

Theories / Models of SDL

There have been many different approaches of educational theories and models developed throughout the years, trying to find the best way to study self-directed learning. Some theories / models have focused more on studying the characteristics of the individual, while other have focused on developing “instruments,” trying to measure these characteristics. In this section of my web page, I am going to present a history of educators, their theories / models, and provide informational links for you to find more information about this information (if so desired).

Jean Ellen Jones (1994) writes,

Educational philosopher John Dewey (1916, 1986) made an important observation: Children and adults learn most naturally when they have a problem solving experience with relevant, real-life issues. Critical to that learning experience is skill in purposeful reflection.” Jones continues, “Several decades later, learning theorists under the constructivist banner have come to the same conclusion. By viewing learning as a construction of the individual, not something to be absorbed from teachers and texts, they are experimenting with a ‘portfolio assessment’ approach to education. In this approach, problem solving and student reflection, and their appropriate portrayal or documentation, receive primary attention” (as cited by Hiemstra and Brockett, 1994, p.23).

This, and other research (Houle, 1961; Hiemstra and Brockett, 1994; Merriam & Brockett, 2007) state that portfolio assessment education methods of teaching have generated a great deal of enthusiasm from teachers who have tried them. This translates into more enthusiasm from the students in the classroom, most of the time.

Cyril Houle introduced a different theory to the educational arena. According to Confessore and Confessore (1994),

Houle’s (1961) work is generally credited with having given rise to a flood of scholarly works on participation in adult education. Over the years, some of these studies have focused on characteristics of the individual, such as learning styles and motivation (Boshier, 1971; Burgess, 1971), while others have focused on “attractors” and “deterrents” affecting participation (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980; Cross, 1981; Scanlan and Darkenwald, 1984) (as cited by Hiemstra and Brockett, 1994, p.31).

Even though the actual time frame for how long self-directed learning has been taking place may not be known, it was only since the 1960’s that the learning style and model started to become studied. “Groundwork was laid through the observations of Houle (1961) (University of Chicago, Illinois). He interviewed 22 adult learners and

classified them into three categories based on reasons for participation in learning: (a) goal-oriented, who participate mainly to achieve some end goal; (b) activity-oriented, who participate for social or fellowship reasons; (c) learning-oriented, who perceive of learning as an end in itself. It is this latter group that resembles the self-directed learner identified in subsequent research” (Hiemstra, 1994 & 1998). All of this information was written in Houle’s book, *The Inquiring Mind* (1961), which has been said by many scholars, (Hiemstra & Brockett, 1994; Zsiga, 1998; Fogerson, 2005) to begin the acceleration of the separation of the field of adult education from general education.

Even though this groundbreaking research led to new theories and models in self-directed learning, it may not have been the most important contribution that he made to the field. No, instead, the most important contribution that he made to the field of adult learning may have been his role as a major professor. If he were not to have been a major professor, then the field of adult education may not have the contributions it has today of two gentlemen named, Malcolm Knowles and Allen Tough. Houle served as both of these two men’s professor as they were studying the field during their collegiate adult learning years.

Malcolm Knowles introduced the study of “andragogy” to the field of education. Knowles separated this study from the field of “pedagogy,” stating that adult learners learned in different ways, different methods, than children learned. Zsiga (1998) writes, “Knowles introduced his concept and the word *andragogy* to American educators (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1992; Carlson, 1989; Kruse, n.d.; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Merriam, in press) through the publication of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (Sork, 2000, p.172)(Zsiga, 1998, p.36). Zsiga (1998) continues,

The now well-known principles of adult learning he presented are that as individuals mature, four important changes take place:

1. Their self-concepts move from one of being a dependent personality toward being a *self-directed* human being.
2. They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning.
3. Their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles.
4. Their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness. (Knowles, 1989, pp. 44-45, *emphasis added*). (as cited by Zsiga, 1998, p.36).

To summarize Houle’s contributions to the adult learning field, Houle (1961) established that adults are often self-directed in their

learning and Tough (1971) confirmed the frequency of adults' self-directed learning projects. From their work, efforts to further conceptualize and measure self-directed learning developed vigorously (as cited by Fogerson, 2005).

As we move on to discuss the next several types of models there is one item that is the foundation for all of them. The item is what is known as the **“learning contract.”** A learning contract, similar to self-directed learning itself, is known by several different definitions. However, the most commonly found definition, and the one that will be used when referred to on this website, when referring to a “learning contract” is the definition used by Slusarki (1994) in her research. This definition of a learning contract is: “a means to help learners gain control of the learning event by systematically planning subsequent activities, and to move from dependency to self-direction (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991; Hiemstra and Sisco, 1990; Knowles, 1975, 1990; O’Donnell and Caffarella, 1990)” (as cited by Slusarki, 1994, p.75).

There are three important components, or questions, to ask in a learning contract. These questions are decided / constructed by the learner (with or without assistance from the advising professor). The questions are: a) What do I want to learn; b) How will I learn it; and c) How will my learning be evaluated? These questions *must be* answered, before the learning begins, because without these answers the learner will not have a “guide” to follow in his/her studies.

