Inquiry Project: Exploring Motivation & Engagement

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EPSE 565R-074: Developing Self Regulating Learners

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Inquiry question:

How can I instill motivation and engagement with students who are so quick to say "I'm done" so that I know they are actually trying their best and not just rushing through?

Rationale

I have multiple students in my class who think that finishing first is "the best". They are quick to say "I'm done" when we just start an activity. They do not put their best work forward, nor do they seem to care or want to work any longer. No matter the activity or how motivated or interested the students are, I still have quite a few students (often the same ones) coming to me exclaiming "I'm done" within five minutes of starting the activity.

In my class the rule is that when you finish early you can quiet read. Even though I do not think this is a highly motivating activity, since they do not necessarily want to quiet read during quiet reading time anyways, it is still something they strive to get too by finishing their work quick. I have thought about changing the expectation for early finishers but anything that is too fun or engaging, I worry will just continue to instigate this finishing early behavior. I also still need something for students to do who are finishing up while the other students are working, other than just sitting at their desk disengaged in anything.

I question students when they hand their work in if it is their best work, and if we can add more and can always find something they can work more on. I encourage them to look at their own work and tell me what they could improve on before handing in. Although they just continue to quickly finish and do the things I asked or we discussed, until it gets to the point I just want them to finish because they are constantly interrupting me working with other students to say they are finished. I am interested in learning more about how to teach students to "learn to want to learn" vs. learning to "want to finish quickest". I am thinking there is a correlation or an

instance in students' lives where they have been taught or have got the idea that the quickest

finisher is the smartest, or that I will be more impressed if they finish first.

This question is both interesting and applicable to me personally as it is a challenge that

has provided me with daily stress since I began teaching full time. It is not something I ever

discussed in teacher's college or really noticed happening during my practicum. As I have gained

more experience and knowledge in the field, I am becoming more complexed with this issue. I

think that by tapping into potential reasons, as well as solutions and research around motivation

in this instance, it can help for myself and other educators to better support students. I know that

this is something that all educators struggle with from K-12. Furthermore, policy makers and

other professionals who have a say in the field or curriculum implementation to take these types

of situations into account in order to provide professional development opportunities for all.

The Learning Journey

Over the last month of working on this project I have learned a variety of things while

inquiring about this specific issue. The issue of motivation and engagement is one that many

teachers have struggled to grapple with in the past, and will continue to grapple with for years to

come. As the students within the classroom are all diverse learners, they all have diverse needs as

well as areas in which they feel motivated and engaged. The idea of designing a curriculum that

is motivating and engaging for all learners is complex and encompasses a fine balance of

teaching, planning, and reflecting on practice.

Prior to beginning this project, I had some ideas as to what motivating tasks involved for

students as well as the area in which I was struggling to deal with in my classroom. The more

motivated and engaged students are in a task, the more likely they are going to work harder and

stay on task. Although not every activity can and will be particularly engaging and motivating

for every child, that is where the best work will come out. I struggle with finding the connection or ways to make students find that motivation in everything they do, such as printing practice or sentence writing (assignments and tasks that are particularly difficult and often unmotivating for most students in my class). Furthermore, I was wondering how I could successfully weave this into my teaching practice in such a way that it is not difficult for me, and also encourages that self-regulation piece in my students.

Through further research as well as attempting different ideas in practice, I have discovered some insights into my inquiry question, as well as realized some further wonderings I have. I have some to realize that the questions of instilling motivation in students who are so quick to say "I'm done", is not something that can be answered in a month or so long project, but something that I will continue to grapple with for years to come as an educator.

In a search of the UBC library database, I discovered a variety of peer-reviewed articles that were useful in allowing for me to delve deeper into my inquiry questions and some further wonderings I have, as well as to help guide some of the decisions I was making within practice. I also discovered a few websites that were useful resources in lesson planning and inspiring SRL related skills and development within the classroom. These resources allowed for me to find some specific areas to explore in regards to my inquiry question.

