

# INED: LIVE South Florida

January 20, 2024

## INTERACTIVE *Mini*-WORKSHOP

---

### **Empower the Future: A Parent's Guide to Self-Directed Learning**

---

## INSIGHTS & REFLECTIONS WORKBOOK

This Mini-Workshop is a sampling from the Full-Day interactive Workshop:

***Brilliant, But Struggling***  
***Empowering Your Teen Beyond Conventional Schooling***

# INTERACTIVE *Mini*-WORKSHOP

---

## Empower the Future: A Parent's Guide to Self-Directed Learning

### Introduction

In today's world, the once clear-cut path through education to success has become obscured. The old mantra – excel in high school, get a degree, land a dream job – has lost its certainty. We navigate a dynamic global market that prizes skills such as critical thinking, advanced computer literacy, effective communication, data analysis, problem-solving, and collaboration. Yet, our educational system clings to outdated methods, preparing our children with coercion and conformity, instilling a fear of failure that stifles curiosity and innovation.

Our children dwell in a hyper-connected reality, with a universe of information at their fingertips. They inhabit a world in constant flux, while traditional education remains firmly rooted in its industrial age origins. The “sit down, be quiet, do as you’re told, and learn what I say” paradigm is failing to harness our collective potential, confining our globally-aware youth to classrooms that limit their vast horizons.

This mini-workshop, and the mini-workbook in your hands is a sampling of what you can gain from the Brilliant, But Struggling full-day workshop. It represents a departure from these archaic confines. Here, we will begin to:

- **Challenge the Status Quo:** We dare to question the traditional education system and advocate for a model that embraces self-directed learning—a model that thrives on freedom and flexibility.
- **Navigate Innovations:** We explore the inspiring world of microschoools, homeschooling, and unschooling, showcasing alternative educational landscapes that are as diverse as the learners they serve.
- **Craft Personal Pathways:** We provide you with the practical tools and knowledge to navigate homeschooling logistics, ensuring your teen's education is legally sound and rich in experiential learning.
- **Empower Your Choices:** This workshop is a compass for parents seeking to chart a course that aligns with their deepest values, lifestyles, and their children's unique futures.
- **Instill Confidence:** You will encounter stories of families who have embraced permission-based, learner-centered education, and how it has empowered their teens to thrive.
- **Unlock Potential:** We affirm that a child's educational journey should be as boundless as their dreams, and that a tailored approach to learning is not just possible—it is essential.



— **Carol Black** —

*“We have radically altered our own evolved species’ behavior by artificially segregating children in same age peer groups during the day; by expecting them to be indoors and sedentary most of the day, by asking them to learn from artificial text-based materials instead of contextualized, real-world activities; and by dictating arbitrary timetables for learning instead of following the unfolding of a child’s developmental readiness.*

*Common sense should tell us that all of this is going to have complicated and unpredictable results, and in fact it does. While some children seem able to function in this artificial environment, in fact really significant numbers of them cannot. And around the world every day, millions and millions of normal, bright, healthy children are labeled as failures in ways that damage them for life. And increasingly those that cannot adapt to the artificial environment of school are diagnosed as brain disordered and drugged.”*



## About the Presenter

**T**erry Travers is the founder and CEO of Astrolabe Academy, a national virtual high school and community that promotes self-directed education for teenage students. With over twenty years of teaching and leadership experience, Terry is a passionate advocate for empowering students to overcome educational anxiety and reach their full potential.

Having both researched and witnessed the limitations and frustrations of institutional schooling structures and its impact on youth, especially teens for the past two decades, Terry has made it her mission to transform education from the ground up. Through her work at Astrolabe Academy and as a speaker at conferences, seminars, summits, and webinars, she provides parents and experts with research-based insights into the challenges that adolescents face in school and offers practical frameworks for breaking through the barriers of institutional education.

