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Goal Achievement Through Self-Directed Learning and Self-Regulation in Young Adulthood

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GOAL ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND SELF-

REGULATION IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD

by

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A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

Goal Achievement through Self-Directed Learning and
Self-Regulation in Young Adulthood

The purposes of this research project were to: (a) explore the processes of self-directed learning and self-regulation throughout young adulthood, and (b) determine how young adults apply the concepts and principles of self-directed learning and self-regulation in goal setting and goal achievement. The researcher reviewed six major adult learning concepts and constructs, including self-directed learning and self-directedness, self-regulation and self-regulated learning, experiential learning, dialogue learning, critical reflection, and transformational learning, in order to better understand the autonomous and self-directed learning processes that adults engage in on a daily basis. A PowerPoint presentation with a practical goal setting and goal achievement framework was designed to help young adults (i.e., ages 18-28 years old) to increase their self-directedness and their ability to self-regulate their life activities. An increase in self-direction and self-regulation will influence adult learners' learning direction and outcomes, as well as, foster their autonomy, empowerment and enlightenment. The PowerPoint presentation focuses on young adults in the following categories: (a) learners seeking more self-direction, (b) learners seeking upward mobility in their careers, and (c) learners seeking more autonomy and empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex, technological, and ever-changing society, adults'

need for continuous learning, education, development, and training during their lifetime

is an inevitable reality (Ricard, 1993). Learning unfolds through many dimensions: (a)

self-directed learning and self-directedness, (b) self-regulation and self-regulated

learning, (c) experiential learning, (d) dialogue learning, (e) critical reflection, and (f)

transformational learning. Learning occurs in varied ways and places, in and throughout

the lives of adults. Adults learn best: (a) when they feel the need to learn and (b) when

they have a sense of responsibility for what, why, and how they learn (Brookfield, 1991).

There is no single theory that adequately describes adult learning. Each theory describes

a particular way in which an adult is capable of learning. The interrelationship among the

above concepts of adult learning influences the holistic development of the adult learner

and the attainment of his or her full potential in the life course. The developmental

capacity and potential of adults are boundless. However, adults must have the desire to

reach their full potential through the life course. These attitudes (e.g., interest, ambition,

and motivation) are key elements in the transition process that adults need to possess in

order to increase their self-directedness and self-regulation. Each of the above learning

concepts examines the adult learner from different learning perspectives and in different

contexts.

Statement of the Problem

In an ever-changing world with continuous developments, adult learners must equip themselves with the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, and tools to be able to adapt to world changes and develop their abilities to use the various techniques, strategies, and approaches in problem-solving processes (Caffarella, 2001). Self-directed learning is the process by which progress in human development is transmitted through experiences created in unique contexts. Adult learners should be sufficiently flexible to adapt to uncertain or, at best, ill-defined future circumstances and be able to rise to the challenges to overcome the social and political structures, which place limitations on their capability to reach their full potential. Adult learners must be able to self-regulate, in order to attain enlightenment and self-actualization. Therefore, there is a need for adult learners to take full control of their learning direction.

Purpose of the Project

The purposes of this research project were to: (a) explore the processes of self-directed learning and self-regulation in young adulthood, and (b) determine how young adults can apply the concepts and principles of self-directed learning and self-regulation in goal setting and goal achievement. The researcher identifies the related adult learning concepts (e.g., self-directed learning and self-directedness, self-regulation and self-regulated learning, experiential learning, dialogue learning, critical reflection, and transformational learning) that will help adult learners to better understand the learning process and how adults learn in varied ways. This research project is delivered in a

PowerPoint presentation format, supported with dialogue activities that will help adult learners to make connections between the content and their own lived experiences.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 1, the Introduction, the researcher emphasized the importance of adult learning and the need for lifelong learning in a complex, pluralistic, and ever-changing world. The researcher advocates that learning is the sole responsibility of the adult learner. In Chapter 2, the Review of Literature, the researcher discusses the myriad and varied ways in which adults learn and focus on the processes that adult learners engage in, in order to set and achieve their goals. Adult learning is examined from a multidimensional perspective, and information is presented to support the importance of self-directedness and self-regulation in goal setting and achievement. Due to the scope and complexity of this review, it is crucial to note that the primary purpose of this research project is to understand the processes that adults engage in while they take control of their learning direction.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purposes of this research project were to: (a) explore the processes that young adults engage in as they complete self-directed learning activities and (b) determine how young adults self-regulate, in order to achieve their goals. The central premise of self-directed learning is the development of learner autonomy (Armstrong, 2010). Often, self-directed learning is associated with setting goals, selecting learning materials, and managing time. Hence, self-directed learners are responsible for most of the detailed decision-making about learning, including choices about what and how to learn and at what pace the learning will occur (Tough, 1979, as cited in van Eekelen, Boshuizen, & Vermunt, 2005).

Adults are suppose to actively self-regulate their learning processes by mastery of lifelong learning skills (van Eekelen et al., 2005). Zimmerman (2002, as cited in van Eekelen et al.) identified eight skills, which are important for the process of self-regulation:

1. setting specific proximal goals for oneself,
2. adopting powerful strategies for attaining these goals,
3. monitoring one's performance,
4. restructuring one's learning environment to make it compatible with one's goals,
5. managing one's time effectively,
6. self-evaluating one's methods,
7. attributing results to causation, and
8. adapting future methods. (p. 451)

Throughout the process of self-regulation, all eight skills are not necessarily used all of the time.

<div align="center">Adult Learning</div>

In adult education, it is the responsibility of the learner to direct his or her own learning and be able to specify: (a) what would be learned, (b) how it would be learned, and (c) what would be an appropriate indication of learning (Wilson & Hayes, 2000). According to Brockett and Hiemstra (1991, as quoted in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), "only by accepting responsibility for one's own learning is it possible to take a proactive approach to the learning process" (p. 107). Fenwick (2003) cited Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) and defined learning as "a process through which one becomes capable of more sophisticated, more flexible, more creative action" (p. 38).

Learning is the human act of making meaning from experience (Fenwick, 2003). In adult education and learning, the experiences of adult learners are acknowledged, and the purpose is to develop active, self-aware adult learners who have the capacity and freedom to frame their own purposes. According to Fenwick:

> Learning happens only when there is reflective thought and internal processing of that experience by the learner, in a way that actively makes sense of the experience, that links the experience to previous learning, and that transforms the learner's previous understanding in a way. (p. 47)

There are critical connections between experience and learning (Tennant & Pogson, 2002). Experience generates developmental changes in adult learners; it enables adult learners to better understand themselves as well as the link between personal development and social development (Fenwick). Illeris (2002, as cited in Merriam et al.,

2007) postulated that the process of learning begins with one of the following five

stimuli.

1. Perception – this is where the surrounding world comes to the individual as a totally unmediated sense impression.
2. Transmission – this occurs wherein someone else passes on information or transmits specific sense impressions or messages.
3. Experience – this can include both perception and transmission.
4. Imitation – occurs when the learner attempts to imitate or model another's actions.
5. Activity or Participation – this is when the learner is engaged in a goal-directed activity, sometimes participating with others as in a community of practice. (pp. 97-98)

All of these characteristics of the learning process can be present in a single learning

event within a specific situation.

Learning is the absolute responsibility of the adult learner (Merriam & Brockett,

2007). Adult learners can exert more control over their lives and the environment when

they are able to equip themselves with the educational tools to address the existing social

conditions in the society. According to Roberson and Merriam (2005), "learning is

actually a response to one's situation in life and that the particular state in one's life

becomes the context for learning" (p. 270). Adult learners should neither shrink from the

new nor wither in self-doubt when they determine new learning directions (Ricard, 2008).

<center>Self-Directed Learning and Self-Directedness</center>

In an ever-changing world, adult learners are forced to engage in self-directed

learning activities that will promote both personal and professional development

(Caffarella, 2001). Such change is required for adults to deal with the myriad challenges

at home, at work, and in their communities. Knowles (1975, as cited in Merriam &

Brockett, 2007) defined self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the

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lead 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" (p. 138). Guglielmino (1977, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) identified the psychological qualities involved in the readiness for self-directed learning as: (a) initiative, independence, and persistence in learning; (b) acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning; (c) self-discipline; (d) a high degree of curiosity; (e) a strong ability to learn independently; (f) enjoyment of learning; (g) a tendency to be goal oriented; and (h) a tendency to view problems as challenges rather than obstacles. Self-directed learning plays a vital role in adult education, learning, and development.

Collins (2006) stated that "there is probably no learning experience as powerful as when learners decide to learn for themselves" (p. 228). Learners have a strong desire to control and individualize their learning experiences in order to accommodate their needs and interests (Armstrong, 2010). "Self-directed learning will have a high payoff in a society that demands that people become active thinkers and learners" (Collins, p. 228). Self-directed learning places greater emphasis on the learning process rather than the learning outcome. Thus, self-directed learning must include acceptance of responsibility to construct meaning and monitor one's own learning process, with an emphasis on personal action and responsibility. The self-directed process enables learners to think critically and to become reflective in their learning (Armstrong).

