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Call Number: LC32 .C653 2000

Journal Title: Conceptions of self-directed learning: theoretical and conceptional considerations
Journal Vol:
Journal Issue:
Journal Year: 2000
Article Title: What is the self in self-directed learning?
Article Author:
Article Pages: 75-92
OCLC Number: 47115939
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Edward Deci and Richard Ryan

**WHAT IS THE SELF IN SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING?**

**FINDINGS FROM RECENT MOTIVATIONAL RESEARCH**

The concept of self-directed learning means different things to different researchers, but the most commonly used distinction concerns whether or not students require proximal directives and incentives in order to proceed with the activities of education. Essentially, students are said to be self-directed if they do not require inducements or prompts, whereas they are said to be other-directed or non-self-directed if they do require such contingencies. The distinction between self-directed and nonself-directed learning, when made in this way, has a great deal of intuitive appeal and is consistent with some current theories of motivation (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Locke and Latham, 1990; Rotter, 1966).

However, research on motivation and education guided by self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 1991) indicates that this distinction may not be the most psychologically meaningful way of defining self-directed learning for purposes of predicting academic achievement, classroom adjustment, and wellbeing. In this chapter, we review the key motivational concepts of self-determination theory in order to discuss the self in what we believe to be truly self-directed learning.

1 The Motivation to Behave

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 1991) is a motivational theory that addresses the difficult issue of human volition. In other words, it explains in motivational terms what it means to feel a true sense of autonomy, freedom, and
willingness in one's actions, and it differentiates motivation in terms that allow for a careful consideration of the concept of self-determination or volition.

Within self-determination theory, as in most cognitive theories of motivation, the concept of motivation implies that people are acting with purpose, with the intention to attain some outcome and the belief that they are able to (Lewin, 1951). We contrast the concept of motivation with that of amotivation which implies passivity and conveys either that people are not acting at all or that their actions are not purposeful or intended. For example, expressive emotional reactions such as yelling or pounding a fist on the table are not intentional if they are uncontrolled expressions of people's feeling rather than being goal-directed or purposeful actions.

The distinction between motivation and amotivation is, of course, an extremely important one, and understanding what conditions foster motivation and prevent amotivation has both theoretical and practical significance. However, we contend that having both a meaningful understanding of human motivation and a basis for discussing self-direction requires conceptualizing motivation in a differentiated way. Thus, we consider not only the amount or intensity of people's motivation, but also the different orientations of their motivation (i.e., the different regulatory processes underlying their motivated behavior).

Self-determination theory proposes that different types of motivated behavior have different qualities, and we maintain that it is useful to differentiate intentional behaviors in terms of the extent to which they are self-determined versus controlled. In other words, behaviors can vary in the degree to which they are experienced as being freely chosen and emanating from one's self versus being pressured or controlled by some interpersonal or intrapsychic force. To the extent that behaviors are experienced as freely chosen, they are considered self-determined (or autonomous) whereas, to the extent that they are experienced as seduced or coerced, they are considered controlled. The concepts of self-determined and controlled motivations thus represent the ends of a continuum describing the quality or orientation of people's motivated behavior. DeCharms (1968) used the concept of an internal versus external perceived locus of causality to label this continuum.

An example of school behavior that is controlled is a boy who is studiously doing his classwork in order to get his teacher's approval. In contrast, an example of self-determined behavior is the boy who completes his assignment because he finds it interesting and meaningful. The first student would be complying with what he thinks he should do to get approval, whereas the latter student would be acting with a fuller sense of choice and self-initiation. In both cases, the students' behaviors would be intentional - that is, they would both be motivated, as opposed to amotivated - but the different degrees of self-determination experienced by these two students would have very different consequences for performance and well-being. In order to further explicate the concept of controlled versus self-determined behavior and to review the research that relates it to educational outcomes, we turn to a consideration of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsically motivated behaviors are performed out of interest and thus require no specific contingencies - that is, no external or intrapsychic threats or promises (Deci, 1975). The only necessary 'reward' for these behaviors is the spontaneous experience of interest and enjoyment that accompanies the activity itself. Curiosity, exploration, and wonder are all aspects of intrinsically motivated learning (White, 1959).

Intrinsic motivation is the prototype of self-determination. When people do something simply because they find it interesting, they feel volitional, they feel as if the behavior is an expression of their sense of self. For children, intrinsically motivated behavior represents the 'business of life', although as people get older intrinsically motivated behaviors tend to be less common and are more typically found when people are away from their typical 'business of life'.

