Assessing Self-Directed Learning as an Effective Approach to Inclusion in the Post-Secondary Environment: A Review of the Literature

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Introduction

"The truth is, that even those who enjoy to the greatest extent the advantages of what is called a regular education must be their own instructors as to the greater portion of what they acquire, if they are ever to advance beyond the elements of learning…" **George Craik, 1866 (cited in Candy, 1991, p. 5)**

The above quotation succinctly summarises the benefits, indeed the inevitability, of a self-directed approach to learning. Self-directed learning, through learner-based initiative, facilitates the informal and personal acquisition of knowledge. In the traditional education route, knowledge was typically acquired through a pre-determined curriculum, a focus on rote learning and regurgitation, and from the presumption that the student is an empty vessel waiting to be filled by an enlightened teacher (Candy, 1991; Collins, 1998; Freire, 1970/1993; Knowles, 1975; Leach, 2005). Unlike traditional learning, however, which usually takes place within formal, institutional settings, a self-directed approach to learning can be practiced anywhere and acknowledges the role and responsibility of the student or learner as equal to that of the teacher or facilitator (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Candy; Clark, 2001; English, 2000, 2005; Freire; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Vella, Berardinelli, & Burrow, 1998). In so being, self-directed learning is a highly adaptable and applicable approach to a variety of learning circumstances and needs, arguably idealised as a democratic, inclusive, and compassionate approach to learning.

This literature review provides a thorough critical analysis of self-directed learning as a viable approach to facilitating inclusion in the post-secondary institution. This review specifically focuses on the post-secondary environment because it has the propensity to educate in a structured, hierarchical, and hegemonic way. This approach to education often results in the unwitting homogenisation and uniformisation of students, which can lead to marginalision, exclusion, and silencing (Agger, 1991; Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Clinchy, Belenky, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1985; Finger, 2005; Freire, 1970/1993; Glastra, Hake, & Schedler, 2004; hooks, 1994,

2003; MacDougall, 2000; Stevens, 2004; Tanaka, 2002; Tisdell, 1998; Weeks, 1995).

Self-directed learning, which is a sub-component of the area known as adult learning, is a non-professional, socially active approach to acquiring knowledge or information for personal or social change (Candy, 1991; Chovanec, 1998; Collins, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Imel, Brockett, & James, 2000; Knowles, 1975; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Vella, 2002). In order to provide a thorough analysis of the effects of self-directed learning in the post-secondary environment, a critical analysis of adult education and its component part of adult learning from a historical, philosophical, and pedagogical perspective provides a context for fostering self-directed learning (Candy; Chovanec; Cunningham; Elias & Merriam; Collins; Imel et al.; Knowles; Knowles et al.; Selman, Selman, Cooke, & Dampier, 1998; Wang & Sarbo, 2004). Because adult education and adult learning are topics that include many sub-topics, however, focusing on only one of their learning approaches suffices for the purpose of this literature review. Consequently, an overview of self-directed learning's effects within the post-secondary environment focuses on four groups that could benefit from its implementation: women, international and adult immigrant students, queer students, and students with learning disabilities. Finally, an analysis of the field of adult education—and by association, self-directed learning—as a tool of the post-secondary and corporate communities that potentially exploits and compromises its very foundations is also introduced (Candy; Chovanec; Elias & Merriam; Collins; Imel et al.; Knowles; Knowles et al.; Selman et al.). By providing such analyses, this review provides a holistic overview of self-directed learning as an approach that cultivates self-awareness, meaning-making, collaboration, and care (Agger, 1991; Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Clinchy et al., 1985; Finger, 2005; Freire, 1970/1993; Glastra et al., 2004; hooks, 1994, 2003; MacDougall, 2000; Stevens, 2004; Tanaka, 2002; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998;

Wang & Sarbo, 2004). In a technologically interconnected yet self-serving world, self-directed learning may be one approach that brings to fruition the hope of a more sustainable, interactive, and co-operative global community.

In order to provide evidence from human experiences within specific contexts, this review focuses on a more qualitative approach to research (Hayes, 1991; Kincheloe, 1991; Richardson, 2002; Woolgar, 1996/2000). A qualitative approach to research seeks to improve practice within a specific field to understand the experiences of those within that field (Hayes; Kincheloe; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Richardson; Woolgar). It assumes that reality as it is known is not imposed on individuals by an external agent; it is constructed by individuals themselves as a catalyst through which social interaction takes place. Because such realities are unique to the individual, no one experience is the same as another (Hayes; Kincheloe; Merriam & Simpson; Richardson; Woolgar). A qualitative approach to research, therefore, is interested in how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences and how they subsequently construct their realities relative to these experiences (Merriam & Simpson).

Considering the focus on human experiences, resources consulted for this review include primary sources that provide a historical and theoretical background on adult education, adult learning, self-directed learning, and queer and sexuality issues in North America. These resources encompass the late 1960s to the early twenty-first century and focus on either the pioneers of specific movements, theories, and approaches within the field of adult education or their advocates (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Candy, 1991; Collins, 1998; Freire, 1970/1993; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al., 1998). In addition to these books, articles from academic journals on related subjects were also used and encompass the late twentieth to early twenty-first centuries. Because self-directed learning's

potential for implementation within the contemporary post-secondary environment is examined, the belief is that the most current research on it and its related topics would be the most revealing and beneficial, hence a focus on more recent publications. A connection between past and more recent research was established when individual experiences indicated behavioural patterns that endured through time and the reasons for them. Databases used to obtain these resources include EBSCO Host, JSTOR, ProQuest, Project Muse, and SAGE and, along with primary (book) sources, restricted to adult education and historical journals within the fields of social history; adult learning; teaching; planning, assessment, and evaluation; reading and writing research; critical and poststructuralist theory; and queer theory and sexuality. These restrictions were imposed because the experiences that are outlined fall almost exclusively within the realm of adulthood and the acquisition of knowledge through various learning approaches that are most appropriate for adults. Connections between how adults learn and how children learn are provided, in part, to justify these restrictions. Related information was obtained from educational conferences and workshops that took place within the last 3 years in the areas of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), academic writing, self-directed learning, assessment and evaluation, and queer and sexuality issues. Most of these are presented within a post-secondary context. Finally, related information was also obtained through research conducted for local (Toronto) film festival groups in the areas of queer and sexuality issues and multiculturalism. To a large extent, many of the primary books and academic journals used are American, though much effort was made to find those of Canadian origin. As both Canada and the United States share similar socio-cultural histories and issues, much of the information found of American origin were deemed applicable to the Canadian experience and so justify their use. Sources not used in writing this review include Canadian dissertations, though these are worth exploring in

future for their currency and relevance to Canadian adult education. International educational journals (excepting American ones) were also excluded.

Adult Education

Because self-directed learning is only one sub-component of the field of adult education, it is important to provide a context within which it exists in order to facilitate a thorough understanding of its origins and why it is worthy of implementation within a post-secondary environment. As a sub-component of adult education, much of self-directed learning's philosophies, characteristics, and traits are informed by this field. It is important, therefore, to gain an understanding of it and its various components as they relate to self-directed learning.

What Does "Adult" Mean Anyway?

Any study of adult education would benefit from even a basic definition of the term "adult." This is no easy task as from a social and legal context definitions vary. In many of Canada's cultural communities, for instance, puberty is synonymous with adulthood or the age when one is old enough to marry; this varies according to culture. The Canadian legal driving age as well as the age when one can legally leave school—which varies according to province—is 16; in order to legally vote or consume alcohol, one must be 18. Do these life stages, predicated on age, constitute being "adult"? Certainly many would argue that adulthood is distinguishable from childhood by different societal expectations of behaviour (Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

> Those people (in most societies, the large majority) to whom we ascribe the status of adult may and do evince the widest possible variety of intellectual gifts, physical powers, character traits, beliefs, tastes and habits. But we correctly deem them to be adults because, by virtue of their age, we are justified in requiring them to evince the basic qualities of maturity. Adults

> are not necessarily mature. But they are supposed to be mature, and it is on this necessary supposition that their adulthood justifiably rests. (Paterson, 1979, p. 13)

Adult Education and Adult Learning

In the context of this paper, the term “adult”, when used to refer to the education of adults, must be further distinguished from the learning of adults. Adult learning involves internal cognitive processing that affects what the learner does or how the learner responds to external stimuli regardless of whether this stimuli occur in a formal environment or in a series of unplanned events (Flannery & Wislock, 1991; Merriam, 2004; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). An individual learning to sew, for instance, may engage in the process through trial and error using cognitive skills not only in attaining technical mastery but also by using self-reflection in order to assess progress. Similarly, a person who contracts a disease may learn more about it by reading as much as possible or watching video programs devoted to it in order to cope with the disease. These are examples of (adult) learning at its most personal. One is embedded in personal interest the other in personal experience.

On the other hand, adult education entails a defined set of activities, the intellectual processes involved in seeking and being provided the support to learn, and the institutional or formal systems in place within which an adult may learn (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al., 1998). How such phenomena are manifested, however, are just as varied as the desires and goals of the adults concerned—often connected to social, vocational, professional, and self-developmental factors (Selman et al.). If, in the previous example, the person learning to sew decided to take lessons or if the person who contracted the disease were to engage in some kind of formal educational program that led to an increase in knowledge, these would be examples of

(adult) education (Merriam & Brockett; Selman et al.). In sum, adult education may be defined as adults either "alone, in groups, or in institutional settings … improve[ing] themselves or their society" (Houle, 1972, p. 32).

Philosophical Underpinnings: Adult Education's Beginnings

As far back as the Greek philosphers and up to the modern scientific movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, a liberal adult education underscored most of education as a whole; however, its goals, methodology and content were highly regulated, delineated and established (Chovanec, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Collins, 1998; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Selman et al., 1998). Such a philosophy reflected society's belief that truth was absolute, so structured disciplines in its study were considered quantifiable and, therefore, reliable.

As time progressed, however, liberal education's structured disciplines have given way to less rigidity and the inclusion of critical voices with the rise of modern science, technology, and philosophy, which paralleled (industrialised) society's gradual opening to and accomodation of notions of relativism and an increasingly heterogeneous population (Cunningham, 1989; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Finger, 1995; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al., 1998). This led to a more progressive adult education, which influences many of today's educational philosophies while maintaining loose ties with its antecedent liberal education. It is important to note, however, that a continual antagonism between traditional liberal education and progressive adult education exists to this day as the former's approach to rigourous scientific investigation, emphasis on absolute truth, and the rigid cultivation of disciplines conflict with the latter's more fluid, pragmatic emphasis on personal growth and potential for social change (Cunningham, 1989; Elias & Merriam; Finger; Freire, 1970/1993; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al.).

These conflicts have resulted in the perpetual re-thinking, revising, and re-adapting of adult education's theories, philosophies and practical application.

An Historical Context: Social Activism and Self-Improvement as the Impetus for Adult Education.

Adult education's formation through the social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s led to three "paradigmatic orientations: lifelong learning, … radical adult education and the pedagogy of liberation, … and andragogy" (Finger, 1995, p. 110). All came to focus on adults as solely in charge of their destiny in a socially evolving, technologically advancing, and dispassionate world (Finger; Freire, 1970/1993; Glastra et al., 2004; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Industrial development needed humanising because it was prone to creating inequities between those who control power and those who are subject to it. Adult education became the arena within which individuals maintain awareness of the political and social interests that could curtail human emancipation and in so doing potentially pre-empt or mitigate oppression (Cunningham, 1989; Finger; Freire; Glastra et al.; hooks, 1994, 2003). Underlying the notion of individual empowerment is the collective effort resulting from the gathering of enlightened individuals who, through learning, challenge social inequities to effect change not only for the individual but for the society as a whole (Finger; Freire; Glastra et al.; hooks; Merriam & Brockett; Newman, 2005).