Feedback

The article "Peer feedback mediates the impact of self-regulation procedures on strategy use and reading comprehensions in reciprocal teaching groups" (Schunemann, Sporer, Vollinger & Brunstein, 2017), brought forth some interesting ideas surrounding the concept of feedback and how it can play a role in motivating and engaging students. This element of engagement is accomplished through "socially shared regulation" which is when a group of students are able to

regulate their joint work on a learning task (Schunemann et al., 2017). In this study, the use of reciprocal teaching groups allowed for students to be leaders, provide peers with feedback, and therefore be more successful in self-regulatory procedures (Schunemann et al., 2017).

I found this to connect with a video called "Austin's Butterfly" (Models of Excellence, n.d.), that I also found to be a great resource for my inquiry project as well as inspire an activity within my classroom. I showed this video to my class and discussed the importance of feedback, as well as the importance of taking your time and having "rough drafts" for work. I believe this connected back to my inquiry project in trying to slow down those students who are so quick to say I'm done and having them think about their work and the purpose of it. After watching the video, I challenged the class to use their "scientific eye" to draw a picture of a lion. We discussed the importance of looking for details, created 3 rough drafts and one final good copy, using peer feedback on each draft to allow us to improve for the next draft.

I feel that the video allowed for the students to see and understand the expectations for the activity, as well as model some ways to provide feedback to peers. The whole class discussions about the project and the importance of feedback helped to solidify the purpose, which I believe allowed for them to be more engaged. Even the students who are usually so quick to say "I'm done" were taking their time and looking for details. They were showing both motivation and engagement throughout the activity. They were all very proud of their work once completed and even shared them at the "Sharing Assembly" with the entire school.

The Learning Cycle

Another resource I found called "An investigation of the impact of the formative learning cycle on student self-regulation to confidently produce quality homework" (Sapsara, 2016) provided some interesting insight into the idea of the learning cycle and how this can play a role

in exploring my inquiry question. The formative learning cycle allows for "opportunities to learn, demonstrate and apply self- regulatory processes to help aim for and reach specific lesson-level learning targets" (Sapsara, 2016, p. 1). Throughout reading this article I was able to reflect on my current practice and whether or not I was providing these opportunities and how this could be affecting my inquiry question. There are five phases involving modeling and explaining, guided practice, performance of understanding, formative feedback and improve performance (Sapsara, 2016). I decided to look into areas of my teaching in which I was perhaps missing certain steps, or taking away opportunities for self-regulation to help students remain engaged in the task.

From inspiration within the course EPSE 565 as well as discussing with a peer, I decided to implement the "stairs to success" in order to help students self-regulate and complete all steps within a task during the performance of understanding phase. This is because my inquiry question applies to when students are carrying out independent work and demonstrating their knowledge. Each student received their own set of "stairs" which had five steps, in order to complete the five steps that task involved. I wrote the five steps to the task on the board modelled how to use the stairs within their weekly printing work activity. I then provided feedback and support for students while they were working independently. Afterwards I listened for students' feedback as to what they did or did not like about the "stairs to success". Many expressed that they liked it and felt that they were working towards something. As in the article, my students were also able to identify a strategy that did, or did not help them be successful within a particular task. This will allow for them to hopefully be more successful in the future as they can remember this strategy. Some of the students who found this to be particularly helpful have continued to ask to use the stairs and apply them towards other activities. Therefore they

are showing some self-regulatory behavior in implementing a strategy that allows for them to stay on task and be successful.

Growth Mindset

The textbook "Developing Self-Regulating Learners" (Butler, Schnellert & Perry, 2017) also proved to be a great resource in exploring my inquiry question. In chapter eleven, Butler et al., discuss the concept of motivating and engaging learners (Butler et al., 2017). They question that "students are always motivated, but the key question is, what are they motivated to do?" (Butler et al., 2017, p. 163). This really interested me and allowed for me to take a step back from my inquiry question and wonder, what am I trying to motivate them to do? Am I somehow sending the message that being done first is the best? Is that encouraging this haste work ethic? Or is this coming from a previous environmental context and being brought into the classroom? While pondering these musings, I began thinking about the importance of establishing a growth mindset with my students as "what individuals bring to the learning and how they interact with the environments we create" (Butler et al., 2017, p.165) helps to determine their level of engagement within a task. If my goal for them is to be engaged within a task and put their best work forward, how can I accomplish that with the environment I create?

