



International Journal of Self-Directed Learning[®]



**Volume 16, Number 1
Spring 2019**

The *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning* (ISSN 1934-3701) is published biannually by the International Society for Self-Directed Learning. It is a refereed, electronic journal founded to disseminate scholarly papers that document research, theory, or innovative or exemplary practice in self-directed learning. Submission guidelines can be found at www.sdlglobal.com.

SUBSCRIPTION or BACK COPY ORDERS: Contact:

International Journal of Self-Directed Learning

501 SW 11th Place, #301A, Boca Raton, FL 33432

issdl.sdlglobal@gmail.com

© 2019, International Society for Self-Directed Learning. All rights reserved. No portion of this journal may be reproduced without written consent. Exceptions are limited to copying as permitted by Sections 107 (“fair use”) and 108 (“libraries and archives”) of the U. S. Copyright Law. To obtain permission for article reproduction, contact the editors at:

International Journal of Self-Directed Learning

issdl.sdlglobal@gmail.com

Cover design by Gabrielle Consulting

International Journal of Self-Directed Learning

Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 2019

EDITOR

Michael K. Ponton, *Regent University*

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Janet F. Piskurich, *Paul L. Foster Medical School, Texas Tech*

FOUNDING EDITORS

Lucy Madsen Guglielmino, *Florida Atlantic University (Emeritus)*

Huey B. Long, *University of Oklahoma (Emeritus)*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Naomi R. Boyer, *Education Design Lab*

Ralph G. Brockett, *University of Tennessee*

Valerie C. Bryan, *Florida Atlantic University*

Robert J. Bulik, *University of Texas Academy of Health Science Education (Emeritus)*

Philippe Carré, *Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, France*

Robert C. Donaghy, *Bradley County Schools (Retired)*

Brian W. Findley, *Palm Beach State College*

Lucy Madsen Guglielmino, *Florida Atlantic University (Emeritus)*

Joan H. Hanor, *California State University San Marcos (Emeritus)*

Roger Hiemstra, *Syracuse University (Emeritus)*

Wayne B. James, *University of South Florida*

Carol E. Kasworm, *North Carolina State University (Emeritus)*

William J. Kops, *University of Manitoba, Canada*

Theresa N. Liddell, *Education Consultant (Retired)*

Patricia A. Maher, *University of South Florida (Retired)*

Kelly E. McCarthy, *University of South Florida*

Elsa Mentz, *North-West University, South Africa*

Sharan B. Merriam, *University of Georgia (Emeritus)*

Magdalena Mo Ching Mok, *The Hong Kong Institute of Education*

Albertina L. Oliveira, *University of Coimbra, Portugal*

EunMi Park, *University of South Florida*

Shelley Payne, *Otterbein University*

George M. Piskurich, *ACS, a Xerox Company*

Thomas G. Reio, Jr., *Florida International University*

Karen Wilson Scott, *Idaho State University*

Susan Stockdale, *Kennesaw State University*

Peter L. Zsiga, *Florida Atlantic University*

Website Managers: Lila Holt and Peter Zsiga

Preface

In the first article of this issue, Brockett presents the findings of a biographical case study describing the self-directed learning process used by John Steinbeck in writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. Discussed are the “myth” of isolation, self-doubt and struggle, social and individual dimensions, and the pain of transformation. Brockett concludes that this case study “serves as an excellent example of a writer engaging in a learning process, which to a large degree is highly self-directed” (p. 9).

In the following practice brief, Ponton discusses seven recommendations that can help International Self-Directed Learning Symposium presenters to transform their symposium papers into publishable *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning* articles. “Considerations include the use of symposium discussion to inform manuscript refinements, formatting requirements, and the journal vetting process” (p. 12).

Michael K. Ponton, Editor

International Journal of Self-Directed Learning

Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 2019

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ii
<i>John Steinbeck and The Grapes of Wrath: A Writer and His Self-Directed Learning Process</i>	
Ralph G. Brockett	1
Practice Brief: <i>Moving From ISDLS Paper to IJSDL Article: Recommendations From the Editor</i>	
Michael K. Ponton	12

JOHN STEINBECK AND *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*: A WRITER AND HIS SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING PROCESS

Ralph G. Brockett

This article explores the process through which John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*. This process can be viewed as a learning process with elements of self-directed and transformative learning. Using primary and secondary sources, including a journal Steinbeck kept while writing the book, four themes are discussed: (a) Steinbeck's learning was a process that, unlike the actual writing, did not take place in isolation; (b) the juxtaposition of Steinbeck's confidence and productivity with examples of struggle and self-doubt; (c) a comparison of individual and social dimensions of self-directed learning; and (d) in writing the book, Steinbeck underwent a major transformation that had both negative and positive ramifications. This study continues a line of scholarship on self-directed learning using biographical case study to understand self-direction in the lives of others.

