Self–Directed Learning
Meaning and Praxis in Classrooms

Vandana Singh*

Abstract

The shift from behaviourism to cognitivism in educational psychology has placed an increasing responsibility on learners for their own learning, and self-regulated learning has become a frequent area of educational research. Also, by giving learners more responsibility for their learning can also expect to reduce the burden of teachers for effecting student achievement and teachers can utilise that time in catering to the individual differences among the learners. Therefore, it is important for the teachers to understand the meaning and importance of the Self-directed Learning from the point of view of the various models of the Self-directed Learning. The paper focuses on the ways by which class room practices and conditions can encourage learners to engage in Self-directed Learning. This paper also addresses to instructional issues and ways of fostering Self-directed Learning in the classroom settings.

Introduction

The framework for understanding the psychological basis of learning has gradually shifted from behaviourism to cognitivism since the 1960s (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1995; Bredo, 1997). Beside this, there is a growing pressure for increased results from the learners but with respect to the growing number of learners, there is a shortage of qualified and experienced teachers. This situation demands to invest heavily in learning and development of individuals. One way through which the problem can be tackled to some extent can be through developing our learners as Self-directed i.e., they become autonomous learners, who are in the constant search of knowledge on their own. It is important to note here that the capability to become autonomous lies in each individual. Even, Greek philosophers as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle gave importance to the self study.

John Dewey (1916, 1938) also proposed that all persons are born with an unlimited potential for growth and development; further he defined education as the agency that facilitates this growth and also cautioned that the teacher must guide rather than interfering or controlling the process of learning. We also understand that learning is not limited to the classroom

*Assistant Professor, School of Education, IGNOU New Delhi.

situations only but it can be extended in all situations. Since the Self-directed Learners are self-motivated, they are attempting to gain new skills, knowledge, and attitudes to improve their performance in any field. The Self-directed Learning can be useful in improving family life and health, enjoy the arts and physical recreation, participate in a hobby, or simply increase their intellectual capital. Hence, the only trait which is needed for the Self-directed Learning is to have motivation.

Understanding Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed Learning has its roots from adult education, the term became popular after Tough (1971) used the term 'Self-directed Learning' in the North American literature while working on the learning projects , where he demonstrated that self-teaching was a natural process among many adults. Malcolm Knowles (1975, 1980) built his andragogical model on the basic assumption that adult learners are Self-directed Learners and described it 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).

In its broadest meaning "Self-directed Learning" describes 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. Other labels found in the literature to describe this process are "self-planned learning", "inquiry method", "independent learning", "self-education", "self-instruction", "self-teaching", "self-study", and "autonomous learning". The trouble with most of these labels is that they seem to imply learning in isolation, whereas Self-directed Learning usually takes place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people, and peers. There is a lot of mutuality among a group of Self-directed Learners.

It is desirable to encourage Self-directed Learning among all learners, in a wide variety of settings. We can observe Self-directed Learning taking place in libraries where learners are actively involved in their intellectual pursuits while other category Self-directed Learners engage in more interpersonal communication (with experts and peers) than is as can be noticed   in conventional classroom .

Mocker and Spear (1982) proposed a descriptive model of lifelong learning which was 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. It was proposed that the Self-directed Learning situation occurs when learners—not the institution—control both the learning objectives and the means of learning, which means that the learning is totally in the hands of learners.

Thus, whether learning is Self-directed depends or not depends more on learners who decides what should be

learned, who should learn it, what methods and resources should be used, and how the success of the effort should be measured rather than on the subject matter to be learned or on the instructional methods used. To the extent the learner makes those decisions, the learning is generally becomes Self-directed.

The resources available to Self-directed Learners include printed and audiovisual materials; teachers, telephone, or in person; cultural institutions. The learner's ability to locate appropriate and useful resources has often been cited as a key aspect of learning on one's own. It is important to note here that encouraging self-direction does not mean giving learners total control and responsibility but rather providing opportunities towards increasing independence for lifelong learning. Therefore, it can be deduced that the Self-directed Learning does not necessarily mean learning in isolation or without assistance. This assistance is often sought from friends, experts, and teachers in both the planning and execution of a learning activity. According to Knowles (1975), the self-concept of the Self-directed Learners moves from dependence on teachers to independence or self-directness.

Following are the Characteristics of SDL

(a) SDL views learners as responsible owners and managers of their own learning process.

(b) SDL recognizes the significant role of motivation and volition in initiating and maintaining learners' efforts. Motivation drives the decision to participate, and volition sustains the will to see a task through to the end so that goals are achieved (Corno, 1992).

