

The Importance of Promoting Self-regulating Activities in Task-Based Learning Involving Video Curriculum

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Abstract—This paper highlights how Non-Instructional Class Time (occurring either before the lesson begins or after it ends), can play an important role in encouraging student engagement in self-regulated learning, using a case study of adult learners studying the Pragmatics of English, as part of a video-curriculum in Hong Kong as an example. Mixed methods data analysis reveals how self-regulating activities work to integrate class-time, homework, and assessment into a feedback loop, offering constant stimulus to overcome learning disruptions. The paper concludes that Self-regulated learning (successfully encouraged during NICT) is effective at safeguarding course continuity and stimulating learning activity using video curriculum materials with adult learners.

Index Terms—Adult learners, NICT (non-instructional class time), self-regulated learning, video-based curriculum.

I. INTRODUCTION

When teaching a course on the Pragmatics of English in Hong Kong the predominant observation that emerged during teaching was that Adult learners' learning experiences, (constant work / family interruptions to learning progress) may make it necessary for teachers to stimulate self-regulation activities to ensure *course continuity* and *student engagement*. At the conclusion of the course it became apparent that Non-instructional class time (NICT) should not be overlooked and ought to be used to encourage student engagement in *self-regulated learning*, both then and in future. This paper seeks to make clear that position by presenting data demonstrating how self-regulating activities can integrate class-time, homework and assessment into a continuous feedback loop.

This paper contains three sections. In the first section (I, II) a brief review of the literature on self-regulated learning and some of the differing perspectives taken and priorities placed on the topic is given. In the second section (III, IV, V) field notes and participant observations introduce the learning context and are analysed for evidence of the differences between each of the adults learning experiences becoming integrated, via non-instructional, self-regulating activities improving course continuity. In the final section (VI & VII) conclusions are made and a case is made that course continuity can be facilitated with self-regulating activities during Non-Instructional Class Time (henceforth referred to as NICT). Cultural and social development implications of this approach are also highlighted.

II. SELF-REGULATED LEARNING AND NON-INSTRUCTIONAL CLASS TIME

Differing perspectives have been taken and different priorities placed on the topic of self-regulated learning, and thus this term requires being both clarification and clear scoping. This section then introduces the three key areas involved namely, a) metacognition, b) strategic action and c) 'motivated effort and control' [1]. Non-Instructional class time is then defined.

From the Educational psychology perspective self-regulated learning has been researched in terms of its correlation with feelings of 'Self-Efficacy' [2]. From the information processing perspective Self-regulated learning has been looked at in terms of two main function, those of "Motivation" and "control" [3] while researchers looking at the issue from the student performance perspective have attempted to measure in their words the "expert learner" [4] performance. From the social-cognitive perspective self-regulated learning is conceptualised as an interaction between three main areas of concern: the person, their behaviour and the environment [5].

Yet from the Higher Education perspective, the view adopted in this paper, self-regulated learning is most practically analysed in regard to a) person-driven or "active", b) unconscious / "dynamic" processes and c) combination of both [6]. Iran-Nejad and Brad raises two main points of interests, firstly "dynamic control appeared to contribute about four times as much variance to cumulative grade point average as active control" [3] This is taken to mean that explicit control of learning by the learner (alone) may be somewhat of a false idol. The second point of interest they raise is that "the active-and-dynamic theory is not the only way to think about the nature of internal conflicts. Instead, one might contrast active person regulated internal control with skill-based automaticity, which is often equated with no control at all" [3]. Here, self-regulated learning is defined as any source of learning activity, involving everything from explicit, executive control-type cognition (for sake of brevity ~ thoughts) to skill-based automatic internal mental processes (intuitions), and/or combinations of both (reflection) that are constituent of learning, leading people to connect richer experience and the process of learning, closer and more frequently together.

