A focus on self-directed learning: The role that educators' expectations play in the enhancement of students' self-directedness

Charlene du Toit-Brits iD
School of Professional Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, North-West University, South Africa
charlene.dutoit@nwu.ac.za

Research in self-directed learning (SDL) has become imperative for education and training in the international arena, and in South Africa. This is a result of the changing education landscape all over the world, initiated by the demands of the 21st century and the changes in knowledge and information production. Teacher-centred methods are still the standard in most schools and higher-education institutions in South African and therefore they do not sufficiently prepare students to become lifelong learners in the 21st century. This study was guided by the following research question: How do educators' expectations influence students' self-directed learning willingness? A constructivist paradigm is evident in my epistemological position, as the idea of SDL is based on the answers of the 12 research participants rather than on my own conceptualisation, as I choose a more personal manner of data collection and data analysis. It is recommended that educators transform their learning environments into supportive SDL environments by practising good teaching by a) motivating students not only to learn, but teaching students how to learn in a manner that is relevant and meaningful, b) having a longing to share their love of the subject with students, c) encouraging independence in learning, d) implementing teaching approaches that necessitate students to learn actively by taking responsibility for their own and co-operatively learning, and e) demonstrating positive expectations from students' learning and encouraging students to engage in SDL.

Keywords: educators' expectations; self-directed learning; self-directedness; students' motivation; willingness

Introduction

Modern-day changes at economic, social, cultural and political levels and education systems characterised by transformation and scarce resources, demand SDL, which is vital to students' success in education and in the world of work (Guglielmino, 2013). The so-called knowledge outburst and rapid development of technology have become key challenges for students to keep up with the outburst of knowledge and technological innovations. The difficulty in predicting possible changes brought about by the knowledge outburst makes our students unprepared to meet future demands. These demands, to name but a few, are a) curiosity and a desire to know, b) creativity in cultivating innovative ideas/solutions, c) a willingness to think and reflect on problems, d) the ability to share own thinking with others, e) accepting criticism and building on that, f) the ability to solve problems creatively, which leads to knowledgeable opinions and decisions, g) the ability to think logically, h) being a mediator of constant change, i) continuous self-development and the ability to learn on one's own, j) an ability to participate in interactive teaching-learning experiences, k) being self-directed, l) the ability to place knowledge into real-life contexts and lastly, m) becoming 21st-century students/individuals learning from inquiry, design and collaboration (Verster, Mentz & Du Toit-Brits, 2018).

Students in the 21st century require skills that will prepare them to collaborate with others on a global level. Louws, Meirink, Van Veen and Van Driel (2017) debate that the changing world is associated with the digital revolution where self-directedness and SDL have become vital (Guglielmino, 2013; Verster et al., 2018). Within this changing world, learners should learn to study more independently, in preparation for higher education, work and life in the 21st century. As a result of the unprecedented rate of change we face in all aspects of our lives, formal education and training no longer effectively assist students to face future learning desires (Brockett, 2006; Douglass & Morris, 2014).

Assisting students to face future lifelong learning desires, SDL has become one of the pre-eminent means of familiarising oneself with changes, which include the outburst of knowledge, as it can support students to respond in a manner that attains their subjectivity and positivity and can empower them to be self-directed in their actions (Attard, Di Ioio, Geven & Santa, 2010; Imants, Wubbels & Vermunt, 2013). SDL is a purposive mental process, where students determinedly take responsibility for making decisions about their learning goals, and therefore become their own learning change agents (Long, 2005). There is a need for the implementation of SDL in education to ensure that students are ready and equipped for the life-long self-directed learning, which will be demanded of them in the future; hence, by implication, cultivating the self-directedness of students (Cohen, 2012; Du Toit-Brits 2015; Guglielmino, 2013) also in the South African context.

The core thrust of the article is the concept of SDL (which is explained in more detail in the theoretical framework). This study was guided by the following research question: How can students' self-directedness in learning be influenced by educators' expectations? Self-directed learning is suited to any environment where learning takes place because of the intrinsic nature of learning and its dependency on positive educators' expectations and students' involvement in this process, which can support students in a) acquiring capability, b) transforming their expectations and c) affecting their attitudes towards SDL in a positive manner (Douglass & Morris, 2014; Kop, Fournier & Mak, 2011; Yu, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

In constructing an understanding of SDL, influential studies were conducted by Douglass and Morris (2014), Guglielmino (1978, 1991, 1997, 2013); Guglielmino, Guglielmino and Choy (2001); Guglielmino, Guglielmino and Durr (2000); Hiemstra (1976, 1982, 2002, 2011), Hillard and Guglielmino (2007), Houle (1961), Knowles (1970, 1980, 1989), Kop et al. (2011), Song and Hill (2007) and Tough (1966, 1968, 1979, 1982), to mention only a few. Although numerous definitions of SDL have been introduced by many researchers (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1997; Gibbons, 2002; Hiemstra, 2011; Knowles, 1975; Owen, 2002), this article focuses on only one of the key definitions of SDL.

For purposes of this article, Knowles' (1975) definition of the concept of SDL is used. He defines SDL as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the 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, 1975:18). Knowles (1975) emphasises that education is a continuous process. Learning enables students primarily to focus on skills regarding investigation, research, knowledge acquisition and understanding. The development of attitudes and appropriate values also enable students to live responsively, learn actively and adapt effectively in a fast-changing world where students need to focus more on using knowledge than simply acquiring it. According to Knowles (1975) students should continuously be generating original ideas in the pursuit of self-knowledge, self-created meaning and creativity in a progressive learning environment. Investigation, research, knowledge acquisition and understanding are the endeavours of students who accept change. These students also develop the habit and the skill to gain learning experiences from all potential opportunities. Students should therefore develop the attitude to understand their learning needs, motivations, interests, capacities and goals (Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1989). In the end, students need to be accountable and active learners, able to adapt and learn to learn in a new, fast-changing environment. Students need to focus more on constructing the use of what they have learnt and less on just mastering knowledge.