(c) In SDL, control gradually shifts from teachers to learners. Learners exercise a great deal of independence in setting learning goals and deciding what is worthwhile learning as well as how to approach the learning task within a given framework (Lyman, 1997; Morrow, Sharkey, & Firestone, 1993).

(d) Teachers scaffold learning by making learning 'visible.' They model learning strategies and work with students so that they develop the ability to use them on their own (Bolhuis, 1996; Corno, 1992).

Importance of the Self-Directed Learning

Increasing or improving students' Self-directed Learning might be of value for

Differences between Self-directed learning and Teacher-directed Learning

Teacher-Directed Learning	*Self-Directed Learning*
Assumes the learner is essentially a dependent on the teacher for what and how they should learn.	Assumes that the human being grows in capacity to be self-directing independently.
Assumes that the learner's experience is of less value than that of the teacher, the textbook, the textbook writers as a resource	Assumes that the learner's experiences become an increasingly rich resource for learning, which should be exploited along with the resources of experts.

for learning, and that therefore the teacher has the responsibility to see to it that the resource of these experts are transmitted to the learner.	Assumes that the student's natural orientation is task or problem centered and that therefore learning experiences should be organised as task accomplishments or problem solving learning projects.
Assumes that students enter into education with a subject-centered orientation to learning (they see learning as accumulating subject matter and those therefore learning experiences should be organised according to units of content.	Assumes that learners are motivated by internal incentives, such as the need for self-esteem, the desire to achieve, the urge to grow, the satisfaction of accomplishment, the need to know something specific, and *curiosity*.
Assumes that students are motivated to learn in response to external rewards and punishments, such as grades, diplomas, awards, degrees, and fear of failure.	

(Adapted from the book 'Self-directed Learning' By Malcom Knowles, Published by Cambridge Adult Education in 1975).

both teachers and learners for several reasons. The most important advantage of the Self-directed Learning is the responsibility and control of learning which is there in the hands of the learners. But, it should be noted that the amount of the autonomy to be given to the learner must depend upon their learning needs rather than on teacher's beliefs. Apart from this, other advantages of the Self-directed Learning is strongly encourages active learning, develops learner's autonomy and give responsibility of learning to the learners.

With respect to teachers and schools, these changes might provide an economical way to increase total learning time without the need to allocate additional teaching or instructional time. By giving learners more responsibility for their learning can also expect to reduce the burden of teachers for effecting student's achievement. Having learners share in this responsibility might reduce teachers' anxiety that they alone are the cause of students' successes and failures. Freeing teachers from being the sole and constant source of knowledge transmission also allows them to devote classroom time to monitoring and responding to the needs of individual students.

The literature on SDL asserts that Self-directed Learners demonstrate a greater awareness of their responsibility in making learning meaningful and monitoring themselves (Garrison, 1997). They are curious and willing to try new things, view problems as challenges, desire change, and enjoy learning (Taylor, 1995). Taylor also found them to be motivated and persistent, independent, self-disciplined, self-confident and goal-oriented. There is evidence that training in Self-directed Learning activities such as goal setting, self-control, and self-

monitoring improves both the on-task behaviour and academic achievement of elementary students when compared with uninstructed control students (Borkowski, 1987; Harris & Trujillo, 1975)

Self-directed Learning allows learners to be more effective learners and social beings. Guthrie, et al. (1996) noted that the Self-directed Learners in a Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) program demonstrated the ability to search for information in multiple texts, employ different strategies to achieve goals, and to represent ideas in different forms (drawing and writing). Morrow, etal. (1993) observe that with proper planning and implementation, Self-directed Learning can encourage students to develop their own rules and leadership patterns.

Knowles (1971) puts forward three immediate reasons for Self-Directed Learning, which are as follows

(a) Self-directed Learners 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).

(b) Self-directed Learning is more in tune with our natural processes of psychological development i.e., maturation. The learner develops the ability to take increasing responsibility for our own lives.

(c) The new developments in education put a heavy responsibility on the learners to take 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.

Hence, it can be deduced that the Self-directed Learning not only actively involves the learners in the learning process but also develops a more responsible and effective social beings.

Theoretical Constructs for SDL

There have been many models which had been proposed for the Self-directed Learning, these models helps us in understanding the nature of the Self-directed Learning in a better way.