The modern phenomenon of rapid advancement in technological and industrial development and its effects is not dissimilar to the changes that industrial societies of the world underwent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During these periods, many adult education programs were also the result of social movements that called for a just and egalitarian society. These included the suffragette movement, the effort of racial minorities, and the organization of labour

movements (Chovanec, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Collins, 1998; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Freire, 1970/1993; Selman et al., 1998).

Many of the adult education movements that took place in Canada had their inception elsewhere. The socialist movements in Europe of the mid to late 19th and early 20th centuries, for instance, made their way to North America through the massive immigration phenomenon at the time. These advocated independence from capitalist ventures that gave so much to so few whilst the masses languished in poverty (Cunningham, 1989). People formed organisations and educational programs and aspired to be independent; they sought to replace economic competition with co-operation and the equal distribution of wealth through the social justice model (Cunningham).

From such activism, specific groups within the social, political and educational fields were formed (Chovanec, 1998; Collins, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Selman et al., 1998). The Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), for instance, started in Britain in the mid 19th century (Selman, et al.). As an urban venue for young men from rural areas to engage in health-related and social activities, the organisation spread in popularity throughout the world and evolved to provide a variety of classes (Selman et al.). Similarly, the Mechanics' Institute, which provided technical and scientific information for workers, was founded in Britain in 1820 and a decade later in Toronto (Selman et al.). Another British-based organisation (1903) was the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), made up of the working class, universities, and the co-operative movements, which provided education for those interested in leadership skills and who would not have had opportunities for such training (Selman et al.). Finally, the Open University, which, in the late 1960's, provided educational access through distance programs, helped to widen the boundaries of traditional, site-based education by addressing the needs of those in far-flung

places (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al.). It did so through a variety of means including correspondence courses, broadcasting, publishing, and other support services (Merriam & Brockett; Selman et al.). Such programs reflected the variety of needs specific groups in society had and the impetus for addressing these by providing educational solutions that were also specific in nature. Most resulted not only in changes to the law and their effect on society, but also led to the transformation of the individuals involved. This is a remarkable quality of adult education, an implication of which is that it does not advocate learning for its own sake but rather for the purpose of achieving an end regardless of whether that end has its roots in a personal, professional, political, or social context.

Another impetus for the development of adult education programs in the late 19th century was nation building. Canada, like the United States, was experiencing rapid expansion over a vast geographic area. Newly-landed immigrants from Europe were in need of new vocational skills, the development of cultural identities within newly-created territories necessitated acquiring knowledge about these areas, and the dissemination of government services through different levels of agencies and authorities required devising ways to divide up and assign responsibilities (Cunningham, 1989; Selman et al., 1998). As a result of these needs, several educational models were developed and implemented. The agricultural extension provided knowledge for those moving into the field of agriculture, perhaps for the first time; correspondence education provided training for (Sunday) school teachers; a North American model of the university, started at the University of Wisconsin, changed the focus of their classes by placing more emphasis on the educational needs of the people they were serving rather than on maintaining traditional academic lectures; school boards and colleges also started providing classes specific to adults at the municipal level, who were then responsible for educating children

and who also initiated night school programs; and human relations training, which had its inception in Bethel, Maine (Cunningham; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al.).

Historically, adult education was also propelled by the interest in self-improvement (Bergmann, 2001; Candy, 1991; Cunningham, 1989; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al., 1998; Wang & Sarbo, 2004; Williams, 2002). Such an attitude was believed to be the basis for "not merely social advancement or economic mobility, but for intellectual and spiritual fulfilment" (Candy, p. 28). Underlying the notion of self-improvement, therefore, is the belief that humans have the capability of self-change, attributing this skill to the capacity for self-awareness, self-questioning, and growth (Bergmann; Candy; Elias & Merriam; Mezirow, 1978, 1985b, 2002; Wang & Sarbo). Such skills could be applied to many different areas of life including business, agriculture and philanthropy: any endeavour where improvement in life experience was sought (Bergmann; Candy; Cunningham; Elias & Merriam; Merriam & Brockett).

The proliferation of many adult educational programs in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, therefore, illustrates the breadth of programs and services available to an ever expanding population. Of note is how adult education did not necessarily take place within the confines of a traditional, school-based program in order to facilitate sound, growth-inducing learning (Bergmann, 2001; Selman et al., 1998; Williams, 2002). Further, the focus was on the learner whose needs the course content tried to address. The teacher, on the other hand, acted more as facilitator, providing guidance and feedback to the learner believing in the potential of the adult.

Missing Voices: Exclusion from Educational Opportunities.

Despite liberal adult education's progressive and encompassing growth in North America, many groups were excluded from reaping its benefits, particularly in the early stages of its inception. These groups included women, African-Americans, aboriginals and segments of the middle and lower classes which were often seen as threats to the authority, wealth, and social status of the very clergymen, politicians, societal elites and slave owners who initiated educational programs with the intention of aiding these groups (Bergmann, 2001; Candy, 1991; Cunningham, 1989; MacKeracher, 1997; Williams, 2002). Indeed, for the many who believed in the power of self-education as a means to free oneself from oppression in addition to the recognition of its importance as a link between work and leisure life were others of more conservative values who viewed the upper classes as setting societal standards through the cultivation of manners, tastes, and principles (Bergman; Candy; Williams).

Examples in history that describe traditional attitudes often predicated along race, class and gender lines, contrasted with progressive ones that used learning through education to seek ways to actually emancipate. Indeed, leaders of educational movements that sought to improve social conditions for the masses identified the corruption inherent in government as the root cause of social injustices, and not the masses that were reputed to have been (Cunningham, 1989). It is remarkable to note how current attitudes towards learning compare with those of the past and whether industrialised societies of the world have actually made significant progress in bringing about social equality, collaboration, and co-operation. Regrettably, the patterns that hampered progress in the early days of the adult education movement—exclusion, marginalisation and hegemony—continue to play themselves out today, albeit in more subtle ways (Brookfield, 2000; Collins, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Finger, 2005; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994, 2003; Tennant,

2005; Tisdell, 1998). The question of whether societies of the modern age will ever achieve the collective, collaborative harmony that adult education seeks to facilitate for all continues unanswered.

Current Insights.

Recent research into the field of adult education highlights its current path leading to professionalisation, which has prompted questions from many (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Chovanec, 1998; Collins, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; English, 2004; hooks, 1994, 2003; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002) because adult education has historically been defined as predicated on "human activity, not a profession or a field seeking 'scientific' verification" (Cunningham, 1989, p. 34). Specifically, adult education is a field whose inception lies in the popular grass roots movements, volunteerism, social and political movements, and rural community activities which rallied to provide information to a population eager for enlightenment, self improvement, and change (Chovanec; Cunningham; Collins; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Finger, 1995; Selman et al., 1998). What professionalisation achieves, many (including Brookfield; Chovanec; Cunningham; Collins; Elias & Merriam; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks) claim, is the creation of a discipline-based structure, which narrows focus and marginalises those who do not fit in or who purposefully transgress its boundaries. In turn, this creates hegemony where subtle ways to wrest control from individuals and relegating it to the powerful few are regarded as normal and acceptable especially when hegemony is obscured from critical analysis (Brookfield; Chovanec; Collins; Cunningham). This phenomenon is counterintuitive to the notion of adult education as education for the non-professional, non-academic, yet highly astute masses eager for a way to have their voices heard and paving the way to a more egalitarian society (Brookfield; Chovanec; Collins; Cunningham; Finger; Freire; hooks; MacKeracher, 1997).

Defining the Field: Adult Learning as an Aspect of Adult Education

Adult Learning and Child Learning.

In the realm of adult education the desire to learn is the focus, which, one could argue, distinguishes it from child learning, whose characteristics include compulsory attendance in a formal setting for the purpose of transmitting knowledge of a culture (Knowles, 1975). Is this desire to learn in adults, however, significantly different from the desire to learn in children? Some (including Candy, 1991; Collins, 1998; English, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) would argue that adults want to learn because of a need or an interest strong enough to compel them to do so. Another distinction is the degree of maturity between children and adults. Child learning traditionally involved the establishment of societal morals and values in order that children will be productive, contributing members of society (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Adults, on the other hand, are presumed to have an established set of values, attitudes, and life experiences, which contribute to a greater sense of self (Merriam & Brockett; Knowles; Selman & Dampier; 1991). These, in turn, influence their desire to learn and establish goals about what and how to learn (Knowles; Merriam & Brockett; Selman & Dampier). Others (including Merriam, 2005; Knowles; Merriam & Brockett; Wang & Sarbo, 2004) argue that because learning is contingent upon life experiences, culture, and readiness to learn, these needs and desires are subjective; one can cultivate a sense of interest strong enough to compel one to learn more about it regardless of whether one is a child or an adult. Indeed, in the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain and the United States, universality in education—wherein children and adults were mixed in the same classroom—was a common way to learn (Candy; Merriam & Brockett; Williams, 2002). In the 20th century, however, three characteristics of adult learning were proposed by Knowles in the 1960's that emphasise specific forms of learning. These components of adult learning are

andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning (Merriam). In reality, andragogical and pedagogical approaches exist on a continuum and may be applied to both kinds of learners depending on individual needs (Candy).

Andragogy versus Pedagogy: The Distinction between Adult and Child Learning.

Knowles (1975) defined andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 38). Further, he distinguished this form of teaching from that of pedagogy, which is the way to help children learn. He specifically pointed to the gradual development of maturity in adults as the crucial distinction between how they learn from how children learn. Maturity cultivates independence, providing adults with the capacity to be self-directing, which then facilitates the accumulation of experience, which in turn, acts as a resource from which an adult may draw to address specific problems (Knowles). It is this gradual focus away from subject-specific learning to problem-specific learning that distinguishes pedagogy from andragogy.

Since this initial definition of andragogy, however, Knowles et al. (2005), along with others (such as Brookfield, 2000; Chovanec, 1998; Clinchy, Belenky, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1985; English, 2000, 2005; Fox, 1994; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002) have acknowledged the various circumstances within which dependence and independence can be exhibited by both children and adults, blurring the lines between andragogy and pedagogy. Factors such as personal history, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and learning disabilities can affect a person’s capacity to be autonomous (the foremost criterion of independence) hampering control of learning regardless of how old one is. It is, therefore, important to note that teaching always assumes something about the learners because the teacher who makes one set of assumptions will teach either

pedagogically or andragogically regardless of whether he or she is teaching children or adults (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al.).

Self-Directed Learning as an Aspect of Adult Learning.

The second assumption of adult learning is that through maturity and accumulated life experiences, adults are able to self-direct their learning (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975). Self-directed learning, as a recognised component of adult learning, was inspired by Tough (1971), whose research on adult learners concluded that adults engaged in self-initiated projects that reflected learning conducted in daily life under varied conditions and circumstances, and regardless of whether in a formal or informal setting (Candy; Knowles; Leach, 2005). Indeed, the term self-directed learning is a premise of andragogy, distinguishable from conventional education by its learner-initiated approach. In its broadest meaning, self-directed learning describes “a process in which individuals take initiative, with or without help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles, p. 18). Referring to a previous example, a person, in learning to sew, gathers materials and tools that can help to achieve this end and uses the cognitive skills necessary to assess, evaluate, and ascertain progress. This would be an example of a self-directed learning approach outside of a formal educational program. On the other hand, such an approach to learning manifests in a formal classroom setting as a symbiotic collaboration between student (learner) and teacher (facilitator), where together both are student(s) as well as teacher(s) (Candy; Chovanec, 1998; Freire, 1970/1993; Knowles; hooks, 1994, 2003).

