Helping Students through the Self-Education Crisis
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Published by: Phi Delta Kappa International
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20299345

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they're skeptical, I just have one of the kids demonstrate a machine for them.”

“But how many customers do you have for these supertoys?” Fred asked.

“Hundreds. The microprocessors in the personal computers are capable of a variety of games.” He motioned toward the TV set with the animated baseball game. “But we have preprogrammed cassettes for the Star Trek computer that will do inventory or payroll for a small company. They can be interfaced with other equipment to short-cut a lot of paperwork.”

Fred mentally pictured a desk full of ungraded test papers. “For $600?!” he exclaimed.

“That kid over there in the army shirt watched me do a demonstration for a customer on a program that estimates the energy savings of insulation, storm windows, etc., for a home. He asked me if he could do an estimate for his house, then his grandmother’s, and now he’s working on an apartment building his uncle manages.”

“Hey, wait a minute,” said Fred. “I recognize that kid at the table over there. That’s Robert Gonzales. He was in trouble last year for threatening a teacher with a knife. What’s he doing here?”

“Well, he was watching the kids play math bingo one day, and I could tell he wanted to join in but didn’t feel he could compete. So I offered to let him practice with the Math Man. It looks like a calculator, but it actually provides a quick drill in basic arithmetic. It sells for about $25.”

Several days later the principal of Early High entered the vice principal’s office. “I checked downtown, as you requested, to see what happened to Fred Strong, the truant officer. He turned in his resignation. I don’t understand it. One of the best the district had. The rumor is that when they asked what he was going to do he muttered something about going out and contributing to the delinquency of minors.”

**Author's Note:** Although some of the devices and programs described in this story sound like science fiction, they are all available as of fall, 1978, for the prices quoted. While educators quibble about the capacity of technology for revolutionizing education, while they focus discussion on large computer systems, entrepreneurs are marketing and parents are buying low-priced microprocessor-based devices designed specifically for teaching.

A revolution is indeed under way. If you don’t believe it, you are not aware of the fact that it is now possible to purchase more computing power for less than $1,000 than you could rent five years ago for more than $1,000 per month. The question is, Will educators become a part of this revolution or be trampled by it?

The advent of microprocessor-based teaching devices is not at all analogous to any recently introduced teaching aid. Observers have compared the invention of movable type and the computer. At first books were expensive because they were made by hand, i.e., slowly. But now a book with hundreds of pages can be typeset, printed, and on sale in a matter of days. Low-cost availability of the printed word drastically revolutionized education. Similarly, the computer started out as an expensive handmade product. Now microprocessors are quickly and inexpensively manufactured. The primary difference is that educators were allowed 400 years for the book-adoption process. With computers, they may have no more than four more years. Are we ready for the challenge?

### Helping Students Through The Self-Education Crisis

**by Maurice Gibbons and Gary Phillips**

**Self-directed learning is vastly different from teacher-directed learning and generally produces crises. But teachers can anticipate these crises and help students through them.**

When members of a high school staff decide to establish a program of student-directed learning, they launch a crisis for themselves and the students involved. For the student the crisis is, “After all these years of following directions, can I successfully choose and manage my own learning activities?” For the teacher the crisis is, “After all these years of presenting lessons, giving assignments, and grading papers, can I become skillful at helping students to choose, implement, and evaluate their own learning activities?” For most teachers and students the answer is, “Yes, but not without a struggle.”

Self-directed learning is vastly different from teacher-directed learning. Imagine for a moment that you are a student entering a classroom where overnight a transition from teacher-directed (T-D) to student-directed (S-D) learning has occurred. For 10 years the teacher has told you where to sit, punished you for inattention, and kept you in after school when your work was not done. But this morning she says that the classroom will be only one location available for your work, that motivation must come in large part from you, and that you must discipline yourself to learn and accomplish.

“My responsibility,” she says, “is to teach you how to design and manage your own learning, to give you every assistance I can with basic skills, and to help you make contacts with other teachers and members of the community. The responsibility for learning is strictly yours!” Sud-
Critical Stages in the Transition

The rough passage students usually experience in becoming self-directed follows fairly predictable phases. The stage sequence described below is the result of careful observations of students entering four S-D programs, one of them a Walkabout program now in its fifth year. While the sequence has also been confirmed by others who teach S-D programs, the outline should not be considered universal. A few students who enter may have already learned self-direction at home or elsewhere, and a few others may be unable to progress through the stages no matter how much opportunity and assistance is provided. In addition, each of the stages can be experienced in a wide variety of individual ways. With these qualifications, the following description outlines the stages students generally experience in the transition to productive self-directed learning.

