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Social interactions that support students' self-regulated learning: A case study of one teacher's experiences

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ABSTRACT

Developing self-regulated learning (SRL) among students is critically important to enable success in and beyond school. This case study highlights the practices of an experienced Grade 7 teacher, Janet (pseudonym), who supported students' SRL through social interactions. This exemplary case was drawn through a screening procedure with data collected via an in-depth interview, informal conversations, and classroom observations. The study presents the teacher's perspective and ways of working to support students' SRL. The data reveals that constructive social interactions and SRL are closely linked. The implications are discussed in light of SRL supportive teaching practices.

1. Introduction

Early conceptions of self-regulated learning (SRL) portrayed it as an individual, cognitive–constructive activity and focused on learners' individual characteristics such as metacognition, planning, and strategy use (Butler, 1998; Zimmerman, 1986). The *self* is emphasized to activate, alter, or sustain learners' practices. Later, motivation is highlighted as an essential dimension of SRL, for example, goals, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and outcome expectations (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Similarly, the social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) and social cognitive (Bandura, 1986) theories are heightened to emphasize that SRL is more than an individual process which involves social interactions (Patrick & Middleton, 2002). The Vygotskian approach emphasizes that individuals co-construct knowledge through social interactions, and focuses on individuals as constructors of knowledge (see Mahn, 1999). Whereas, the social cognitivist assume that SRL is a social process that is influenced by contexts and behavioral events in a reciprocal fashion. More recent conceptualizations of SRL emphasize a shared construction of knowledge (Hadwin, Jarvela, & Miller, 2011). The sociological position suggests that knowledge construction is social in character, and it is the process that constitutes knowledge, not the individuals (Gergen, 1982, 1995). Accordingly, there is a shift of focus in the research on SRL from an individual constructivist perspective to a social constructionist perspective.

A long-standing position of SRL views the attainment of personal goals through an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and engaged in as an adaptive, recursive activity (Zimmerman, 1989). As the term *self* suggests that there is something personal attached to this process, similar terms have been used in situations where learners engage in responsible and strategic forms of learning. These include, for example: self-directed learning (Bolhuis & Voeten, 2001;

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Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008), independent learning (Kennedy, Regehr, Baker, & Lingard, 2009), and autonomous learning (Tai, Sadler, & Maltese, 2007). Kennedy and colleagues examined the pressure on medical trainees toward independent working in clinical teaching contexts and found that trainees and teaching staff spoke of independent working and learning in different ways such as: 'self-sufficient' (p. 647), 'self-driven,' 'self-directed,' 'independent,' 'on our own' (p. 648); 'independent thinker,' and 'independence' (p. 651). Similarly, Brydges and Butler (2012) documented SRL with other terms including 'self-guided/self-directed learning,' 'independent learning and practice,' and 'to learn autonomously' in an analysis of medical education research on SRL (p. 75). Although these labels overlap, they accentuate different points of emphasis. Yet, the supports for SRL are apparent in these forms of learning.

This apparent confusion also influenced our initial conceptualization of the study. While we conceptualized it as a study about independent learning; we emphasized three components to draw upon (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Hendy & Whitebread, 2000; McNeill, 2003; Williamson, 1995). First, the learner is active and responsible during learning (e.g., he/she sets goals, monitors learning); however, the extent to which he/she takes responsibility may vary. Second, the learner does not learn in isolation, rather learning is facilitated through social interactions with teachers, capable peers, and adults. Third, the learner makes strategic efforts to enhance learning, for example, making effective use of available resources.

However, as we analyzed the data, we discerned that SRL emerged as an influential theme. Consequently, we drew on the SRL literature to make sense of these insights. This led us to reframe it as a study about SRL. Since the research instruments were formulated and data were collected before this reframing, the term independence/independent learning dominates the interview questions and transcripts. Nevertheless, we recognize this re-conceptualization as an important learning outcome for ourselves and others. We, therefore, examine this re-framing and its implications on our study across different levels.

This paper focuses on how SRL is developed and implicated as a form of socially-supported activity whether one is learning by oneself or is working within a group (Hadwin et al., 2011). It examines how a teacher can help students to navigate expectations in different instructional environments on their own, with peers, or in whole class discussions to support SRL. The following section describes the conceptual framework adopted for the study.

1.1. SRL – A conceptual framework

We describe SRL as the metacognitive, motivated, and strategic actions of learners (Zimmerman, 1989) occurring within a social context (classroom) that characterizes interactions between the teacher and students. It is a social process which occurs 'when students are motivated to reflectively and strategically engage in learning activities within environments that foster self-regulation' (Butler, 2002b, p. 60). Thus, SRL is developed and supported as a socially-situated activity within a traditional classroom (Hadwin et al., 2011).

SRL is influenced by an integrated repertoire of metacognitive controls, motivational beliefs, and learning strategies (Perry, Thauberger, & Hutchinson, 2010). However, although distinctive, they are interdependent and an effective form of SRL requires all of them to come into action (Zimmerman, 2013).

Several terms have been used to describe metacognition including metacognitive beliefs, metacognitive awareness, theory of mind, metamemory, and learning strategies to name a few (see Veenman, Hout-Wolters, & Afflerbach, 2006). This often leads to a lack of coherence in defining metacognition and outlining its components. A common distinction among the components that have been associated with metacognition within SRL include: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experiences and metacognitive control or interaction with the strategy dimension in a learning situation (Butler, 2002a). Together, all three components are important aspects of a deliberate, strategic engagement in SRL.

Metacognition involves what we know about our own cognition (Flavell, 1979). It influences our strategic engagement in SRL through an interplay of metacognitive knowledge, experiences and control. It has three dimensions including knowledge about: oneself, tasks/activities, and when and why to use a specific strategy (Winne & Perry, 2000). Consistently, one not only monitors one's knowledge about oneself to influence learning (metacognitive knowledge) (Zimmerman, 1986), but also manipulates how to interpret and perform various tasks (metacognitive experiences) (Butler & Cartier, 2004) along with the knowledge of when and why to apply specific strategies (metacognitive control) (Weinstein, Acee, & Jung, 2011).

Motivation plays a mediating role during learning (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). It helps students to initiate, guide, and maintain efforts toward effective SRL (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Motivation and SRL are mutually interdependent. There are several constructs of motivation within SRL including self-efficacy and outcome beliefs (Pajares, 2008), goal orientation or mastery learning (Dweck & Master, 2008), interests (Hidi & Ainley, 2008), and intrinsic motivation (Reeve, Ryan, Deci, & Jang, 2008). Self-efficacy beliefs are beliefs about one's SRL capabilities. They refer to the judgment of personal capabilities (such as confidence in oneself, persistence) to achieve designated goals. Outcome beliefs, however, are the judgments of the outcomes of one's capabilities and actions. High self-efficacy is attributed to the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, hard work, persistence, and so on. Goal orientation includes: (a) performance orientation and (b) learning, mastery, or task goal orientation. While the former emphasizes gaining positive judgments and social comparisons; the latter involves self-improvement and self-competence. It emphasizes mastering learning through continuous self-evaluation and appropriate use of deep processing strategies via SRL. Interest, is a psychological condition that is influenced by both affective and cognitive components to trigger learner's re-engagement with the task/content. It can be initially