

Self-Directed Learning

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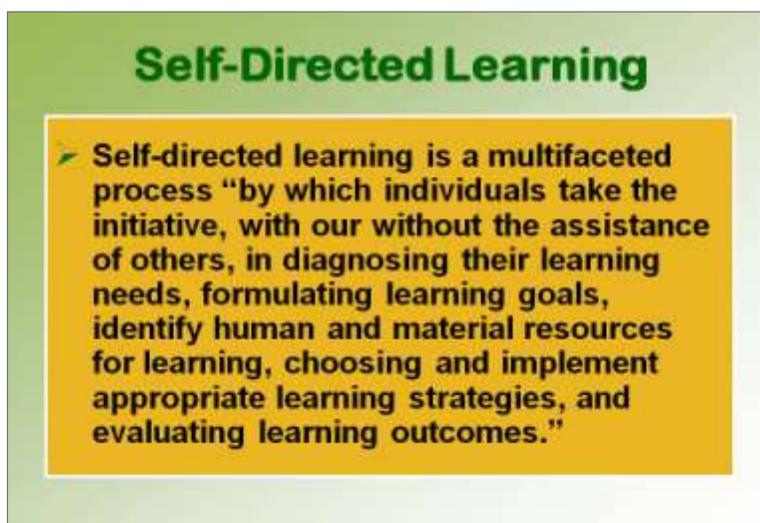
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Definition of Self-Directed Learning

- The following definition of self-directed learning by Malcolm Knowles was retrieved from:
<https://ahappydiscovery.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/self-directed-learning-2/>



Self-directed learning refers to a family of related approaches to education that recognize that learners need to be taught how to develop skills in the effective use of learning strategies while they are learning academic concepts and content. All students need to learn and to learn how to learn.

It is often stated that we want students to assume ownership of their learning. When students assume ownership they accept responsibility for figuring out what they want to learn, what needs

to be learned and how to manage their learning processes so they result in positive outcomes. Students recognize the power of, and responsibility for, making choices about their learning that will help them be prepared for successful and fulfilling lives. Assuming ownership transforms the role of student from one that is a passive recipient of information from others to an active participant in identifying and pursuing learning outcomes that will have the greatest impact on their lives and future success.

The role of counselors and teachers is also transformed when students assume ownership of their own learning. Educators are no longer the primary source of information to be transferred to students. Rather, they are freed up to perform the roles of coaches and facilitators who guide students in their decision making and learning rather than making decisions for them. Their role goes from educator-driven to student-driven learning. Rather than being told what to do, students heuristically establish and pursue their learning goals and through self-reflection take corrective action along their learning pathways to ensure the highest level of achievement.

In order for students to assume ownership of their learning and be responsible for selecting and achieving positive outcomes, they must become self-directed learners. Self-directed individuals actively manage their own lives rather than passively following the path of least resistance. These students are cognizant of their responsibility to make critical choices, plan to achieve critical goals, and control and manage their learning in ways that maximize their potential for achievement and success.

Self-Directed Learning is Fundamental to a CBA

Acquiring essential self-knowledge and learning to be self-directed are important and desirable goals for all students and should be a focus for the work of all school counselors. Through interactions with the counseling program, all students are encouraged to identify their own life directions, make academic choices consistent with these directions, and connect their classroom learning to their life goals.

As noted above, even though the focus of self-direction is on the individual, the ability to self-direct and become proficient self-directed learners develops in social contexts. We are not born into this world with the ability to self-direct. It is a learned trait. In short, other people help encourage and nurture the process leading to mastery of self-directed learning processes. School counselors have such a role by acting as guides and facilitators.

Students need help in learning how to make meaningful choices, establish achievable goals, monitor their progress and evaluate their results. Self-directed learning is a blend of independence and interdependence. The “Help Seeking” topic under the “Relationships” construct provides additional insights into the need for and benefits of students seeking help to successfully address challenges in their learning which they are not fully prepared to handle.

School counselors have multiple ways to help students become self-directed learners. First they teach students what it means to be self-directed and why it is important to their learning and success in school and life. Next they guide the transition from dependence to independence and interdependence in directing their own learning. Third, counselors remain available to guide students in making meaningful and realistic choices upon request from students or when counselors perceive that a student is struggling with finding direction and needs their help. The

graphic below represents the basic areas in which school counselors can help students become self-directed learners.



Not all students are proficient as self-directed learners and will require more direct instruction and support than those who are capable of making meaningful choices and managing their own learning processes. It is the counselors' responsibility to ascertain the capacity of their students for self-directed learning and adjust their approaches to teaching and assisting them accordingly.

Counselors are central to the process of helping students learn how to learn, plan for their future success and cope with the challenges of growing up and being prepared for entry into the postsecondary world. Regardless of what level of proficiency at self-directed learning is achieved, it is a goal of school counseling programs to help students develop strategies and skills that will enable them to become life-long learners who continue to be excited about learning, motivated to achieve throughout life and continue to effectively manage their learning processes in ways that increase their levels of achievement and fulfillment.

Additional Resources Related to Self-Directed Learning

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

Blake Boles, in this video entitled “The Art of Self-Direction” presents a fascinating story about his journey of self-exploration and teaching kids to be self-directed learners. He has also published books on this topic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGlr09DWEd8>

This Ted Talk by Shelley Wright is a beautiful illustration of how her class was transformed from a traditional learning environment where the students sat in rows and the teacher imparted knowledge to one where the students conceived of and achieved a remarkable goal of raising over \$20,000 to help students in Uganda. This story is a testament to what can happen when students establish their own goals, are highly motivated to succeed and self-direct their learning processes with an amazing degree of self-efficacy and sense of social justice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fMC-z7K0r4>

This video was designed and produced by students and provides a great deal of useful information for understanding self-directed learning.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvPEbyEdOQU>

Websites

A website dedicated to self-directed learning (SDL), with a list of resources including websites, books, discussion groups, SDL readiness assessments, learning style assessments, online journals and others.

<http://www.selfdirectedlearning.org/sdl-resources>

Short description of self-direction based on Knowles definition. Identifies basic steps in the process leading to self-directed learning.

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