Slusarki (1994) provides good examples to follow, in order to find out answers to these questions, if you become “stuck.” When trying to determine the “what,” Slusarki suggests, “One technique to help learners take control of what they want to learn is to provide a diagnostic exercise ... so the learner has a guide to follow” (Knowles, 1975) (as cited by Slusarki, 1994, p.75). In order to determine “how” to learn it, Slusarki (1994) recommends, “A brief discussion of where to obtain materials or how to request information from people may be necessary” (p.75). By doing this learner is becoming prepared to find answers for themselves, so that in the future they will become a better self-directed learner. On future projects he/she will know to find information, without needing assistance. Finally, when determining “how well” the learner has learned the research he/she has conducted, the learning contract is used as a learning process.

The next model that I have researched is the *SDLRS* model, developed in 1977, by Lucy M. Guglielmino. Now, a professor in Adult Education at Florida Atlantic University, Dr. Guglielmino developed the *SDLRS* model for her doctoral dissertation at the University of Georgia (Hiemstra & Brockett, 1991). Hiemstra and Brockett (1991) write,

... the *SDLRS* was designed to assess the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to possess skills and attitudes

frequently associated with self-directedness in learning. The instrument was designed through a three-round Delphi survey process involving 14 individuals considered to be experts on self-directed learning. Upon revision, the instrument was administered to 307 persons in Georgia, Vermont, and Canada. From this administration, additional revisions were made and a reliability coefficient of .87 was estimated (p.57-74).

There are eight factors that Dr. Guglielmino (1977) identified from the instrument:

- * Love of learning;
 - * Self-concept as an effective, independent learner;
 - * Tolerance of risk, ambiguity, and complexity in learning;
 - * Creativity;
 - * View of learning as a lifelong, beneficial process;
 - * Initiative in learning;
 - * Self-understanding; and
 - * Acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning.
- (as cited by Hiemstra and Brockett, 1991).

This model was cautioned to being used by the creator herself (1977), because of the factor structure. However, studies other than Guglielmino's have proven the model valid. Studies such as the one performed by Torrance and Mourad (1978).

... this study provided support for the construct validity of the instrument. Forty-one graduate students enrolled in a course on creative thinking completed the SDLRS and eight other instruments that produced 11 measures. Significant positive correlations were found between self-directed learning readiness and the following: three measures of originality, the ability to develop analogies in the description of photographs, creative personality, creative achievements, and right hemisphere style of learning. A significant negative correlation was found between SDLRS scores and the left hemisphere style of learning. The author thus concluded that a link exists between creativity and the tendency toward self-directedness. (p.1170) (as cited by Hiemstra and Brockett, 1991).

These positive results, by themselves, produce strong enough evidence to support the "tests/research." However, with the negative results having a strong correlation as well, this supports the research even further, which almost assuredly proves that the researchers beliefs are correct.

The SDLRS is a great tool in that it can be used both as a quantitative and a qualitative measuring tool. When using the SDLRS as a qualitative measure, the scale is used to measure / explore relationships between self-directed learning and other variables. Thus far, the research

that I have presented has emphasized the SDLRS as a tool used for research in a quantitative, more specifically, an analytical measure. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) report:

At present, the SDLRS has been used in two major ways. First, it has been utilized to explore relationships between self-directed readiness and other personological variables through experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational research designs. Second, it has been used as a diagnostic tool for assessing learners' perceptions of readiness for self-directed learning (p.56).

According to Fogerson (2005), numerous research studies have been performed on the SDLRS, employing the scale in one of two ways: "(a) as an instrument to explore relationships between self-directed learning and other variables; and (b) as a diagnostic tool to assess learners' readiness for self-directed learning" (p.48). By performing the research studies as an instrument to explore the relationships, the SDLRS is being used more as a "qualitative" tool, than a "quantitative" tool.

Another example when the SDLRS would be used as a qualitative tool, instead of a quantitative tool, would be if research were to be performed on the standard of living of older adults, living in long-term healthcare facilities today. Although quantitative research could also be taken in this same research, better results would be seen from qualitative research. This is because qualitative research will display their feelings, emotions, etc. (This example given is given if the people's concerns in the long-term healthcare facilities interest are the main priority, not the healthcare facility itself.) According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982) participant observation, case study, and in-depth interviewing is used to gather this data. The focus is on the importance of the "... meaning that participants attach to their experiences" (as cited by Hiemstra and Brockett, 1991, pp. 83-91).

Jack Mezirow also introduced a theory of self-directed learning in the late 1970s, entitled *Transformation Theory*. Hiemstra and Brockett (1991) write,

"In the late 1970s, Mezirow (1978) presented his notion of 'perspective transformation' to the literature of adult education. This concept, which had come out of several years of conceptual work (e.g., Mezirow, 1975) is based on the idea that in adult development an essential kind of learning involves 'how we are caught up in our own history and are reliving it' (1978, p.101)."