In contrast to intrinsic motivation, extrinsically motivated behaviors are those that are instrumental to the attainment of some separable, often arbitrary, outcome. Extrinsically motivated behaviors typically do not occur spontaneously, so they must initially be prompted by some type of external contingency.

Early research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation yielded the finding that offering people extrinsic rewards for performing an intrinsically interesting task tends to decrease their intrinsic motivation for the activity (e.g., Deci, 1971;
Lepper et al., 1973), and a recent meta-analysis confirmed that this is a reliable finding (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, 1999). Thus, several commentators have suggested that extrinsic motivation is necessarily non-self-determined. However, we believe that extrinsically motivated behavior can vary in the degree to which it is self-determined. Studies showing that under some circumstance extrinsic rewards sustain rather than undermine intrinsic motivation (e.g., Ryan, Mims, and Koestner, 1983) support our view because these extrinsically motivated behaviors must be at least somewhat self-determined or they would undermine intrinsic motivation.

Within self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) we provide a developmental analysis of extrinsic motivation that differentiates the concept of extrinsic motivation and explains when and how extrinsically motivated activities can be self-determined.

**Internalization of extrinsic motivation.** Behaviors that are extrinsically motivated become self-determined through the developmental processes of internalization and integration. Internalization involves taking in a regulation, and integration is the process through which an internalized regulations is integrated into one's self (Ryan, 1993).

People are naturally inclined to internalize the regulation of socially sanctioned activities in order to feel related to others and effective in the social world, and they are inclined to integrate those regulatory processes to maximize their experience of self-determination. Thus, in seeking to feel related to others, socially competent, and autonomous in their actions people have the tendency to take in and integrate the regulation of behaviors that were initially externally regulated (Deci and Ryan, 1991). However, although the processes of internalization and integration are natural processes, there are times when they do not function effectively. Within self-determination theory, the effectiveness of the processes of internalization and integration determine the extent to which the subsequent behaviors will be self-determined. To the extent that the processes do not function well the subsequent behavior will be controlled.

There are four types of extrinsic motivation that result from different degrees of internalization and integration. These types of extrinsic regulation can be ordered along the self-determination continuum from heteronomous control to autonomous self-regulation.

**External regulation** refers to behaviors that are regulated by specific contingencies that are external to the person. Engaging in behaviors to get a reward or to avoid a punishment are the prime examples of this type of extrinsic motivation. Externally regulated behaviors are dependent on external contingencies and are thus said to be controlled by those contingencies.

**Introjected regulation** refers to behaviors that are motivated by internal prods and pressures such as self-esteem-relevant contingencies. This type of regulation is present when people behave because they think they should or because they would feel guilty if they did not. When regulations have been introjected, they are internal to people in the sense that they no longer require overtly external prompts, but they still remains separate from or external to the people's sense of self, so they have an external perceived locus of causality (Ryan and Connell, 1989). Introjected regulation, then, describes a form of internal motivation in which actions are considered controlled or coerced by internal contingencies that are external to the self. This type of regulation is particularly important in terms of our present discussion, for it illustrates a case of motivated behavior that most theories would consider self-directed because people do not require proximal demands or contingencies to carry out these behaviors. However, we do not consider them self-determined because the regulation underlying the behaviors has not been integrated with people's sense of self. People have not accepted the regulation as their own, so they experience an inner conflict and the regulatory processes do not provide a basis for true self-direction.

**Identified regulation** results when people have adopted a behavior or regulation as being personally important or valuable to the self. Here people do not behave simply because they feel they should, but rather because the behavior has personal importance to them. This personal importance results from their having identified with the underlying value of the activity and thus having begun to incorporate it into their sense of self. An example of an identified regulatory style would be a high-school girl who studies subjects she does not find interesting because she has the personal goal of going on to university and having good grades is important for doing that. This stands in clear contrast to another example of a girl who studies hard because she believes she 'should' go to college like everyone else and would feel worthless if she did not (introjected regulation), or to yet another of a student who studies because her parents pressure her to do so (external regulation).
Integrated regulation is the most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation. It results from the integration into people's coherent sense of self of new values and regulations that they have identified with. For example, a teenage boy might identify with being both a good student and a good football player, two identifications that could be equally valued and yet could conflict. These identifications could, however, become integrated if the boy assimilated them both with his sense of self. That, however, might require making changes such as spending his time differently or spending it with different people. Through integration these two values could coexist harmoniously along with other aspects of the self. Regulation resulting from integration is the most autonomous and mature type of extrinsic motivation.