The Goals of Self-Directed Learning and the Self-Directed Learner

Self-directed learning is central to the success of the adult learner's progress and development in his or her motives for learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Self-directed learning occurs outside of formal institutional settings, and it is embedded in people's everyday lives; it involves all the tasks or activities that individuals engage themselves in on a daily basis, outside of schools, colleges, and universities. Hersey and Blanchard (1988b, as cited in Merriam et al.) defined self-directed learners as "learners of high self-direction who are both willing and able to plan, execute, and evaluate their own learning with or without the help of an expert" (p. 117). A self-directed person exhibits the qualities of moral, emotional, and intellectual autonomy. Adult learners must be ready and willing to learn in order to acquire autonomy and empowerment. Success in any task is based on a combination of preparation of one's self and the ability to seize the appropriate opportunities, in order to excel. Self-directed learning is the way most adults acquire new knowledge, ideas, skills, attitudes, and experiences.

Tough (1967, 1971; both cited in Merriam et al., 2007) postulated that highly deliberate efforts to learn take place in the lives of every individual. Self-directed learning is an informal learning process in which adults take the primary initiative for planning, executing, and evaluating their own learning experiences. Knowles (1970, 1980; Tough, 1971; both cited in Merriam et al.) advocated that learners become increasingly self-directed as they mature and gather more experience. The more education people have, the more they will want to learn (Wlodkowski, 2008). Self-directedness is a personal attribute or characteristic of the adult learner. Being self-

directed in one's learning is a natural part of adult life, and it involves a set of personal

attributes and specific skills.

Self-directed learning is focused on three main goals (Merriam et al., 2007).

1.   To enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning.
2.   To foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning.
3.   To promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of
       self-directed learning. (p. 107)

Self-directed learning epitomizes personal growth and development, which ultimately

leads to enlightenment, satisfaction, and well-derived intrinsic values. Self-directed

learning incorporates a humanistic philosophy in which it is assumed that: (a) human

nature is good, (b) individuals possess unlimited potential for growth, (c) it is only when

one accepts responsibility for one's own learning that it is possible to take a proactive

approach to the learning process, and (d) learning promotes personal autonomy and free

will to make choices (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, as cited in Merriam et al.).

Self-Directed Learning and Critical Reflection

Reflection is a cognitive process (Merriam et al., 2007). Hence, to be a self-

directed learner is to be a critical thinker (Armstrong, 2010). One can think about an

experience and muse, review, and so forth; but to reflect critically, one must also examine

the underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect how sense can be made of the

experience. Mezirow (1985) and Brookfield (1985, 1986; both cited in Merriam et al.)

emphasized the need for adult learners to reflect critically, in order to understand the

historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for their needs, wants, and interests. This

self-knowledge is a prerequisite for autonomy in self-directed learning. People actively

construct their own knowledge and learn through their interaction with and support from

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other people and objects in the world (Bruning & Others, 2004, as cited in Wlodkowski, 2008). The outcome of reflection is to gain deeper insight that lead to action.

Self-Directed Learning and Context

Brookfield (1991) stated that "self-directed learning in adulthood is a matter of learning how to change our perspectives, shift our paradigms, and replace one way of interpreting the world by another" (p. 19). Self-directed learning involves: (a) self-management, (b) self-monitoring, (c) self-motivation, and (d) abundant use of meta-cognitive processes. Giddens (1991, as cited in Hake, 1999) argued that the application of knowledge to social life is the most important aspect in the organization and transformation of societies. Collins (1996, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) emphasized that involvement in participatory learning and social action should foster democratic and open dialogue about self-directed learning and enable adult learners to engage in transactional dialogue in which there are exchanges of: (a) ideas, (b) views, (c) beliefs, (d) experiences, (e) interpretations, (f) expectations, and (g) criticism. The presence of self-directed learning empowers adults to create the opportunities that will improve their social conditions (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). The ability to self-direct one's learning is an empowerment tool that enables mastery over an adult's life and his or her environment. According to Spear and Mocker (1984, as cited in Roberson & Merriam, 2005), one's environment can influence an individual to organize his or her self-directed learning activities.

The Process of Self-Directed Learning

According to Roberson and Merriam (2005), "a loosely organized series of events constitute the process of self-directed learning," (p. 275) as depicted in Figure 1. The self-directed learning process begins with an incentive to learn that can be internal or external. An internal incentive is usually something that the person wants to learn on his or her own; an external incentive is something that others ask the person to do. Interest (i.e., motivation) is crucial for the process of self-directed learning to continue. Accessing resources (i.e., materials and people) with systematic attention will help individuals to prioritize their learning activities. Adjustments in learning help individuals to deal with erratic difficulties and maneuver around obstacles. As individuals engage in varied self-directed learning activities, some activities will end (i.e., resolution), whereas others remain ongoing. The motivation and intensity to learn are often enhanced during the self-directed learning process through a catalyst. Roberson and Merriam defined a catalyst as any life event that speeds the self-directed learning process or motivates individuals to learn on a deeper level. In reality, there are multiple learning projects occurring at the same time while each individual engages in the self-directed learning process.

Figure 1. The process of self-directed learning.
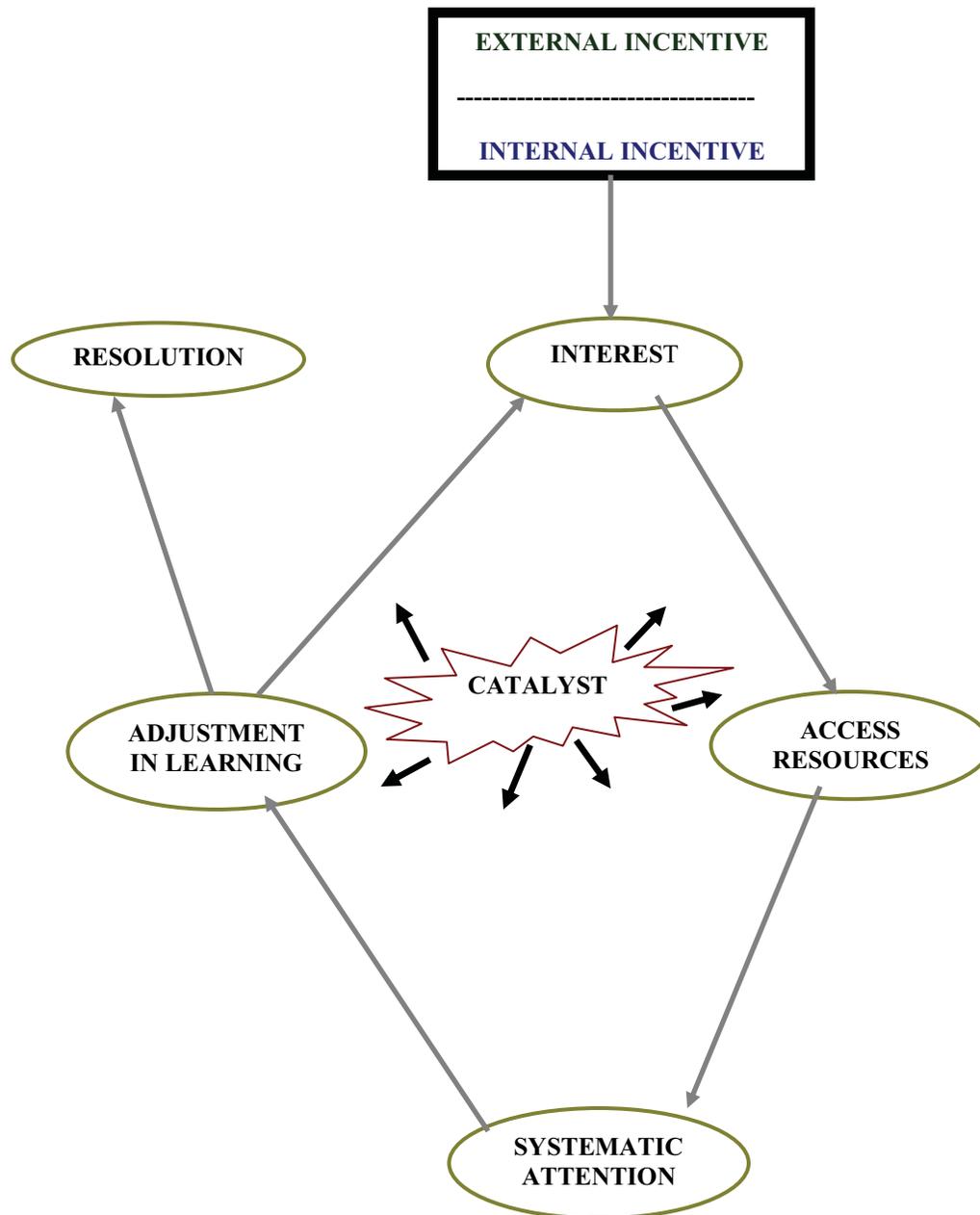
Self-Directed Learning and Biographical Competence

Self-directed learning and personal autonomy enable adults to develop the capacity to think rationally, reflect, analyze evidence, and make judgments (Merriam et al., 2007). Hake (1999) posited that "Individuals are responsible for formulating their own identities and life courses" (p. 7). Alheit (1992, as cited in Hake) argued that individuals require biographical skills in order to formulate their own identities and life courses. Biographical competence is the capacity to "learn to live a life" (p. 9) in changing and uncertain times. Adults use biographical skills to cope with the risks associated with transitions and critical life events in order to ensure individual survival in society. The presence of life events and transitions precipitates the most potent learning experiences. Hake asserted that individuals require biographical competencies in order to manage their learning and engagement in self-directed learning. Learning is a personal process since, ultimately, adult learners must take ownership of what they should learn, when they should learn, and how they should learn. Mezirow (2000, as cited in Merriam et al.) defined learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 5).

