

Notes, Asides, Secrets, and Acknowledgments

Below you'll find notes about my sources, suggestions for further reading, thank-yous, and commentary that didn't make it into the chapter. It's totally worth reading!

Introduction

The summer camp I attended as a child was Deer Crossing Camp (<http://www.deercrossingcamp.com>) which, at the time of this writing, was entering its 32nd year of continuing operation. The book by John Taylor Gatto that blew my mind was *A Different Kind of Teacher*.

Not Back to School Camp (<http://www.nbtsc.org>) was, at the time of this writing, also still operating, and I've worked there every year since 2006.

Learn more about my company, Unschool Adventures, at <http://www.unschooladventures.com>.

The Girl Who Sailed Around the World

Laura Dekker kindly gave me permission to share this story, e-mailing me all the way from New Zealand. You can learn more about her by googling her profile in *Outside* magazine, watching the TEDx talk she gave, and finding a copy of the feature-length documentary about her voyage, *Maidentrip*.

What Self-Directed Learners Do

Do you like that map and compass analogy? I do. Whenever I'm backpacking on a trail, I appreciate the fact someone has done the hard work of blazing a path through the wilderness for me. Without such paths, I probably would never have begun to appreciate the outdoors. But I also know that the best outdoor gems are almost always off the beaten path, and all you need to find them are a few basic backcountry navigation skills. Self-directed learning is like navigating the wilderness of "getting an education." Pretty decent analogy? Right, guys? Right?

What Self-Directed Learners Don't Do

Fellow Berkeley undergraduate Nate Singer and I created the original *Never Taught to Learn* course through the De-Cal (Democratic Education at Cal) program. We horribly over-enrolled it but managed to keep our heads on. Leading a class for 70 fellow undergrads as a 20-year-old is a hardcore challenge. The next semester I ran the course again, by myself, with a much smaller group. (Nate's also the guy who handed me the John Taylor Gatto book.)

If someone knits me a beanie like the one that I lost, it will *make my day*.

Consensual Learning

How old do you need to be to make a consensual decision about your education? That's an open question. My own work is biased towards teenagers and young adults, most of whom I believe to be fully capable (or very nearly capable) of full consent. For younger kids, obtaining consent isn't always an option, but modeling it is.

Can you learn and grow in a nonconsensual learning environment? Yes, of course. Flowers can bloom in the most

inhospitable places. I don't believe, however, that this is very good excuse for coercing someone (or yourself) into a long-term education situation that feels perpetually painful and unproductive.

The quote from Ana Martin, the mom behind “The Libertarian Homeschooler” page on Facebook, was used with permission.

Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose

The idea behind the illustration is “carry your own carrot.” In other words: motivate yourself. My illustrator Shona came up with that one. I love it! (Even if a “sticks and carrots” motivational system is what we're trying to avoid.)

Celina's family found the 50 different families in 17 different countries with whom they stayed through the Servas network. (Google it.) Waldorf schools hosted the dance classes that the family taught to fund their travels.

Check out photos of Celina's tiny house construction project on her blog: <http://mytinyabode.blogspot.com>. Celina gave me permission to share her story.

Autonomy, mastery, and purpose are the building blocks for all

intrinsically motivated behavior, as proposed by the psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. To learn more, I highly recommend Deci's book *Why We Do What We Do*, along with Daniel Pink's book *Drive*, from which I originally learned about intrinsic motivation. (In Deci's and Ryan's language, the three ingredients are autonomy, mastery, and relatedness. Pink rebranded the third one as *purpose* in his book.)

I really love the meaning of the word *autotelic*. (Too bad it's such a mouthful.) Csikszentmihalyi is another author in the "positive psychology" camp—along with Deci & Ryan, Martin Seligman, Abraham Maslow, and many others—who's worth reading. The autotelic quote came from Csikszentmihalyi's 1997 book, *Finding Flow*.

Discipline, Dissected

In this chapter I combine the advice found in Stephen Pressfield's wonderful book, *The War of Art*, and Paul Graham's life-changing essay, *What You'll Wish You'd Known*. Read all of Paul Graham's essays for free on <http://www.paulgraham.com>.

Cages and Keys

This is the first of many chapters that owes its existence to Jim Wiltens and Deer Crossing Camp. Nowhere else (and from no one else) have I learned so much about learning how to learn.

If you happen to be young, reading this story, and planning to go to Deer Crossing Camp—I apologize for ruining the night walk surprise.