Numerous SDL models had been developed, such as the Educational Transaction Model (Garrison & Baynton, 1987), the Staged Self-Directed Learning Model (Grow, 1991), the Two-Shell Model of Motivated Self-Directed Learning (Straka & Schaefer, 1997), Garrison's model of SDL (Garrison, 1997) and the Instructional Model of SDL (Person-Process-Context [PPC] model) (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012).

This study was conducted in a formal academic setting, and for this reason it is necessary to review and place the meaning of SDL within an educational dimension of SDL and encompass the discussion in this article by investigating the Instructional Model of SDL, namely Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model. In answering to criticism on their Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model and based on their increasing experience and knowledge about SDL, Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) restructured the PRO model (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991) and called it the PPC model.

This model integrates three key dimensions of SDL, the a) psychological dimension (students' attributes, characteristics, perceptions), b) the pedagogical dimension (SDL process and development), and the c) the sociocultural dimension (sociocultural context and learning environment) (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012). Important features of the PPC model are the student, the teaching-learning process and the social-context (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012). This model suggests that SDL will be effective when the student is self-directed or willing to be self-directed; the instructional process (for instance the educator) inspires students to take responsibility for their own learning; and that the learning environment offers a conducive atmosphere for SDL. The PPC model proposes that educators can play a key role in both encouraging and obstructing SDL and students' self-directedness. This article, therefore, conceptualises the meaning of SDL as a process mediated by the interaction between the student and the learning environment, where educators and their expectations of students play an important role in guiding students towards self-directedness.

Students are not characteristically self-directed, and SDL is a compound development and method that necessitates students to take the initiative and think about the purpose of learning to improve their self-directedness. With a view to achieve self-directedness in learning, students need to take into consideration the learning path, which includes numerous responsibilities such as identifying their own new learning needs and formulating their own new goals for learning (Jossberger, Brand-Gruwel, Boshuizen & Van de Wiel, 2010; Knowles, 1975). Students' abilities needed for SDL can be characterized by their willingness to participate in SDL (Fisher & King, 2010). Even more so, students' psychological characteristics, which include a) independence and determination in learning, b) acceptance of individual responsibility for learning, c) self-discipline, d) inquisitiveness, e) capability to learn

autonomously, and f) educators' expectations concerning SDL, all influence students' willingness to participate in SDL (Du Toit-Brits, 2015).

Many other aspects (for example social, cultural, demographic) may influence students' self-directedness (Du Toit-Brits, 2015; Oliveira & Simões, 2006). One other aspect that may also indirectly affect students' self-directedness is educator expectations (Cadorin, Bortoluzzi & Palese, 2013).

A review of numerous studies demonstrates the superiority of SDL to other learning methods, both in students' academic performance and the development of positive expectations and attitudes towards an SDL process (Stewart, 2007; Williams & Brown, 2013). It is proposed that educators' expectations add to students' self-directedness and their willingness to be self-directed (Williams & Brown, 2013). If the student is willing to participate in SDL, the countenance of this willingness can reduce dependence on the learning situation, such as an educators' lack of experience in SDL, educators' expectations (either negative or positive), anxiety, and a lack of motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) (Du Toit-Brits & Van Zyl, 2017; Reio & Davis, 2005).

Therefore, the discussion in this article focuses mainly on how students' self-directedness in learning is influenced by educators' expectations.

The influence of educator expectations on students' self-directedness

Educator expectancy (what the educator thinks the student is capable of doing), is not something that can be bottled and sold. As educators have different expectations of different students, they interact differently with different students. Furthermore, educators and students (all individuals) are forever changing, growing and adapting to survive in the educational sector. In this adaptive interaction between educator, student and the learning environment, students need to be provided with adaptive and personalised learning experiences aimed at students' particular educational needs and personal characteristics on the road to making the most of their learning and learning success (Douglass & Morris, 2014; Drexler, 2010; Sarrazin, Tessier, Pelletier, Trouilloud & Chanal, 2006). These adaptive and personalised learning experiences that take place in the teaching and learning process can impact on educators' expectations and students' motivation to learn in a self-directed manner (self-directedness) on a daily basis (Du Toit-Brits, 2018; Guglielmino, 2013; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2012).

Ercole (2009) is of opinion that educators' expectations motivate students to perform academically. By developing a mindset of growth, students can generate a love of learning and

resilience (Zhao, Niu, Hou, Zeng, Xu, Peng & Yu, 2018). Educators need to try to continuously conserve a positive attitude for educators' expectations to support students and help them believe that they can and will learn. Educators ought to teach and interact with students in a way that encourages them to perform (Zhao et al., 2018). Muska and Ashworth (1990, as quoted by Chin'anga, 1999) support this statement and state that whenever students are excluded from the teaching and learning process they experience feelings of rejection, embarrassment and stigma, which can demotivate students to learn in a self-directed manner, or to be self-directed (Byrne & Flood, 2005). In students' SDL development process, educators need to guide them to be confident that they are able to resolve problems, to take responsibility for their own learning, to determine own learning needs and goals in the learning process, and to motivate themselves while learning. These are some of the elements that need to be fostered to enhance self-directedness within students (Knowles et al., 2012). A positive, self-directed teaching environment supports positive learning expectancies within students (Adomßent & Hoffmann, 2013; Du Toit-Brits, 2015; Knowles et al., 2012). This can be created when an educator responds with enthusiasm to a) SDL (show a positive assertiveness to SDL; regularly engage in SDL in learning environments, and facilitate students' initiatives for SDL), b) students' learning motivation, c) empower students by using SDL, d) construct a co-operative learning environment where the educator assists to encourage students' learning experiences.