Keywords: self-directed learning, Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*

Writing is very much a learning process. As Zinsser (1988) noted, writing about a topic is an excellent way of becoming immersed in the knowledge of that area. Conversely, to be an informed writer one must engage in a learning process in order to understand the context for the topic. While this is self-evident in nonfiction writing, the same can also be said for writers of fiction. For example, one cannot write a believable Civil War novel without having knowledge of specific facts surrounding certain people, battles, and situations in which the story takes place. A good example of the writer as learner can be found in a study by Owenby (1996) who undertook a detailed examination of the science fiction novels of Robert A. Heinlein. Among Owenby's findings was that in order to understand the subjects about which he wrote, Heinlein actively engaged in learning about a wide range of topics that included political science, astronomy, physics, mathematics, and history.

In the study of self-directed learning, biographical case study has been a valuable approach to understanding the lives of people for whom taking primary responsibility was essential to their success. A classic study by Gibbons et al. (1980) that analyzed the biographies of 20 famous people who achieved success without formal education beyond high school showed how self-directed learning was central to each person's success. Among those individuals studied by Gibbons et al. (1980) were

Frank Lloyd Wright, Virginia Woolf, Harry Truman, Malcolm X, Aaron Copeland, Amelia Earhart, and Mohammed Ali. In another study, Cavaliere (1988) described the process by which Orville and Wilbur Wright invented the airplane. Their journey was a 28-year effort replete with many setbacks as well as successes. Although these studies are somewhat dated, they are examples of biographical case studies that support the purpose and method of the current study.

The Grapes of Wrath (Steinbeck, 1939) is the fictional story of the Joad family and how they migrated from Oklahoma during the Depression era dust bowl to the so-called "promised land" of California. Written in a 6-month period between late May and early December in 1938 (Parini, 1994) and published in 1939, the book is widely considered to be one of the most important contributions to American literature in the 20th century. Steinbeck won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize, and according to DeMott (1989), the book was the "cornerstone of his 1962 Nobel Prize award, and one of the most enduring works of fiction by any American author" (p. xxi). In fact, Meyer and Railsback (2006) stated that the book is one of few "in regular consideration as the Great American Novel" (p 129). However, there is a "backstory" to the book. As I have described elsewhere,

Throughout the process of writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck regularly kept a journal, where he shared his thoughts on the book's progress and about his life in general during this time. This journal was published in 1989, in a volume edited by Robert DeMott entitled *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath* (DeMott, 1989). Thus, in Steinbeck's own words is a first person account of the thoughts, struggles, and routines that made up the author's life during this most intense period of creativity. (Brockett, 1991, p. 21)

Together with various biographies of Steinbeck (e.g., Benson, 1984; Parini, 1994) as well as a volume of Steinbeck's correspondence compiled by Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten (Steinbeck, Steinbeck, & Wallsten, 1975), it is possible to gain insight into the process by which Steinbeck created *The Grapes of Wrath*. In addition, it is possible to get a partial glimpse into elements of the transformation Steinbeck experienced especially in the aftermath of the book's publication.

Purpose and Method

In this article, my purpose is to show how the process of writing *The Grapes of Wrath* serves as an excellent example of a writer engaging in a learning process that to a large degree is highly self-directed. In addition, I offer a tentative view on how the process of writing the book had a transformative element that had an impact on John Steinbeck's life after the book was published. It is important to state at the outset that this is not a study of literary criticism. Although by way of full disclosure I am quick to admit that the book is a personal favorite, an assessment or analysis of the book itself is beyond the focus of this study. Rather, my intent is to tell the story of how Steinbeck engaged in an extensive learning process that took place both in preparation for and during the

actual writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*. By doing so, it is possible to see evidence of self-directed and, albeit a bit less definitively, a transformative learning process.

This study has evolved over close to three decades. The idea for the study first came to me in 1989. I was attending the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) in Madison, Wisconsin, when I found a copy of DeMott's (1989) *Working Days*. As I read the book, the connections to self-directed learning became apparent. In 1991, I wrote a paper that was based on a preliminary analysis and presented it at the 1991 AERC in Norman, Oklahoma (Brockett, 1991). In 2001, I had the opportunity to visit the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas, California, that rekindled my interest in the earlier study. Given some of the feedback received at my 1991 presentation along with new insights and perspectives that have developed over the years through reading and reflection, I eventually decided that the time was right to revisit and update my earlier paper, taking into account new literature sources not available in 1991 as well as my own insights that were drawn from my increased understanding of self-directed learning. Thus, I presented an updated version of the paper at the International Self-Directed Learning Symposium in 2008. The present article is a refinement of the first two versions; in addition, I have attempted to make some very tentative connections to transformative learning. Although the themes and many of the quotes remain from the original AERC paper, I have offered new perspectives that grew out of further analyses of the available information.

For this research, a biographical case study approach was used. Case study involves content analysis of relevant documents and, in some cases, artifacts. I selected this method because case study focuses on a single, specific entity (Merriam, 1997). In this study, the research focused on how one individual created one specific piece of work. The major sources from which materials were drawn include Steinbeck's journal and the accompanying introduction (DeMott, 1989), two biographies (Benson, 1984; Parini, 1994), and to a lesser extent the volume of letters mentioned earlier (Steinbeck et al., 1975) and Steinbeck's earliest writing about this period in history in *The Harvest Gypsies* (Steinbeck, 1936/1988).

