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DEVELOPING THE AUTONOMOUS LIFELONG LEARNER – PROVIDING THE SCAFFOLDING

PURPOSE, GOAL AND OUTCOME¹

Purpose:

In response to the knowledge economy's growing need for skilled workers who can manage their own learning in today's fast-changing professional world, HEIs must develop learning autonomy in an increasingly diverse student population. This project seeks to create a powerful learning environment which will encourage a deep approach to learning in students at the beginning of their university studies, and thus provide a basis for the development of self-efficacy and learning autonomy.

Goal:

The project will investigate whether the learning environment created by the 'scaffolding' provided by a combination of pedagogical constructs can have a beneficial effect on:

- Students' achievement as measured against the learning outcomes of the module
- Students' engagement with the learning required for the course of study, and with learning in general
- Students' understanding and appreciation of their own development as learners and their increasing self-confidence in managing their own learning.

Outcome:

Since the recent shift to student-centred learning rather than teacher-led instruction, pedagogical theorists have presented compelling pictures of the potential of techniques such as Personal Development Planning, Assessment for Learning and Constructive Alignment to promote the development of learning autonomy. This small-scale study will provide some empirical evidence of the efficacy of these techniques by a combination of statistical analysis of student achievement and qualitative evaluation of student opinion gathered from reflective writing and in interviews. As the students concerned are at the beginning of their university courses, the learning environment under study can only hope to sow the seeds of learning autonomy, and to nurture the first green shoots of a lifelong deep approach to learning.

The evaluation of this project is intended to provide a guide to best practice for other academics faced with similar problems.

¹ Richards L (2005) *Handling Qualitative Data: a Practical Guide*, London: Sage