



Using Meta-Learning to Teach Students how to Learn

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Abstract

A critical role for educators now and in the future is to teach students how to learn. Not just *what* to learn, but *how* to learn. The concept of meta-learning is essentially concerned with the development of an awareness of oneself as a learner and the application of this knowledge toward becoming a more effective learner [1]. The first phase in this process is to help students to understand themselves as learners in a particular learning context.

This paper arises out of an ongoing research project concerned with how educators can facilitate meta-learning (learning how to learn) into their teaching. The project was established by the author in 2009, with initial results published in 'The International Journal of Art and Design Education' in 2011.

An alternative strategy to prevalent diagnostic approaches toward developing a students capacity for meta-learning was proposed. Working with undergraduate art and design students the system was tested with empirical evidence revealing that the strategy helped students to better understand the nature of the subject they were learning, and how to go about learning more effectively in that subject.

The system was based on the development of an 'Inquiry Cycle' designed to provide a structure within which to facilitate generative thinking about learning through engaging with fundamental questions related to the subject of learning rather than the learning subject (i.e. the student). This represented a departure from previous diagnostic-based approaches.

Using this approach, reflection on learning is structured within a disciplinary context designed to illuminate connections between ones own learning, ideas about learning from pedagogical research, and the nature of the subject matter itself. The objective is to help students become aware of the relationships between their own understandings and approaches to learning, and wider ideas about the arguably unique environment of art and design learning and the nature of the subject. Since its establishment and initial testing, the system has been used in an ongoing way with various groups of undergraduate art and design students.

This presentation will include an outline of the conceptual basis to the system and an overview of its use with various student groups (both past and present), including the results of empirical testing. Current work on a resource for teachers to support the design of meta-learning systems tailored to other teaching and learning contexts (based on the ideas in this research) is underway. The paper will extend the project beyond the subject of art and design, proposing how teachers in other subject areas can build on this research and find their own ways to integrate meta-learning activity in the classroom.

References

- [1]. Biggs, J. (1985) The role of meta-learning in study processes, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 55, No. 2, pp. 185-212.