

2-27-2017

Lessons from Linda Nilson: Self-Regulated Learning and How to Help Our Students Learn How to Learn

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Recommended Citation

Bird, John C., "Lessons from Linda Nilson: Self-Regulated Learning and How to Help Our Students Learn How to Learn" (2017). *The Weekly Reader*. 110.

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February 27, 2017
Volume 8, Issue 14

The Weekly Reader

Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

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Lessons from Linda Nilson: Self-Regulated Learning and How to Help Our Students Learn How to Learn

A few weeks ago, I went to York Tech for their annual conference on strategic enrollment. Former Winthrop student Will Folden organized the conference, and he invited me to make a presentation on effective class discussion.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Linda Nilson, Director Emerita of the Clemson University Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation. Linda is nationally known in teaching and learning circles, and it was a pleasure to meet her and to hear her address. I though this week I would summarize what she talked about and add my thoughts about her important topic.

The title of her presentation was "Self-Regulated Learning: Active Learning on the Inside." I have heard about active learning, of course, but I had never encountered the concept of self-regulated learning, or SRL. She gave this definition of self-regulated learning: "The conscious

planning, monitoring, and evaluation of one's learning in order to maximize learning."

She began by talking about student assumptions about learning, then made the point that students have to learn how to learn.

I think we often make the assumption that students already know how to learn: if they have made it to college, they certainly already know how to learn, right? Hmmm...

Dr. Nilson outlined three stages of SRL: planning, or what happens before learning; self-monitoring, or what happens during learning; and self-evaluation, or what happens after learning. Each of these stages is broken into three parts: metacognitive, meta-emotional, and environmental. She provided us with a chart, "Questions That Self-Regulated Learners Ask Themselves."

Examples of

metacognitive planning would include asking questions like these: What kind of a task is this? What is my goal? How will I know I have reached it? What do I already know about the topic? I can see how such a focus, before learning begins, would be very helpful to students. When I think of planning, [I think about ME doing the planning. Student planning for active learning is something I have focused on only occasionally.]

Examples of meta-emotional planning include these kinds of questions: How interested and motivated am I? What's the value or relevance of what I'll be learning? How confident am I to learn this material? What similar tasks can I recall doing well in the past? [I can see the value in guiding students to ask questions like these, and again, I can see how this is something I have not paid much attention to.]

Linda gave these examples of environmental planning

“Examples of metacognitive planning would include asking questions like these: What kind of a task is this? What is my goal? How will I know I have reached it? What do I already know about the topic? [I can see how such a focus, before learning begins, would be very helpful to students. When I think of planning, I think about ME doing the planning. Student planning for active learning is something I have focused on only occasionally.]”



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questions: What is the best environment for the task that I can create? Is the temperature right for me? How about background sounds? Have I had enough sleep? Have I had the right amount of coffee today? Have I put potential distractions far, far away? [These are the kinds of concerns that only the student can monitor—I am not there while he or she gets ready to read or work on a project. And they are questions that most students will not ask without some guidance.]

Moving on to self-monitoring, metacognitive questions to ask during learning include these: Am I sure I know what I am doing? Does my approach to the task make sense? Am I making good progress toward my goal? How focused am I? What material is the most important? What material am I having the most trouble understanding? [I can immediately see how much more active learning would be if students would ask such questions.]

Nilson provided meta-emotional questions during learning: If my interest and motivation are sagging, how is what I'm learning relevant to my experience or my future? What material is challenging what I've

thought about the subject? Am I starting to get discouraged? What similar tasks can I recall doing well in the past? [I can see how helpful such questions would be, and I again see that this is something I have never really talked to students about.]

Environmental questions during learning are next: Should I try another environment to see if it works better? Am I staying away from distractions? Do I need to take a short break to refresh my mind and body? [Again, these are questions that the student has to learn to ask herself—we are not there to ask them.]

Finally, self-evaluation, with metacognitive questions for students to ask after a learning task: How well did I achieve my goal or master what I set out to learn? What can I recall and what do I need to review? What were the most important points I learned? What am I still having trouble understanding? [These are questions we have all asked students, at the end of class or at the completion of a unit, but how much more students could learn and how much more deeply if they learned to ask such questions on their own!]

A self-evaluative meta-emotional question is “How am I reacting emotionally to my evaluation of my learning?” Linda noted what results from positive and negative reactions and the effect on future learning. [I don't think I have ever really considered this before when it comes to my students' learning—although I do it all the time myself. It is time I learn how to transfer that kind of skill to my students.]

Last are environmental self-evaluation questions: How well did I avoid distractions and stay on task? If not that well, how can I avoid distractions more effectively in the future. [While I wrote this column, I had music from Pandora playing in the background, and I checked out a few songs, even reading the band bio for Pure Prairie League. I also paused to check out Facebook. Wonder what my students did while they were reading *The Grapes of Wrath* for class?]

I really enjoyed Linda Nilson's presentations, and I am eager to put these ideas into practice. How invigorating it can be to take a Friday to think and learn about teaching and learning! See the registration for ours, below.

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If you have a request for a session you would like to see, please email me and I will try to arrange it. And if you have a session you would like to present, please email me. We will set something up as soon as we can!

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just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

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Click here for the registration form:

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Thought For the Week

"We do not deal much in fact when we are contemplating ourselves."
--Mark Twain