



Starting from Scratch: One Classroom Builds Its Own Curriculum

Steven Levy

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While the professional literature is glutted with theories on educational reform, our children remain starved for authentic learning that grows out of their unique, original classroom experiences. Award winning teacher Steven Levy attributes this disparity to the lack of clear examples illustrating the kind of thinking and planning that results in powerful learning. The void, he asserts, too often prompts teachers to "either return to the curriculum guide or try to implement projects developed by others."

Starting from Scratch presents an inspired alternative. In detailed accounts, it explains the step-by-step observations, thinking, and planning that enabled Levy to develop a variety of original projects with his elementary students. These have ranged from environmental inquiries--students studying the impact of a local bike path on their community--to an imaginative look at the qualities of number--a classroom quest to determine which is the greatest number.

While these projects were generated by the children's own interests, they also provided myriad opportunities for basic skills development. In this regard, *Starting from Scratch* offers a creative reconciliation of some of the more hotly debated issues in education: project based learning versus basic skills; integrated curriculum versus discipline centered instruction; state and national standards versus local and individual interests. Instead of recapitulating fundamental arguments, *Starting from Scratch* simply shows successful illustrations of how "the best of both worlds" can coexist in an engaged classroom.

Starting from Scratch was written primarily with professional educators in mind. But its appeal will extend to parents, business leaders, and anyone interested in related issues such as character education, teaching gifted and talented students, and teaching thinking. In short, it will inspire anyone concerned with the challenge of educating strong individuals who have a spirit of community.

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