Self-Regulation and Self-Regulated Learning

The fundamental adaptive challenge of adults is to adjust to the major changes in the neurological, physiological, cognitive, emotional, somatic, social, cultural, and behavioral characteristics of adulthood (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). Adults are able to adapt to these changes through the use of self-regulation. According to Shonkoff and

Phillips (2000, as cited in Gestsdottir & Lerner), "self-regulation pertains to all aspects of adaptation, as people alter their behaviors, as well as thoughts, attention, and emotions, to react to different contexts and modulate their reactions to their contexts" (p. 204). Gestsdottir and Lerner found that the ability of adults to adjust to varied environments enabled them to influence their own developmental trajectory, by the simultaneous selection, creation, and change of the context. Throughout young adulthood (i.e., ages 18-28 years old), adults come to know themselves by observation of their own functioning and that of others, as well as the interactions between individuals; and the observations and inferences drawn from them may enhance the development of their self-regulatory skills.

According to Gestsdottir and Lerner (2008), there are two types of self-regulation that describe the different features of the individual which contribute to developmental regulation: (a) intentional self-regulation and (b) organismic self-regulation. Self-regulation enables adults to be creators of their own development. Schunk (2008) cited Bandura (1986) and stated that self-regulation is "the process of influencing the external environment by engaging in the functions of self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction" (p. 465). Self-regulation involves the use of individual characteristics to link the individual and the context and constitute the means through which adults contribute to and shape their own development (Gestsdottir & Lerner).

Intentional Self-Regulation

Gestsdottir and Lerner (2008) defined intentional self-regulations as "conceptualized actions that are actively aimed towards harmonizing demands and

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resources in the context with personal goals in order to attain better functioning and to enhance self-development" (p. 204). Intentional self-regulation is characterized by goal directed, conscious behaviors. Thus, assimilation and accommodation play a central role in the activities of intentional self-regulation. Intentional self-regulation is strongly supported by cognitive theory and the contextual contributions of individuals to their development. Changes in the brain and cognitive development directly influence self-monitoring and response inhibition (Gestsdottir & Lerner). Also, self-monitoring and control of executive functions improve as the brain matures through childhood and adolescence (Berger, 2007; Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2008).

Intentional self-regulation helps people to foster their personal development and well being through self-modification (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). Typically, the processes of intentional self-regulation refer to: (a) how people make thoughtful, intentional plans within domains, such as academic or occupational functioning; (b) how people make choices; (c) how they select and utilize strategies; and (d) how they monitor their progress toward given goals.

Organismic Self-Regulation

Gestsdottir and Lerner (2008) defined organismic self-regulations as "broad, consistent attributes of a person that involve biologically based, physiological structures and functions that contribute to the relationship an individual has with the environment" (p. 204). The focus of organismic self-regulation is on unconscious behaviors. However, there is some overlap between intentional and organismic self-regulation. Both intentional self-regulation and organismic self-regulation involve behaviors that may be

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conscious or unconscious (i.e., automated), and they coact to influence a person's interaction with the context. Organismic self-regulation involves activities such as: (a) hypothalamic control of body temperature, (b) circadian rhythms, (c) pubertal timing, and (d) temperament attributes such as threshold of responsivity or quality of mood.

Goal Setting and Goal Achievement

According to Gestsdottir and Lerner (2008), goal setting and goal attainment are crucial for development (i.e., changing a part of a person). Gestsdottir and Lerner cited Demetrious (2000) and stated, "self-regulation involves both individuals' ability to set goals about their own functioning or about the environment and direct their mental and physical functioning so that these goals can be attained" (p. 207). The use of such regulatory processes helps people to: (a) make choices, (b) plan actions that are appropriate to reach their goals, and (c) regulate the execution of their actions. As a person develops through the life span, intentional self-regulation becomes prominent, while organismic self-regulation wanes (Gestsdottir & Lerner). According to Ricard (2008), adult learners may find the acts of goal setting, resource identification, implementation, and evaluation of the learning experiences invigorating, exciting, challenging, or frustrating.

Self-Regulation and Social Context

Human development is shaped by the environment and people's own action (Berger, 2007). Self-regulation operates within a social context that is defined by: (a) parents, (b) schools, (c) public figures, (d) peers, and (e) the larger society (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). Self-regulation is heavily influenced by socialization. According to

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Gestsdottir and Lerner, "socialization refers to how individuals are shaped by people and institutions in the acquisition of the motives, values, and behaviors that allow them to function appropriately in society" (p. 213). Socialization plays an essential role in identity formation during the adolescent and adult period. Through the process of socialization, self-regulation provides individuals with control over the direction of their development, that is, self-directedness.

Gestsdottir and Lerner (2008) stated, "Based on prior interactions with the context and on the history of consequences of his or her own actions, an adolescent forms representations of himself or herself and the context" (p. 214). Mental representations create a foundation for self-understanding, which allows people to discriminate their own world from those of other people and to negotiate their goals and actions with those around them. Mental representations influence the creation of an identity. According to Gestsdottir and Lerner, self-observations and self-evaluations are based on a person's identity. However, the act of self-regulation does not occur without the interaction of the person with the environment.

Metacognition, Self-Regulation, and Self-Regulated Learning

Schunk (2008) cited Flavell (1985) and reported that metacognition is defined as "any knowledge or cognitive activity that takes as its object, or regulates, any aspect of any cognitive enterprise. . . its core meaning is 'cognition about cognition'" (p. 465). Metacognition is the ability to reflect on one's thoughts or think about thinking (Merriam et al., 2007). The focus of metacognition is on how adults encode, process, store, and retrieve information. Self-regulation allows adults to be active participants in their

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learning direction, that is, active seekers and processors of information. The process of self-regulation regulates the flow of information throughout the human system. Schunk stated that "teaching involves others providing instruction and guidance, but for self-regulation to develop, this external influence must be internalized by learners into their self-regulatory systems" (p. 466). Hence, metacognitive strategies include the ability to plan, monitor, regulate, and evaluate.

Dinsmore, Alexander, and Loughlin (2008) wrote: "metacognition deals primarily with reflective abstraction of new or existing cognitive structures. In this sense, metacognition emphasizes learner development over learner–environment interactions" (p. 393). Kaplan (2008) cited Dinsmore et al. and contended that metacognition, self-regulation and self-regulated learning share the underlying notion of "a marriage between self-awareness and intention to act" (p. 478). Also, Kaplan cited Fox and Riconscente (2008) and noted that metacognition and self-regulation are broadly conceptualized "within the broad context of all activities for humans of all ages and points of development," whereas, in comparison, "self-regulated learning is, by most definitions, limited to students in academic contexts" (p. 479).

Kaplan (2008) concluded from the Dinsmore et al. (2008) empirical study that each individual engages in a different type of self-regulation in order to pursue his or her different purposes of engagement in the task at hand. Hence, self-regulation itself is not a unitary construct; there is no one set of cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral strategies that constitute the desirable mode of engagement in every setting and task. There are many types of self-regulated actions that are more or less appropriate

for different tasks, in different domains, in different sociocultural contexts, and for different adults.

<center>Experiential Learning</center>

Merriam et al. (2007) cited Kolb (1984) and postulated that "learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. . . Knowledge is continuously derived and tested out in the experiences of the learner" (p. 27). Adulthood is a time of development and change, which involves both social and personal development. An adult's history (i.e., biography) is the summation of various life altering experiences. According to Tennant and Pogson (2002), experience (e.g., practical intelligence, wisdom, expertise and tacit knowledge) is a central concept in adult learning and development. Experiential learning involves the flow of ongoing meaning making from informal or incidental life experiences. Learning experiences influence adult learners' self-esteem, self-concept, self-confidence and, ultimately, their sense of identity. Experiential learning empowers individuals and influences the transformation of a person's beliefs, assumptions, and actions. According to Mezirow (1990, 1991, 1996; all cited in Fenwick, 2003), people undergo perspective transformation through critical reflection on their experience. "Learning is an active process in the sense that learners are continually trying to understand and make sense of their experiences" (Tennant & Pogson, 2002, p. 150). Experience is a conduit for effective learning, and it allows individuals to create tacit knowledge and practical intelligence. Direct, embodied experience engages individuals mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually in the moment. Hence, people learn from experience.

