Editorial: Special Issue on Strategies and Self-regulation in Self-access Learning

Heath Rose, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland

Corresponding author: heath.rose@tcd.ie

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Strategies and Self-Regulation in Self-Access Learning

Edited by Heath Rose

Editorial

Heath Rose, Trinity College, The University of Dublin, Ireland

Learner Strategies, Self-Regulation, and Self-Access Learning

Welcome to the special issue of SiSAL Journal on strategies and self-regulation in self-access learning. Learner strategy and self-regulation theory have been in a state of flux in recent years, and I believe it is an exciting time to share new ideas, conceptualizations and models of research in order to move the field forward. Therefore, I was eager to pursue a special issue where emerging voices in these fields could be heard, and these new ideas could be shared. In addition, I was also impressed by the number of learner strategy-related papers presented at this year's Independent Learning Association conference in Wellington, New Zealand. The representation of strategic learning in the ILA conference is indicative of a growing trend in the field to move towards a self-access and learner autonomy perspective. I, for one, feel the potential to share knowledge between these fields is immense.

For this reason, I chose SiSAL Journal for the special issue, in order to bring these fields, which have already been gravitating together, closer in a more concrete and published format. SiSAL Journal was a natural choice for me, because I have always been impressed with the level of professionalism and speed at which the editorial board work. Rather than having to wait years to assemble this special edition, we were able to complete this project within the year, for which I am grateful to the editorial team, the reviewers and the authors. Moreover, the nature of SiSAL as an open access journal ensures that emerging new voices can be widely heard, as opposed to having their voices restricted by library catalogue subscriptions and the limited access afforded by print journals.

In total, nine articles have been selected for the special issue after a rigorous blind review process. The nine articles provide a cross-section of strategic learning and self-access practices around the globe. The special issue includes researchers (or research) based in eight countries on four continents, including Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Japan, Mexico, the USA, New Zealand, Ireland, and Greece. The articles also examine a wide range of learning contexts, such as learners of Chinese and Arabic as an L2, to learners of English as an L2 in countries as diverse as Japan and

Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, a number of papers examine self-access learning and self-access learning center practices on a global scale, with contributions from the USA, Malaysia, Mexico, and Greece.

The focus of the papers is equally diverse, with a nice division of theory-driven, research-driven, and practice-driven papers. The theory driven papers, which I have featured in this special issue offer conceptualizations of learner strategies, self-regulation and self-access learning in each of their respective fields. The research-driven papers advance our knowledge of their respective fields, and also serve as models to future researchers hoping to conduct similar studies. The practice-driven papers should be of interest to self-access learning practitioners, managers and researchers—a large cohort of SiSAL journal readership.

Featured Articles

I have decided to feature three articles in this special issue, as I truly believe the theoretical implications they have for the field are immense. The first article is one on learner strategies by **Yongqi (Peter) Gu** of Victoria University of Wellington. This article strips learner strategies back to their core features, and explores the concept of learner strategies beyond the theoretical confines of language learning. Many of us in the field, including myself, have been guilty of looking at the notion of learner strategies through the narrow lens of language learning alone. We often neglect the wealth of research conducted into the learner strategies used by students when engaged in other types of study. I know that this article has been long-awaited by big names in the field of language learner strategies, so I am delighted that the author has chosen this special issue to publish his work, and I am equally delighted to showcase it as the leading featured article.

The second featured article is by **Jim Ranalli,** from Iowa State University on self-regulation. I have decided to feature the article because of its implications on theory building in the field. Like Gu's article, this article also positions self-regulation theory in a broader context for the reader. Since Dörnyei (2005), and Tseng, Dörnyei's and Schmitt's (2006) controversial critiques, the field of language learner strategies has been in a tailspin, and authors in our field (myself included) give the misleading impression in our publications, that Dörnyei's proposed model of self-regulation is the only one in existence. Jim Ranalli reminds us that self-regulation

theory has a long history of research in the field of psychology and that there are numerous established models of self-regulation that we can apply to the field of language learning. He uses a selection of data from his doctoral studies to highlight the applications of one such model to language learning research.

The third featured article is by **Carol J. Everhard,** formally of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. I have decided to feature this article, because like Yongqi Gu's article, she takes a stripped back examination of the concept of self-access learning. One of the intentions of the special issue was to invite stronger connections between research into strategic learning and self-regulation, and research into learner autonomy and self-access language learning. Indeed, much research in these fields examines the same notion—that is, how a learner strategically learns a language and self-regulates this learning often in independent settings. For this reason, I was pleased that the author chose this special edition on strategies and self-regulation to publish her piece on self-access learning and thus create stronger ties within these fields. I hope its inclusion will allow cross-fertilization of ideas and concepts in self-access to the readership of this special issue, which will also include learner strategy and self-regulation researchers.

Therefore, due to the high level of theory-driven articles in this special issue, I am able to feature three strong theoretical articles on learner strategies (Gu), self-regulation (Ranalli), and self-access learning (Everhard), which I feel cover all of the key areas I hoped to be covered in the special edition.