Decision. Students must decide whether or not to take the S-D program and, if they take it, whether or not to commit themselves to it as a method of learning. If it is the first S-D program to be offered in a traditional school, students will have neither a model nor graduates upon whom to base their judgment. The opposition from conventional positions may be great. Even if they have encouraging information, students who choose the program will enter without knowing the rigors involved. If they volunteer but are not convinced they can succeed, they will be particularly susceptible to the traumatic features of the transition.

Initial Ecstasy. As they enter, students usually anticipate their future in the program with high optimism. They enjoy new freedom of movement and new relationships with staff and peers. Elated with their release from the constraints of the T-D program, they begin to plan their first activities with great expectations and enthusiasm but little experience or skill. Lacking in self-awareness, unpracticed at self-diagnosis, and untrained in personal decision making and goal setting, students tend to choose activities that are either too easy and familiar or too grandiose and beyond reach.

Shock of Recognition. Students gradually recognize the huge size of the task they face. They begin to comprehend the extent of their ignorance. They see the difficulties in arrangements to be made, involving unfamiliar people and situations. They realize that there is hard work to be done under their own motivation, and that their failures as well as their accomplishments will be very visible. Overwhelmed by all of this, they experience the trauma of freedom and recognize with a shock the responsibility that goes with it. Many turn to the teacher for assistance. Others want to be told what to do. And some students may seek a quick route back to the T-D classroom.

Crisis. In this stage shock turns to lethargy and procrastination. Immobilized by the complexity of their self-directed tasks, students fail to meet deadlines, or they perform at a level much below the one they had anticipated. The reality of the demands upon them. But for many hostility is the precursor of escape, attempts at flight from an uncomfortable situation forcing them to face truths about themselves they may not wish to face, and forcing them to shoulder responsibilities for themselves they may not wish to shoulder. At this point they may claim that S-D learning is not real learning at all (e.g., "I’ve never learned this way before."). Others may solicit support from their classmates (e.g., "The whole class hates this program."). They may ask their parents to get them back into a T-D classroom, and parents may turn to the school administration to arrange it.

Realism. In this stage, students accept the reality of their failure. Recognizing the futility of condemning themselves and blaming others, they begin to examine the demands of S-D learning more realistically. Gradually, students convert the diff...
ficulties they experienced into valuable lessons. They clarify their role and the roles of others; they develop a clearer picture of what they can accomplish; they accept the need for organizing their time and effort; and they acknowledge the importance of S-D learning. This state of readiness for further development is the turning point in the transition, a stage at which teachers can beparticularly helpful to their struggling students.

**Commitment.** Students begin to change. Behavior and attitudes necessary for successful S-D learning begin to emerge. Commitments to the task, to the development of skills, and to the program are reaffirmed. Work is conducted in a more orderly and sustained fashion, motivated by the students’ desire to avoid previous failures and by their renewed hope that this time they will be successful. As they exert self-discipline, mount a sustained effort, and see their progress, students begin to report a new sense of power. Parents begin to report their sons’ and daughters’ more independent, responsible behavior at home. Students recognize and willingly describe changes in themselves and others. As their enthusiasm and pride increase, however, students may begin to overpower, to design activities and goals so grandiose they cannot possibly be achieved.

**Achievement.** Problems arise but are not as devastating as in earlier stages. Students solve them, increasing their sense of accomplishment. They also complete projects, share them with peers, and generally begin to enjoy their ability to shape events. They begin to evaluate their own work and to report achievements with pride. As students take ownership of their success, grades and teacher/parent approval become less important rewards than the personal feelings of worth, efficacy, and satisfaction they derive from the activity itself.

**Plateau.** After a round of successes, students often relax and become more comfortable with themselves and the program. They tend to hang around the classroom, to repeat previously successful experiences — especially community experiences — and to resist taking on a new level of challenge. They have climbed their personal Everest and find it difficult to start again on another task. Eventually, many students have to be firmly prodded out of the nest again.

**Mobilization.** Students become productive. After conducting a range of activities, they begin to concentrate on a few fields, or even a single field, of interest. Sustained effort with a clear focus marks the end of the transition phase and the beginning of the students’ pursuit of excellence. Having done it to prove they could, they work now for the rewards of competence.

