



Teachers as Mentors, Students as Constructors of Knowledge

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It is universally agreed that, in order to meet the future needs of students, the roles of teachers and students, along with the traditional pedagogies found in many classrooms, must be reconceptualised. This paper explores the relationships developed between three teachers and forty of their ten to twelve year old students during the implementation of an eight month research project in which they were participants. The study explored the potential of senior primary school aged students to develop the cognitive capacities of executive function as understood by Howard Gardner. Gardner describes the cognitive capacities of executive function as the outward expression of the intrapersonal intelligence domain of his Multiple Intelligences Theory. The students were required to select their own learning tasks in English from a differentiated program of work, determine their personal strategies for task completion and select the product and mode they would each use to present their learning to their peers and teachers. Their selections were based on their self assessed relative learning strengths and limitations. This process also involved students monitoring their own learning behaviors, identifying occasions when they needed to seek feedback from teachers or peers and taking responsibility for clarifying and justifying their task related choices. The teachers were asked to work with the students in two ways. A defined part of the English timetable was dedicated to the explicit teaching of procedures, strategies and knowledge related to the conceptual knowledge embedded in the tasks. This was their more traditional role. Their second role was to mentor the students' regarding their task selections and their decisions related to the task completion. It was this second role that afforded the teachers a unique insight into their students and how they learned most effectively. It also provided multiple opportunities for authentic assessment of their students' skills, strategies and knowledge. Equally importantly, it facilitated productive learning partnerships between the students and their teachers. The students provided evidence of increased interest, motivation and perseverance with their task completion and increasingly took greater responsibility for their own learning. The teachers became learners alongside their students and developed a more complex understanding of their students' learning differences and how the challenges that accompanied this diversity could be met by individual teachers in regular, formal teaching and learning contexts. The teacher-student relationships that emerged as the result of the type of interaction dictated during this research project was evidenced in the teachers' interview comments and evaluative responses. By empowering their students in this manner, the teachers themselves felt increasingly successful, productive and empowered.