Once again through being inspired in the EPSE 565 course and my peers, I decided to implement a "bump it up" wall within the classroom in which we co-constructed as a class. We also have had multiple conversations about what a growth mindset is. We discussed and created a list of all the different ways we can have a growth mindset about our work, similar to that on page 171 developed by Jennifer Ross (Butler et al., 2017). The students have already started to use more of the growth mindset language and have been referring to the list more and more. I have also seen students refer to the "bump it up" wall in looking at their work and determining

where it falls in the categories that we worked to co-constructed. I believe this also plays a large part in the reason they are using it because they were able to help co-construct the criteria for success.

Resources

Although I did not explicitly use youcubed.org (YouCubed, n.d.) or modelsofexcellence.eleducation.org (Models of Excellence, n.d.) in attempting to answer my inquiry question by using any of these lessons, I have found two amazing resources to help me continue to be inspired around the idea of creating lessons that help to develop self-regulation. The YouCubed website in particular is a great resource in planning math lessons with a creative mindset and growth mindset perspective. The Models of Excellence website has many great videos and resources like "Austin's Butterfly" which can also inspire for me to implement different lessons encouraging high quality work from my students and how to achieve this.

Next Steps

In relation to my ongoing learning and practice within this inquiry question, I have many next steps. I have learned that attempting to answer why students are so quick to say "I'm done" cannot be answered in a month-long inquiry project, nor in a year. It is an inquiry that will continue to be wondered and explored for years to come by me, as well as other educators. It has been discussed a lot throughout the term the idea that becoming a self-regulated learner is a big journey and one that can take a lot of time for students to develop all of, or even some, of the skills needed to self-regulate their learning. It is important to not get discouraged when there not immediate changes within the students, but take the time and opportunities to constantly reflect on what I am trying to motivate my students to do.

I will continue to seek out resources that help for me to inspire a growth mindset, as well as develop those crucial pieces of learning to be a self-regulating learner. By continuing to provide these opportunities to develop such skills, as well as modeling them for the students, I will be establishing an environment in which they feel comfortable and confident to learn.

Implications for theory, research and practice

Some implications for future theory, research and practice are that an inquiry question such as this cannot be answered easily. Depending on the educator and their experience, as well as the environments they create and the students in their class, this issue as well as the solutions to this issue will be different. The idea of motivation and engagement with students has so many variables that can be explored until an educator can find a balance within their learners and their learning journey. While researching for this inquiry question, I did not find a lot of articles that I found related to my inquiry question in a way that would be helpful for me to answer it. It is clear that this inquiry is one that is difficult to answer and may never be answered. Due to the different variables that interact in finding that perfect balance, I believe it is a great area for further research into the idea of what makes students say "I'm done" before they are and what can motivate and engage them to continue and persist through an activity they might not find all that motivating to begin with.

As for future practice, I believe I have found some inspiration for me to persist as an educator and continue to explore this theory. Although that does not mean that every educator has been inspired to try to tackle this issue. Through the continuous collaboration with colleagues and peers at UBC I can continue to be inspired with new ideas, as well as share some of my own findings with others. Hopefully we can continue to work together and learn more about motivating and engaging students effectively. Furthermore, perhaps we can seek out more

professional development in this area of need by looking for workshops surrounding this issue or having groups in which rich discussions about this issue can take place.

The profession of being an educator is one in which you are constantly learning and evolving in your practice. Through having wonderings and inquiries about the field of education as well as reflecting on our own practice, one can strive to be the best educator they can be. By continuing to challenge our students and ourselves every day, we are persisting through on our own learning journey that will continue for the rest of our lives. Through inquiry we can push the boundaries of thinking and further develop those skills needed to self-regulate our learning.

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