

A STORY ABOUT NATHAN, A SELF-REGULATED LEARNER

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Nathan, nine years old, studies in a school which encourages pupils to research topics they take an interest in. About six hours a week are allotted to the pupils' research projects. Nathan has chosen to examine the influence Golda Meir has had on the involvement of women in Israeli politics and business. He has previously researched other aspects of Golda Meir's life; in second grade he examined why this special person had decided to immigrate to Israel, so Nathan seems to have taken an interest in the famous lady. This is the research outline he presented to the teacher for approval:

- Collect information from encyclopedia, history book, biography, Internet and previous project.
- Send a fax to famous women in business and politics asking for their views.
- Make a telephone survey to people chosen from the telephone directory asking them yes/ no questions.
- Write up all the data so others and I can understand it.
- Draw conclusions from the data.

Nathan learned early on that he was flooded with information from the many resources, and he needed assistance of how to make choices regarding what was relevant and of interest to this project. He presented his first version of the theoretical background to the teacher for feedback (no marking), and based on her guidelines he revised the first part of the project. When he sent the faxes, he realized that he needed to design short questions, which asked for longer answers. He also learned that people were more likely to answer if he faxed only one page. He was disappointed to learn that not every "famous" business woman or female politician took time to answer. However, many of those who did, praised him and encouraged him to inform them about his findings. When he started with the telephone survey, he panicked when he was supposed to ask strangers his pre-planned questions. So he wrote out a polite introduction and practiced the interview with family and parents of friends before he started the survey. He contacted randomly chosen names from the telephone directory, and quickly learned that there are various kinds of people in the world. Not everybody was interested in his

project and some told him off, whereas others took a keen interest in the topic, and were not only willing to spend time in answering his questions, but also to provide extensive advice. Nathan collected a lot of data in various forms, of which he had difficulties analyzing, so he turned to the math teacher to help him organize the data in tables for presentation. On this occasion he learned how to work with the suitable software. However, the math teacher could not help with the longer answers from the faxes, and he received help at home on how to analyze data of quantitative kind. In writing up the conclusions, he realized that there was not one single answer to his question, and he seemed to be a bit disappointed at his findings. They did not agree with what he had thought when he started the project; with his hypothesis. As he said at the end: *I learned something about Golda Meir that I didn't know I would learn.* The final version was nicely printed out and handed to the teacher for marking. The teacher did not give a score in form of a number or a letter, but wrote extensive comments relating to the learning process, progress and to the outcome. The bottom line was that Nathan had worked well with the task and presented a very good project. All the pupils gave a short oral presentation of their projects at the end-of-year conference of the class.

Analysis of Nathan's learning process

Upon having a closer look at Nathan's learning process, we notice that the following activities took place:

- Learning from resources, using knowledge of others.
- Producing personal understanding of topic by integrating the resources.
- Revising work based on feedback from the teacher.
- Designing an open-ended questionnaire.
- Sending faxes.
- Learning about the real world; not everybody is nice nor helpful.
- Having his admiration for famous people tested when he did not receive answers from everybody.
- Designing a yes/no questionnaire.
- Learning that a skill (telephone interviewing) requires practice.
- Learning that fear might be overcome by practice.
- Learning basic statistics and computer programs.
- Learning that types of data need to be treated in different ways.

- Learning that hypotheses are not always verified.
- Mastering public information about Golda Meir, and being the owner of unique information about her.
- Learning that new information is made public by presenting it in written and oral form.

Nathan learned so much more than a lecture in class about Golda Meir would have taught him. Simons (1999) calls this action learning, and compares it to exploring. He compares learners involved with this type of learning to *pioneers who explore new land* (: 16) There are, according to Simons specific success factors:

Opportunities to explicitly determine one's own learning goals.

Opportunities to choose one's own learning strategies.

Learners control their own learning.

Learners are responsible for their own learning.