Findings

From my analysis, four major themes were identified: the first three support the notion that in writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck was indeed actively engaged in a major self-directed learning process whereas the fourth theme is tentatively related to the transformation Steinbeck underwent during and after the process of writing the book. The first theme revolves around the belief that self-directed learning takes place in isolation. The focus of the second theme is the way in which Steinbeck's confidence and productivity are juxtaposed against struggle and self-doubt. In the third theme, individual and social dimensions of self-directed learning are compared and contrasted. Finally, the fourth theme offers a tentative view that Steinbeck underwent a major process of transformative learning as a result of writing the book.

The Myth of Isolation

A common belief about self-directed learning is that such an activity takes place in isolation where the learner works alone without contact with others such as teachers, facilitators, and fellow learners. Although self-directed learning does sometimes occur in isolation, it often involves interaction with others. Sometimes these others are mentors; at other times they can be peers whose insights can contribute to an interactive process. Self-directed learning does not necessarily take place in isolation (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

Writing is often thought of as an individual activity. Indeed, the actual process of writing most often takes place in isolation. Steinbeck's journal (DeMott, 1989) shows that he was able to block out regularly scheduled periods of time in which to do his writing. As DeMott (1989) stated, when Steinbeck entered "his writerly posture," he was able to create a "disciplined working rhythm" and "a sense of continuity and cohabitation with his material" (p. xxxi). Thus, a large part of Steinbeck's creative process did in fact take place working in isolation. However, through the process that led to the eventual writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*, it can be shown that the period spent writing the book was actually the culmination of a journey that had begun 2 years earlier and involved much interaction with others.

In August 1936, Steinbeck was invited to write a series of newspaper articles on migrant farm labor in California. To gain information in order to write these articles, he toured a number of squatter camps in the San Joaquin Valley. Benson (1984) noted that "the poverty and filth of these encampments appalled him" (p. 332). As he continued in his travels, Steinbeck met Tom Collins who had been involved in the "sanitary-camp program," one of the few government-funded programs designed to provide migrants with decent treatment and a chance "to regain their health and self-respect" (Benson, 1984, p. 338). Collins became a mentor to Steinbeck, and the descriptions of his experiences with the migrants provided much of the material from which Steinbeck drew in his writing. During a 2-week period in February 1938, Steinbeck joined Collins and worked in one of the migrant camps. Parini (1994) made the following comment about this experience: "Mud-caked, drenched and exhausted, Steinbeck continued day after day, driven to action by the pathetic conditions of the migrants, many of whom were too weak from hunger to walk even a few steps towards a meal" (p. 245). Still another observation on this experience was offered by Charles Wollenberg (Steinbeck 1936/1988) who wrote the introduction to the 1988 edition of Steinbeck's *The Harvest Gypsies*, the volume containing the initial newspaper articles. In describing this process, Collins reported that he and Steinbeck "worked 'for forty-eight hours, and without food or sleep,' helping 'sick and half-starved people whose camps had been destroyed by the floods'" (Steinbeck, 1936/1988, p. xiv). Collins stated that although they were too tired to speak to one another, "we walked together as cogs in an intricate piece of machinery" (Steinbeck, 1936/1988, p. xiv). Thus, while the learning process began as an outside invitation for a writing assignment and involved learning from the experiences of others, it was Steinbeck's initiative and desire to learn as much as he could and to experience the lives of the people he was writing about that reflects his self-directedness.

The Grapes of Wrath was actually Steinbeck's fourth writing effort related to the dust bowl migrants. The first of these was the seven-part series of newspaper articles titled *The Harvest Gypsies* (Steinbeck, 1936/1988), which served as Steinbeck's entrée into this arena. The second was an unfinished novel *The Oklahomans* that DeMott (1989) claimed has never been found nor is likely that Steinbeck did much work on this project. Third, Steinbeck completed an entire book, an angry work of satire entitled *L'Affaire Lettuceberg*, which he subsequently destroyed. Each of these works were based on what Steinbeck had learned in his travels with Tom Collins and in his conversations with migrants and observations of the conditions in which the migrants were forced to live. These earlier efforts provided much of the foundation upon which Steinbeck built the story of *The Grapes of Wrath* and clearly exemplify the process of learning in which Steinbeck engaged prior to writing the book.

There is another element to the myth of isolation that occurred during the time in which Steinbeck was actually writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. I describe this subtheme by the phrase "life goes on." It is clear from Steinbeck's journal (DeMott, 1989) that he was able to create the periods of solitude necessary to write the book; that is, his so-called "writerly posture." Similarly, it was often difficult for him to walk "back into the domestic world from the world of imagination" (DeMott, 1989, p. 51). However, it is clear that the routine of daily living was also a very real part of Steinbeck's life during this period. While Steinbeck appears to have been able to temporarily push outside concerns away while he engaged in writing, these situations remained a very real part of Steinbeck's life during this period. For example, at one point Steinbeck wrote in his journal, "there are four things or five rather to write through. . . . If I get this book done it will be remarkable" (DeMott, 1989, p. 51). Here Steinbeck was referring to his wife's recent tonsillectomy, the bankruptcy of his publisher and his efforts to be of assistance, a filmmaker's interest in adapting an earlier book for the screen, and buying and moving into a new house. These themes and a host of other distractions surface continuously throughout the journal. In other words, it took a tremendous amount of self-discipline, perseverance, and, indeed, self-directedness in order for Steinbeck to produce an average of 2,000 words a day in the face of so many distractions.

