

Self-Directed Learning: Myths, Dialectics, and Alliance

Abstract

Since self-directed learning (SDL)—typically associated with adult education—became a mandatory course in Taiwanese high schools in 2019, it has been consistently riddled with controversies, confusion, and doubt. Teachers and students alike are not only poorly prepared to engage with such an unstructured task—one that is supposedly driven by students’ interests and autonomy—but are also uncertain about how SDL is integrated into the high school curriculum and the college entrance examination system. Six years later, it is time to reflect on how SDL has performed in high schools, to what extent it has achieved its intended goals, and what can be done to enhance its impact. In this study, we identified ten factors from the literature—scope, purpose, impact, planning, execution, sourcing, improvement, (meta)evaluation, outcome, and aftermath—that characterize the nature of SDL projects. We also established a partnership between National Tsing-Hua University and Hsinchu High School to enable preservice teachers to facilitate high school students in conducting their SDL projects in the classroom. To understand how SDL is conceptualized and how the course functions for students, we observed three SDL classes over the course of three semesters. In addition, we conducted interviews with 17 students and 10 teachers, and organized three focus groups. We also analyzed 152 SDL plans and 91 SDL outcome reports. Our findings offer valuable insights for improving the implementation of SDL in high schools. These results are intended to support educators in effectively guiding students through their SDL projects in the classroom.