Whenever a camper says “I can’t” at Deer Crossing, there are actually three things that an instructor suggests as a replacement:

- Say “T’NACI”, i.e., “I can’t” spelled backwards. There’s a whole story about the T’NACI monster—which I won’t recount for you—that’s part of the camp’s genius.
- Say “I choose not to”: a basic acknowledgment of consent.
- Say “I could if I...”

Examining your self-talk, identifying irrational beliefs, and attempting to replace those beliefs with rational ones are the same steps behind Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Second Right Answers

Sean gave me permission to share this story. But I didn't ask permission to create an illustration of his awesome dreadlocks. I hope he likes it.

The “multiple right answers” idea originally came from Jim Wilkens.

Googling Everything

Austin Kleon's quote came from his incredible book, *Steal Like an Artist*, which was a huge inspiration for this book and its illustrations.

Bryan (the guy with the broken ankle) shared his story with me on the condition that I pass along the message that he traveled against the advice of doctors and doesn't necessarily recommend this approach for other people.

Perhaps the most important Internet skill is distinguishing between factual and nonfactual content online. My friend and journalist Michelle Nijhuis has a wonderful instructional article about this, entitled “The Pocket Guide to Bullshit Prevention”: <http://www.lastwordonnothing.com/2014/04/29/the-pocket-guide-to-bullshit-prevention/>.

Check out Will Richardson's book, *Why School?: How Education Must Change When Learning and Information Are Everywhere*, for further insights on the integration of technology into education and schooling.

E-mailing Strangers

Jonah, who gave me permission to share his story, was a member of *North Star: Self-Directed Learning for Teens* in Hadley, Massachusetts, at the time that he became passionate about chemistry. If you haven't heard about North Star, check it out (<http://www.northstarteens.org>): it's an innovative model for supporting self-directed teens, and it's spreading.

Inspiration for the e-mail writing advice came from "How to Get a Busy Person to Respond to Your E-mail: 5 rules for good e-mail etiquette" by Mattan Griffel (<https://medium.com/@mattangriffel/how-to-get-a-busy-person-to-respond-to-your-email-52e5d4d69671>).

The Digital Paper Trail

Warning: *Girl Walk // All Day* contains explicit lyrics. (Sorry, I'm probably too late!)

I attempted to contact Anne Marsen to ask her permission to share this story, but I was unsuccessful. My primary source for the story was the *New York Times* article about her and *Girl Walk // All Day*: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/magazine/06GirlWalk-t.html>.

I wrote more extensively about creating shareable online content (“deliverables”) in my second book, *Better Than College* (<http://www.better-than-college.com>).

Information Versus Knowledge

My editor told me that I gave MOOCs a bad wrap in this chapter. I agreed with her defense of the dropout rate: on the Internet, where something is free, the dropout rate will naturally be huge because there’s no disincentive. But I hold fast to my original instinct regarding MOOCs. I think they’re a great idea for scaling schooling from a business perspective, but they’re not innovative when it comes to departing from the lecture model.

The 95% MOOC dropout rate is documented here: <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2014-01-21/harvard-online-courses-dropped-by-95-percent-of-registered-study-says>.

Alone, Together

The idea for the Unschool Adventures Writing Retreat came from National Novel-Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), a challenge to write 50,000 words in the calendar month of November. Launched in 1999 by freelance writer Chris Baty, NaNoWriMo encourages budding novelists to turn off their inner editors and focus instead on daily word output. I tried and failed twice to meet a NaNoWriMo goal. The first time I got to 11,000 words, the second time around 30,000. More: <http://nanowrimo.org>.

If you're a solo entrepreneur, freelancer, or part of a very small business team, I highly recommend you check out your closest "co-working" center: a place to work in an open office atmosphere alongside others with similar careers. (I wrote big chunks of this book at my own local center which offered much-needed ping-pong and conversation breaks.)

The comment by Michael F. Booth (username: mechanical_fish) can be found here: <https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=2462777>.

Nerd Clans

Inspiration from this chapter came from Paul Graham's essay, *Why Nerds are Unpopular*.

Living and working in the student co-ops was the most important part of my college experience. If you have the chance to join one, I highly recommend it. Do an online search for “student co-op [your area]” to find both formal co-ops (i.e., those associated with large organizations like the Berkeley Student Co-ops) and informal ones created by people who are simply passionate about cooperative group living.

Learning How to Learn

Here's where my inspiration for some of the leadership retreat activities came from:

- Entrepreneur weekend: Tina Seelig of the Stanford Design School
- Paperclip weekend: Kyle MacDonald's One Red Paperclip project: <http://youtu.be/BE8b02EdZvw>
- Hobo weekend: The Deer Crossing Camp ascent trip

Here's the source of the Seth Godin quote: http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2013/09/the-truth-about-the-war-for-talent.html.

