

Self-Directed Learning

Delmo Della-Dora, Gaye McGovern, James D. Wells

Doris Hamm likes to encourage **self-directed learning in her second-grade** classroom at Lake Weston Elementary School in Orlando, Florida. She does this in a variety of ways and in several areas of the curriculum. Usually the subject matter lines are crossed in interdisciplinary projects. For example, children explore math tools and equipment and decide for themselves what kind of measurement they will study for a particular day. Each child, either alone or with others, creates his or her own project and reports to the class what has been discovered. Children take on the responsibility for designing bulletin boards as an outgrowth of the different projects.

A number of teachers at P. K. Yonge School in Gainesville, Florida, use **self-directed learning in everyday teaching**. Diane Walsh, a first-grade teacher makes extensive use of learning centers in her skills program. When students finish an activity at a center they proceed to design their own projects with materials that are handy, or they select an activity designed by the teacher. The choice is theirs.

Two middle school teachers, Tom Massey and Peter McCall, have established a procedure for their students in mathematics where the students work on practice sheets in required skills and take sequential tests on their own. If they need help they ask the teacher, or they may request a tutor or permission to work with another child. Each student sets his or her own pace to match individual abilities and interests.

Fred Lawrence (P. K. Yonge School) coordinates the **independent study program** and the **community involvement program** for the middle

and high school. Independent study may be done by any student in place of other requirements. The community involvement projects are a requirement for all seniors. Some of the projects have been: (a) a slide-tape presentation on mortuary operations; (b) learning emergency first aid skills; (c) studying other high schools' methods for handling failures on the State Assessment Tests; and (d) a slide show of a nursery school in action.

Two reporting sessions are a part of each project. The first is given to the community people who have assisted, and the second is to other high school classes.

Alia Sayegh reports that **teachers of the humanities course** at Atlantic City High School have developed many strategies to encourage self-directed learning. Among the strategies used are: (a) the election of a representative council of students to monitor course progress, involve other students in projects, and help solve classroom management problems; (b) the use of samples of previous student work as part of the instructional materials; (c) a personal journal allowing students to comment on any issue; (d) the inclusion of student local history projects in publications now registered in the Library of Congress; (e) parent involvement in social events and discussion panels; and (f) the compilation of anonymous student questions on topics for use by guest speakers.

The Humanities program at the Atlantic City High School, now in its fifth year, was planned in conjunction with distinguished professors during the 1974-75 school year as the result of a grant from the National Humanities Faculty, 1266 Main Street, Concord, Massachusetts 01742.

The following course materials are available upon request: (a) brief

course description; (b) program for Annual Covered-Dish Dinner; and (c) unit on autobiography. Contact Alia Sayegh, Supervisor of Arts and Humanities, Atlantic City High School, Albany and Atlantic Avenues, Atlantic City, New Jersey 08401.

Students of Fort Smith, Arkansas, needing basic skills before entering regular college mathematics courses have found help in the form of a young and growing **developmental mathematics program** offered through Westark Community College's Developmental Education Division.

Basic arithmetic begins with an individualized contract of four basic areas in skill as deemed from the student's diagnostic test. In a student/instructor conference, the student chooses the appropriate materials to help develop weak skill areas. This allows the student to choose the type of learning style best suited to his/her needs and attitudes.

Beginning algebra is slightly more structured because the student chooses any of several approaches to learning the required material. A basic self-tutorial text is the main reference with easy access to various supplementary materials. Individual student/teacher conferences again help guide the student toward appropriate and helpful material.

Guidance in learning rather than assigned tasks has attributed to an average 40 percent increase in scores between the diagnostic and achievement tests given at the beginning and at the end of the course. Percentages of students passing nursing board exams, preliminary technical program requirements, and using options for higher mathematics and/or business education courses have also increased since the inception of this program. Students take pride in controlling their own education. Accepting re-

sponsibility is easier for the student who has some personal input into the learning process.

Descriptions of course material and specific mechanical aspects of the course can be obtained from Terri L. Smith, Division of Developmental Education, Westark Community College, Grand at Waldron, P.O. Box 3649, Fort Smith, Arkansas 72913.

Jersey Shore Area School District (Pennsylvania) has designed a program to **improve basic math skills** and also develop students' ability to manage their own learning experiences.

