

# Chapter 7

## Transformative Curriculum Design and Program Development: Creating Effective Adult Learning by Leveraging Psychological Capital and Self-Directedness through the Exercise of Human Agency

**Sharon E. Norris**  
Spring Arbor University, USA

### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this chapter is to introduce improvisational self-directed learning as a transformative approach to developing effective adult learning. Improvisational self-directed learning is a method that encourages individuals to leverage their psychological capital and self-directedness through the exercise of human agency. It is common practice to focus on content-related learning objectives while designing educational curriculum and programs. Less routine is a simultaneous focus on the psychological state, human agency, and self-directedness of those involved in the entire process. The type of transformative learning communities necessary for effective 21<sup>st</sup> century adult education require ongoing faculty and student development. This chapter provides a theoretical framework based on human agency, psychological capital, improvisational behavior, and adult learning. The use of improvisation is presented as a technique for leveraging psychological capital, human agency, and self-directedness to create thriving 21<sup>st</sup> century learning communities.*

### INTRODUCTION

Numerous books have been published on the call to rethink the foundations of education (Caldecott, 2012; Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011; Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2010). Some scholars

suggest a return to traditional liberal arts; some administrators propose a break from tradition and underscore the need to educate with a vocational focus. Within the varying perspectives on education, one common theme emerges: the capacity for lifelong learning is a necessary ingredient for

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5872-1.ch007

success in the modern world regardless of occupation or pursuits.

The development of a lifelong learner does not mean the creation of a lifetime student of academia for the purpose of ongoing revenue generation for colleges and universities. Lifelong learning refers to the requisite capacity required for critical participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lifelong learning is not an optional activity that high achievers pursue in order to gain recognition or promotion. Globalization, technological advancements, and rapid modernization force everyone to continually learn and adapt. The way people use their cell phones, take pictures, and pay for groceries at the local supermarket continually change as businesses upgrade with the latest computer-mediated functions. As systems continually change, local citizens going about their domestic lives must continually learn.

The workforce faces similar challenges as organizations continually improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. As a result, employees engage in a continual process of learning and ongoing inquiry (Vaill, 1996). The most successful organizations are those with executive leaders who recognize the value of the lifelong learning capacity of their employees. Matsushita is an organization that manufactures electronic products and brands such as Panasonic. Konosuki Matsushita explained, “We make people first before making products” (Suzaki, 1993, p. 5). Such organizational leaders understand that new opportunities emerge as the workforce learns, grows, and develops. Learning in the modern environment is not a once and done endeavor but rather “a journey full of surprises and moments of epiphany” (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004, pp. 107-108). In order to keep pace with the challenges of the modern work environment, as well as thrive and flourish within the competitive global marketplace, continual lifelong learning is “the only adequate response” (Milic, 2013, p. 168).

In order to keep pace with ongoing changes, individuals and organizations respond by learning.

At the individual level, those people who recognize a need to learn something and set out to do so exhibit the characteristics of *self-directedness* (Confessore, 1992). Self-directed behaviors reflect the human capacity to direct one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Watson & Tharp, 2014). Self-directed individuals are internally motivated to find answers to their nagging questions, explore new possibilities using modern technology, and solve life-altering problems. While in pursuit of their goals, new challenges may be encountered. To overcome these obstacles, self-directed people not only recognize the need to learn something, but they also set out to do so. After recognizing the need to learn, the individuals who accept primary responsibility for their learning will engage in activities to obtain what is needed; these behaviors describe *self-directed learning* (DeBruin & DeBruin, 2011).

Self-directed learners believe they have the power to direct and control the trajectory of their own lives, take responsibility for doing so, engage with others, and anticipate a ripple effect of change within the environments where they live and work. Their self-directed learning takes place within a range of social settings such as formal training programs, higher education, on-the-job, and also informal contexts. Eneau (2008) stated, “taking responsibility for or control of one’s own education results from taking responsibility for oneself and one’s own life” (p. 246). Brookfield (1986) explained that self-directed learning springs from an “internal change of consciousness” (p. 47) and occurs when learners regard knowledge as relative, contextual, and useful for transforming not only themselves but also the social environment. Bandura (1997) posited, “In agentic transactions, people are both producers and products of social systems” (p. 6).

When learners are self-directed, they make “choices about the directions they pursue” (Hiemstra, 1999, p. 13). The consequences that are associated with these choices impact not only the individuals but also their surroundings.

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