Digital Promise
Accelerating Innovation in Education

Self-reliance & Autonomy

Self-reliance and autonomy refer to a person's ability to think, feel, and make decisions independently and to guide one's own learning. These valuable mindsets can be developed through a variety of learning strategies that put students in the center of their learning and their lives.

Key Method

Learning strategies such as personal autonomy charts, values journals, student-designed projects focused on a strong personal interest or passion, entrepreneurship programs, solo outdoor experiences, and mindfulness practices help students be more intentional about developing their self-reliance and autonomy.

Method Components

As students undertake an activity, the educator leads through them through a series of learning strategies that can help them consciously work toward increasing their autonomy as their ability to manage more independence increases and their capacity for self-reliance grows. This can be done individually, in small groups, or in whole-group instruction.

Examples of autonomy-developing strategies

- *Personal autonomy charts*: Students create a chart with three columns—High, Medium, and Low Autonomy—and rows with categories of everyday life activities such as waking up, eating meals, choosing clothes, transportation, schoolwork, after-school activities, entertainment choices, technology choices, and so on. Students fill in examples of everyday activities in each category under the autonomy column that best represents their level then discuss their thoughts and reflections on their current levels of autonomy, where they'd like to see changes, and what it would take to make these changes happen.
- *Personal values journals*: Students create a list of the values that are most important to them with at least one example of how each value has affected something they've done in the past; they then rank their values list in order of importance. Have students revisit this list every few months and make changes that reflect their current set of values and their priority rankings.
- *Personal interest project*: Students design and develop a project based on a strong interest or passion, which can include a mentor that has expertise in the area of interest; at the conclusion of the project, students present the results of the project, the process they went through, and their key lessons learned from the project.
- *Entrepreneurship programs*: Students learn how to be entrepreneurial and develop an idea into a detailed business plan and strategy through an entrepreneurship development program.
- *Personal outdoor experiences*: Being more self-reliant in a natural outdoor setting, such as camping and hiking experiences where students set up shelters for themselves, cook for themselves, experience a solo nature hike, and complete other activities, can be a valuable experience that builds a sense of independence and self-reliance.
- *Personal mindfulness practices*: Having a regular time to quietly tune into one's thoughts and feelings, fully relax, and be more aware of oneself can provide a more solid foundation for developing self-reliance and autonomy (see the Mindfulness micro-credential).

- Students identify the parts of their lives where they have more independence and autonomy and areas where they are more dependent on, or more directed by, others, and decide whether they are satisfied with these levels of autonomy and self-reliance; students share and discuss their observations with other students.

Suggested review
- Students reflect on and discuss lessons learned from the self-reliance strategies they experienced and how their views of autonomy have changed from those experiences.

Supporting Research

Self-reliance and autonomy in students is a dynamic developmental process that can be enhanced by increased awareness and experiencing of supportive strategies that help develop students' mindsets about the levels of autonomy they are capable of and comfortable having.
- Jang et al., *Engaging Students in Learning Activities: Is It Not Autonomy Support or Structure but Autonomy Support and Structure,* http://goo.gl/E1QFtJ
- Reeve, *How Teachers Can Promote Students' Autonomy During Instruction: Lessons from a Decade of Research,* University of Iowa, http://www.amazon.com/Powerful-Learning-About-Teaching-Understanding/dp/0470276673
- Fahnoe and Mishra, *Do 21st Century Learning Environments Support Self-directed Learning? Middle School Students' Response to Intentionally Designed Learning,* http://punya.educ.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/FahnoeMishra-SITE2013-paper.pdf

Resources

- *Development of Autonomy in Adolescence,* University of Nebraska-Lincoln, http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/archive/g1449/build/g1449.pdf
- McCombs, *Developing Responsible and Autonomous Learners: A Key to Motivating Students,* American Psychological Association, http://www.apa.org/education/k12/learners.aspx
- Gamill, *"Google Thursdays" and the Power of Self-directed Learning,* EdWeek, http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2014/07/09/gammill_ctq_google.html?r=647115491&preview=1
- *JA Be Entrepreneurial,* Junior Achievement, http://goo.gl/GbjEpn
- Sibthorp et al., *The Pedagogic Value of Student Autonomy in Adventure Education,* Journal of Experiential Education, http://www.health.utah.edu/parks-recreation-tourism/docs/nols/sibthorpjee.pdf
- *Contemplative Education Programs Database,* Garrison Institute, http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/contemplation-and-education/contemplative-education-program-database

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

Following are the items you must submit to earn the micro-credential and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1, 3, and 4 and a "Yes" for Part 2.

Part 1. Overview questions
(200-word limit for each response)
- **Activity Description:** What kind of project activities did you and your students engage in to become more proficient in applying self-reliance and autonomy development strategies to improve learning? Please describe the learning activities and strategies you used.
  - **Passing:** Activity description is clear with sufficient detail to illustrate what the students did to gain competencies.

- **Activity Evaluation:** How do you know your students increased their proficiency by engaging in the self-reliance and autonomy activities and what evidence did you collect that demonstrates these learning gains?
  - **Passing:** Activity evaluation process and evidence are clear, appropriate, and sufficient to evaluate the competencies.

Part 2. Evidence/artifacts

Please submit work examples from two students (such as links to writing, audio, images, video, or other media) that demonstrate progress toward the self-reliance and autonomy competency, including such items as evidence of student discussions on their levels of autonomy, examples and demonstrations of the autonomy-building strategies students engaged in, evidence of increases in students' levels of self-reliance and autonomy, discussions of lessons learned from the strategies, and other relevant items.

"Yes"	"Almost"	"Not Yet"
Student work clearly demonstrates learning from the self-reliance and autonomy strategies through: 1. Detailed examples and demonstrations of the autonomy-developing strategies the students experienced 2. Clear evidence that both awareness and levels of self-reliance and autonomy improved from experiencing the strategies 3. Many student reports of reflections and discussions on how their mindsets about self-reliance, self-direction, and autonomy have changed or improved their learning	Student work demonstrates learning from self-reliance and autonomy strategies with some examples and artifacts from the strategies experienced, but little evidence of the effects the strategies had on students and few examples of discussions on how the experiences changed attitudes about autonomy and self-reliance and helped them improve their learning	Student work shows some learning from the self-reliance and autonomy strategies, with a few examples of work from the strategies, but little evidence of students becoming more independent or self-reliant and few or no discussions about changing attitudes toward autonomy and self-reliance

Part 3. Student reflection

For the two students whose work examples were included above, submit student-created reflections on their experience of the self-reliance and autonomy activities. Use the following questions as a guide (200-word limit for each reflection):

- How did the activities help you become more independent and self-reliant?
  - **Passing:** Student reflections clearly indicate how the self-reliance and autonomy strategies helped them increase their autonomy and self-direction, and the reflections are specific and convincing.
- How did the self-reliance strategies change your views of the amount of autonomy that is best for you and the benefits of being a more self-directed learner?
  - **Passing:** Student reflections clearly discuss how the activities changed student views of the level of autonomy that is best for them and the benefits of self-directed learning, and the reflections are specific and convincing.

Part 4. Teacher reflection

Provide a reflection on what you learned, using the following questions as a guide (200-word limit for each response):

- What was the impact of engaging your students in the self-reliance and autonomy activity?
  - **Passing:** Teacher reflections clearly indicate how the activity affected both the students and the teacher, and the reflections are specific and convincing.
- How will experiencing these project activities shape your daily teaching practice in the future?
  - **Passing:** Teacher reflections clearly state how the experience will affect the teacher's future practice, and the reflections are specific and convincing.