



A case study of self-regulated learning in junior secondary English

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A case study of self-regulated learning in junior secondary English

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Abstract:

This paper reports on a case study that aimed to identify key factors that influence students' motivation and capacities to self-regulate their learning in English in junior secondary school. The study focused on pedagogical and affective conditions through an analysis of (a) a group of year 8 students' perceptions of self-regulatory learning strategies in tackling a range of literacy tasks, and (b) organizational structures and teaching and learning processes in this curriculum area that supported the development of self-regulation. The paper concludes with some implications for future practices for teachers and students in this area of student learning.

Introduction

There is now far greater recognition of the complexity of interlocking factors that influence students' capacity to self-regulate their learning. Pintrich's and de Groot's (1990, p. 38) claim that students need to have both the 'will' and the 'skill' as key enablers of this learning remains compelling. However, research that builds on this foundational understanding has recognized that multiple developmental skills are required to achieve learner independence, and that the context (defined variously as cultural, curricular, pedagogical, and the organizational space of the classroom and school) impacts strongly on self-regulatory learning opportunities for students (Greene & Azevedo, 2007; Hadwin Wozney, & Pontin, 2005; Nair, 2002).

In responding to this increasingly complex account of conditions that affect student self-regulation of learning, researchers have shifted focus from the needs of individual learners (effective motivational tasks or activities, and acquisition of explicit metacognitive learning strategies) to a broader view of affective and contextual factors that contribute to developing learner perspectives, capacities and scope for independence in learning. These include not just students' beliefs about their capabilities, and their views about what is worth learning, including volitional strategies to sustain effort (Corno, 2001), but also a focus beyond the individual learner to pedagogical, classroom and other contextual dimensions, such as domain-specific knowledge (Perry, 2002), peer pressure influence on motivation and effort (Sullivan, McDonough & Prain, 2005), possible co-regulatory strategies modelled by teachers to support this learning (Hadwin Wozney, & Pontin, 2005), and the broader organization of learning experiences (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Nair, 2002), where time, space, and appropriate learning experiences in a community of learners support self-regulated learning. There is also far greater acknowledgement of the key role of the teacher-student relationship and the identities student form from this relationship as crucial factors in all effective learning (Apple & Beane, 1999; MacBeath, 2006), including programs that seek to influence students' capacity to become more self-reliant.

The study reported in this paper is part of a larger ARC project investigating factors affecting disengagement with middle years schooling in a regional setting. The project, titled WHOLE, examines this issue from multiple perspectives, including general pedagogical and social interventions, and well as specific initiatives in the key curriculum areas of English, mathematics and science. In this paper I present some preliminary findings of a case study that sought to develop students' self-regulatory capacities in an English class in Year 8 in one of the three schools in the project, as part of this multi-dimensional approach to addressing student disengagement. The paper focuses mainly on a case study of 11 students' responses to an English program over 11 weeks of schooling in 2008.

Literature Review

Following Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), researchers in the WHOLE project consider that engagement should be understood as a multi-faceted construct. From this perspective, engagement can be characterized behaviourally (strong participation in academic, social and extra-curricular activities), emotionally (affective ties with teachers, classmates and school), and cognitively (investment in effort to master complex problems and skills), with overlap across each area. Therefore, any attempt to increase student engagement with schooling necessarily faces complex challenges, both in terms of the scope for action and the expected role of teachers in promoting this variety of outcomes.