From working with leaders and researchers in the area of self-directed learning for over 10 years, hearing their stories and research results, and working with teens and parents during that time, Terry has come to believe that every student has the potential to love learning with the right approach. She finds joy in helping parents and teens rediscover their passion for education. With her visionary leadership and dedication to creating a new paradigm for global education, Terry is a driving force behind the movement to revolutionize the way we teach and learn.

# Mini-Workshop Agenda

## Empower the Future: A Parent's Guide to Self-Directed Learning

Opening/Introduction

Segment 1: Core Philosophy of Unschooling

**Principles Covered:** Learning happens all the time, does not require coercion, and feels good.

**Interactive Discussion**

**Brainstorming Activity**

Segment 2: Overcoming Challenges and Misconceptions

**Principles Covered:** Learning stops when confused, becomes difficult when perceived as difficult, must be meaningful, and is often incidental.

**Addressing Objections**

**Group Activity**

Segment 3: Social and Emotional Aspects of Unschooling (15 minutes)

**Principles Covered:** Learning is a social activity, involves emotions, and requires a sense of safety. There is no need for testing to assess learning.

**Role-Play Scenarios & Discussion**

Conclusion and Q&A

# How to Use This Workbook

**W**elcome to 'Empowering the Future: A Parent's Guide to Self-Directed Learning.' This workbook is designed to complement our interactive session, serving as both a guide during the workshop and a resource for ongoing reflection and application afterward. Here's how to make the most of it:

## 1. During the Session:

- **Follow Along:** As each segment of the workshop unfolds, use the corresponding sections in the workbook to follow along. This will help reinforce your understanding of key concepts as they are presented.
- **Participate in Activities:** The workbook includes spaces for activities and interactive exercises. Engage with these during the workshop to deepen your learning experience.
- **Take Notes:** Utilize the margins and blank spaces for personal notes. Jot down insights, questions, or additional thoughts that come to mind during the workshop.

## 2. Reflective Prompts:

- Each section contains reflective prompts. These are meant to encourage deeper thinking and personal application of the concepts discussed. Take your time to ponder and respond to these prompts, either during the session or afterward.

## 3. After the Session:

- **Review and Reflect:** Revisit your notes and responses to the reflective prompts. This review can offer new insights and reinforce your understanding.

- **Develop an Action Plan:** Use the 'Action Plan' section at the end of the workbook to outline how you will implement self-directed learning principles in your family's educational journey.
- **Resource Utilization:** Refer to the 'Additional Resources' section for further reading and exploration. This can be invaluable for extending your learning beyond the workshop.

## 4. Share and Discuss:

- Consider discussing your insights and plans with other workshop participants or in your community. Sharing can provide additional perspectives and support.

## 5. Keep it Handy:

- Keep this workbook accessible for ongoing reference. As you experiment with self-directed learning, the workbook can continue to be a valuable resource for ideas, inspiration, and guidance.

This workbook is more than just a collection of pages – it's a tool for your journey towards empowering your child's education. We hope it serves as a catalyst for growth, exploration, and transformation in your approach to self-directed learning.

## — Principles of Unschooling —

By Pam Sorooshian

**Learning happens all the time.** The brain never stops working and it is not possible to divide time up into "learning periods" versus "non-learning periods." Everything that goes on around a person, everything they hear, see, touch, smell, and taste, results in learning of some kind.

**Learning does not require coercion.** In fact, learning cannot really be forced against someone's will. Coercion feels bad and creates resistance.

**Learning feels good.** It is satisfying and intrinsically rewarding. Irrelevant rewards can have unintended side effects that do not support learning.

**Learning stops when a person is confused.** All learning must build on what is already known.

**Learning becomes difficult when a person is convinced that learning is difficult.** Unfortunately, most teaching methods assume learning is difficult and that lesson is the one that is really "taught" to the students.

**Learning must be meaningful.** When a person doesn't see the point, when they don't know how the information relates or is useful in "the real world," then the learning is superficial and temporary - not "real" learning.

