

Best Practice: How to initiate self-directed learning

There are many opportunities for teachers to pursue knowledge and skills outside of training courses, mentoring or other on-the-job CPD opportunities if they take the initiative.

The internet has made self-directed learning easy. For example, if a teacher feels inadequate teaching math, there are excellent free and low-cost programmes available online to help the teacher build his or her knowledge, understanding and confidence of the subject. Courses also usually include methods for effective teaching of learners at different grades.

A reflective and interested teacher will also learn by his or her own experience, called experiential learning. This requires an aptitude for mental processing of experiences, using one's intuition, a willingness and courage to experiment, and systematic accumulation of best practices.

A teacher also acquires knowledge, skills and aptitude by interacting with and watching more experienced teachers perform. This in an informal way of mentoring. Such learning can be effective if the teacher is critical, alert and takes note of what works well and what does not. A teacher should not imitate a senior teacher's bad habits or outdated practices, but should be able to distinguish between what benefits the learners and what does not.

The impact of self-directed learning can be increased by learning in groups. This allows teachers to support one another, engage in regular dialogue, share knowledge and experiences and stimulate each other's interests. The learning achieved in a group will exceed the sum of the knowledge of each member of the group and is therefore an extremely valuable approach to learning. In small schools, teachers might form just one or two groups, one focusing on science subjects and one focusing on arts subjects. In larger schools, groups of teachers may refer to grades or they may, and especially in secondary school, be based on subjects.

The group approach to learning can be extended beyond the school involving professional subject associations and communities of practice.

At the heart of self-directed learning is the notion that the human mind by nature is geared to continuously learn, and that knowledge is formed instinctively in the subconscious mind.

A teacher can apply the *Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders (TSC, 2017)* as a guide and inspiration for self-directed learning.

It is important school leaders and distinguished or highly accomplished teachers take the initiative to stimulate and guide self-directed learning among teachers.

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