
- Encourage critical thinking skills by incorporating [into class] such activities as seminars.
- Create an atmosphere of openness and trust to promote better performance (fisher, 1995).

- Behave ethically, which includes not recommending a self-directed learning approach if it is not congruent with the learners' needs.
- For educational institutions and employers engaged in providing self-directed learning experiences:
- Have the faculty meet regularly with panels of experts who can suggest curricula and evaluation criteria.
- Conduct research on trends and learners' interests.
- Obtain the necessary tools to assess learners' current performance and to evaluate their expected performance.
- Provide opportunities for self-directed learners to reflect on what they are learning.
- Promote learning networks, study circles, and learning exchanges.
- Provide staff training on self-directed learning and broaden the opportunities for its implementation.

Even in the workplace the supervisor's attitude and knowledge about learning has a tremendous impact on the development of employees (thus, the major reason the Free Management Library was developed). Thomas D. Fisher, in Self-Directedness in the Workplace: A Re-Examination cites numerous suggestions (from Lowry) in order to better enable self-directed learning in the workplace. Some of those suggestions are listed below, and are wonderful ways for supervisors and learners to turn the workplace into a classroom (pp. 4-5):

1. Help the learner identify the starting point for a learning project and discern relevant [ways!] of examination and reporting.
2. Encourage adult learners to view knowledge and truth as contextual ... and that they can act on their world individually or collectively to transform it
3. Create a partnership with the learner by negotiating a learning contract for goals, strategies and evaluation criteria
4. Be a manager of the learning experience rather than an information provider
5. Teach inquiry skills, decision making, personal development, and self-evaluation of work
6. Help learners develop positive attitudes and feelings of independence relative to learning
7. Recognize learners' personality types and learning styles
8. Use techniques such as field experience and problem solving that take advantage of adults' rich experience base
9. Encourage critical thinking skills by incorporating ... such activities as seminars
10. Create an atmosphere of openness and trust to promote better performance
11. Behave ethically, which includes not recommending a self-directed learning approach if it is not congruent with the learner's needs
12. Obtain the necessary tools to assess learner's current performance and to evaluate their expected performance
13. Provide opportunities for self-directed learners to reflect on what they're learning
14. Promote learning networks, study circles, and learning exchanges, self-managed teams of self-directed learners)
15. Provide staff training on self-directed learning and broaden the opportunities for its implementation

Fisher adds that "Self-directed learning is more than a form of education. It is a component in human development" p. 7, (McNamara).

Conclusion

Fisher (1995) argued that the existence of self-directedness in adult students is well documented. Consequently, it is   incumbent upon researchers, theorists, educators, and institutions to make certain, to the extent possible, that this dimension of adult humanity is not impeded, but is

allowed to proliferate in the classroom. Self-directed learning should take place in an environment where there is some structure provided by the instructor (and sometimes by an institution), yet the learner retains the freedom and flexibility to explore and develop as a person within some boundaries. Ideally the learner should have some control and responsibility over learning objectives. This in turn should help to influence the development of competency and skill attainment which would be reflective of the degree of internalized change within the student.

He continued that in an appropriate environment, the students contribute, share, and mutually participate in many of the decisions within the overall structure the instructor has set for the course, e.g., class times, methods of evaluation, attendance requirements, objectives and goals. The resultant class structure is then intellectually functional for the students and is more likely to meet their needs. Concurrently, the instructor reserves the right to respectfully challenge work and comments, guide the general class direction, provide alternatives in thought and practice, suggest resources, provide commentary, and establish minimum standards of evaluation (Fisher, 1995).

Suggested studies: further research should be conducted regarding philosophy and theories of self directed learning for adult learners.

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