https://doi.org/10.37420/j.cer.2024.022

The Significance of Self-Directed Learning in Adult Lifelong Education

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Abstract:
Self-directed Learning is a learning style based on self-driven and self-managed learning, which will play an increasingly important role in the process of adult lifelong learning.

Keywords:
Self-led Learning Adult Lifelong Learning Important Role

With the development of the times and changes in society, knowledge is updated at an alarming rate and new technologies are constantly emerging. Our knowledge and skills will gradually become obsolete and outdated, and the ever-advancing society also needs people to keep progressing and learning. If we do not update our knowledge in time and lack new skills, we will eventually be eliminated by society. Against this background, adult lifelong learning has become an indispensable attitude to life. Adult lifelong learning can not only update one's knowledge and skills, but also enhance one's self-education and self-management ability, and improve one's competitiveness and survival ability. In the process of adult lifelong learning, self-led learning will play an increasingly important role.

Self-directed Learning (SLD) is a learning style based on self-driven and self-managed learning, which is the best way for learners to take the initiative to master the learning progress, independently choose the direction of learning, learn and explore on their own, self-reflect and adjust, emphasize on self-motivation, emphasize on the application of learning, cultivate self-leadership as well as promote lifelong learning.

1. Historical Perspectives on Self-Directed Learning

The study of self-led learning began in the 1960s, and historically a number of foreign scholars have conducted systematic research on self-led learning from different perspectives.

American scholar Tough first put forward the theory of "self-directed learning" in 1966. According to Tough, self-directed learning refers to self-learning in which the learner makes plans and directs learning activities. This type of learning puts more emphasis on learner autonomy and is a form of learning that corresponds to other-directed learning. Tafu emphasizes that self-directed learning generally goes through 13 steps, and these steps enable learners to learn with clarity about what to learn, where to learn, and how to learn.

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) is one of the major figures in modern sociology. In his

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study of social behavior and bureaucracy, he emphasized the importance of individual autonomy. He argued that individuals need to be capable of self-directed learning in order to adapt to changing social environments in the face of social change and development.

The English philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was the founder of experimental science and an advocate of self-directed learning. He put forward the famous slogan "Knowledge is power", encouraging people to acquire knowledge and improve their own abilities through scientific experimentation and observation. His methodology and scientific ideas have had a profound impact on the development of self-directed learning.

The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) is an important representative of modern Western liberal thought. In his Essay on Human Understanding, he put forward the concept of "self-fashioning", emphasizing that individuals should have the ability of self-directed learning in the process of self-growth. He believed that, through self-directed learning, individuals could independently determine their own direction of development and realize the goal of a free life.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is one of the major figures in modern philosophy. His ideas are strongly anti-traditional and anti-authoritarian, encouraging people to challenge established ideas and values. In his Thus Spoke Zarathustra, he put forward the concept of "self-overcoming", emphasizing the importance of the individual's continuous evolution and transcendence through self-directed learning.

Rodgers (c. 1075-1141 A.D.) was an English educator and philosopher whose book The Organization of Learning is considered a classic of the learning sciences. He developed the concept of self-direction, which emphasizes the importance of individual initiative and self-direction in the learning process. He believed that through self-directed learning, individuals can better adapt to the ever-changing world and realize personal growth and development.

From the thoughts of scholars such as Max Weber, Francis Bacon, John Locke, Nietzsche to Rodgers, we can see the importance and prevalence of self-directed learning in different historical periods and in different cultural contexts.

2. Implications of promoting self-directed learning

Self-directed learning is the best form of learning that an individual can adopt in lifelong learning, and it is only when an individual is capable of self-directed learning that he or she can ensure that the ideal of lifelong learning can be realized. As Skager R.,1975, an advocate of lifelong education, said: the key factor in practicing lifelong learning is the implementation of self-led learning. With the rapid development and changes in society, adult self-led learning has become more and more important in modern society and is of great significance to the practice of lifelong education.

(i) Adult self-directed learning can help individuals expand their knowledge and skills. By self-selecting the topics and content of their learning, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of their areas of interest and acquire new knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing their competitiveness.

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(b) Self-directed learning by adults allows them to choose the subject and content of their learning independently, to better control their own learning progress and goals, to gain a deeper understanding of their areas of interest, and to acquire new knowledge and skills. By making their own learning plans and schedules, they can better manage their time and energy, better balance their work and life, and improve their personal productivity and efficiency.

(c) Adult self-directed learning can help individuals develop the habit of lifelong learning. In modern society, knowledge is updated at a very fast pace, and only through continuous learning can we maintain our competitiveness. Through self-led learning, individuals can develop the habit of lifelong learning and continuously improve their quality and ability, thus enhancing their competitiveness.

3. Qualities that should characterize self-led learning

(i) Autonomy

Self-directed learners have a strong intrinsic motivation to learn, and they take the initiative to select and learn knowledge and skills that interest them rather than being driven by external factors.

(ii) Independent thinking

Self-directed learners have the ability to think independently and analyze and solve problems independently rather than blindly accepting the views and opinions of others.

(iii) Curiosity

Self-directed learners usually have a strong curiosity, a desire to explore new things and unknown areas, and a willingness to keep learning and trying new things.

(iv) Confidence

They usually have strong self-confidence that they are in control of their learning and career development and can succeed in their studies and work.