While noting that diverse factors influence student effort at school, we consider, like many other researchers (Ames, 1992; Boekaerts, 1999; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Zimmerman, 2001; Zimmerman & Pons, 1988), that a key element in engaging junior secondary students is promoting their capacity to self-regulate their learning. An extensive longstanding literature from the 1980s and 1990s (Ames & Archer, 1986; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986) has defined self-regulated learning as the development of independent learning skills. More recently this definition has broadened to include "multi-component, iterative, self-steering processes that target one's own cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of the environment for modulation in the service of one's own goals" (Boekaerts, Maes, & Karoly, 2005). At the same time, Boekaerts and Cascallar (2006), Hadwin et al, (2005) and others, have recognized the key role of learning environments in this mix of academic learning and the development of a sense of wellbeing, where teachers are crucial in determining what kind of self-regulatory possibilities learners are offered. More recently, Dweck (2000; 2002) asserted that students may enable or constrain their capacity to self-regulate learning because of beliefs they hold about their intelligence and the value of effort. She distinguished between students who view their intelligence as pre-determined, and who therefore view effort as superfluous, with students who believed that effort could lead to success. She considered that appropriate guidance and feedback by the teacher to students on the value of effort could have a positive effect on students' capacity to self-regulate learning experiences. However, despite this strong advocacy of the value of this capacity, teachers still struggle to provide learning experiences that support this learning capacity in students.

In recent years researchers in this area have identified a range of strategies teachers can use, and classrooms environments they need to create, to promote this learning. There is broad agreement that students should have a sense of autonomy and responsibility for how and what they learn (Boekaerts, 1999; Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Butler & Winne, 2005; Dembo & Eaton, 2000; Grinsven & Tillema, 2006; Tadich, Deed, Campbell & Prain, 2007; Winne & Perry, 2000), as well as self-efficacy in using and monitoring effective strategies for this learning (Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006). For Boekaerts and Corno (2005) such strategies include motivational engagements, direct teaching of metacognitive skills, mentoring and apprenticeship-oriented work. Teachers should be less directive, and provide students with multiple opportunities for self-evaluation as a basis for developing self-regulatory learning strategies (Zimmermann, 2000, 2001). Tillema, Kessels and Meijers (2000) noted that such an approach shifts the teacher's role fundamentally from monitor and regulator of student learning to activator of learning opportunities. However, Perry (2002) also claimed that self-regulation is closely tied to domain-specific competencies, and therefore teachers needed to focus on fundamental concepts and structures in particular subjects if they were to provide appropriate guidance and feedback for students.

Focusing on the learning environment, Hickey and Granade (2004) claimed that more flexible classroom organization, where students participated as a community of learners working on extended rich tasks, made students' self-regulatory learning opportunities more complex and challenging. Hadwin et al. (2005) argued that teachers are crucial in developing student self-regulatory learning capacities, with student self-regulation necessarily starting with co-regulation with teachers, where control gradually shifts from teacher-modelled and teacher-directed learning to more independent student decision-making processes. In this co-regulatory phase, students and teachers alternate between prompting and guiding roles, sharing understanding of the nature and demands of specific

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domain tasks. As instances of effective practice, Hadwin et al (2005) proposed that the teacher should explicitly focus on the language students might use to set task goals, to explain the strengths and weaknesses of these goals, asking students to decide what makes a goal good. The focus can then shift to strategies to enact these goals. Individuals within groups could then take on different roles, including reminding students to monitor and evaluate their progress, to check task parameters and purpose, and to share ideas and strategies for task completion. These proposals assume that students need to self-assess accurately their current effectiveness as a basis for identifying strategies to make them more efficient learners. Hadwin et al (2005) also noted the importance of the teacher establishing a shared language with students for talking about self-assessment and their learning strategies.

The question of how to assess self-regulated learning has also received recent increased research attention (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Winne & Perry, 2000). Past trait-like measures of stable learner attributes have been replaced by a focus on assessing “what students are thinking, feeling, and doing while pursuing a learning goal” (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006, p. 207), as well as their reflections on these experiences. According to Boekaerts and Corno (2005) instruments currently used to assess various aspects of self-regulation in action include questionnaires, observations, interviews with students and teachers, analyses of student written work, and diaries. Multiple forms of evidence are needed to capture a complex ecology of self-regulated learning performance and gains. Boekaerts & Cascallar, (2006, p. 206) pointed out that these multiple instruments were needed to attempt “to create a window on the students' perception of cues in the learning environment that help them to self-regulate skill development, as well as their motivation to improve that skill”. This mix of instruments is also premised on recognition that students' self-regulatory capacities change over time because of changing self-assessment capacities, growth in domain knowledge, and altering psychological needs.

