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**Which two or three ideas associated with "self-directed learning" do not effectively explain Noah Adams' efforts with music and/or some of the custodial workers' experiences/aspirations and why?**

### **Introduction**

An important concept in a learning society is self-directed learning in adults. In *Piano Lessons*, Noah Adams (1996) reflects on his year of learning the piano. In the documentary *The Philosopher Kings* (2009), Director Patrick Shen follows several custodians in their work and reveals their learning through reflection on their life and experiences. These learners show how we must reexamine the concept of self-directed learning and where and how it occurs. First, there is the idea of learning as socialization and integration, but these learners learn on their own mostly in isolation and learn for themselves. Second, learning involves a deliberate process and awareness of the self, while these learners show less reflection and more of a subconscious, spiritual purpose of learning. Lastly, we must consider learning in later stages of life as more for enrichment rather than just participation in the workforce.

### **The social context of learning**

One idea of self-directed learning as outlined by Smith (2010) is the model of social participation, the idea that learning involves socialization or integration of the individual into a larger whole. Even in their PRO model of self-direction in adult learning, Brockett & Hiemstra (1991) explain how the social context of learning is often overlooked. Learners can move into a "fellowship" of learning, "While the individual is the starting point, the social context provides the arena where the self-direction is played out" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Boyatzis writes that our most crucial learning occurs when we are involved in groups that have importance (p. 12) We see with Adams and the custodians of *The Philosopher Kings* that learning is not some integration into a greater group or even society. Adams' learning remains on an individual level. Much of his learning was independent such as the Miracle computer program and Sudnow method. Even when he participates in the Autumn Sonata, he is not really forming genuine connections with the teachers or other participants. Some of the custodians also seem content learning for themselves while on the job. Melinda enjoys her self-described "learning experience" reading the information while she works in the museum at the University of Florida. Corby, who works at Cornish College of the Arts, enjoys the creative energy and people at the college, but he still continues his own art independently, rather than participate in the academic culture.

There is, however, some social activity, and Adams and the custodians help reveal a different social context for learning. Adams struggles most of the year to learn and by autumn struggles finding the drive to continue with the Miracle program and Sudnow method (p. 132, 141, 145). Yet his drive to learn is the desire to play for someone, his wife (p. 204). Boyatzis explains that relationships enable us to learn. "Relationships are mediators, moderators, interpreters, sources of feedback, sources of support, permission for change and learning" (Boyatzis, p. 12). The relationships for Adams and the custodians, however, are not the drivers

or facilitators of learning. For these learners, it is the relationships themselves, not to join or improve, but just learn. For Adams, learning is for an intimate moment with his wife. The custodian Jim from Cornell explains the impact of relationships, “It’s a learning opportunity, every day is. Whether it’s a fellow worker, fellow student, or a professor. You could learn from every one of ‘em.” He says he’s learned more in his seven years at work than in his own formal schooling, but it is not for some specific purpose. Moreover, his learning still remains on an individual autonomous level.

### **Awareness and intentionality of learning**

Another idea of learning involves some self-awareness and intentionality by the learner. Brookfield (2012) defines self-directed learning as learning in which “the design, conduct, and evaluation of a learning effort are directed by the learner.” Brockett & Hiemstra (1991) describe this intentionality by the learner actively learning, planning, and evaluating learning. Boyatzis expands this idea by explaining that self-direction is an intentional change of who you are (the Real) or who you want to be (the Ideal) (p.11). This idea of intentionality and the gap between Real and Ideal Self do not necessarily fit Adams and the custodians. For Adams, the piano was actually an impulsive purchase (p. 246). Although intentional choices for learning were made to avoid piano lessons, to use the Miracle of Sudnow programs or to enroll in the Autumn Sonata, his description of these methods do not reveal much learning and seem laborious. Yet by the end of the year, elements seem to align and without realizing exactly how, he is learning. Yes, there is reflection while writing *Piano Lessons*, but one does not see much reflection when the learning is occurring during the last months.

These learners also reveal learning that has a subconscious or even spiritual aspect. Just as the two main pieces Adams focuses on, “Misty” and “Träumerei” refer to dreaming or reverie, he often writes about a mystical connection to music from his interviews and even his own learning. He concludes that “suddenly there’s beauty” in playing (248). For Melinda in *The Philosopher Kings*, butterflies provide a model for living. Corby finds learning as just living life in the creative process. Josue finds a higher purpose in each visit to Haiti wanting to do more for the needs of rural villages. One of Jim’s motives in learning is to make every day count. For these individuals, learning is providing meaning, purpose.

### **How long should learning last?**

For many of the authors, self-directed learning has focused on the workplace or as participants in a knowledge-based economy. Even though Brockett & Hiemstra (1991) write that adult learning takes place over a lifespan, there is an implication that they are not focusing on older learners. Smith explains that learning tails off about the age of 45 because there is less need to study for employment (2010). Adams is in his fifties when he purchases the piano and is just starting to learn. He alludes to Einstein taking violin lessons as a child, but not wanting to play later in life until he heard Mozart’s sonatas (p. 247-248) or to pianist Arthur Rubinstein not finding satisfaction until he eighty years old (p. 135). The custodian Jim who finds learning every day is in his fifties or sixties. Oscar who is near retirement keeps learning as he gives advice from his mother to continue to live deliberately, “you cannot catch a fish with your line and your hook on the bank. Has to be in the water. I make sure mine’s in the water.” If we expand our notion of learning to take into account a more spiritual or purposeful life, we need to expand to include a rich life across a lifetime.

### **Conclusion**

The readings and film reveal the difficulty of defining a concept of adult learning and self-directed learning. Adams and the custodians expand our understanding to include learning in isolation but also that learning can simply be through a relationship with someone. Learning does not necessarily have to be a conscious and reflective act but could also result from a more purposeful or spiritual life. Moreover, we need to consider this learning as something that could be a lifelong process and for learning's sake. In order to have an understanding of a learning society, learning does not have to have social, economic, or political ramifications, but also to live a deep and more meaningful life.

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