Self-Doubt and Struggle in the Context of Self-Directedness

There is a belief among some people that the process of self-directed learning is free from struggle, frustration, and pain. According to Brookfield (1988), "the view of learning enshrined in this paradigm is one that emphasizes the joyful, conflict-free release of the individual's boundless potential" (p. 21); however, Brookfield noted that such is not always the case.

In writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's confidence and perseverance were often juxtaposed with self-doubt and struggle. These feelings of self-doubt were something Steinbeck had to deal with long before his work on *The Grapes of Wrath*. Parini (1994) described how earlier in his career, his first wife Carol was often very harsh in her criticism of his writing and that he "felt continually like a failure" (p. 143) even though Carol was also a major source of support and encouragement particularly

when Steinbeck was writing *The Grapes of Wrath* (DeMott, 1989). Parini offered some insight into Steinbeck's self-doubt in the following observation:

Like so many artists before him, Steinbeck had to fight his way through a period of intense negative reaction to his work that inevitably compounded his tyrannical self-doubts. What is required during such periods is a firm place inside where one can stand: a point of balance. As long as that is available, there is always hope. And Steinbeck, for all his talk about rejection and despair, was clearly able to find such a place, to maintain his equilibrium and keep going. He knew that he had valuable things to say and that, one day, his technical resources would match his imaginative and sympathetic powers. (p. 144)

Although Parini was referring to an earlier period in Steinbeck's career in making this observation, this also seems to have carried over to the process of writing *The Grapes of Wrath* where there are frequently recurring examples of self-criticism. The following entries in his journal highlight the sense of self-doubt and struggle through which Steinbeck produced his novel (DeMott, 1989):

June 19 – “If I could only do this book properly it would be one of the really fine books and a truly American book. But I am assailed with my own ignorance and ability” (p. 29);

July 7 – “Strange how I'm fighting this book now. I think it is about to change now though because I am feeling more and more like work. The despair came on me for a while but although still nervous from it I think I am recovering” (p. 39);

August 19 – “I'm not a writer. I've been fooling myself and other people. I wish I were. This success will ruin me sure as hell” (p. 56);

September 26 – “This book has become a misery to me because of my inadequacy” (p. 76); and

October 19 – “I am sure of one thing – it isn't the great book I had hoped it would be. It's just a run-of-the-mill book. And the awful thing is that it is absolutely the best I can do” (p. 90).

This self-doubt continued even while the book was in production. In a letter to his agent, Elizabeth Otis, Steinbeck wrote the following:

Look, Elizabeth, Pat [Viking editor Pascal Covici] talked in terms of very large first editions of this next book. I want to go on record as advising against it. This will not be a popular book. And it will be a loss to do anything but print a small edition and watch and print more if there are more orders. (Steinbeck et al., 1975, p. 163)

While these journal entries provide evidence of self-doubt indicating that writing the book was physically and emotionally draining for Steinbeck, it is clear that determination and confidence were also very much in evidence. It is possible that

Steinbeck used negative self-talk as a way to motivate himself to continue writing. On many day's entries, Steinbeck ends on an upbeat note by adding a positive footnote at the end of the day. Examples (DeMott, 1989) are as follows: "Turtle sequence [Chapter 3] stands up" (p. 21); "Finished and I have a good feeling about today's work" (p. 40); "Got her, by God" (p. 60); "I made it!" (p. 63); and on the day Steinbeck completed the last chapter, he wrote, "Finished this day – and I hope to God it's good" (p. 93).

Individual and Social Dimensions of Self-Direction

Still another theme relates to the individual and social dimensions of self-direction. As I noted previously,

the issue related to self-direction that has often been misunderstood is the belief that self-directed learning is strictly centered on the individual learner while neglecting the social context in which learning takes place. Candy (1991) and Brookfield (1993) have both addressed this concern in some detail. Where the misconception can arise is in the attempt to set up a false dichotomy between individual and social emphases in self-directed learning, and adult learning in general. More than 90 years ago, Lindeman (1926) provided insight into this concern when he stated, "Adult Education will become an agency of progress if the short-time goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-time experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order" (p. 105). (Brockett, 1991, pp. 24-25)

This quote exemplifies how the individual and social aspects of self-directed learning can be linked. The example of Steinbeck writing *The Grapes of Wrath* shows an individual who is engaged in an individual creative process, yet the motives behind writing the book were to a large extent humanitarian. Steinbeck was deeply moved and disturbed by what he saw while visiting and volunteering in the migrant camps, and this seems to have been the driving force behind writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. For Steinbeck, writing about the problem was the best way to help create greater awareness of and concern for the situation and, in his unique way, to contribute to social change through his individual learning effort.