At its inception, self-directed learning was regarded as being at the basis of how adults learn. Indeed, during ancient Greek times, even the most enlightened teachers and philosophers would

often have had to initially learn what they knew by themselves (Candy, 1991; Chovanec, 1998; Leach, 2005). In the 20th century, however, a more structured model of linear learning, where a process was developed by both teacher (facilitator) and student (learner) (Knowles, 1975; Leach; Tough, 1971) was conceptualised as part of the field of adult education. This approach to self-directed learning is common in formal classroom settings. In more recent times, however, a non-linear model of self-directed learning takes into consideration an individual's personal knowledge and environmental circumstances; experimental and practical application; the learner's personality characteristics; the learner's process of learning; and the learner's ability to self-manage, self-monitor and self-motivate (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). What makes these models non-linear is that they all consider the social factors that effect a learner's viewpoints and potential to mature and that do so through non-sequential, often random life events and experiences. These, in turn, influence a learner's ability to engage in self-directed learning.

The above models pose questions that continue about self-directed learning's exclusive application to adult learning, specifically about whether children are also capable of self-direction and whether self-directed learning can be used with all adults when cultural, experiential and personal backgrounds are taken into consideration. Another criticism aimed at self-directed learning is its overemphasis on the individual as opposed to the interdependence required to evince a more cohesive, co-operative society, particularly one that reflects a more diverse population (Glastra et al., 2004; Leach, 2005). It also presumes a universal application, which, considering its conception is North American, does not necessarily consider those whose cultures are collectivist in makeup; the differences between the way men and women learn; and the class rifts that place those in the lower classes at a disadvantage because of the lack of access to educational opportunities (Brookfield, 2000; Candy, 1991; Glastra et al.; hooks, 1994, 2003;

Leach; Tisdell, 1998). Regardless, self-directed learning, in its varied applications, continues to be a viable (though contested) option that incites debate amongst practitioners in (adult) education.

Learning for Personal Growth: The Power of Transformational Learning.

The third component of adult learning is transformational learning theory, which focuses on how adult learners draw meaning from experiences, how they interpret those meanings, how they modify initial interpretations, and how these interpretations are changed when learners find them no longer relevant or appropriate (Cranton, 2005; Mezirow, 1978, 1985b, 2002; Merriam, 2004; Wang & Sarbo, 2004). A crucial component of adult learning is the confirmation of communicated ideas without which could lead to the distortion of ways of knowing, believing, and feeling. The process of consensually confirming the validity of these ideas, therefore, affects whether meaning derived from them is accepted, rejected, or re-structured (Cranton; Mezirow; Wang & Sarbo). In this sense, transformational learning is an exclusive adult learning theory because meaning-making is predicated on adult life experiences and a more advanced cognitive ability (Cranton; Merriam).

By advocating self reflection through the asking of questions about life goals, Freire, (1970/1993), for instance, used education as a form of radicalisation, something that could be used not only to empower individuals, but to bring about changes in their lives. "[T]he more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it" (Freire, p. 39). Implied in this process is the risk that a learner takes in being able to manifest life changes through honest critical (self-)reflection, ascertaining whether current ways to make meaning are still adequate, and whether, through action, a new perspective can be adopted. Changes, however, do not occur immediately but developmentally

and contingent on the individual's level of cognitive ability (Cranton, 2005; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1978, 1985b, 2002; Wang & Sarbo, 2004).

Like self-directed learning, current approaches to transformational learning have also come to embrace learning that draws on everyday life experiences (Clinchy et al., 1985; Cranton, 2005; Lindeman, 1982; Vella, 2002). They also draw on spirituality (English, 2000, 2005) , the ways the body gains new insights to the self (Clark, 2001), and advocates social and political activism as ways to bring about change for those in the margins (Clinchy et al.; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Vella).

Adults as Self-Directed Learners: Learning for Life

As the focus of this review is on one component of adult learning—self-directed learning—the following sections will discuss its philosophy, characteristics, varied applications, and weaknesses to ascertain its legitimacy as a learning approach. The recent interest in self-directed learning, particularly in a formal context, is a response to the traditional, teacher-centred approach to learning that, in many respects, does not focus on the very entity it is meant to—the learners—and how this has consistently resulted in silencing. It is an approach that, therefore, affirms individuals as crucial components of the teaching-learning dynamic, acknowledging them not only as responsible for their own learning but also as the foundation on which the learning process is based. At the heart of self-directed learning lies its goal of cultivating moral, emotional, and intellectual autonomy, which coincides with the goal of education as a whole (Candy, 1991) yet must recognise learners' ability to choose to learn dependently as well as independently contingent on circumstances as well as their ability to self-assess their capacity for intended actions (Anderson & Lux, 2005; Candy, 1991). Such acknowledgement recognises that

unfamiliarity with a subject may necessitate learning about it from an expert underscoring the notion that self-directed learning as an approach need not preclude collaborative, co-operative learning for the achievement of common goals (Candy; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002).

Self-Directed Learning's Varied Applications.

It is important from an educator's standpoint, to be aware of self-directed learning's broad scope and varied applications. First, it is learning that is influenced by humanist, behaviourist, and developmental psychology so may be distinguished into several components (Chovanec, 1998). Self-directed learning may be viewed from a technical and interpretive (Knowles, 1975) perspective in the way it combines the use of "learning contracts, objectives, techniques, and outcome evaluations (technical paradigm)" (Chovanec, 1998) in order to facilitate self-awareness and personal growth (interpretive paradigm). Other interpretations (including Brookfield, 2000; Candy, 1991; Collins, 1998; Freire, 1970/1993; Mezirow, 1978, 1985b, 2002) see it from a more critical perspective as a way to bring about personal transformation and social change.

Within these paradigmatic interpretations of self-directed learning are arrays of dimensions that attempt to define it further as a process of learning and as the personality trait of the learner (Brookfield, 2005; Candy, 1991; Leach, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Self-directed learning as a process requires a context; whether this context takes place within a traditional classroom or in a less formal setting can yield very different results (Brookfield; Candy; Clark, 2001; English, 2000, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella; Vella, 2002). Self-directed learning as a personality trait can further reflect the psychological and philosophical characteristics of individuals (Candy; Leach; Merriam & Caffarella). Other theorists (including Brookfield, 2000; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991) take a more multi-dimensional view of self-directed learning, combining both the process and personality traits of the learner in order

to facilitate learning and growth (Chovance, 1998). "[S]elf-direction is not so much a method of teaching as a characteristic of learners....In fact, self-direction is increasingly viewed not simply as an attribute that people either have or do not have, but as a quality that may be present in varying degrees" (Candy, p. 7). It would, therefore, be erroneous to presume that self-directed learning as a process is mutually exclusive from self-directed learning as a goal (outcome). In reality, it is a continuum, with the deliberate and purposeful relinquishing of some responsibilities by the teacher (facilitator) accompanied by the willing acceptance of responsibilities by the student (learner) (Brookfield; Candy; Leach; Merriam & Caffarella).

Self-directed learning approaches may be used to explore informal learning outside of the academic environment (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Clark, 2001; English, 2000, 2005; Vella, 2002). Somatic learning, for instance, uses the body's experience to gain self-knowledge. "Ironically, the traditional understanding of experiential learning has become cognitive—we have an experience, then later we reflect on it. This locates the learning in the act of reflection rather than the experience itself." (Clark, p. 85). Through listening to the body and allowing it free expression of its experiences, one can gain insights that precede those ruminated on in the head.

Another technique that is used to create meaning is narrative learning when we, as natural story-tellers, reflect on our own stories in order to gain insight about ourselves (Clark, 2001; English, 2000, 2005). Narrative learning can help with achieving coherence in life, and as an aspect of self-directed learning, can lead to greater self-awareness, understanding, and fulfilment. Further, it is a concept that confirms the autonomous ability to bring about change in one's life irrespective of setting, social status, or financial privilege, but that also challenges one to think critically about how one situates one's self within the area one is learning about. Mezirow (as

cited in Merriam, & Caffarella, 1999) claims that an "understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for one's needs, wants, and interests….is a pre-requisite for autonomy in self-directed learning" (p. 291). This approach may use writing, oral reading, or conversation to achieve results.

The cultivation of one's spirituality that regards the person holistically (not just externally, socially, emotionally and intellectually), for instance, may be fostered through self-knowledge and autonomy both qualities inherent in self-directed learning. In this context, spirituality is not defined as being exclusively connected with religion but rather with how self-reflection can achieve the goals we strive for through a better sense of self, meaning-making, teaching, ethics, relationships and the care, nurturing, and collaboration that take place when people work together to achieve similar ends (English, 2000, 2005). "The building of mutuality and respect, the stretching to be all one can be, is an explicitly spiritual dimension." (English, 2000, p. 33). They can also be components of self-directed learning.

In facilitating varied ways to learn, self-directed learning affirms the notion that learning neither has to take place within the confines of the traditional classroom nor be evaluated using traditional grading systems. Self-directed learning can start where traditional and formal education end. It is important to note, however, that self-directed learning, though it implies an individual focus, may also occur in co-operation and in relationship with others so that it is learning that need not take place in isolation (Brookfield, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003; Tennant, 2005; Vella, 2002). This is particularly true where individuals who feel alienated by the academic setting are concerned and whose public or post-secondary education experiences were neither fruitful nor fulfilling. Ideally and through collaboration, adult learning may help to develop a strong sense of self, which, in turn, may have a profoundly positive effect on society as

a whole. Attaining goals gradually builds on what already exists, illustrating how adult learning may be used to augment past knowledge for the purpose of creating more knowledge not just for the individual learning but for those with whom this learning is shared (Collins, 1998; hooks 1994, 2003; Vella, 2002). It is a remarkable comment on the potential for adult learning, within the broader field of adult education, to engender hope because it facilitates the perpetual envisioning and striving for a kinder, gentler, more humane world.

Implications of Self-Directed Learning within a Post-Secondary Institution: Reflections

In ascertaining the effectiveness of self-directed learning on adult learners, it is important to examine its potential weaknesses and shortcomings. Indeed, the three main components of adult learning—andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformational learning—are constantly being questioned as to whether they may also apply to individuals not considered “adult”. Further, self-directed learning’s highly individual focus precludes the notion of collective effort. Finally, the constant flux of the adult experience reflected in cultural differences, gender issues, sexual orientation, and learning ability influences the creation of more theories and approaches that strive to empower and include. Would self-directed learning work in the post-secondary environment? How do we practically make the transition from a teacher-centred approach to learning to a student-centred one? Should we do so? How do we assess and evaluate students who are encouraged to self-direct within a formal institution when self-directed learning is subjectively motivated seemingly obviating compliance with the standards of an institution? Do inequities in practice and implementation exist? Given how this review advocates its benefits, it is important to acknowledge self-directed learning’s shortcomings about which we may know

little and for which there may not be easy solutions. It would, therefore, be beneficial to examine several approaches and theories that could shed more light on its efficacy.

Indefinable: An Approach Fraught with Contradictions.

