

Chapter 2

Describing Self-Directed Learning in Primary Students

ABSTRACT

Chapter 2 discusses research literature on adult SDL which is used to construct a framework of the processes of SDL from which a questionnaire and interview questions were developed. The findings are reported from a pilot study used to trial the use of questions designed to seek perspectives of primary students' SDL from school staff, parents and students. Next, there is a description of the process of using revised questions to collect views about SDL from a larger group of school staff, parents, and students. Following this, there is a summary of the findings from interviews carried out with randomly selected primary students, gifted students and students with learning difficulties. These views describing variables comprising SDL in primary students are combined with the research literature to construct a model of effective SDL in primary students.

INTRODUCTION

Although some descriptions of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) in adults, young children and gifted elementary (primary) students have been discussed, there has not been a specific outline of SDL as it relates to students in regular primary school classrooms to which Australian teachers can refer. This is surprising because current curriculum documents advocate the need to develop successful learners, who are confident and creative individuals, and active and informed

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2613-1.ch002

citizens (ACARA, 2015), and students who understand learning and have strategies for thinking, learning and working collaboratively (DECS, 2010). An important first step in developing students who can learn successfully in a self-directed way is to clarify the concept of SDL as it relates to students in regular primary school classrooms.

CLARIFYING THE PROCESSES OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING IN PRIMARY STUDENTS

Research reported by Knowles, 1975; Candy, 1991; Blumberg, 2000, and Hmelo and Lin, 2000, has provided the framework of SDL processes involved in completing inquiry tasks requiring students to take responsibility for their own learning, as shown in Table 1. Specific researchers whose work has contributed to the development of each statement in each section, are shown in parentheses in the table. The processes described are carried out by a learner before, during and after working on an inquiry task. The ‘after’ activities, such as evaluation of work on the task and SDL, as well as review, can be carried out following inquiry or at any time during the inquiry where students are learning in a self-directed way.

Table 1. A framework of SDL processes

| SDL Process | Processes Carried Out by the Adult Self-Directed Learner and Gifted Students |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Before 1. Recognize what is known about the inquiry task | 1a. Identify what the inquiry task is about (Knowles, 1975). 1b. Construct learning issues involved in the inquiry task (Knowles, 1975). 1c. Recognize the usefulness of prior knowledge which could be used on the task (Hmelo & Lin, 2000; Treffinger, 1975). 1d. Explain learning objectives involved in successful completion of the task (Candy, 1991). |
| 2. Identify the activities involved in completing the learning task | 2a. Identify activities to be undertaken in order to work on the task (Candy, 1991). 2b. Judge which skills and information will be needed in order to be able to work on the task (Candy, 1991). 2c. Distinguish whether the main goal can be achieved with the knowledge possessed (Candy, 1991; Treffinger, 1975). |
| During 3. Planning the steps to take on a learning task | 3a. Have a clear plan of the main steps to be taken in order to work toward achieving the main goal (Knowles, 1975). 3b. Determine time involved in completing the sub-goals of the activity (Blumberg, 2000). 3c. Distinguish strategies or skills which could be used to reach the main goal (Candy, 1991). 3d. Judge whether there is a need for training to be able to use strategies, skills or tools on the sub-goals of the task (Candy, 1991). 3e. Outline the main goals of the work to be completed within a realistic time (Candy, 1991). 3f. Reflect on the main goals involved in completing the task (Candy, 1991; Treffinger, 1975). |

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