Aims and Methods of Study

The WHOLE project aimed to identify key influences on students' approaches to learning and schooling in the early secondary years. The overall research questions for this study were:

1. What self-regulatory capacities do students use and what is their approach to learning?
2. What interventions increase the students' capacity for self-regulation of, and positive approach to, their learning?

The research questions for the study reported in this paper were:

1. What self-regulatory capacities do students use to engage with English tasks?
2. What interventions and factors have a positive influence on their capacity for self-regulation of learning in this subject?

This research used a case study approach similar to the method described by Stake (1995) to identify 11 participant Year 8 students' beliefs and practices regarding engagement with tasks in English. This group of students (6 males and 6 females, equally distributed across above average, average, and below average performance in English, based on past testing) was used to gain an understanding of their beliefs and practices in engagement with English. The students were observed in two lessons and in non-formal independent study at school, interviewed individually, and in a focus group interview, and also surveyed. Their teacher was also interviewed, but in this paper I focus on the students' perceptions.

Two sets of interviews were conducted two to three weeks after the introductory lesson to two major topics in English. These focus group and individual interviews, which lasted approximately 40 minutes each, were conducted by a research assistant, based on questions collaboratively generated by

the researcher and the Year 8 English teacher. These questions focused on affective responses and student strategies for completing tasks. A case study approach (Merriam, 1998) was used to identify and code participant perceptions based on the literature and emerging themes. The researcher independently read transcripts of the interviews to identify these themes and perspectives, before analysing with the research assistant emerging patterns to identify key issues. The researcher then discussed the responses of the teacher to confirm the accuracy of identified themes. Surveys were also conducted with the majority of students in Year 8 at the school, with some questions focusing on the cohort's attitudes towards English, and the value of effort in the subject. These surveys contained both open-ended questions and statements that used a Likert scale. These were coded and then used to support the individual and focus group interview findings.

Research Context

This study was conducted in 2008 in a school trialing a learning community of students, while the remainder of the school's curriculum was structured traditionally around a full-day timetable and allocated groupings of students by subject and year level. The trial learning community is a response by the school to a regional plan for the school to become part of a cluster of secondary colleges in a regional city that aims to introduce personalized student learning plans and a more flexible approach to learning pathways and choices for students in Years 7-10. Teachers in this new environment will be expected to function more as coaches of groups of 16 students rather than as teachers of the traditional curriculum in timetabled classes, supporting individual students to identify and address academic goals, but also addressing the wellbeing needs of individual students. The teachers as student advisors will also be expected to negotiate a set of learning goals and experiences that address State curricular learning outcomes.

Schools in the cluster will be structured into learning communities of about 150 students, with some schools mixing year levels in these communities, and others focusing on a single year cohort. Each school will conduct teaching and learning programs in newly designed buildings with a mix of more open space areas and designated curriculum areas for particular subjects such as science and art. The design of the schools assumes that students will work in a range of actual and virtual contexts, including formal lessons, informal work areas, and larger open spaces for presentations, performances and virtual communities. Teachers are expected to identify and address the learning needs of individual students, and to develop a personalized curriculum that combines a planned curriculum program of teaching and learning opportunities with more individualized and group-negotiated learning tasks of varying degrees of duration.

The School in the study was participating in a trial learning community comprising 130 students selected from years 7 and 8, with 8 teachers providing a range of traditional subject-based classes and more individualized, informal coaching activities. Rather than the traditional daily timetable of scheduled lessons in each curriculum area, students were given more time for independent work on individual inquiry projects, designated as Inquiry in the daily program, where they were expected to work with their designated teacher, or other teachers in the community, and/or student groups. The students were also expected to volunteer daily for morning classes targeting particular skills in relation to English and Mathematics. These elective classes, programmed for 50 minutes, but flexible in terms of duration depending on student needs, focused on the acquisition of skills necessary for succeeding with a major assessment piece. For example, English skills addressed in these teacher-directed classes included practice at summarizing, editing, as well as an explicit study of strategies appropriate to interpreting fictional texts and making a visual representation of their learning. The school's student population is drawn predominantly from low socio-economic groups with most from an Anglo-Celtic background. Teachers at the school perceived that many of their students were under-performing and disengaged from school subjects. The school's concern with the effectiveness of its curriculum for this age group led to the formation of a partnership with the research team to support subject and general curricular change to address this challenge.