One of the characteristics of self-directed learning that most researchers (including Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Candy, 1991; Collins, 1998; Chovanec, 1998; Ellsworth, 1989; Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) are unanimous on is its adaptability, which, despite being one of its advantages, can also create difficulties in universally defining it. Its earlier proponents (including Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1979) believed, for instance, that in order to facilitate the development of self-awareness and personal growth in the learner, one had to employ formal teaching approaches (Candy, 1991; Chovanec, 1998; Collins, 1998). Such a belief attests self-directed learning as a process ostensibly favouring the learner yet is often contradicted by instructional realities—particularly in a formal setting—that emphasise "curriculum, grading, methods and teacher skills rather than … the learners themselves" (Chovanec, 1998, p. 302). Such a viewpoint is shared by others (including Brookfield, 2000; Candy, 1991; Collins, 1998) who disparage the encroachment of the technical and the formal into the interpretive aspect of self-directed learning compromising its humanistic, learner-based traits. These concerns arise from the belief that self-directed learning, as an aspect of modern adult education practice, has become increasingly focused on methodology and as a result is being professionalised and commodified to favour standardisation, bureaucracy, big business, and governmental interests rather than those of ordinary people (Collins).

This brings to the fore learners themselves and whether it is possible to define their characteristics. Earlier theorists believe that adult maturity that evolves over time is one characteristic of the self-directed learner (Chovanec, 1998). Others (including Caffarella, 1993;

Candy, 1991; Ellsworth, 1989) believe that it is educational experience that determines whether one can be self-directive or not. There are others yet (including Brookfield, 2000; Candy, 1991) who believe that, ironically, it is those who favour a more structured paradigm who would respond well to this approach. It is important to acknowledge that the autonomy required in being a self-directed learner entails paradoxes:

> Simply because a learner exercises control over dimensions of the teaching/learning situation does not mean that he or she is capable of exercising personal autonomy in the broader sense … [T]he extent to which people are, or can be, self-determining is itself largely situation specific. Conversely, the fact that a learner does not choose to exercise control in a particular educational setting cannot be taken as evidence that he or she lacks personal autonomy in the broader sense. (Candy, p. 21)

Indeed, autonomy as a characteristic of self-directed learning is often criticised for overemphasising the individual and calls for it to "be coupled with interdependence and interconnectedness" (Caffarella cited in Chovanec, 1998, p. 305) in order to effect a more balanced result. More importantly, such a call recognises that self-directed learning is rife with contradictions and paradoxes that require careful thought in its implementation and practice.

Critical Reflection.

There are many researchers (including Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Vella, Berardinelli & Burrow, 1998) who advocate engaging in critical reflection in order to examine the social functions of a theory or approach and the way these could unknowingly be inequitable. Critical reflection, in the way that it "examine[s] both the social functions of adult education …. and the way [educators'] own practice reproduces existing patterns of inequity" (Brookfield, 2000, p.

33), is particularly relevant in the field of adult education because of this field's inherent complex and diverse theories, approaches, and issues (Brookfield; Ellsworth; hooks; Merriam & Caffarella; Tisdell; Vella, 2002; Weeks, 1995) and the challenges of ascertaining a specific remedy. Adult education focuses on the ways adults learn, which in turn, have consistently been contextualised along the lines of race, class, gender, and levels of learning ability (Brookfield; Ellsworth; hooks; Merriam & Caffarella; Stage & Milne, 1996; Tisdell; Vella; Vella et al.; Weeks). In examining self-directed learning's efficacy in the classroom, one must consider a student as an individual. Does personal or cultural background, for instance, play a role in determining a student's comfort zones in how he or she learns, and if so is self-directed learning the best approach to use with this student (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Chovanec, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998)? For instance, does the student come from a culture which encourages independent thinking, or do teachers play a highly active role in determining the knowledge the student acquires? Indeed, what could be easier than to be told what to do to save one from having to make crucial decisions solely? For many students, memorising and regurgitating information as opposed to ruminating on them and subsequently having to develop an independent opinion seem less complicated and involved. If so, a teacher may need to consider that for many students who come from cultures where teacher-centeredness—a possibly inherent social ideology—is still the pre-dominant way to learn, they may find assurance in this approach (Brookfield; Leach, 2005; Vella; Vella et al.). Such consideration confirms the diverse ways adult students learn and underscores the need to address these on an individual level (Brookfield; hooks, 1994, 2003; Leach; Merriam & Caffarella; Tisdell, 1998; Vella; Vella et al.; Wang & Sarbo, 2004).

Problems also arise when students, conversely, identify their own needs because from a pedagogical standpoint they may not be challenged sufficiently beyond their comfort zones (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Vella, 2002; Vella et al, 1998). “[E]quating good teaching with how many students feel you have done what they want works to prevent significant learning” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 42). Further, advocating autonomy does not preclude students relying on external resources (Arries, 1999; Candy, 1991; Chovanec, 1998; Ponton et al., 2005; Vella; White, 2002). Indeed, Collins (1991) (as cited in Chovanec, 1998) claims that “learners who require more structured forms of support may respond well to some self-directed learning methods such as pre-packaged, self-paced learning materials” (p. 305) because of the way they track progress. More to the point, despite its potential benefits, self-directed learning approaches may not be appropriate for all students. Differences in ways of learning as well as expectations about how much responsibility individuals have in their own learning may preclude its application (Brookfield; Chovanec; Ellsworth, 1989; Leach, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Vella; Vella et al.).

Another factor to consider is the contradictions that exist in formal institutions. Despite the advocacy of self-directed learning approaches from a pedagogical context, for instance, the ways of evaluating student work are still largely based on standards that are institutionally set and which obviate this approach (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Chovanec, 1998; Ellsworth, 1989; Fassinger, 1995; Stage & Milne, 1996; Wang & Sarbo, 2004). How, for instance, when reviewing a student’s essay, is it possible to diminish the emphasis on the editing process advocating instead a focus on its content, whether there is sufficient critical analysis, and a cogent, compelling style when teachers still evaluate essays largely based on correct use of grammar and mechanics? English-as-a-Second Language students, in particular, already at a

linguistic disadvantage, are perplexed by this contradiction. Because self-directed learning is a process-oriented approach that was traditionally "assumed by the teacher" (Chovanec, p. 302), this change has to be considered in course design, curriculum development, and evaluation (Knowles, 1975; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998; Wang & Sarbo, 2004); however, "while process definitions focus on the individual learner, instructional realities often contradict this ideal" (Chovanec, p.302). Detractors of the concept of self-directed learning also point to the notion that teachers, despite engaging students in discourse, may unconsciously undermine student autonomy because of teachers' own personal biases (Brookfield; Cherryholmes, 1988; Chovanec; Ellsworth; English, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999); however, this presupposes the notion that as one initiates one also subjugates. While a teacher needs to be aware of the existence of biases and inclinations, one may, by encouraging resourcefulness and persistence in students (Ponton et al., 2005), mitigate against biases thereby making ethically and pedagogically sound decisions about implementing self-directed learning approaches.

Taking an Ethical Approach.

It is these realities that require some thought to the role of ethics when considering the implementation of a self-directed learning approach. "A true code of ethics deals explicitly with shared values and the implications for practice of accepting those values" (Sork & Welock, 1992, p.117). Indeed, one may argue that because of the pluralistic nature of the field of adult education, it needs a code of ethics to ensure that its varied purposes, ideologies, and philosophies are applied responsibly and appropriately (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sork & Welock). Fears that a code of ethics will be restrictive or potentially be defined too narrowly are short sighted because codes of ethics are simply used as guides to make informed decisions and as communication tools to inform about a group's shared purpose (Sork & Welock). Indeed,

when educating students, there are many ways to respond to even similar situations, so “ethical dilemmas are grounded in conflicting yet often equally legitimate views of what is good and right” (Merriam & Caffarella, p. 371). Does insisting that one’s students take more self-direction in the writing of their own paper, for instance, believing that doing so encourages more independent, critical thinking, actually undermine their ability to make this decision for themselves? Further, perhaps students can appreciate the philosophies and objectives of self-directed learning, but are not yet at a stage in their personal development where they can implement these (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella). Having a code of ethics specific to adult education provides the field with credibility as well as ensuring that the responsibility for practices and decisions within its boundaries are placed not with an individual but rather with the community of adult educators as a whole (Sork & Welock).

In developing a code of ethics for the field of adult education, we need to be mindful of students’ individual circumstances. Examples of frameworks include the individual theories of Starrat (1991), Brockett (1988), and Sork (1988, 1990), who approach ethical issues from theoretical, personal, and organisational contexts respectively (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). In becoming familiar with and adapting these frameworks, teachers and administrators may come to appreciate not only their attributes but also their implications, the latter illustrating possible consequences to programs and teaching methodology within a formal institution. As a teacher (facilitator), is one ready to meet the challenges of implementing a new approach or vision? In this regard, a code of ethics may help to provide a reference point for practitioners: one that provides a foundation for consistent, ethical action.

Self-Directed Learning in the Post-Secondary Institution

Factors that Silence

A Breadth of Circumstances, Expectations, and Ideologies

As the concept of self-directed learning is a broad one (Brookfield, 2000; Chovanec, 1998; Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) its implementation is particularly challenged when coupled with the realities of modern-day society's fixation on accreditation, often the purview of educational institutions. Whether a specific institution's mandates are appropriate to an individual's needs, therefore, is a question that is difficult to answer. This, in part, is due to the fact that individuals' needs together with the "dominant ideology and power arrangements of the time" (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 41) vary and evolve, so that ways to address these have to do the same (Brookfield; Cherryholmes; Clark, 2001; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella; Rossiter, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998; Wang & Sarbo, 2004). "For example, curricula designed in the 1950's were silent on issues such as feminism, racism, poverty, and social injustice and inequality, issues about which some curricula designed in the 1970's and early 1980's were vocal" (Cherryholmes, p. 41). Indeed, many institutions' promotional campaigns, tout their ability to address students' needs presupposing that these are identical (Brookfield, 2000; Chovanec; Tisdell). Students, however, have diverse ways of learning and varied levels of readiness to learn; have contrasting historical and cultural backgrounds; and contrasting gender-related experiences and political affiliations (Brookfield; hooks; Merriam & Caffarella; Stage & Milne, 1996; Tisdell; Vella; Wang & Sarbo, 2004). Further, even if an institution acknowledges the diversity of students' needs, the breadth of its resources often pre-determines and limits the range of its services. Addressing all needs, therefore, becomes virtually impossible (Brookfield; Merriam & Caffarella). As decisions that

affect program design, services, and resources are made, institutions “privilege some and leave others feeling relatively unacknowledged. These choices are also always made against an ideological background. They are never value free, though the values that inform them are often implicit and unacknowledged” (Brookfield, p. 41).

It is important, therefore, to be aware of how privileges within an institution exclude because of their inherent nature to differentiate according to status and special rights that more often than not favour academic achievement, and how doing so may (even unintentionally) silence those who do not meet certain criteria. This is particularly relevant for students who fall outside of the mainstream culture and who are discriminated against along lines of culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, and learning ability. Part of the challenge of being an educator (facilitator) within an educational institution, therefore, is being aware of the various factors that contribute to the silencing of students (learners) and how to avoid or mitigate these (Brookfield, 2000; Castles, 2004; hooks, 1994, 2003; MacDougall, 2000; Stage & Milne, 1996; Stevens, 2004; Weeks, 1995; White, 2002). Applying self-directed learning approaches judiciously and discerningly may be one way to address these factors that silence.

