

CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS REGARDING THE TASKS

Several of the findings involved the frequency, time, and difficulty of the various tasks.

Extent to which the Tasks Were Performed

One hypothesis in the present study was as follows: a self-teacher performs several of the major teaching tasks that are commonly performed by professional teachers. Each of the twelve tasks used in the present study was described to each subject, and he was asked whether he had performed that task at least once during his self-teaching project. The resulting data, presented in Table 1 confirm the hypothesis. In actual practice, adult self-teachers do choose the goal, decide activities, obtain resources, deal with difficult parts, and perform other tasks of the teacher. Every one of the forty subjects performed at least six tasks. The majority of the subjects performed eight, nine, or ten tasks, and two subjects performed all twelve tasks.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF TASKS PERFORMED BY EACH SUBJECT

Number of Tasks	Number of Subjects
6	4
7	4
8	9
9	9
10	7
11	5
12	2

Mean number of tasks: 8.8

Median: 9

The major criterion for selecting each of the twelve tasks to be used in the study was the likelihood that it would be important during self-teaching. In a sense, each task was a hypothesis: it was hoped that each task would be relevant in at least some projects. Table 2 shows that each task was, in fact, performed by at least seventeen subjects, which is 42 per cent of the forty subjects. It seems clear that each of the twelve tasks included in the present study is relevant in many self-teaching projects. Indeed, most of the tasks were performed in more than half of the projects.

Four tasks were especially common. All forty subjects decided which activities would be effective and obtained resources, and thirty-nine subjects

recalled choosing the goal and estimating their level of knowledge and skill.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS WHO PERFORMED EACH TASK

Task	Number
Deciding activities	40
Obtaining resources	40
Estimating level	39
Choosing the goal	39
Deciding about time	37
Dealing with difficult parts	32
Dealing with doubts about success	27
Deciding about place	22
Dealing with dislike of activities	21
Deciding whether to continue	21
Deciding about money	19
Dealing with lack of desire	17

Frequency with which the Tasks Were Performed

The frequency with which each task was performed is shown in Table 3. Each task was performed fairly often during at least some self-teaching projects. For example, each task was performed ten times or more (or continuously) by at least six subjects.

Some tasks were performed especially often. For instance, thirty-one of the forty subjects estimated their level of knowledge and skill ten times or more (or continuously). At least half of the subjects performed each of three tasks continuously throughout the learning.

Time Spent at Each Task

Each of the forty subjects was asked how much time he (and any persons who assisted him) spent altogether performing each task. The responses are presented in Table 4.

A brief examination of this table indicates that the typical self-teacher spent many hours performing for himself the various tasks of a teacher. In addition, of course, he spent many hours performing the *learning* activities such as reading, practising, and observing. During the interviews the writer was impressed by the large amount of time that many subjects spent at the one self-teaching project being discussed. Several subjects said that they spent every spare minute at it. Many of the projects seemed to form an extremely important part of the subject's life, and seemed to dominate his time and thoughts for weeks or even months.

TABLE 3
FOR EACH TASK, THE NUMBER OF SUBJECTS WHO
PERFORMED IT WITH CERTAIN FREQUENCIES

Task ^a	"Once or twice"	"Between 3 and 9 times"	"Ten times or more"	"Continu- ously"
Estimating level		8	5	26
Deciding activities		10	8	22
Obtaining resources	1	10	14	15
Deciding about time	4	10	3	20
Dealing with difficult parts	5	9	10	8
Choosing the goal	16	9	5	9
Deciding about place	4	4	5	9
Dealing with dislike of activities	1	9	8	3
Dealing with doubts about success	10	9	5	3
Deciding whether to continue	10	4	3	4
Dealing with lack of desire	3	8	3	3
Deciding about money	7	6	2	4

^aThe tasks are arranged in descending order according to the sums of the figures in the two right-hand columns.

Examining the tasks separately, one can see that each task required a large amount of time during at least a few projects. Even the last tasks in Table 4 required six hours or more during two projects. At the top of the list, only seven subjects obtained their resources in less than an hour.

Near the end of each interview the subject was asked to select the two tasks that had required the most time. More than half the subjects (21) selected the task of deciding activities. Dealing with difficult parts and obtaining resources were each selected by 16 subjects. The number selecting each of the other tasks ranged from 2 to 5.

Difficulties

When an adult assumes responsibility for planning and supervising a major learning project, he may experience a great deal of difficulty and concern. In order to obtain some indication of the most frequently troublesome aspects of

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS WHO SPENT CERTAIN AMOUNTS
OF TIME PERFORMING EACH TASK

Task	"Less than 8 or 9 minutes"	"Between 10 mins. and almost one hour"	"Between 1 hour and 5 hours"	"Six hours or more"
Obtaining resources	2	5	14	19
Deciding activities	4	9	11	16
Dealing with difficult parts	1	12	6	13
Choosing the goal	10	9	9	11
Estimating level	5	13	12	9
Dealing with doubts about success	7	10	4	6
Deciding about time	16	8	8	5
Dealing with dislike of activities	5	7	6	3
Deciding whether to continue	8	4	6	3
Dealing with lack of desire	5	6	3	3
Deciding about money	4	9	4	2
Deciding about place	15	4	1	2

the learning project, each subject was asked the following question for each task he had performed: Was any part of this task especially difficult to perform, or did it cause you some worry or concern?

All but 6 subjects replied affirmatively for at least one task. Of the 9 major teaching tasks that he performed, a self-teacher representing the median found 3 of them troublesome. Indeed, 16 subjects found at least 4 tasks troublesome.

Every task created some difficulty or concern for a few self-teachers. The first column of Table 5 shows that at least three subjects experienced some difficulty or concern with each task. Most of the tasks created difficulty or concern for at least one-quarter of the subjects.

Near the end of the interview the subject was asked to choose "the two tasks that caused the greatest difficulty or the greatest concern--the two most troublesome tasks." The number of subjects choosing any particular task ranged from two to seventeen.

TABLE 5
AMOUNT OF DIFFICULTY AND CONCERN
EXPERIENCED WITH EACH TASK

Task	Number of Subjects Who Experienced Some Difficulty or Concern	Number of Subjects Who Found the Task One of the Two Most Troublesome
Deciding activities	17	17
Dealing with difficult parts	15	16
Estimating level	11	8
Deciding about time	13	7
Dealing with dislike of activities	10	7
Obtaining resources	11	6
Dealing with lack of desire	7	5
Deciding whether to continue	3	4
Deciding about place	6	3
Dealing with doubts about success	10	3
Choosing the goal	17	2
Deciding about money	5	2