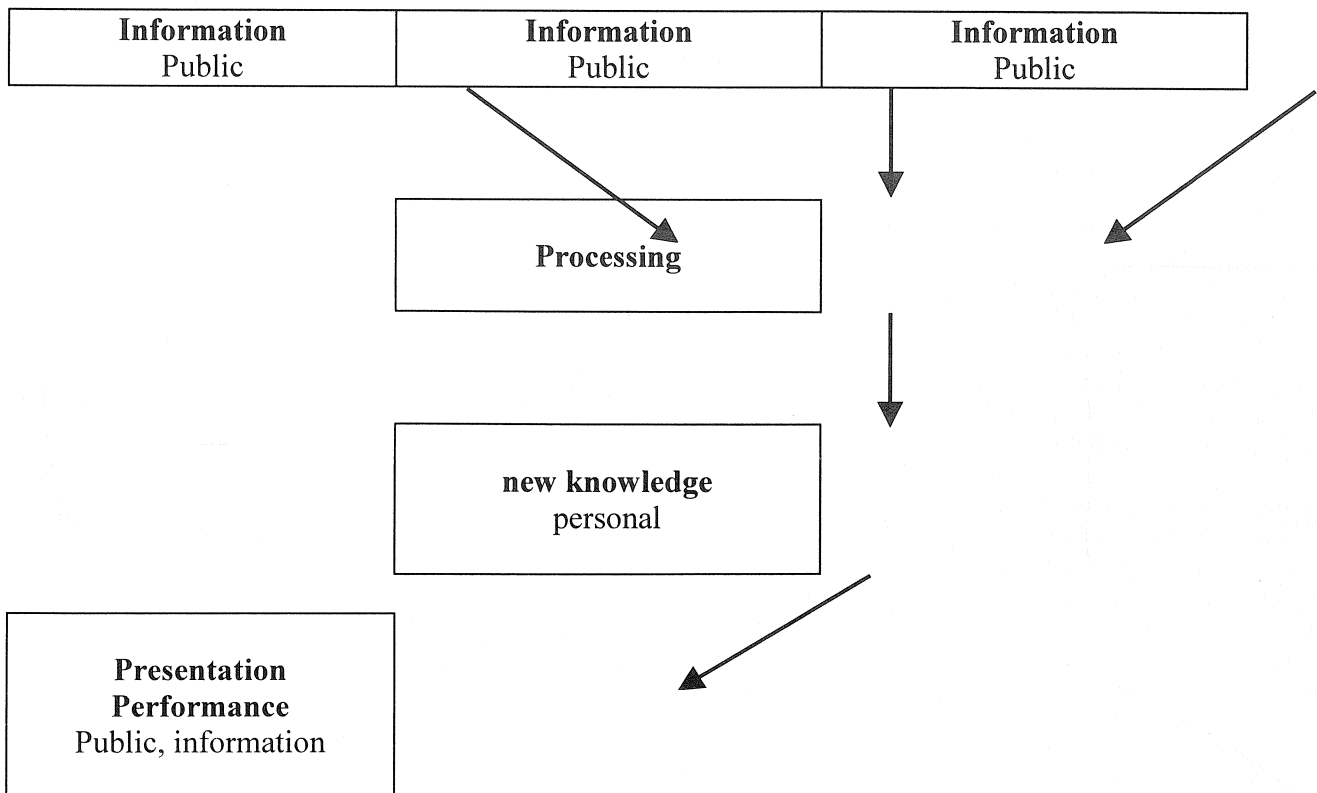
Opportunities to learn independently.

Opportunity for self-testing. (Simons, 1999: 16)

These factors were present in Nathan's learning experience.

Vermunt and Verloop (1999) discuss the importance of self-regulated learning, or meta-cognitive learning. The learning process has two aspects, the cognitive and the affective aspect. Learning activities related to the cognitive aspect are those the learner engages in that lead to new knowledge, the outcome of learning. Examples of cognitive aspects of learning are structuring, analyzing, application, selection, and critical processing. The affective aspect of learning are strategies the learner uses to cope with emotions during the learning process, motivation, attribution, appraisal, frustration, anger, excitement and so forth. A meta-cognitive learner is one who is able to choose what cognitive strategy to apply, and how to manage personal emotions involved with a specific task or process. Quality learning requires self-regulated learning, the learner makes the decisions, often based on guidance from a teacher, but the decision stays with the learner.

Figure one, model of learning



A MODEL FOR USING A SELF-ACCESS CENTRE ON AN EAP COURSE

Joan McCormack

Introduction

Context

The context of this model is the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) unit of the Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS), University of Reading. This unit runs a number of academic English language courses to prepare students for undergraduate or post-graduate courses at university.

There are two main academic courses, one of which is the English for Language and Study Skills course (ELSS course) which runs from October to March, and the other is the Pre-session course, running from April to October. The aim of the students on both these courses is to reach the required entry level for post-graduate or under-graduate study at university. Students come from a range of cultural backgrounds including Chinese and other Asian countries, Arabic, African, South American, and a small number of Europeans. Some students come from an educational background where the system did not encourage independent thinking, and some students are thus reluctant to accept the idea that they can determine for themselves what they need to learn. The age-range of the students varies from 17 to 50, and this will also influence students' attitudes to how they perceive effective learning to take place. Any change in attitudes based on deep-seated beliefs takes time to change.

The length of time needed for this depends on the individual concerned, their previous learning experience, age, language level, personality, as well as the social and cultural background available to them (Nakhoul 1993). Study in a UK university means that students need to have the ability to work independently and think critically. These skills can be promoted through working in self-access.

A model of the learning process Nathan experienced is presented in figure one. If we analyze Nathan's story in light of the model, we can see that Nathan collected information from a variety of resources (encyclopedia, books, Internet, his previous project, collected data). The information was processed with the help of knowledgeable others (assistance within the Proximal Zone of Development (Vygotsky, 1978). The outcome of the learning process, new knowledge, was presented in form of a written research report and an oral presentation. By doing this, Nathan made his new knowledge available to the public, it became public information others may use when engaging in new learning activities.

Most educators would favor action learning as described in the above, but this is not the type of learning we mainly find in schools. Guided learning, in which the teacher is the guide and leads the class to reach a common goal for all, is most common in schools (Simons, 1999). It is not my intention to advise against all forms for guided learning in schools, but I agree with Simons in his argument to leave more time, space and opportunities for quality learning to take place. Nathan was fortunate to have been given that opportunity by a wise teacher. He learned at a young age to be a self-regulated learner, an experience which will help him function well in the 21st century society which requires continuous learning and the ability to adapt to changes.

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