

Deep Learning in a Digital World

Tony Glover Student Self-directed Learning

TONY: Student self-directed learning is where the learning process is turned on its head, and instead of having a traditionally prescribed curriculum where the students go into a box lesson they're taught for a period of time, a subject, they move from there to another box where they're taught another prescribed subject, and so on -- instead of that, the students negotiate their learning with their teacher advisor. They have their agenda, which is their booklet with all their activities of the week or the next couple of weeks set out. So they will negotiate which taught lessons or seminars they will attend, which project learning they will do, and where they will go for each time of the day.

So for example, they will go to a Science area to do their own individual work, or collaborative work with other students, supported by teachers who are there as facilitators, rather than there as dictators. And then their attendance there will be recorded, the teacher advisor will check that things are going okay. They will have assessments in a normal way. But the focus is on the students negotiating their learning. And ultimately, they decide where they're going to go, and how they're going to get from this point in their learning to that one, through these very stages, what they will attend. And the students then negotiate any changes, any developments, any remedial work that needs to be done, any additional work, and so on. So the responsibility rests with the students. And the school is organized in that particular way.

So it has bearing on the organization, the physical look of the school, so that there are specialist rooms where specialist lessons will be taught. But there will also be larger areas in those subject departments, where students of all grades can come together to get on with their own individual assignments, or can work with one another, supported by the teachers. It's also self-directed learning, takes a time element out as well. The students will go at a pace that is determined in negotiation between them and their teacher. So it's a much more individual approach, as well.

I was in the fortunate position of having a new school, my school was being rebuilt. And I was in the process of designing the accommodation. So I designed the facilities so that we could have elements of self-directed learning. For example, in every learning area, I arranged for there to be interview rooms where there could be those conversations between student and student, teacher and student, teacher and teacher. I had some areas that could be opened up into rooms about three or four times the size of a normal classroom, so that you could have groups combined, and you could have teachers with floor time. And then I gave those areas to the teachers who I thought were the movers and shakers, and were up for looking ahead. Then I walked around and I saw it

happening, and I thought, "Wow!" So it can work in elements alongside a traditional approach.

There's another school that came over here three years ago. They now for intervention lessons, for additional work that students are doing to catch up on their various courses. They have what they call now a "Mary Ward room," because Mary Ward is the centre for student self-directed learning here. They now have that facility for those students. So again, the students come in. They negotiate what work they're going to do. They have teachers who have floor time in that area to support them, and they get on with it. So the culture of expectation that the students will work and will take ownership and responsibility for the learning is developing.

I also found that where I was looking to work with schools had fallen into difficulties, and I had to come up with something different, a way in which learning will be improved. I also put in the education brief for those schools, for our government, a clear focus on students' directed learning, the student leadership and learning, and move towards that. So it can certainly be adapted, this approach, it can be adapted. It can be used in elements alongside a traditional system. And I've seen that work. Yes.

The school has to have an appropriate curriculum offering, so the subject lessons need to be in place, and the opportunities for the students to continue their learning at an appropriate rate has to be there. But then, there will be a published set of lessons, a published set of lessons across each subject what the content will be. And then, the students negotiate with their teacher advisor which they will go to, to ensure they cover an appropriate curriculum. But there's a challenge. And it does require a completely different relationship on the part of the teachers who are acting as teacher advisor, because they need to know the curriculum. They need to know the needs and the levels of those students. And they need to be able to work effectively with those students to make sure that those gaps -- that there aren't any gaps, that everything is covered. And also, there's a challenge for the school to ensure that the assessment processes are in place in a formative way, so that at the various -- at each assessment stage. Then the teacher advisor, or the student, can look and say, well, we need to do a bit more of this, or a bit more of that, and therefore they will revise their plan and their program of lessons for the coming weeks.

So there is a challenge, for sure. Incidentally, that was a question that was raised of the teacher from the school and the students this afternoon, that very question. So it's really important that that is addressed. But it does work in that sort of environment.

Also significant is that the students have an expectation that they will want to know how they're doing, and they will want to know what it is that they need to do to cover their courses, because they're taking responsibility. There isn't a hiding place for them, so they can't just -- the notion of students just drifting along and having to be pushed into this or that or the other area, that doesn't happen because culturally, the students are motivated within that school to want to progress with the learning. But it is a challenge, but in those ways I've seen it working. I was there yesterday. I saw this very kind of work going on.