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# Developing Students' Learning Ability by Dint of Self-Directed Learning

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**Abstract**

Now that the world is changing, people should take control of their own learning and adopt self-directed inquiry as a lifelong priority. People learn lots of things from different sources which influence to the way of life and decision making; hence, self-directed learning takes an important role nowadays. People learn something more from their own experiences independently. Generally, the full meaning of self-directed learning has come to be labeled "Andragogy" which is defined as the art and science of helping adults learn. Interestingly, a researcher strongly believes that process and the rationale for self-directed learning, which belong to Knowles, enable to apply appropriately and plan for teaching and learning effectively. Touching this research, it is aimed to find ways to reach individual learning styles and needs by dint of Self-Directed Learning and assess students' knowledge retention from their real experiences as a case study. Students are also able to show their experiences in selling and purchasing products, and they can apply skills to experiences that all face with in the International Fair held by Suan Sunandha International College. Importantly students must be aware of a chapter of Economics and follow some theories to merge with activities. To accomplish this research, a total of 200 samples from the first-year students for the purpose of learning new experiences from each situation were selected to, and the findings can be conspicuous for self- directed learning as a tool of teaching and learning.

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## 1. Introduction

There are a number of theories that indicate and initiate many interesting ways of learning, for instance, Maslow's primary contribution to psychology or Hierarchy of Needs. This seems to be the underlying values attached to the basic needs of human beings. Furthermore, Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, which says that all human beings possess eight "intelligences", though not each one is necessarily strong in all, has met with a strongly positive response from many educators. These are some exemplary theorists. The researcher; however, prefers Knowles' theory to others. Self-directed learning is, in fact, a proper way for learners, and this enables to apply for university students as a lecturer. In connection with a theory, Malcolm Knowles puts forward three immediate reasons for self-directed learning. First, there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better while people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners) learn fewer things. Ones enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation and also tend to retain and make use of what ones learn better and longer than the reactive learners do. (Knowles, 1975) 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 lives-to become increasingly self-directing. A third immediate reason is that many of the new developments in education put responsibility on the learners to take a good deal of initiative in own learning (Knowles, 1975).

## 2. Review of Literature

In addition to understanding the benefit of self-directed learning, this theory regularly enables to be a perfect content transmitter. Once the researcher began to take into account the roles in which the first-year students concern with self-directed learning and firstly started to prepare a plan before teaching. Undoubtedly, self-directed learning creates a systematic way for a teacher. As the teacher and researcher, any topics can be specified and covered into manageable units. In the past, the researcher had ever taught a topic of economics without well-organized units. This was referred to time management; one-hour units, one-week units, or one-semester unit [1]. As a result, the researcher couldn't have accomplished one lesson in time. Notwithstanding the fact that the researcher planned for some lessons which would be transmitted by audio-visual presentation, students were not satisfied with this method as they couldn't have interrogated any questions. To support self-directed learning, students were assigned to figure out and searched for more information and what they wanted to know from a chapter. Then, the researcher had to administer tests to find out how much of the content the students had received and absorbed from their workshop: students must form groups and prepare for international fair which allows students to sell real products and create business strategies like a real business.

## 3. Methodology

No sooner had that chapter started than I introduced self-directed learning to students. Last year students planned groups and set up leaders and assistants. That could have encouraged students in term of management and leadership. For example, a group of students plan to sell juices: orange juice, lemon juice, strawberry juice, and so on. Students had to learn how to peel different kinds of fruits. Students started to learn new experiences from that point. Each of the fruits that individuals chose and bought from markets to sell in the fair had different ways to prepare and keep. Some were easily rotten but other had to be refrigerated all time. Further, students were supposed to know the process and set the price for each glass of juice. As sellers, students surveyed the market and knew what kinds of favourite fruits were for customers. Why a consumer preferred a kiwi juice to a watermelon juice. How students could have sold watermelon juices as many glasses as kiwi juices. Also students were at the point of seeing that teamwork led to succeed, thereby ones had to be well-managed and solve problems together. That meant students were able to learn new experiences from self-directed of learning. When the fair had come, students would have really been good suppliers to consumers with good preparation. During running business, the researcher always walked around and observed the way of processes and how students could solve different kinds of problems like the lack of syrup, crowded incidents, sale promotion, and so forth, Owing to those problems, students definitely learned something new from experiences. Lastly, the researcher systematically evaluated processes of students' groups on selling products. The objectives of this research paper were 1) to evaluate students' abilities and knowledge of the fundamental and technical concepts of economics, 2) to assess how well students can identify and use economics

terminologies in oral and written communications, 3) to enliven students for an awareness of role in the global economics environment.4) to encourage to make decisions wisely using cost-benefit analysis and demonstrate a sense of responsibility and a capacity for service. 5) to provoke students to examine personal and professional beliefs and opinions and an understanding of the balance in life between work, play, family, and friends, 6) to investigate students' demonstration and an understanding of their personal interests, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses as each one pertains to the international fair, lastly, 7) to ensure that students will demonstrate a basic understanding of career options available to them and will establish career objectives.