Educators' expectations are important aspects to take into consideration in the self-directed teaching and learning development process, especially in motivating students to participate in SDL and to be more self-directed (Knowles et al., 2012; Lai, 2015). Negative educator expectations can have a snowball effect on students' motivation to participate in SDL activities (Imants et al., 2013). If students do not participate in SDL, it is thus possible that the educator has made little or no effort to support students or to create positive motivation and expectancy towards SDL (Kyndt, Gijbells, Grosemans & Donche, 2016). Examples of how educators may support their students to become self-directed learners, can be a) to display SDL characteristics while teaching in order to establish a classroom structure that promotes SDL; b) to lay the foundation for SDL; c) to provide tools for self-managed learning; d) to construct a co-operative learning environment where he/she encourages students' learning experiences; e) to facilitate students' initiatives for SDL; f) to assist as a mentor rather than an instructor; g) to embrace resources in the course that inspire students' self-directedness and attentiveness; and h) to deliver

students who have knowledge of hands-on, self-directed activities (Du Toit-Brits & Van Zyl, 2017).

If an educator makes little or no effort to support students or to develop motivation and expectancy towards SDL, a further result can be that both the student and the educator experience the self-directed teaching and learning process negatively, resulting in this negative cycle repeating itself. If an educator does not intentionally break this destructive cycle, the teaching and learning process can deteriorate even further (Cabrera, Casteloes, Lampi, Razo, Wallace & Murillo, 2012). For effective SDL to take place, it is important for educators to understand how their expectations influence students' motivation to participate in SDL (Guglielmino, 2013; Kyndt et al., 2016), as this influence may differ from student to student (Koca, 2016; Kyndt et al., 2016). An educator's expectations may influence students to take responsibility for their own learning, enable them to learn autonomously, influence them to demonstrate determination in their learning and to be goal-oriented (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Knowles et al., 2012; Koca, 2016). All these elements are important for students to be regarded as self-directed students (Guglielmino, 2013).

It seems that little research has been conducted in South Africa on how students' self-directedness in learning and their willingness to learn in a self-directed manner can be influenced by educators' expectations. It also appears that most of the research in South Africa on educators' expectations focus on the students' race, culture and colour. This, however, is not the focus of the current study. The focus of this study was on interpreting and understanding how students' self-directedness in learning is influenced by educators' expectations.

Method
This study was guided by the main research question: How can students' self-directedness in learning be influenced by educators' expectations? The following sub-questions were also formulated:
1. How do your educators' expectations influence your attitude towards SDL?
2. Do your educators' expectations of you affect your willingness to engage in SDL and how?
3. To what extent do your educators' expectations create a learning environment where you can develop your self-directedness?
4. How do you describe a self-directed educator?

To answer these sub-questions, 12 research participants, who voluntarily offered to take part in the research, were interviewed. The key aim of the individual semi-structured interviews was to explore the participants' understandings of how their self-directedness was influenced by their educators' expectations.

Constructivist Research Paradigm
This study followed a constructivist paradigm, as the idea of SDL is based on the answers of the 12 research participants rather than on my own conceptualisation. The aim of this study is not to generalise, but rather to provide an understanding of how students' self-directedness is influenced by their educators' expectations, and how students are motivated to learn in a self-directed manner. A constructivist paradigm is evident in my epistemological position, where I choose a more personal manner of data collection and data analysis. To underline the above, I shared the transcripts with the research participants – this provided them with an opportunity to review and comment on the correctness of the transcriptions.

Resulting from my involvement in the data collection and data analysis, issues of validity arose. I acknowledge that, from a constructivist perspective, no objective reality exists, and that my contribution was to interpret the reality raised by the research participants rather than capturing a reality (Creswell, 2013). Validity issues are treated differently in a constructivist paradigm, and as this study falls within a qualitative research paradigm, it is more suitable to think about the trustworthiness of the research rather than to emphasise validity, which is more relevant to quantitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative Study
This study followed a basic qualitative research methodology where real-world settings were studied (Yin, 2011). In this qualitative study the views and perceptions of the participants were represented.

Sampling strategies and ethical considerations
Nonprobability sampling and purposive sampling were applied as the participants contributed purposefully to this study (Yin, 2011). A Faculty of Education at a South African university was purposefully selected. The full-time first year education students studying the Senior and Further Education and Training Phase programme (168 students) were invited to take part in the study, but only 12 volunteered to participate. All the participants (Afrikaans- and English-speaking students) agreed to be interviewed.

General information about this study was provided in an Information Sheet (information included my name, contact details, research participants' requirements, the data-gathering procedures, duration of semi-structured interviews and a brief explanation of the project). The sub research questions were used as interview questions. Most of the semi-structured interview sessions lasted about one hour and were recorded with the education students' permission.

