Providing support to learning and distance working skills

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Special issues about study skills in online learning

Online learning requires

- ability to work independently, even when the teacher is not available,

- ability to regulate one's own working, e.g., making timetable or organising the sequence of tasks,

- ability to manage on problems of learning or on technical problems,

- ability to recognise when help is needed,

- ability to wait the teacher's guidance or help, sometimes even a longer time.

Online learning situations are also difficult because usually it is not easy to get advice or help from the peers, similarly as in f2f-learning.

The interconnectedness of motivation, study skills and guidance

Study skills

Motivation

Guidance
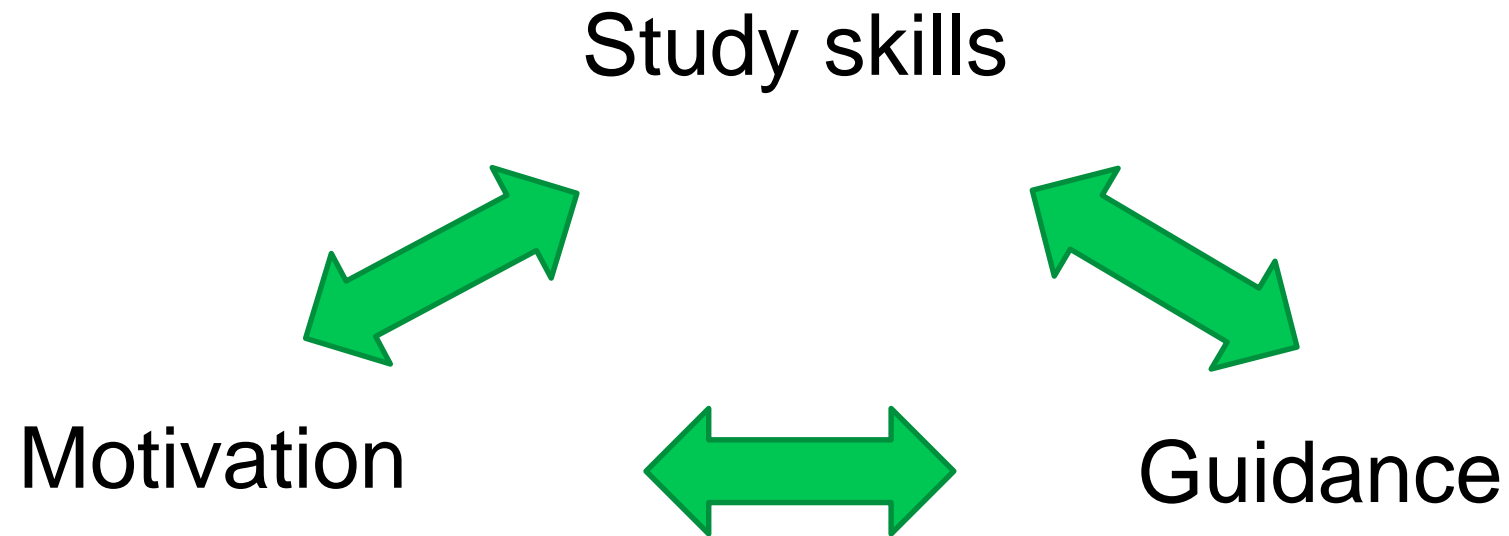
What type of motivation is needed in studying?

Both external and internal motivation are necessary to maintain motivation over time. Without external motives students may not start studying initially some uninteresting courses at all.

Strong external motivation may make students continue their studies, but it is also important to expect, seek, and experience interest, and in this way, raise the internal motivation.

Internal motivation promotes learning better than external motivation.

Motivation is a skill: you can teach students to be internally motivated.

Supporting study skills and practices

What are study skills (also terms learning skills, learning to learn -skills, metacognition)?

They consist of two types of skills:

1) skills to regulate own learning, such as using time, continuing independently, working for the aim, and

2) consciousness about own knowledge, understanding, and competences, beliefs (true or false!), understanding why to improve.

Study skills direct learning and help encountering new learning challenges.

Good study skills support continuing working even when facing problems, when the tasks are difficult, and to continue after disappointments. They are also the ability to enjoy new challenges, learning and own competence. In addition, good study skills produce better learning outcomes.