Integrated regulation (and to a lesser extent, identified regulations), together with intrinsic motivation, represent the basis for autonomous or self-determined behavior. They share the qualities of psychological flexibility, total involvement of the self, and a full sense of volitional behaving. They are thus quite similar. However, they are also different in that intrinsically motivated behaviors are based in interest and provide their own rewards, whereas integrated behaviors are performed instrumentally (though freely) for an outcome that is valued by the self.

External regulation and introjected regulation together represent controlled behavior. In both cases people tend to feel pressured by contingencies, so these forms of regulation do not constitute self-direction. And with this lack of self-direction comes less effective learning. The interesting point in this is that introjected regulation, which we place squarely in the controlling category, is not dependent on immediate external contingencies, but instead requires only contingencies that are within the person but external to the self.

3 Motivation in Social Contexts

Self-determination theory has specified a set of three innate psychological needs that are essential for effective functioning and psychological health and are relevant to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). These are the needs for relatedness or affiliation (Harlow, 1958); competence or effectiveness (White, 1959), and autonomy or self-determination (DeCharme, 1968). We maintain that people are inherently motivated to feel connected to others within a social milieu, to feel effective in that milieu, and to feel a sense of personal initiative while doing so. Intrinsically motivated behaviors have been linked primarily to the needs for competence and self-determination (e.g., Deci, 1975), whereas extrinsically motivated behaviors have been analyzed developmentally in terms of all three needs (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 1991).

Specifying these innate psychological needs is important because it allows prediction of variables in the social context that will affect people's intrinsic motivation and the development of their extrinsic motivation. Those social-contextual factors that afford people opportunities to satisfy their needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy will facilitate intrinsic motivation and the integration of extrinsic motivation, whereas those that thwart satisfaction of these needs will hinder intrinsic motivation and the integration of extrinsic motivation.

A considerable number of studies have accumulated clarifying the effects of social contexts on motivation, learning, and development. We now turn to a review of that literature, beginning with studies of intrinsic motivation and then moving on to internalization and integration.

4 Effects of the Social Context on Intrinsic Motivation

The earliest studies of the influence of contextual factors on intrinsic motivation were laboratory experiments that examined the effects of specific external events such as rewards and feedback. They confirmed that events which are experienced as controlling (i.e., as pressure to perform in specific ways) undermined intrinsic motivation, whereas those that are experienced as autonomy supportive (i.e., as encouragement for self-initiation and choice) maintained or enhanced intrinsic motivation. With some limiting conditions,
these experiments indicated that material rewards (Deci, 1971), threats of punishment (Deci and Cascio, 1972), evaluations (Smith, 1974), deadlines (Amabile, DeJong, and Lepper, 1976), imposed goals (Mossholder, 1980), and good player awards (Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett, 1973) were experienced as controlling and thus undermined intrinsic motivation, whereas, providing choice (Zuckerman, Porac, Lathin, Smith, and Deci, 1978) and acknowledging feelings (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, and Holt, 1984) were experienced as autonomy supportive and thus enhanced intrinsic motivation.

Additional work indicated that although certain events such as rewards, positive feedback, or limits tend, on average, to be experienced one way or the other - as being either controlling or autonomy supportive - the style and language with which the events are administered significantly influence their effects. For example, Ryan, Mims, and Koestner (1983) found that performance-contingent rewards, when administered in a controlling style using language like 'you should' or 'you have to', undermined intrinsic motivation, but when administered with a more autonomy-supportive style (i.e., without pressuring language) were less likely to be undermining. Comparable results were found for limit setting. When limits were set on children's behavior in a way that did not use pressuring language but provided choice and acknowledged feelings, they were not detrimental to intrinsic motivation, although they were detrimental to intrinsic motivation if they were set in a way that was pressuring (Koestner et al., 1984).

Some studies have examined aspects of the environment that affect intrinsic motivation by promoting versus thwarting people's feelings of competence. To be intrinsically motivating an activity must provide an optimal challenge (Deci, 1975; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), so target activities that are optimally discrepant from people's skill levels tend to be highly intrinsically motivating relative to easier or harder tasks (Danner and Lonky, 1981). Further, studies have shown that positive feedback tends to strengthen perceived competence and enhance intrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci, 1971), but these effects depend on the feedback's being administered with an autonomy-supportive style. Positive feedback has been found to enhance intrinsic motivation by strengthening perceived competence only when the positive feedback results from self-determined behavior or is presented with a noncontrolling style (Fisher, 1978; Ryan, 1982; Usui, 1991). We refer to positive feedback that is administered in an autonomy supportive way as being informational.

