

Chapter 20

Reference Course Model: Supporting Self-Regulated Learning by Cultivating a University- Wide Media Culture

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ABSTRACT

Since our mission is the collaborative cultivation of a university-wide media culture, in this chapter the authors propose to look at the relation between Self-regulated learning (SRL) and Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments (TELE) from the point of view of a learning organization. The goal is to clarify how to embed TELE-technologies in educational institutions in a collaborative way that sustains and continuously improves the quality of teaching and learning at a university. Our solution is focused around the concept of “university-wide media culture”, a corporate culture for new media that we hope to develop by means of a collaborative instrument called the “Reference Course Model”. The authors begin by screening and summarizing what they consider to be relevant aspects of components of the SRL theory (models, learning strategy, prompting) and continue by introducing the concepts of media culture, media literacy and their relation to TELE and SRL; based on this they then present their idea of what they call a “Reference Course Model”, explaining its theoretical foundation and developing its conceptual features. Finally, they conclude by showing how they have implemented this model in their university and reflect on the experiences collected to-date.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning and teaching at a distance makes high demands to the learners, the teacher and the organisation in charge. From our experience at the Swiss Distance University of Applied Sciences, we agree with Garrison (2000) that one major challenge that theory and practice of distance education have to deal with, today, is a collaborative approach to learning (as opposed to individual learning) before, during and after the teaching and learning process.

On the other hand, since our students learn mostly part-time (because of family obligations and a nearly full-time employment), maintain a close connection with their profession and adopt a very practice-oriented attitude, they need to be more autonomous, more flexible in planning, more motivated, more able to organize their learning resources, more involved in setting their learning goals and more active in their learning. In short, they need (and wish) a higher ability and more opportunities to control their own learning. Furthermore in a study (Bergamin, Ziska & Groner, 2009) we have found three relevant factors of flexibility for university students: flexibility of time, flexibility of teacher contact and flexibility of content.

It was because of this challenge of supporting self-regulated learning (SRL) on one side, and at the same time promoting a practice of collaboration among teachers and among students on the other side, that projects aiming at cultivating a university-wide media culture were launched at our university.

SELF-REGULATED LEARNING

In the German and English speaking area we find different terms for self-regulated learning such as self-steered, independent, self-determined, autonomous, self-organized, self-directed learning etc. (Götz, 2006; Schreiber, 1998). This multi-

plicity hinders reaching a clear and consistent definition (Artelt, 2000). In our view one of the still most concise definitions originates from Knowles (1975, p.18): "...a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help from others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes". One of the most remarkable points in this understanding of learning lies in the emphasis on the active role of the learners (Fischer & Mandl, 2002). But from the perspective of the teaching organisation, respectively of the teacher, we ought also to mention, that in practice a fully self-regulated as well as a fully externally regulated learning is impossible to realize. The student's learning actions are more appropriately conceived as moving over a continuum between the two poles self-regulation and external regulation (Schreiber, 1998; Artelt, 2000).

Therefore, what counts from an organisational perspective is the degree of expression of different characteristics, such as the orientation of the learning experience (learner orientation vs. teacher orientation), activity level of the learners (active learners vs. passive learners), time flexibility of the learners (flexible learning times vs. fixed learning times), freedom of decision concerning learning goals (learning goal autonomy vs. predetermined learning goals), design of the learning experience (decisional options vs. strict planning), assessment of the learning success (self-assessment vs. external assessment) during a learning process.

Models

Scientifically established models of SRL, mostly coming from a cognitive approach, try to describe the process of self-regulation, to explain the learning processes taking place and to relate the characteristics involved with the learning achievements. Between these concepts there are similarities but also differences (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). One

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