Students' study skills (and metacognitive skills) vary, and the differences come out already at early childhood education. However, these skills can be learnt and improved: they develop in daily studies.
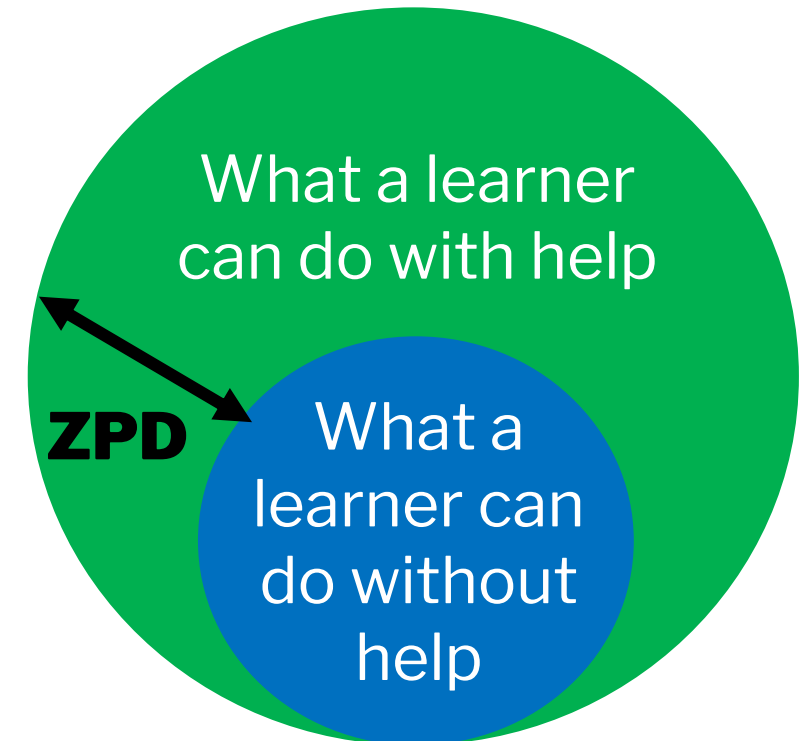
Supporting study skills is undervalued, especially in various online teaching practices although online learning is more demanding than f2f learning, especially for those whose motivation and study skills are low.

A suggestion: in difficult situations focus especially on supporting study skills!

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a theory for guiding students

ZPD is a dynamic area between students' independent, *real* mastery and *supported, potential* mastery of a knowledge or skill.
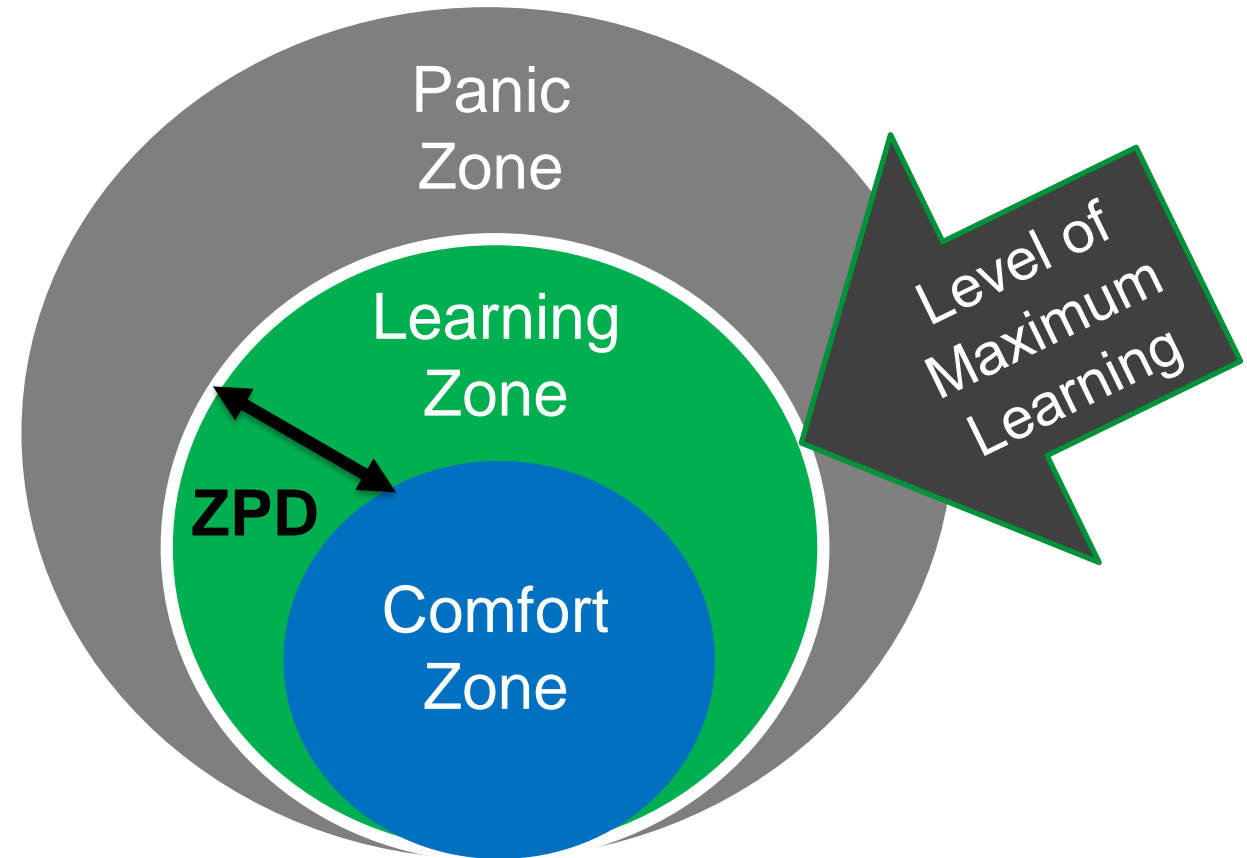
■ In ZPD the learner is able to do and learn more than alone with the support from teacher or in collaboration with peers.