“People get hired for professional skills and fired for personal skills” came from Pieter Spinder of the Knowmads Business School in Amsterdam.

The Dance Lesson

Grace Llewellyn (author of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* and founder/director of Not Back to School Camp) originally connected me to Alicia Pons. Thanks, Gracey.

Alicia's sayings were drawn from my fuzzy memory; they're not direct quotes.

Indescribable Sexiness

I adapted this workshop from Jim Wiltens, who teaches these techniques as part of the Deer Crossing Camp instructor training. I altered the phrasing and acronyms; Jim's original terminology is PEGSS (Posture, Eyes, Gestures, Sound, Smile) and RIQE (Reflective listening, I-messages, open-ended Questions, and Experience).

I chose the acronym PASHE because the word “pash” is a fun colloquial word from the early 1900s that describes either a short, passionate fling or a sloppy French kiss.

I really do love online cat videos.

Deliberate Practice

Information about Ericsson’s research is widely available online; my primary source was the excellent book *Talent is Overrated* by Geoff Colvin.

Daniel Coyle’s advice was adapted from his helpful manual for putting deliberate practice into action: *The Little Book of Talent*.

Pumping Poop for the Win

Let me share a secret with you: I’m working hard on starting my camp / (un)school / big program *right now*. I’m super excited for it. Hopefully, by the time you read this, I’ll have more details to share with you. Stay tuned on my blog (<http://blakeboles.com>) or by stalking me on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/blakeboles>).

Jim Wiltens generously shared his time with me over the course of multiple years, as I bugged him repeatedly for the details

of his fascinating life. He also graciously accepted the fact that I used the word *poop* in the chapter title.

Passion, Skill, Market

Carsie Blanton gave me permission to share her story in the midst of preparing for her Kickstarter-fueled musical tour of the United States. If you get the chance to see her perform, don't miss it: <http://www.carsieblanton.com>.

Find more of Tina Seelig's career advice by googling her Stanford eCorner video on "interests, skills, and market" or reading her book, *What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20*.

The passion / skill / market approach doesn't account for the "moonlighting" approach of making money with a day job (which you're not passionate about) and working on hobbies at other times. Can you take this approach and still be a self-directed learner? As long as you're consciously aware of your approach and you keep a close eye on your sanity levels, then yes, I think it's possible. (Personally, I'd rather risk impoverishment in the pursuit of a passion / skill / market overlap.)

Time Wealth

Dev Carey, who works with me at Unschool Adventures and recently launched his own gap-year program (see: <http://www.hdcss.org>), authorized this story.

Career Advice from a Robot Dinosaur

Read more @FAKEGRIMLOCK on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/FAKEGRIMLOCK>) and <http://fakegrimlock.com>.

The out-of-persona interview with the mind behind the scenes can be found here: <http://thenextweb.com/insider/2012/03/31/breakfast-of-champions-meet-the-man-known-as-fakegrimlock/>.

The post about personality, entitled “Minimum Viable Personality,” is here: <http://avc.com/2011/09/minimum-viable-personality/>.

How to Light Your Mind on Fire

Read more about Carol Dweck’s theory in her book, *Mindset*, or online at her website, <http://www.mindsetonline.com> (from which the quotes are taken).

The Geoff Colvin quote is from his book *Talent is Overrated*.

Final Acknowledgments

This book wouldn't have been possible without the generous support of 264 Kickstarter backers (<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/blakeboles/the-art-of-self-directed-learning>), the members of my book superhero team, the self-directed learners who shared their stories with me, and Franki Wangen. Thanks, everyone.

Many important people helped transform my manuscript into a well-polished and independently published final product. Lori Mortimer (editor) carved my manuscript up like a Thanksgiving turkey and then helped me sew it back together again; Shona Warwick-Smith (illustrator) “got” my message and independently devised many of the illustrations; Ashley Halsey combined words and graphics into a beautiful PDF; and Dawn Forbes proofread like a boss.

About the Author

Blake Boles builds exciting alternatives to traditional school for self-directed young people. He directs the company Unschool Adventures and is the author of *Better Than College* and *College Without High School*. Blake and his work have appeared on TEDx, The Huffington Post, USA Today, The New York Times, BBC Travel, Fox Business, Ignite, NPR affiliate radio, and the blogs of The Wall Street Journal and Wired.com.

To stay in the loop regarding Blake's projects and writings, join his author mailing list: <http://blakeboles.com/list/>.

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