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IMPROVING STUDY HABITS

LENGTH: 3481 WORDS

XXXXX

PERSONAL PROJECT
2012-2013

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1. Introduction

To end the MYP cycle, tenth graders had to achieve a personal project in which each student was going to demonstrate their personal appreciation of global contexts and how they could apply the ATL skills on their own. The topic could be anything we wanted and it was a completely personal decision, but students had to be aware it should be a topic which would make an impact on our community, and a topic which would allow each one of us a certain way of action. In my opinion, picking the topic was the hardest part, because you don't really know if that topic is going to allow you to fulfill all of the tasks you are asked to do or if you really like the topic enough to want to work on it for more than five months. Nevertheless, I discovered that once I got started it was almost impossible to stop. New inquiries and obstacles were constantly crossing my path, but this is when everything I had learnt through the program helped me get over all of the difficulties until I reached what I wanted to achieve.

The topic of my personal project is something that has always caused me a lot of curiosity: how each person learns. I have learned in biology classes that every person's brain is slightly different, and that not all of us make connections in the same way, which is why each person has their own preferred way of learning something. However, what I began to wonder was whether knowing this could be of any use for my personal or educational life? Then, while studying for my December exams, I found out I wasn't the only one stressing about how I was going to be able to learn all of the information we had to learn by heart, so the idea of finding a way to make studying easier for everybody came to my mind. During this time, I realized that throughout my years in school, no one has ever taught me how I'm supposed to study, and I think is something extremely important which should be taken into consideration because the only way to improve your exam results is if you study correctly. In the end, I made a connection between these two topics, and decided that the topic of my personal project would be how to improve and facilitate our students' study habits based on their own abilities to learn.

In this report I will talk about some of the process I went through in order to complete my personal project: specifically about the goal I set; the resources and application of information I used; the criteria I developed for my product; how I was able to achieve the goal; and the reflection I've made on my learning.

2. Investigating: The goal

The purpose of my personal project is to help students to improve their learning by modifying their study habits, taking into consideration how they should study for each subject, which is their preferred learning style, and how their internal and external conditions should be in order to have a good, effective, period of study. What I want to achieve is to make a difference in people's study methods by informing them about the different learning styles a person can have and to help them recognize how their study habits should be modified to a method which fits their learning style. In order to do this I plan to create a web site and make informational posters and share my project with a presentation to my school community. Students will learn that there are small but important things that affect them negatively at the time of studying, and that if they make a small effort to help their brain while studying, preparing before an exam is not as difficult and as stressful as it seems.

Hopefully, the main message others are going to understand through my work is that studying can be easy once you find the skills you are better at, and that learning this will greatly benefit your academic life. I don't believe our community gives studying the importance it deserves, and some people have given up with studying because they think that studying is a waste of time because they are still not going to remember anything when they enter the exam. The problem is that we have never been taught how to study, and maybe the methods some students use are not appropriate, so no matter how long they study, the information will simply not go into their heads. Some think that they don't need to study because it is enough with what they have learnt in class, but there are going to be exams for which you will have to study correctly if you want to get good results or even pass, and those are the exams we are going to face soon.

As a result, the impact I want my project to have is to help students obtain better academic results by changing their study habits so they can be more relaxed at the time of studying for exams and then be able to take them in a more confident way. The thing about studying is that it is not only learning things by heart, it consists also of understanding what you are studying, and that is easier if you know which your learning abilities are.

A very important part of my goal is to make sure that this project contributes to all of the community and not only to the students of this time, which is why the main goal is to be able to include in the curriculum at least one class per section in which students are taught how they should study and how their learning style affects their studying methods.

3. Research skills: Selection of sources and application of information

I used different sources for my investigation in order to develop my project. The first one was my prior knowledge on the topic. When I was 13, I attended a course on neurolinguistics, so I knew a bit about the fact that people learned in different ways and that there are different things we can do to help our brain to memorize things. I had prior knowledge from my classes in biology, where I also learned based on experience when we did a test to determine our multiple intelligences. From the media (different blogs and online news paper articles) I found that there are different places in the world where they have included teaching their students how to study based on learning styles¹, which was useful to plan ways to include the same thing here at the xxx. Some schools use things like breakfast clubs, so students can come in in the morning and make different exercises to improve their learning styles. Other schools, like XXX University, has a link in their official webpage where students can find small tips on how they can study, which was what gave me the idea to make a webpage to include the link in the school's webpage.

