

# Adult, Self-Directed Learning – An Introduction

**Critical and Contemporary Issues in Adult Education**

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# Self-Directed Learning: An Important Issue

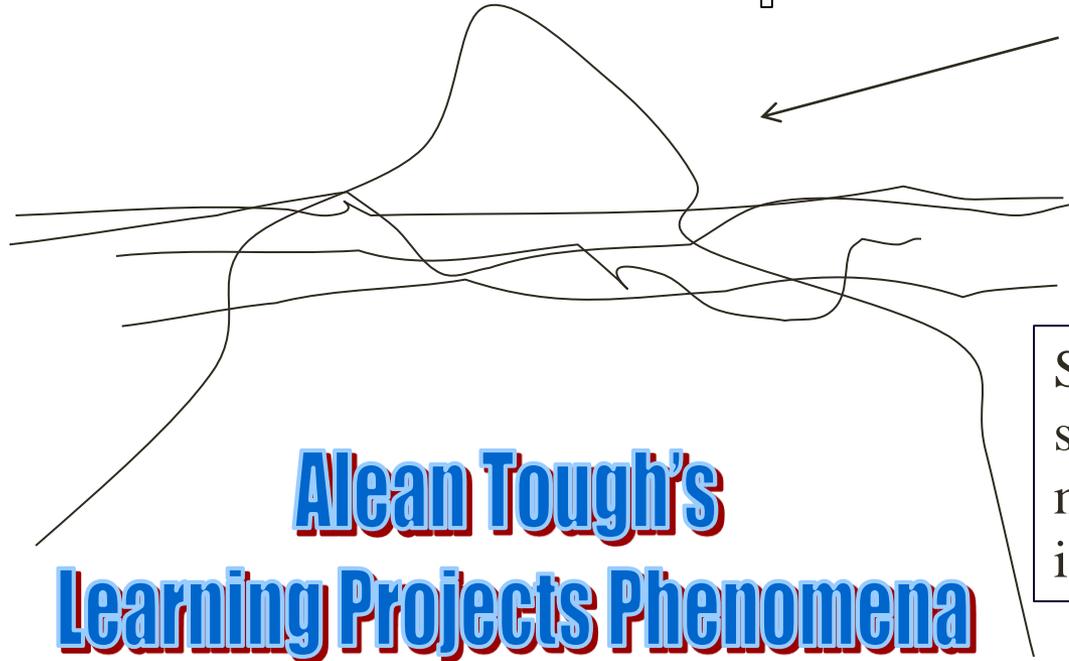
- This may be one of the most important contemporary issues that can be discussed (of course I am biased)
- Examine the International Society for Self-Directed Learning's web site for more ideas:  
<http://www.sdlglobal.com/>
- New knowledge regarding self-directed learning is exploding. Peruse some of the articles in the Society's journals:  
<http://www.sdlglobal.com/journals>

# Old Dogs Can Learn New Tricks!



- Researchers consistently confirm adults can learn throughout life
- Increasing confidence over time that adults have untapped abilities good instruction and learning resources can take advantage of
- Crystallized intelligence (inductive reasoning, accumulated knowledge, experience based) tends to increase with age
- New knowledge of multiple types of intelligence reveals adults can maximize one or more types
- Most adult learning is found to go on outside the classroom and in a self-directed manner

Tip of the Iceberg



See the next  
slide for  
more  
information

For reference material see the following:

<http://roghiemstra.com/iiindex.html>

<http://roghiemstra.com/sdlindex.html>

# Allen Tough's Contributions\*

- Allen Tough's dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966, on *Learning without teachers*, sets stage for his interest in further research
- Tough completes 1970 study of adults; discovers they engage in much more adult learning than ever found before. Prior knowledge about adult learning is only the TIP OF THE ICEBERG - underneath is much learning activity
- *The Adult's Learning Projects* published in 1971, initiates worldwide interest in Learning projects and leads to more than 150 similar studies

[\*Now in the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame and was the 2006 winner of the Malcolm Knowles Memorial Self-Directed Learning award]

# Allen Tough's Contributions (continued)

- One of his major findings was that adults prefer to direct their own learning; initially called self-planned learning, it quickly morphed into self-directed learning
- In 1978 he published a journal article that summarized self-directed and related research results (this summary information follows in a few slides)
- Tough branched into other research areas: intentional changes, future of adult learning, and extraterrestrial intelligence

# The Central Concepts in Tough's Learning Projects Research

## LEARNING PROJECT:

A highly deliberate effort to gain and retain certain definite knowledge and skill, or to change in some other way, that takes at least 7 hours of time during the past year (but the sustained effort must have taken place within a six-month period).

- Method used by Tough to collect data: Structured Interview

- Interview questions asked:

1. What did you intentionally do this past year that resulted in any learning?
2. How much time did you spend?
3. Why did you do it?
4. Are you still active?
5. How pleased are you in having learned the information?
6. Who decided what you would learn and how you would learn?