In this paper Self-Regulated Learning (henceforth referred to as SRL) is discussed both theoretically in terms of cognition/internal mental processes and in terms of practically (for the classroom) as a source of learning activity, to get the fullest possible picture of what SRL is and what it puts into motion for the adult learner. The benefit of such a focus to

post-secondary ESL contexts, is the attention it heeds not so much to the mechanics of self-regulation itself, but the attention it pays to the flow-on effects self-regulation may well initiate. According to L. Rawls at Florida Gulf University self-regulation learning strategies cover three key areas “Deliberating about appropriate learning strategy, Setting goals and Monitoring progress”. This is done in order “to increase Academic performance, to provide individuals with tools for lifelong learning and to provide intrinsic rewards” [7]. Which raises the question, what does SRL involve from the perspective of the adult learner? According to Zimmerman, self-regulation has three stages: Forethought, volitional control and reflection. In particular the importance of wrapper tasks or “activity based on pre-existing learning or assessment task that allow the learner to draw their own conclusions about the learning process” [8] are important in this effort.

As was the experience with this case study, SLR in general can be an effective way for bringing to a close, problems such as late or missing assessment or students. Learners are more tacitly aware of a progression in their learning they are encouraged to make tangible their “progress know-how” and their need to maintain it.

NICT or Non Instructional Class Time (in class time occurring before the lesson begins and after it ends), should not be confused with NIT (Non-instructional time) which is a term used in school administration to refer to time set aside by a school before or after classroom instruction, usually for the purposes of lesson planning or co-teaching coordination. Here the use of NICT for regular “learning experience review (as opposed to learning content review)” will be further discussed and elaborated. NICT occurs inside the classroom and is a time teachers usually covers tasks colloquially referred to by some teachers as “housekeeping” (IE collecting homework, checking attendance, collecting forms etc. NICT is a teacher-expanded examination of self-evaluated learning, performed on a regular basis, emphasising student-led learning strategy and learning experience adjustment while seemingly administrative affairs of the classroom are attended to by the teacher. NICT emphasises the importance of self-regulated learning without explicitly requesting or even suggesting the shape it should take. It helps to contrast NICT with formal/informal and incidental learning to understand exactly how it works.

Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a by-product of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it Marsick and Watkins [6].

In summary, NICT occurs inside the classroom and operates in an awareness-raising mode, being conducted with little evident structure. Like incidental learning it is a by-product of another activity (interpersonal interaction / organisational culture) yet unlike incidental learning it involves learning that is negotiated not controlled. NICT learning is co-operatively negotiated in order to critically reflect on the learning process. It is learning how to learn in a learner specified and non-normative fashion. Being formalised through repetition in formal settings it adds a cumulative dimension to the learner’s experience of learning as something ongoing and adjustable.

III. CONTINUING EDUCATION, THE HKFTU AND ADULT LEARNERS

This paper examines the context of a mixed-methods case study of adult learners studying the Pragmatics of English in HK at the HKFTU (Hong Kong Federated Trade Unions) an institution which in the literature is described in within the broader context of Continuing Education. Continuing Education globally is “Lifelong, life-wide, voluntary, and self-motivated”. For adults it involves “delayed enrolment after high school graduation, and often involves “working full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled” [9]. In her doctoral thesis written while working at the HKFTU as Deputy Executive Officer, C.M. Wong outlines how “students may return to education at different times and in different forms (such as part-time courses).”

The HKFTU has a 100 year history and 15 centrally located training centres. Class size is enrolment-dependent. Courses need to appeal to adult learner interest, and can’t be formal study dependent as anecdotal evidence suggests that learners at HKFTU often arrive to class tired and have work, and family support commitments to attend to on top of any requirements of the course that make lengthy homework completion unfeasible.

Adult learners in particular may already have accumulated sizeable life experience and often face levels of financial and familial responsibility the average University student are only beginning to comprehend before they graduate. As was revealed by Wynne [10] in the European Co-operation focused ASSET (Adding Support Skills for European Teachers) project, adult learners “tend to favour practical learning activities that enable them to draw on their prior skills and knowledge. Problem based learning exercises are welcome...Adults (also) need to know why they are learning something” [10].