In order to assess students based on self-directed learning model, the qualities of good assessment were generally important to be considered at that time. The researcher always introduced two assessments to students namely Performance Assessment and Formative Assessment.

### *3.1 Performance Assessment*

In connection with that international fair, the assessment allowed students to explore creativity and showed attempts and ability to decide and solve problems. Individuals demonstrated abilities and knowledge of economics and made decisions wisely using cost and benefit analysis especially, to solve each problem in a real situation. The reason that the researcher intentionally chose performance assessment as one of the methods of teaching this topic was students were able to engage personally with selling and purchasing. To assess students fairly and appropriately, individuals would be rated in group. At first, students form a group of and paid close attention because students were fascinated with products each wanted to sell products. From the point, students with various intelligences could fully show their capacities. The following rubric was specifically provided for each group:

Table 1. Workshop Rubric

| Scoring criteria | 4<br>Excellent | 3<br>Good | 2<br>Need some improvement | 1<br>Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participation | Always willingly focus during group work and workshop. | Usually willingly focus during group work and workshop. | Sometimes willingly focus during group work and workshop. | Rarely willingly focus during group work and workshop. |
| Remaining on Task | Complete work with the expected timeframe Manage time effectively | Complete work with the expected timeframe | Require some assistance to complete the task | Need to be redirected to the task by teacher or other member of the team |
| Achievement of Purpose | A purpose is clearly established and effectively supported | A purpose is clearly established and generally supported | A purpose is established but may not be supported | A purpose is vaguely established and may not be supported |
| Group Creativity | Co-operatively work and fully share abilities to one another | Well organized and show abilities clearly | Quite organized yet some mistakes found | Choices demonstrate little awareness and do little to enhance a role play |

### *3.2 Formative Assessment*

In addition to assessing from workshop, the researcher was supposed to check their understanding and judge the students' success from the mid-term paper. The researcher preferred an essay writing to multiple choices questions since the essay gave students opportunities to show how effectively individuals could have developed points of view, presented ideas logically and clearly, and used language precisely. The rubric below fostered communication between the teacher and students. That method of assessment allowed the facets of the mid-term paper and corresponding point values to be clear to both parties. The students and the teacher also benefited from the assessment's ability to account for the whole as well as components. Primarily the test was graded with two specific standards in mind. The questions were worth to give points. Three from five points were judged contents and ways in which the students perceived and interacted with the question. The remaining points were incorporated grammar, and sentence structure. As an international College, it was imperative that students be supported for English writing. Not only did the researcher focus on economics but also teachers encouraged how to write effectively.

Table 2 Rubric for mid-term examination

| Criteria | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Content | Successful completion of all parts of the question as well as creative incorporation of outside knowledge. | Most part of the questions was answered, and above average knowledge of the material was shown. | The bare minimum of information was related, and at times inconclusive. | The answer clearly displayed that the student was unfamiliar with all parts of the question. |
| Grammar | N/A | Spelling errors are few and do not affect understanding. Word choice is thoughtful and shows mastery of the English language. | Spelling errors are numerous, but do not greatly affect understanding. Word choice is correct and shows knowledge of English | Spelling errors are numerous and effect understanding. Word choice is sometimes incorrect and shows little knowledge of English |

## 4. Findings

The findings of this research showed that most of first year students were able to understand a chapter of economics easily and precisely after self-directed learning technique had been introduced. With reference to assessments, the researcher willingly used both performance and formative assessments requiring rubrics. To find out the exact result, the researcher compared students to direct teaching technique. Students showed their writing from formative assessment with high level of scores in contents as individuals experienced new things and applied economics terminologies in oral and written communications. Scarcely had students known how to write from experiences when each one completed essay writing effectively due to the fact that individuals know what to write. As a result, scores were better than sitting in the classroom and being directly taught. From the previous years, the researcher never initiated self-directed learning to teach students and each student didn't see, solve, prepare for real situations. All that individuals could have done was to listen and stay focused. As a result, scores from Mid-Term test revealed that students without performance assessment (self-directed learning) stood in antithesis with the finding of the latest research by applying self-directed learning technique.

Now that English was a medium of instruction, students who require English as a foreign language had to understand both contents from each chapter precisely and convey ideas clearly and grammatically in essay writing. However, students with low English proficiency level were not able to convey knowledge although individuals understood contents based on what each one experienced.

To sum up, approximately 80 percent of all students go high levels of scores in proportion to study in a classroom with direct teaching from the teacher. Students with no participation in the fair approximately 20 percent showed low level of score and were not able to explain in essays provided for Mid-Term Test. There come with no doubts that students were satisfied with learning new experiences by self-directed learning technique. "Imagination from new experiences enables to complete the Mid-Term Test easily and correctly," said one of the students.

