

Malcolm Knowles Awards for Significant Lifelong Contributions to the Field of Self-Directed Learning

Dr. Robert Donaghy

Dr. Donaghy first became interested in self-directed learning during his MS program at the University of Tennessee. In the late 1990s, he joined the UT SDL Research Group as the only MS student among a group of doctoral students. Thus, he was one of the original “Brockett’s Rockets.” In 2000, the group made its first ISSDL presentation on a content analysis of SDL literature. Bob was a part of this presentation.

Once Bob completed his MS, he enrolled in the PhD program at UT and continued his interest in SDL. He worked on a number of projects and presented at the ISSDL on several occasions. Bob’s dissertation was a very important study on several of the major contributors to the field of self-directed learning. He interviewed eight scholars in depth about their work in SDL (Long, Hiemstra, Guglielmino, Caffarella, Brookfield, Kasworm, Tough, and Brockett). The findings of this study provided valuable historical context to the development of self-directed learning scholarship from the late 1960s through the early 2000s. An especially important aspect of Bob’s research is that he was able to connect with Allen Tough, who invited him to his home in Toronto for an interview. Bob was instrumental in inviting Allen to attend the ISSDL Symposium and receive the 2006 Knowles Award.

After completing his PhD, Bob continued to engage in scholarship. For example, he co-authored a study about Cyril Houle’s connection to SDL through his “Inquiring Mind” study and mentorship of Malcolm Knowles and Allen Tough. This study was published in the IJSDL. Bob subsequently made the decision to become credentialed as a public-school teacher and for a number of years before retirement, taught high school math in Cleveland, TN. As a secondary school teacher, Bob worked to implement principles and practices related to SDL. Some of these innovations have been presented at symposia in recent years.

During his time teaching high school, and after retirement, Bob reengaged in the ISSDL, focusing on self-directed learning in the secondary school setting. He continues to make presentations at the annual symposium in this area. One of Bob’s most important contributions to the International Society for Self-Directed Learning has been his volunteer service through his photography and video recording of many sessions of the symposia over several years. This is a thankless job as it meant that Bob was accountable for recording certain sessions (and often missing others that might have better fit his personal interests). He did this without complaint.

As a result, the ISSDL has a substantial historical archive of its symposia over a number of years. Bob began this role during his time as a doctoral student and continued for many years, including the 2019 symposium. Bob Donaghy has had a nearly 20-year

history with the ISSDL and has made a number of scholarly contributions to the field. Bob's passion for SDL was such that for many years, he attended the symposium on his own time and money.

Bob is an outstanding example of one who has maintained a sustained commitment to SDL for many years and has also given unselfish service to the society for many years. Dr. Robert Donaghy clearly meets the spirit of the Malcolm Knowles award.