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Conceptions and Dimensions of Experiential Learning

Based on experiential learning, individuals are able to learn through the repeated

practice of skills in different situations, while they deal with social and political factors

(Fenwick, 2003). Dewey (1938, as cited in Fenwick), a proponent of experiential

learning, asserted that people learn by doing. For learning to occur, Dewey noted that an

experience must include two key dimensions:

1. continuity – the learner's capacity to connect aspects of the new experience to previous experience, and
2. interaction – the learner's ability to actively interact with his or her environment. (p. 7)

Learning from experiences involves reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and

personal transformation. According to Tennant and Pogson (2002), the approach to

learning from experiences involves three tasks:

1. get people to talk about their experiences,
2. analyze those experiences individually or collectively, and
3. identify and act on the implications of what is revealed. (p. 160)

Fenwick (2003) identified five prominent conceptions of experiential learning:

1. constructivist theory of learning – holds the belief that individuals construct personal knowledge (i.e., meaning-making) by mentally reflecting on concrete lived experience. Individuals continually adapt their interpretations, perceptions and actions through interactions with situations in their environment;
2. situative theory of learning – holds the belief that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection;
3. psychoanalytic theory of learning – focuses upon attuning to unconscious desires and fears;
4. critical cultural theory – concerned with resisting dominant norms of experience; and
5. complexity theories applied to learning – concentrates on exploring ecological relationships between cognition and environment. This view assumes that cognition depends on the kinds of experience that come from

having a body with various sensori-motor capacities embedded in a biological, psychological, cultural context. (pp. 21-22)

In these conceptions of the process of experiential learning, one begins by asking questions about the nature of human experience and learning itself and, often, different conclusions are reached. Everyday human experiences vary dramatically in kind. Fenwick defined the major dimensions or types of experiential learning as:

1. direct embodied experience – an immediate encounter in the here-and-now, planned or unplanned, involving us physically, emotionally, sensually, mentally, and perhaps spiritually;
2. vicarious experience – listening to or reading about the experience of others and imaging ourselves immersed in the encounter;
3. simulated experience – a direct experience planned to be like something real, but controlled within an artificial context;
4. reliving experience – recalling past encounters through introspection or dialogue;
5. collaborative experience – joining others in a shared community of experience whose meaning is constructed together amid conversation and joint action; and
6. introspective experience – non-physical experience such as visualization or meditation or dreaming or reading. (pp. 12-13)

The nature of experience has five essential components: (a) purpose, (b) interpretation, (c) engagement, (d) self, and (e) context (Fenwick, 2003). The approach to learning or accomplishing a task in a given situation is influenced by a person's purpose or intention. "How we interpret an experience will also affect how we recall it, and thus what we learn from it" (Fenwick, p. 15). The role of experience in learning is highly complex. Kolb (1984, as cited in Fenwick) conceptualized that learning from experience requires four different kinds of abilities:

1. concrete experience – an openness and willingness to involve oneself in new experiences;
2. reflective observation – observational and reflective skills, so these new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives;

3. abstract conceptualization – analytical abilities, so integrative ideas and concepts can be created from their observations; and

4. active experimentation – decision-making and problem-solving skills, so these new ideas and concepts can be used in actual practice. (p. 46)

The Actual Process of Experiential Learning

Fenwick (2003) cited Kolb (1984) who postulated that experiential learning is a tension and conflict-filled process, which occurs in a cycle. According to Fenwick, "New knowledge and skills are achieved through confrontation among concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and subsequent active experimentation" (p. 46). Kolb described the experiential learning process in four consecutive stages, as outlined in Figure 2. First, the learner lives through some kind of concrete experience (i.e., direct embodied, simulated, collaborative, etc.). Second, the learner then takes some time for reflective observation on his or her unique experience. Third, the learner uses insights gained through reflective observation to create an abstract conceptualization. Fourth and finally, the learner applies the new learning through active experimentation. The learner continues to apply the new learning to similar situations and then different situations. Ultimately, the learner revises and reshapes the learning based on what happens through active experimentation.

Kolb (1984, as cited in Fenwick, 2003) acknowledged that not all adults acquire new learning from their multitude of life experiences. Fenwick postulated:

Learning happens only when there is reflective thought and internal processing of that experience by the learner, in a way that actively makes sense of the experience, that links the experience to previous learning, and that transforms the learner's previous understandings in some way. (p. 47)

According to Jarvis (2001, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007), there are two types of learning from experiences: (a) non-reflective learning includes remembrance of an

experience and repetition of it, or just follow instructions; and (b) reflective learning

includes planning, monitoring, and reflecting upon lived experiences.

Figure 2. The process of experiential learning.

CONCRETE EXPERIENCE

- The learner lives through some kind of concrete experience:
    - i.   Direct embodied
    - ii. Simulated
    - iii. Vicarious
    - iv. Relived

REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION

- The learner creates meaning of his or her experience through critical reflection
- The learner questions his or her experience:
    - i.   What did I observe?
    - ii. What was I aware of?
    - iii. What does this experience mean to me?
    - iv. How might this experience have been different?

ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION

- The learner uses insights gained through his or her reflective observation to create abstract conceptualization
- The learner asks:
    - i.   What principle seems to be operating here?
    - ii. What general rule-of-thumb have I learned here?
    - iii. What new understanding does this experience reveal about myself, or people, or how things work in particular situations?

ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION

- The learner applies new learning through active experimentation
- The learner asks:
    - i.   What will I do next time?
    - ii. How will I adopt this principle for other contexts?
- The new principle is tested out in similar situations, then in different situations, and the learner continues to revise and reshape the learning based on what happens through experimenting with it.

In Kolb's (1984; as cited in van Eekelen, Boshuizen & Vermunt, 2005) model of experiential learning, it is assumed that the end of a learning process is the beginning of a new learning process. The learner experiences, reflects, conceptualizes, and experiments, and starts experimenting again.

Experiential Learning and Critical Reflection

Experience helps to shape the meanings, perceptions, beliefs, and values in an adult's life (Fenwick, 2003). Adults should be willing and ready to learn from an experience and be able to reflect on their feelings. Through reflection on experiences, adults can examine their beliefs and assumptions and learn procedural knowledge (e.g., how to do things or solve problems) as well as propositional knowledge (i.e., what things mean). Fenwick stated, "experiential learning involves becoming fully aware sensually to one's reality, acutely attuned emotionally, physically and intuitively to interpret all its complexities – a holistic knowledge" (p. 52). Brookfield (1987, as cited in Fenwick) described three stages in the process of critical reflection:

1. identifying the assumptions that underlie our thoughts and actions;
2. scrutinizing the accuracy and validity of these assumptions in terms of how they connect to, or are discrepant with, our experience of reality; and
3. reconstituting these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative. (p. 49)

The use of reflective practice allows an adult to make judgments about complex and murky situations, that is, judgments which are based on experience and prior knowledge. Reflective practice is a deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, to allow for higher level thinking processes (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007).

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According to Fenwick (2003), adults recall and reevaluate their experiences through four processes:

1. association – relating new information to familiar concepts;
2. integration – seeking connection between the new and the old;
3. appropriation – personalizing the new knowledge to make it our own; and
4. validation – determining the authenticity of our new ideas and the feelings of the experience. (p. 53)

The use of critical reflection helps adults to develop a sense of direction for future learning. Through experience, individuals develop an awareness and understanding of why they attach the meanings they do to reality (Fenwick, 2003) through critical reflection on lived experiences. This allows individuals to live meaningful lives with a strong sense of purpose and belonging to a particular social group, or culture. Experience provides the catalyst for learning in reflective practice. As a result, the outcome of reflection is to gain deeper insights that lead to action.

Experiential Learning and Dialogue Learning

Dialogue is closely related to experiential learning (Vella, 2002). Vella (1994, as cited in Merriam & Brockett, 2007) argued that the most effective adult learning is achieved through dialogue. According to MacKeracher (1996, as cited in Fenwick, 2003), some adults learn through relationships while others prefer more autonomous, self-directed modes of experiential learning. All interactions between adults from different communities of practice contribute to the shaping of their experiences, as well as the community to which they belong. The continuing process of dialogue and cooperation between adults allows each adult to affirm his or her experiences, as well as challenge them. Fenwick stated "we dialogue to connect with, learn from, or challenge

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the different experiences and interpretations shared by others" (p. 58). Experiences are

recalled and retold through dialogue.

<div align="center">*Experiential Learning and Context*</div>

Fenwick (2003) reported that adults learn best by "doing" (p. 52) in a particular

environment. Tennant and Pogson (2002) maintained that "learning typically occurs

through active participation in the experience and subsequent analysis of the experience"

(p. 157). Also, Fenwick postulated that people construct mental knowledge structures as

they recall, analyze, reframe, and articulate lived experiences (i.e., life histories).

Learning is strongly linked to elements of context, as specific contexts shape an adult's

experience in different ways. Learning in situ is an embodied experience that depends

upon the milieu. Fenwick stated: "Through reflection on how different contexts

influence our experiential learning, we may make sense of our actions, piece together an

identity, or jolt ourselves into changing certain habitual behaviors and thinking" (p. 55).

Contexts shape the interpretations of the individual's experience.

Fenwick (2003) wrote:

People's experiential learning is textured by their struggles to fit in with or fight
dominant cultural norms; to withstand discrimination, cruel treatment, and
alienation; to create alternate identity models besides the prevalent negative
images ascribed to particular racial, ethnic, or sexual identities; to break free of
stereotyped expectations of their behavior patterns, capabilities, and interests; or
to struggle for basic rights. (p. 61)

According to Fenwick, adults' cultural images, behavioral norms, language, and values

shape what adults believe counts as an experience, how they interpret the experience, and

what knowledge they consider worthy of learning in the experience. Tennant and Pogson

(2002) postulated that "adult development can only have meaning in a given social and

historical context" (p. 5). Hence, self-development involves the capacity of individuals to overcome the prevailing social and economic conditions, which potentially lead to alienation and enslavement, in order to attain autonomy and empowerment. "Learning to be, is indeed a continuous, lifelong pursuit, one in which the self struggles to preserve continuity with past experiences and, simultaneously, to change and develop in order to make sense of current and future experiences" (Tennant & Pogson, p. 10).

