

## How might we help students to learn for themselves?

Personalising learning involves teaching in ways that stimulate students to organise their own learning and take responsibility for extending their own knowledge and skills. Among the skills that students are expected to learn are strategies for “regulating” or managing their own learning. What kinds of classroom experiences help students learn how to learn?

A recent Dutch study, which explored teaching students to regulate their own learning within vocational education, found a number of teaching approaches offered students positive experiences for self-regulation. It also found that fostering self-regulated learning positively affected the value that students allotted to the task and their motivation for learning.

The teaching approaches of ‘powerful’ learning environments identified by the study involved:

- **interaction between learners** – co-operative learning had positive effects on self-regulation and led students to have greater confidence in their own competence, higher intrinsic motivation and an improvement in skills
- **assessment** – the type of evaluation used affected learning behaviour substantially. Students were more likely to use effective learning strategies when they paid more attention to improving their own performance than comparing their performance to that of others
- **self-selected, problem-based activities** – such tasks gave students a better sense of how to use and apply knowledge. When learning tasks were interesting, challenging and self-selected, students were more likely to use self-regulated strategies voluntarily. They were also more likely to persist and maintain their focus when work became difficult
- **autonomy** – the most important task for teachers in enabling students to regulate their own learning was to encourage them to make their own decisions
- **a focus on learning how to learn** rather than assimilating knowledge, which meant students being open to challenge and learning from mistakes.

The study found that the form of teaching that included most of these features was ‘problem-based instruction’, which the researchers commented is *not* the most prevalent format in vocational education. In problem-based learning classrooms, students are invited to direct their own learning from a structured menu of activities that enable them to accomplish learning tasks with a high degree of autonomy. But, the researchers pointed out, assessment has yet to reflect this focus on learning rather than knowledge.

*Could you do more to encourage students to direct their own learning? For example, could you encourage them to direct their efforts towards accomplishing interesting and challenging tasks they have selected? Could you help them to learn from their mistakes, by asking them to think about how they carried out the task and reflect on what helped them learn and achieve?*

**Evidence source**

Van Grinsven, L., & Tillema, H. (2006) Learning opportunities to support student self-regulation: comparing different instructional formats. *Educational Research* 48 (1) pp.77-91

You can find out more about helping students learn effectively in the Demos report, 'About learning': [www.demos.co.uk/publications/aboutlearning](http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/aboutlearning)