From interviews with tenth grade students, I found out that most students have lost the “respect” for studying, and they said that “studying isn't worth it because either I revise or not, I won't remember anything the next day and I will do bad in my exams”, which lead me to look for ways in which the students would find studying as something important again (telling them for example, that if they study following the tips there's a bigger chance that they could improve their grades). Others said that the way they studied depended on the subject they were going to study, which was something that lead me to another area of inquiry: How should we revise for each subject?

I then asked some of my teachers how should we revise for their subjects and they told me that basically the most important thing to revise was clarifying the concepts with a book or with the teacher, and once students do this, they have to make several exercises about the topic they are studying and a summary if it's convenient. I also made a survey as a source of information and the results were very satisfying because they gave me evidence to support the fact that students haven't been taught how to study. 53% of secondary school students who answered my survey claimed that they had never been taught how to revise for their exams, and 92% answered that they would be interested to know how to study based on their abilities. I also used observations and experiences, because I have a friend who studies only while listening to her repeating things over and over again, but once I tried it and it didn't work for me.

The other half of my investigation was from Internet pages, but I only chose the links that seemed reliable. I found links with tests to determine your learning style², which was very useful because determining your learning style is the base for my project. I also found scientific researches on things like which type of music is allowed while studying³, characteristics on each

¹http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev064.shtml

²<http://www.howtolearn.com/learning-styles-quiz>

³<http://www.mindthesciencegap.org/2012/10/08/does-music-help-you-study/>

learner⁴ and descriptions on how each learner learns best⁵, from which I took some of the ideas of the material I had to include in my final webpage.

All of these sources helped me in a way to advance in my inquiry and made me reflect on how the outcome of my project was going. In this stage of the process I used a lot of ATL skills, but specially the information literacy skills. Some of them included accessing information to be informed and inform others (survey and webpage), collect research from a variety of digital sources, make connections between a variety of resources (all of the sources), utilize media to obtain perspectives (survey and interviews), process data and analyze results (analyzing the survey results and making the graphs), communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences and actively make connections between different media resources in presentations. By doing this, I concluded that maybe a booklet wasn't the best idea for my final product, and that a web-page would've been more useful and efficient, because the easiest quizzes to find out your learning styles are found online, and because taking into account all of the things I had to include in my product (What are learning styles and their importance, which are the types of learning styles, how should each type of learner revise and key tips for studying), it would be too much information in a booklet.

⁴http://www2.eit.ac.nz/library/ls_guides_learningstyles.html

⁵<http://www.bcps.org/offices/lis/models/tips/styles.html>

4. Planning

Development of criteria

In order to plan my product and make a prior evaluation to see if it was really going to make the impact I wanted it to make, I made some specifications of how the product should have looked like, what it would include, and how I would make it to make sure people caught the meaning I was trying to give.

The posters had to be colorful and catchy. They had to make people look at them with the use of a catchy slogan in each one of them. They had to include enough information to give the main message about the tip or learning style it referred to, but each poster shouldn't have too many information because people were supposed to read them as they walked by. They would be done in computer and printed in a special office sized poster paper. It's main function or purpose was a campaign to make students reflect on the ways they are studying, so hopefully, they would take notes of the tips the posters displayed so they could take them into consideration while studying. They would make them do this because the posters promoted a tempting idea: Get higher grades without having to make a huge effort, just follow some steps and go to a webpage. The audiences for the posters are secondary school students from the junior section, and they are hoping this product would inform them about studying in a serious but fun and interesting way. They will look at the posters because it will make them wonder if they are studying how they should and especially they would like to find out which is their learning style. Finally they should be made with bright colors, so people are attracted to them. The final costs of making the posters is of 28,000 pesos.

In the end, the posters did follow all of the criteria except one. Like they were too many, there wasn't always two columns between each one, so reading them wasn't possible to do while walking normally and sometimes you had to walk a bit slower in order to read the whole poster.

The webpage is a multimedia way where students will find out how to study depending on their learning styles, as well as some tips they should remember every time they revise. It had to include a questioner so students could find their learning style, some keys to study based on their abilities, tips to change their normal study habits and descriptions of what the characteristics of each learning style are. It had to be a short website but it had to include everything mentioned above in a fun way (everything should be straightforward and organized so users find exactly what they are looking for and waste no time in the webpage). It had to be a webpage for primary and Bach students, who wanted this webpage to tell them how to study based on their learning styles and give them some advise on how they can improve their studying. It should also give them the opportunity to know which is their learning style and if they find it and feel identified with it, they will want to give it a try while studying. Students will use it because it's a tempting thing to know how to get better grades by just following a step-to- step guide. The webpage should've had a short and easy link to remember and should've had everything in the same place (in this way, students wouldn't have the need to go to other places by their own looking for answers). It had to be attractive when looking and reading it, and it should make the topic look interesting and essential so they keep on looking at all of it.

