

“Self-Direction” Overview

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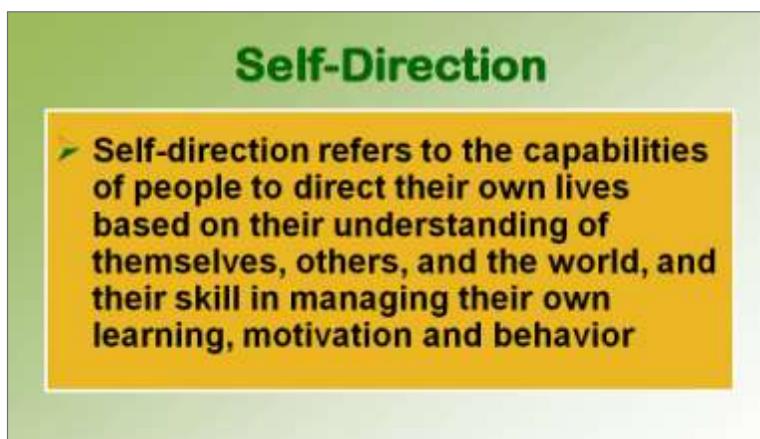
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Definition of Self-Direction

Self-direction is critical to student learning and the ability of students to assume ownership of their own learning processes.



The notion of self-direction can suggest independence rather than dependence; the ability to make choices independent of others and manage our actions and lives without external forces influencing or dictating what we should do. The term suggests a high degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency in our thinking and behavior.

From an educational perspective, self-direction in students is a desirable trait. Self-directed students are more effective learners with a stronger commitment to life-long-learning. From this perspective, it is the responsibility of school counselors and other educators to encourage and nurture self-direction in students. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that self-direction in an educational context does not suggest total autonomy or that school counselors should simply leave students alone to make educational choices and pursue educational goals on their own. Rather, self-direction is about interdependence between students and the adults who guide them. Cultivating self-direction in students is a dynamic process with students in the driver’s seat and school counselors helping them navigate the complex processes involved in learning and achievement.

Self-Direction Sub-Constructs

This section will provide a general understanding of self-direction as it relates to student learning and achievement. The discussion will focus on five sub-constructs of the self-direction construct.



We will look at why each of these sub-constructs is important as a critical focus in CBA school counseling programs and why knowledge and use of these concepts should be evident in school counselor practice.

Simply Stated

As a way of getting started, let’s define each of the sub-constructs associated with self-direction in simple terms. Links to each of the Self-Direction sub-constructs are provided at the end of this webpage.

- **Self-Directed Learning:** Individuals direct their own learning by establish goals, developing and implementing plans, monitoring progress and evaluating results.
- **Self-Regulated Learning:** Individuals regulate their thinking and behaviors in order to maximize their potential for learning and improving their learning outcomes.
- **Self-Regulation of Emotions:** Individuals regulate their impulses and emotional responses to stimuli and events in their lives and learning.

- **Executive Functions:** These functions control and manage the complex processes that enable us to learn and live balanced lives.
- **Goal Setting/Action Planning:** Individuals have the capacity to establish goals, develop action plans and then take action to successfully achieve their goals.

Self-Direction is Fundamental to a CBA

The self-direction construct is inextricably related to the other three CBA constructs of motivation, self-knowledge and relationships. For example, motivation is the driving force that compels us to make appropriate choices, establish meaningful goals, and effectively plan for and achieve desired results by becoming proficient learners. Motivation drives our desire to direct our learning in ways that ensure we achieve our goals.

Self-knowledge enables us to understand our abilities and interests and how to manage and control the mental processes we use to learn. Metacognitive awareness, metacognitive skills and self-efficacy are all critical processes related to self-direction. It also helps us to make accurate attributions that explain the causes of our successes and failure, and to recognize our locus of control as internal rather than external.

Relationships are critical to becoming self-directed as no one achieves self-direction in isolation. Others contribute to our understanding of and ability to self-direct our lives. Self-direction is enhanced in social contexts and we need social skills to be able to interact with those who can help us achieve self-direction through supportive relationships. Self-direction must also be seen in the context of group direction where it is important for students to be self-directed while working in harmony with group-directed activities.

Additional Resources Related to Self-Direction

The Internet is a wonderful tool for accessing information on just about any topic. It has been invaluable in helping us to identify what research has demonstrated to be strongly related to students’ academic achievement and well-being, and evidence-based practices that provide concrete examples of how to translate the research findings into meaningful learning opportunities that support student development.



Staying informed about what works and does not work to help students achieve and succeed is one of the defining characteristics of a professional school counselor. Internet search engines can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the topics discussed on the CBA Website. To get you started, here are some additional resources you may find helpful. These resources, however, only scratch the surface of what is available on the Internet or in published books and articles. We encourage you to use search engines to find more resources that will increase your understanding and build your capacity to apply these ideas in your work as school counselors.

Videos

This is a video by SECCEducaionalTV on self-directed learning, presented by Nancy Nozaki, a Kindergarten teacher explaining how she works with students to become self-directed learners. She discusses the importance of students developing self-direction skills.

<https://youtu.be/mNaQAc5GabY>

An introduction to self-direction as a 21st Century skill by SECCEducationalTV. Presented by Cheryl Lemke.

<https://youtu.be/dpcVuGPZc6O>

Another video by SECCEducationalTV on self-direction, this time related to high school geometry. Narrated by Pearl Hinlo, a high school Geometry teacher.

<https://youtu.be/hV7s5J0ydwU>

Websites

This article from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory on “Working Toward Student Self-Direction and Personal Efficacy as Educational Goals” provides an overview of issues related to self-directed learning (SDL), compares self-directed vs. traditional teaching methods, and describes strategies for fostering SDL in students. It also discusses implementation pitfalls and provides case studies.

<http://www.lupinworks.com/glit6756/onlineArticles/Barell.html>

Links to the Self-Direction Sub-Constructs

Now that you have a general sense of the importance of Self-Direction to student learning and why it is fundamental to a CBA, it is time to explore the five sub-constructs associated with the Self-Direction construct. The sub-constructs are listed under the “Self-Direction” Overview link in the following order.

- Self-Directed Learning Each sub-construct has its own webpage and can be accessed by clicking on the desired sub-construct hyperlink in the Sidebar to your left.

- Self-Regulated Learning
- Self-Regulation of Emotions
- Executive Functions
- Goal Setting/Action Planning

Self-Direction links will appear in the Sidebar of all webpages as long as you are within the “Develop a CBA” module. “PDF” versions of all these webpages can be accessed from within the respective webpages, and in the “Free Resources” module.