

Variables that influence the supervision of extended essays

Introduction

The development of an understanding of the enhancement of knowledge is increasingly seen as a key outcome for education in contemporary knowledge based societies. A knowledge based society requires the development of new and complex skills, which are dependent on accessing an education that assists learners to develop their ability to research, organise and enhance or creatively use their knowledge. We are beginning to pay more attention to the role of subject knowledge, the kinds of thinking, and the motivational behaviours required to enhance knowledge. Current research has shown that enhancing knowledge is a complex process and needs to be nurtured in students. Teachers need to understand the complexities of the processes when teaching student academic creativity. The extended essay provides a context for examining these issues.

The nature of the EE

The nature of the EE is to recognise an ill defined problem which has:

- Conflicting assumptions
- Evidence and opinion which may lead to multiple solutions

To represent the ill defined problem by:

- Creating goals and outcomes
- Essential information to define and solve the problem
- Strategies to be applied to the information to solve the problem

Variables that influence the supervision of the EE

- Student perception that the EE is a demanding task
- The role of subject area knowledge
- Thinking skills
- Motivations

Recommendations to improve the supervision of the EE

Key learning behaviours in the supervision of the EE:

- To structure or build up a question
- Develop an awareness of the goal and final outcome
- Develop a learning pathway
- Link ideas with and use existing subject knowledge
- Identify the learning strategies used
- Monitor their learning
- Automate what they have learnt
- Organise the new learning into of the set criteria

Strategies to help supervision

It is recommended that students be

- exposed to a variety of research skills. Research skills are understood as:
 - determining the information needed to answer the research question
 - able to locate the sources containing the information. This requires access skills involving information and communication technologies
 - selecting appropriate information
 - critical and evaluative skills that create an awareness of the authority and currency of information sourced from the internet, the values and biases of information, the influence of cultural context.
 - synthesising this information into an appropriate presentation format
 - acknowledging the sources used in approved referencing and bibliographic style

- taught to recognise the research need/issue and in so doing trained in problem identification and construction of a clear problem statement
- connect student knowledge and previous experience in writing to the issue or task
- taught to formulate sub questions to support the main thesis or question
- work on questions outside the set course (subject domain)
- prepared to collect relevant information to answer the questions and sub questions and resolve the main issue or problem
- instructed on the use and management of time for researching, drafting and refining the topic/question
- advised on the planning, development and managing of the extended essay task through an action plan
- educated on the importance of monitoring and revising the action plan
- encourage to reflect, analyse and evaluate the process of converting information to knowledge
- better informed as to the purpose of the extended essay to answer a question/issue/hypothesis with research based evidence.
- making written and spoken comments that are positive and supportive

These recommendations enable students to be better able to engage in 'personal research', to formulate a question, to research and communicate their findings in a coherent manner through writing. These recommendations enable the supervisor to more effectively offer support and direction to students, guidance in the skills of undertaking research and support in the construction of a clear problem statement.

David Hamer

david.hamer@carey.com.au