Candy's Four Dimensional Model

Candy (1991) described SDL, as an umbrella concept, which encompasses four dimensions, and has added the important element of depth in understanding during the Self-directed Learning. The dimensions proposed by him are as follows:

(a) Self-direction as a personal attributes (*personal autonomy*);

(b) Self-direction as the willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education (*self-management*);

(c) Self-direction as a mode of organising instruction in formal settings (*learner-control*); and

(d) Self-direction as the individual, non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities in the natural societal setting (*autodidaxy*)"

Further, Candy's model was the first to state that a learners 'self-direction' might be different in different *content*

areas. But, the model has been criticised as it is not been able to describe how SDL is relevant in different learning contexts such as classroom learning or online learning.

Brockett and Hiemstra's Personal Responsibility Orientation Model (PRO)

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) gave the personal responsibility orientation model in which they combined both the process and personal attribute perspectives; they suggested two primary orientations in developing an understanding of SDL: process and goal. In the first orientation, SDL is viewed as a *process* in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process. In the second orientation, SDL is referred to as a *goal*, which focuses on a learner's desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning. They also integrated another significant factor which is missing in many models proposed for SDL i.e., social context as a component in the model by adding the role of institutions and policies in SDL. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) defined the social context as different physical institutions where learning takes place, such as community colleges, libraries, and museums.

Garrison's Three-Dimensional Model

Garrison's model of SDL also includes the perspectives of SDL as a personal attribute as well as a learning process. Garrison (1997) suggested that SDL is accomplished by three dimensions interacting with each other: self-management, self-monitoring, and

motivation. In educational settings, self-management involves learners, how learners use of learning resources within their learning context in such a way that they can attain their learning objectives. He further explained that learner control did not mean independence, but rather collaboration with other people within the context. From this perspective, we can see Garrison's model did have a focus on the learning process perspective of SDL. Like Candy (1991), as well as Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Garrison (1997) also recognised the context factor in his model in that he specified self-management of resources in a given context. Yet, the role of context was somewhat superficial in Garrison's (1997) model and the dynamic interaction between learning context and SDL was not explicit.

Role of Teachers to Support Self-Directed Learning

Supports for Self-directed Learning are both related to instruction and management. Proper support can motivate learners to engage meaningfully in particular activities. This can be done by including integrative study activities i.e., teaching activities which are learner's oriented. As far as the role of the teacher is concerned, they have to act as knowledge facilitator rather then only a knowledge provider. Therefore, whenever the teachers want to promote the Self-directed Learning among their learners, one of the most important tasks will be to raise student's awareness of their roles in learning from being a knowledge provider to knowledge facilitator. In order to develop learners as Self-directed, it is important that the learning activities designed:

(a) must become a central part of the curriculum,

(b) learners must have ample opportunity to engage in these activities, and

(c) these opportunities should include mechanisms by which students can monitor and appraise the effectiveness of their methods.

It is important to note here that involving learners to participate in decision-making is another fundamental aspect of the SDL approach. These decisions about deciding their learning emphasises the importance of allowing learners to pursue their own interests so that learning becomes more meaningful. However, the learners do not have to be given total freedom, the teachers could, for instance, establish a thematic framework within which students are given choices. You must be thinking that this will increase the chances of committing more mistakes among the students. But, even if they make mistakes while doing so, the activities will sustain their interest, transcend frustration, and eventually break barriers to achievement.

Lyman (1997) and Bolhuis (1996) stress that teachers who want to encourage SDL must free themselves from a preoccupation with tracking and correcting errors, this threatens the ego of the learner. Corno (1992) suggests allowing learners to pursue personal interests without the threat of formal evaluation. While promoting Self-directed Learning among your learners, teachers have show greater tolerance of uncertainty and encourage risk-taking, and capitalising on learners' strong points instead of focusing on weaknesses, as it is more beneficial for learners to achieve a few objectives of importance to them than it is to fulfill all the objectives that are important to the teacher.

As quoted by Lowry, C. M. (2006), the following are the ways in which the teachers can facilitate Self-directed Learning among their students:

- Help the learner to identify the starting point for a learning project and discern relevant modes of examination and reporting.

- Create a partnership with the learner by negotiating for a learning goals, strategies, and evaluation criteria.

- Be a manager of the learning experience rather than an information provider.

- Help learners acquire the needs assessment techniques necessary to discover what objectives they should set and achieved.

- Help match resources to the needs of learners.

- Help learners develop positive attitudes and feelings of independence relative to learning.

- Use techniques such as field experience and problem solving that take advantage of adults' rich experience base.