In contrast to positive feedback, negative feedback, particularly if it is critical and evaluative or administered in a controlling context, tends to diminish perceived competence and decrease intrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci and Cascio, 1972; Vallerand and Reid, 1984). If administered in a noncritical, autonomy-supportive way, negative feedback can provide a challenge and help people figure out how to do better. When administered in that way negative feedback need not undermine intrinsic motivation, but in general negative feedback has been found to have detrimental effects.

Some researchers have proposed that knowing what behaviors yield desired outcomes and feeling effective at those instrumental behaviors are the critical factors for promoting intrinsic interest and learning (e.g., Bandura, 1977). However, the previously mentioned research by Ryan (1982) and others has shown that although self-efficacy (i.e., having perceived control over outcomes) is important, it is not sufficient for intrinsic motivation. The feelings of competence must be accompanied by perceived autonomy in order for people to be intrinsically motivated.

Other studies of social contexts have been performed in schools and have contrasted autonomy supportive versus controlling classroom climates. Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, and Ryan (1981) developed a measure of autonomy support within the classroom that assesses the degree to which teachers attempt to motivate learning in an autonomy supportive versus a controlling manner. These researchers found that children in more autonomy supportive classrooms, where teachers tended to consider the students' perspective and encourage them to solve their own problems, displayed greater curiosity, more independent mastery attempts, and higher feelings of self-worth than students in more controlling classrooms. Ryan and Grolnick (1986) also found autonomy supportive teaching environments to be associated with greater intrinsic interest in learning and higher perceived academic competence.

In complementary research Grolnick and Ryan (1989) used parent interviews to examine the impact of parental autonomy support versus control on their children's motivation and autonomy with respect to learning. An autonomy-supportive parenting style was evidenced by a willingness to offer choice and to consider the children's perspective when making decisions. In contrast, a controlling parental style was characterized by the use of extrinsic contingencies such as rewards and punishments to motivate the child. Results revealed that
parental autonomy support was positively correlated with children's self-reported intrinsic motivation.

In general, then, the results of numerous studies support the view that contextual supports for competence and autonomy are the key ingredients for maintaining intrinsic motivation.

5 Effects of the Social Context on Internalization

Through internalizing socially-endorsed regulations people feel related to others and competent within the social matrix. Internalization can, however, merely take the form of introjection, or it can be more integrated. Although people may feel both relatedness and competence when their behavior is regulated by introjects, they will feel autonomous only when the regulation is self-determined - that is, only when internalized regulatory processes have been integrated.

Research has revealed that internalization and integration are facilitated when significant adults provide autonomy support and interpersonal involvement. For example, Grolnick and Ryan (1989) found that parental autonomy support and involvement helped children internalize regulations and become more autonomously self-regulated in doing their school work, which in turn led them to be rated by teachers as more competent and better adjusted.

Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, and Leone (1994) proposed that there are three factors that allow need satisfaction and thus support self-determination and facilitate integration of a behavioral regulation: a meaningful rationale for why people are being asked to do the behavior; an acknowledgement that they might not find it interesting; and an interpersonal style that emphasizes choice rather than control. Deci et al. performed a laboratory experiment to test their reasoning and found that the need-supporting conditions did lead to greater internalization than the need-thwarting conditions. This therefore represented an experimental replication of the findings from the Grolnick and Ryan (1989) field study.

The Deci et al. experiment also indicated that internalization which occurred in the self-determination-supporting conditions was integrated, as reflected by positive correlations between behavioral self-regulation and self-reports of perceived choice and enjoyment of the activity, whereas the internalization that occurred in the more controlling conditions was only introjected, as reflected by negative correlations between behavioral self-regulation and the same three affective self-report variables. It thus seems that controlling contexts not only decrease the likelihood of internalization, but they also ensure that whatever internalization does occur will be only introjected rather than integrated.

The findings on contextual affects on intrinsic motivation and integration are important in two ways. First, they provide insights into the conditions that will help people develop the inner resources necessary for self-directed learning, and second they suggest the kinds of classroom conditions that will encourage self-directed learning. Simply stated, social contexts, at home and in school, that allow basic need satisfaction as individuals are engaging in learning activities tend to facilitate greater capacity and willingness for self-directed learning.

