Chapter 24
SRL/SDL and Technology-Enhanced Learning: Linking Learner Control with Technology

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ABSTRACT

When exploring the central role control plays in implementing technology-enhanced learning initiatives, it is essential to take into consideration self-regulated learning (SRL) and self-directed learning (SDL). Pilling-Cormick & Garrison’s (2007) work provides a research framework which includes a comprehensive overview of how SRL and SDL are integrally related. In this chapter, the connection is taken one step further by using the framework to explore SRL/SDL Technology-Enhanced learning. Implications for practice are derived from three exploratory studies using technology-enhanced learning (handheld, web-based, and online) with a focus on learner control. Solutions and recommendations arise, including considerations for designing instruction with a focus on learner control as it relates to technology.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on crucial issues in using a learner-centered approach to technology from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint. Knowing that there is a link between self-directed learning (SDL) and self-regulated learning (SRL) (Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007), this chapter builds on that work with a specific emphasis on that connection. The intent of the chapter is not to give a comprehensive overview of exploratory studies, but is rather a review of lessons learned.
from three studies conducted in a Canadian urban school board where learner control in technology-enhanced learning environments was the focus. The first study, the handheld study, involved 11 and 12 year old learners in a classroom setting where they were using handheld computers to learn to read and write. The second, the web-based study, focused on a group of 9 to 13 year old struggling readers who were using a web-based program to improve their reading skills. The third, the online study, involved a group of 16 to 18 year olds from across the school board, who were enrolled in an online course. In all three exploratory studies, important lessons arose about how educators can increase learner control and how essential this is to successful technology integration.

BACKGROUND

Technology is changing the way people live and learn. Jarvis (2009) describes a “new educational ecology where learners may take courses from anywhere and instructors may select any learners, where courses are collaborative and public, where creativity is nurtured as Google nurtures it, where making mistakes well is valued over sameness and safety, where education continues long past age 21, where tests and degrees matter less than one’s own portfolio of work, where the gift economy may turn anyone with knowledge into teachers, where the skills of research and reasoning and scepticism are valued over the skills of memorization and calculation, and where universities teach an abundance of knowledge to those who want it rather than manage a scarcity of seats in a class” (p. 210). As Jarvis admits, his view of a new educational ecology may be utopian. The reality is that there could eventually be a movement toward such a view of education. Educators need to be aware of that possibility and the role learner control plays in this scenario. As Candy (2004, p. 39) claims, there is a lot of literature about the use of digital technologies in education, but little on “the powerful role of the teacher, trainer or facilitator and the relatively powerless and dependent role of the student, trainee, or learner”. Issues rising from the research done on learner control and implications for living in a knowledge society help provide opportunities for successful technology-enhanced initiatives.

As Coiro, Knoebel, Lankshear and Leu (2008) recommend, researchers need to “pay greater attention to what new technologies mean to users and less attention to specific new technologies per se” (p. 413). This, in turn, means going beyond the bells and whistles of what some new and wonderful technical application can do. In SRL/SDL Technology-Enhanced learning, the focus goes beyond the features of technology to discovering ways learners and educators successfully adjust to technology restrictions and the role control plays. Exploring the SRL/SDL connection, as it relates to learner control, and looking at the ways education is changing become essential.

SRL/SDL Connection

When addressing control in technology-enhanced learning, both SRL and SDL play a crucial role. As Pilling-Cormick & Garrison (2007) indicate, there is a link between SRL and SDL with both addressing issues of responsibility and control. They explored this link by focusing on the covert (person) and overt (behaviour and environment) aspects linking SRL and SDL. By reviewing selected SDL and SRL models and related concepts, they came up with a comprehensive and coherent framework which would then have useful and lasting value to practitioners. Both SRL and SDL are processes involving setting goals and priorities for learning. Learners, in effect, are determining what to learn. Both involve making sense of learning. For this chapter, SDL is defined as a process in which individuals determine their priorities and choose from various resources available. They play an active role in developing a system of meanings to interpret events, ideas or circumstances.
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