

Self-Direction Strategies

The ultimate goal of education is to produce students who can learn on their own. This is especially critical in the 21st century, a time of rapid technological change, when skills must be constantly learned and relearned. Self-directed learners are efficient at planning and following through without prompting. They know how to identify and use a wide variety of resources and tools. They take appropriate risks and learn from their mistakes.

The literature shows that classrooms promoting self-directed learning develop students who are curious and willing to try new things (Garrison, 1997), view problems as challenges, desire change, and enjoy learning (Taylor, 1995). Taylor also found students in these environments to be motivated and persistent, independent, self-disciplined, self-confident, and goal-oriented. All of these characteristics support the 21st century skills that students must acquire to be successful in their future endeavors. The following table summarizes the methods, purposes, and instruments used for self-direction and collaboration.

| Assessment Method | Purpose | When Used | Instrument |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Project Plans | Project plans help students take ownership of learning. Students identify goals, design strategies to meet goals, create timelines, and define criteria for assessment. | Use at the beginning of a project in conferences with students. Help students develop their own plans and review for feasibility and specificity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Checklists• Prompts• Forms |
| Self-Assessment and Reflection | Self-assessment and reflection provide students opportunities to assess their own progress, thinking, and learning and reflect on methods for improvement. | Use throughout the project either orally, through conferences, or in written form. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Checklists• Prompts |
| Peer Feedback | Peer feedback helps students internalize the characteristics of quality work by assessing the work of their peers. | Use throughout the project during group discussions, after rough drafts, or with final products or performances. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Checklists• Scoring Guide or Rubric• Prompts• Forms |

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| Observation of Groups | Observation of group work supports assessment of collaboration skills. | Use throughout the project by taking notes, using checklists, and providing prompts while students work together to complete tasks. Students also assess their own group work skills using checklists and reflections. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Checklists• Questions• Reflections |
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References

- Garrison, D. R. (1997, Fall). Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 18–34.
- Taylor, B. (1995, November). *Self-directed learning: Revisiting an idea most appropriate for middle school students*. Paper presented at the Combined Meeting of the Great Lakes and Southeast International Reading Association, Nashville, TN.