

## Chapter 5

# Students' Strategies for Planning and Reflecting on the Process of Carrying out the International Baccalaureate Personal Project

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### ABSTRACT

*Students in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools running the Middle Years Programme have been involved in completing the IB Personal Project for a number of years. This chapter describes how the IB approach to research influences students' learning in terms of how they plan and reflect on carrying out a research project, and could provide a framework for students completing research projects in schools that do not run the IB programme. The IB Personal Project has students planning a project, collecting resources to carry it out, presenting the completed project, and reflecting on the research process. This chapter discusses an investigation in which 24 students were interviewed about how they planned and reflected on their work on the IB Personal Project before carrying it out and after they had completed the project. Three case studies illustrate "less productive," "productive," and "very productive" sequences of students' planning and reflecting strategies.*

### INTRODUCTION

I was part of a small team of researchers who interviewed students in two schools about how they planned and reflected on their IB Personal Projects. As I listened to the students talk about their Personal Projects I was impressed by the

enthusiasm they expressed for their work on this research activity. Some commented that this was the first time they had completed a school activity, others talked about spending time on the project on weekends and in the holidays, and many described how they had worked with family members on construction aspects of their project.

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The students seemed to be able to answer in detail the questions about how they planned and reflected on their project, and I wondered what knowledge these students had about self-regulation and self-regulated learning strategies.

The purpose of the study carried out by the research team was to investigate how the IB approach influenced students' learning in relation to how they plan the Personal Project and reflect on the way they carried it out. An interpretive approach (Erickson, 1986) was used to analyse students' interview responses to questions about their planning for the Personal Project in terms of their knowledge of the inquiry process, use of mentors, helpful attitudes, and handling challenges. A year later, the same students were interviewed again and their reflections on the Personal Project were considered in relation to their analysis, organisation, and reflection on the steps carried out to complete the project. Three case study summaries presented in this chapter illustrate less productive, productive and very productive sequences of planning and reflecting on the IB Personal Project. One broad question guided the study: how do secondary students in IB schools plan and reflect on a research project? The results suggest that interviews could be a useful way for teachers to find out what students know about learning independently, and that teachers could use the information gained from interviews to guide their teaching about self-regulated learning.

## **BACKGROUND**

Planning and reflecting on a research project is part of a constructivist approach to learning in which students need to be self-regulated. Hattie (2009) argued that such a constructivist approach to learning requires students to become their own teachers and described processes that are important aspects of any research project as 'visible learning'. He proposed that visible learning happens when students are active in the learning process

so that they seek out optimal ways to learn new material and ideas, seek resources to help them in their learning, and set themselves appropriate and challenging goals. Students completing any research investigation need to know about and carry out these self-regulated learning processes effectively. However, Lawson and Askell-Williams (2011) reported on investigations of how well-prepared high school and tertiary students were to direct their own learning and found that many were not able to do this well. They proposed that teachers need to find out about the level of *knowledge students have about learning itself*, and that teachers need to teach students how to understand a task, set goals, carry out plans and reflect on the activity carried out (Lawson & Askell-Williams, 2011, 253). They argued that students need to be taught about the competencies of self-regulated learning that comprise motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive processes. In this way students would be deepening their knowledge of learning and learning about how to learn.

Self-regulated learning has been described as self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are systematically oriented toward attaining one's own goals (Rozendaal, Minnaert, & Boekaerts, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Schunk and Zimmerman (1998) had earlier stressed that in order to learn, the self-regulated learner needs to co-ordinate self-processes. Schunk and Zimmerman organised these self-processes into the phases of forethought (the processes involved in goal setting, developing self-efficacy, learning goals, and intrinsic interest); performance (including attention focusing, self-instruction, and self-monitoring); and self-reflection (including self-evaluation, assigning attributions for the way the student did or did not work well, self-reactions, and adaptation to problems). This discussion of self-regulated learning as a largely internal process suggests that if teachers engaged students in broad discussions of strategies for planning and reflecting they could have limited effectiveness

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