In terms of making a connection to writing the book as a learning process, it is noteworthy that while Steinbeck "was always a compassionate man who was most concerned with the 'little guy,' the misfits and downtrodden of society" (Meyer & Railsback, 2006), it was probably the influence of Steinbeck's first wife, Carol, that helped shape his social conscience and activism particularly in relation to the inequities of life during the Depression. So, once again, there is evidence that Steinbeck's learning process did not take place in isolation. Learning from others need not mean abdicating control of one's learning process.

A Painful Transformation

Steinbeck's struggle did not end once the book appeared in print. While the book brought "fame, notoriety, and success" (DeMott, 1989, p. xiv), Steinbeck also entered a difficult period in his life after completing the book. Health problems including a painful bout of sciatica, marriage difficulties and eventual divorce, and threats from those antagonized by the book are three examples of this ongoing struggle (DeMott, 1989). More important, though, the book forever changed its author (Benson, 1994). As DeMott (1989) speculated, Steinbeck "was so nearly unraveled in the process that the unique qualities . . . that made his art exemplary in the first place could never be repeated with the same integrated force" (p. xiv). In an assessment of how writing *The Grapes of Wrath* was transformative for Steinbeck, Benson (1984) made the following observation:

The satisfied reader puts a book down, happy with his [*sic*] journey, and waits for another just like it; the writer, having abandoned ship, is lost in the turbulence of the departing wake and tries desperately to take new bearings. Critics and literary historians have speculated about what happened to change Steinbeck after *The Grapes of Wrath*. One answer is that what happened was writing the novel itself. (p. 392)

This observation from Benson illustrates what often happens in transformative learning. In transformative learning, the "disorienting dilemma" can be a positive or negative experience (e.g., Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Similarly, the transformation that takes place can fall on a continuum from highly positive to highly negative. In Steinbeck's case, writing the book had both positive and negative consequences; thus, it is possible to understand his transformation to simultaneously be a positive and negative one.

An important aspect of transformative learning is that it is not the mere accumulation of knowledge or experience that leads to transformation; rather, it is the process and how the person makes meaning of that process that leads to transformation. As Cranton and Taylor (2012) stated, "transformative learning theory is based on the notion that we interpret our experiences in our own way, and that how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences" (p. 5). There is evidence to suggest writing the novel led to a fundamental change in Steinbeck's perspective that was not merely the result of doing the writing but rather was an irreversible transformation in how he viewed himself and the world around him.

Benson (1984) noted that after the publication of the book, Steinbeck "spent the first part of the year looking for a way to escape and the second part looking for some direction or project by which he could restore some sanity and order to his life" (p. 392). This, it could be argued, was Steinbeck's initial response to the disorienting dilemma resulting from the publication of and response to the book. According to Mezirow (2000), "Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (p. 5). Steinbeck had to find a way to interpret his experience in

a way that would allow him to move past the experience and aftermath of writing his novel.

Of course, Steinbeck did continue his career as a successful writer and went on to write such classic works as *Cannery Row* (1945), *East of Eden* (1952), and the autobiographical travelogue *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1952). As was noted at the beginning of this article, Steinbeck received numerous honors in subsequent years, but there is some evidence that *The Grapes of Wrath* was a creative peak never to be reached again by Steinbeck. In this way, Steinbeck seems to have undergone a transformation that was painful and led to a redefining of his self. For further examination of the remaining three decades of Steinbeck's life following completion of *The Grapes of Wrath*, I recommend biographies such as those by Benson (1984) and Parini (1994) as well as *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (Steinbeck et al., 1975). As a recommendation for future research, I believe it would be important to examine transformative learning and its impact on Steinbeck's life in greater detail rather than just focusing on a single episode as I have attempted to do in this study. It would be interesting to better understand how this transformation impacted the remaining years of Steinbeck's life.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this article was to show how the process of writing *The Grapes of Wrath* serves as an excellent example of a writer engaging in a learning process, which to a large degree is highly self-directed. It is a case illustration of a self-directed learning effort that offers insight into four themes: self-directed learning does not take place completely in isolation; self-doubt and struggle can be a part of the process; individual and social purposes can, indeed, coexist within a learning process; and sometimes personal transformation, despite recognition through external rewards, can be painful and actually have a negative impact on future creativity. In closing,

three tentative conclusions can be offered. First, in order to understand writing as a form of self-directed learning, it may make sense to think of writing as a *learning process* as well as a *product* or *outcome*. The Steinbeck example reveals a writer who engaged in an extensive learning effort, which provided him with the raw material for his artistic effort. Second, the case illustration offers evidence to show how the learning and creative process can be a very personal struggle. Learning is not always a carefree, joyous experience, but is often fraught with struggle and self-doubt. Third, while self-direction does typically imply an emphasis on the individual, it is not necessarily devoid of social goals. It is my hope that this study helps to show the value of biography as a tool for adult learning research. I believe that there is much to be gained by learning from the lives of others and that this can be done by studying the process through which a person engages in learning as part of the process of creating. (Brockett, 1991, p. 25)