<p style="text-align:center">Dialogue Learning</p>

Vella (2002) argued that dialogue is the best process for adult learning. Vella identified 12 basic educational principles and practices for effective adult learning that can be used to begin, nurture, and maintain dialogue.

1. Needs assessment: participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned.
2. Safety in the environment and the process. We create a context for learning. That context can be made safe.
3. Sound relationships between teacher and learner and among learners.
4. Sequence of content and reinforcement.
5. Praxis: action with reflection or learning by doing.
6. Respect for learners as decision makers.
7. Ideas, feelings, and actions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning.
8. Immediacy of the learning.
9. Clear roles and role development.
10. Teamwork and use of small groups.
11. Engagement of the learners in what they are learning.
12. Accountability: How do they know they know? (p. 4)

Adult learners are decision makers of their own learning as they engage in praxis. Praxis is an ongoing process, which involves reflection-on-action. Every educational program or learning plan requires a needs assessment, in order to identify the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and tools needed to complete a given task, as well as to determine the interests of the adult learners. Attention to the three domains of adult learning (e.g., cognitive,

affective, and psychomotor) helps adult educators to recognize and appeal to the experiences of adult learners. Vella stated that "Listening to learners' wants and needs helps shape a program that has immediate usefulness to adults" (p. 5). As an adult learner, it is necessary to feel safe and respected in the learning environment for the process of meaningful learning to occur. According to Vella, the feeling of safety in the learning environment is created when:

1. trust is developed in the competence of the design of the learning tasks,
2. trust is developed in the feasibility and relevance of the learning objectives,
3. adults are allowed to find their voices in small groups,
4. trust is developed in the sequence of learning activities, and
5. the environment is nonjudgmental. (pp. 9-10)

Vella postulated, "Sound relationships for learning involve respect, safety, open communication, listening, and humility" (p. 10). The purpose of dialogue education is to evoke optimal learning with adults. Vella's comparative analysis of dialogue education and quantum learning delineates an interrelationship, which enables adult learners to exhibit six core quantum concepts: (a) relatedness, (b) a holistic perspective, (c) duality, (d) uncertainty, (e) participation, and (f) energy.

English (2000, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) defined dialogue as the interpersonal connections and interchanges among adults that encourage and promote their development. Through dialogue with adult learners, which facilitates the acquisition of critical consciousness, adult learners become conscious of the forces that control their lives, and they become empowered, and empowerment leads to action (Freire, 1970, as cited in Merriam et al.).

Dialogue Learning, Experiential Learning, and Context

The purpose of adult education should be to value and emphasize the experiences of adult learners and engage them in meaningful dialogue about their goals and purposes in their profession (Vella, 2002). Dialogue is important to the transformative process. The use of dialogue helps the learner to expand his or her views. Knowles (1989, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) maintained that "adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and range of experiences" (p. 58) than children and adolescents. Learning through experiences is never an isolated event. The learning outcome(s) of an adult is determined by the nature of the experience and the social context. There is no meaning without a situational context. In their research, Kolb and Kolb (2005, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) made six general propositions about experiential learning.

1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2. Learning is re-learning.
3. Learning requires a resolution of dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world, by moving between opposing modes of reflection and action and feeling and thinking.
4. Learning is holistic.
5. Learning involves interactions between the learner and the environment.
6. Learning is constructivist in nature. (p. 163)

Critical Reflection

The recognition and analysis of assumptions are essential for critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995). A reflection on hidden values and assumptions helps adult learners to critically examine and improve their own particular social conditions. Such reflections will help adult learners to become more cognizant and better able to understand how external forces (i.e., social, cultural, political, economical, historical, ethical, or

philosophical) shape their beliefs, values, assumptions, perspectives, expectations, and actions (Brookfield, 1991; Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

The use of reflection in the process of experience helps adults to develop the capacity to cope with unique, uncertain, and conflicting life situations (Fenwick, 2003). Critical reflection is essential for both personal and professional development (Brookfield, 1995). A person's level of self-directedness increases as he or she reflects upon his or her learning experiences. Critical reflection is the key to learning from experience.

Critical Consciousness

In the practice of critical reflection, critical consciousness can be evoked and elicited (Brookfield, 1995). The ability to be critically conscious requires that adult learners: (a) take responsibility for their own knowledge, (b) interpret their own experiences, and (c) understand how their experiences affect their worldviews. Adult learners develop a better understanding of their thoughts, actions, and circumstances through critical consciousness. Adult learners possess the capability to enhance their abilities to act meaningfully through the process of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

Transformational Learning

Growth and learning occur through the process of transformation, as adult learners assimilate and accommodate their experiences (Merriam et al., 2007). Merriam et al. maintained that transformative or transformational learning is about change, that is, dramatic, fundamental change in the way individuals see themselves and the world in

which they live. It is through experiences that adults can transform. Real change

requires a fundamental shift in ideas (i.e., cognitive), feelings (i.e., affective), and actions

(i.e., psychomotor). Transformational learning occurs when adults encounter an

experience or information that is so incompatible with their existing schemata,

worldview, or perspective that they must reorder their meaning-making structures in

order to accommodate the new material (Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Transformational

learning shapes the adult learner's perspectives and interpretations of his or her

experience. Kegan (2000, as cited in Merriam et al.) postulated that transformational

learning refers to "changing what we do," (p. 48) in order to adapt to changing situations

that affect one's life directly.

   According to Mezirow (2000, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007), transformative

learning occurs when there is a transformation in one's beliefs or attitudes (i.e., a

meaning scheme), or a transformation of one's entire perspective (i.e., habit of mind).

When adults are authentic and open to experiences, transformation can occur. Boyd

(1991, as cited in Merriam et al.) defined transformation as "a fundamental change in

one's personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the

expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration" (p. 459).

Ultimately, transformative learning influences individuals to take action, in order to

change their situations. Through transformative learning, adults are freed from uncritical

acceptance of others' purposes, values, and beliefs. Action is the final component of the

transformative learning process. Adults may take "immediate action, delayed action or

reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action" (Mezirow, 2000, as cited in

Merriam et al., p. 135). Action can range from making a decision about something to engaging in radical political protest.

Transformational Learning and Dialogue Learning

Transformative learning involves discourse, which allows adults to seek out a variety of opinions, arrive at the best possible judgment of an interpretation or belief, and act on the new perspective (Merriam et al., 2007). The use of dialogue can influence adults to expand their worldviews. According to Freire (2000, as cited in Merriam et al.), dialogue plays an integral role in the process of transformation, which can help to raise awareness about adults' life situations.

Transformational Learning and Context

According to Clancey (1997, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007), "Every human thought and action is adapted to the environment, that is, situated, because what people perceive, and how they conceive their activity, and what they physically do develop together" (pp. 1-2). Social contexts profoundly influence transformational learning. Mezirow (1996, 2000; both cited in Merriam et al.) noted that much of what individuals know and believe, their values and feelings, depends on the context of the individuals' biographical, historical, and cultural factors, which shape the nature of the transformative learning.

Transformational Learning and Critical Reflection

Experience and critical reflection are essential for transformative learning. According to Mezirow (2000, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007), adults need to reflect critically and have an understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons

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for their needs, wants, and interests. Such self-knowledge is prerequisite for autonomy in self-directed learning. Adult development is the outcome of transformative learning and critical reflection. Mezirow identified four components of the transformative learning process: (a) experience, (b) critical reflection, (c) reflective discourse, and (d) action. This means that the learner must: (a) critically reflect on his or her experience, (b) speak with others about his or her new worldview in order to gain the best judgment, and (c) act on the new perspective. Critical reflection helps adults to scrutinize and analyze their assumptions, beliefs, and values. Mezirow (1981, as cited in Merriam et al.) argued that "critically reflecting upon our lives, developing an awareness of why we attach meanings that we do to reality, may be a unique characteristic of adult learning" (p. 141). The adult learner's critical self-analysis of the assumptions and beliefs which have structured how his or her experience has been interpreted helps the adult learner to appropriately modify his or her point of view and habits of mind.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2, the Review of Literature, the researcher identified six major adult learning concepts and constructs and emphasized the interrelationship between them. The researcher was able to provide answers to some of the questions regarding adult learning, education, and development: (a) How do adults learn? (b) How do adults actually learn from their experiences? (c) In what ways do adults derive meaning from their experiences? (d) What is the relationship between learning and doing, and between learner and context? (e) How can adults self-regulate? (f) What are the processes that adults use to set and achieve their goals? (g) How can adults obtain enlightenment and

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self-actualization? (h) How can adults change to fit into particular situations? (i) How can adults achieve autonomy and empowerment? (j) How do adults become self-directed?

The researcher focused on the processes that adult learners engage in, in order to set and achieve their goals. The researcher noted the importance of self-directedness and self-regulation in adult learning and development, and explicated how these two concepts enable adult learners to take control of their lives. In Chapter 3, the researcher describes the method used to develop a PowerPoint presentation designed to define and outline a practical process with learning strategies that adult learners can use in goal setting and goal achievement activities.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The purposes of this research project are to identify the concepts of self-directed

learning and self-regulation, and determine how adults can apply these concepts in their

everyday activities, during the young adulthood years (i.e., 18-28 years old). In order to

have a better understanding of the autonomous and self-directed learning processes that

adults engage in, the researcher considered six major adult learning concepts and

constructs: (a) self-directed learning and self-directedness, (b) self-regulation and self-

regulated learning, (c) experiential learning, (d) dialogue learning, (e) critical reflection,

and (f) transformational learning. Given that learning is multifaceted and

multidirectional, there is an interrelationship among these six major adult learning

concepts and constructs. The researcher reviewed the literatures (i.e., adult education

books and research articles) in order to: (a) clearly define the meaning of each of the

above adult learning concepts and constructs and (b) define and outline a practical

process with learning strategies that adult learners can use in goal setting and goal

achievement activities.