(v) Spirit of adventure

Self-directed learners are usually willing to try new approaches and ideas, are adventurous, and are able to bravely try and explore new areas and opportunities.

(vi) Self-reflection

They usually have a strong capacity for self-reflection and are able to constantly reflect on their learning processes and outcomes, and are able to adapt and improve them accordingly.

(vii) Self-motivation

Self-directed learners are usually self-motivated and able to set their own goals and take action towards their own learning and professional development.

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(viii) Adaptable

They are usually highly adaptable, able to adapt quickly to new environments and situations, and able to gain knowledge and experience from them.

(ix) Fast learning

Self-directed learners typically have the ability to learn quickly, acquire new knowledge and skills quickly, and be able to apply them in real-life situations

4. How to promote self-led learning

(i) Setting learning objectives

First, learners need to define their learning objectives. This may include professional skills, knowledge level, interests and hobbies. Clarifying learning objectives helps learners to formulate learning plans and goals in a targeted manner, and to better control the learning progress and effect.

(ii) Creating a learning environment

Learners need to create an environment that is conducive to learning, including a quiet space, sufficient time, and the necessary learning materials and tools. In a learning environment, learners can focus on learning tasks and avoid interruptions and distractions.

(iii) Developing good habits

Good study habits are crucial for self-directed learners. This includes a regular schedule, regular study times and frequency, and effective study methods. By developing good study habits, adult learners can absorb knowledge and skills more efficiently.

(iv) Stimulating interest and enthusiasm

Self-directed learners need to find out what motivates and interests them in learning. Only by developing an interest and enthusiasm for the learning content can they maintain continuous motivation and enthusiasm for learning. This can be done by understanding the context and practical application scenarios of the learning, or by talking to relevant people to stimulate their interest.

(v) Keeping an open mind

In a self-directed learning process, learners need to be open-minded and constantly receptive to new knowledge and ideas. This includes a willingness to try new ways of learning, to accept advice and feedback from others, and to maintain a sense of exploration and curiosity about knowledge.

(vi) Fostering innovative thinking

Creative thinking is a key ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment and to solve complex problems. Innovative thinking can be fostered by trying out new ways of learning, challenging one's own mindset, and attempting to think about problems from different perspectives, thus reinvigorating self-directed learning.

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(vii) Developing critical thinking

Critical thinking, the ability to evaluate and judge information, is important for adult self-directed learners. By developing critical thinking, information can be better sifted and understood, and the ability to think and judge independently can be improved so that complex learning challenges can be better met.

5. Other support

(i) Leveraging science and technology

With the development of modern technology, access to information has become easier and more convenient. Instead of being confined to traditional classroom learning, learners can learn at their workplaces or at home via the Internet. More and more technological tools are available to help adult learners improve the efficiency and quality of their learning. For example, the use of online courses, educational apps, and virtual communities can provide access to richer learning resources and communication channels. Self-directed learning can be made more convenient and efficient with the help of technology.

(ii) Building information literacy

In the age of the information explosion, information literacy is vital for adult self-led learners. This includes the ability to search, filter, understand and evaluate information. By building good information literacy, learning resources can be better accessed and utilized, and the efficiency and quality of learning can be improved.

(iii) Seeking support from others

In a self-directed learning process, learners need to seek the necessary support. This may include seeking guidance from a tutor or coach, joining a learning group or community, or attending an online or offline course. These supports can help learners better understand the content and improve their learning.

(iv) Fostering a spirit of cooperation

While self-directed learning emphasizes an individual's ability to learn on his or her own, it is also important to collaborate with others. By building a good network of interpersonal relationships and collaborating with others, experiences and resources can be shared, innovation and thinking can be stimulated, and better learning results can be achieved.

6. Future vision for self-directed learning

(i) The rise of self-directed learning communities

With the increasingly diverse needs of adult learners, it is foreseeable that more self-directed learning communities will emerge in the future. These communities can provide a platform for adult learners to share resources, exchange experiences and support each other through online platforms or physical spaces.

(ii) Popularization of interdisciplinary learning

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With the development of interdisciplinary thinking and cross-disciplinarity, adult self-directed learning will become more interdisciplinary. Learners will focus more on exploring knowledge and skills from different fields and integrating them to enable innovation and solve real-world problems.

(iii) Certification and translation of learning outcomes

With the popularization of adult self-led learning, the certification and transformation of learning outcomes will also become an important trend. Through the establishment of credit banks and accreditation bodies, learners can transform their learning outcomes into recognizable academic or vocational qualifications and enhance their professional competitiveness.

(iv) Construction of learning ecosystems

Adult self-led learning in the future will focus more on building a learning ecosystem. By closely integrating education with work, family and community, a mutually supportive and mutually reinforcing learning environment will be formed to help learners achieve comprehensive growth and development.

Japanese scientist and inventor Kazuo Inamori once said, "Only through continuous learning can we continue to innovate and gain a foothold in this age of change." Over time, adult self-led learning will become more focused on the concept of lifelong learning, and adult lifelong learning will become an irreplaceable life experience. Learners will realize the importance of maintaining a passion for self-led learning and continuous growth, and will actively seek out opportunities and resources to continually improve their competitiveness and better meet the challenges of the future.

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