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**Approaches to Learning: The Selection and Use of Learning  
Strategies**

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## Abstract

This study examines two relationships. First, the influence of study management skills, forms of task representation and learner characteristics on learning strategy selection. Secondly, the subsequent effect of those learning strategies, in conjunction with prior knowledge and study management skills, on learning outcome in the context of specific learning tasks.

The approach students use to learning is measured by a self report questionnaire which also obtains biographical information (N=479). Principal component analysis, standard multiple regression and logistical regression were used on the data.

The results indicated that the main influence on learning strategy selection was the form of task representation the student used. Other influences included: the nature of the task, planning, a deep motive, age and gender. Learning strategy selection suggested that students exhibit complex patterns of strategy use in response to perceived task demands. This finding challenges the underlying assumption of other studies which submit that student learning can be characterised simply as either deep or surface.

When learning outcome is examined in a generic context, prior knowledge has the strongest effect. Prior knowledge seems to be most important at more advanced stages of learning. Smaller contributions are made by study management skills. When the same outcome is examined in a specific task context, other variables also emerge as making important contributions. Learning strategies which may be beneficial in one task context may be detrimental in another. In some contexts planning can be important to a successful learning outcome. Procrastination and an obsession with neat, organised study notes may translate into a poor learning outcome.

Several recommendations for the practical application of the findings are suggested and avenues for further research are proposed.

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### Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my mother, Margret Winifred Lawler, who is not here to witness the triumph of its completion, but shares in it anyway.

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