**Learning is often incidental.** This means that we learn while engaged in activities that we enjoy for their own sakes and the learning happens as a sort of "side benefit."

**Learning is often a social activity, not something that happens in isolation from others.** We learn from other people who have the skills and knowledge we're interested in and who let us learn from them in a variety of ways.

**We don't have to be tested to find out what we've learned.** The learning will be demonstrated as we use new skills and talk knowledgeably about a topic.

**Feelings and intellect are not in opposition and not even separate things.** All learning involves the emotions, as well as the intellect.

**Learning requires a sense of safety.** Fear blocks learning. Shame and embarrassment, stress and anxiety—these block learning.

*Learning Happens is one of a <https://learninghappens.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/principles-of-unschooling/>*





# Segment 1: Embracing the Core Philosophy of Self-Directed Learning

## The Importance of Self-Directed Learning

**S**elf-Directed Learning (SDL) represents a fundamental shift in the approach to education. It places the learner at the center of the learning process, empowering them to take control of their educational journey. This approach is rooted in the belief that learning is a natural, ongoing process that occurs best when driven by the learner's curiosity and interests.

## Why It Matters

In a world that values innovation and adaptability, SDL prepares learners to be proactive, self-motivated, and capable of navigating their own educational and career paths. It fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to learn how to learn – skills crucial for success in the 21st century.

## How It Can Be Accomplished

Implementing SDL involves creating environments that encourage exploration, providing access to resources, and supporting learners in setting their own goals and evaluating their progress. It's about shifting from a teaching-centric model to a learning-centric model, where the educator's role is more of a facilitator or guide.

## Core Philosophy

At the heart of self-directed learning lie several key concepts that form its core philosophy:

**1. Learning Happens All the Time:** The first principle we embrace is the understanding that learning is not confined to classrooms or structured environments. It occurs continuously in various settings – at home, in nature, through hobbies, social interactions, and even in moments of quiet reflection. Recognizing this continuous learning helps us appreciate and harness the myriad opportunities for education that life offers.



# Segment 2: Navigating Through Challenges and Misconceptions in Self-Directed Learning

## Navigating Through Challenges

**T**he transition to self-directed learning often comes with its set of challenges and misconceptions. Common concerns include the effectiveness of SDL in covering all necessary educational content, ensuring socialization, and preparing learners for standardized assessments or college admissions.

## Why Addressing These is Crucial

Dispelling these misconceptions is crucial for a successful implementation of SDL. It involves understanding that SDL is not an unstructured process but a more personalized approach to education. It fosters learning in a context that is meaningful and relevant to the learner, making education more engaging and effective.

## Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

Educators and parents can overcome these challenges by fostering a culture of open communication, providing diverse socialization opportunities, and using innovative assessment methods. It's also important to stay informed and adaptable, continually aligning SDL practices with the learner's evolving needs and goals.

## Unpacking Key Principles

**1. Learning Stops When Confused:** Confusion can be a significant roadblock in any learning process. It's important to recognize that when a learner is confused, their ability to absorb new information effectively diminishes. In self-directed learning, we tackle this by encouraging learners to pause, ask questions, seek clarity, and explore different perspectives or methods until the confusion is resolved.

**2. Learning Becomes Difficult When Perceived as Difficult:** Perception plays a crucial role in how a learner approaches their education. If learning is viewed as a difficult task, it becomes one. Shifting perceptions from difficulty to possibility can transform the learning experience, making it more approachable and enjoyable.



# Segment 3: Social and Emotional Aspects of Unschooling

## The Role of Social and Emotional Learning in Unschooling

**U**nschooling recognizes that learning is not just an intellectual activity but a holistic process that involves social interactions and emotional engagement. This approach emphasizes the importance of learning within a community and acknowledges the impact of emotions on the learning process.