Instruments
Implementing a constructivist qualitative theory position emphasises research participants' stories and underlines the significance of a cooperative relationship between the researcher and research participants in co-constructing knowledge. It was decided that individual semi-structured interviews would be the best instrument to collect data from the participants. Research participants were afforded the opportunity and flexibility to provide their views and perceptions, while the researcher viewed these interviews as an active conversational process. The interview questions (open-ended experience verification questions and behavioural questions) were specially aimed at assisting me in finding answers to the key research question. Yin (2011) suggests that broad interview topics should be used in interviews to guide rather than constrain the interview session. Four interview topics and questions were developed and used in this research:

1. The influence of educators' expectations on creating a learning environment where students can develop their self-directedness.
   To what extend do your educators' expectations create a learning environment where you can develop your self-directedness?
2. The affect educators' expectations have on students' willingness to engage in SDL.
   How does the expectations that your educator have about you affect your willingness to engage in SDL? And how?
3. Description of a self-directed educator.
   What is your description of a self-directed educator?
4. The influence that educators' expectations have on students' attitudes towards the enhancement of their self-directedness.
   How does the expectations that your educator have about you influence your attitude towards the improvement of your self-directedness and SDL?

Before the semi-structured interview sessions, the participants were asked to sign informed consent forms to indicate their willingness to voluntarily take part in the study. All the participants were reminded that their identities would be kept anonymous and that they could withdraw from the research at any stage. An informal conversational style of interaction was adopted throughout the interviews. In cases where participants did not completely understand the questions, I provided help by, for example, paraphrasing the questions.

Thematic data analysis
Thematic analysis was chosen as it is a flexible and useful approach to analysing qualitative data (Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015; Yin, 2011). Thematic analysis also provides detailed data and is simple to use as it does not require advanced theoretical and technological knowledge. No interpretation process can ever be free from researchers' subjective understanding (Percy et al., 2015). However, misinterpretation was avoidable because I was familiar with the aim of the research and was guided by the research questions. Furthermore, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid approach was used, which allowed me to use both deductive analysis (focusing on identifying data within predetermined themes) and inductive analysis (focusing on creating themes embedded in the data). By using these two approaches, it prevented me from missing important data. To conclude, all semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed by me. The research participants were asked to check whether I had accurately recorded and transcribed their responses. The analysis process in this research was based on guidelines by Fouché and Schurink (2011).

Findings and Discussion
After due consideration and thorough scrutiny of the collected data, I formed an impression of the participant's opinions, experiences and perceptions related during the semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the data is presented in two themes generated after thorough coding and classification of the data. The two themes that emerged from the data are presented below.

Theme 1: Empowering Students' Self-Directedness through Educator Expectations that have the Potential of Creating an SDL Environment in which SDL Skills can be Employed without Fear or Uncertainty
Educators' expectations influence students' growth, self-directedness and their beliefs in their own SDL abilities (Drexler, 2010; Henney, 1978; Krabbe, 1983). This may lead to students' positive attitudes towards SDL and the adoption of SDL skills. By empowering students to be more self-directed, they will be able to take initiative for their own learning, diagnose their own learning needs, formulate their own learning goals, identify human and material resources for their own learning, choose and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate their own learning outcomes. Therefore, the potential exists for students to improve their academic results through the development of their SDL skills. The data from the semi-structured interviews underscores the notion that educators' expectations have the potential of creating an SDL environment in which SDL skills can be employed without fear or uncertainty. The following research question was posed during the interviews to underscores this notion: To what extend do your educators' expectations create a learning environment where you can develop your self-directedness?

> *"If the lecturer creates a classroom for SDL, it encourages me to do SDL and in such a class, if a lecturer actually believes in me and has positive expectations about me and my learning – it let me be more motivated. Through a lecture's expectations a classroom can be created to help me*

to take control over my learning ... because I believe in myself, so I try again and again." [*sic*] (Student 5:208–209)
"*As my dosent 'n klasomgewing skep waarin sy/hy selfgerigte leer doen, sal ek ook meer gewillig wees om vaardighede hiervan aan te leer want dit voel dan vir my of sy/hy in my glo en hulle verwag dat ek my beste moet gee, dan laat dit my voel dat ek kan self leer ..., man, Mevrou, ek voel dan nie bang om iets nuuts te doen nie.*" [*sic*] (Student 1:22–25)

From the data it became clear that students would believe in themselves and would be willing to employ SDL skills (Ercole, 2009) if educators can create SDL environments in which SDL skills can be employed. These SDL skills should be employed a) without fear or uncertainty of negative repercussions for errors, b) for students to understand their own learning styles and setting their own learning goals, c) for students to remain motivated to learn, and d) for students to manage their own learning. Students who are intrinsically motivated have the potential of progressing in their self-directedness through the positive expectations created by educators in their SDL environments.

Positive educator expectations are more real than educators realise, and these may have an immediate effect on students' willingness to engage in SDL within a learning environment. The following research question was posed during the interviews to emphasise this notion: How does the expectations that your educator have about you influence your attitude towards the improvement of your self-directedness and SDL?

