

Autonomous Space Exploration Online in a Writing SAC or OWL

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Abstract

Virtual spaces to help learn a language or write autonomously have become common and are only likely to increase. Multiple resources can be placed on a site easily accessible 24/7 and computer mediated communication in various forms can supply needed human interaction spaces. But how are these sites used by the local students? Following the path of several individuals in detail can allow more understanding and depth of the precise usage of space.

This paper tracks two Arab students exploring and using a newly formed online self-access centre (SAC) for writing or online writing lab (OWL) for the best part of a semester. As an exploratory action research study, it was data driven and multiple data sources were mainly unobtrusive so that the study could proceed very naturally. The choices, learning style, autonomy types and personality differences between the two students suggest a range of support is ideal in an online SAC to cater for individuals in this context, including resources, how to learn, 1-1 asynchronous with advisor (emails), forums, electronic writing raters, and a high profile test. Ongoing action research should help to keep the online facility relevant to needs and open to new ways.

Keywords: autonomy, bottom-up development, L2 writing, online SAC/ OWL, space to place

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