Description of English Program

English at the learning community was organized into large inquiry tasks around themes. This study reports on students' responses to two themes over 11 weeks in 2008: these were the theme of "identity: finding the real self" (5 weeks) and "a place called home" (6 weeks). In the first topic students were expected to undertake 2 inquiry tasks, based on a personal learning plan that was negotiated with and guided by their Home Group Advisor, culminating in a verbal presentation supported by artefacts and resources. The first inquiry task required students to research and prepare a presentation that represents their sense of themselves as learners. Students were asked to consider the following questions:

What is learning? Some things have to be learnt for survival, some things are learnt out of significant life events, and other learning happens out of choice. Produce a table that lists examples from each category.

From the table you have constructed, explore further examples of learning. Collect stories of from close family members.

How important have significant events been for teaching you 'lessons of life'? What have you learnt about pain, endurance, beauty, acceptance, rejection, courage, grief, happiness, parenting, and communicating? Find a way to present your thoughts about what you have learnt from these life experiences.

The second inquiry task required students to use their findings from the first inquiry to develop a presentation that explored and demonstrated their understanding of identity. Texts, including *Big Fish*, *Winter*, and *Love is a UFO* were studied to explore the idea of whether a person can change their identity or whether they just 'discover' it more deeply. Students were expected to construct a commentary (narrative, film, cartoon strip, storyboard or mind map) to show factors that might influence identity, including family and friends, acts of courage, accidents and illness, significant life events, media, and perceived intelligence.

The researcher and the English teacher collaborated to design an English skill lesson on developing a plotline as a basis for identifying themes in a film, in this case through analysis of *Big Fish*. The lesson focused on why summarizing is valuable in learning, how summarizing of extended texts provides a way of guiding understanding, and the need to identify key parts as the basis for a sound summary. Students were invited to consider what were key events in the film and the extent to which these key events, once identified, formed a pattern that could be the basis for identifying the film's main themes.

In the second theme, students were expected to prepare a digital portfolio that explored and presented their understandings of place and how it relates to home and a sense of belonging. The portfolio could be completed using a character portfolio or interview, an argumentative or persuasive piece, a poem or a cartoon/comic strip, or a comparison between contemporary Australia and one other culture, current or past. Set texts for this theme to engage students' ideas on this topic were *Boy Overboard* by Morris Gleitzman, *Lockie Leonard – Human Torpedo* by Tim Winton, and *My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins. The students were given a range of skill sessions in relation to understanding how to construct the possible representations.

The researcher and the English teacher collaborated to design an English skill lesson for students to explore and understand the form/function of meaning making in a comic strip. To identify background knowledge and interest, students were given a broad sample of comics to read as a basis for identifying key features. Most students were only vaguely familiar with the conventions of a

comic strip, but read comics regularly. The lesson focused on genre-specific knowledge, inviting the students to identify options they could use to make their comic interesting. These included varying the angle of vision of the picture, the size and shape of frames, the use of colour, the varied use of close-up and long-distance perspectives to heighten the drama of the story-telling. The students were also guided by the following questions on understanding and making a comic book or storyboard:

1. How do comic book makers tell a story?
 - (a) How do they show the start of the story?
 - (b) How do they show time passing?
 - (c) How do they show the characters' thoughts and speech?
 - (d) How do they show sounds?
 - (e) How do they show characters' feelings about what is happening?
 - (f) How do they show the story has ended?
2. How do they try to make the story interesting for us?

Students were then expected to work on their presentation in Inquiry time supported by peers and teachers, with opportunities for them to familiarize themselves with relevant computer programs for constructing a comic strip.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented as two emerging themes in relation to the research questions.