The Banking Concept: Recognizing the Source of Knowledge

The traditional way teachers convey content to their students may be particularly problematic because it precludes interaction and discourse between teacher and student placing the focus on the former rather than on the potential for a more equitable exchange between teacher and student (Ellsworth, 1989; Freire, 1970/1993; Wang & Sarbo. 2004). “Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, p. 72). The implication is that students are not

the source of knowledge but rather the receivers of it. As sources of knowledge, teachers on the other hand, are regarded as superior to students, which results in the dynamic of power within the classroom favouring the teacher (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Cherryholmes, 1988; Ellsworth; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Wang & Sarbo, 2004). Students then "accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher" (Freire, p. 72). When students are not acknowledged as being collaborators in their own learning, there is the tendency to assign responsibility for learning to the teacher, which not only can create patterns of dependency but also subsumes students' individualities into the collective whole known as "the class". By so doing, students' individual needs may be ignored, their voices unheard (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Cherryholmes, 1988; Ellsworth; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Wang & Sarbo, 2004).

Hegemony: Education as Instrument of a Patriarchal Paradigm

There are others (including Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Clinchy et al., 1985; Cherryholmes, 1988; Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Weeks, 1995) who believe that current educational practices are predicated along sexist and racist lines imposed on students by society's patriarchal paradigm. It is not easy to discern these lines, which are often hidden beneath layers of ideologies and social assumptions about what is considered morally acceptable and true. This is where hegemony—loosely, the domination of one group over another—exercises its greatest hold.

The tendency to acquiesce to those who wield power is widespread in society and no less prevalent in educational institutions (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994,

2003; MacDougall, 2000; Nesbit & Wilson, 2005). This does not mean that power itself is necessarily bad. Indeed, power regarded and used in the context of social interaction can be liberating (Nesbit & Wilson). When circumscribed by a dominant group, however, it can subjugate. This underscores the importance of being aware of the power dynamics extant in educational institutions and who wields it. More importantly, what ideologies does it represent (Brookfield; Ellsworth; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks; Nesbit & Wilson)? Instructors hold great power over students regardless of how democratic and equitable they try to be, so it is important to be aware of the varied ways that power is exercised. The ways faculty encourage student participation, for instance, differ with female teachers consistently soliciting student participation in the form of responses, providing feedback, and acknowledging students' comments as well as encouraging student interaction (Clinchy et al., 1985; hooks, 2003; Fassinger, 1995). Conversely, female students claim they stay silent because of "poorly formulated ideas, ignorance about a subject, and fear of appearing unintelligent to peers" (Fassinger, p.84). Further, critiques can be made about public education mandates that simultaneously insist that education is democratising yet does nothing about the biases that relegate some to the margins (Cherryholmes, 1988; hooks).

The notion of participation is particularly relevant in the learning of English as a second language by international students and adult immigrants. Having arrived speaking a different language, and often with undergraduate or graduate degrees from their own countries, those who wish to pursue academic and professional opportunities take either non-credited or credited courses in order to acquire or improve their English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Theoretically, these aid students to assimilate and flourish in an increasingly interconnected world (Finger, 2005; Fox, 1994; Glastra et al, 2004; Tanaka, 2002). In reality, however, many obstacles exist for these students during the language training process (Finger;

Fox; Glastra et al.; Tanaka). In degree-credit programs, for instance, international and adult immigrant students take the same courses as native English speakers and are, therefore, held to the same standards. Such standards, which presuppose the uniformity of individuals, employ assessments that do not consider linguistic differences that place an international or adult immigrant student at a disadvantage, that ignore cultural differences in writing styles and conventions, that overlook learning disabilities that may not have been diagnosed in the student's home country, and that are seemingly indifferent to the transition into a foreign environment (Finger; Fox; Glastra et al.; Tanaka). International and adult immigrant students are particularly vulnerable to the inequalities these experiences result in.

The Learning Disabled: Silencing the Already Invisible

The notion of being silenced is particularly relevant to students with learning disabilities because they suffer stigmas that affect self-esteem, which in turn can result in the denial of the disability, the cessation of motivation, and the curtailment of redress (Sork & Welock, 1992; Stage & Milne, 1996; White, 2002). In Canada,

> "Learning Disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning **(a)** [sic]**,** in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are specific not global impairments and as such are distinct from intellectual disabilities. (http://www.ldao.ca/resources/education/pei/assessment/index.php)

Students with learning disabilities have needs that not only require knowledge in the type, extent of, and ways to address the disability, there are conflicts in ascertaining these in addition to arguments as to whom the responsibility for doing so belongs (Arries, 1999; Brookfield, 2000; Sork & Welock, 1992; Stage & Milne, 1996; White, 2002). Further, students often obscure these disabilities behind a façade of competency for fear of judgment (Arries; Stage & Milne; White). In their relationships with peers, in particular, students with learning disabilities are vulnerable to varied reactions including denial of the disability to false impressions about a student's level of intelligence to a patronising attitude (Stage & Milne; White). Time is particularly problematic for these students because limitations are placed on the completion of assignments or tests, thereby creating more obstacles. As a result, many of these students are apprehensive to discuss their disabilities with peers (Stage & Milne; White). Indeed, a student with a learning disability may be able to self-express logically and clearly in speech but may not be able to write a simple sentence or paragraph (Arries; Stage & Milne; White). Learning disabilities adversely affect skills in reading, writing, math, the organisation of thought, and the processing of information (Arries; Stage & Milne; White). It is, therefore, only through the general testing of academic skills that the disability may first be noticed; however, assessment resources that provide accurate information about the existence of a learning disability within a specific skills area are still lacking (Stage & Milne; White). Further, educators often lack the knowledge and training to realise the implications of learning disabilities for students (Stage & Milne; White). Brinckerhoff, Shaw, and McGuire (1992); Hawthorne (1977); and Walker (1980) (cited in Stage & Milne, 1996), indicate how "many authors have pointed out that attitudinal barriers and organizational structures within universities may impede the attainment of handicapped students' goals" (p. 429).

The perception that learning disabilities, in being linked to neurological impairment, further marginalises students. When a learning disability is considered strictly a neurological disease as opposed to also a social construct like other disabilities, it is potentially conflated with being a fraud (White, 2002), the likelihood of which is compounded by the uncertainty of diagnosis (Stage & Milne, 1996; White). With such numerous obstacles that inhibit them, the potential to silence these students increases.

Sexual Orientation as a Form of Oppression

Finally, those whose sexual orientation is outside the heteronormative mainstream have also suffered for various reasons, the most affective being the presumption that most, if not all, people are heterosexual, and so are favoured over those who are not (MacDougall, 2000). This not only creates a stigma resulting in the non-heterosexual being regarded with suspicion, it also presumes that just because a group is in the minority that it ought to be treated dismissively or with less respect (MacDougall). In schools in general, the emphasis on heterosexuality silences those who are not heterosexual, excluding them from discussions and resources on love, sexuality, marriage, the arts and sciences, and social interaction in a non-heterosexual context (MacDougall; Stevens, 2004; Tanaka, 2002; Weeks, 1995). In research, there are those (including Fassinger, 1991; MacDougall; Stevens; Tanaka) who regard sexual orientation as being influenced by environment and divided into three categories—open, hostile, or null—with the latter defined as being neither positive nor negative, and in so being is considered just as undesirable as a hostile environment because the evident lack of positive support was synonymous with upholding the views of the status quo (Stevens). Further, classroom size often affects non-heterosexuals because the kinds of comments offered by classmates and professors

and the difficulty in ascertaining who was hostile and who was not causes a great deal of wariness and anxiety (Stevens; Tanaka). Despite the increasing diversity of the post-secondary environment whereby access to resources and social networks for non-heterosexuals are perceived as more readily available than in the past or than in high school, the decision to come out is still a risky one given the difficulty in ascertaining to whom it is safe to do so (Stevens). Perceived openness, therefore, is often tempered by the heterosexism and homophobia that pervades the university environment (MacDougall; Stevens; Tanaka). Difficulties in coping in such an environment affect the development of sexual identity and its integration into other aspects of self, a common occurrence in non-heterosexuals, to which heterosexuals are not necessarily subject (Stevens).

Silencing the Marginalised: An Affliction of the 'Other'

The aforementioned factors often result in the silencing of many students, their needs regularly left unaddressed, their plight subsumed into the neat category of 'other'. The effect this silencing has perpetuates stigmas that marginalise, create deep-seated insecurity, and affect already-fragile self-esteem (Brookfield, 2000; Clinchy et al., 1985; hooks, 1994, 2004; MacDougall, 2000; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Stevens, 2004; Weeks, 1995). To this end, a close examination of existing institutional programs, courses, and areas in which a student-centred, self-directed approach may be initiated is worthwhile because any desire to effect institution-wide changes starts at the program level (Brookfield; Clinchy et al.; Merriam & Caffarella; Tanaka, 2002). Presuming such program areas has in place administrative bodies amenable to implementing unconventional learning approaches allows for the development of questions and rationales that address individual needs. In such circumstances, could self-directed

learning approaches be used to address these issues, bridging the gap between dilemmas and discrepancies, and thereby creating a more confident, resourceful, and self-initiating student? Perhaps it is. On the other hand, there are many students who do not want to be singled out as individuals; many, in fact, prefer the anonymity of being part of the collective. It is, therefore, important to recognise that self-directed learning approaches are not appropriate for such students.

From Teacher-Centred to Student-Centred: Self-Directed Learning as One Approach to Learning

The World as One: Self-Directed Learning to Offset the Effects of Globalisation

The effects of rapid globalisation currently taking place compel us to rally forth and collectively address inequities that pervade our governmental and educational environments. Such phenomena as market competition and movement, and highly individualistic consumer choices require flexibility on the part of organisations and workers (Finger, 2005; Glastra et al., 2004; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Globalisation, defined as the integration of the economy, and the uniformisation of culture and technology has been a rapidly growing phenomenon over the last twenty years. Because of globalisation's rapid increase—for instance, the high levels of migration between nations, the growth of international finance, and the phenomenon of the Internet—consequences have manifested, including the loss of identity; the devaluing of people, nations, and labour; and the increase of social inequities and job insecurity, ecological damage, and fundamentalism (Finger; Glastra et al.; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al.; Tanaka, 2002). This increase has had an impact on individualisation because of the subsequent rise in competition. Beck, (cited in Glastra et al., 2004) believes that "[i]ndividualization refers here to the growing autonomy of individuals vis-à-vis social structures and cultural and moral

orders, and the fact that individuals must resolve systemic and institutional frictions essentially on their own" (p. 293). These phenomena have resulted in the de-stabilisation and fragmentation of personal and social relations and the proliferation of life choices that are disconcerting for many as the possible consequences of such choices are unknown and leave individuals accountable for making them (Castles, 2004; Glastra et al.; Knowles; Knowles et al.).

Ironically, traditional education has played a role in globalisation because of its advocacy of knowledge through objective research, which is biased towards a scientific and technological culture that has, through funding from the nation state, precipitated in a homogenisation of the world (Finger, 2005). Adult education, on the other hand, because it is less dependent on support from the nation state, has actually been able to take advantage of the globalisation phenomenon (Finger; Knowles et al, 2005). Because its existence has been predicated on social activism and personal development, it has been utilised by the very firms and corporations that contribute to globalisation by implementing customised programs that employ self-directed learning approaches to help individuals cope with the adverse effects—commercialisation and industrial and technical development—of globalisation (Finger; Knowles et al.). The concern, however, is that self-directed learning, within the context of adult education and as an antidote to globalisation, is becoming a commodity, sold as a means to gain an advantage, in essence, to maintain a competitive edge (Finger). If not applied judiciously, and with the purpose of creating division, self-directed learning loses touch with the very tradition that is at the heart of its inception: personal development through social activism (Finger). Contextualised self-directed learning approaches could be used to empower individuals not to create further division but to encourage collaborative, co-operative, life-enriching experiences that are then shared with others in the spirit of community and regardless of whether such learning take place in solitude,

collectively, formally, or informally (Finger; hooks, 2003; Lindeman, 1982; Tennant, 2005; Vella, 2002).