## 5. Discussion

For a classroom in 21$^{st}$ century, the teacher must create more activities so as to provoke students to study enthusiastically. The activities in class must be attractive so that students will be satisfied with working in groups and the activities provided; furthermore, applying self-directed learning can be a tool to encourage students to learn new thing both inside and outside classroom since each students can take the initiative and the responsibility for what occurs or what problems individual can solve in real situations: each of students are able to select, manage, and

assess own learning activities, which can be pursued at any time, in any place, through any means, at any age. Learning to learn is not just another slogan. This donates a specific pedagogic approach that teachers must master if ones want to be able to pass on to others. This also involves the acquisition of work habits and the awakening of motivations which must be shaped in childhood and adolescence by the programmers and methods in schools and universities. Each individual's aspiration to self-learning must be realized by not only in school and university but elsewhere too, under conditions and circumstances of all kinds-with the means, tools, and incentives for making personal studies a fruitful activity. (Faure, and others, Learning to Be, 1972) This means students learn more by exploring the world, and students will be fascinated by lots of amazingly new experiences. Studying with the teacher as usual, this may really bore students as each one can't see new things. That's why the college provides interesting activities that are focused to outdoor activities The researcher strongly believes that everyone do not only get education from institutions or universities anyhow what one learn outside is equally or more necessary to exist. People cannot gain knowledge or experiences from institutions. Ones must step out to another institution. That's the school of life, of practical life and experience. Students enthusiastically want to step ahead owing to the fact that everyone believes that new experiences will surely fulfil knowledge. Definitely, students can apply to daily life. Learning new experiences from elsewhere activates to learn more and search for more information from other additional sources. Students gain more knowledge from real experiences and the college gives scholarships to explore the world, and this is like to provide activities for students to discover what they want. Accordingly, self-directed learning is useful so much, and a teacher is willing to apply for teaching in any fields. Students will get a chance to learn outside classrooms even though students don't have chances to abroad. Typically, people think of learning as what takes place in the classroom-that is "being taught." To be adequate for a strange new world, people must come to think of learning as being the same as living. One must learn from everything one do; one must exploit every experience as a "learning experience." (Malcolm Knowles, 1975).

This is, in fact, no longer suitable to balance education with youth. Education must now be defined as a lifelong process or learning. Admitting that one is not a teenager and becomes older and older, education can be continued wherever ones are. Learning whilst working will be focused on acquiring the knowledge, skills, attitude, understanding, and values required for living adequately in a rapidly changing world. Frankly speaking, a researcher as a student of DePaul University and continued a master degree in the School for New Learning. The researcher has heard from seniors about this graduate program. This interested the researcher at first and started wondering how that was possible to earn credits at workplace, through independent study, night courses, weekend seminars, and courses over the internet. The researcher asked whether that had been self- directed learning. Time passed by, the researcher continued a degree eagerly. I had learnt many things from the first course. The researcher had to search for some lessons, information, and news and so on through the internet. The researcher was much more familiar with computer than ever in the past. The researcher asked friends, teachers when having doubts and found out many interesting books from library. Generally, every institution in community-stores, churches, temples, government agency-become a resource for learning, as does every person we have access to-parent, child, friend, service provider, doctor, teacher, fellow worker, supervisor, minister, store clerk, and soon and on. Learning means making use of every resource-in or out of educational institutions-for personal growth and development. (Knowles, 1975).

According to Malcolm Knowles' theory, this inspires the researcher to learn and realize on self-directed learning in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others. Since the researcher started the first course of the master degree in the beginning of the year 2008 at DePaul University at Chicago, U.S.A. with a pride of a member of school for new learning. The researcher learnt lots of things from a professor, Dr.Susan McQuary and knew how to write correctly and understood what SLR was. The researcher had searched out lots of information to complete homework and spent most of the time in university library to learn and gained the new ideas and compared to pedagogical style since the first course began. Theoretically, teacher-directed learning assumes that the learner is essentially a dependent personality and that the teacher has the responsibility of deciding what and how the learner should be taught, whereas self-directed learning assumes that human being grows in capacity (and need) to be self-directing as an essential component to maturing, and that this capacity should be nurtured to develop as rapidly as possible (Malcolm S.Knowles, 1975). The researcher understands much more clearly and believes that self-directed learning is appropriate for university students, and individuals understand

lessons outside the classroom at the same time. Providing that students come to college and listen to a teacher without any interesting things from the school, students will be bored of and that leads to unhappy state. Thereby, the researcher will apply this learning process to all students in this teaching career.

## 6. Future Studies

Never do students get bored of activity provided in International Fair as students are able to experiences new things and solve problems with own decision. Not only students can show abilities to others but also all are able to understand the lesson deeply and keep retention to apply in their lives. With reference to the result, all students prefer self-directed learning to direct teaching. This is not strange that following self-directed learning can be applied to different fields of subjects appropriately. Definitely one says that the difference challenges an educational system that assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test students' learning. Indeed, as currently constituted, the educational system is heavily biased toward linguistic modes of instruction and assessment and, to a somewhat lesser degree, toward logical-quantitative modes as well. Gardner argues that a contrasting set of assumptions is more likely to be educationally effective. Students learn in ways that are identifiably distinctive. The broad spectrum of students - and perhaps the society as a whole - would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a numbers of ways and learning could be evaluated through a variety of means."

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