6 Autonomous Motivation and Learning

Considerable research has related the motivational processes outlined in self-determination theory to the acquisition, integration, and use of information. This research has tested the general hypothesis that high quality learning and performance would be most evident when people are intrinsically motivated and autonomously self-regulated. Contextual conditions that facilitate intrinsic motivation and integrated self-regulation were thus expected to promote high quality learning.

Ryan, Connell, and Plant (1990) asked students to read a passage and rate their interest and enjoyment of the material. Subsequently, the students were tested on the material although they had not expected the test while they were reading the material and completing their ratings. Results revealed a strong positive correlation between subjects' interest/enjoyment and both their self-reported comprehension and their actual recall of the material. These findings suggest that intrinsic motivation for learning, as reflected in interest and enjoyment, are important contributors to the learning process. Schiefele (1991) also found interest to be positively related to quality of learning.

In a study by Grolnick and Ryan (1987) elementary-school children who were more self-determined when reading text material - that is, who were higher on intrinsic motivation and identified regulation - displayed better conceptual
learning than those who were less self-determined. Further, Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci (1991) reported a positive relation between children's self-determined motivation and both objective measures of achievement and teacher reports of the children's competence.

Several studies have extended the findings that self-determined forms of motivation are related to high quality learning. For example, Vallerand, Fortier, and Guay (1997) reported that autonomous motivation of high school students (viz., integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation) were positively related to their staying in school whereas their controlled motivation (viz., external regulation and introjected regulation) was positively related to their dropping out of school. Ryan and Connell (1989) found that although both introjected regulation (i.e., more controlling motivation) and identified regulation (i.e., more autonomous motivation) were correlated with children's self-reports of trying hard and parents' reports of their children being motivated, introjection was positively correlated with anxiety in school and maladaptive coping with failures, whereas identification was positively correlated with interest and enjoyment of school and positive coping with failures.

To summarize, people can be motivated to learn in more controlled ways or more self-determined ways, and it is the self-determined forms of motivation that positively predict high quality learning and personal adjustment in school. From this perspective, self-directed learning results from self-determined or autonomous motivation and includes both intrinsic motivation and identified self-regulation. In contrast, nonself-directed learning is what we refer to as controlled motivation and includes both external regulation and introjected regulation.

Introjected regulation is the most important type of regulation for clarify what we mean by self-directed learning. Although the introjected regulation of learning occurs largely within the person, the regulation is not within the self. Thus, to understand self-directed learning, one must be able to differentiate among types of motivation or regulation that do not depend on specific external contingencies (i.e., are within the person) but nonetheless involve very different regulatory processes. Because introjected regulation has negative achievement and adjustment consequence, it is essential to make the distinction between introjected and identified forms of regulation and not consider them both to be forms of self-directed learning.

Other studies have focused on the extent to which contextual factors representing autonomy support and involvement promote high quality learning. For example, Grolnick and Ryan (1987) hypothesized that autonomy-supportive contexts would result in greater depth of processing and subsequently better comprehension and mastery of learned material than controlling contexts. They compared the effects of a learning condition in which the experimenter was autonomy supportive and one in which the experimenter was controlling. (In the latter case the experimenter emphasized that the students' learning would be tested and graded.) After the students read the text material they were all tested, and results showed that the controlling condition led to poorer conceptual learning of the material than the autonomy-supportive condition.

Recent experiments by Kage (1991) found similar results in Japanese schools. For example, the studies showed that junior high school students in a controlling evaluative conditions where they were given a series of five quizzes to be counted as part of their grade in history expressed less interest in the material, rated themselves as less competent, and reported greater anxiety than similar students in an autonomy-supportive condition where they got the quizzes as a means of monitoring their own learning without having the quizzes count in their final grades. Further, those students in the controlling condition actually performed significantly worse on three of the five quizzes as well as on a summary exam at the end of the course segment. This work suggests that the use of graded quizzes as a way of motivating learning may be counterproductive causing not only negative affect but also poorer learning.

A study by Benware and Deci (1984) examined the extent to which 'active' versus 'passive' involvement with material led to greater conceptual learning. In this study, college students learned material in order to put it to use by teaching it to others (the active condition) or learned the material in order to be tested on it (the passive condition). Those in the active involvement condition reported higher intrinsic motivation for learning the material and showed better conceptual understanding of the material than those in the passive-involvement condition.

The importance of self-determination for flexible thinking has also been demonstrated. McGraw and McCullers (1979) found that subjects who were controlled with the offer of a financial reward for solving a series of problems had a harder time breaking mental set when presented with a problem that required a different (and easier) strategy than did subjects who were not offered
a reward. In this instance, the reward can be seen to have undermined intrinsic motivation for problem solving, resulting in less cognitive flexibility.

