

Self-Direction

Self-direction is active participation and control over one's behavior, motivation, and thought process. Taking initiative and responsibility for one's learning.

Explore these strategies to intentionally support Self-direction as a Habit of Mind your classroom.

Choice Moments

Whenever possible, allow for student choice. This could include allowing for different variables to be investigated, encouraging a variety of ways that data can be presented, providing different media for journal recording, or supporting different styles for presenting an argument. When students have a choice, they can exercise critical thinking, they can learn from mistakes, and they can develop self-direction, and they are more engaged and motivated to learn.

Jigsaw

Want to promote collaboration in your classroom? Conduct a Jigsaw! Place students in a "home" group and have each student choose a different article to read. After reading, the groups divide into new "expert" groups consisting of students who read the same article. The article is discussed and then students re-form into their home groups and share in the construction of meaning. Working independently to accomplish shared goals is at the heart of collaboration!

Round Robin

Use the "Round Robin" group brainstorming technique to elicit students' personal knowledge or to share information about a topic. Ask students a question or give them a prompt, and have them write their response on index cards. Compile a combined list from the individual cards and record additional ideas. This brainstorming allows all students to have a voice, even those less comfortable with speaking up in class, and results in building a complete list of ideas around a topic.

Journaling

Have students capture their ideas in a journal as they work through an investigation. Primary grade students can capture their thoughts in drawings, keeping them engaged as they move through the process of scientific inquiry. Older students can express their learning in writing, enabling them to see their learning clearly. Check student journals regularly and use them as a quick formative assessment to provide insight into how the students are processing their learning.

Exit/Admit Slips

Have students write the answer to a question that helps to summarize new learning. This can happen on the way out of class or on the way into class. This formative assessment gives insight into student thinking and helps students take ownership of their learning.

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, Thumbs Sideways

Getting thoughts out of students' heads and onto paper or expressed verbally helps them clarify and refine ideas. Have students show their thinking about a new topic or as a review of their learning. Allow them to choose one of the methods to display their thinking: think and write, think and draw, or think and talk.

Present and Defend

Have students conduct a Present and Defend to develop presentation skills as well as audience participation skills. Research teams present a summary of their investigation to the class. The class analyzes the information presented and asks clarifying questions, challenges and/or supports the arguments made, and even presents alternative explanations as appropriate. Research teams defend their explanation with evidence and reasoning.

Question, Comment, Aha

Ask groups of students to process what they've learned by discussing their thoughts and coming up with one question (and an answer if possible), one comment (a fact or piece of learning), and one "aha" about their learning (something that surprised them). After the groups have their question, comment (learning) and "Aha" ready, a spokesperson for each group shares with the class. This process can be done quickly as a formative assessment or in more depth to drive new learning.

Know Your Role

Encourage effective collaboration by having students work in teams of 3-5 and take on specific roles. Each of the roles must be critical to the investigation, and each student must rely on the others to be successful. This can be an opportunity for student choice if the students show an affinity for a particular role.

Minute Paper

Give students one to three topic words. Have them write the words on their paper and leave space to write under each word. Ask them to write the most important things they know about each topic. Give students one to two minutes to write their information. Have them share what they wrote with a partner and then with another team. Ask the team to share one item from each topic with the whole class. Create a master list.

Give One, Get One

Have students number their papers 1-5. Give them the topic you are about to study and have them write down 3 things they know about the topic. After they've written down 3 things, they move around the classroom and ask another student for a 4th piece of information and they share one of their ideas. They find a different student and repeat the process for a 5th piece of information.



Source Swap

Have each student find a website or a video in support of the topic(s) under study. For example, if studying Earth's features, students may choose a feature (trenches, ridges, mountain ranges, etc.) and find a source with information about their chosen feature. Once they have reviewed their source they trade with another student and review the new source. The pairs then discuss the two sources and decide how to use the information as reasoning to support their claim.

Marble Jar

Keep a jar in the front of the room. Place a marble in the jar when the class is on task and is showing self-direction. Determine how many marbles it takes for the class to “earn” some extra minutes of recess, free reading time, or another sought-after reward.

U-Pick

Keep a class list of things students want to know. When there are a few minutes, or when some students have finished work and others have not, encourage students to pick a topic from the list to research and find an answer. You can limit the list to phenomenon or science content they are studying, or you can take a broader approach and encourage a wide range of wonderings. Choose one day each week where students can present on what they learned.

GIVE ONE, GET ONE

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Topic: _____

Ideas from me

Ideas from others