"*I want to learn ... I want to direct my own learning in the class, I want to be an owner of knowledge because my lecturer said that I can and that I am capable of doing good in my learning.*" [*sic*] (Student 6:35)
"*... as my dosent vir my sê ek kan selfgerig werk in haar klaskamer, en my ook meer vryheid gee om dit te doen, dan wil ek graag vir haar wys dat ek kan probeer om selfgerig te werk*" (Student 11:78).
"*I have a lecturer, and his classroom is open. With open I mean that he tells us that in his classroom our input are very important and we need to try to work more independently, but he is here, all the time. He guide us, and what is nice, he asked us what we want to get out of his class ... nice, ne? In his classes there is also freedom and he allow us to control our own learning destiny.*" [*sic*] (Student 2:108–120)

The fact that students respond positively to educators' expectations may potentially advance the creation of an SDL environment in which SDL skills can be employed without fear or uncertainty. This substantiates Jussim and Harber's (2005) view that students react intentionally and unintentionally to the expectations that an educator creates while teaching (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). The teaching and learning process in an SDL environment can therefore be more self-directed and the educator can have an immediate effect on students' self-directedness and their willingness to engage in SDL activities. Like the PPC model, the instructional process should inspire students to take responsibility for their own learning. Positive educator expectations towards SDL can reduce students' fear of working autonomously in the learning environment, which hinders the development of students' self-directedness:

"*I would like whatever way she encourages me to do better in my learning and be able to learn more independently because I am not afraid to fail because my lecturer believe in me, she expect it and shows it to me.*" [*sic*] (Student 8:513–514)
"*Simple things, just by telling me not to be afraid to try to take more responsibility for my work, that will give me the confidence to learn, to learn more on my own, maybe. I do not think that I can learn on my own, I am afraid of that because it is new to me.*" (Student 2:469–470)

On the other hand, negative educator expectations hold the potential of restricting the self-directed teaching and learning process in the learning environment. The research findings reported in this article confirm statements made by Sarrazin et al. (2006), namely, that inflexible and negative educators who do not expect much from their students and do not allow students to take responsibility for their own learning during the teaching and learning process, will often get the same response from the students – they will not want to actively participate in the act of learning and they will have no interest in and curiosity for learning and learning activities. Participants' responses to questions during the semi-structured interviews indicate that negative educator expectations tend to have an immediate negative effect on students' self-directedness, their motivation to learn in a self-directed manner and their progressive development in SDL skills. Students feel discouraged when educators do not trust them to be autonomous, and they feel defeated and hopeless when they do not sense autonomy and freedom within the learning environment, resulting in no control over their own SDL development process:

"*I feel discourage if my lecturer expect nothing from me*" [*sic*] (Student 12:201).
"*In my een klas het die dosent min vertroue in ons vermoë om bietjie control te vat oor ons leer. Dit maak my gedemotiveer in daai module*" [*sic*] (Student 10:215-220).
"*If my lecturer has negative expectations around my learning, so I believe that I cannot exceed in my learning*" [*sic*] (Student 6:514-515).

These negative expectations can determine students' approaches to learning and do not create a supportive environment that fosters SDL.

Consequently, it can be concluded that students, like all living beings, prefer and react better to positive expectations. It seems that an instinctive action and reaction takes place between the educators' expectations, students' self-directedness and their willingness to learn in a self-

directed manner. When educator expectations guide students on how to progress in their learning and if educators trust them to be autonomous, students will try to be more self-directed in their learning and tend to believe that they are capable of improving their own learning and academic performance.

Theme 2: Educators' Attitudes, Expectations and Commitment to Building a Learning Environment Conducive for the Growth of Students' Self-Directedness

This theme is explored based on different sub-themes, namely educators' enthusiasm for SDL, educators' competence in SDL, and educators' commitment to SDL for building a learning environment conducive for the growth of students' self-directedness. The following research question was used during the interviews to determine participants' views: What is your description of a self-directed educator?

> *"... omdat my dosent 'n selfgerigte persoon is, doen sy baie meer as wat sy moet en sy is commit tot wat sy doen. Dit spoor my aan om ook so selfgerig te wees, nie net in die een module nie, maar ook in my ander modules."* [*sic*] (Student 7:312–313)
>
> *"Ek soek 'n dosent wat positief en toegewyd tot ons is, wat met 'n doel teach, wat opbouende kommentaar vir my kan gee en wat vir my kan ondersteun en rigting gee. My dosente is oor die algemeen baie verantwoordelik en dit gee my vertroue in hulle en in my."* [*sic*] (Student 11:280–282).

Within the teaching and learning environment, a number of key elements occur that are considered to be significant to students' self-directedness in learning, namely good teaching purpose, educators' constructive attitudes towards SDL and educators' engagement in SDL in their teaching (Du Toit-Brits, 2015). I am of opinion that a student's self-directedness and willingness are also determined by the educator's attitude towards and commitment to SDL in the learning process, which to me, is a meaning-making learning change process focusing on students' development of SDL and their willingness to participate in SDL (Knowles et al., 2012).

Encouraging students to adopt self-engaged learning can enhance their persistence in learning and a desire to learn with self-confidence. The succeeding research question was asked during the interviews to underscores this notion: How do the expectations that your educator has about you, influence your attitude towards the improvement of your self-directedness and SDL? From the data it is understood that students are motivated and inspired to learn in a more self-directed manner through constructive, productive and structured teaching. The data from the semi-structured interviews confirms the findings of the research done by Biggs (1999), Cabrera et al. (2012) and Wilburn (2013).