Target Audience

The PowerPoint presentation can be used to help young adults (i.e., ages 18-28

years old) to effectively engage in self-directed learning activities (i.e., intentional,

external, or unconscious) for both personal and professional development. The target

audience includes adult learners: (a) seeking more self-direction, (b) seeking

upward mobility in their careers, and (c) seeking more autonomy and empowerment. The researcher has identified myriad learning strategies that each young adult can use as a developmental tool in his or her goal setting and goal achievement initiatives. The goal is to help young adults increase their self-directedness and to self-regulate their life activities. The information in this PowerPoint presentation can inform individuals who participate in: (a) local and community-based institutions that work with young adults, such as those programs offered by museums, libraries, religious and civic organizations, and service clubs; (b) academic administrators; (c) adult educators and practitioners; and (d) facilitators, instructors, and designers of adult education programs.

Organization of the Project

The PowerPoint presentation is designed as a 130-minute personal/professional development seminar for young adults (i.e., ages 18-28 years old) who could be: (a) learners seeking more self-direction, (b) learners seeking upward mobility in their careers, and (c) learners seeking more autonomy and empowerment. The personal/professional development seminar is divided into three phases, in order to accomplish three educational goals. In the first phase, the researcher begins with a 60-minute multimedia PowerPoint presentation that addresses the pressing importance of self-directed learning and self-regulation in an increasingly complex, technological, and ever-changing society. The multimedia PowerPoint presentation should provide adult learners with learning strategies that they can use in their goal setting and goal achievement activities.

In the second phase, the researcher will use 30 minutes to outline and encourage adult learners to use: (a) Roberson and Merriam's (2005) self-directed learning model; (b) Kolb's (1984, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) experiential learning model; (c) Gestsdottir and Lerner's (2008) self-regulation strategies; and (d) Zimmerman's (2002, as cited in van Eekelen et al.) self-regulation skills to attain autonomy, empowerment, and enlightenment. In the third phase, the researcher will use 40 minutes to engage the audience in interactive dialogues, using worksheets with examples of real life experiences to trace the developmental steps of a practical goal setting and goal achievement framework. This dialogue-worksheet exercise will help the audience build links between the content (i.e., self-directed learning, self-regulation, experiential learning, dialogue learning, critical reflection, and transformational learning) and their own unique life experiences.

<center>Preliminary Assessment Plan</center>

Upon completion of the multimedia PowerPoint presentation and worksheets with examples of real life experiences for interactive dialogues, the author arranged to have the PowerPoint presentation slides reviewed by three adult education practitioners. The assessors were asked to review the presentation slides for the validity, generalizability, and applicability of the content. Their feedback is discussed in Chapter 5.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

In Chapter 3, the researcher defined the primary target audience as young adults, between the ages of 18-28 years old, and described the organization of the PowerPoint

presentation and a preliminary assessment plan. In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the

completed PowerPoint presentation.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction

Ricard (2008) observed:

In an era when there is increasing recognition of learning as a lifelong process and persons are living longer, adult learners must consider not only what, why, and when or where they want to learn but how they want that learning to occur in terms of the delivery system or the approach that supports it. (pp. 33-34)

The purpose of this research project was to determine how adult learners self-regulate, in order to set and achieve their goals, and explore the learning processes that emerge as adult learners engage in self-directed learning activities.

This research project includes: (a) a PowerPoint presentation designed to address the crucial importance of self-directed learning and self-regulation in an ever-changing, information society; (b) a dialogue segment that briefly outlines and discusses Roberson and Merriam's (2005) self-directed learning model, Kolb's (1984, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) experiential learning model, Gestsdottir and Lerner's (2008) self-regulation strategies, and Zimmerman's (2002, as cited in van Eekelen et al.) self-regulation skills; and (c) a worksheet exercise which uses examples of real life experiences to illustrate a practical goal setting and goal achievement framework. This research project format is designed to create an interactive education tool which will allow the audience to connect with the content as well as facilitate dialogues for meaningful learning.
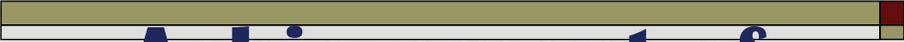
Achievement of Goals Through Self-Directed Learning & Self-Regulation

Learning is the process through which one becomes capable of more sophisticated, more flexible, more creative actions (Fenwick (2003).

Learning is ideally a:

1) self-regulated
2) planned
3) spiral
4) active
5) reflective process
6) involves a behavioral change

THE NEED FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In an ever-changing world with continuous developments, adult learners must equip themselves with the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, and tools to be able to adapt to world changes and develop their abilities to use the various techniques, strategies, and approaches in problem-solving processes (Caffarella, 2001).

- Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.

- Learning is re-learning.

- Learning involves interactions between the learner and the environment.

- Learning is constructivist in nature.

Adult learners should be sufficiently flexible to adapt to uncertain or, at best, ill-defined future circumstances and be able to rise to the challenges to overcome the social and political structures, which place limitations on their capability to reach their full potential.

- There is a need for adult learners to take full control of their learning direction.

- Learning is the absolute responsibility of the adult learner (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

- The developmental capacity and potential of adults are boundless.

Adults learn best when they:

a) feel the need to learn

b) have a sense of responsibility for what, why, and how they learn (Brookfield, 1991).

In adult education, it is the responsibility of the learner to direct his or her own learning and be able to specify:

1. what would be learned
2. how it would be learned
3. what would be an appropriate indication of learning (Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

ADULT LEARNING DIMENSIONS

Learning occurs in varied ways and places, in and throughout the lives of adults:

- Self-Directed Learning and Self-Directedness
- Self-Regulation and Self-Regulated Learning
- Experiential Learning
- Dialogue Learning
- Critical Reflection
- Transformational Learning

- There is no single theory that adequately describes adult learning.

- Each theory describes a particular way in which an adult is capable of learning.

- Learning is the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action (Mezirow, 2000).

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING & SELF-DIRECTEDNESS

□ In an ever-changing world, adult learners are forced to engage in self-directed learning activities that will promote both personal and profession development (Caffarella, 2001).

□ Self-directed learning occurs outside of formal institutional settings, and it is embedded in people's everyday lives; it involves all the tasks or activities that individuals engage themselves in on a daily basis, outside of schools, colleges, and universities.

□ Self-directed learning is the process in which individuals take the lead 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 (Knowles, 1975).

- Self-directed learning influences the development of learner autonomy (Armstrong, 2010).

- Adult learners must be ready and willing to learn in order to acquire autonomy and empowerment.

- Self-directed learning places greater emphasis on the learning process rather than the learning outcome.

- The self-directed process enables learners to think critically and to become reflective in their learning (Armstrong).

- Self-directed learning enables adults to develop the capacity to think rationally, reflect, analyze evidence, and make judgments (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

□ Learners have a strong desire to control and individualize their learning experiences in order to accommodate their needs and interests (Armstrong, 2010).

□ Self-directed learning is an informal learning process in which adults take the primary initiative for planning, executing, and evaluating their own learning experiences.

Self-directed learning involves:

a) self-management,
b) self-monitoring,
c) self-motivation, and
d) abundant use of meta-cognitive processes.

SELF–REGULATION & SELF–REGULATED LEARNING

- The fundamental adaptive challenge of adults is to adjust to the major changes in the neurological, physiological, cognitive, emotional, somatic, social, cultural, and behavioral characteristics of adulthood (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008).

- Adults are able to adapt to these changes through the use of self-regulation.

- Self-regulation pertains to all aspects of adaptation, as people alter their behaviors, as well as thoughts, attention, and emotions, to react to different contexts and modulate their reactions to their contexts (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

- Adult learners must be able to self-regulate, in order to attain enlightenment and self-actualization.

□ Self-regulation enables adults to be creators of their own development.

□ Self-regulation helps people to foster their personal development and well being through self-modification, self-monitoring, self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction

Zimmerman (2002) identified eight skills, which are important for the process of self-regulation:

1. setting specific proximal goals for oneself,
2. adopting powerful strategies for attaining these goals,
3. monitoring one's performance,
4. restructuring one's learning environment to make it compatible with one's goals,
5. managing one's time effectively,
6. self-evaluating one's methods,
7. attributing results to causation, and
8. adapting future methods.

- Throughout the process of self-regulation, all eight skills are not necessarily used all of the time.

- The ability to self-direct one's learning is an empowerment tool that enables mastery over an adult's life and his or her environment.

- One's environment can influence an individual to organize his or her self-directed learning activities (Spear & Mocker, 1984).

- Goal setting and goal attainment are crucial for development (i.e., changing a part of a person).

- Human development is shaped by the environment and people's own action (Berger, 2007).

- Self-regulation involves both individuals' ability to set goals about their own functioning or about the environment and direct their mental and physical functioning so that these goals can be attained (Demetrious, 2000).

Metacognition

- Metacognition is the ability to reflect on one's thoughts or think about thinking (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

- Metacognition deals primarily with reflective abstraction of new or existing cognitive structures (Dinsmore, Alexander, & Loughlin, 2008).

