

# **Towards a Classroom Pedagogy for Learner Autonomy: A Framework of Independent Language Learning Skills**

Hayo Reinders  
Middlesex University

*Abstract. In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the importance of learner autonomy and the role of individual learners in directing their own learning process, both inside and outside the classroom (Alford & Pachler, 2007; Benson, 2000; Breen, 2001; Conacher & Kelly-Holmes, 2007). However, in practice it is not always clear how to support learners in this role, and how to ensure they are ready to assume it. This paper explores some of the teaching aspects related to the development of learner autonomy and proposes a framework of skills that could be used by teachers as a guide to increasing learner responsibility. Although this framework was developed in the context of language education, its underlying theories apply to all educational settings.*

## **Learner autonomy in language teaching**

Language teachers have always attempted to find ways to reconcile the collective nature of most teaching environments with the (inevitably) individual aspects of learning. The development of learner autonomy, or learners' ability to take control over their own learning (Holec 1981), has been one way in which teachers' have tried to make links with learners at a more individualised level, and to connect classroom learning with out-of-class language use.

The theoretical and pedagogical rationale for the implementation of more learner-centred approaches to teaching is well developed and goes back many decades. Starting from the 1950s, and influenced by the work of George Kelly (c.f. Kelly, 1955) and others in psychology, there emerged an increased recognition of the importance of the learner as an active individual who brings previous experiences, beliefs and preferences to the classroom. Rather than seeing the learner as a passive container to be filled with the teacher's ideas, these humanist approaches considered the learner as someone who actively shapes his or her learning experiences with the purpose of self-development and fulfilment (Stevick 1980, Atkinson 1993).

Similarly, constructivism gives a more central stage to the learner by focusing less on the knowledge to be transmitted, and more on the process of constructing, reorganising and sharing that knowledge. In this process, the learner plays a key role. In order to be successful, learners need to be made aware of their own learning and how to manage it. These developments also influenced language education, both through the development of specific teaching methods rooted in these ideas, such as the Silent Way and Suggestopedia (Gattegno,

1963; Lozanov, 1978)<sup>1</sup> and—perhaps more importantly—through a general influence on language teaching toward a greater focus on the learner.

Another influential impetus was the work done in the 1970s and 1980s on identifying the characteristics of the ‘good language learner’ (Naiman et al., 1978). It was found that successful language learners shared a number of characteristics, such as (to give just two examples from a very long list) being proactive in their learning and self-motivated.

On the face of it, this seems to provide language teachers with a clear set of objectives for the classroom. For example, if learners can be made more proactive, then they might be expected to learn better. In practice, however, the implications of these studies are not quite so clear-cut. One problem relates to operationalising constructs such as ‘proactivity’ and ‘self-motivation’. There is a great deal of debate around what such concepts mean. And, even if there was a consensus around them, it still would not be clear how learners could be made, for example, to self-motivate; teacher intervention would, perforce, be a form of direction and any resulting motivation could thus not be said to originate from the learner.

Another, perhaps more important, problem is related to the question of whether the characteristics of good language learners *cause* success in language learning, or whether these characteristics are simply *correlated* with better learning outcomes. It may be possible to be a successful language learner, even without being proactive, for example. It just may happen to be that more successful learners are also, generally speaking, more proactive. In other words, research on the good language learner may not have a great deal of explanatory power.

Similar problems surround the concept of learner autonomy, which, although it had been known and used as a political construct for centuries, developed as an educational construct only in the 1980s, being used to refer to the ability of learners to take control over their learning (Holec, 1981). This ability implies many of the characteristics found in the ‘good language learner’. Learners are unlikely to take control over, for example, decisions about what to learn or how, unless they have some degree of motivation to do so, and unless they are proactive in their learning. This also makes the implementation of a pedagogy for developing learner autonomy difficult: for the same reasons it is difficult to identify practical implications of studies into good language learners.

In addition to the learning aspect, however, autonomy also includes a more political element, relating to the idea of individual freedom of choice. As applied to education, learners are unable to ‘take control’ or make choices about their learning, unless they are free to do so. At a practical level, this means that economic and other disadvantages of certain groups in the wider population, state-led education policies, school curricula and the prescribed use of textbooks, are all examples of ways in which the development of autonomy may be hindered. Sometimes individual teachers can overcome these constraints, but often they cannot.

An additional problem in relation to the concept of autonomy is that is unclear exactly what it means. Although a great deal of theorising has taken place over the years (see Benson, 2007, for an overview), it sometimes seems as if autonomy has become a catch-all term, comprising other concepts such as motivation (Ushioda, 1996), awareness (van Lier, 1996), and interaction (Kohonen, 1992). This lack of specificity may reduce its usefulness and make it difficult to operationalise. Few studies exist that have attempted to quantify autonomy (for some attempts, see Lai, 2001 and Vanijdee, 2007), and some have suggested this should not

---

<sup>1</sup> Some have argued, however, that these developments were not new at all, and that in fact similar developments had already started in the nineteenth century (van Essen, 2002).

be attempted, as autonomy is a fundamental educational goal that underlies many other skills and therefore cannot be broken down into component parts to be measured. Perhaps as a result, few practical models or comprehensive frameworks exist that could systematically guide teachers in implementing autonomy in the classroom.