Alternative Choices: Learning through Connection and Experiences

Recent research reveals the varied ways individuals learn best that not only reflect personality but also gender. Factors that distinguish the learning experience of women from the learning experience of men include the notion that most women—especially those of the lower classes—feel that they had been treated as less intelligent than men (Clinchy, et al., 1985; hooks, 1994, 2003). Also, many female students find the standardised way institutions evaluate students as not necessarily reflective of individual skill, intelligence, or progress (Clinchy et al.; hooks; Tisdell, 1998).

> Although teachers in the more highly structured institutions may pay close personal attention to individual students, the system itself is relatively impersonal. All students are expected to perform certain tasks and submit certain products at specified uniform dates, to be evaluated according to objective criteria. The student's work is compared not with her own past work but with other students' work. (Clinchy et al., p. 38)

Many women prefer to learn through experience and connection so that they have a context within which to apply information they have learned (Clinchy et al., 1985; English, 2004; hooks, 1994, 2003; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002). From a pedagogical context, such learning advocates a highly interactive, collaborative environment where teachers never impose their will on students, instead inviting them to share their individual experiences (Candy, 1991; Clinchy et al.; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks; Tisdell; Vella) for the purpose of mutual understanding.

Underscoring the connectivity between and experience of individuals, however, should not preclude the relevance of this approach to the way people learn generally, because gender issues in education may be used to maintain "the interests of women … while attempting to change the educational systems to also benefit those who have been marginalized by race, class, sexual orientation, and ableness" (Tisdell, 1998, p. 146). By emphasising the connection between and experiences of students (learners), a teacher (facilitator) validates, affirms, and includes all students in the learning experience (Clinchy et al., 1985; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994, 2003; Tisdell; Vella, 2002). This emphasis also questions notions of truth that, heretofore, may have been regarded as absolute but which, from this standpoint, takes into consideration its contingent, ever evolving nature that subsequently affects and reflects the individual's shifting identity (Brookfield, 2000; Clinchy et al.; Freire; hooks; Tisdell; Vella). It is through this kind of classroom dynamic that students learn as much about their own abilities and how these may be applied to the knowledge they are acquiring as the knowledge itself. From a pedagogical context, therefore, an emphasis on individual connections and experiences facilitates self-directed learning through the establishment of a learning environment conducive to dialogue, discussion, and inquiry (Collins, 1998; Clinchy et al.; Freire; Knowles, 1975; hooks; Vella).

Self-Directed Learning in the Multicultural Classroom

When planning programs, today's educators may consider the varied interpretations and applications of self-directed learning (Brookfield, 2001; Chovanec, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sork & Wellock, 1992) as a way to ensure that all voices in the classroom are heard. Of note, is the notion that "being heard" as symbolic of the notion of participation, may be defined differently according to cultural background. For those who are comfortable engaging in

conversation, participation constitutes spontaneously speaking out (Fritschner, 2000); for those who are naturally quieter it is defined more broadly: listening attentively, consistent attendance, completing one's assignments, and being prepared (Fritschner).

> [M]any international and adult immigrant students come from cultures with strong traditions of communicating indirectly and holistically, learning by absorption, valuing the wisdom of the past, and downplaying the individual in favour of the group …. [These traditions] affect the way students interact with their professors and classmates, their attitudes toward the books they read, and the problems they are called upon to solve. (Fox, 1994, p. viii)

Research (including those of Chen & Sanchez, 2001; Fox, 1994) on English-as-a-Second Language Students, for example, shows that thinking patterns about world views, behaviour, and values are culturally influenced and, therefore, affect writing skills. Because of this, an individual can likely transfer writing conventions from first language to the language currently being used, resulting in lack of clarity, confusion, and incomprehension in written or oral form (Chen & Sanchez; Fox). The introduction of North American writing conventions through discussion-based activities to international students, for instance, may be used as a springboard to learning about the writing conventions of other cultures, discovering how interpretations of writing assignment criteria are often subject to cultural influences, and defining what these are (Chen & Sanchez; Fox). By recognizing cultural differences as factors that may inhibit academic success within the North American classroom, a teacher (facilitator) can convey to students that success is not necessarily predicated on whether a person is a skilled learner but rather on influences and traditions in which the student grew up (Barer-Stein, 1997; Fox). For many, this revelation is profoundly effective because it absolves a student of the guilt the belief of not already possessing specific learning skills produces and instead holds the promise of the gradual

acquisition of such skills though practical experience (Barer-Stein; Fox). Such recognition utilises self-directed learning through discourse and the continual exchange of ideas about cultural distinctions between students and teachers facilitating understanding, mutual respect, and the affirmation of learning traditions often predicated on upbringing (Barer-Stein). By comparing and contrasting the student's culturally-based learning tradition with the North American tradition, the teacher provides a context within which to convey the importance of "an abiding commitment to the essential similarities between people everywhere, while paradoxically maintaining an equally strong commitment to … differences" (Barer-Stein, p. 159). Regardless of which (self-directed learning) techniques are employed to achieve this end, both the goal and result is inclusivity, a hallmark of democratic education: one that advocates the active participation of teacher and student alike (Barer-Stein; Fox; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 2003).

Self-Directed Learning for Students with Learning Disabilities

For students with learning disabilities, self-directed learning approaches could be used to motivate students despite the learning disability. "Teaching that attempts to "remediate" by focusing on what is wrong with the way students are reading and writing only emphasizes their disability" (White, 2002, p. 728). Such an approach merely entrenches the belief that a student has an obstacle to overcome (White). Presuming that a learning disability has been legitimately diagnosed either through a series of rigorous testing (of reading and spelling skills, for instance) or through self-identification, it is important for a teacher (facilitator) to expose the student (learner) to learning approaches that cultivate a level playing field between facilitators (teachers, therapists, peers) and learners and between learners themselves (of note is the importance of

classroom teachers working in collaboration with an institution's centre for students with learning disabilities in order to ascertain a particular student's learning disability and to prescribe ways to address specific problems) (Arries, 1999; White). This may be achieved by providing activities—music, movement (somatic learning), or drama (narrative learning)—that are not exclusively reading or writing oriented and with which students can connect because of interest (Arries; Clark, 2001; English, 2000, 2004, 2005; White). Some students with learning disabilities have difficulties reading and writing because of difficulties in phonetically decoding words (Arries; White); however, by providing topics of interest to them, students are able to acquire sufficient knowledge about a reading in order to engage in discourse, obviating the need to understand single words in order to create meaning (Arries; White). This is learning through association or context and is, thus far, considered one of the most effective learning approaches (Arries; White). Engaging in discourse confirms inclusion in the classroom experience because it facilitates interaction between all participants, challenging perspectives, and encouraging self-reflection (Arries; hooks, 1994, 2003, Vella, 2002; White). A discourse-oriented classroom environment is also an alternative to traditional forms of learning such as testing, which often causes anxiety in students with a learning disability and that should, therefore, be sparingly used (Arries). It is the cultivation of such a dynamic in the classroom—embodying the characteristics of self-directed learning—that motivates and compels students to succeed and affirms that success regardless of the existence of a learning disability (Ponton et al., 2005; White; Vella). "A student-centred curriculum requires students to invest more of themselves in the learning process than they do in a traditional classroom" (Arries, p. 107).

Towards (Self-)Acceptance: Self-Directed Learning as Affirmation

Finally, the term *queer* was historically used derogatorily to distinguish gays and lesbians from heterosexuals, emphasising their “otherness” from the norm, and thus defining them as the “un-normal”. Such an appellation effectively shames and stigmatises, which is why Queer Nation, an American activist group re-appropriated the word in the early 1990s to symbolise the empowerment of those outside the heteronormative mainstream (Grace, 2005). Thus, it has come to replace even the terms *gay* and *lesbian* and includes those who regard themselves “as bisexual, intersexual, transgender, and transsexual … as well as others across the spectrum of sex, sexual, and gender differences” (Grace). Queer theory explores notions of identity, community, and politics (Dilley, 2005; Grace; Namaste, 1994). Specifically, it seeks to identify borders because of the way these may unfairly favour one group over another, especially when they manifest as a result of institutional heterosexism and homophobia. Despite advances made by many gays and lesbians, there are those still rendered invisible and silent by the effects of educational institutionalisation, which, through rigorous standardisation, unconsciously dismisses their existence (Brookfield, 2000; Dilley; Grace; hooks, 1994, 2003; MacDougall, 2000; Stevens, 2004). Recent research grounded in queer theory calls for a focus on how queer students can develop their identity in a post-secondary institution that incorporates aspects of their gender, racial, and religious identities together with their sexual identity, thereby dissolving boundaries (Stevens), and leading to the transformation of the individual (Freire, 1970/1993; Grace; hooks; Stevens). In so doing, queer theory also helps to dissolve the boundaries between the dualities of homosexual/heterosexual and male/female (Grace).

The development of an identity that incorporates aspects of the individual holistically begins with self-acceptance (Dilley, 2005; Stevens, 2004). How a person achieves this is predicated on

several factors including the degree of support an individual perceives he or she has, the perceived existence of heterosexist and homophobic attitudes in the learning environment, and the diversity of that environment (Dilley; Stevens). The way an individual experiences this is varied and usually not in a linear sequence (Dilley; Stevens). Research that addresses how queer students may be accommodated within the post-secondary institutional setting are limited; however, a hypothesis about how teachers may facilitate an open discursive environment that exposes heterosexual students (learners) to queer lifestyles may be effective (Dilley; MacDougall, 2000). In so doing, the teacher in being accommodating, inclusive, and solicitous, gains the trust of students regardless of whether this is acknowledged or not. This results in the gradual elimination of inhibition and paves the way for the sharing of insights from a queer perspective (Dilley). In the context of self-acceptance, a self-directed learning approach may prove effective because a classroom environment that allows a student to contribute to a discussion that facilitates self-acceptance, also steers discussion onto topics that may have been left unknown, and therefore, unchallenged. Further, a classroom environment that accommodates discourse usually facilitates a concomitant rise in self-initiative, curiosity, and enthusiasm for continued exploration of a topic (Candy, 1991; Castles, 2004; Ponton et al., 2005).

The Delicate Art of Providing Feedback

Cultivating a setting in which a student feels at ease and allows for self reflection is a challenge for tutors and instructors. The practice of providing feedback to students, for instance, which is one option to facilitate this end, is a delicate balance wherein many factors affect results and for which there is little conclusive evidence of its effectiveness (Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Mutch, 2003). Factors including a student’s self-esteem, interpretation of the words conveyed by

the tutor, extent of the commentary, whether these are conducted in oral or written form, and receptivity to true self development as opposed to an emphasis on obtaining high marks, all play a role in the effectiveness of feedback (Fife & O'Neill; Mutch). It is important, therefore, for tutors and instructors to consider not just the way feedback is conveyed to students but how that feedback to provide is reflected within course design (Fife & O'Neill; Mutch). Fairclough (1995) and Lea & Street (1998) (as cited in Mutch, 2003), believe that "the giving of feedback on assessed course work is a social practice that demands attention to not only the text but also conditions of production, distribution, and reception" (p. 25).