- Metacognitive strategies include the ability to plan, monitor, regulate, and evaluate.

- Self-regulation allows adults to be active participants in their learning direction, that is, active seekers and processors of information.

- Self-regulated learning involves planned, goal-directed, active, intentional learning activities.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- Learning is the human act of making meaning from experience (Fenwick, 2003).

- Experience generates developmental changes in adult learners; it enables adult learners to better understand themselves as well as the link between personal development and social development (Fenwick, 2003).

- Learning happens only when there is reflective thought and internal processing of that experience by the learner, in a way that actively makes sense of the experience, that links the experience to previous learning, and that transforms the learner's previous understandings in some way (Fenwick, 2003).

- Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience (Kolb, 1984).

- Experiential learning involves the flow of ongoing meaning making from informal or incidental life experiences.

□ Experiential learning empowers individuals and influences the transformation of a person's beliefs, assumptions, and actions.

□ People undergo perspective transformation through critical reflection on their experience (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1996).

□ Learning from experiences involves reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and personal transformation.

□ Learning is an active process in the sense that learners are continually trying to understand and make sense of their experiences (Tennant & Pogson, 2002).

□ People learn by doing (Dewey, 1938).

□ Experience allows individuals to create tacit knowledge and practical intelligence.

Types of Experiential Learning

- Direct embodied experience
- Vicarious experience
- Simulated experience
- Reliving experience
- Collaborative experience
- Introspective experience

The Actual Process of Experiential Learning

- New knowledge and skills are achieved through confrontation among concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and subsequent active experimentation (Fenwick, 2003).

- Kolb describes the experiential learning process in four consecutive stages:
1) the learner lives through some kind of concrete experience (i.e., direct embodied, simulated, collaborative, etc.),
2) the learner then takes some time for reflective observation on his or her unique experience.
3) the learner uses insights gained through reflective observation to create an abstract conceptualization.
4) the learner applies the new learning through active experimentation.

The Actual Process of Experiential Learning (continues)

- The learner continues to apply the new learning to similar situations and then different situations.

- Ultimately, the learner revises and reshapes the learning based on what happens through active experimentation.

□ Experience helps to shape the meanings, perceptions, beliefs, and values in an adult's life (Fenwick, 2003).

□ Through reflection on experiences, adults can examine their beliefs and assumptions and learn procedural knowledge (e.g., how to do things or solve problems) as well as propositional knowledge (i.e., what things mean).

□ Experiential learning involves becoming fully aware sensually to one's reality, acutely attuned emotionally, physically and intuitively to interpret all its complexities – a holistic knowledge (Fenwick, 2003).

- The use of reflective practice allows an adult to make judgments about complex and murky situations, that is, judgments which are based on experience and prior knowledge.

The nature of experience has five essential components:

1) purpose,
2) interpretation,
3) engagement,
4) self, and
5) Context.

- Learning is strongly linked to elements of context, as specific contexts shape an adult's experience in different ways.

- Contexts shape the interpretations of the individual's experience.

- Adult learning outcomes are determined by the nature of the experience and the social context.

- There is no meaning without a situational context.

DIALOGUE LEARNING

- Dialogue is the best process for adult learning (Vella, 2002).

- The purpose of dialogue education is to evoke optimal learning with adults.

- Dialogue is the interpersonal connections and interchanges among adults that encourage and promote their development (English, 2000).

- Dialogue facilitates the acquisition of critical consciousness.

□ Involvement in participatory learning and social action can foster open dialogue about self-directed learning and enable adult learners to engage in transactional dialogue in which there are exchanges of:

o ideas
o views
o beliefs
o experiences
o interpretations
o expectations
o criticism

□ Learning can only occur – ultimately – under the internal control of the learner (Oosterheert & Vermunt, 2003).

CRITICAL REFLECTION

- Reflection is a cognitive process (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

- Hence, to be a self-directed learner is to be a critical thinker (Armstrong, 2010).

- To reflect critically, one must examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that affect how sense can be made of the experience.

- Adult learners reflect critically, in order to understand the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for their needs, wants, and interests.

- People actively construct their own knowledge and learn through their interaction with and support from other people and objects in the world (Wlodkowski, 2008).

- The outcome of reflection is to gain deeper insight that lead to action.

- The use of critical reflection helps adults to develop a sense of direction for future learning.

- Through experience, individuals develop an awareness and understanding of why they attach the meanings they do to reality through critical reflection on lived experiences (Fenwick, 2003).

- The recognition and analysis of assumptions is key to critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995).

- A reflection on hidden values and assumptions helps adult learners to critically examine and improve their own particular social conditions.

- Such reflections will help adult learners to become more cognizant and better able to understand how external forces (i.e., social, cultural, political, economical, historical, ethical, or philosophical) shape their beliefs, values, assumptions, perspectives, expectations, and actions (Brookfield, 1991; Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

- The use of reflection in the process of experience helps adults to develop the capacity to cope with unique, uncertain, and conflicting life situations (Fenwick, 2003).

- Critical reflection is essential for both personal and professional development (Brookfield, 1995).

- Critical reflection is the key to learning from experience.

- Adult learners possess the capability to enhance their abilities to act meaningfully through the process of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

☐ Growth and learning occur through the process of transformation, as adult learners assimilate and accommodate their experiences (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

☐ It is through experiences that adults can transform.

☐ Real change requires a fundamental shift in ideas (i.e., cognitive), feelings (i.e., affective), and actions (i.e., psychomotor).

☐ Transformational learning occurs when adults encounter an experience or information that is so incompatible with their existing schemata, worldview, or perspective that they must reorder their meaning-making structures in order to accommodate the new material (Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

☐ Transformational learning shapes the adult learner's perspectives and interpretations of his or her experience.

- Transformational learning refers to "changing what we do," in order to adapt to changing situations that affect one's life directly (Kegan, 2000).

- Transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in one's beliefs or attitudes (i.e., a meaning scheme), or a transformation of one's entire perspective (i.e., habit of mind). (Mezirow, 2000.

- Ultimately, transformative learning influences individuals to take action, in order to change their situations.

Learning is a personal process since, ultimately, adult learners must take ownership of what they should learn, when they should learn, and how they should learn.

- [ ] Transformative learning involves discourse, which allows adults to seek out a variety of opinions, arrive at the best possible judgment of an interpretation or belief, and act on the new perspective (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

- [ ] The use of dialogue can influence adults to expand their worldviews.

- [ ] Dialogue plays an integral role in the process of transformation, which can help to raise awareness about adults' life situations (Freire, 2000).

- Much of what individuals know and believe, their values and feelings, depends on the context of the individuals' biographical, historical, and cultural factors, which shape the nature of the transformative learning (Mezirow, 1996, 2000).

- Experience and critical reflection are essential for transformative learning.

Components of the Transformative Learning Process

a) Experience
b) Critical reflection
c) Reflective discourse
d) Action

(Mezirow, 2000).

This means that the learner must:

☐   critically reflect on his or her experience,

☐   speak with others about his or her new worldview in order to gain the best judgment, and

☐   act on the new perspective.

□ TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LEARNING
   DIRECTION

□ An unexamined life is not worth having

□ Success in any task is based on a combination
  of preparation of one's self and the ability to
  seize the appropriate opportunities, in order to
  excel.

□ **SUCCESS** = **PREPARATION** +
   OPPORTUNITY

# GOAL SETTING & GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

A practical framework:

1) Identify your goal / Formulate goal & objective

2) Gather information on your goal / Formulate Learning Needs / Locate Appropriate Resources

---

3) Plan-Design-Develop learning strategies or tasks to accomplish goal

4) Implement learning strategies or tasks / Take actions

5) Assess the learning process / Evaluate learning outcomes
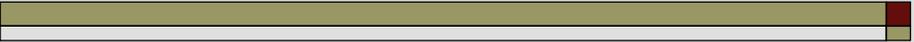
JAH

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher presented the complete PowerPoint presentation that was designed for a personal/professional development seminar for young adults. In this presentation, the researcher focused on three educational goals: (a) a 60-minute multimedia PowerPoint presentation that addresses the pressing importance of self-directed learning and self-regulation in the everyday activities of adults; (b) a 20-minute lecture that briefly outlines a self-directed learning model, an experiential learning model, self-regulation strategies, and self-regulation skills; and (c) a 40-minute group dialogue that engaged the audience in cooperative learning.

In Chapter 5, the discussion, the researcher evaluates the completed research project to determine whether the content meets the original objectives of the research project. The researcher discusses the contribution of the project, the limitations, the preliminary assessment results, and recommendations for further development.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

In this research project, the researcher: (a) explored the learning processes that emerge through self-directed learning and self-regulation activities and (b) determined how young adults self-regulate through experience, dialogue, and critical reflection in order to achieve their goals and transform their lives and social contexts. In this research project, the researcher acknowledged that there are many types of self-regulated actions that are appropriate for different tasks, based on the given social context. As a result, the researcher identified the common elements found in many self-regulated actions and designed a general conceptual framework that young adult learners can use in their goal setting and goal achievement tasks. According to Kaplan (2008), these types of self-regulated actions are inseparable from the purpose of engagement in the task. Kaplan stated that the purpose of engagement constitutes a comprehensive psychological framework within which different self-aspects, objects of regulation, and strategies are integrated to form the type of self-regulated action relevant for engagement in the task.