Instructional Designs to Promote Self-directed Learning

In order to promote Self-directedness among learners, teachers need to invest many hours of instruction and also have to design the instructions based that can

promote Self-directed Learning. Also, since SDL stresses meaningful learning, Temple and Rodero (1995) advocate a situated learning approach, in which teachers bring real-life problems into the classroom for learners to work on. Learners should also be allowed to collaborate with the teacher in determining deadlines and other regulations. Some of the designs may include the problem based learning and inquiry based instruction.

(a) Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a learner-centered instructional strategy in which students collaboratively solve problems and reflect on their experiences. This is not a new model of instruction, even philosophers like Plato and Socrates required that their students think, retrieve information for themselves, search for new ideas and debate them in a scholarly environment. However, it was pioneered and used extensively at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Advocates of PBL claim it can be used to enhance content knowledge and foster the development of communication, problem-solving, and Self-directed Learning skill.

It is defined by Finkle and Torp (1995) as, "a curriculum development and instructional system that simultaneously develops both problem solving strategies and disciplinary knowledge bases and skills by placing students in the active role of problem solvers confronted with an ill-structured problem that mirrors real-world problems".

PBL creates the three conditions that information theory links to subsequent retrieval and appropriate use of new information (Schmidt 1983):

- ***Activation of prior knowledge*** - students apply knowledge to understand new information.

- ***Similarity of contexts in which information is learned and later applied*** - research shows that knowledge is much more likely to be remembered or recalled in context in which it was originally learned (Godden and Baddeley 1975). PBL provides problems within context that closely resemble future professional problems.

- ***Opportunity to elaborate on information that is learned during the problem-solving process*** - elaborations provides redundancy in memory structure, reduces forgetting, and facilitates retrieval. Elaboration occurs in discussion with peers, peer-teaching, exchanging views, and preparing essays about what students have learned during the problem-solving process.

Following are the Characteristics of PBL

- Reliance on problems to drive the curriculum - the problems do not test skills; they assist in development of the skills themselves. Learning is driven by challenging, open-ended problems.

- PBL is learner-centered-learners are progressively given more responsibility for their education and become increasingly independent of the teacher for their education.

- PBL produces independent, life-long learners - students continue to

learn on their own in life and in their careers

- Students work in small collaborative groups and teachers take on the role as "facilitators" of learning.

- Use of real world problems - problems is relevant and contextual. It is in the process of struggling with actual problems that students learn content and critical thinking skills.

Problem Based Learning Process

(a) Identification of the Problem : There are many versions available for finalising the problem, either the problem is identified by the facilitator/teacher along with the students or the students identify the learning issues they wish to explore. After the finalization of the problem, the students receive the following learning materials:

- the problem

- a list of objectives that the student is expected to master while working on the problem

- a reference list of materials that pertain to the basic objectives

- questions that focus on important concepts and applications of the knowledge base

2. Working for the Solution of the Problem : The students work in teams to complete the project, resolve the problem, and accomplish the learning objectives.

- each student has a particular role in the team - leader, facilitator, recorder, or team member

- time allotted to each project is fixed

- the team schedules its own activities and decides how to use the allotted time

3. Evaluation : Student performance is evaluated by instructors, peers, and self using questionnaires, interviews, observation, and other assessment methods

Role of the Teacher in PBL

The learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their group and organize and direct the learning process with support from a tutor or instructor. In PBL, the instructor/teacher serves as a resource to the student teams. The instructor is frequently acts as a mentor or tutors to the group and dispenses information to the group.

The instructor/teacher is actively involved in planning the PBL the content and sequence of activity, providing immediate feedback on student work and discussion, and evaluating students. Basically the teacher acts as metacognitive coaches, serving as models, thinking aloud with students and practicing behavior they want their students to use.

The responsibility of the teacher in PBL is to provide the educational materials and guidance that facilitate learning. The principle role of the teacher in PBL is that of a facilitator or educational coach (often referred to in jargon of PBL as a "tutor") guiding the learners in the PBL process. As learners become more proficient in the PBL learning process the tutor becomes less active.

(b) Inquiry-Based Learning

Based on John Dewey's philosophy that education begins with the curiosity of the

learner and optimal learning and human development occur when people are confronted with substantive, real problems to solve.With the inquiry method of instruction, students arrive at an understanding of concepts by themselves and the responsibility for learning rests with them.