# Examples of Learning Projects

- Learning how to repair a car
- Becoming involved in a rug quilting group
- Learning how to weatherize a home
- Taking a class on PowerPoint
- Learning more about yourself
- Taking a graduate course
- Learning to be a parent
- Learning how to speak publicly
- Studying about another country before a trip

# Most Salient Finding:

Adults prefer settings where they have the primary responsibility for directing their own accumulation of new knowledge, experiences, and skills

**"ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, I PROMISE YOU YOU'LL  
HAVE A BIGGER SAY IN RUNNING THE FLOCK!"**



Malcolm Knowles writes a book entitled “Self-Directed Learning.” His definition sticks and the movement officially is named and justified.

- Self-Directed Learning: “A process in which individual stake the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material learning resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.” (Knowles, 1975)
- For more information on Malcolm see <http://infed.org/mobi/malcolm-knowles-informal-adult-education-self-direction-and-andragogy/> and his impact on others <http://www.sdlglobal.com/award-winners>

# A Summary of Learning Projects Research

Allen Tough summarized research from many studies in a 1978 journal article:

- 1. Ninety percent of adults conduct at least one major learning effort each year
- 2. The average learner conducts five distinct learning projects in one year
- 3. The average person spends an approximate 100 hours/learning effort -- a total of about 500 hours/year
- 4. Seventy-five percent of the learning projects are motivated by some anticipated use of the knowledge or skill to be obtained
- 5. Approximately seventy-five percent of the learning projects are planned by the learners themselves (it is this latter finding, what Tough initially called self-planned learning, that can be said to have initiated the entire self-directed learning movement)

# Why Self-Directed Learning?

1. People prefer SDL
2. As a result, they tend to be more highly motivated, learn more, and learn better
3. SDL is more in “tune” with natural psychological development
4. More emphasis today on nontraditional and distance forms of education; thus, greater need for SDL skills
5. Technology increases forces new definitions of and approaches to learning (blogs, wikis, podcasts, Blackboard, etc.)
6. Need to view education and learning as a lifelong process
7. Need to recognize learning how to learn on one’s own as the essential human competence and goal

# What has research shown as the main benefits of self-directed learning?

1. Greater transfer of learning from one situation to another.
2. There seems to be increased retention of both knowledge and skills.
3. There is greater interest in continuous learning.
4. There is an improved self-concept for learners.
5. There is an enhanced life satisfaction experienced by learners.
6. Improved patterns for approaching and solving problems are developed.

# More than you may want to know about self-directed learning research!

- Here is a draft of material about self-directed learning. For those of you really interested in this contemporary issue, I have posted it online for your reading pleasure. A forewarning: it is long!!!
- <http://roghiemstra.com/sdlresearch.html>

# The Teaching/Learning Continuum

## From Teacher-Directed

Lecture (didactic)

Drill and practice

Questioning/recitation (socratic)

Discussion

Demonstration/modeling

Guided discovery (facilitative)

Collaborative learning activities

Individualized instruction

Self-assessment/critical reflection

## To Student-Directed Learning

**Note:** The continuum goes from more directed or prescriptive down to more facilitated and eventually self-directed learning

# How to Take More Control of Your Own Learning!!!

- Understand Yourself as an Adult Learner
  - Your Learning Style
  - Your Personality Style
  - Complete the SDLRS (<http://lpasdlrs.com/>)
  - Adult Learning Theory
- Begin to Let Go of Traditional Learning Views
  - Use Facilitation Techniques
  - Learning Contracts
  - Become involved in Self-Directed Teams/Groups
  - Individualized Learning Approaches

# How to Take More Control of Your Own Learning (2)!!!

- Increase Your Technical Learning skills
  - Goal Setting, Planning, and Self-Evaluation
  - Micro Study Skills - Reading Proactively, Journal Writing, & Web/Library Search Skills
- Work to Develop a Sense of Personal Competence
  - Confidence Building and Self-Concept Enhancement; Growing Trust in Your Own Personal Abilities
  - Respect for Available Resources
  - Obtaining and Using Feedback from Others

# Recommendations for Enhancing SDL in Others

- Make many self-directed and non-traditional resources readily available
- Make a variety of materials and study space available in some easily accessible space
- Learners should be able to phone for or access on-line any learning resource whenever it is needed
- Develop self-study materials which can be used in various and flexible ways
- Develop better methods of helping learners identify learning deficiencies and capabilities

# Recommendations for Enhancing SDL in Others (continued)

- Provide guided assistance to each learner as they become more self-directed
- Create a climate which will stimulate continuous, self-directed learning
- Help educational organizations become more aware of the importance of their promotional and support roles
- Above all else, help others believe in themselves as you believe in them

# TOOLS FOR YOU

- Overcoming Resistance to Self-Direction in Adult Learning:
  - <http://roghiemstra.com/ndacesdindex.htm>
- Self-directed Learning -- A Summary:
  - <http://roghiemstra.com/sdlhdbk.html>
- Self-directed Learning Web Page: <http://roghiemstra.com/sdlhome.html>
- Techniques, Tools, and Resources for the Self-Directed learner:
  - <http://roghiemstra.com/sdltools.html>