This case study discusses three adult learners who best exemplified strength in one of the three stages of SRL Zimmerman proposed, that is; Mr Yellow is a good example of SRL’s first stage, volitional control. Ms Red is a good example of SRL’s second stage (reflection), and finally Ms Blue is a good example of SRL’s third stage, forethought. Before we continue a quick background of each of these research participants is needed in order to better account for individual differences in their backgrounds to ensure any comparisons are made on fair grounds. All of the learners are in the 30-39 age bracket, have been learning English since Kindergarten and they all graduated college.

Mr Yellow listed speaking and listening as his macro skills of strength and self-rated "Volume (neither too loud nor too soft)" highest on the conversation skill rating scale. His reflective diary suggested 'preparing before talking' as a weakness. He listed role-play, Self-recording and 4/3/2 drill as the in-class activities most useful for improving his English. For the purposes of this paper Mr Yellow was chosen as a good example of SRL's first stage, volitional control as, both in the teacher-observed field notes and during the interview, he demonstrated confidence in discussing a variety of topics, with different speakers (the teacher, classmates, administration staff etc.). In his own words "in the real-world, meeting with suppliers, I talk about: study, work experience, HK life... I feel confident talking about these things with practice".

Ms Blue listed reading as her best macro skill. She detailed 'creativity during role-play' as a strength but gave her 'encouragement of agreement (encouragement of partner to talk)' a low mark on her self-evaluation using the conversation skill rating scale. She listed role-play and self-recording as the in-class activities most useful for improving her English. Ms. Blue was chosen as a good example of SRL's third stage, forethought, because though absent sporadically (in one case for consecutive lessons), she always demonstrated the ability to either pre-complete assessment before being absent, or to catch up on missed workload in a timely fashion after being absent.

Ms Red also listed reading as her best macro skill. She reported "too many, pauses in the conversation" and "context not well-organised" in her reflective journal as a weakness. She listed 'role-play' and 'video-watching' as the in-class activities most useful for improving her English. Ms. Red was chosen as a good example of SRL's second stage (reflection) because post-course survey open response items indicate that Ms Red was in the regular habit of listening intently to in-class feedback, and incorporating suggested improvements into the next lesson.

In the words of Marsick and Watkins "Informal and incidental learning is at the heart of adult education because of its learner-centered focus and the lessons that can be learned from life experience..[6]. In their chapter devoted to this type of learning they outline their experience in this regard concluding "It seems clear that these [the processes and strategies learners use when learning informally and incidentally] are the most pervasive forms of adult learning, and that we can indeed enhance this kind of learning with educational intervention.. Informal and incidental learning can be enhanced with facilitation or increased awareness by the learner" [6].

This concept of 'intervention in awareness' in the field of incidental learning, parallels the process concerns raised in the area of Self-Regulated Learning. The SLR model goes a bit further into the idea, with the goal of enabling learner mastery. The goal during this pragmatics course was more modest, not aiming to enable learner self-mastery of learning, but rather to generate activity and movement in that direction in order to garner a snowball effect and create momentum in activity beneficial to course continuity.

IV. EVIDENCE OF INTEGRATION

A classroom discourse analysis was conducted to measure effectiveness of metacognitive strategies by revealing evidence of confidence and "attendance to language use". Lesson 5 was used as the example as that lesson was about midway through the course when learners are neither too familiar nor too new to the course to speak naturally in class. During that class the skill of pragmatic analysis was introduced, cartoons were analysed as a warm up and finally short video clips were shown twice. Once the background situation in the video has already been analysed the video was shown again and comparison of forms, IE "can you" vs. "could you" are discussed in terms of differences in meaning created by the same language forms being used in different contexts.

