

CHAPTER III

THE TEACHING TASKS OF THE SELF-TEACHER

Teaching and Self-teaching

The preceding chapter described several examples of attempts to shift some control or responsibility from the teacher to the learner. In each example, one important variable was the amount of control exercised by the learners compared to the amount exercised by the teacher. Probably this characteristic varies along a continuum: at one pole the teacher has maximum control over the learning process and at the other pole the learner has complete responsibility for planning and managing his learning without contact with a teacher. A review of research into teaching methods has suggested that this continuum is the major variable in teaching methods research. The review stated that the vast majority of studies involve as a primary dimension the extent to which the teacher acts in an authoritarian way, that is, "the degree to which . . . the teacher exercises control over the behavior of" the students.¹

Perhaps adult educators are not generally aware of the importance of this dimension. In a book prepared by the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, for example, Verner's definition of the term *adult education* includes only a formal instructional setting in which an external educational agent selects, arranges, and continuously directs a sequence of activities.² Such a definition of adult education ignores the possibility that the degree of control might vary on a continuum. Verner's definition says, in effect, that either the external agent assumes full control (Verner says this is adult education) or the learner himself assumes full control (Verner says this is self-education, not adult education).

The major focus of the present study was the behavior of adults when they themselves had the primary responsibility for planning and conducting a fairly lengthy learning project. The framework used as a tool in this investigation, however, arose from previous research into the behavior of classroom teachers in schools and colleges. A preliminary investigation of the self-teaching of several individuals yielded the following fundamental assumption: when an adult learns near the "no teacher" pole of the continuum, he becomes a self-teacher, and performs for himself several of the tasks that would be performed by a professional teacher if he learned near the other pole. These teaching tasks can include any major decisions and actions that are important in teaching and learning. For example, the learner instead of the teacher may set his objectives, decide what activities are necessary in order to learn, and estimate his level of knowledge and skill. When a person performs certain teaching tasks for himself,

¹Norman E. Wallen and Robert M. W. Travers, "Analysis and Investigation of Teaching Methods," *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. N. L. Gage (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1963), p. 470.

²Verner, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32.

he becomes, in a sense, his own teacher—he teaches himself.

Although a self-teacher supervises the entire course of his learning and ensures that all of the necessary teaching tasks are performed, he does not necessarily perform each of these tasks entirely by himself. He may obtain advice, encouragement, and other assistance with these tasks from friends, relatives, and others. Occasionally, he may even obtain such assistance from professional teachers without giving up his own control over the entire learning process.

Very few writers have stated that a learner might perform certain specific tasks or functions traditionally performed by a teacher, and the present writer has not found any such discussion longer than one or two paragraphs. One report, written by Stolurow and Davis, discussed the possibility, pointing out that certain tasks can be performed by a teacher, by a machine, or by the learner himself:

Depending on the degree of automotion, each of these functions is performed by a device or a person. . . .

When the learner accomplishes one or more of these functions, he is, in fact, performing a teacher's function, not a learner's function. In other words, students can teach themselves.¹

In an earlier publication Stolurow suggested that many of the components and functions of teaching machines "can be extremely simplified by relying upon the learner to perform them."²

Procedure for Selecting the Tasks

The major tasks of a teacher have been studied by many researchers. The decisions and actions of a teacher that are especially important in facilitating learning have been called *teaching tasks*,³ *teaching functions*,⁴ and *social roles* and *sub-roles*.⁵ A consistent cluster of such actions has interchangeably been called a *teaching method* and a teacher's *pattern of behavior*.⁶

¹Lawrence M. Stolurow and Daniel Davis, *Teaching Machines and Computer-based Systems* (Technical Report No. 1; Urbana, Illinois: Training Research Laboratory, University of Illinois, 1963), p. 27.

²Lawrence M. Stolurow, *Teaching by Machine* (Office of Education Cooperative Research Monograph No. 6; Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 14.

³Philip W. Jackson, "The Teacher and Individual Differences," *Individualizing Instruction*, ed. Nelson B. Henry, Sixty-first Yearbook, Part I (Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education, 1962), p. 90.

⁴Philip W. Jackson, "The Conceptualization of Teaching," *Psychology in the Schools*, I (July, 1964), 235 and Louis E. Rath, "What is Teaching?" *Educational Leadership*, XIII (December, 1955), 147.

⁵Robert J. Havighurst and Bernice L. Neugarten, *Society and Education* (2d ed.; Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1962), p. 480.

