Chapter 1
Developing Student–Driven Learning:
The Patterns, the Context, and the Process

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to introduce some contextual and conceptual matters which can affect the development of student-driven learning strategies. There are four sections. The first connects the rationale for student-driven learning strategies with what we know about dominant patterns in the classroom. The second offers a multi-level view of key issues in the context that can help or hinder development. The third makes suggestions about the process of development of student-driven learning strategies. A final section considers definitions.

INTRODUCTION

When classrooms were first created on this planet in Sumeria 50 centuries ago, they contained patterns of interaction which have survived to this day. Teachers control the topic, the interaction and the evaluation. These patterns of interaction are evident in school classrooms across the world (Cazden, 2001). So to a major degree the varying cultures across the world have been superimposed by the immediate culture of the classroom.

In school teaching of maths and science, a large international video study concluded "Looking across the results presented in this report, there is no country among those that participated in the study that is distinct from all the other countries on all the features examined in this study" (Hiebert 2003 page 121). In such a context detailed twentieth century studies of learning issues in classrooms using hidden microphones and cameras have highlighted a core issue, summarised as "The Hidden Lives of Learners" (Nuthall, 2007). What becomes clear is that learners' processes are unknown and just because a teacher is teaching, does not mean students are learning.

Do any of these patterns linger into higher education? One possibility is that lecturing could be handled and seen this way. As a Brazilian student in UK put it: "They teach you something and go" (Welikala 2008).

But when we ask the key question "How does achievement happen in such contexts?" our attention shifts to the learner and their powers of self-regulation. A study in Slovenia found 'different areas of self-regulation could explain 34% of variance of school performance in the primary school, about 21% in the secondary school and nearly 14% in the university education' (Vukman & Licardo, 2010: 267). This is one of the largest effects from a single variable, yet it is a variable that is mostly hidden in the lives of classrooms, but it is having a significant effect. How do we explain the reducing proportion explained by this variable? The authors suggest that it is because the data is based on learners' self-assessment - the older students have automatised more of self-regulative processes than younger, they may not be aware so much that they engage in these processes. Another possible explanation is that those who have self-selected to enter higher education are amongst the higher scorers on this variable, so the scale of variation is reduced.

Key aspects of the self-regulated learner have been described as Self Managing, Self Monitoring, Self Modifying (Costa & Kallick, 2004). In everyday terms, when I ask adults and young people to think about a time when their learning was going really well, and then ask them to indicate the degree of match with the following elements:

1. You had some sort of Goal, more or less well-defined, anywhere between "clear" or emergent.
2. You were knowingly trying out your Approach/Strategy.
3. You were getting Feedback, either directly from your own observation, or interpreting others'.
4. You were adding Variations to what you were doing.

The degree of match is high.

So the development of Student Driven Learning Strategies is a way of bringing to the surface and making explicit the processes which drive learning and performance anyway. Some students recognise this at an early stage, as 12-year old Gwen said:

One thing I'm learning is learning how to learn, because when I grow up and I'm in a working force, if I need to know something a teacher's not just going to pop out of thin air and give me the information. (chriswatkins.net/classroom-videos)

This chapter deliberates on facets of learner driven learning that include learner agency, teacher agency and organization agency.

AGENCY AND CONTEXT

A valuable concept for this topic is that of agency. It refers to the human capacity to act intentionally, notice one's effects and make a difference. Straightaway that is a capacity which many take for granted (and perhaps don't talk about as a result), but others struggle to develop. So it is important to recognise that although agency is a core human capacity, it is something which is achieved/developed. This is recognised in the fridge magnet saying: "Children are born with wings: teachers help them fly".

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