Feedback provides students with the opportunity to become aware of the processes involved in completing a task within whose parameters there is latitude and an opportunity to express their own voice (Fife & O'Neill, 2001). This is autonomous learning defined in that it promotes agency in the learning activity engaged in (Ponton et al., 2005). This an attribute of self-directed learning (Candy, 1991; Freire, 1970, 1993; Knowles, 1975; hooks, 1994, 2003; Ponton et al.; Vella, 2002). By providing a loose structure and guidance for the student, a teacher, acting in the role of facilitator, provides not only information and knowledge but also reassurance for and affirmation of the student (Fife & O'Neill). It is learning at its most interactive and personal, facilitating discussion and critical analysis of the subject matter, methodology, and perspective. Andragogically, it provides teachers with a way to truly teach, presenting information that can be questioned, reflected on, and applied (Brookfield, 2000; Candy; hooks; Fife & O'Neill; Knowles, 1975; Ponton et al.; Vella). Feedback contrasts with traditional teaching approaches that focus merely on disseminating information because it is not just about correcting student work. Real feedback on essay writing, for instance, provides information explaining why a particular issue is one and in the context of the student's essay. This facilitates a genuine grasp of the issue at hand,

which is then augmented with practice exercises to which the student may later apply the principles learned. Real feedback then moves beyond the written comment (Fife & O'Neill) and onto the arena of collaboration.

Towards True Equity and Equality: Self-Directed Learning as the Practice of Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism, particularly in the context of the aforementioned arenas of race, gender, sexual orientation, and learning abilities, highlights equity (which focuses on the notion of fairness and justice) and equality (which focuses on the potential to benefit from opportunities and the ability to freely participate) and how these can be achieved in the post-secondary institution (Brookfield, 2000; Candy, 1991; hooks, 1994, 2003; Vella, 2002). In many of the circumstances where self-directed learning may be applied, there is the implication that adults, whether in the role of facilitator (teacher) or learner (student), are considered equals capable of making informed choices, which then shapes how needs will be addressed and the subsequent decisions made about the type of programming and curriculum implemented and the types of resources used in achieving goals (Candy; Freire, 1970/1993; Johnston, 1992; Knowles, 1975; Vella; Vella et al.). This underscores the notion that there is not a significant difference between teacher and student, in addition to the recognition that learning is achieved on an individual basis. Of note is the understanding that the goal towards self-directed or autonomous learning does not preclude guidance because of

> the paradox that the less accustomed learners are to thinking and acting autonomously, the more encouragement, direction, and support they are likely to require in their first tentative steps toward autonomy. Accordingly, the development of autonomy as a goal is not

> necessarily best achieved by the use of autonomy as a method … [E]quality is not inconsistent with direct instruction in some subject areas. (Candy, p. 37)

In such ways, the concept of self-directed learning assuages the fears of potential contradictions between its principles and applications. As issues relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, and learning ability continue to gain more recognition in the post-secondary institution, new ways to address inequities seek to provide understanding and compassion rather than condemnation and punitive measures to bring about change (hooks, 1994, 2003; Tanaka, 2002; Vella, 2002). New views of culture that acknowledge interaction between all groups, not merely those defined along racial lines and that promote inclusivity, equality, and community are gaining in popularity (Candy, 1991; hooks, 2003; Tanaka; Vella). In contrast, this new intercultural theory augments the former by focusing on the way cultures—defined along lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, and learning ability—interact and relate as they co-exist over time (Barer-Stein, 1997; Tanaka; Vella). It is worthwhile to consider this new theory particularly at the post-secondary level because new studies that look into the impact of power by the culturally dominant group—in this case defined as male, heterosexual, English-speaking, Christian, and Caucasian—are rare (Tanaka). Ignoring this impact on an increasingly diverse student population may result in shortcomings in the ways to address the impact this power has on the participation of diverse groups and the development of resources that can achieve harmony across all groups (Brookfield, 2000; hooks; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sork & Wellock, 1992; Tanaka). One implication of this new theory is that in recognising the co-existence of all cultures, no one culture is denounced (Barer-Stein; Tanaka). Conversely, no one culture is exempt from scrutiny or critique because this new theory or approach does not promote the assimilation of cultures but rather celebrates the diversity of all (Barer-Stein; Tanaka). In

sum, self-directed learning approaches, in their multi-varied ways of application, promote an ethic of care and hope (Griffin, 1997; hooks; Macheracher, 1997), one that respects the individual as both the initiator as well as the catalyst for learning. By so doing, such approaches pave the way to a more enlightened, confident person who, in the sharing of new-found knowledge, can contribute to the collective benefit of all.

Implementing a Self-Directed Learning Approach: Strategies in the Post-Secondary Environment

Just as a thorough critical analysis of self-directed learning as an approach is a necessary part of ascertaining its appropriateness, a careful plan that considers programme and learner objectives, the diagnosing of needs, the setting of goals, the planning of procedures and resources, and the eventual evaluation of the approach prior to and after its implementation is equally needed so that ways to improve upon it within a specific context may be considered (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Herman, 1997; Knowles, 1975; Sork, 2000; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998). Such consideration is particularly noteworthy given how, thus far, self-directed learning has been presented as being open-ended, informal, and highly interactive and so maybe misconstrued as obviating the formality and rigour of a more structured plan. Many critical writers (including Brookfield, 2000; Candy, 1991 Glastra et al., 2004; Leach, 2005), for instance, believe that andragogy is a self-centred approach to learning. A purposeful, thorough assessment of whether a particular approach is appropriate to implement with learners, however, is not anathema to a less structured, informal, and collaborative learning environment (Sork; Vella; Vella et al.). Regardless of the setting, the ultimate goal is learning, so ascertaining whether this has been, is being, or will be achieved by all concerned is a necessary component of any goal-orientated approach. Further this review has outlined how many learners, contingent on their

personal, cultural, linguistic, and learning backgrounds, may find it challenging, even impossible, to adapt to a less rigorous, less structured, and less traditional learning approach. Because it is the learner's needs, not the approach used to meet those needs, that are the focus, assessing the appropriateness and potential efficacy of a learning approach is tantamount to its implementation (Brookfield, 2000; Cervero & Wilson; Knowles; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sork; Vella; Vella et al.).

Planning, evaluating, or assessing the efficacy of a program or approach is a complex task because of the myriad components that make-up the approach in addition to the varied effects these have on learners (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Leach & Zepke, 2005; Sork, 2000; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998). In the context of self-directed learning, for instance, these components include assessing student need and progress, the anticipated and resultant effectiveness of the specific approach or program, and the validity of innovations or initiatives (Leach & Zepke; Vella; Vella et al.). Planning, evaluating, and assessing are not objective tasks and are often influenced by political ethos. Regardless of biases and the frameworks used, however, defensibility is extremely important and a factor in ensuring the efficacy, care, and attention to ethical practices crucial in facilitating a more collaborative, learner-centred, and growth-inducing experience for all involved (Brookfield, 2000; Davie, 1997; Herman, 1997; hooks, 2003; Knowles, 1975; Leach & Zepke; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Vella; Vella et al.).

A Radical Change in Thinking about Planning and Evaluating: A Collaborative Approach

Just as self-directed learning is an approach that focuses on the (adult) learner, its planning and evaluating should subsequently be learner-centred, collaborative, and continual (Herman, 1997; Knowles, 1975; Vella, 2002; Vella et al, 1998). This is particularly noteworthy in light of

how pre-existing models of program planning and evaluation typically place the responsibility of conducting these solely in the hands of the teacher, are linear in their implementation, and occur within the confines of a fixed environment (Johnston, 1992; Knowles; Herman). Much of the research today (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Crowe, 2000; Davie, 1997; Herman; Knowles; Sork, 2000; Vella; Vella et al.), however, advocates placing emphasis on the need for learner input; a constant, mutually respectful dialogue between teacher (facilitator) and student (learner); and the cultivation of an informal environment conducive to the aforementioned. Consistent with the notion of care and the consideration of ethical practice, this new model corroborates the very nature of self-directed learning practice itself.

Classical models of program planning and evaluation were often outlined in linear sequence and included the conducting of a needs assessment, the setting of learning objectives, the choosing of methods and resources, the implementation of the model, and finally the evaluation of learning (Herman, 1997). Clearly, there was a beginning and an end. In recent, more interactive, learner-centred approaches (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Crowe, 2000; Davie, 1997; Herman; Knowles, 1975; Sork, 2000; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998), however, components that advocate and consider a safe, comfortable environment; the relationships between learners and learners and teachers (facilitators); the opportunity for learners to reflect on what they are doing (praxis); the generating of ideas, feelings, and actions; the immediacy of the learning; collaboration; the assurance that all learners are engaged in the learning process; and ascertaining how learners know they know (accountability) are added to reflect a more dynamic and engaging learning experience. These are not necessarily meant to be implemented sequentially but rather along a continuum that accommodates choices, circumstances, reassessment, revision, continuity, interactivity, and the evolution of learner and

teacher (facilitator) alike (Caffarella; Cervero & Wilson; Crowe; Davie; Herman; Knowles; Sork; Vella; Vella et al.). Underscoring these characteristics is the fact that, as programs vary according to their objectives or goals, evaluations will too, so that a standardised evaluation is not applicable to all programs (Vella et al.).

Considering the Learner in All: Program Design Based on Need and Context

One of the most important elements of the program planning and assessment process is the consideration of learner needs and the context within which these exist (Brookfield, 2000; Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Knowles, 1975; Sork, 2000; Vella, 2002; Vella et al.). As self-directed learning advocates a focus on the learner as individual, a program design that strives to know about the individuals within it and the organisation wherein the learning takes place is tantamount to implementing it. When teaching academic writing in a small, degree-granting art college, for instance, one may, in the planning, design, and implementation of a program, consider the extent of learners' academic writing experience; whether there is a significant number of visual as opposed to text-based learners; the degree of cultural diversity (that includes sexual orientation) of the college; and the presence of disabilities that may inhibit learning (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Caffarella; Cervero & Wilson; MacDougall; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Sork; Stevens, 2004; Tanaka, 2002; Vella; Vella et al.; White, 2002). Current models on designing, evaluating, and assessing the needs of individuals within a self-directed learning context vary but have common assumptions: they focus on learning for the purpose of changing the individual, organisation, and societal norms; they are non-linear allowing practitioners to reflect on and revise any part of the plan at any point of the process; they consider the context—social, economic, political, cultural—of the

individuals involved, so negotiation is acknowledged as a necessary part of the process; they accommodate the various ways practitioners plan; they ensure the safety of all involved; and they assume that planners themselves are learners (Brookfield, 2000; Caffarella; Cervero & Wilson; Freire, 1970/1993; Merriam & Caffarella; Sork; Vella; Vella et al.). In sum, and consistent with the flexible, inclusive, and collaborative nature of self-directed learning, a more interactive approach to program planning and design facilitates the many qualities of a self-directed learning approach.

Shop Talk: The Power of Dialogue to Effect and Assess Progress and Success

It is at the start of the learning program that both teacher (facilitator) and student (learner) have, through dialogue, the opportunity to know each other. In contrast to traditional education, which has such characteristics as teacher centeredness, certainty, absoluteness, indisputability, and rigidity, dialogue-based education takes into consideration the context of the learning environment and the of the learners' individual backgrounds (Vella, 2002). Using dialogue to ascertain learner needs results in, among others, the development of sound, respectful relationships between all involved; the establishment of connections between the teacher (facilitator), student (learner), and what is being learned; an embrace of dual-based thinking (both/and); a cycle of reflection-based action (praxis); a focus on ideas, creativity, and the exploration of feelings; the recognition that all are facilitators as well as learners; and that through various forms of participation, all are members of a learning team (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Freire, 1970/1993; Vella; Vella et al.). Engaging students (learners) in dialogue does not necessarily avert conflicts or difficulties between individuals nor does it attempt to idealise the learning experience by providing pat solutions to common problems. Indeed, part of

the purpose of initiating a dialogue-based learning environment acknowledges the uncertainty and challenges of life by considering the context—cultural, social, political—of a learning environment along with learners' backgrounds. By establishing it as an evaluative and assessment tool, however, dialogue-based learning is then acknowledged to not only potentially avert problems that may otherwise occur without its implementation, it is also affirmed as growth-inducing, life-altering, and transformative (Brookfield & Preskill; Cranton, 2005; Freire; Leach & Zepke, 2005; Mezirow, 2002; Merriam, 2004; Vella; Vella et al.).

