

Chapter 2

Who are Self-Discovery Learners...Online?

A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Self-discovery learning may be understood in multiple ways—as a state of expertise and learning maturity; as an attitude and approach to self-directed learning; as a perceptive and learning stance to the world; as a minor everyday skill for informal information-seeking, and even as an inherent part of the self-discovery learner. It is this last conceptualization that is addressed in this chapter, which explores who self-discovery learners are and what their learning needs may be. Self-discovery learning may be a human character trait. Further, this chapter explores who self-discovery learners are online and how they behave in those spaces. Given the sparseness of the research data, this work proposes questions of how future researchers may further define self-discovery learners online. Finally, this work offers some suggestions for how those online spaces may be evolved to more closely meet the needs of self-discovery learners.

INTRODUCTION

Self-discovery learning may be understood in multiple ways. It is a state of expertise and learning maturity, a point at which a learner can move forward and develop his or her mastery on his or her own. Self-discovery learning may be conceptualized as a general practice—often for informal types of learning—that may bridge learning for work and personal interests. The self-discovery adult learner may be understood

It is important to study who self-discovery learners are in order to better meet their needs through design—namely to lower the inefficiencies and barriers to self-discovery learning, to head-off the misconceptions that come with unguided discovery learning, and to enhance self-discovery learning skill sets.

The research literature—in self-regulated learning, inquiry-based learning, autodidaxy, self-learning, independent learning, lifelong learning, autonomic learning, and discovery learning—offer some basic highlights of who self-discovery adult learners are.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-320-1.ch002

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The pure self-discovery learning environment is the world, foremost. Self-discovery learners, by definition, can learn anywhere; using their imaginations and intuition, they can sense-make and engage the environment for information and learning. The world then includes the natural, social, and human-made aspects. One of the foremost aspects of the current learning world would involve online spaces of the Web and the Internet. The pure self-discovery environment may lack any sort of designed learning structure, so self-discovery learners will need to create their own learning opportunities, structures (mental and situational), relationships, and conclusions.

Self-discovery learning may be conceptualized as originating with learner-centered constructs (Malone, 2008), foremost, constructivism—or the idea that learning occurs foremost inside learners, who engage in sense-making. Oehlmann describes the importance of five main phases: evidence collection; awareness of consistencies between the learner's mental model and what is observed; utilization (perspective change), explanation, and elaboration of the new perspective in a new theory (2002, pp. 7-8). In this conceptualization, the self-discovery learner aligns his or her internal knowledge with the external and observed realities in the world.

Social constructivism suggests that people work together to co-construct knowledge whether they interact directly or only peripherally through each other's created digital artifacts (articles, videos, podcasts, and other objects). The sense of a learning community is a critical one for the acquisition of many skill sets. Co-learners may be a source of encouragement and new knowledge; they may provide social camaraderie.

Adult self-discovery learners are understood to be learning outliers in a learner population bell-curve. They are active, self-motivated, and self-driven (Wang & Li, 2007, p. 259); they have an internal locus of control (and do not feel like

they're failures are based on external factors) and are intrinsically motivated. They tend to evaluate their own performance and self-correct (DuBois & Staley, 1997).

In alignment with the body of adult learning literature, such self-discovery learners select topics that have relevance to themselves and which may be practically applied to their work and / or personal lives. Some learning pursuits have direct effects on their respective self- (personal) and public identities (social and profession-related). Said another way, learning is part of self-creation: "Learning is becoming" (Ranson, Martin, Nixon, & McKeown, 1996, p. 14).

The educational research literature focuses on three main aspects of self-discovery learners: (1) their self-motivation and drive; (2) their self-regulatory (executive) skill set; and (3) their mixed self-discovery learning outcomes.

Self-Motivation and Drive

The signature characteristic of self-discovery learners is their self-motivation and drive; they are powered by their own initiative, and they are able to engage the world as a learning space in order to acquire knowledge and skills. In their learning, self-discovery learners are often unsupervised and autonomous. In general, they have to decide their own learning opportunities and their own pacing. They have low dependency needs (Hai-Jew, 2008). They may opt-in occasionally for help-seeking, but often, they use limited guidance or direction. Adult learners tend to become more self-directed in their learning as they mature (Knowles, 1970, 1980, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 289). Self-discovery learning has been aligned with a greater sense of learner personal responsibility and ownership of the learning, which is said to lead to improved "acquisition, retention, and transfer of knowledge" and more significant learning, and ultimately, mastery (Malone, 2008, p. 533). Contemporary self-discovery adult learners are "power users" of online spaces.

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