



Workshop For Summer, 2018

Creating Communities of Self-Directed Learners

Imagine a classroom humming with activity. Scattered throughout the room, students are working on a range of activities, some on their own, and others teaching and learning from each other. They are engaged and enthusiastic about learning. They have a sense of belonging and ownership, and they are skilled at working with each other.

A student in this room is a tenacious learner. She works, not for points, but out of an intrinsic drive to push herself to learn and to excel. In general, she evaluates herself; as a result, she rarely needs to argue or even talk about grades with her teacher.

Above all, she feels that she is a member of a community with a common purpose — the intellectual and personal growth of every person in the room.

Does this sound like a utopian fantasy? It isn't. This kind of learning environment is immensely practical and attainable. This can, in fact, be your classroom.

To make this shift, we need to cultivate the growth mindset in our students. They need to acquire grit and self-awareness. They need to learn the skills of self-governance and collaboration. They need to be unafraid of making mistakes, and become adept at learning from them.

This workshop explores Self-directed Learning, a proven, field-tested educational approach that weaves the cultivation of these traits into every aspect of the student's experience. It redefines the purpose of everyday structures like homework, tests, and grades, and establishes a classroom culture that is grounded in the act of genuine learning.

This is change from the inside out, and it works.

The Workshop

This one week intensive summer workshop is designed to jump-start profound change in the classroom. It guides participants to adapt the basic principles of Self-directed Learning to their own classrooms and to begin creating the materials and strategies that they will use at the start of the school year.

Participants will be given extensive support materials, including two on-line reference books and a library of teacher generated forms and structures. Since the workshop uses the “flipped classroom” approach, it requires extensive preparation, both in reading and writing; time in the workshop itself is spent largely in discussing the writings and exploring their application in study groups. Participants experience the strategies they will use with their students first-hand.

In this workshop, you will discover how to create an environment that responds to the individual needs of each student and, at the same time, enhances the functioning of the whole group; in short, you will learn how to transform your classroom into a community of self-directed learners.

The workshop will meet 3 hours per day for 5 days in June. Location, dates, and times will be determined later.

Who It Is For

This workshop is designed to be useful for teachers from every discipline and every academic level, for new teachers and veterans alike. It has been used successfully in a wide range of classes, from Title I remedial algebra through AP psychology, and in disciplines including science, english, math, history, ESL, and foreign language. It is also ideal training for instructional coaches, since it provides a philosophical base to work from and a large range of techniques to share.

Follow-up Support

The workshop will provide each participant with the necessary grounding in the theory and practice needed to implement many of the ideas presented. However, it is optimal to have support and guidance throughout the summer in order to refine the work each teacher does to prepare for the launch of a new school year. Furthermore, support is critically important throughout the first quarter of the year, when the new structures are put into practice and all the problems with implementation become visible.

To that end, Geni Consulting provides extensive support to follow the workshop, including multiple meetings throughout the summer, and weekly planning sessions, classroom observations, and debriefing meetings on an as-needed basis at the start of the school year. Informal advice and support by means of telephone, email, or Skype are also available. Participants will of course have continued free access to all materials available on the presenter's website.

The Presenter

With over 30 years of experience as a classroom teacher and educational consultant, Larry Geni has developed a philosophy and a system of classroom structures that have a transformative effect on teachers and students alike. He is the founder of Geni Consulting, and has written two books on this approach, "Agency: A Teacher's Guide to Self-directed Learning" and "This Changes Everything", both freely available on his website, www.geniconsulting.org.

A Brief Workshop Syllabus

Monday: The Paradigm Shift — Creating the Classroom Culture

Creating a sense of community. Establishing the classroom philosophy and working assumptions. Redefining the role of student and teacher. Challenging the habits of "doing school" and the fixed mindset.

Tuesday: Reframing Student Work — Cultivating Conversational Learning.

Shifting the purpose of homework to boost metacognition and prepare for participation in conversational learning. Boosting homework completion rates. Managing student work using learning journals and portfolios. Creating and using study groups. Techniques for "sharing the wealth" and reducing the bell curve.

Wednesday: Differentiated Learning — Using Learning Contracts

Fostering student-directed differentiated learning. Creating and using learning contracts. Exploring the many uses of mini-contracts. Learning to use open work time effectively. Exploring the importance of ungraded feedback.

Thursday: Designing the Learning Process

Shifting the focus of planning from teaching to learning. Creating learning sequences. Using unit contracts to organize a course, define learning goals, give structure to differentiation, and provide an evaluation of the learning process.

Friday: Making Assessments Meaningful. Planning the Summer and Beyond

Rethinking the purpose of grades. Teaching students the skill of self-evaluation. Mastering the mechanics of formative assessments and test remediation. Fostering student responsibility and ownership through grade conferences. Finally, each workshop participant will determine the scope and pace of change during the rest of the summer and into the following school year.