1. The role of the organizational context in promoting self-regulatory capacities in Year 8 students in English.

The interviews with students indicated that the new context of the learning community, with its changed structure of classes, and with teachers expecting students to undertake independent work in Inquiry time had positive effects on student perceptions, opportunities and practices in relation to self-regulation of their learning. While students noted that these expectations (a) made learning more challenging, (b) produced anxiety about the sign-up process for elective skill sessions, (c) led to being with some students in Inquiry time that distracted them from working, and (d) reduced the chance of regularly working with friends in elective classes, they noted various benefits from this new set of learning opportunities. The following comments are examples of their responses and reflections on working in this new environment:

Well I would never put my hand up and answer questions and things like that, and I do that now because the teachers are helpful and like I said there's no wrong answers and they encourage you (Kate)

It's been very different to my normal classes like when I started here, there's a lot more choice which I've never had in any subjects before and there's a lot more freedom to present and explain the work, things that I want to explain in my projects (Jody)

I reckon you get a bit more help this way, like you are spending a lot more time with other people you get to know them and you just help each other out (John)

The learning community's helped me a lot so far like it's easier to do work one on one with teachers if you need to. The old system you kinda got kids at the back, normally me and a couple of mates having a chat, and not really engaging in what we were learning (Andrew)

Just the pressure from all the other kids thinking that you have to impress them as well, or otherwise you're gonna get picked on saying you're dumb and all that sort of stuff, but like in this community they don't care about how good you are (Kate)

You can get more done. People are working and you can get more done (Sarah)

These comments indicate that students had positive attitudes towards what they perceived as a changed classroom ethos, with opportunities for more individualized work with teachers. The absence of a continuous daily scheduled syllabus, while involving students in some transitional anxieties about new demands and uncertainties, had a positive effect on their sense of their role as learners in this new environment. Jody and Kate commented on the novelty and value of having more responsibility for their learning, and having to nominate individual learning goals with their advisor teacher. As noted by Jody, "It's been very helpful to have more freedom with our choices of classes...and with your goals you decide them individually, by yourself and put them down on paper".

2. The self-regulatory capacities used by students to engage with English tasks

Nine of the 11 participant students (with the exceptions of Alice and Albert) demonstrated various strong self-regulatory strategies in engaging with the English lessons and subsequent inquiry work to complete tasks. As presented in the findings below based on student interviews and classroom observations after the plotline lesson, this group of 5 students saw value in the plotline strategy for summarising an extended text, were willing to apply the strategy to their inquiry task, had developed personal insights about their own learning, and were willing to seek help from others to achieve their own goals. They were able to use the Inquiry time to extend their understanding, often through effective time management and through what they saw as improved learning opportunities through the learning community organization.

Use of Lesson on Plotline	Jody	Kate	Andrew	John	Sarah
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued novel plotline strategy • Prepared to utilise strategy in future learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued novel plotline strategy • Prepared to utilise strategy in future learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued novel plotline strategy • Prepared to utilise strategy in future learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued novel plotline strategy • Prepared to utilise strategy in future learning 	

Personal Insights about learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claimed effort, perseverance , participation required to make progress Enjoyed choice in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saw relevance of goal setting with future career goals Some initial organisational challenges but appreciated having responsibility & choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aware of weaker areas, able to do extra classes and improve Aware of his disengagement in previous year Aware of increased personal responsibility in Inquiry Reward from effort, pride in new skill of public presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciated choice in Inquiry projects Used a strategy for avoiding distraction Learnt about time management and work skills Aware of areas that needed extra classes, or homework Effort was rewarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understood project basics Aware of improvement-finishing work Aware of effort required practice persistence, extra work at home
Role of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety in LC to express opinions, not pressured by peers to dumb down (in contrast to previous year) Appreciated seeing talents of other peers Confident seeking help from teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understood & valued role of home group adviser Appreciated seeing talents of other peers Confident seeking help from teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claimed more students contribute in LC Felt more comfortable in LC Appreciated lots of opportunities to practise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciated support from teachers Friends were supportive and cooperative with projects and Timetable selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valued support from friends

