

Learning to learn or lifelong learning

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Definition and background of learning to learn skills

Learning to learn also known as Lifelong learning is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups (Hoskins, 2010). Lifelong learning is viewed as involving all strategies that are put in place to create opportunities for people to learn throughout life. It is about learning of what, how, when and where one wants to learn (Marjan Laal, 2014). According to Gould (2009) and Fredriksson (2013) there are various considerations when defining and describing this concept. These include:

- Awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities
- Ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully
- Gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills
- Seeking and making use of guidance
- Build on prior learning and life experience: at home at work, in education and training
- Motivation and Confidence

Learners can be distinguished between intention learners and self-directed. Becoming an intentional learner means developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used. Intentional learners are integrative thinkers who see connections in seemingly disparate information to inform their decisions.

Self-directed learners are highly motivated, independent, and strive toward self-direction and autonomy (Ciechanowska, 2011). They take the initiative to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategy, and evaluate learning outcomes (Savin-Baden and Major, 2004). When it comes to students learning for life, they should learn to:

- Effectively communicate orally, visually, in writing, and in a second language
- Understand and employ quantitative and qualitative analysis to solve problems
- Interpret and evaluate information from a variety of sources
- Understand and work within complex systems and with diverse groups
- Demonstrate intellectual agility and the ability to manage change
- Transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment and action

In addition to intellectual skills, the learning should include ways of investigating human society and the natural world such as the human imagination, expression, and the products of many cultures; the interrelations within and among global and cross-cultural communities; means of modelling the natural, social, and technical etc.



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Development models for learning to learn

Development models of learning how to learn (Daniel K. Apple, 2015)

Approaches vary depending on whether the person is in the early stages of learning or is in the advanced stages. The complexities of learning to learn also increase as one gets mature and they vary in accordance to the environment the skills and knowledge acquired will apply to. Though varying in many ways, they all revolve around the capacity to read text, numbers or situations, the capacity to transform the data or information into meaningful messages, the ability to apply or make others apply. Therefore, some of effective approaches which teachers can use to develop learning capabilities and the characteristics identified in the review include the following:

- structured tasks that focus on specific metacognitive strategies in the context of the lesson/subject
- capacity built into activities in lessons for more explicit transactions between the learner and the teacher concerning the purpose of the activity
- small group interactions promoting the articulation of the use of strategies during teaching
- mechanisms built into the task to promote the checking of mutual understanding of the goals by peers and with the teacher
- enhanced opportunities for the learner to receive diagnostic feedback linked directly to the task. For example, in science, explicit processes necessary for designing experiments should be identified, such as planning, justifying and evaluating and tasks developed within the specific context of the lessons to scaffold learners' performance and to establish effective feedback loops to monitor progress.

According to Vauras et al. (1999), in another example, inquiry skills are developed by envisioning snapshots of what it would mean to be successful at each stage of the task combined with consolidation through the completion of concrete tasks. The key components of the interventions are planning, based on a good understanding of the processes of learning, key concepts of the content to be studied, and an awareness of the learning context. There is also support for the view that the orientation towards learning should be one in which success results from appropriately guided effort and not on a construct of ability.

In short, approaches which explicitly develop learners' awareness of strategies and learning techniques by which they can succeed are effective, particularly when they are targeted at the metacognitive level.

Stages for elevating thinking skills (Daniel K. Apple, 2015).

This related to thinking skills for processing information, constructing meaning, and applying knowledge. Learners who actively start integrating all levels of thinking skills (information processing, constructing meaning, applying knowledge, and problem solving) into the learning process will improve their learning performance in five stages (Davis, 2007).

1. The first stage in applying thinking to the learning process is actively thinking about what you already know, and transferring prior knowledge and different life experiences to the current learning challenge.
2. The second stage is processing the available information through effective reading using a very thoughtful and purposeful methodology.
3. The next stage is to clarify the learning goals and expectations so that a plan can be created for achieving these learning outcomes.
4. The crucial stage of the learning experience is thinking critically by using relevant information and prior knowledge to analyse and understand models and examples. Comprehension is enhanced by conversing with others and writing to learn
5. The final stage is applying the thinking skills needed to contextualize and generalize this knowledge so that it can be transferred to new problem-solving situations.



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Transmission approaches for learning to learn

- **Learning how you...**

This refers to the ability to identify one's preferred language learning style in order to use it to improve the reading and writing skills. The person should consider that he/she will always use multiple learning styles, although he/she might favor one. There are three types of learners according to Valencia J. A. (2014): visual learners, auditory learners, and kinaesthetic learners. A set of learning strategies specific to each follow.

- **Strategies for visual learners**

Visual learners are proficient at reading charts, spelling, learning by watching videos or demonstrations, and using words and phrases that evoke visual images. The following strategies can help develop their reading and writing skills: first, write annotations in the margins of readings; circle, underline, or highlight unknown words to look up in a dictionary, or even main ideas to easily recall information from assigned readings. Second, transfer concepts from assigned readings into diagrams, flowcharts, or drawings. This will be especially helpful if one has trouble understanding the plot of narratives as it will help to identify main components and textual strategies. Third, use colors to help better recognize the paragraph structure in terms of PIE (point, illustration, explanation). For example, highlight points in red, illustrations in green, and explanations in yellow.