### Why This Approach is Beneficial

Focusing on the social and emotional aspects is beneficial because it creates a more natural and engaging learning environment. It helps learners develop not just academically but also emotionally and socially, preparing them for real-world challenges and interactions.

### Implementing Social and Emotional Learning

This can be achieved by creating learning opportunities that encourage collaboration, communication, and empathy. It involves integrating real-world problems and projects that require teamwork, as well as creating safe spaces where learners can express themselves and explore their interests without fear of judgment or failure.

### Exploring Key Unschooling Principles

**1. Learning as a Social Activity:** Unschooling recognizes that learning is inherently social. Social interactions — conversations, group projects, community involvement — play a crucial role in learning, offering diverse perspectives and enhancing understanding.

**2. Beyond Standardized Testing:** Unschooling challenges the conventional reliance on standardized testing as the sole measure of learning. Alternative assessment methods that focus more on individual growth, creativity, and practical application rather than standard test scores.

**3. Emotions in Learning:** Emotional engagement is pivotal in unschooling. This principle highlights the profound impact of emotions in the learning process. Emotional connections to subject matter can



## Bonus:

### Reconnecting with your teen

One of the most common apprehensions I encounter from parents contemplating homeschooling, particularly with their teens or pre-teens, revolves around the friction that often arises at this age. They worry about the arguments, the defiance, the distance that seems to be widening between them and their child. What if I told you that embarking on the self-directed learning journey and entrusting them with their own education can serve as a bridge to close this gap?

Looking back at my personal experiences, I found myself trapped in a whirlwind of struggles when my son was eleven. He was strong-willed, angry, and defiant, acting with an air of entitlement that left me helpless and frustrated. The constant battles over school assignments and various other issues had strained our relationship to a breaking point. I was desperate for a solution, even contemplating harsh reform programs to 'fix' his behavior.

However, the journey to mend our relationship led me to a profound revelation. The path to transformation wasn't about changing my child; it was about changing me. When I altered my approach towards him, the dynamics between us shifted, and the very child I was trying to 'fix' turned out to be my greatest teacher. This journey of self-discovery led me to four crucial insights that I believe can strengthen the parent-child bond:

- **Listen Actively:** Truly hear your teen out. Let them narrate their story without interruptions, and maintain a quiet and calm demeanor. Once they're done, ensure you understood correctly by summarizing what they've said, and seek their validation.
- **Avoid the Drama:** Respond once and then step back. No arguing, no coercion, no bribery, and no nagging. If your teen starts to lash out, resist the urge to respond in kind. Instead, walk away, and engage when they're calm.
- **Don't Take It Personally:** It's easy to feel targeted during these heated exchanges, but remember, it's not about you. When drama ensues, be the adult - walk away.
- **Stay Positive:** Use your words and actions to uplift your child, creating an environment of encouragement and positivity.



— Peter Gray —

*"In a setting that encourages self-directed learning, young people bloom and develop like vigorous plants in a rich soil. That's true for preparation for college too. They develop strong interests and learn how to pursue those interests."*

Now, you might wonder how self-directed learning plays into this. Here's where the magic happens. As we give them the reins of their education, we communicate an inherent trust in their abilities and decisions. This, in itself, is a powerful catalyst for mending the strained relationship.

But there's more. Active listening doesn't just help in arguments; it's also a tool to pick up on your teen's sparks of interest. As you transition into the role of a facilitator in their education, you can use these insights to guide them towards resources and opportunities that align with their passions. This shared journey not only helps reignite their love for learning but also serves as a platform to rebuild your connection.

By joining them in their educational exploration and learning alongside them, you communicate that you are on their team, rooting for their success. This feeling of support and collaboration can have a profound impact on re-establishing connection and mutual trust.

Self-directed learning is not merely an educational choice; it's a holistic approach to life that can foster healthier, more enriching relationships between you and your teen. It's a voyage you undertake together, rediscovering the world, each other, and perhaps most importantly, yourselves.

