

**2003 Midwest Research to Practice Conference in  
Adult, Continuing, and Community Education**

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**Development of Self-Directed Learning Skills in  
Students Enrolled in ESL/Adult Education Classes**

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The purpose of this table-top presentation is to fill the gap between the everyday practical concerns of English language teaching professionals and research in the fields of Adult Education, Educational Psychology, and Teaching English as a Second language with respect to self-direction. Being prompted by research in these fields, the presenter proposes to teach self-directed learning skills explicitly in ESL classes. By choosing this approach, ESL students take responsibility for their own learning process, learn about their learning styles and develop knowledge how to learn, how to plan, how to achieve outcomes, and how to transfer that knowledge into new, real life situations. A self-directed component in ESL class enhances students' motivation and independence. Adult students are usually serious learners once motivated.

As adult learners vary greatly in education and past experiences, it is really important to individualize instruction in an ESL class. Needs Assessment and Learning Contracts help ESL instructors develop an effective plan for the class teaching with the elements of an individualized instruction according to the learners' needs and goals. Learning Needs Assessment provides educators with the data about the level of knowledge, academic background, and short/long-term learning goals. A Learning Contract provides a framework for teacher-learner collaboration and leads students towards understanding Self as a learner and helps them see possible resources and solutions to address the problem (e.g., in improving speaking skills.) The ESL instructor facilitates the development of L2 learning strategies according to the students' learning styles and goals. These strategies and techniques can be used in and outside the class-room. The participants of this presentation will have hand-outs with the suggested needs assessment form and a sample of a learning contract.

Students should also be encouraged to seek feedback from their peers and their facilitator, and understand that self-direction does not mean learning in isolation. Self-directed learning skills include the ability to ask questions and to work with people. Learning ESL is a social process. A previous study (Churpina, 2001) found that readiness for self-direction in learning and cross-cultural adaptability correlate. Therefore, SDL can help ESL learners living in the U.S.A. not only with language acquisition, but also with their adjustment to the new culture.

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