> *"My lecturer motivates me and inspires me to learn harder, to take control of my learning of Life Science. She shows me how to do the work with different learning tools and she gives me continuous support. She expect from me only the best and she expect me to learn also by myself."* [*sic*] (Student 9:422–424)
>
> *"Learning need to make sense otherwise I waste my time in the classroom and my lecturer is doing that. I want to know what I am learning ... give me a classroom where we all work as a team with support and constructive feedback and I will perform."* [*sic*] (Student 8:266–267)
>
> *"Ek't 'n dosent wat geleenthede vir jou gee in die klas om self dinge te ondersoek, om foute te maak en dan ook motiveer om jou foute self reg te maak, met haar hulp en leiding natuurlik. Sy verwag van ons om in beheer te wees van ons leer, sy sê ook vir ons dat sy van ons verwag om te groei in ons kennis en vaardighede, die jaar wat ons by haar is. Dis nice dat sy verwagtinge vir ons stel."* [*sic*] (Student 11:398–410)
>
> *"In some classes we communicate with each other in the classroom. One lecturer let us make our own examples and get our own sources and we participate in class because the lecturer is expected this from us"* [*sic*] (Student 2:141, 183).
>
> *"My dosent vertrou my en sy sê dit gereeld vir my ... Ek is gemotiveerd deur my dosent se verwagtinge vir my, want sy glo dat ek beheer oor my werk kan neem en beheer oor my prestasies"* [*sic*] (Student 1:160).

While analysing the data I took the liberty to assume that students' SDL readiness could be enhanced if educators display confidence in their teachings; help to provide rich content and resources that will help individual students; aid students as they grow in confidence; offer guidance and opportunities for critical and creative thinking and stimulate interest and a positive attitude.

From the data it is clear that students want educators to impart confidence and self-efficacy to be sufficient in SDL. I am thus of opinion that the development of a willingness towards SDL is possible if educators are positive practitioners of SDL, put good teaching purposes into practice, create constructive expectations, emphasise independence, and enhance constructive attitudes towards SDL. This will create learning conditions aimed at enhancing students' motivation to take ownership of their own learning (Du Toit-Brits & Van Zyl., 2017). Students need to feel autonomous and competent, thus the social-contextual factors within the learning environment need to promote feelings of autonomy and competence in students to be self-directed in their learning. All the above-mentioned aspects are possible if these are projected through educators' expectations in the learning environment (Knowles et al., 2012; Wilburn, 2013).

Based on the data from this research I am of the opinion that students will respond positively to educators' enthusiasm, competence and their

commitment toward SDL in the teaching and learning process, as students would like educators to encourage them to become self-directed practitioners. As seen in the PPC model, educators play a key role in encouraging students' self-directedness. Educators thus need to create a learning environment that instils trust and student's commitment for the development of SDL skills through positive educator expectations, constructive learning, student motivation and a positive attitude towards SDL. For that reason, educators need to a) create opportunities for support and guidance of students who are emotionally not prepared to deal with SDL within the learning proses, and to b) create an improved learning environment through their positive and constructive expectations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Educator expectation is an important factor in enhancing students' self-directedness. It is essential that educators, through their positive expectations, encourage students to be self-directed learners. Positive educator expectations can improve students' self-concepts and beliefs in their potential to a) take initiative with regard to their learning; b) learn with or without the help of others; c) identify own learning desires; d) articulate and communicate their own learning goals; e) select and implement applicable learning strategies; f) evaluate their own learning outcomes; g) cultivate social and interpersonal skills; h) be open and positive towards SDL; and i) experience a sense of belonging to be more comfortable with SDL and become self-directed students.

Educators with positive expectations possess the potential and power to contribute positively to students' self-directedness. Negative educator expectations infuse students' loss of motivation/willingness to be self-directed in their learning. Educators need to be made aware that if they think students are competent to be successful in SDL, they need to support this belief through their expectations. The analysis of the data indicated that if educators encourage students through their positive beliefs, students' learning efforts will improve. Educators therefore need to instil trust in student's commitment to the development of SDL skills.

In conclusion, positive educator expectations play an essential part in students' self-directedness. If positive/constructive educator expectations are present in the learning environment, students will be competent to control and master SDL in the learning environment and their own learning. Students will be persistent in their learning and they will experience a sense of autonomy, freedom and belonging within the learning environment where they can control their SDL development (Jossberger et al., 2010).

Therefore, the instructional process can inspire students to take responsibility for their own learning and the learning environment needs to offer a conducive atmosphere for SDL. Educators play a fundamental part in both encouraging and obstructing SDL and students' self-directedness. SDL is thus mediated by the interaction between students and the learning environment in which educators and their expectations of students play an important role in guiding students towards self-directedness. Education students thus need to be armed with SDL skills to meet the changing demands in a complex context of fast globalization and huge transformation in the 21st century. Tomorrow's educators are the key to educational change and transformation.

Notes

References
Adomßent M & Hoffmann T 2013. *The concept of competencies in the context of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* (Concept paper). Available at https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9ec3/118c915b2b11fd1017a1691398346f46af45.pdf. Accessed 20 November 2017.

Attard A, Di Ioio E, Geven D & Santa R 2010. *Student centered learning: An insight into theory and practice*. Bucharest, Romania: Education and Culture GD. Available at http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/T4SCL_forum_Leuven_October_2010/34/2/2010_T4SCL_Stakeholders_Forum_Leuven_-_An_Insight_Into_Theory_And_Practice_600342.pdf. Accessed 27 March 2019.

Biggs J 1999. What the student does: Teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 18(1):57–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436990180105

Brockett RG 2006. Self-directed learning and the paradox of choice. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 3(2):27–33. Available at https://www.taosinstitute.net/Websites/taos/files/Content/5693976/Scott_International_Journal_of_Self-Directed_Learning_2006.pdf#page=30. Accessed 26 March 2019.

Brockett RG & Hiemstra R 1991. *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research and practice*. London, England: Routledge.