(p. 129-130).

From this theory one may be puzzled how the *Transformation Theory* is related to “self-directed learning.” At the time that Mezirow published the theory others asked Mezirow the same question. His suggestion (1981) is that by, “Enhancing the learner’s ability for self-direction in learning as a foundation for a distinctive philosophy, adult education has breadth and power. It represents the mode of learning characteristics of adulthood” (p.21).

Referring back to the SDLRS theory, there have been critics to this theory, for various reasons, since its inception. Fogerson (2005) writes of several doctoral dissertations using the SDLRS at the University of Tennessee (Canipe, 2001; Chuprina, 2001; Cox, 2002; Nelson, 2000; Owen, 1996; Robinson, 2003; Wood, 1994) and of the International Self-Directed Learning Symposium reporting on some research utilizing the SDLRS (Fogerson, 2005, p.50). It is because of these different methods that cause adult learning expert, Brockett, to believe that, “... the instrument is less effective in measuring self-directed readiness in adults with lower levels of formal education” (Brockett, 1985b; as cited by Fogerson, 2005, p.50).

Brockett is not the sole critic of the SDLRS theory. Fellow adult learning theorist, Brookfield, began to contribute his ideas about self-direction to the North American adult education literature, the term “self-directed learning” started to appear in his writing. In using this term, Brookfield, (1984c) noted the need to recognize differences between “learning” and “education.” There is a very important difference between the two, when discussing education.

Brookfield (1984c) wrote,

... that learning has been used alternately to describe “an internal change in consciousness... an alteration in the state of the central nervous system” as well as “a range of activities... equivalent to the act of learning” (p.61). In this view, the former is used interchangeably with learning while the latter is used in a way similar to education (p.61).

This theory of Brookfield’s has similarities to the concept of Knowles’ concept of “andragogy.” The most striking similarity noted is the “alteration in the state...” mentioned. This can be compared to the state of which Knowles states the fact that there has to be two, separate learning fields. The first learning field for children, entitled pedagogy. And, the second learning field for adults, entitled andragogy.

As mentioned, Brockett also criticized the SDLRS theory. He began to study and perform research, during the 1980s, looking for answers for a stronger theory. In 1991, along with colleague Hiemstra, Brockett designed a model for self-directed learning, entitled the “PRO

Model.” “PRO” is an acronym for Personal-Responsibility-Orientation. All of the “factors” of this model are drawn *inside a circle*. Brockett and Hiemstra’s reasoning for this is because it is their belief that a person is responsible for their own learning in the self-directed learning process. By drawing a circle around all of the factors, the circle provides a visual representation, which shows all other factors outside of the circle need to be under the control of the learner to not hinder the learner from learning.

When writing about the elements on the inside of the circle, Hiemstra (1991) writes,

“... the point of departure for understanding self-direction is personal responsibility and empowerment. Personal responsibility refers to individuals assuming ownership for their own thoughts and actions. This does not necessarily mean control over all personal life circumstances or environmental conditions, but it does mean people can control how they respond to situations” (p.4).

On the left side of the model is the self-directed learning component. This is described as what is external to the learner. Also included are the teaching and learning processes. On the right side of the model is the learner self-directed component. “This involves a learner’s personality characteristics, or those factors internal to individual, such as self-concept” (Hiemstra & Brockett, 1991, p.4). I have already mentioned the final component of PRO model, which is the circle surrounding all of the other components.

The activity of self-direction in the PRO model is somewhat similar to that of a “learning contract.” It is similar because the learner has the responsibility for their learning throughout the entire process. In both “models” there are “steps” that are taken in the learning process. The main difference is that in the PRO model these “steps” are all “interlinked” with other steps because of this circle that is encircling the entire learning process.

Next, there are several “Internet Theories” that have been developed that have impacted self-directed learning. This is very important, considering the fact that the Internet is accessible in education almost everywhere. Not including “formal education” people have access to the Internet on cell phones, which is an example of how they can obtain “educational ideas and thoughts of self-directed learning.”

Hiemstra (2006) writes,

“Bulik and Hanor (2000) believe that the Web supports SDL by both increasing learner control and providing mechanisms for learners to determine what information is pertinent to them. Rager (2006) writes that being skilled at using the Internet is

critical now when thinking about the organizing circumstance concept introduced by Spear and Mocker (1984) more than two decades ago... Rager cautions us, however, to think about the challenges that the Internet can present to some learners” (p.46).

In closing, I would like to relate back to something mentioned briefly, which was “formal education.” These places are locations that self-directed learning normally does not occur. Or, as Gibbons and Phillips (1982) aptly write,

Self-education occurs outside of formal institutions, not inside of them. The skills can be taught and practiced in schools... but self-education can only truly occur when people are not compelled to learn and others are not compelled to teach them— especially not to teach them a particular subject-matter curriculum (p. 20).

It is the many differences in theories and models that makes self-directed learning what it is today... a work-in-progress. People are never supposed to stop learning, so in order to find a suitable model, why should there be one that everyone could agree upon?