Contribution of the Project

The researcher felt a special need to present the information contained in this research project, in a practical way, for young adults to increase their level of self-directedness and self-regulation. The researcher strongly believes that, through the processes of self-directed learning and self-regulation, adults take control of their lives and decide what to learn, when to learn, and how to learn. The information in this

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research project can inform local and community-based professionals and counselors who work with young adults, such as those programs offered by museums, libraries, religious and civic organizations, and service clubs as well as academic administrators and adult educators. Most of all, the content of this research project should especially appeal to young adults (i.e., 18 to 28 years old), who are engaged in intentional, as well as spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home, school, workplace, and community.

The researcher found that adults participate in self-directed learning in their everyday tasks and self-regulate in order to accomplish set goals or objectives. Unfortunately, many adults do not recognize their daily tasks as engaging in self-directed learning (i.e., intentional, external, or unconscious). The researcher was able to identify and explore six major adult learning concepts and constructs which help adults to make meaning of their experiences, and he outlines the experiential learning model and the self-directed learning model which helps adult learners to self-regulate. All adults possess varying degrees of self-directedness and self-regulation. As a result, adult educators should function as facilitators in the learning medium and challenge adult learners to reach their highest potential.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

The primary focus of this research project was on self-directed learning and self-regulation in young adulthood (i.e., 18 to 28 years old). Due to insufficient time allotted to complete this research project, the researcher was unable to include more interactive exercises that would encourage members in the target audience to participate in self-

directed activities. A chart or flow diagram that illustrated Roberson and Merriam's (2005) self-directed learning model and Kolb's (1984, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007) experiential learning model might address this limitation. The researcher will consider the use of multiple seminars, in order to adjust to the attention span of adult learners, as well as accommodate the need for active participation and application.

<div align="center">Preliminary Assessment Results</div>

The resulting PowerPoint presentation slides and self-directed learning activities (i.e., the worksheets) were shared with three adult education practitioners. The assessors were enthusiastic about the research product and commented that the content of the research product was well represented. The reactions from the assessors were encouraging.

One assessor expressed that the researcher's holistic approach was thought provoking, excellent, and effective. The assessor stated that she had an intriguing and energizing experience while reviewing the research product, and she remains impressed by the critical thinking that the researcher demonstrated.

A second assessor expressed that the researcher did a wonderful job of identifying a relevant topic, including sound theoretical content, and structuring the presentation to move toward practical application of the learning (i.e., the movement of content from learning and the dimensions of learning in general to self-direction and self-regulation; from experiential learning, dialogue, and critical reflection to transformational learning goal setting and achievement).

A third assessor commented that the research product takes on a practical design that can be useful and the research product was substantive, informative, and well supported. The assessor suggested that the PowerPoint presentation can be tailored to suit various audiences. Another suggestion was that the PowerPoint presentation could be divided into six segments or modules covering the six dimensions of learning, and designed to fit a particular time-frame, one conducive to effective and interactive adult learning.

The researcher was applauded on the movement of the text (e.g., the use of the text "Take control of your learning direction"), the use of color in titles, and variation in the use of fonts. It was suggested that the research product needs to be user friendly in its own way, to stand alone from the research project text. The assessors pointed out that they found few errors, omissions, or corrections in the research product.

<center>Recommendations for Further Development</center>

There is a clear need for further research to determine the specific factors that influence self-directedness and self-regulation at each developmental stage throughout the lifespan. Adult education practitioners will need to determine how individuals develop and use specific self-regulatory skills throughout the lifespan. The researcher acknowledged that research is needed to identify more self-directed learning strategies.

<center>Project Summary</center>

The primary purpose of this research project was to understand the processes that adults engage in while they take control of their learning direction. This research project emphasized the need for lifelong learning in a complex, pluralistic, and ever-changing

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world, and noted the importance of self-direction and self-regulation in adult learning and development. The researcher advocated that learning is the sole responsibility of the adult learner and discussed the myriad and varied ways in which adults learn. This research project focused on the processes that adult learners engage in, as they set and achieve their goals.

A PowerPoint presentation was designed: (a) to educate adult learners on the myriad and varied ways in which they could learn and (b) to define and outline a practical process with learning strategies that adult learners can use in goal setting and goal achievement activities. This PowerPoint presentation can be delivered in a personal/professional development seminar for young adults who are: (a) learners seeking more self-direction, (b) learners seeking upward mobility in their careers, or (c) learners seeking more autonomy and empowerment. The primary target audience of this research project is young adults between the ages of 18-28 years old.

The researcher addressed various research questions that were of key interest to self-directed learning, self-regulation, experiential learning, dialogue learning, critical reflection, and transformational learning. The researcher found that young adults can increase their self-directedness and self-regulate when they become aware of the various self-directed learning strategies and self-regulated skills that are available to them.

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APPENDIX A

Glossary

Glossary

- ❖ Biological Competence

  This is the capacity to "learn to live a life" in changing and uncertain times.

- ❖ Critical Reflection

  This is a reflection on hidden beliefs, values and assumptions, which helps adult learners to critically examine and improve their own particular social conditions.

  This is a reflection that helps adult learners to understand their historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for their needs, wants, and interests.

  It helps adults to scrutinize and analyze their assumptions, beliefs, and values.

  It helps adult learners to develop a sense of direction for future learning.

- ❖ Discourse

  Dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief.

- ❖ Dialogue Learning

  It engages adults in transactional dialogue in which there are exchanges of ideas, views, beliefs, experiences, interpretations, expectations, and criticism.

  Includes the interpersonal connections and interchanges among adult learners that encourage and promote their development.

  It facilitates the acquisition of critical consciousness, which enables adult learners to become conscious of the forces that control their lives.

  It involves connecting with, learning from, or challenging the different experiences and interpretations shared by others.

  It influences adult learners to expand their worldviews.

❖ Experiential Learning

It involves becoming fully aware sensually to one's reality, acutely attuned emotionally, physically and intuitively to interpret all its complexities.

It involves the flow of ongoing meaning making from informal or incidental life experiences.

❖ Intentional Self-Regulation

It involves conceptualized actions that are actively aimed towards harmonizing demands and resources in the context with personal goals in order to attain better functioning and to enhance self-development.

❖ Learning

A process through which one becomes capable of more sophisticated, more flexible, more creative action.

This is the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action.

It is the continuous process grounded in experience, where knowledge is continuously derived and tested out in the experiences of the learner.

It is an active process in the sense that learners are continually trying to understand and make sense of their experiences.

It occurs through active participation in the experience and subsequent analysis of the experience.

❖ Metacognition

This is the ability to reflect on one's thoughts or think about thinking.

It deals primarily with reflective abstraction of new or existing cognitive structures.

❖ Non-reflective Learning

It includes remembrance of an experience and repetition of it, or just follow instructions.

❖ Organismic Self-Regulation

This is the broad, consistent attributes of a person that involve biologically based, physiological structures and functions that contribute to the relationship an individual has with the environment.

❖ Praxis

This is an ongoing process, which involves reflection-on-action.

❖ Procedural Knowledge

It involves how to do things or solve problems.

❖ Propositional Knowledge

It refers to what things mean.

❖ Reflective Learning

It includes planning, monitoring, and reflecting upon lived experiences.

❖ Reflective Practice

This is a deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, to allow for higher level thinking processes.

❖ Self-Directed Learner

A learner of high self-direction who is both willing and able to plan, execute, and evaluate his or her own learning with or without the help of an expert.

❖ Self-Directed Learning

A process in which individuals take the lead 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.

❖ Self-Regulation

It pertains to all aspects of adaptation, as people alter their behaviors, as well as thoughts, attention, and emotions, to react to different contexts and modulate their reactions to their contexts.

This is the process of influencing the external environment by engaging in the functions of self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction.

❖ Socialization

It refers to how individuals are shaped by people and institutions in the acquisition of the motives, values, and behaviors that allow them to function appropriately in society.

❖ Transformative or Transformational Learning

It occurs when adult learners encounter an experience or information that is so incompatible with their existing schemata, worldview, or perspective that they must reorder their meaning-making structures in order to accommodate the new material.

It shapes the adult learner's perspectives and interpretations of his or her experience.

It refers to "changing what we do," in order to adapt to changing situations that affect one's life directly.

It occurs when there is a transformation in one's beliefs or attitudes (i.e., a meaning scheme), or a transformation of one's entire perspective (i.e., habit of mind).

A fundamental change in one's personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration.

It influences individuals to take action, in order to change their situations.

It involves discourse, which allows adults to seek out a variety of opinions, arrive at the best possible judgment of an interpretation or belief, and act on the new perspective.

❖ Young Adult

Any individual who is in the age group between 18 to 28 years old.

APPENDIX B

Self-Directed Learning Activities

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A PRACTICAL GOLD SETTING AND ACHIEVEMENT FRAMEWORK

1. Identify your goal / Formulate goal & objective
2. Gather information on your goal / Formulate Learning Needs / Locate Appropriate Resources
3. Plan-Design-Develop learning strategies or tasks to accomplish goal
4. Implement learning strategies or tasks / Take actions
5. Assess the learning process / Evaluate learning outcomes

Exercise 1

☐ Learning how to drive a car or ride a bike.

Exercise 2

☐ Learning how to create a monthly budget.

Exercise 3

☐ Learning how to utilize the features of a smart phone.