In Fig. KEM0007- 4 we can see that Mr Yellow's strength is in volitional control, as he most often uses words such as "help", "polite" suggesting his focus is on smooth social interaction maintained through making affirmative statements and emphasising sameness over difference. In Fig. 5 we can see that Ms Red's strength is in reflection as she uses words such as "maybe" and "think" suggesting her focus is on possible scenarios and opinions rather than concrete, black and white statements. In Fig. 3 we can see that Miss Blue's strength is clearly in forethought, as she uses words like "ask" and "reason". There is an attempt in her classroom discourse to determine, via asking, the reason behind peoples actions in the scenarios presented. So the discourse analysis reinforces field-note observations made by the teacher during that lesson that "Mr Yellow and Miss Red participate well and are proficient at individual and pair-work. Ms Blue asked the most difficult questions in class".

All three learners were sufficiently confident in their participation during the lesson and each demonstrated an effective metacognitive strategy, but when it came to "attendance to language use" Miss Blue's strong use of forethought proved the most effective strategy for enhancing class discussion with the teacher. Mr Yellow strength at volitional control improved his ability to engage different speakers but this was not beneficial to longer talk-turn discussions. Thus from this we can see that different metacognitive strategies can be executed more or less effectively, but each tends to favour certain types of tasks over others. So how can this observation be used to enhance course continuity?

Challenges to course continuity can be overcome when non-instructional class time is used to encourage individuals to engage in self-regulating activities. Coaching the class as a whole on different metacognitive strategies is not a very efficient use of time because typically a learner will pick out one or two strategies that most suits their particular sensibilities and try out that one. Researchers focusing on this area emphasis that more successful students use a variety of metacognitive strategies rather than sticking to a couple of tried and true methods. If instead of focusing on the metacognitive strategy the focus is put on evaluating the result of specific experiences of learning, then strategy-specific enhancement of the most efficient use of a specific strategy

for the purposes of that specific task can be fully explored during NICT. When experiences of learning are repetitively evaluated formally in the classroom, using criteria specified by the learner and not the teacher, problematic or insufficient learning practices are more likely to be changed without the blow to confidence that a poor assessment grade or inability to perform a request in class can incur. In the case of Ms Blue, Mr Yellow and Ms Red they each had an area of learning they were particularly strong at, but as the course progressed and we repetitively discussed and as a group evaluated their experiences of learning, Mr Yellow and Ms Red in particular began to realise the benefit of asking better thought-out questions (forethought) as well as focusing on task participation as they had already.

In terms of evidence that course continuity improved, the following field-note observation from the final lesson of the course demonstrates how this came about.

Acting out abstract concepts or subtle nuances such as “taking a position on responsibility” (when receiving complaints) or “the difference between justification and excuse” and providing examples of these through instances of talk helped their capacity for meaning creation. These instances of talk either helped put an example into context or to demonstrate the effect of language choices on the ‘direction’ of the conversation. This field note just mentioned shows that self-regulation is important in creating more nuanced meaning that is effective at communication by being more responsive and not a one-sided strategy.

V. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A. Lesson 5 Preliminary Analysis

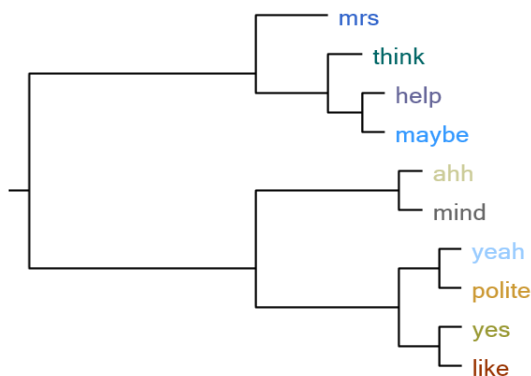


Fig. 1. Top nine words used by cohort.

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
alright	35	1.83
good	19	1.00
just	21	1.10
know	18	0.94
one	35	1.83
questions	16	0.84
request	16	0.84
time	20	1.05
video	32	1.68

Fig. 2. Top nine words used by the teacher.