References

- Brockett, R. G. (1991). John Steinbeck's learning project: Self-direction and struggle in writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. *Proceedings of the annual Adult Education Research Conference*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma.
- Benson, J. J. (1984). *The true adventures of John Steinbeck, writer*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Brockett, R. G., & Hiemstra, R. (1991). *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research, and practice*. London, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brookfield, S. (1988). Conceptual, practical and methodological ambiguities in self-directed learning. In H. B. Long & Associates (Eds.), *Self-directed learning: Application and theory* (pp. 11-37). Athens, GA: Adult Education Department, University of Georgia.
- Cavaliere, L. A. (1988). *A case study of the self-directed learning processes and network patterns utilized by the Wright brothers which led to their invention of flight* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Order No. 8827337)
- Cranton, P., & Taylor, E. W. (2012). Transformative learning theory: Seeking a more unified theory. In E. W. Taylor, P. Cranton, & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp. 3-20). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- DeMott, R. (Ed.). (1989). *Working days: The journals of The Grapes of Wrath*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Gibbons, M., Bailey, A., Comeau, P., Schmuck, J., Seymour, S., & Wallace, D. (1980). Toward a theory of self-directed learning: A study of experts without formal training. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 20(2), 41-56.
- Merriam, S. B. (1997). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, M. J., & Railsback, B. (2006). The grapes of wrath (novel). In B. Railsback & M. J. Meyer (Eds.), *A John Steinbeck encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Owenby, P. H. (1996). *Robert A. Heinlein: Popular adult educator and philosopher of education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.
- Parini, J. (1994). *John Steinbeck: A biography*. London, UK: William Heinemann.
- Steinbeck, J. (1939). *The grapes of wrath*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Steinbeck, J. (1945). *Cannery row*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Steinbeck, J. (1952). *East of Eden*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Steinbeck, J. (1962). *Travels with Charley: In search of America*. New York, NY: Viking.

- Steinbeck, J., Steinbeck, E., & Wallsten, R. (1975). *Steinbeck: A life in letters*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Steinbeck, J. (1988). *The harvest Gypsies*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books. (Original work published 1936)
- Wollenberg, C. (1988). Introduction. In J. Steinbeck, *The harvest Gypsies* (pp. v-xvii). Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books.
- Zinsner, W. (1988). *Writing to learn*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
-

Ralph G. Brockett (brockett@utk.edu) is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is a founding member of the International Society for Self-Directed Learning board and a board member for the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame.

MOVING FROM ISDLS PAPER TO *IJSDL* ARTICLE: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EDITOR

Michael K. Ponton

The purpose of this practice brief is to outline relevant considerations associated with transforming a paper presented at the International Self-Directed Learning Symposium into a manuscript suitable for publication in the *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*. Considerations include the use of symposium discussion to inform manuscript refinements, formatting requirements, and the journal vetting process.

Keywords: journal publishing

The International Self-Directed Learning Symposium (ISDLS) was conceptualized by Huey Long in 1986 (Reimler, n.d.) with subsequent annual meetings that have led to this year's 33rd symposium in Cocoa Beach, Florida, that offered approximately 30 academic sessions (International Society for Self-Directed Learning [ISSDL], 2019). Before 2004, symposium papers were selected for publication in an edited compendium; in 2004, the International Self-Directed Learning Symposium Group published the first issue of the *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning (IJSDL)* led by founding editors Huey Long and Lucy Guglielmino. In 2005, the ISSDL was founded with the following vision:

The International Society for Self-Directed Learning (ISSDL) is dedicated to the promotion of self-directed lifelong learning and to the encouragement and dissemination of continued research on self-directed learning both within and outside of institutional contexts: in childhood education, higher education, adult education, training and human resource development, as well as formal and informal contexts. (ISSDL, n.d.-a, para. 2)

Since its inception, the *IJSDL* has published 15 volumes (two issues each) and 136 articles with the following editors (ISSDL, n.d.-c): Huey Long (2004-2009), Lucy Guglielmino (2004-2017), Roger Hiemstra (2009-2010; guest editor, 2007), and Michael Ponton (2018; guest editor 2016-2017). The most recent issue (ISSDL, 2018) included one associate editor (Janet Piskurich; associate editor, 2015-present) and 28 editorial board members who serve as reviewers for submitted manuscripts.

On average, the *IJSDL* publishes 4.5 articles per issue; however, this average has fallen from 5.0 articles per issue during the first 10 years of volumes to 3.6 articles per issue during the last 5 years (ISSDL, n.d.-c). Thus, the motivation behind this

practice brief is to offer recommendations to ISDLS presenters that may help in transforming symposium papers into publishable *IJSDL* articles.

Recommendations

Use the Symposium

There is an established preference by the ISSDL board to title the annual meeting “symposium” rather than “conference” in that the former nomenclature connotes a more informal opportunity for presenters to offer nascent ideas in order to engender discussion that can inform refined ways of thinking or analysis. The symposium provides a wonderful opportunity for presenters to interact with those whose ideas might actually be cited in the presenters’ work.

Although the most obvious opportunity for interaction is at the presenter’s own session, there can be the sessions of others at which researchers can garner ideas for their work. The presentations themselves may offer relevant ideas, or questions can be asked that comport with both the session’s presentation as well as the researcher’s interests.

