Self Directed Learning: Captaining One’s Own Ship

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A self-directed learner is someone that takes the initiative to pave their own educational path and follow through in order to meet their intended educational goals (Briggs, 2015). It is someone who looks internally to see what they may be lacking, or what their intent is to become, create a game plan, go through the steps, find the resources, and work their way towards facilitating their own education. In essence, it is akin to captaining one’s own ship. It requires a lot of coordination and work, however, we are free to explore the areas which we want and all the responsibility lands on our own shoulders. It comes with great trials and tribulations, however, there is freedom of exploration and boundless opportunities. Through self direction, one steers the ship, determining the curriculum and making the determination if a subject is highly valued or merely flotsam and jetsam. In some shape or form, we are all self directed learners. There are skills we want to learn and do so, whether it is learning to cook a recipe from a cookbook or by following a youtube tutorial to learn how to apply makeup, we are finding ways to learn. It is a part of being human; the ever wanting desire to learn and evolve.

The essential aspects of self-directed learning boils down to four main categories: to assess one’s readiness to learn, to set learning goals, to engage in the learning process, and to evaluate learning (The University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence, n.d.). Self-directed learning is a highly self involved and arduous task. To ensure one’s long term success, a student has to look inwards to ensure that their motivation is sustainable and strong enough, as there is a direct link between motivation and one’s academic success (Réka, Kármen, Susana, Kinga, Edit, & Kinga, 2015). Next, is to create concrete and attainable goals in which one can work towards, while building up important milestones and applicable skills. Along the way, the student should be involved with the process through an active learning approach. An active learning approach, entails analysis and evaluation of course material, through acts such as in depth writing, participating in discussions, and asking thoughtful questions (Techniques for active learning, n.d.). And lastly, a learner needs to be able to seek guidance and advice. Working independently is a hallmark of the process, however, at times it is crucial to seek outside help when stuck. It is also wise to receive regular evaluation from an outside perspective for an objective view of one’s work.

I think that one of my biggest strengths as a student is that I am a team player. I have always enjoyed working in teams, whether it has been artists, engineers, or even astronauts. I enjoy working with other people and learning through them. It comes with an openness to learn and to seek guidance from multiple sources as well as the eagerness to engage in the process that benefits me as a student. I also believe that it also works in a way to help develop communication skills.

My other biggest strength as a student is my overall desire towards lifelong learning. I love learning new skills, new languages, and new programs. I think that at its core, we all have a desire to grow as people. I seek that out by throwing myself in classes and lessons. I really enjoy learning for the sake of learning, and as a student, that internal motivation helps to carry on with the needed efforts and progression. However, this also leads to my biggest weakness.

I think that my biggest weakness as a student is that I lack direction. I enjoy learning for the sake of learning, but sometimes that involves going off on tangents or seeking out new ideas and innovations instead of sticking to one thing. I already have an undergraduate degree, however, here I am, looking at pursuing another in a totally different field. As a student, it is this lack of focus that weakens assignments and may cause overall lapses in motivation to engage thoroughly within assignments.

My other biggest weakness is that I adhere too much to logic and reason sometimes. I do not understand when people act unexpectedly or when certain reasonings or tasks are outside my realm of understanding. It is fine in more subjects that involve hard factual sciences, however, when there are areas abundant with subjectivity and gray areas, it takes a while to overcome my internal thoughts and to perceive deviations far from my own.

In terms of strategies to become a more self-directed learner, they are as follows. One: I plan on creating an outline of my academic curriculum. Under the UoPeople courses and program, I will chart out what classes to take, how many, and when I should take them, in order to make a concrete long term plan. Hopefully it will add motivation, focus, and accountability to reach my overall learning goals. I will also do so, under the pretense, that the schedule is flexible and can change somewhat to accommodate an appropriate pace or for alterations as the learning process changes overtime, as to still remain accountable and locked-in, but not overly so and trapped. Secondly, I plan to foster good learning habits and a process in which I tackle assignments. I will be accountable by listing out a set of rules in which to follow as well as a loose schedule in order to better prepare assignments and cultivate a long term and evolving attitude and approach towards coursework. And lastly, I plan to take breaks between sessions and terms to focus internally and reevaluate what my goals are. This is in adherence to my weakness of direction, and to ensure that I give myself a time of reflection to properly assess the direction in which I want to proceed and if any approaches or methods need to be altered.

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