Knowing these stages are likely to occur, teachers and other participants can develop strategies to help students overcome the difficulties they will inevitably face in completing the transition to self-directed learning.

**Strategies for the Transition**

In the transition from T-D to S-D learning, new attitudes and personality characteristics as well as skills become important. To be helpful to the struggling student, the teacher must assist in all three aspects. For instance, students must value self-direction. If they do not have a great desire to become self-directed, they will likely lack the motivation to take the initiative and to persevere in the face of difficulties, as self-education so often requires. But even with desire and initiative, students still need the skills of organization, planning, and interacting with others. The question is, how can teachers help students develop the attitudes, characteristics, and skills they need to become self-directed learners? The following chart outlines specific strategies for each stage of the transition:

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**Teaching Activities**

- **Decision**
  - Help students visualize the experience of being an S-D learner. Model S-D learning.
  - Teach students to value S-D learning (teacher must value S-D learning and communicate that the fact without ambiguity).
  - Help each student create a self-fulfilling prophecy of success as an S-D learner. During interviews, conversations, planning sessions, and progress reviews, reinforce the prophecy. Enlist the aid of parents.

- **Students compile a list of goals for each S-D learner.** (Including graduates of S-D classes), then list the personality characteristics, ways of learning, and skills most common among them. From these lists, they produce a profile of the S-D learning process and of a successful S-D learner.

- **Students describe how they would like to be successful at the end of one year or one semester.** They list behaviors that would show progress in this direction. They record any signs of these behaviors.

- **Students assess their rate of progress toward the profile of an S-D learner and their personal list of desired behaviors.** They evaluate their performance of such S-D skills as time management.

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**Learning Activities**

- **Initial Ecstasy**
  - Organize a process, such as contracting, to structure time and effort. Set expectations and limits. Help students to explore alternative activities.
  - Teach new skills. Students require, such as goal setting, time management, and resource identification.
  - Establish one-to-one conferences to discuss the individual’s learning style and learning tasks.
  - Inform parents of the S-D process. Secure their commitment to support students during the transition crisis.

- **Shock of Recognition**
  - Clarify new teacher and student roles: “This you can expect from me; this I expect from you.”
  - Discuss purpose and direction with students, provide a general program structure, examine this shock stage and optional routes out of it. Help but do not rescue: “I refuse to do for you what you can do for yourself.”
  - Renegotiate learning contracts, setting more realistic goals and deadlines.
  - Reinforce any sign of success; help students to identify with exemplars and to build a self-fulfilling prophecy of success. Model respect for S-D learning and encourage respect among the students.

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**Shock of Recognition**

- **Small groups form for discussion of emerging difficulties and to confirm that the student is not the only one who is struggling.**

- **Launch small-group projects to allow for modeling leadership in S-D activities by some students and to permit less challenging roles by others. Students must test their initiative gradually.**

- **Combine activities for personal development with activities for development of intellectual and procedural skills. Example: Lead a team conducting a survey of community opinion on an important issue.**

- **Begin preparation for introductory challenges experiences in home and community settings.**

- **Students overcome apathy by completing a task successfully. (Teachers help them to finish any task by any means.)**
Teaching Activities

Crisis
- Permit time for solitude, reflection on personal difficulties with tasks, and acceptance of responsibility for them.
- Help students to identify their best ideas and become confident of their ability to accomplish them. Prepare to get started.
- Help the student to win the end product of his effort. He must anticipate pride in the result in order to weather the frustrations of the crisis.

Realism
- Help students process their feelings and behavior during previous stages in order to maximize learning from success and failure.
- Make opportunities for student reports about their activities and demonstrations of their accomplishments. Reward them for their efforts and for their honesty in personal comments, public statements, and reports to parents.
- Model optimism and risk taking. Reinforce the value of challenge, struggle, and personal growth.

Commitment
- Secure written commitment in detailed learning contract and public commitment in peer group and in adult support group.
- Conduct individual conferences to establish pattern of self-evaluation (e.g., "Give your own grade and defend it.").
- Students conduct trial challenge activities, report their experiences to the group, and discuss their struggles and successes.
- Students break their next activity into a series of sub-goals with a time sequence so they can say, "The first step is . . ., which I will finish by . . . ."