Byrne M & Flood B 2005. A study of accounting students' motives, expectations and preparedness for higher education. *Journal of Further Higher Education*, 29(2):111–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770500103176

Cabrera V, Casteloes S, Lampi K, Razo MS, Wallace R & Murillo EG 2012. *In what ways do teachers contribute to students' negative behavior?* Los Angeles, CA: California State University. Available at

http://emurillo.org/Classes/Class2/documents/Way sTeachersContributetoStudents.doc. Accessed 2 November 2017.

Cadorin L, Bortoluzzi G & Palese A 2013. The self-rating scale of self-directed learning (SRSSDL): A factor analysis of the Italian version. *Nurse Education Today*, 33(12):1511–1516. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2013.04.010

Candy P 1991. *Self-direction for lifelong learning: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chin'anga LC 1999. Teaching styles and the acceptance of pupils. MEd dissertation. Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa. Available at http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/16501 /dissertation_chin%27anga_lc.pdf?sequence=1&is Allowed=y. Accessed 24 March 2019.

Cohen M 2012. The importance of self-regulation for college student learning. *College Student Journal*, 46(4):892–902.

Creswell JW 2013. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed). London, England: Sage.

Douglass C & Morris SR 2014. Student perspectives on self-directed learning. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 14(1):13–25. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v14i1.3202

Drexler W 2010. The networked student model for construction of personal learning environments: Balancing teacher control and student autonomy. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26(3):369–385. Available at http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi= 10.1.1.366.6074&rep=rep1&type=pdf. Accessed 24 March 2019.

Du Toit-Brits C 2015. Endowing self-directed learning in learning environments: Interrelated connection between students' environments and self-directed preparedness. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 2015(Special issue 1):32–52.

Du Toit-Brits C 2018. Towards a transformative and holistic continuing self-directed learning theory. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(4):51–65.

Du Toit-Brits C & Van Zyl CM 2017. Embedding motivation in the self-directedness of first-year teacher students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(1):50–65. https://doi.org/10.20853/31-1-824.

Ercole J 2009. Labelling in the classroom: Teacher expectations and their effects on students' academic potential. Honours thesis. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut. Available at https://opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.c gi?article=1074&context=srhonors_theses. Accessed 22 March 2019.

Fereday J & Muir-Cochrane E 2006. Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1):80–92. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F160940690600500107

Fisher MJ & King J 2010. The self-directed learning readiness scale for nursing education revisited: A confirmatory factor analysis. *Nurse Education Today*, 30(1):44–48.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2009.05.020

Fouché CB & Schurink W 2011. Qualitative research designs. In AS De Vos, H Strydom, CB Fouché & CSL Delport (eds). *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions* (4th ed). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Garrison DR 1997. Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1):18–33. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F074171369704800103

Garrison DR & Baynton M 1987. Beyond independence in distance education: The concept of control. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 1(3):3–15.

Gibbons M 2002. *The self-directed learning handbook: Challenging adolescent students to excel*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Grow GO 1991. Teaching learners to be self-directed. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3):125–149. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0001848191041003001

Guglielmino L, Guglielmino P & Choy S 2001. Readiness for self-directed learning, job characteristics, and workplace performance: An Australian sample. In HB Long & Assosicates (eds). *Self-directed learning in the information age*. Schaumburg, IL: Motorola University.

Guglielmino LM 1978. Development of the self-directed learning readiness scale. PhD dissertation. Athens, GA: University of Georgia.

Guglielmino LM 1991. Developing self-directed learners: Why and how. *Changing Schools*, 19(2):6–11.

Guglielmino LM 1997. *Contributions of the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) and the Learning Preference Assessment (LPA) to the definition and measurement of self-direction in learning*. Paper presented at the First World Conference on Self-Directed Learning, Montreal, Canada, 14–17 September.

Guglielmino LM 2013. The case for promoting self-directed learning in formal educational institutions. *SA-eDUC Journal*, 10(2):1–18. Available at https://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/f iles/p-saeduc/sdl%20issue/Guglielmino,%20L.M.%20Th e%20case%20for%20promoting%20self-directed%20lear.pdf. Accessed 17 March 2019.

Guglielmino LM, Guglielmino PJ & Durr RE 2000. Learning contracts: A learning technique and a developmental process. In GM Piskurich, P Beckschi & B Hall (eds). *The ASTD handbook of training design and delivery: A comprehensive guide to creating and delivering training programs—instructor-led, computer-based, or self-directed*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Henney M 1978. Facilitating self-directed learning. *Improving College and University Teaching*, 26(2):128–130.

Hiemstra R 1976. *Lifelong learning*. Lincoln, NE: Professional Educators Publications.

Hiemstra R 1982. The elderly learner: A naturalistic inquiry. *Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, 23:103–107.

Hiemstra R 2002. *Lifelong learning: An exploration of adult and continuing education within a setting of lifelong needs*. New York, NY: High Tree Press.

Hiemstra R 2011. Self-directed learning: Individualizing instruction – most still do it wrong! *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 8(1):46–59.

Hiemstra R & Brockett RG 2012. Reframing the meaning of self-directed learning: An updated modeltt. In *Proceedings of the 54th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*. Available at https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?ref erer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&art icle=3070&context=aerc. Accessed 14 May 2019.

Hillard LC & Guglielmino LM 2007. Promoting reading improvement: A case study of exemplary elementary principals. *ERS Spectrum*, 25(2):13–23.

