Self-Directed Learning: An Effective Way for Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract: The traditional model of teacher professional development ignores the individual uniqueness of teachers and requires teachers to develop in the form of external instruction. While self-directed learning, which is characterized by autonomy, flexibility, universality, and development, can give full play to teachers' initiative in process of their professional development. This paper starts from the status quo of teachers 'professional development, summarizing the main characteristics of teachers' self-directed professional development, pointing out the necessity and feasibility of teachers' self-directed learning, summarizing the main factors affecting the self-directed learning of teachers. In order to effectively improve teachers' self-directed learning ability, teachers must "want to learn, know how to learn, enjoy learning, and persist in learning" while external support must be "harmonious, diverse, timely, and efficient."

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, Teacher Learning, self-Directed Professional Development

1. Introduction

The breadth and depth that teachers are able to arrive at during their professional development largely influences the heights that students can reach. From a student teacher to an experienced teacher, two stages are required: pre-service education and in-service education. In pre-service stage, the content of student's learning is mainly curriculum-oriented, that is the school curriculum defines the skills and subjects that student teachers are expected to learn. In the in-service stage teachers mainly improve their teaching ability by participating in educational training and teaching seminars which are mainly task-oriented. In the in-service training activity, experts appeared with professional theoretical knowledge and teachers treat training as additional pressure for teaching tasks which would result in teachers' revulsion. Both curriculum- and task-oriented training, in which teachers' growth is primarily externally driven, ignore the individual uniqueness of teachers and result in a disconnection between the content of the training and the problems teachers need to solve in their actual teaching.

Fortunately, in recent years, teachers have gradually begun to recognize the dominant role of himself in his professional growth. And the paradigm of teacher professional development has shifted toward individual, internal changes. This paradigm focuses on the development of individual teachers' self-efficacy, collaborative learning, and lifelong learning. Unlike the curriculum-oriented and task-oriented paradigms of teacher professional development, this professional development paradigm that focuses on the individual teacher reflects a process of conscious growth and self-learning. In this process, teachers need to be conscious, active, and sustainable learners. In this regard, the self-directed learning theory in the field of adult learning can be well suited to the internal needs of teacher professional development in this paradigm.

2. Overview of Self-Directed Learning

2.1. Connotations of Self-Directed Learning

Through in-depth conversations with continuing learners, Hall found that adults had different tendencies towards learning motivation and he classified adult's learning motivations into three types: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. In 1975, in his monograph *Self-Directed Learning*, Knowles first discussed in detail the definition of self-directed learning and the course-oriented model of self-directed learning.

Since then, the definitions of self-directed learning by domestic and foreign scholars are almost similar, all that claimed that learners identify learning needs and goals through self-analysis, and formulate concrete learning plans, as well as acquiring all learning resources throughout the self-directed learning process, monitoring and adjusting learning plans at the same time, and finally adopting diversified evaluation means to assess learning outcomes

2.2. Characteristics of Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning emphasizes the learner's primary responsibility in the process of self-directed learning and has its key features such as autonomous, flexible, universal, developmental, and economical.

2.2.1. Autonomous

In the course of SDL, learners determine learning goals which are aligned with learners' learning needs through self-reflection and self-observation. Such goals are determined by learners according to their own learning needs, and learners are able to apply the learning outcomes in practice after achieving the goals, which has the characteristics of practicality. The learning process is consistent with learner's abilities and context. Self-directed learning is spontaneously initiated and controlled by the learner. In the process of self-directed learning, learners can adjust their learning style and speed according to their situation. The learning resources can also match the learner's learning style which can reflect learner's habitual learning style and tendency in the learning process. Learning styles can also reflect the way that learners receive and process information with different learning strategies. In the process of self-directed learning, learners can select learning resources according to their own learning styles and characteristics. Resources that match the learner's learning style can enhance the learner's learning effectiveness.

2.2.2. Flexible

Self-directed learning is controlled by the learner, who can learn anytime and anywhere. The roles that each of us plays in society are multiple. For example, in addition to playing the role of a teacher, a teacher also takes on multiple roles such as father, son, friend, leader, and researcher. In this role set, the obligations and rights of learners in different roles are different, which inevitably causes conflicts in the process of role behavior and affects the learning process and effectiveness. In self-directed learning, learners can flexibly decide what to learn, when to learn, how to learn, and where to learn according to their different roles.

2.2.3. Universal

Self-directed learning can serve individuals at any level. In the process of self-directed learning, learners are not deprived of learning opportunities because of their social status or economic environment. Anyone who has the will to learn and improve can carry out self-directed learning. This not only reflects the possibility of establishing a learning society but also provides ideas for building a lifelong learning system.