In the end, the webpage followed most of the criteria except two. The first one was that in order to make the learning style test, they had to go to another link and make it and then come back to the page because I couldn't really find a way to insert the questionnaire in the same webpage. The other thing that went wrong was the link. It was a bit long and boring in the end ([REDACTED]) because I had to pay 50 dollars to obtain a shorter and easier domain. I thought about pasting some posters with my link and the barcode in it, so students could easily scan the barcode and access the webpage through their smart phones, but then I found out that smartphones required a special app to access to Internet pages through barcodes, so I didn't do it in the end.

5. Taking Action

Achieving the goal

Since the beginning, my personal project was supposed to enrich my understanding of the global context I chose. The context of my personal project was an inquiry into scientific and technical innovation, because by knowing that there are different studying methods we can *explore the impact of environments on human activity; how humans adapt environment to their needs* (by researching how students and teachers in the school should adapt the use of technology, so students are aware of how they should revise for their exams) and see if really everyone is given the opportunity to obtain better results. By asking the students if they have been taught how to study and if they are aware of which learning style they are good at, we can *explore systems, models, methods, products, processes and solutions* and identify *methods for adaptation, ingenuity and progress* such as adding some things in the curriculum and helping students to modify their study habits.

In my opinion, the product was efficient because it provided me enough tools to achieve the goal. The goal was to make people conscious of the importance of studying and to help them change their studying methods, which was something found on both the posters and the webpage. In the end I didn't talk only about study methods depending on learning styles, but I also included things/actions that students often do that are proven to be inefficient, such as listening to music while studying or studying the day before. The tips are easy to follow and the best part is that the guide is in a link, which will last forever. The link will be placed in the school webpage and like this, the head of sections and students can have access to it whenever they want. However, the only way to say if changing the study habits of students did helped them to obtain better academic results would be asking students to honestly say if they continently used the tips for the cumulative exams on June for example, and see if this made a difference. Also, I know it's not possible to change the way every student studies and that not everyone, for more entertaining that it is, will enter to the web site, but it's nice to see that at least for some, the idea of making the webpage was valuable and they took their time to look at it and consider what it was stating. I already put it on a Facebook group 10th graders had, and many students have come to say they found the webpage very useful and interesting (others liked the post on Facebook and commented on it).

6. Reflecting

After all of this work, the personal project has been something that has extended my understanding of my topic and of the global context. Changing the way people do something is not only telling them how they should do it, it is also showing them in a way, how they are going to be benefited from doing it in a different way. Every time I investigated more and discussed my topic with someone else, new inquiring themes arose. I learnt that achieving a perfect way to study is very difficult, and that there really isn't a general rule for studying. Learning styles and the ways they can modify your study method is just a guide that will make studying easier, but it doesn't mean is the only thing that should be taken into consideration while studying. To study you should also be aware of the time of the day, the conditions of the environment in which you study in and the subject you are going to study. It has also helped me to understand the global context, because in a way we are all connected in this topic: Students, teachers and head of sections. Teachers need to help students to know how to prepare for their exams, they should advise them on how they think their subject should be studied and they should let them know the importance of learning styles and of having good study habits.

The project provided a great opportunity for me to engage in action, because as I have explained, the main point of my project is to help to improve something that is weak in the community. I was able to talk with Mrs. xx about my project. I explained to her my concern about the fact that students don't know how to learn, and she said she was thankful for letting her realize this. She told me that she was going to make learning styles a topic of one of her assemblies to teachers next year, because she is aware that it is something important that should be taken into consideration in the curriculum.

I will also have the opportunity to show my webpage to the seventh graders in an assembly, in order to let them know that they have this resource and the benefits that using the web page will bring to their academic life.

What I liked the most about the project was that we were able to use all of the ATL skills: thinking, social, research and self-management, because its really the first project in which we were able to use all of them. We had to use them to find solutions to all of the doubts which emerged in the way, but it was interesting to see how despite all the effort you make, things don't go exactly as how you plan them, but at the same time that even though they don't go as planned, sometimes better ideas emerge.

To conclude, is important to say that my project is not something that will only help me individually, it will also help future generations of students who will hopefully receive the classes I didn't receive about how to revise for exams. It will be something they will be very grateful for, due to the fact that knowing how to study efficiently is something essential in one's academic life (school, university and work), and it will be something they remember forever.

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