Houle CO 1961. *The inquiring mind*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Imants J, Wubbels T & Vermunt JD 2013. Teachers' enactments of workplace conditions and their beliefs and attitudes toward reform. *Vocations and Learning*, 6(3):323–346. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-013-9098-0

Jossberger H, Brand-Gruwel S, Boshuizen H & Van de Wiel M 2010. The challenge of self-directed and self-regulated learning in vocational education: A theoretical analysis and synthesis of requirements. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 62(4):415–440. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2010.523479

Jussim L & Harber DK 2005. Teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies: Knowns and unknowns, resolved and unresolved controversies. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 9(2):131–155. https://doi.org/10.1207%2Fs15327957pspr0902_3

Knowles M 1975. *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers*. Chicago, IL: Follett Publishing.

Knowles MS 1970. *The modern practice of adult education: Andragogy versus pedagogy*. New York, NY: The Association Press.

Knowles MS 1980. *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Cambridge Adult Education.

Knowles MS 1989. *The making of an adult educator: An autobiographical journey*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Knowles MS, Holton EF & Swanson RA 2012. *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (7th ed). London, England: Routledge.

Koca F 2016. Motivation to learn and teacher–student relationship. *Journal of International Education and Leadership*, 6(2):1–20. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1135209.pdf. Accessed 13 March 2019.

Kop R, Fournier H & Mak JSF 2011. A pedagogy of abundance or a pedagogy to support human beings? Participant support on massive open online courses [Special issue]. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 12(7):74–93. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v12i7.1041

Krabbe MA 1983. Self-directed learning of the basic skills. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 56(8):372–373. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1983.10113811

Kyndt E, Gijbells D, Grosemans I & Donche V 2016. Teachers' everyday professional development: Mapping informal learning activities, antecedents, and learning outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4):1111–1150. https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0034654315627864

Lai C 2015. Modeling teachers' influence on learners' self-directed use of technology for language learning outside the classroom. *Computers & Education*, 82:74–83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.11.005

Long HB 2005. *Skills for self–directed learning*. Available at http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Huey.B.Long-1/Articles/sd/selfdirected.html. Accessed 6 March 2018.

Louws ML, Meirink JA, Van Veen K & Van Driel JH 2017. Teachers' self-directed learning and teaching experience: What, how, and why teachers want to learn. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 66:171–183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.04.004

Oliveira AL & Simões A 2006. Impact of socio-demographic and psychological variables on the self-directedness of higher education students. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 3(1):1–12.

Owen TR 2002. *Self-directed learning in adulthood: A literature review*. Morehead, KY: Morehead State University. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED461050.pdf. Accessed 18 April 2019.

Percy WH, Kostere K & Kostere S 2015. Generic qualitative research in psychology. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2):76–85. Available at https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?refe rer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&arti cle=2097&context=tqr/. Accessed 10 March 2019.

Reio TG & Davis W 2005. Age and gender differences in self-directed learning readiness: A developmental perspective. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 2(1):40–49.

Sarrazin PG, Tessier DP, Pelletier LG, Trouilloud DO & Chanal JP 2006. The effects of teachers' expectations about students' motivation on teachers' autonomy-supportive and controlling behaviors. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 4(3):283–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2006.9671799

Song L & Hill JR 2007. A conceptual model for understanding self-directed learning in online environments. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 6(1):27–42. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Liyan_Song4/ publication/250699716_A_Conceptual_Model_for _Understanding_Self-Directed_Learning_in_Online_Environments/links/ 00b7d52b2c6b2ada02000000.pdf. Accessed 8 March 2019.

Stewart RA 2007. Investigating the link between self-directed learning readiness and project-based learning outcomes: The case of international Masters students in an engineering management course. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 32(4):453–465. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043790701337197

Straka GA & Schaefer C 1997. *Self-directed learning in*

the process of work: Conceptual considerations - empirical evidences. Paper presented at the First World Conference on Self-Directed Learning, Montreal, Canada, 14–17 September. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED413434.pdf. Accessed 23 April 2019.

Tough A 1979. *The adult's learning projects: A fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning* (2nd ed). Toronto, Canada: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Tough AM 1966. *Learning without a teacher*. Toronto, Canada: OISE.

Tough AM 1968. *Why adults learn: A study of the major reasons for beginning and continuing a learning project*. Paper presented at the National Seminar on Adult Education Research, Toronto, Canada, 9–11 February.

Tough AM 1982. *Intentional changes: A fresh approach to helping people change*. New York, NY: Cambridge Books.

Tsiplakides I & Keramida A 2010. The relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement in the teaching of English as a foreign language. *English Language Teaching*, 3(2):22–26. Available at https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081569.pdf. Accessed 7 March 2019.

Verster M, Mentz E & Du Toit-Brits C 2018. Requirements of the 21st century for teachers'

curriculum as praxis: A theoretical perspective. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, 9(3):461–463.

Wilburn S 2013. How the 'outside' becomes 'inside': The social orientation of South African teachers' expectations for learning. *Journal of Education*, 58:87–109. Available at http://www.humanities.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/104/wilburn2013_0.pdf. Accessed 5 March 2019.

Williams B & Brown T 2013. A confirmatory factor analysis of the self-directed learning readiness scale. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 15(4):430–436. https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12046

Yin RK 2011. *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Yu TW 2013. The use of self-assessment to facilitate self-directed learning in Mathematics by Hong Kong secondary school students. PhD thesis. Durham, England: Durham University. Available at http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6995/1/YuTW_2013_final_v5.pdf?DDD29+. Accessed 7 March 2019.

Zhao Y, Niu G, Hou H, Zeng G, Xu L, Peng K & Yu F 2018. From growth mindset to grit in Chinese schools: The mediating roles of learning motivations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9:1–7. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02007