This program, known as Project SAIL (Systems Approach to Individualized Learning), encourages students capable of assuming more decision-making responsibilities to gradually advance through four types of individualized instruction. These four types of individualization are arranged into a hierarchy ranging from teacher-guided instruction to student-guided instruction.

Essential to the operation of SAIL are the locally identified and sequenced basic math skills, along with the corresponding instructional materials, skill correlation charts, and mastery tests. Ongoing record keeping and a testing program are used to monitor student progress and group students in need of similar skill learning.

Additional information can be obtained by writing to Nelson Wruble, Project Director, Jersey Shore Area School District, 201 South Broad Street, Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania 17740.

One kind of setting that is sometimes used for self-directed learning occurs in what is called "**open education**" classrooms. Harold Bonekemper has done his doctoral dissertation in this field and reports the following.

Critical requirements for effective teaching in an open education setting were determined by analyzing data obtained in student interviews and teacher questionnaires. Requirements were categorized into three major areas: (a) interaction with the pupil on an individual basis; (b) preparation of materials for the learning environment; and (c) facilitation of learning in a group situation. Numerous examples of self-directed learning were reported by students as illustrations of effective teaching. Additional information is available from H. George Bonekem-

per, Upper Perkiomen Middle School, East Greenville, Pennsylvania 18041.

An **Autonomous Learner Index (ALI)** has been developed by Barbara Ferrell of Illinois. The *Index* is "... a Likert-type scale ... administered to students ... at the beginning and end of the school year to measure movement toward self-direction. ..." The instrument seems to hold promise for assessing growth in self-direction among older youth and young adults. A factor analysis has identified six components in the makeup of the *Index*: "intrinsic motivation"; "perseverance in problem solving"; "need for structure in the learning environment"; "learning curiosity"; "confidence in one's own study skills"; and "need for teacher direction." Contact Barbara Ferrell, Research Associate, Southern Illinois Collegiate Common Market, John A. Logan College, RR#2, Carterville, Illinois 62918.

"Resources for Youth" is a free quarterly newsletter published by the National Commission on Resources for Youth, Inc., West 44th Street, New York, New York 10036. A recent issue summarizes significant research on youth participation activities and reviews current literature in this field. One publication cited in the newsletter was *Experience-Based Learning: How to Make the Community Your Classroom*, Northwest Regional Laboratory, 710 N.W. Second Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204. \$9.45.

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education has published a series of books dealing with "**experiential**" (**experience-based**) **education**. *Experiential Education: A Primer on Programs* describes 40 exemplary projects. *The Current Status of Assessing Experiential Education* describes how five programs have been evaluated. *Perspectives on Investigating the Consequences of Experiential Education* provides research insights from anthropology, economics, psychology, and sociology for those interested in experience-based education. For more information, contact Michael Crowe, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

Interested in **preparing teachers for self-directed learning**? Look at programs currently underway at Michigan State University and the University of Massachusetts.

The Secondary Education Pilot Program (Michigan State) represents a significant departure from traditional preservice approaches. Program elements are included in all of four full years of undergraduate work. Each student must set her/his own performance standards with assistance from staff members. The major program components for prospective teachers are to: (a) develop initiative within themselves for their own professional growth; (b) require that they take on responsibility for as much of their own learning as they can; and (c) display commitment to becoming exemplary teachers.

The Integrated Day program (University of Massachusetts) is a teacher center for elementary schools. It is "... committed to the ideal of helping learners become self-directive and self-managing." Beliefs that guide program operation include ones that "Participants should be actively involved in solving problems ... in decision-making about ... design of their own programs ..." and that "Participants will set short- and long-term goals recognizing that growth takes time and is continuous." The Integrated Day program has three major components: Designs (Preservice); Inservice Growth Program (M.Ed.); and Leadership (Ed.D.).

For details about each of these teacher programs contact either Secondary Education Pilot Program, 324 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, (517) 355-1786; or contact Dr. R. Mason Bunker/Dr. Masha Rudman, Co-Directors, Integrated Day Program, 224 School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01002. (413) 545-0246.

Send in news items about self-directed learning to Delmo Della-Dora, Teacher Corps Project, California State University/Hayward, Hayward, California 94542. **ET**

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