

IATEFL, Aberdeen 2007

Jo Mynard

Koryo International College, Aichi, Japan

**How computer technology can
promote learner autonomy**

Overview

- Computer applications for EFL learners
- Computer as a tutor
- Learner autonomy
- The computer as a tool
- Mindtools
- Ongoing research
- Conclusions

Computer applications designed for EFL learners

- World Talk
- Top Notch
- Rosetta Stone
- Dyned
- Focus On Grammar
- Real English
- Hot Potatoes
- Author Plus (Clarity)
- WIDA Authoring Suite

In the interests of server space, pictures of computer applications have been removed from this slideshow

5 minute discussion

- Think of a piece of technology (specifically written for language learners) that you have used with your English language students.
- What are the aims of the programme?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks for students?

Benefits

- Professional
- Varied activities
- Fun / motivating
- Can lead to mastery of a particular language point
- Extra out-of-class practice
- Tailored to students' needs (authourable)

Drawbacks

- Not usually authentic
- Do not reflect students' needs
- Not student-centred
- Students do not always pay attention to feedback

Learner Autonomy

Definition (Little, 1991:4)

- Capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action
- Development of a psychological relation to the process and content of learning
- Transfer of learning to wider contexts

Computer as a tutor

- Contains a tutorial
- Provides context-sensitive help
- Guides the learner
- Responsive to needs of the learner
- Provides appropriate, error-free feedback

“If the computer tutor satisfies such criteria, then it can provide real autonomous learning opportunities for the students” (Levy, 1997:199)

Computer as a tutor

“Control is delegated to the computer to manage the learning, and in consequence, students will rely on its judgments” Levy (1997:199)

Computer as a Tool

Levy (1997:200)

- The computer's role is neutral
- The computer does not evaluate the student
- The learner has responsibility for managing interaction
- The learner decides how to use the tool
- The learner determines whether the use of the tool is appropriate

Mindtools / Cognitive Tools

Mindtools are “computer applications that have been adapted or developed to facilitate critical thinking and higher-order learning” (Jonassen, Peck and Wilson, 1999:152)

“...technology can amplify what we know...cognitive tools go beyond amplification and can help learners reorganize their knowledge in a manner that results in deeper understanding” (Lajoie, 2005:87)

Mindtools (Jonassen, 1996)

- computer based
- readily available
- affordable
- can be used for knowledge representation
- generalisable to different subjects and contexts
- engage learners in critical thinking
- promote transferable learning
- promote simple yet powerful ways of thinking
- easily to learn

Mindtools - Examples

- Microsoft packages (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Communication tools: e-mail, chat rooms, online forums, MSN
- Blog programmes

Chat Rooms as Mindtools

Study in the UAE (Mynard, 2004)

- Students required little guidance to complete tasks
- Students took initiative
- Students made decisions
- They collaborated naturally with peers
- Active participation rate was high
- Students applied a range of strategies
- They made connections and observations
- They transfer learning to/from other contexts

What did you learn?

- “Vocabulary. I used words what she [the guest] used because I want to learn how to use it”
- “About festivals and traditional food”
- “We practice how to put the sentence with verb and subject”
- “Writing. Sometime we say the sentence before we write. I see the sentence in my mind”

Blogs as Mindtools

2 year research project in Japan

- Students make decisions about content
- Students decide how often/how much to write
- Students personalize language learned in class
- Students use blogs to reflect on their learning

Extracts from Blogs

- “In the class, I took the test of TOEIC. It was a reading section which was difficult. I couldn't do well and I'm so dissapointed in myself. I have to study a lot.”
- “In class, I did some role-plays... These are really good experience for me. Actually, I booked a tour to Paris, so I was happy to have had these class previously.”
- “presentation was difficult for me because I`m shy, so it`s hard for me to have confidence....but I didn`t want to fail like last presentation. So I want to inproove! I did my best!?”

Conclusions

How computer technology can promote learner autonomy

- Computer as tutor
- Computer as tool / mindtool

Learner support

Further promote autonomy:

- Awareness-raising activities
- Self-evaluation
- Reflection activities
- Goal setting with follow-up

Thank you for listening!