⁶Wallen and Travers, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

Since there was no suitable list of teaching tasks that could serve as an effective tool in the present study, it was necessary to develop one. The writer recorded every potentially relevant task and function suggested by the following sources: the literature described below, several faculty members at the University of Chicago, eleven exploratory interviews, and an analysis of the writer's own self-teaching. Those tasks that seemed highly unlikely to be relevant during self-teaching were eliminated, and those that seemed similar were combined. The descriptions of tasks were revised several times after consultation with three faculty members at the University of Chicago and after several initial interviews with self-teachers. The goal was to produce a simple, precise description of each task. Each task was described at a fairly macroscopic level so that it could include several of the innumerable microscopic actions performed by a self-teacher and could apply to a wide range of knowledge and skills.

The result of this procedure was a list of twelve major tasks, each of which seemed clearly different from the other. In a sense, each served as a hypothesis; the relevance of each task in self-teaching was to be determined by having forty adults rate its importance to their own self-teaching.

The Literature Consulted

One of the first sources consulted was Houle's analysis of the steps involved in planning an adult education program.¹ His scheme applies to several program planning situations, including the situation in which an individual adult plans his own program of learning.

A related source was the writer's analysis, written in February 1963, of his five-week project of preparing for a Ph.D. French examination. In this analysis he discovered that he had performed almost all of the steps in Houle's scheme, although at the time he had not been conscious of doing so.

Several articles and books dealing with the functions and roles of classroom teachers were also consulted. Wingo, for example, listed "certain activities of teachers which have an important place in most, if not all, patterns of instruction."² Jackson listed and discussed six teaching functions,³ Rath described thirteen functions of teaching,⁴ Jensen discussed the teacher's influence on

¹C. O. Houle, "Basic Steps of Program Development" duplicated copy distributed during his course called "Designing and Improving the Adult Educational Program" at the University of Chicago, January, 1963 and (revised) January, 1964.

²G. Max Wingo, "Methods of Teaching," *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, ed. Chester W. Harris (3d ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 855.

³Jackson, "The Conceptualization of Teaching," pp. 235-238.

⁴Raths, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

learning,¹ and Ryans described several "teacher behaviors."² Woodruff suggested certain functional "teaching jobs"³ and Smith presented a detailed list of "the sorts of actions we perform with language in the classroom."⁴ Grambs noted the distinction between the "teacher as director of learning" and "the social function of teaching, the teacher as mediator of the culture."⁵ Havighurst and Neugarten described several social roles of the teacher,⁶ Nedelsky described several ways in which a teacher affects peer relationships of children,⁷ and Waller discussed the roles of the teacher in the community.⁸

Self-teachers may perform for themselves some of the tasks of a guidance counselor as well as those of a classroom teacher. Bennett,⁹ Parmenter,¹⁰ Sorenson,¹¹ and Humphreys, Traxler and North¹² have listed and discussed several of the tasks of counselors and other guidance workers. Certain tasks of the

¹Gale E. Jensen, "Teacher as Director of the Learning Process," *The Teacher's Role in American Society*, ed. Lindley J. Stiles, Fourteenth Yearbook of The John Dewey Society (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), pp. 94-102.

²David G. Ryans, "Theory Development and the Study of Teacher Behavior," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, XLVII (December, 1956), 472.

³Asahel D. Woodruff, *Fundamental Concepts of Teaching* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1959), p. 3.

⁴B. Othanel Smith, "A Concept of Teaching," *Teachers College Record*, LXI (February, 1960), 237.

⁵Jean D. Grambs, "The Roles of the Teacher," *The Teacher's Role in American Society*, ed. Lindley J. Stiles, Fourteenth Yearbook of The John Dewey Society (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), pp. 73-74.

⁶Havighurst and Neugarten, *op. cit.*, pp. 494-97.

⁷Ruth Nedelsky, "The Teacher's Role in the Peer Group During Middle Childhood," *Elementary School Journal*, LII (February, 1952), 325-34.

⁸Willard Waller, "The Teacher's Roles," Joseph S. Roucek and Associates, *Sociological Foundations of Education* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1942), pp. 204-222.

⁹Margaret E. Bennett, "Functions and Procedures in Personnel Services," *Personnel Services in Education*, ed. Nelson B. Henry, Fifty-eighth Yearbook, Part II (Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education, 1959), pp. 103-133.

¹⁰Morgan D. Parmenter, *Suggestions for Group Work Related to Guidance, Grades 9 to 13* (Toronto: Guidance Centre, Ontario College of Education, 1960), pp. 1-5, 13-16.

¹¹A. Garth Sorenson, "On the Functions of a School Counselor," *Journal of Secondary Education*, XXXVI (February, 1961), 89-91.