More recent developments in education, both as an extension of the work done in the area of autonomy, and separate from it, have seen a greater understanding of the role of the individual in the learning process:

*[...] most researchers agree that a major shift is taking place [...] in education away from the teacher-centred classroom toward a learner-centred system where the learner is in control of the lesson content and the learning process.*

(Fotos & Browne, 2004, 7)

One impetus for this has been the influential work done in the area of ‘individual differences’. This body of work emphasises, among other things, how learners differ in their capacity to process, store, and retrieve information; how they differ in terms of age, intelligence, beliefs about language learning; and how they differ in their approaches to learning.

A related area is that of ‘learning styles’, which, based on work done in cognitive psychology and general education, attempts to identify ways in which learners differ in their learning preferences. This information may be used by teachers to match teaching styles with individuals’ learning styles, and to ensure that a range of learning styles is provided for.

The realisation that learners approach learning tasks in different ways has also led to an interest in what learners themselves have to say about their learning. The area of ‘learners’ voices’ (Benson & Nunan, 2005), is an example of this interest, and attempts to better understand learners’ motivations, reasons for success, fossilisation or dropping out, and learners choices in how they approach the language learning process. The interest in learners’ voices is an example of a sociocultural perspective on learning. In this view, learners and learning can only be understood with reference to their context: their ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘how’ (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001). Sociocultural views of second language acquisition have had considerable influence on language teaching methodologies in recent years.

What all these developments and approaches have in common is that they assume that learners have, or will develop, the ability to manage decisions around lesson content and the learning process (Fotos & Browne 1997), and are able to act on their individual beliefs, experiences, learning styles and preferences. In practice, however, this is not necessarily the case. Students need a great deal of preparation and support before they are comfortable with and able to assume greater responsibility for their learning. Reinders & Cotterall (2000), for example, found from a factor analysis that the most important determinant of success in a self-access centre was the degree of preparation the students had received. The provision of materials for self-study also is not sufficient. Previous studies (for example, Jones, 1993; Reinders & Lewis, 2006) that such materials frequently lack the necessary support structures, such as clear instructions or even answer keys, and do not explicitly encourage students to reflect on the learning process. Hurd also emphasises the importance of preparation:

*...if learners are not trained for autonomy, no amount of surrounding them with resources will foster in them that capacity for active involvement and conscious choice, although it might appear to do so.*

(Hurd, 1998, 72-73)

Even where materials have been selected carefully and are provided as part of a more comprehensive and structured approach to developing autonomy, the results may be disappointing. Reinders (2007), for example, found that students who were given access to an on-line self-access system, which included a variety of tools (such as needs analyses and learning plans) and support structures (such as guided instructions and automated prompts and reminders), made use of the system in limited ways, often only using a small selection of the materials, without adequate planning, monitoring and revision.

Clearly, there is an important task for the classroom teacher in raising students' awareness of their learning outside the classroom, and for ensuring students have the necessary skills. This is the focus of the rest of this paper.

### **Toward a pedagogy for autonomy**

Despite the general movement toward greater learner-centredness in education, and the interest in learner autonomy in particular, it is not always clear how individual teachers can implement the underlying principles. Especially in relation to learner autonomy, as we have seen above, there is terminological confusion and existing materials and tools may not be sufficient to ensure that students develop the necessary awareness and skills. In response, several approaches have been taken to fostering autonomy. I divide these into specialist and general approaches.

#### **Specialist approaches**

These include all the deliberate programs and support structures that do not form part of (although they may be linked to) regular classroom teaching, and that have the development of autonomy as one of their primary aims. Figure 1 summarises the most common of these approaches, many probably well-known to most readers, and includes references to some of the key texts for more detail.

APPROACH	INVOLVES	REFERENCES
<b>Learner training</b>	<p>Specific courses or short courses where the focus is on developing skills for independent learning and raising students' awareness of the importance of learning outside the classroom.</p> <p>Such courses usually include strategy instruction and often also include general study skills, rather than language learning skills only.</p>	Rubin & Thompson, 1994
<b>Strategy instruction</b>	Often offered as part of regular classroom teaching, and sometimes offered as specific classes or short courses on language learning strategies.	Macaro 2001; Oxford 1990
<b>Self-access</b>	<p>Often considered the most common way of implementing autonomy: the provision of a self-access centre or on-line self-access materials usually involves making available resources for independent learning and staff support.</p> <p>Sometimes self-access learning is integrated into the classroom, with the teacher working with students in the centre, and sometimes self-access is used outside classroom time, for remedial or practice purposes, either with a teacher or independently. In North America, Writing Centres often perform a similar role.</p>	Gardner & Miller 1999
<b>Language advising or language counselling</b>	A type of language support whereby a teacher and a learner meet to discuss the learner's needs and progress, and where the adviser offers feedback, recommends materials, and helps the learner to plan their learning.	Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001
<b>Specific tools</b>	<p>Many institutions have developed or link to (on-line or print) tools for the management of the language learning process that often aim explicitly to foster learner autonomy. Examples include (electronic) portfolios, such as those developed by the European Union, tandem learning programs and personal learning environments that aim to facilitate and create links between formal and informal learning. Some have developed on-line learning environments that offer materials for self-study, tips for independent learning, and opportunities for staff and student communication.</p>	<p>Portfolios: Ekbatani &amp; Pierson, 2000</p> <p>Online learning environments: White, 2003</p> <p>Tandem learning: Schwienhorst 2007</p>