Word frequency analysis of the nine most used words in lesson 5 was conducted in three realms: collective learner word use (Fig. 1) teacher word-use (Fig. 2) and individual learner's word use (Fig. 3-Fig. 5). Words in bold typeface are considered to reflect themes of learner's individual experience of learning as reflected in their choice of words during the lesson.

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
ah	3	1.45
mind	3	1.45
reason	3	1.45
request	3	1.45
think	3	1.45
yes	3	1.45
aah	2	0.97
ask	2	0.97
chinese	2	0.97

Fig. 3. Top nine words used by Ms. blue.

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
yeah	11	3.27
do	6	1.79
polite	6	1.79
yes	5	1.49
help	4	1.19
interview	4	1.19
like	4	1.19
mind	4	1.19
think	4	1.19

Fig. 4. Top nine words used by Mr yellow.

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
help	5	2.59
maybe	4	2.07
think	4	2.07
yes	4	2.07
like	3	1.55
polite	3	1.55
video	3	1.55
bank	2	1.04
call	2	1.04

Fig. 5. Top nine words used by Ms. Red.

VI. CONCLUSION

Effective use of NICT is all the more important with adult learners as they are often more individualised in their needs and more fragmented in their study techniques. Self-regulated learning, successfully encouraged, can be an effective way for stopping short term teaching problems such as late or missing assessment or students becoming medium term course continuity issues.

The evidence of greater course continuity such an approach achieves can be seen in the increasing overlap in learner's individual experience of learning as reflected in their choice of words during lessons (as was just saw in the discourse analysis section of this paper). In this case the themes of "think", "mind" and "reason" overlap in Ms. Red, Mr. Yellow and Ms. Blue's classroom vocabulary. Even though they each deployed different metacognitive strategies and preferences; Ms. Blue favouring forethought, Mr Yellow favouring volitional control and Ms. Red favouring reflection. This suggests each learner, when coached to see "the learning experience" as adjustable and encouraged to constantly use and adapt different ways of learning (the right "ways" - plural) different strategies are enabled, yet the focus remains in overlapping themes. Overlapping themes ensure course continuity, and overlapping themes are made possible through the collective practice of NICT.

VII. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

As was mentioned previously NICT learning is co-operatively negotiated in order to critically reflect on the learning process. It is learning how to learn in a learner specified and non-normative fashion. Being formalised through repetition in formal settings it adds a cumulative dimension to the learner's experience of learning as something ongoing and adjustable. If adjustability is entirely decided on terms suiting only the teacher, learners may find this reflection embarrassing or perhaps even negative reinforcement of the "good learners" and the "bad learners" pecking order. Even when you only treat the good students better you still perpetuate favouritism and social exclusion of those not yet brave enough to speak up and be heard in your classroom. Why settle for, or even reinforce, indifference?

Different cultures approach the process of education in various ways and the balance of power and position of respect the teacher occupies in formal classroom teacher is never quite the same in every country on earth. When the teacher and learner are from different cultural backgrounds, (as they usually are in ESL), cultural sensitivity is needed; so educate yourself to their needs.

After all, Learning should be both a positive experience and an endeavor. It is at times wrapped up in the very personal realities of our own habits and seemingly random preferences, and at other times it is detached and not personal: a goal, a project, an objective determination to become good at something, unswayed by opposition. So consider starting up this conversation with your learners. What do you think is going on when you learn? What is your experience of learning before you came here? What problems do you have? Which bits are easy? Once you get over the initial generality responses and dig a little deeper into their social reality you

tap into a growing awareness that this thing they are doing here (learning) is theirs, but not entirely. You can help them not just with the subject being taught, but with their progress in general. If you try this, I think you'll find by the end of the course, or semester etc. that that thing they are doing (their learning) may well eventually become something belonging wholly to them. In that case, not only have you done your job as a teacher, you've developed a socially responsive and more participative frame, not just in the mind of learners but in the adaption of reality to worthwhile pursuit (shared learning).

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