Full Research Articles

In addition to the featured theory-driven papers, we have six full research papers that show how a range of theory in the fields of learner strategy, self-regulation and self-access learning can be applied to research projects. We have three full research papers in the area of strategic learning and self-regulation, followed by four others with more of a focus on self-access and learner autonomy practices.

Alex Poole from Western Kentucky University adds an insightful article on reading strategies of learners of Chinese as a second language to his already impressive list of publications in the field. This paper in particular resonates with me as I feel past research into second language acquisition is biased towards learning

English as a second language. The processes involved in learning to read in languages other than English are fundamentally different, and therefore warrant greater attention. Now that China has become the world's second largest economy, and its importance in the world seems to be only increasing, research into L2 learning of Chinese will only become increasingly more relevant in the future.

Mohammad Alnufaie and **Michael Grenfell** from Trinity College Dublin, present a research project that examines learner strategies in the writing practices of English learners in Saudi Arabia. Michael Grenfell has been influential in the field of learner strategies for over ten years, and this exciting contribution with researcher Mohammad Alnufaie adds to this history of publications in the field. Grenfell's work, particularly his co-authored chapter with Macaro (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007) on the claims and critiques of learner strategies in Macaro and Cohen's co-edited book influenced me considerably when writing on the topic. Alnufaie and Grenfell's paper in this issue acknowledges the contributions of previous conceptualizations of leaning strategies as well as catering to more recent critiques when constructing its research design. It, therefore, serves as an example of how to carry out a relevant and current study, without disregarding contributions to the field over the past 30 years.

Atushi Mizumoto from Kansai University presents a paper of vocabulary learning strategies by L2 learners of English in a Japanese university. I believe a great strength of Mizumoto's work is his ability to use both quantitative statistics and qualitative approaches when examining self-regulation and strategic learning. In this latest article he introduces text mining of students' qualitative responses as an analytical tool to produce quantifiable results. Thus, this research article not only broadens our understanding of strategies used in vocabulary acquisition, but also of research methods available to researchers conducting similar studies in the future.

Erin O'Reilly of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in the USA examines language-counseling reports of students learning Arabic in the USA. The author uses Oxford's S2R as the framework of her study, and it is one of the first published research articles I know of to apply this model, which was outlined in Oxford's 2011 book, *Teaching and Researching Language Learning Strategies*. I think this article serves as a bridge between learning strategy theory and studies in self-access learning, which was one of the rationales behind this special issue. This paper marks an ideological shift in this special issue from the previous papers where

the focus is on strategic learning of the learner, to the following papers, where the focus is on self-regulatory and self-access practices of the learner.

Normah Ismail and **Masdinah Alauyah Md Yusof** from the Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor Bahru, and the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia offer a paper on research into self-access learning practices in Malaysia. This paper focuses on the use of language learning contracts as a means to foster learner autonomy. The researchers use data from an impressive range of sources, which only scratches the surface of the amount of data they must have collected in this project. I look forward to reading more on the findings of this research project in the future.

Finally, **María del Rocío Domínguez-Gaona**, **Guadalupe López-Bonilla** and **Karen Englander** from Universidad Autónoma de Baja California examine the notion of self-access learning through the framework of New Literacy Studies. The concepts behind New Literacy Studies were new to me, so I found the paper an extremely interesting read, in their examination of self-access learning as a social practice. The study was very thought provoking for me as a reader unfamiliar with this analytical framework.

Conclusion

Cohen (2007) notes that among researchers in the field of language learner strategies, the terms self-regulation and learner autonomy are often used synonymously. Despite this clear connection between the fields, there has been little sharing of knowledge between them—that is, authors of self-access learning and learner autonomy very rarely write on strategic learning or self-regulation. Likewise, researchers of self-regulation and learner strategies in second language learning, rarely incorporate self-access and learner autonomy into their theoretical frameworks. Researchers such as Stella Hurd and Tim Lewis have aimed to bridge this divide. In their 2008 edited book titled *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings*, I was delighted to see names like Phil Benson co-authoring chapters with Xuesong Gao, and alongside names such as Oxford and Cohen. However, very little cross fertilization of ideas, concepts, practices and research findings has happened since this book was published. The potential for further collaboration between these fields is immense, and research that builds on theory developed across disciplines can only deepen our understanding of how learners regulate their learning of language, both strategically, and in a self-directed, autonomous way.

I finished my article in the June, 2012 issue of SiSAL Journal stating that I believed it was an exciting time to conduct research into strategic learning, and based on the caliber of articles we received for this special issue, I stand by this conviction.

Notes on the contributor

Heath Rose is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Trinity College, The University of Dublin. He holds a Ph.D. and M.Ed. from The University of Sydney. His doctoral and masters' research focused on language learner strategies and self-regulation. This year he has published on strategic learning in Applied Linguistics and SiSAL Journal, and has a forthcoming article on self-regulation in Foreign Language Annals (Rose & Harbon, 2013). More recently his research interests have expanded into the field of Global Englishes. He is currently in the process of co-authoring a book with Nicola Galloway of the University of Edinburgh titled *Introducing Global Englishes*, which will be published by Routledge in 2014.

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