The main components of inquiry-Based Learning include

- a question(s) related to the topic of inquiry to be explored (problem statement),
- followed by an investigation and gathering of information related to the question (data collection),
- continuing with a discussion of findings (analysis),
- Commencing with a reflection on what was learned (implications/conclusion).

As understood, it is important to encourage learners to be Self-directed. This method is form of Self-directed Learning which encourages students through supports to build research skills that can be used throughout their educational experiences. In addition, students determine their own learning needs through a learning contract.

The four stages which defines Self-directed Learning i.e., determining what they need to learn, identifying resources and how best to learn from them ,using resources and reporting their learning and assessing their progress in learning, for all the stages the students take more responsibility in inquiry based learning. In this kind of learning, the students take the initiative and are largely responsible for seeing they successfully complete their learning in a given area.

Generally, students draft a "learning query" and then execute it – the instructor submits a grade on completion of the contract.

It encoura learners to be Self-directed is a critical skill that students need to acquire in order to be successful in post-secondary education. This method encourages students through supports to build research skills that can be used throughout their educational experiences. In addition, students determine their own learning.

Finally, teachers need to model learning strategies such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing, so that students will develop the ability to use these strategies on their own. Teachers also need to allow individual learners to approach a task in different ways using different strategies.

Evaluation of the Self-directed Learning

As evaluation is the important component of the entire learning cycle, in the Self-directed Learning process since the students are actively involved with the entire therefore it is important that a habit of self-monitoring to be established among the learners. The teachers need to encourage learners to reflect on what they did and to revise attempted work. Self-evaluation is defined as students judging the quality of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of doing better work in the future. When we teach students how to assess their own progress, and when they do so against known and challenging quality standards, we find that there is a lot to

gain. Self-evaluation is a potentially powerful technique because of its impact on student performance through enhanced self-efficacy and increased intrinsic motivation.

There are various ways to maintain the Self-Evaluation:

(a) **By maintaining a journal**

(b) **By keeping a diary of events**

(c) **By maintaining a personal portfolio:** a portfolio contains a purposefully selected work of the students. This may include highlights of the student's progress, samples of earlier and later work, and comments about the growth in learning. Then, the student and/or teacher might select items that illustrate the development of one or more skills with reflection upon the process that led to that development to show growth or change over time. These comments are made in the portfolio either by the learners or by teacher and sometimes by both teacher and students after identifying best pieces of work to showcase a student's strengths or accomplishments.

The Portfolio helps in following ways to the Learners

- to help develop process skills such as self-evaluation and goal-setting
- to identify strengths and weaknesses
- to track the development of one more products/performances

(d) **By rubric:** It is a scoring guide which organises the criteria that describe what students need to complete for an assignment, and it measures the levels proficiency of student work. Rubrics can be used in any content area. They are time consuming to create, but they allow students and parents to know exactly how a teacher will grade an assignment. When teachers design specific performance criteria, students know how they will be evaluated. Rubrics allow students to better understand the meaning behind their grade. If students know exactly how their work will be evaluated, they are more likely to produce higher quality work. Rubrics allow students and parents to see specifically how a teacher arrived at a specific score. In addition, rubrics give teachers well-defined criteria for areas in an assignment that are subjective, such as artwork or style.

Conclusion

The paper began with the challenges of the present day educational scenario, where there is growing demand on the learners and the teachers to take the responsibility of learning. It is noted that answering the challenge would entail giving students' greater responsibility for their own learning i.e., they have to become Self-directed Learners. It was discussed how various models like candy's model, hiemstra model of SDL has been discussed which have focused on the learning as an active process. It has also been discussed that the Self-directed Learning process starts with the diagnosing of the learning needs of the learners and ends with the evaluation of

the learning. But in the entire process right from the identification of the learning needs till evaluation, it is the learner who actively decides all the aspects of learning. It is then suggested how classroom contexts affect student engagement in Self-directed Learning activities. Although, the learner is the in-charge of learning but the role of the teacher is not diminished but had change from knowledge provider to knowledge facilitator. It is apparent from this discussion that fostering Self-directed Learning is a challenging goal for teachers and schools. It requires a commitment to change, the willingness to take risks, and the development of a comprehensive plan. According to the recommendations presented here, students are viewed as ultimately responsible for their own learning. The proper role of the teacher, in this view, is to make it possible and easy for students to carry out this responsibility which can be done through using various instructional designs such as the problem based learning and inquiry-based approach has been discussed in the paper. To evaluate the learning, various tools of evaluation like portfolio, rubrics could be used. Hence, the paper covers all the major aspects of the Self-directed Learning.

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