- **Strategies for auditory learners**

Auditory learner prefers to receive information by verbal explanation rather than by reading. They like to talk through concepts, give presentations, or read out loud. The following strategies help develop the reading and writing skills: Read aloud when wanting to focus on learning specific concepts from the readings. Use this strategy during the revision process to help to identify grammar mistakes, confusing sentences, and other editing issues. Take advantage of any opportunity to discuss out loud texts one is reading or writing with other people. To begin a writing assignment, talk about the ideas with someone else. As one talks, he writes an outline and considers ways to structure his/her ideas.

- **Strategies for kinaesthetic learners**

Kinaesthetic learners absorb, process, and retain new information best by doing, moving, or engaging in activities that require interaction with others. Strategies help develop the reading and writing skills: Draw, underline, or highlight in the book while reading; then, make graphs, diagrams, and concept maps to help understand the material. One can look for active ways to engage the ideas such as posting parts of the essay on the walls of the room, then walking around reading them. This may help to identify new ideas or ways to improve one's work. Additionally, one may use markers of various colors to make notes on the draft that will help to activate the visual system.

Recognizing whether you are a visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic learner and identifying strategies that correspond to your learning style will help you to learn more effectively and efficiently.



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Learning to learn strategies & techniques

Learning to learn strategies (Weinstein, 2000)

‘Learning to learn’ strategies include any thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, or emotions that facilitate the acquisition, understanding, or later application and transfer of new knowledge and skills in different performance contexts. They range from active rehearsal to help remember word lists, to the use of elaboration and organization to encode, integrate, and later recall or apply knowledge across several content areas. Learning to learn strategies help generate meaning for the new information that is to be learned.

They all are designed to help the learner generate meaning and store the new information in memory in a manner that will facilitate integration with related knowledge and increase the probability of later recall and use, particularly in transfer contexts.

A learning strategy is also a plan for orchestrating cognitive resources to help reach a learning goal. ‘Learning to learn’ strategies have several characteristics in common.

1. First, they are goal-directed: ie they are used to help meet a standard of performance or to reach a learning goal.
2. Second, they are intentionally invoked, which implies at least some level of active selection. The selection of one or more of these strategies is determined by a number of factors, such as a student's prior experience with the strategy, his or her prior experience with similar learning tasks, his or her ability to deal with distractions, and the student's commitment to his or her goals.
3. Third, cognitive learning strategies are effortful; they require time and often involve using multiple, highly interactive steps. Because of the effort required, a student must be motivated to initiate and maintain strategy use (e.g., see Motivation, Learning, and Instruction). In addition, the student must believe that the strategy will be effective and that he or she can be successful using the strategy.
4. Finally, cognitive learning strategies are not universally applicable—they are situation-specific. The student's goals, the task requirements, the context, and other factors all interact to help determine which strategy may be best. To be successful in selecting and using a strategy, a student must understand under what circumstances a given strategy is, or is not appropriate.

Techniques/Tools for learning how to learn (Fredriksson, 2013).

1. **Reading literacy:** “An individual’s capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential and to participate in society”
2. **Mathematic literacy:** An individual’s capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics plays in the world, to make well- founded judgements and to use and engage with mathematics in ways that meet the needs of that individual’s life as a constructive, concerned and reflective citizen
3. **Scientific literacy :** An individual’s scientific knowledge and use of that knowledge to identify questions, to acquire new knowledge, to explain scientific phenomena, and to draw evidence based conclusions about science-related issues, understanding of the characteristic features of science as a form of human knowledge and enquiry, awareness of how science and technology shape our material, intellectual, and cultural environments, and willingness to engage in science-related issues, and with the ideas of science, as a reflective citizen
4. **Problem solving:** Problem solving is an individual’s capacity to use cognitive processes to confront and resolve real, cross-disciplinary situations where the solution path is not immediately obvious and where the literacy domains or curricular areas that might be applicable are not within a single domain of mathematics, science or reading” (Valencia J. A., 2014).



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Learning to learn - challenges

Lifelong learning is viewed as involving all strategies that are put in place to create opportunities for people to learn throughout life. It is about learning of what, how, when and where one wants to learn. Various challenges are to be found in many spheres of life including: financial, demographic, technological, social, environmental and democratic challenges (Marjan Laal, 2014).

The pressures and demands of everyday life in an increasingly more complex world make learning more challenging. According to Smith (2014), To be successful in life as well as in college, learners must produce strong learning performances even while meeting non-academic but top-priority challenges, such as being exhausted from hours of work, nursing a sick child, or caring for an aging grandparent. On top of this, when tragedies occur (a divorce, a layoff, an accident, or the death of a family member or friend) the recovery must be quick and effective. Thus, improving emotional skills of persisting, coping, responding to failures, and adapting to change is critical to building the resilience that is needed to overcome the difficulties that arise from personal factors. As facility with other learning-to-learn components grows (e.g., higher levels of learning, improved learning skills, and identity as a learner), so does the proactive problem-solving capacity for addressing these personal factors.



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