Learning Community (LC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciated diversity of learning community Preferred larger spaced learning area to smaller classroom setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced confidence, participation, respect in LC Claimed improved attitude in LC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite early challenges LC has offered increased teacher support Initial Timetable difficulties with LC Still issue with lack of advance knowledge Liked opportunities for revision and coaching LC can be intimidating due to range of students and bigger classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liked the increased involvement of friends in LC LC allowed for more work, quieter, task orientated, less hostile Would prefer advanced knowledge of Timetable
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The following comments are examples of another six students' responses and reflections on engaging with the comic strip task for the second topic in English:

Instead of doing just the line with the different boxes, I overlapped the stuff, cos I fitted it all on a square page...We learnt how you can't really hear a comic, so we learnt how to give the effect of sound in it (Michael)

Instead of just explaining it, I might put more detail into it so the reader or the person who sees it gets to know it more and gets the point more (Jack)

If you change a picture too much in each slide it just looks like it's two different pictures but if you make them change a little bit on each slide it looks like they move (Albert)

Instead of us just sitting there and going through worksheets over and over again with stuff that we may or may not have already known, he explained it to us (Alice)

It was interesting the different angles you can use to make a cartoon more interesting...and I did use a few of the angles and I made it brighter and I had speech bubbles and everything...When he (a character) was a loner I made the scene more darker, and when he found a friend I made it more brighter. With one frame when he was a loner it just had the people picking on him, and I did a zoom in on his face with a tear. (Julie)

These comments indicate a strong sense of ownership of choices and a sense of communicative purpose for the task, aligned with Perry's (2002) assertion about the importance of domain-specific knowledge as a crucial content with which self-regulatory capacities should engage. These comments also suggest that each learner perceives they are participating in a meaningful activity which is giving them fresh insights into the demands and opportunities of the task, and that from a motivational perspective they are taking pride in their achievement. Julie is perceiving the practice of skills such as demonstrating diversified angles or changes to the distance from the viewer as purposeful communicative expression rather than decontextualized skill practice.

The following table indicates that the interviewed students perceived the task and the lesson on the

structure of comic strips to be valuable, although two students (Albert and Alice) struggled with this task, as observed in the Inquiry time, and confirmed in interviews. Five of the six students (excluding Alice) were proud of their product.

	Michael	Jack	Albert	Alice	Rhonda	Julie
Use of Lesson	Changed initial plans as a result of lesson Aware of benefits from lesson	Changed plans as a result of lesson Aware of benefits of lesson	• Some value given although not clear about influence	Very high appreciation for lesson Enjoyment of new learning Understood purpose & audience essence of lesson	Some benefit from lesson claimed-organisation, new knowledge about comics	Familiar with overall place of comic in the project Gained new ideas from lesson Deliberate attempts to incorporate new ideas
Practical Tech skills used for Comic task	Confident with own drawing skill	Able to use technology for Comic production	Able to use familiar technology	Great difficulty with technology Made two unsuccessful attempts	Able to do digital photography Skills did not match desire for quality product	Used initiative to learn new techniques from peer
Role of peers in task	Independent approach	Positive support from peers	Highly valued support from peers	Some positive help from peers Some problems with peer distraction	Very reliant on brother for the majority of project	Problem solved via helpful peer
Organisational Planning Skills	able to manage time and deadlines	Used time in Inquiry and at home Used re-reading to assist Met deadline	Aware of distraction Most work done at school Final work after several drafts reflected book character profile	Other parts of project more manageable Time spent on comic not rewarding	Project completed at home With part involvement only Most work done by brother	Understood the demands of learning a new skill, time persistence, assistance

