

Chapter 51

Supporting Learning Self-Regulation through a PLE: Dealing with the Time Management Dimension

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ABSTRACT

In the knowledge society, autonomous and Self-Directed Learning (SDL) have become particularly important for professional development and lifelong learning. This kind of learning can take place in physical and virtual spaces that may belong to formal institutions but also to extended communities and networks. In virtual spaces, self-directed learning and self-regulation skills and capacities play an important role in learners' performance. For this reason, it is highly recommended to empower students to design and deploy educational spaces and projects able to fuse formal and informal contexts. The use of Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) can support learners to gain control over their experiences through Web-based tools and a task-orientated environment. It is known that time management is one relevant component of self-regulated learning. There are many Web-based tools that can be used to control time investment and promote planning but little research that takes into account time management in the design and use of PLEs. This chapter describes the results of the Just4me project¹, aimed at designing and developing a PLE to support self-regulated learning dealing with time management as an important dimension in lifelong learning. From this perspective, this chapter contributes to the operationalization and analysis of the time factor in online learning regarding time management in self-regulated learning processes supported by PLEs.

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THE NEED TO SUPPORT TIME MANAGEMENT IN AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ACROSS MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

The conception of today's learner used in this chapter is based on a professional adult, responsible for his or her own development. This responsibility leads to the need for learning throughout life, something that brings into play his/her ability to organize, plan, self-regulate, and engage jointly with others in this learning process. From a socio-cultural perspective, any subject learns continuously through his participation in different contexts, whether more or less formalized, depending on the competences that he/she is able to deploy. We should therefore remember that the competences for learning throughout life are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop appropriately in a specific context. The DeSeCo Project (Rychen & Salganik, 2005) classifies key competences in three broad categories: to use a wide range of tools (both physical and socio-cultural) for interacting effectively with the environment; to engage with others and to interact in heterogeneous groups; and to take responsibility for managing one's life and act autonomously.

Different authors have addressed autonomous and self-directed learning as the pillar for professional development and lifelong learning (Knowles, 1975). It involves being able to use one's own competences and resources to formulate goals strategically, to organize and structure information and to build knowledge that is meaningful to one's aims. It also involves controlling, regulating and assessing consciously and intentionally one's learning process. This requires using different self-regulation strategies (Boekaerts & Pintrich, 2000), including metacognition as the awareness of one's mental processes, and the ability to reflect on these processes.

Recently, self-directed learning (SDL) has been recognized as one of the key skills for the

21st century by UNESCO and OECD reports, closely related to the idea of lifelong learning throughout life. According to Gibbons (2002, p. 2), SDL can be defined as "any increase in knowledge, skills, achievement or personal development that an individual selects and performs by their own efforts, using any method in any circumstance and time." Other authors offer more precise definitions. According to Knowles (1975) SDL involves diagnosing and formulating needs, identifying resources, choosing and implementing appropriate strategies and evaluating the results. For Brockett & Hiemstra (1991) the social context in which learning activities take place is an integral element of the process of self-direction. Pata (2009) proposes the following competences as fundamentally involved in SDL processes: a) the ability to diagnose learning needs in accordance with standards of performance; b) the formulation of meaningful goals for own learning, c) the development and use of a range of strategies for different learning tasks, carrying out a learning plan systematically and sequentially d) diagnosis and monitoring of performance and the identification of resources and tools to meet various types of learning objectives.

Autonomous learning is a complex process. It takes place in a wide socio-cultural context, which involves relations, actions, shared objects and discourses, both in physical and virtual spaces that may belong to formal and confined institutions or to informal and extended communities and networks. Informal learning has been defined by the European Commission (2001, pp. 32-33) as "learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification". It may be intentional or non-intentional (incidental), but control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner.

In the last decade, several authors have proposed definitions that resituate the boundaries between formal and informal learning (Colley,

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