Designing Assignments that Encourage Self-Directed Learning

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What brought you here today?

Purposes

- To define self-directed learning
- To explore the benefits of self-directed learning
- To introduce an example of an assignment that features self-directed learning
- To explore what is involved in becoming an agent of change

What is self-directed learning?

- a process in which individuals take initiative, with or without the help of others (Knowles, 1975)

- students not only identify their own goals, they also take responsibility for managing the challenges inherent in pursing these self-identified goals

- students identify the outcomes they hope to achieve and the criteria by which those outcomes will be assessed

- Self-monitoring and self-management are important in the SDL process

Self-monitoring and self-management

- ## Self-monitoring
  - Objective assessment of progress
  - Reflection on that assessment

- ## Self-management
  - The modification of strategies and actions based on self-monitoring
  - The management of learning resources

An example:
The Self-Directed Project Option (SDPO)

- Doctor, Patient and Society (DPAS)
  - Population health, social science and medicine, epidemiology
- 2nd yr medical students have a choice of assignment option in this course
  - Discussion Group
  - Community-Service Learning Option
  - Self-Directed Project Option (SDPO)
- First-year students apply competitively for the SDPO, submitting a project proposal of their own creation
- Deliverables, learning goals, time frame, and criteria for assessment are all designed by the student

Some goals of the SDPO

- Develop relevant skills in the design of project-specific research methods
- Learn skills related to the development of project-specific partnerships
- Learn how to select and use appropriate means of disseminating project deliverables for maximum clarity and constructive impact for a wide range of audiences
- Develop project management skills, including the ability to make adjustments, revise plans, and problem solve as a project evolves
- Generally, learn skills required to maintain independent control over a major project, such as: time management, communication, task management

Some benefits of self-directed learning

- ## Enhanced motivation
  - To pursue something other than the prescribed

  "SDPO is different than doing something to "tick off the ticky boxes"

  - The potential to design something that will benefit others

  "I always get way more back than what I ever give"

  - To pursue intellectual curiosity
  - To be in control of one's own learning, outcomes, and time

- ## Enhanced problem-solving skills
  - Taking on problems in which one has some investment
  - Problem solving takes on an applied nature

- ## Enhanced collaborative skills

- ## Development of identity in the field

Development of identity

- **Affirming identity**
  - helped student remember what his passions were before entering the highly structured curriculum
  - "*Put my time and effort into something I was passionate about*"
- **Self as problem solver**
  - Coping with disappointment by adjusting goals
  - "*it adds to my personal life history and it adds to my skills*"
  - "*…proving that we can do something more than just study*"
- **Who I am with others: Teamwork**
  - Support from professionals = mentorship & collegiality
- **How I feel: Emotive outcomes**
  - E.g., pride, frustration

Who is self-directed learning suited for?

- *"If you are very self-motivated, self-disciplined person, like flexibility, and are very interested in a hands-on learning experience, then this is the one for you"*
- *"It's NOT for people who don't have strong time management skills"*

The Adoption-Invention Continuum
(Henderson & Dancy, 2008)

Edit Master text styles

Adoption	Adaptation	Reinvention	Invention
Materials and procedures implemented as given	Materials and procedures modified somewhat by instructor	Instructor changes materials and procedures significantly	Instructor develops materials and procedures based on his/her own ideas

The Gap persists when

Those supporting change	Instructors
• Fail to understand the logistic and psychological barriers to change • Fail to take context into account • Fail to see their work in terms of partnerships and networks • Stress adoption over adaptation or reinvention	• See new ideas as a threat to their professional identity • Put personal investment in heuristics above the potential for continual improvement • Seek out others who will confirm their beliefs without ever testing them • Stress invention over adaptation or reinvention

The Gap will be reduced when

- Personal truths are interrogated <u>but also respected</u>
- Educational research is treated as a modifiable resource
- That modification is the result of a partnership between faculty developers and instructors
- Small yet significant networks of instructors are supported

How Teaching Improves

- Roxa & Martensson (2009; 2012)
  - instructors form small significant networks to discuss teaching; these networks influence practice.
  - when academic cultures support scholarly approaches to teaching and learning, more conversations occur.

Significant Networks

- A network consists of individuals and the interactional links between them.

- Network participants come together on a common objective

- Networks allow for the exchange of resources and for capacity building; they allow members to collaboratively develop knowledge

Significant Conversations

- Private
- Trustful
- Intellectually intriguing

"It is likely that these conversations open up the possibility of constructing and maintaining–and perhaps partly changing–an understanding about the realities of teaching." (p.555)

Yes, but …