¹²J. Anthony Humphreys, Arthur E. Traxler, and Robert D. North, *Guidance Services* (2d ed.; Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1960), pp. 14-26.

curriculum planner, such as the curriculum planning steps listed by Tyler,¹ may also be performed by a self-teacher.

A self-teacher may also perform some of the teaching tasks that have recently been performed by teaching machines and programmed materials. Stolurow listed ten functions and components of teaching machines and pointed out that a machine could be simpler if the learner himself performed some of the functions.² Stolurow and Davis listed a few additional functions performed by teaching machines,³ and Fattu listed several "functions in the instructional process which the training device may perform."⁴

Thelen's analysis of the process of inquiry followed by students in schools was also noted. According to his analysis, the learner first gains personal experience and subjective knowledge, next discusses this knowledge with other people, and then seeks further experience that will provide connections between personal knowledge and established knowledge.⁵ As the student's self-direction increases, the teacher's role becomes that of consultant.⁶

The Final List of Tasks

Several factors influenced the order in which the tasks were presented during the interviews. Experience during preliminary interviews indicated that three relatively simple tasks should be presented first. The other tasks were arranged in approximately the order in which a self-teacher might actually perform them. None of the tasks that involved dealing with emotions was presented during the first six tasks.

In the following list, the order and wording of the twelve tasks correspond to that used in the interviews.

Decide about a suitable place. The adult learner may perform the following task: he may consciously decide what place would be suitable for his learning. Or he may take some action to make the place quiet, or free from interruptions, or otherwise suitable.

¹Ralph W. Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction: Syllabus for Education 305*, University of Chicago (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950).

²Stolurow, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-14.

³Stolurow and Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 24.

⁴Nicholas A. Fattu, "Training Devices," *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, ed. Chester W. Harris (3d ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 1530.

⁵Herbert A. Thelen, "Reading for Inquiry," *Controversial Issues in Reading and Promising Solutions*, comp. and ed. Helen M. Robinson ("Supplementary Educational Monographs," No. 91, December, 1961; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 51.

⁶Thelen, "Preparation of Teachers in the Future," p. 115.

Consider or obtain money. The adult may consciously decide how much money to spend on certain aspects of the project. Or he may *obtain* enough money to pay for the expenses of the project.

Decide when to learn, or for how long. The adult may decide *when* he will try to learn. Or he may decide *how much* time he will spend. Or he may set one or more deadlines.

Choose the goal. The adult may decide, in a general way, what knowledge or skills he wants to learn. In other words, he may decide his goal. In order to do this, he may consider his own interests and aptitudes. Or he may decide what is required for success in some future situation. Or he may decide to imitate or surpass someone else. Or he may discover some new and interesting hobby or sport or area of knowledge.

Decide how to achieve the goal. The adult may decide how to achieve his goal. He may decide what activities to perform, for example, or what to read, or which people to talk with. He also may decide how to *change* the ways in which he is trying to achieve the goal.

Obtain or reach people, books, and other resources. The adult may obtain the books, equipment, and other physical materials that he has decided to use for learning. Or he may make arrangements and travel to see the people with whom he has decided to talk.

Deal with lack of desire for achieving the goal. The adult may deal with his lack of desire for reaching the goal. In other words, he may try to increase his enthusiasm and motivation for achieving it. He may do this by persuading himself that the goal is worth the necessary effort and time and money, for example, or by realizing that the goal is not odd or silly.

Deal with dislike of the necessary activities. Even if he strongly wants to achieve the goal, the adult may not like the reading, observing, practising, or other activities that he must perform in order to learn. He may feel that the required time is too burdensome or the required effort is too unpleasant. In order to reduce this feeling, he may take some action to make the learning more interesting, appealing, or pleasant. Or at certain times he may have to *force* himself to begin, and then force himself to concentrate and work hard.

Deal with doubts about success. The adult may deal with his feeling that he is progressing rather slowly, or is far behind other people, or might never reach his goal.

Estimate level of knowledge and skill. The adult may estimate the level of knowledge and skill that he has achieved. Or he may look back in order to estimate how far he has progressed. Or he may look ahead in order to estimate more precisely the *desired* level, or how far he is from that desired goal.

Deal with difficulty in understanding some part. The adult may deal with the problem of not being able to understand some part of the subject matter when he first hears it or reads it. Or he may not be able to perform some part of a skill when he first reads about it or sees it demonstrated.

Decide whether to continue after reaching some goal. When the adult reaches some goal or completes one part of the project, he may consider and decide what to do next. For instance, he may decide to strive for a higher level, or to move in to a related area, or to stop entirely.