Summary of the Literature

This literature review, in advocating the benefits of self-directed learning within a specific environment, focuses on two main areas: adult education and self-directed learning. The rationale for these choices is simple. Adult education, as a broad area of study, contains varied ways of learning so the approaches within it that evince this (adult) learning are also varied. Because this review has chosen to focus on one such approach, that is self-directed learning, it has been necessary to provide contexts—historical and philosophical—that undergird this approach. By situating self-directed learning within the larger field of adult education, this review attempts to justify its beliefs and rationale about self-directed learning's benefits. Self-directed learning as an approach, however, may be broadly applied and practiced; subsequently, its outcomes and effects may also vary (Chovanec, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Collins, 1998; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al., 1998). This literature review specifically examines self-directed learning approaches within the post-secondary environment as an approach to mitigate the marginalisation, exclusion, repression, and silencing of many students by outlining the factors that influence its philosophies and application

therein. The challenges, difficulties, and potential benefits of its application and practice are questioned, refuted, evaluated, and advocated taking into consideration the social, cultural, and political backgrounds of individual learners as well as their academic ability (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Chovanec; Cunningham; Collins; Elias & Merriam; hooks, 1994, 2003; Knowles; MacDougall, 2000; Merriam & Brockett; Selman et al.; Stevens, 2000; Tanaka, 2002). By providing a critical analysis of self-directed learning within the post-secondary environment, this review hopes to illustrate its viability as a highly adaptable, inclusive, and humane approach to learning.

Self-Directed Learning within the Field of Adult Education: A Glimpse of Potential Viability

At first glance, self-directed learning is a modern-day approach whose beginnings are informed by its non-traditional, learner-centred qualities. A closer look at its inception within the field of adult education, however, reveals a past rooted in activism that compelled individuals to voice their opposition to societal norms that were exclusionary or to facilitate self-liberation and transformation through the acquisition of information or new skills (Chovanec, 1998; Cunningham, 1989; Collins, 1998; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Freire, 1970/1993; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Selman et al., 1998). In providing a glimpse into adult education's past, self-directed learning as one of its sub-components, is shown to have been an effective way to incite change to individual lives, hinting at its potential to do the same in today's highly technological and interconnected world (Finger, 2005; Glastra et al., 2004; Knowles et al., 2005). One of self-directed learning's characteristic traits is its adaptability; it may be applied to a variety of contexts as well as to address a variety of individual needs. As a result, it defies the rigidity, linearity, and absolutism of traditional, teacher-centred education and accommodates self-

reflection and the critical analysis, revision, and re-definition of learning. As a component of adult education, self-directed learning reflects the former's social history, its connections to liberal education, to social movements for the purpose of nation building and individual growth, and its current expression as a context for exploring heretofore undiscovered approaches to learning (Candy, 1991; Collins; Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Brockett; Selman et al.). In so being, self-directed learning also historically reflects adult education's propensity to exclude or ignore groups that did not have the means to make itself heard. It is not surprising, therefore, that self-directed learning, as a component of adult education, continues to ignore or exclude in the modern day and regardless of whether this is intentional or not (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Candy; Chovanec; Cunningham; Collins; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Freire; Merriam & Brockett; Selman et al.). The question then is how adult education in the modern day, using self-directed learning as one approach, can alleviate, mitigate or ultimately eliminate this phenomenon of silencing, provided it can identity factors that contribute to it (Agger, 1991; Clinchy et al., 1985; English, 2000, 2005; Finger; Glastra et al., 2004; Ponton et al., 2005; MacKeracher, 1997; Tanaka, 2002). Could the difficulties—indeed, the near impossibility—of defining adult education and of self-directed learning themselves be part of the challenge of the search for ways to address the aforementioned issues?

A Question of Appropriateness: A Critical Analysis of the Self-Directed Learning Literature

The challenges of defining self-directed learning demands a critical approach that constantly questions the appropriateness of its application. Factors such as the distinction between using a more pedagogical (teacher-centred) approach or andragogical (student-centred) approach, which take into consideration the maturity, cultural background, and learning ability of the student; the

learning environment—whether in a formal or informal setting; a program's goals; the philosophical theories that undergird this approach; and the ethics involved in its implementation play crucial roles in whether self-directed learning proves effective or deleterious to learners (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Cherryholmes, 1988; hooks, 1994, 2003; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tisdell, 1998; Vella, 2002; Vella et al., 1998). Self-directed learning's traits of being overly individualistic, which reflects a North American cultural stance, for instance, may not be appropriate when working with international students whose cultures are grounded in collectivism and who may feel uncomfortable taking on more responsibility for their own learning in the way that a self-directed stance demands (Candy, 1991; Finger, 2005; Fox, 1994; Glastra et al., 2004; Tanaka, 2002). Similarly, students with learning disabilities whose needs require more (teacher-initiated) guidance on the learning process may be at a loss, feel frustrated, and embarrassed when obliged to be self-directing. Indeed, circumstances such as the aforementioned, particularly prevalent in the post-secondary environment, seem to obviate self-directed learning's implementation therein in addition to the limitations such factors as rampant standardisation, over-population, and contradictions between institutional policy and faculty behaviour impose. Despite this review's advocacy of its inherent benefits, it also acknowledges the importance of subjecting self-directed learning to a rigorous and thorough critical analysis.

Systemic Inconsistencies: Contradictions within the Post-Secondary Environment

Faced with the challenges of today's globalisation phenomenon, the effects of which include the integration and conflation of the world's economies, cultures, and technologies, many see the advantages of adult education as a vehicle to prospective opportunities because of its inherent quality to focus on the individual and its cultivation of autonomous learning (Candy, 1991;

Finger, 2005; Glastra et al., 2004; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam, 2005). Such qualities can effectively aid individuals by training them to either take advantage of industrial development and commercialisation or to help them cope with their negative effects (Finger; Knowles et al.). Not surprisingly, post-secondary institutions have responded by providing a myriad of programs and courses that purport to honour students' individuality and ostensibly prepare them for this newly unfolding society. In reality, however, some of these programs and courses are, in the way they are administered, complicit with institutional standards that require students to collectively comply, discounting their individuality. Despite the generic claim post-secondary institutions assert that students are treated as individuals, program and course designs still render many excluded, marginalised, and silenced (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Clinchy et al., 1985; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994, 2003; MacDougall, 2000; Stevens, 2004; Tisdell, 1998). Compounding this effect are the hidden layers of ideology and social assumptions of what is morally right or true to which students must also comply further undermining their ability to cultivate and maintain autonomy. Further, concerns arise over how the rapid commodification of adult education—and by association, self-directed learning—by the globalisation phenomenon is gradually eroding the former's intellectual and theoretical foundation, drawing focus away from its origins as a catalyst for social activism and change (Finger). These institutional inconsistencies question the appropriateness of implementing self-directed learning as an approach within the post-secondary environment as the latter seems to obviate the former's application within this setting. The concessions post-secondary institutions make to the demands of globalisation, threatens to perpetuate the rise of homogenization, thwarting the potential for individuals to develop the skills required to generate the collaborative, equitable and inclusive experiences ostensibly desired by all.

Judiciously Applied: Self-Directed Learning's Benefits in the Post-Secondary Environment

Despite the inherent difficulties of applying a self-directed learning approach, however, this review has striven to illustrate its potential to create a more interactive, respectful, equal and equitable learning experience for all practitioners. The reasons for why it does so are many, including theories and philosophies that corroborate self-directed learning's qualities, its adaptability, its potential to counterbalance the hegemonic patriarchy in the post-secondary environment, and its advocacy of self-reliance. (Agger, 1991; Brookfield, 2000; Cherryholmes, 1988; English, 2004; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994, 2003; Sommers & Saltz, 2004; Tisdell, 1998).

The potential for self-directed learning to facilitate the liberation of the learner is prospective given the specific groups this review asserts as marginalised within the post-secondary environment. These include women, international and adult immigrant students, queer students, and students with learning disabilities. For those in these groups who continually feel the pressure to conform to societal conventions that subsume them into the category of "otherness", the implementation of a highly adaptable and flexible learning approach that respects their cultural, personal, and intellectual boundaries whilst encouraging them to create a learning experience in concert with the teacher (facilitator), is not only liberating and compassionate but also affirming and caring.

Theoretical Gaps in the Literature

Within the post-secondary environment, the potential is great for self-directed learning to create highly interactive and inclusive learning experiences that promote equality between teacher (facilitator) and student (learner) and provide opportunities for individual voices to be heard (Brookfield, 2000, 2005; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Chovanec, 1998; Candy, 1991;

Collins, 1998; Ellsworth, 1989; English, 2005; Freire, 1970/1993; Knowles, 1975; Leach, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Ponton et al., 2005). On the other hand, self-directed learning's advocacy of individual empowerment may compound the marginalisation already extant in the formal classroom setting because not all feel comfortable being autonomous learners (Brookfield; Ellsworth; Fritschner, 2000; hooks, 1994, 2003). Further, self-directed learning's highly individualistic focus may be used to promote personal agendas which, despite being honourably intentioned, may be defined according to individual ideals (Brookfield; Ellsworth, 1989; Finger, 2005); these may not necessarily benefit all.

In order to address the contradictions and limitations of self-directed learning, more research is required in several areas. First, because of its highly contingent and multi-varied nature, further empirical studies need to be conducted on how to use self-directed learning approaches within the post-secondary environment, particularly where concerns about participation and inclusion affect specific student groups. A careful analysis of outcomes should then follow. Second, much of the literature presents self-directed learning as a tradition and goal to strive for, but more needs to be written about how best to implement it within the post-secondary environment in order to complement or re-conceptualise the standards upheld therein. In so doing, self-directed learning may be used to emphasise individual need thereby grounding it in reality; maintaining its lofty position as a theoretical ideal merely renders it inaccessible and vulnerable to reification. Third, self-directed learning as a concept needs to be introduced, discussed, and debated extensively with faculty and students; despite much effort made in incorporating it within the classroom, it is not a topic that is widely recognised or used within the post-secondary environment. In order to achieve these ends, it is necessary to recognise the delicacy of implementing a self-directed, informal, and interactive learning approach within a

formal academic environment. I also believe that more literature is needed on self-directed learning and its potential to help marginalised students. In this regard, I refer to the work of Knowles (1975), particularly his Learning Resources charts, which outline ways for teachers and students to conduct needs assessments, to implement learning contracts, and to engage in self-assessment; however, in referring to these charts I recognize the potential to overemphasise the technical aspects of this approach. To counterbalance the formal implementation of self-directed learning, I would refer to the work of Vella (2002) and Brookfield and Preskill (1999) because of their adaptability to a variety of learning environments and their emphasis on learning through dialogue in addition to focusing on evaluation. Finally, I would also refer to Brookfield (2000, 2005), Candy (1991), and Collins (1998) and their acknowledgement of the power dynamics that exist within the classroom that could hinder participation and inclusion. Self-directed learning's focus on the individual should not supersede its potential to build bridges across lines of culture, gender, sexual orientation, and learning ability. Maintaining its humanistic framework, one that emphasises collaboration, co-operation, care, and compassion, is the challenge to which self-directed learning within the post-secondary environment must continually rise.

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