Such interactions, though, are not limited to organized sessions. SDL scholars such as Naomi Boyer, Ralph Brockett, Robert Bulik, Gary Confessore, Lucy Guglielmino, Paul Guglielmino, Roger Hiemstra, Huey Long, and Michael Ponton—all Malcolm Knowles Award winners—have been regular attendees and are typically available for conversation during breaks, meals, or informal meetings. Presenters should be proactive in seeking out such conversations that can inform their work.

Recommendation 1: Presenters should use the symposium as a vehicle for learning more about how to refine their own work.

Use Symposium Discussion

Armed with scholarly input, presenters should then consider ways to revise their work. Such revisions may be in the methods used for prospective research, data analysis of completed studies, or discussion of emerging ideas. Presenters should pay careful attention during sessions so that opportunities for improvements are not forgotten. As time is limited during sessions for discussion, presenters should seek out those who offer in-session suggestions outside of sessions for clarification and further dialogue.

Presenters should also note that many attendees are *IJSDL* editorial board members. This year’s attendees included the following board members (cf. ISSDL, n.d.-b, 2019): Naomi Boyer, Ralph Brockett, Valerie Bryan, Robert Donaghy, Lucy Guglielmino, Kelly McCarthy, Sharan Merriam, EunMi Park, Shelley Payne, and Peter Zsiga. The editorial board members provide blind reviews and publication recommendations to the editor; thus, they are experienced in offering critiques of all areas of research that includes manuscript preparation. Although the input from all attendees should be carefully considered by presenters, input provided by editorial board members may be particularly useful in creating publishable articles.

Recommendation 2: Presenters should use the scholarly input from others as a vehicle for refining their own work.

Formatting Requirements

The “Manuscript Submission Guidelines” (ISSDL, n.d.-d) provide detailed expectations regarding originality, content, style, formatting, submission procedures, and release and copyright assignment for manuscripts submitted to the *IJSDL*. With respect to formatting and style, adherence to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010) is required with the following exceptions: (a) submissions should be single-spaced, and (b) tables and figures should be placed in the text where mentioned (ISSDL, n.d.-d, p. 2). Before submitting a manuscript, authors should perform the following:

- Spellcheck and grammar check all submissions.
- Provide page numbers for all direct quotes and double check their accuracy.
- Double check all citations and references for accuracy AND compliance with APA 6th edition format.
- Make sure all references cited in the text appear in the reference list and that all items in the reference list are cited in the text.
- To format your references, use the Word formatting for *hanging indent* rather than indenting individual lines. (ISSDL, n.d.-d, p. 4)

Recommendation 3: Carefully adhere to the “Manuscript Submission Guidelines” and Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

Because submitted manuscripts should be prepared as they will actually appear in the *IJSDL*, a review of previously published journals (available at ISSDL, n.d.-c) should be performed. This review should focus on not only format and style but also grammar and punctuation. In the final editing process, I edit manuscripts accepted for publication in a manner that is consistent with my previous editing; thus, editing time is reduced when authors submit manuscripts consistent with published articles.

Recommendation 4: Replicate the format, style, grammar, and punctuation of an editor’s previously published IJSDL articles.

Journal Vetting Process

For manuscripts submitted for publication consideration in the *IJSDL*, the “Manuscript Submission Guidelines” (ISSDL, n.d.-d) outline the review process as follows:

The review process typically takes 3 to 4 months. . . . Articles will be subject to a multiple blind review, which will focus on:

- importance of the research or theoretical problem; applicability and interest to the field (relevance beyond case presented);
- originality and contribution to learning;
- clarity of the purpose;
- description of the problem within a theoretical framework, where appropriate;
- appropriateness and adequacy of the literature review;
- soundness of methodological approaches;
- accuracy and adequacy of interpretation and conclusions;
- clear presentation of theoretical and practical implications; and
- organization and clarity of the manuscript.

When the review process is complete, the *IJSDL* editor will send a decision by email. A detailed written summary of the reviewers' comments will be provided in cases where revisions are requested before publication. Once a manuscript is accepted and authors have made the recommended changes on their submissions, the *IJSDL* editor will conduct a thorough review and copyedit before publishing any article. *IJSDL* reserves the right to make editorial changes as needed to correct errors or to conform to *IJSDL* standards. (pp. 8-9)

A typical review is performed by two editorial board members. At the editor's discretion, a third reviewer may also be enlisted in order to inform the editor's recommendation to a manuscript's author(s). Each editorial board member provides one of the following recommendations to the editor with the editor deciding upon a single recommendation to the author(s):

Accept: These manuscripts typically are top quality in terms of relevance, significance, conformity to acceptable research procedures, and make valuable contributions to *IJSDL*. The correction of minor errors or stylistic problems can be addressed through the editorial process.

Conditionally Accept: These manuscripts typically have quite relevant and significant topics, with well-developed theoretical frameworks, rigorous methodological approaches, and findings that are interpreted thoughtfully and insightfully. They fall into the category of conditionally accepted because they may have flaws in one or more of the above areas. These flaws, however, can be deemed relatively minor in that they can be remedied without changes in the overall purpose or approach of the study as presented. In other words, their flaws are not fatal nor does remedying them require a significant change in the nature and presentation of the article.