2.2.4. Developmental

Learners can achieve lifelong learning goals through self-directed learning. Through self-diagnosis, learners determine their learning goals, and then they set and implement learning plans. And in the process of implementing the plans, they can continuously adjust the learning process according to different learning situations, and also develop improvement plans based on the evaluation of learning outcomes. The whole process is dynamic, cyclical and gradual, which can realize the change from quantitative change to qualitative change, which can develop the learners' critical thinking ability, independent learning ability and lifelong learning ability.

2.2.5. Economical

Self-directed learning can solve the contradiction between "resources not needed by individuals" and "lack of resources needed by individuals". Self-directed learning is a process in which learners integrate learning resources according to their learning needs, maximizing the utilization of existing resources. At the same time, it is possible to avoid blindly investing in the creation of resources that do not meet learners' learning needs. Self-directed learning which is initiated by the learners themselves can improve their learning efficiency. The learning goals are mainly determined by the learners according to their real needs, so learners have strong motivation throughout the learning process, which can not only improve the possibility of achieving the learning goals, but also improve the learning

efficiency of individuals.

3. The Necessity and Feasibility of Self-Directed Learning for Teachers

In 1972, UNESCO published a report *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* that has stated "Education is no longer something imposed on the learner from the outside, nor is it something imposed on other people. Education must start from the learner himself." This shows that in the context of learning society and with the development of information technology, it is both necessary and feasible for teachers to engage in self-directed learning.

3.1. Necessity of self-directed learning for teachers

In the context of learning society, teachers should not only be the transmitters of knowledge, but also the producers of knowledge. In addition to imparting students knowledge and experience, they should teach them how to learn and help students become a person with the ability to learn, and then a well-rounded, lifelong learner. And in order to develop student's learning ability, teachers themselves should first become a person with the ability to learn. Teachers are bound to encounter different problems in their teaching careers, and they themselves must be deeply aware of where their problems lie and be able to develop appropriate learning plans for solving them in order to achieve professional growth and breakthroughs.

3.2. Feasibility of self-directed learning for teachers

First, as adult learners, teachers have the advantage of adult learning. Teachers have accumulated a great deal of knowledge and experience through their long-term study, life and work, and this knowledge and experience constitute the internal resources for self-directed learning. In terms of thinking, adult thinking is more mature in terms of fluency, independence, and logic, and can accurately diagnose learning needs in the process of self-directed learning, and can adjust learning plans and goals according to different learning contexts. Secondly, at the age of information technology, teachers can access learning resources in the process of self-directed learning much easier than before, and they can learn anytime and anywhere.

4. Influencing factors of teachers' self-directed learning

There are so many factors that can influence teacher's self-directed learning, such as teachers' personal information literacy, learning ability, learning strategies, learning methods, learning motivation, and the effectiveness, abundance, and accessibility of resources and so on. In addition, the support of facilitators in the process of self-directed learning also affects the effectiveness of teachers' self-directed learning, such as the facilitation of learning communities, the support of leaders, and the guidance of experts.

4.1. Major internal factors affecting teachers' self-directed learning

Richness of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Teachers with rich theoretical knowledge and practical experience can have a clearer perception of the essence behind the phenomenon. In the process of self-directed learning, teachers are able to use their accumulated theoretical knowledge to guide their practice, which in turn further deepens their understanding of theoretical knowledge.

Differences in self-awareness. Self-awareness reflects an individual's perception of himself and his relationship with the things around him, which mainly includes self-awareness, self-regulation and self-evaluation. Teachers with higher self-awareness can not only evaluate their own learning base, learning level and learning effect more objectively, but also plan and monitor their learning process more scientifically.

Handling of role conflict. In addition to playing a role of teacher, teachers may also assume different roles such as father, son, administrator, and researcher, which will certainly cause role conflicts, including inter-role conflicts and intra-role conflicts. In the process of self-directed learning, teachers are bound to encounter conflicts brought about by multiple roles, such as the family role that requires teachers to spend more time on household chores and the teacher role that requires teachers to

pay more attention to the overall learning of students, etc. In the process of self-directed learning, only when role conflicts are handled well can learning be sustained for a longer period of time.

Level of information technology literacy. Teachers' IT literacy refers to their ability to retrieve, acquire, analyze and integrate information. In the context of information technology, people's learning is no longer limited to the teacher's lecture and learning resources are no longer just textbooks used in the classroom. Teachers with higher levels of IT literacy are able to locate, access, and integrate learning resources more quickly in the course of self-directed learning.

Sources of learning motivation. Learning motivation can explain the initiation, direction, persistence, and quality of teachers' self-directed learning goal behaviors. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can prompt self-directed behaviors, but self-directed learning behaviors elicited by intrinsic motivation are more persistent and their motivation to learn is maintained for longer periods of time.

4.2. Major external factors affecting teachers' self-directed learning

Guaranteed of learning time. Learning requires quantitative accumulation to achieve a qualitative leap. In daily teaching activities, teachers not only need to complete teaching tasks, but also need to complete the requirements of different roles. Teachers often complain that they are overwhelmed by the demands of their roles and they do not have enough time to study.

