SELF-DIRECTED BEHAVIORS

Application 1: Identifying Self-Directed Behaviors

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This assignment was very hard to pin down ... there are so many examples of self-directedness all around me that it seemed almost impossible to narrow down the selections to just one person or situation. After some thought, however, I was able to pick out several situations that demonstrate self-directed learning and healthy habits of mind through self-management, self-monitoring, and self-modification (Costa, 2000).

The first thing that came into my mind was an experience I had at my school's fourth grade camp. During a "free time" period in the schedule, I decided to let the students go outside and play. Usually, students need to be given specific guidelines, instructions, and directions for unstructured times like these, but this particular group of students was able to play completely independently. They self-managed by creating games out of little or no materials, solving conflicts internally without the need for adult intervention, and watching out for each other. In the end, both I and the other teachers at the camp were very impressed with their ability to solve problems systematically and play in a self-directed manner.

The second example of self-directed learning was just told to me by a friend named James. James, you see, works a job where he was placed in a room full of cubicles. This room, which used to house giant servers, has a very intricate cooling system meant to keep these mainframes operational during peak use. As a result, James and his co-workers continually find themselves to be too cold, chilled by the overactive air conditioners. After repeated and ignored requests to their management and facilities department, James decided to take matters into his own hands. He proceeded to shove
dozens of manila envelopes into the vents, redirecting the cool air and manually raising
the temperature in the work room. While this example may not seem like the safest
solution to the problem, it clearly demonstrates the plan of action and flexible problem-
solving that self-monitoring and self-modifying learners exhibit.

Personally, I'd like to be more self-directed in my willingness to listen to others
and accept feedback. I can be a very self-reliant and independent person, so I have found
that it is important for me to plan ahead if I am to be a self-monitoring individual who is
willing to value the opinions and advice of other people. I must also seek to view
situations from other people's perspectives and modify my behaviors, words, thoughts,
and feelings accordingly.

I'd also like to be more self-directed in my ability to complete my graduate-level
coursework. I find that I lack the motivation to persist with my assignments when the
subject material is not very relevant to my personal or profession situation or when I am
having a busy or eventful week. Instead, I must plan to be self-managing, self-
monitoring, and self-modifying as I head into the very predictable and sometimes
monotonous coursework that is required for this degree.

From the moment students enter my middle school classroom, I make it very clear
that I expect self-directedness on many levels. They are encouraged to find their own
answers through exploration, to collaborate and help each other continually, and to break
their reliance on the teacher. Assignments that promote creativity and freedom highlight
this expectation, and I make a constant and consistent effort to encourage self-directed behavior while redirecting dependent behavior.

I would, however, love to see the elementary school teachers make a conscious effort to build this independence and critical thinking more at an earlier age. If students could enter the fifth grade with a better ability to self-manage, self-monitor, and self-modify, their path through junior high would be much clearer and smoother.

In general, parents at our school system are incredible advocates and very active participants in the school community. Some, however, are not very self-directed in their ability to use preset communication channels to obtain important information. They hesitate to check grades online, do not read the literature that is sent home with students, continually call and email teachers with questions that have already been answered in school communications, and interrupt class time to get personal help from teachers.

Overall, I feel that self-directed behavior is essential to the growth of middle school students and effectiveness of middle school teachers. Personally, I feel that I have not done my job well until my job is somewhat unnecessary (because students are teaching themselves and each other) ... and I firmly understand my own need to continue to pursue self-direction in my personal and professional life. As November states, “we need to look beyond the technology to seek the ways of collaborating together to help children become independent, critical managers of their own work” (1996).
References:
