**Self-directed learning, what is it good for? --- Writing Assignment Unit 5 UNIV 1001**

According to Manning (2007), self-directed learning is a “characteristic of learners”, not a method of organizing instruction. But not a certainty and often needs to be cultivated. A self-directed learner can be defined as someone who takes control of their education and doesn’t necessarily need to be provided a guideline, as they can find it themselves. In a world where technologies and methods for work are constantly being revolutionized it is becoming increasingly important to be able to do this. Whereas the previous common notion of getting an education and not needing to learn new skills ever again is getting overtaken. This is pushed even farther by the internet, making resources have an ever-increasing availability to people who may not have had the means otherwise. Because of this shift in view towards education, there has been an increased sense of individualism in society's self-directed learners (Manning, 2007). I can speak on this personally, as I attribute individualism to the very core of my being. If you were to ask me about the topic I may say something like, "If you can't be [individual], why be at all?". This can create an ensemble of virtues that directly assist self-directed learning. An important virtue of which is discipline or self-control, maybe the most important. With enough discipline, you can truly accomplish anything, and since self-learning is self-directed, you have to hold yourself accountable for your actions. Being responsible for your actions is often the teacher's responsibility in a traditional learning environment, while it is the students when engaging in self-directed learning.

My biggest strength as a student looking to engage in self-directed learning is already being a self-directed learner. I have been educating myself with online materials since approximately 2017. It is a long and hard road. I was never fortunate enough to have anyone to teach me self discipline, a vital skill for successfully taking your education into your own hands. I didn't start to get truly serious about education until about 6 months ago when I changed jobs to spend more time studying and less time working. This was also around the time I discovered nootropics, specifically lion's mane mushroom powders and the compound within it, NGF or nerve growth factor (Stamets, 2017, 2019). Supplements like lions mane help with my chronically infectious tendency to get distracted and sidetracked when studying so it helps with focus a great deal, and I take it every day. Since I started taking nootropics, I have noticed a massive surge in the ability to stay focused and disciplined when studying, which was a huge educational win for me. Another choice I make that helps me shed distractions is the choice to live an education-centered lifestyle so that studying takes precedence over all non-necessities. I do this by constantly being focused on my education and doing my best to rid myself of anything that won't help or hinder my goals. I try to ensure that everything I do is somehow helpful to my life and its goals in some way, no time wasted on irrelevant or unimportant new articles or material. With time I will become increasingly self-disciplined, and a better self-directed learner.

Being self-reliant can have its disadvantages, some are in my control, and some are out of my control. My main concern is my economic situation as well as my environment as a direct result. Not having a proper environment to work causes learning and focus in school to suffer. As well as having roommates and not being around people with a similar mindset, is also really disappointing. If it were possible I would completely focus on school but unfortunately, I must work a part-time job that will not help my career. It can damage your peace of mind knowing that a significant amount of time will be spent doing work with no future reward other than a paycheck. Regardless of these issues, they are a part of my life and I deal with them. Its a give and take situation since it also motivates me to work more, so I can get where I am meant to be. My other big problem is having inconsistent mental focus. I went into this a bit earlier when I spoke about nootropics and lion's mane, which do help a great deal and are part of my solution to the problem. The issue lies within my mind and the way it works. I can't define the problem with any real accuracy since it is very complex and I could probably write a decent size paper on just that, but I will go into brief detail. As I suspect and have suspected for some time, through the process of meta-cognition, the issue is linked to many variables both mental and physical. Everything from your diet, to when you wake up, to how you think and your behavior patterns can affect your ability to do brain work. Most of my knowledge on the subject comes from Ben Greenfield, his podcast and book, Boundless (2020) in particular. Poor behavior patterns and acts like eating large quantities of food first thing in the morning can decrease your productivity and weaken your mental acuity. A big issue that I believe most people have relates to behavior, letting yourself get distracted by online videos for example. Altering your behavior patterns to mitigate the internet's (or other sources) ability to distract you can and would serve you if you are susceptible to such things. Fortunately and unfortunately there is an endless amount of distractions available to most people, and learning to fight them is a challenge for people of this time in history. But there are are a lot of interesting ways brought on by technology one can use to combat this issue.

An unexpected but useful self-directed learning technique for me is intermittent fasting. I try to fast for about fourteen to eighteen hours a day, every day. When I don't fast and I eat a big breakfast first thing in the morning, it can have a lethargic brain fogging effect brought on by carbohydrates. Although, sometimes it helps to eat when I have trouble focusing, making me calmer and able to work better versus being lethargic from eating. Aside from eating, all habits relating to health are important and can affect my ability to work. Eating healthy food at optimal times, and getting enough sleep is very important for a clear head. Another important strategy I employ is note-taking for reading materials. Especially when they aren't stimulating, and retaining information in educational material that isn’t very stimulating can be very hard without notes. For materials that are more intrinsically interesting however, it often isn't as necessary, but still very useful. My notes do need work, particularly with my ability to summarize notes and get the main ideas behind what I’m reading/watching for faster and more efficient reading. I find that the best way to retain information while taking notes is to not copy material word for word, whenever I type notes I have a much better time remembering it when doing so in my own words. My last strategy for self-directed learning is asking questions. When reading I notice that I don't ask many questions, but it can depend on the material and its difficulty level. For easier more familiar materials it's easier to ask questions and compare what I'm learning with what I know. But when I read or interact with new learning material I find that my mind is less active, in the future I want to get better at questioning everything, be more skeptical and inquisitive. Nikola Tesla (1919) once wrote of an experience when he was swimming in a river and was caught in a current that nearly killed him. He reported that it was because he had the mind of an inventor that he was able to survive, where most people would have given up, he was able to conjure up a way in which he could manipulate his environment to avoid his demise. Practicing these methods for self-education can be difficult at first, but I aim to do so with continuity and frequency. I am always finding something to study and learn every day, whether I am learning a new programming language, brushing up on statistics, or reviewing my college course material. Staying accountable can be hard at times, but over the past year and most notably the last six months, I have become a much better independent learner. I only had a vague idea of what I wanted in my career when I started, and independent learning both benefited from that and put me at a disadvantage as well. Thankfully that phase is over for the most part and I can focus on the important things, the material I know I need to learn, and being able to apply said material.

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