The creation of learning atmosphere. A good learning environment helps to stimulate teachers' desire to learn. If schools have a harmonic learning environment where teachers collaborate with each other, teachers are more likely to feel their own value and the support of their colleagues and schools for their own learning.

Accessibility and relevance of learning resources. Whether the learning resources obtained by teachers in the process of self-directed learning can effectively solve teachers' problems is one of the important influencing factors. Whether teachers are able to efficiently locate learning resources related to their learning goals will affect the progress, direction, and effectiveness of their learning. In the information age, teachers have relatively easy access to attain the learning resources, but they often have to pay for some high-quality learning resources. In the absence of external policies and financial support, teachers are likely to give up those resources due to lack of funds, which in turn affects the efficiency of their self-directed learning.

Relevance of facilitator's support. One might have learned the doctrine earlier than the other, or might be a master in his own special field. The limited stamina makes it impossible for people to master every field. The problems that teachers encounter in the process of self-directed learning are closely related to the teachers' actual conditions. So the relevance of the support that facilitators offer determines whether it is effective for teacher's learning.

5. Strategies to promote teachers' self-directed learning

Self-directed learning consists of five steps: teachers diagnose current learning needs, make a learning plan, seek learning resources to implement the plan, and evaluate learning outcomes. Only when teachers 'want to learn, know how to learn, enjoy learning, and persist in learning' and external support is 'harmonious, diverse, timely, and efficient' can teachers' self-directed learning be effectively improved.

5.1. Teachers must "want to learn, know how to learn, enjoy learning, and persist in learning."

Teachers' self-directed learning must be predicated on their intrinsic motivation to learn, that is teachers must want to learn. Compared to the motivation caused by external stimuli such as external expectations and examinations and promotions, the motivation caused by internal motivation such as interest in learning and desire for knowledge can facilitate the maintenance of teachers' self-directed learning activities. The main factors affecting teachers' motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors mainly refer to teachers' physical and psychological aspects, such as teachers' age, education level, and gender, which will affect teachers' learning motivation. Extrinsic influences are mainly reflected in school's arrangement, the difficulty of teaching tasks, the requirements of different roles, and economic difficulties.

Teacher's self-directed learning must be ensured by teachers' mastery of learning strategies, which

means teachers should know how to learn. If teachers lack learning strategies such as metacognitive strategies and problem-solving strategies in his learning process, even if they have strong motivation to learn, their self-directed learning process will not be complete. Among these strategies, metacognitive strategies are the most important strategy in teacher's self-directed learning process. For example, teachers need to constantly monitor and adjust their learning progress in the process of self-directed learning.

Self-directed learning must be facilitated by teachers' self-efficacy, which means that teachers must enjoy learning. Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to have a more positive attitude to what they can achieve in the learning process, and they tend to be more open to learning. Teachers with high self-efficacy are willing to attempt challenging learning goals, and they always try to eliminate difficulties in the self-directed learning process, and adopt a positive attitude.

Teachers' self-directed learning must also be conditioned by will control, which means teachers should be able to persist in learning. In the process of self-directed learning, teachers will inevitably encounter learning difficulties and external interference, such as physical and mental exhaustion, family pressure, and teaching task pressure, etc. At this time, teachers cannot rely on motivation alone to persist in self-directed learning for a long time, and must rely on teachers' willpower to maintain their learning.

5.2. External support should be "harmonious, diversified, timely and efficient".

Harmonious learning atmospheres are needed for teachers' self-directed learning. Society should speed up the pace of building a learning society and form a good social culture of lifelong learning. Schools should form an organizational atmosphere of mutual trust, mutual understanding, and mutual assistance among teachers. And other members of the family should support teachers' learning and create a good family learning environment.

Multiple learning resources should be provided for teachers' self-directed learning. The lack of learning resources in the process of self-directed learning will discourage teachers from learning and affect the effective maintenance of their motivation. Society, schools, and communities can establish online learning resource libraries and learning resource sharing groups to provide teachers with quick and efficient access to learning resources in the learning process.

It is important to provide timely and efficient human resources for teachers' self-directed learning. Although self-directed learning has the learner as the primary responsible person, not all learning activities are within the teacher's cognitive scope during the learning process. This is where a facilitator who can identify the teacher's learning dilemma and provides support in a timely manner, which can effectively remove the tension of teacher self-direction.

6. Conclusion

Self-directed learning can enable teachers to take full advantage of their initiative in their professional development. Teachers are more mature in cognition and emotion than young people, and it is important to believe that teachers have sufficient capacity for self-directed learning. However, in self-directed learning, society, schools, and families should create a supportive learning environment for teachers to learn. Lifelong learning is the only way for teachers to cope with the changes in the world, and self-directed learning is one of the most important forms of lifelong learning.

Acknowledgement

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