Feelings associated with Comic Task	Proud of work	Positive yet realistic self assessment	Reward Enjoyment Achievement (not gained in other subjects)	Contrasting with lesson, Feelings of defeat, helplessness lack of motivation	Aware that final product was good Appeared aware & troubled by her lack of involvement	Confident about overall purpose of Comic- to show Belonging Realistic self appraisal
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Julie, Michael, Jack and Rhonda were positive about the nature of the task, were engaged in the skill lessons, were able to use the Inquiry time to develop or use technical skills, sought effective support from peers or teachers, organized themselves to complete the task effectively, and were proud of their efforts. While appearing to be mildly attentive and interested in the initial lesson, Albert struggled to use the Inquiry time effectively. As his teacher remarked, he was a student of below average ability, and when observed during some Inquiry time was content to talk mainly with his friends and work on Flash Player 8 to manipulate the title of a novel several times and add details to his graphic of a vehicle. In the interview Albert was able to explain the basic requirements of the task and claimed to have a lot of confidence in his knowledge and effort with the Flash program. He also explained that before being in the learning community he always was late for classes, not well-organized, and was “getting lost most of the time”. His view on not trying hard at school was “when I muck around with my mates... and just don’t hear the teacher”. He had difficulty articulating his views on effort, but was aware of his actions, thoughts and feelings on the occasions when he did not try hard. He considered that he was persistent, concentrated, worked well at home, and received help from friends, but no application of skills or effective production was evident during the observation of his work in Inquiry time.

Alice seemed highly engaged in the lesson on making a comic strip, and reported in an enthusiastic manner about her plans in the interview. She considered that she had learnt “the way to set it out... you set it out differently and you catch people’s eyes”. However she claimed that she could not work Flash and that this prevented her from completing the assignment. She also claimed to attempt to use a powerpoint alternative, but that this “wasn’t like a movie...it didn’t flow through like an actual story line”. She claimed that she could not work in Inquiry time because “if you’re in a room with people who distract you it gets really frustrating”. She thought she would have succeeded if she had been taught how to use Flash. Her teacher considered Alice to be a student of below average ability who struggled to cope with academic expectations. Alice also said in the interview that she thought the task was “beyond me”, even if “the comic was a good idea for people that could do Flash”.

Implications

This study reconfirms the complexity of factors that contribute to conditions conducive to students developing effective self-regulation of their learning. In this case the introduction of the learning community seems to have had a strong enabling effect for many students by (a) promoting a more focused approach to the syllabus, (b) raising expectations about students’ capacities and providing opportunities for students to pursue more independent learning pathways drawing on peer and teacher guidance, (c) setting up a context where teachers routinely worked more individually with students, and (d) creating a strong explicit focus on how learners learn, and effective ways to organize this learning. As noted by MacBeath (2006), and many others, an explicit focus by teachers on the nature of learning and on strategies for how students can become more efficient learners is a crucial condition for promoting student self-regulatory learning behaviour. While the learning community is in its first year of operation, and will no doubt go through various revisions of focus and structure, the

early evidence suggests a range of benefits to students' attitudes and skills from what is a multi-dimensional intervention into how students experience the curriculum and organize their school program.

The study also indicates that under supportive conditions, students can demonstrate a broad range of self-regulatory learning behaviours in engaging with junior secondary English. Where the task is seen as meaningful, where relevant goals and skills are directly addressed through co-regulatory processes, where there are repeated informal opportunities to customize the task to individual preferences, where there is timely support and responsive feedback from peers and teachers, then students can demonstrate self-regulatory learning capacities. In seeking to support all students meeting the various challenges of engaging successfully with extended and complex learning tasks, the teachers at the school are considering the introduction of more tracking strategies to monitor student academic progress and organizational skills more precisely and provide timely guidance.

This study suggests that setting up an environment that supports the development of independent learners poses a range of interconnected challenges. These include (a) catering precisely for ability and interest diversity of students through a differentiated curriculum that enables all learners to experience academic success and a sense of wellbeing, (b) providing a range of structured and informal learning spaces (actual and virtual) that accommodate student diversity and the potentiality for reflection and growth, and which minimize possible negative effects of peer pressure and past histories of individual and collective under-achievement, (c) developing precise frameworks for monitoring student progress, and (c) providing adequate support for teachers to succeed in identifying and addressing individual student learning needs in collaborative and sustainable ways. This study indicates that the practices in the learning community considered in this research provide some insights into how to address these challenges.

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