

## Keller Plan and Other Highly Structured Systems of Instruction

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I enjoyed reading the description of Paul Herzberg's experiences with Keller Plan courses in the January issue. I teach introductory statistics and econometrics at the University of Manitoba, so I was very interested in all the details of his account. The article prompted a few thoughts which may be of general interest and a few questions specifically about Paul's statistics course.

Some of the issues raised in the article apply more broadly than just to the Keller Plan, for example, the need for imposed deadlines in a course designed for students' self-study. The same issue arises with Larry Michaelsen's Team Learning approach, which several of us at the University of Manitoba have used. Jerry Gray in the Faculty of Management and I have both offered workshops about it for faculty here. Lance Roberts uses Team Learning to teach statistics to sociologists, and Murdith Mclean uses it to teach critical thinking in his philosophy course. Many instructors try to adopt pieces of this approach and find, just as Herzberg suggests with respect to the Keller Plan, that it is very difficult to do so successfully.

Another comprehensive schema that emphasizes self-learning and student responsibility is the one described in W. F. Hill's *Learning Thru Discussion*. I used this for a seminar course in the early 1970's. Like Herzberg's and Michaelsen's schemes this one, too, is highly structured and difficult to implement partially.

With respect to Herzberg's implementation of the Keller Plan, I have three points which I hope he might be willing to address:

1. It would be of interest to know how many students his TAs generally had in their lab at the same time, and whether the same students tended to come together from week to week. That is, was the lab a vehicle that facilitated small learning groups, with all their benefits?
2. Because the tests that Elke Weber created at the start of the course have been such a critical feature of the course, I would be interested to know how Professor Herzberg guarded against those quizzes getting into the public domain at some point in the decades over which his course was offered.
3. Also with respect to the tests, he mentions that the questions were designed to detect particular errors in thinking, an interesting idea I would like to know more about.

I also wish to mention that I appreciated Herzberg's wistful final note about the possible demise of this method when he retires from the course. There are a lot of such wistful notes around in academia these days, yet I do find lots of interest in approaches like the Keller Plan among graduate students taking Course Construction Workshops at my university.

### References

Hill, W. F. (1977). *Learning thru discussion: Guide for leaders and members of discussion groups* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Beverley Hills, CA: Sage

Michaelsen, L.K. (1992). Team learning: A comprehensive approach for harnessing the power of small groups in higher education. In D.H. Wulff and J.D. Nyquist (Eds.), *To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional and Organizational Development*, 11. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press Co.

Michaelsen, L.K. and Black, R.H. (1994). Building learning teams: The key to harnessing the power of small groups in higher education. In S. Kadel & J. Keehner (Eds.), *Collaborative learning: A sourcebook for higher education*, Vol. 2 (pp. 65-81). State College, PA: National Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

The October, 1999, issue of [The National Teaching and Learning Forum Online](#) includes a bibliography on Michaelsen's Team Learning and some materials that can be downloaded.