Research by Amabile (1983) has linked intrinsic motivation to creativity, showing that when people created artistic products in response to controlling contingencies such as evaluations or promised rewards, their work was judged to be less creative than the products of those who created art work in the absence of these controlling pressures. This evidence lends support to the notion that motivation for high quality learning and performance can be maximized by providing autonomy support, thus affording the individual a greater sense of self-determination.

Studies such as Grolnick and Ryan (1989) and Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci (1991) found that parents' involvement (i.e., their relating to their children) as well as being autonomy supportive of them led to autonomous self-regulation and high quality learning. The importance of involvement in the learning process was further demonstrated in a study of adolescents by Ryan, Stiller, and Lynch (1994) which found significant positive correlation between the quality of the parents' relatedness to their children and various indices of school functioning, including self-esteem, positive coping, autonomous self-regulation, and engagement in learning.

7 Conclusions: The ‘Self’ in Self-Directed Learning

Self-determination theory asserts that people have an intrinsic desire to explore, understand, and assimilate aspects of their environment. This proactive motivation, which is innate and apparent from the very earliest stages of development, does not depend on external contingencies and pressures and results in ongoing learning. Intrinsic motivation is integral to the natural growth tendency in humans and represents a inherent aspect of the self. As such, when learning is intrinsically motivated it is self-directed.

Learning can also be extrinsically motivated, which means that it is performed in order to attain some separable consequence such as a good grade or a tangible reward. According to self-determination theory, extrinsically motivated learning can vary in the degree to which it is autonomous, depending on the degree to which its regulation is internalized and integrated with people's intrinsic self.

When extrinsic motivation is not internalized it is said to be externally regulated, and when it is taken in but not integrated with the intrinsic self, it is said to be introjected. External and introjected regulation share many qualities and together represent the controlled forms of regulation. Introjected regulation is perhaps the most interesting type, for it is within the person and does not require overt external contingencies but it lacks the qualities of self-determined behavior - namely, volition, flexibility, and positive affect. Within self-determination theory values and regulations that have been introjected are not considered to be part of the self because they have not been integrated with intrinsic motivation and other aspects of people's identity. Thus introjected learning is not considered self-directed.

From this perspective, then, the self in self-directed learning consists of the set of integrated values, motivations, beliefs, and knowledge structures that were either intrinsic to people or have been taken in, identified with, and assimilated with the set of self processes that were already there at the time that these new ones were internalized.

Our research has indicated that learning that results from either intrinsic motivation or integrated extrinsic motivation is of higher quality than that which results from external or introjected regulations. And further, our research has shown that social contexts which support people's innate psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy enhance intrinsic motivation and facilitate integration of extrinsic motivation. In turn, such social contexts lead to higher quality, self-directed learning and to greater personal well-being.

References


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Roger Hiemstra

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING: THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY MODEL

1 Introduction

I have been involved with self-directed learning in various ways for nearly 30 years. Personal research and scholarship, supervising student research, and, especially, finding practical ways of applying such research to adult teaching and learning are some of the results. If you would like to read about much of this journey, I suggest Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Hiemstra and Brockett (1994a). Following is a brief description of how I view self-directed learning to establish a framework for this chapter.

Most adults spend considerable time acquiring information and learning new skills. The rapidity of change, the continuous creation of new knowledge, and an ever-widening access to information make such acquisitions necessary. Much of this learning takes place at the learner’s initiative, even if available through formal settings. Although known by various terms (Hiemstra, 1996), a common label given to such activity is self-directed learning. In essence, I view self-directed as any study form in which individuals have, or take primary responsibility for planning, implementing, or even evaluating the effort. Most people, when asked, will proclaim a preference for assuming such responsibility whenever possible (Tough, 1979). It is this personal responsibility notion that serves as the heart of this chapter.

Research, scholarship, and interest in self-directed learning have grown considerably around the world in recent years. In essence, this book is a testimonial for that interest explosion. Few topics, if any, have received more attention by adult educators than self-directed learning. Related books, articles, monographs, conferences, and symposia abound. In addition, numerous new programs, practices, and resources for facilitating self-directed learning have been created. These include such resources as learning contracts, self-help books, support groups, open-university programs, electronic networking, and computer-assisted learning. The rapid expansion of the World Wide Web is further fueling an increasing need for learners to learn on their own.