■ With appropriate support, the learner can later master new knowledge and skills independently.

■ Besides individual ZPD, groups and communities can have a *collective ZPD*. For example, student groups can perform better with appropriate guidance.

What a learner can do with help

ZPD

What a learner can do without help

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How to support students in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)?

- Give tasks that are challenging, but possible to complete with support.

- Organize enough guidance and help also in online studies.

- Reduce your guidance gradually and support independent mastery.

Help the learners get the feeling of overcoming the learning challenges!

Panic Zone

Learning Zone

Level of Maximum Learning

ZPD

Comfort Zone

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Practical hints for teacher presence

A teacher should be available for students, not only for learning, but for facing the students' daily life, worries, problems and successes. The students have to get an experience that the teacher leads the teaching process, also in longer remote periods.

Small hints for a teacher:

- Open the connection well in time before the online class, and after it, stay for a while for discussions and questions.
- Inform students and parents how to be in contact with you (teacher) and give enough time for these contacts
- Use also private messages to communicate with individuals and groups
- Use same tools and links for the contacts - use tools that are available for students
- Have a regular point of time for meeting you
- Notice all questions and comments, answer to them asap so that the students do not feel like being lost
- Keep on a constant interaction with the students
- Do not miss the points of time which you have informed
- Require also the students to be online during the lessons, if possible

Practical hints for teacher guidance

Before teaching

- Write a clear plan about the phases, the use of digital technology, learning practices, assessment, guidelines and instruction etc. All instructions need to be more clear than in an ordinary classroom.

- The instructions need to be available easily. In written instructions listing (numbering, bulletin points) help to structure the instructions step by step. If possible, it is good to have the instructions also orally, e.g., recorded.

- Share the instructions to the class. If someone seems to have difficulties, contact him/her privately.

- Create, together with your students, rules for online learning, e.g., how to behave, how to communicate, how to ask permission to speak.

- Think about small weekly sessions in groups for reflecting what has been done, how did all manage etc.

- Help students create routines for the learning.

Practical hints for teacher guidance

During an online session

- Share your screen and show what it includes. Give enough time, ask students to try themselves. Write on your screen, show with the cursor what you are speaking about and explain in a calm voice. Explain regularly and several times, also with text, pictures, what is going on, what should be done, when, where and how to come there, when to leave etc.

- Do students have microphones available? Make agreements about how to use them.

- Make agreements about how to use chat. A teacher should take into account the chat messages but not let it disturb …

- Have breaks! In addition, guide your students to go out or exercise at home.

- Note that all students need guidance and instructions, even so-called good students. Do not expect too much self-regulation. But remember that some students need extra support and guidance - could you have special moments for them?