Revise and Resubmit: These manuscripts also have relevant topics and show promise theoretically, methodologically, and/or in terms of their findings. Their flaws, however, are so numerous and/or significant that a substantial reworking of the manuscript is necessary to remedy them. Such reworking might include,

for example, further development of a theoretical framework, a redesign of the methodological approach, or perhaps even additional data collection and/or analysis. Thus, while there is merit in some aspects of the study, generally the required revisions would demand major or even complete redevelopment and redrafting of the manuscript followed by a second review process.

Reject: These manuscripts, while they have been deemed within the general scope of the journal, have fundamental flaws that cannot reasonably be overcome. These flaws might be conceptual and/or methodological; typically flaws in both areas are evident in these manuscripts. Such manuscripts might exhibit a minimal or complete lack of theoretical grounding, inappropriate and/or misappropriated methodological procedures, misinterpretation of findings, and/or minimal significance or relevance to the field of self-directed learning. (ISSDL, n.d.-e, paras. 5-8)

A revise and resubmit recommendation requires at least a second review by the same editorial board members who recommended revisions with additional reviews as necessary until an accept or reject recommendation is reached; depending upon the revisions requested, a conditionally accept recommendation may or may not require further board member reviews but often does. Although there are word limit maximums associated with various types of submissions (cf. ISSDL, n.d.-d, p. 1), recommended revisions that require exceeding the published maximum are typically acceptable. The editorial board review process must result in board members recommending article acceptance—conditional or otherwise—for publication before the editor will recommend acceptance.

Recommendation 5: Carefully consider all recommended revisions and questions offered by reviewers as there will typically be a subsequent review by these same reviewers in order to recommend acceptance.

After the editorial board recommends acceptance, the editor will review and edit the manuscript in great detail and often offer his or her own questions that must be satisfactorily addressed before manuscript publication. Similar to the board review process, this process can require several iterations.

Recommendation 6: Carefully consider all recommended revisions and questions offered by the editor as there will be a subsequent review by the editor before publication.

As is evident by the vetting process, a great deal of time is devoted by the editorial board and editor in reviewing, critiquing, and editing submitted manuscripts. All persons involved gladly give of their time in order to ensure that the *IJSDL* produces high quality issues with articles of genuine archival value (note: they also gladly give of their time at symposiums to mentor potential journal authors). However, as active scholars, their time should not be wasted by authors not committed to

responding to recommended revisions and questions that typically emerge from the vetting process. This does not mean that authors must follow every recommended revision as they may feel there is a good reason for not doing so; however, they must still be willing to provide a rational justification in this regard for each recommendation not implemented. The editorial board or the editor, as appropriate, decides the adequacy of such a response.

Recommendation 7: Only submit a manuscript if you are committed to participating in the review process to its associated end (acceptance or rejection).

Summary

The following recommendations are offered to ISDLS presenters interested in publishing their symposium papers in the *IJSDL*:

1. Presenters should *use* the symposium as a vehicle for learning more about how to refine their own work.
2. Presenters should *use* the scholarly input from others as a vehicle for refining their own work.
3. Carefully adhere to the “Manuscript Submission Guidelines” and *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.
4. Replicate the format, style, grammar, and punctuation of an editor’s previously published *IJSDL* articles.
5. Carefully consider all recommended revisions and questions offered by reviewers as there will typically be a subsequent review by these same reviewers in order to recommend acceptance.
6. Carefully consider all recommended revisions and questions offered by the editor as there will be a subsequent review by the editor before publication.
7. Only submit a manuscript if you are committed to participating in the review process to its associated end (acceptance or rejection).

I personally have subscribed to these recommendations thereby resulting in 12 first-authored *IJSDL* articles; thus, I strongly believe that these recommendations will increase the publishing viability of any symposium paper.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (n.d.-a). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://www.sdlglobal.com/about-us>
- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (n.d.-b). *Journal information*. Retrieved from <https://www.sdlglobal.com/journal>
- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (n.d.-c). *Journals*. Retrieved from <https://www.sdlglobal.com/journals>

- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (n.d.-d). *Manuscript submission guidelines*. Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/dfdeaf_8f77c4225ded48af83b751d42f55e939.pdf
- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (n.d.-e). *Review request*. Unpublished manuscript.
- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (2018). *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 15(2). Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6c1db2_562ac18f5be542728308b28a36761ea0.pdf
- International Society for Self-Directed Learning. (2019). *33rd International Self-Directed Learning Symposium*. Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6c1db2_fea084818db24d6897197b8c934df7a0.pdf
- Reimler, C. (n.d.) *Huey B. Long*. Retrieved from https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/dfdeaf_c35ad8900ef748fc83e66b0e9f340f24.pdf
-

Michael K. Ponton (hrdemike@hotmail.com) is a professor of education at Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA; has published extensively in the field of self-directed learning where his interests include human agency, autonomous learning, and self-efficacy; serves as the editor for the *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*; and was the 2015 recipient of the Malcolm Knowles Memorial Self-Directed Learning Award. He will be retiring from Regent University this summer; beginning in the fall, he will serve as a professor in the Department of Higher Education & Learning Technologies at Texas A&M University–Commerce.