Learning Activities

Achievement
- Increase freedom and responsibility of student. Implement self-evaluation and reporting.
- Encourage greater risks by setting greater challenges in all areas.
- Students rate themselves on scales of time management, organization, accomplishment, and resource identification.
- Students select and declare real-life challenge activities in the community: adventure, service, creative expression, logical inquiry, practical application, academic concentration, work experience, and resolution of an interpersonal problem or conflict.
- Regular practice of skills necessary for success in more complex challenge experiences (formulate as competencies with specific levels of required progress).

Plateau
- Refuse to accept repetition of safe, comfortable challenge activities. Raise the level of competence required.
- Students launch challenge experiences, reaching out farther from the security of home base and farther from familiar people and activities. They begin experiences with competent adults in the world of work.
- Peer groups discuss behavioral changes achieved and successes accomplished by each individual. Students gain reinforcement by tutoring peers and presenting completed projects as tangible evidence of success.

As you can see from this outline, the program radically changes the role of teachers as well as that of students. Teachers become involved much more often in small-group and one-to-one interaction with students. In these closer encounters they find themselves more often dealing with process than content. Rather than teaching specific subject matter and skills, they will more commonly find themselves diagnosing students' abilities, advising them on programs for further development, negotiating individual contracts, arranging contacts in the community, and helping students solve personal and motivational problems related to their self-directed studies. When they are teaching in the traditional sense, the content tends to be such process skills as personal planning, organizing necessary resources, and managing time. And when teachers go into the community to find experts who will teach and to negotiate new locations where students can study and work, it means they must learn entrepreneurial skills seldom required of educators in T-D programs.

These role changes cause other changes to occur. Many teachers new to S-D programs report feeling incompetent in the classroom initially. Some find their personal philosophy of education severely challenged. Others have difficulty finding personal gratification in their new teaching role.

In the S-D classroom teachers have few opportunities to lecture at length to a captive audience. They feel unsure and inept at first in their new role of facilitating and monitoring the students' efforts. And they often report feeling helpless while letting students struggle with problems when they know they could steer these students to the proper solutions, telling them what and how to learn. Those who believe that all students should be treated in the same way find themselves in deep conflict as students and their programs become more divergent and require more divergent responses from teachers. Even more challenging is the removal of the usual on-the-job reward system that encourages teachers to take credit for much of the learning that occurs. In S-D classrooms students become the central performers and teachers move into the background. As a result, the S-D classroom can be a personally threatening place until teachers make their own transition. But when they form in-depth relationships with students, see the benefits of their assistance during the difficulties that occur, and begin to take pride in accomplishments made by students independently, then their own crisis passes and they can begin to enjoy the benefits of teaching students how to learn and pursue maturity on their own.
School Health Education in Conjunction with Medical Schools: A Model

by Robert E. Roush, Armin D. Weinberg, Cynthia A. Spiker, and Robert C. White

Houston-area school districts have collaborated with a center at the Baylor College of Medicine to produce an effective health education curriculum focusing on cardiovascular disease.

Most Americans don’t make wise decisions about health hazards. If they did, heart and blood vessel diseases would not constitute the most devastating medical problem confronting the U.S. today. These diseases have reached epidemic proportions. More than 27 million Americans have some major form of heart and blood vessel disease, making it the leading cause of death.

The challenge of reducing the incidence of heart disease faces all Americans — including teachers and students. With their help, the probability of death or long-term disability resulting from heart and blood vessel disease can be substantially lowered. Properly planned health practices can control or eliminate the risk factors of smoking, hypertension, a diet high in cholesterol and saturated fats, lack of exercise, obesity, and stress. Students, teachers, and parents should learn about these risk factors through effective health education.

This article describes a unique health education program focusing on cardiovascular disease as developed by the Secondary and University Education Section of the National Heart and Blood Vessel Research and Demonstration Center at the Baylor College of Medicine. This section has collaborated with nine Houston-area school districts to produce a cardiovascular disease health education curriculum. The resulting collaboration between public schools and a medical school may be a useful model for other schools.

In the past, health education efforts have not been effectively linked to research-oriented health science centers, which have the capability of reporting the latest research findings and preventive health information. Effective health edu-

Michael E. DeBakey's remarks (above) suggest that individuals can reduce the chance that heart disease will kill them. He also implies that to do so one must adopt a prudent lifestyle.

Dr. DeBakey’s remarks (above) suggest that individuals can reduce the chance that heart disease will kill them. He also implies that to do so one must adopt a prudent lifestyle.