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Fostering Self-Directed Learning in Adolescents Through E-Learning

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Despite the large body of literature on self-directed learning and readiness for this type of learning in adulthood, little research exists on its effects on adolescents. It has been stated that an individual needs a high level of readiness for self-directed learning in order to be successful in e-learning environments. The overall consensus is that in order to take classes in a virtual setting, as opposed to the traditional face-to-face model, one must have some self-directed learning readiness, which according to literature, is something acquired in adulthood. This study proposes that self-directed learning may be fostered at an earlier age if blended learning models are implemented at the elementary school levels and continued through the middle and high school grades. Qualitative observational data; interviews with students; and quantitative survey data is being designed to study the relationship between readiness for self-directed learning in students who take virtual classes at the high school level. While data is still being collected over a period of time to study whether self-directed readiness increases with access to more virtual learning, preliminary findings suggest that when students are exposed to taking classes online they develop an increased readiness for self-directed learning at an earlier age that may possibly effect their learning in adulthood.

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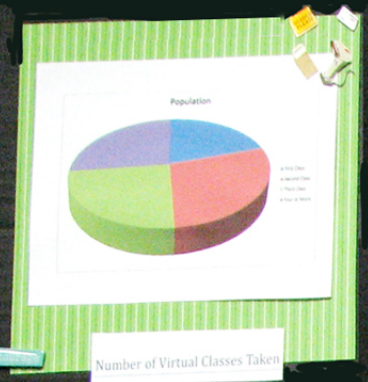
By: Lauren Wanger-Hernandez



Number of Virtual Classes Taken

Introduction

The concept of self-directed learning has long fascinated researchers in the field of learning for quite some time. Becoming a self-directed learner is found to be most important as we develop into adults. It is often cited as being one of the most important functions of education. However, research has shown that there needs to be a readiness for self-directed learning that comes with maturity. One of the key pieces of research states that self-directedness increases as we mature (Knowles, 1968; 1980). Knowles defines self-directed learning "as a process in which the learner, with or without the help of others, identifies learning needs, defines learning goals, develops and implements a learning plan, and evaluates the learning gained (1975).

Those with "high-levels of readiness for self-direction in learning, have been linked with high levels of performance in the workplace" (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2003).

While adults vary in their readiness for self-directed learning that seems to be needed for success in the environment in which we live, adolescents are less ready for this type of learning. As previously mentioned, self-directed learning is one of the primary functions of education. Providing 21st century skills is also a primary goal of education. There is a definite connection between preparing learners to become more self-directed as they mature and providing learners with 21st century skills. One way both can be achieved is through e-learning. In addition, the relationship between e-learning and self-directed learning is cyclical. In order to be a successful e-learner, one must also have some self-directed learning abilities.

Abstract

Despite the large body of literature on self-directed learning and readiness for this type of learning in adulthood, less research exists on its effects on adolescents in e-learning environments. It has been stated by Guglielmino and Guglielmino that an individual needs a high level of readiness for self-directed learning in order to be successful in e-learning environments. Guglielmino and Guglielmino explain that in order to take classes in a virtual setting, as opposed to the traditional face-to-face model, one must have some self-directed learning readiness, which according to literature, is something acquired in adulthood. The purpose of this study is to examine whether self-directed learning can be fostered in adolescents who take virtual classes through blended learning programs implemented at the elementary school levels and continued through the middle and high school grades. In a pilot study, qualitative observational data, interviews with students, and quantitative survey data is being designed to study the relationship between readiness for self-directed learning in students who take virtual classes at the high school level. While data is still being collected over a period of time to study whether self-directed readiness increases with access to more virtual learning, preliminary data using the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale for Elementary Students (SDLRS - E) (also known as the Learning Preference Assessment) suggests that when students are exposed to taking classes online they develop an increased readiness for self-directed learning at an earlier age that may possibly effect their learning in adulthood.

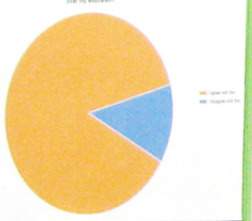
Research Method & Design

Data will be gathered through several methods. Students will be sorted in a variety of categories including:

- Age
- Gender
- New e-learning students versus previous e-learning students
- Grade level
- Number of e-learning classes taken
- Number of years the student has engaged in e-learning classes

Initial Survey

Now that I have taken online classes, I feel that I have more control over my education.



Instrument & Design

Students will be given the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale for elementary students (SDLRS-E). This scale has been used in a number of studies that support its reliability and validity for nearly 20 years, and was created by Dr. L. Guglielmino, an expert in the field of self-directed learning. The SDLRS-E is a questionnaire that can be completed by students in approximately 20 minutes and features Likert-type items that are "designed to measure the complex of attitudes, skills, and characteristics that comprise an individual's current level of readiness to manage his or her own learning (Guglielmino, 1977).

Once students have taken the SDLRS-E, data can be compared between new e-learning students and previous e-learning students. In addition, data can also be compared by previous e-learning students in the categories of age, gender, grade level, years engaged in e-learning, and number of e-learning classes taken. With this data, conclusions can be drawn to assess whether an increase in e-learning classes affects the self-directed readiness score found on the SDLRS-E.

Pilot Study

Preliminary Conclusions

Literature suggests there is some link between self-directedness and e-learning. However, no studies have been found to test the impact e-learning has on self-directedness in students grades K-12.

Preliminary findings from the initial survey of 100 virtual learning students show that characteristics of self-directed readiness are associated with taking e-learning classes. Students most often stated that they are more in control of their education when they choose to take classes virtually versus in the traditional classroom. In a pilot study of 20 virtual students, SDLRS-E scores increased as the number of virtual classes increased.

There is a steady increase in SDLRS-E scores as the number of virtual classes increases.

94% of Students stated that besides learning the content, they also learned how to find information on their own.

Self-Directed Learning Defined

Knowles defines self-directed learning "as a process in which the learner, with or without the help of others, identifies learning needs, defines learning goals, develops and implements a learning plan, and evaluates the learning gained (1975).

Research Question

Can self-directed learning be fostered in adolescents and achieved through e-learning programs?