--	--	--

Figure 1: Specialist approaches to fostering autonomy

### General approaches

This paper is concerned mainly with the practical operationalisation of learner autonomy and its implementation in the language classroom. For that reason the discussion below is restricted to general language teaching situations and looks at ways in which teachers can encourage autonomy in the classroom. One obvious way to do this is to make links with specialist approaches that may have been taken inside the school. For example, where a self-access centre is available, teachers can take students to the centre at certain times to encourage (guided) self-study. However, here the specialist approaches are left aside (the above references will give practical guidance), and the focus is instead on the pedagogical aspects of autonomy that teachers can implement as part of their teaching.

It is important to point out here that the more political and philosophical aspects of autonomy are not actively considered in this framework (apart from the recurrent focus on reflection - see below), not because they are not considered important (they are crucial), but because a climate of relative freedom for both teachers and learners is assumed for the framework below to be implemented. This is, of course, not the case in all classrooms and institutions, but a discussion of this aspect of implementing autonomy takes us too far from the main aims of this paper. For this, the reader is referred to Benson (2000).

As discussed above, it is difficult to operationalise learner autonomy. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Reinders, 2000), it is not as difficult to operationalise *autonomous learning*; it is not impossible, for example, to recognise learning that is learner initiated, or to identify when a learner self-monitors.

For this reason, the framework below starts from the learner and his or her actions. These actions can be encouraged, modelled and monitored by the teacher. They are an adaptation and extension of Malcolm Knowles's extensive and influential work on self-directed learning, carried out in the 1970s (Knowles, 1975). Although Knowles wrote about general education rather than language learning, many of the principles he identified apply equally to language education and form the basis of the framework below. A similar approach was taken by Winne & Hadwin (1998), who identified four key phases in academic learning situations. Academic study generally requires a relatively extensive amount of independent learning and learner self-management, and is therefore a reasonable starting point for a discussion on skills for developing learner autonomy. Winne & Hadwin's four phases include (1), defining tasks; (2) setting goals and planning; (3), enacting study tactics and strategies; and (4), metacognitively adapting studying.

Figure 2 draws on these phases and expands on them. The stages are shown in summary form. The middle column shows how, in general, each stage is covered in a completely teacher-directed environment (such as some classrooms) and the right-hand column in a completely learner-directed situation. Many teaching and learning situations would probably fall somewhere between these two extremes.

LEARNING STAGES	TEACHER-DIRECTED	LEARNER-DIRECTED
Identifying needs	Placement tests, teacher feedback.	Learner experiences difficulties in using the language.

<b>Setting goals</b>	Determined by the course, relatively fixed.	Contextually determined, relatively flexible.
<b>Planning learning</b>	Determined by the teacher. Somewhat flexible.	Contextually determined. Very flexible.
<b>Selecting resources</b>	Provided by teacher.	Self-selection by learners.
<b>Selecting learning strategies</b>	Teacher models and instructions.	Self-selection by learners.
<b>Practice</b>	Exercises and activities provided by teacher	Implementation (language use) and experimentation.
<b>Monitoring progress</b>	Regular classroom feedback and comments on assignments and tasks	Self-monitoring, peer feedback
<b>Assessment and revision</b>	Tests, curriculum changes	Self-assessment, reflection

Figure 2: Stages in the development of learner autonomy

I will now discuss each of these stages in turn, with specific attention to how they can be implemented in the classroom.

### Identifying needs

It is surprising how often learners have no clear idea of their language needs, and the discrepancies that exist between what learners think they need and where their actual weaknesses lie. Equally worryingly, many learners have little idea of their *learning* needs (Barcelos, 2008). In other words: they have little knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses as language learners. They may know, for example, that they need to improve their writing skills, but may not know that they are poor at learning with and from others, which is a learning skill, and one that will affect their success in writing.

In many classrooms, learners are simply given scores that indicate their general levels, but not always individualised profiles of their strengths and weaknesses, including their learning needs. More importantly, learners' individual needs often do not directly inform classroom practice and learners may be forgiven for wondering what the relation is between their learning and the teacher's teaching.

An alternative is to make an extensive needs analysis process a focal point of the class in the first weeks of the course and to encourage students to share their findings with others. Subsequent classroom activities should be linked explicitly to the identified needs and students asked to reflect on their success in completing classroom activities in relation to their needs.

The language and learning needs should be recorded (perhaps in a learning diary or portfolio) and reviewed regularly. As a needs analysis is the starting point of a dynamic

process, it should be repeated at regular intervals. In this way, students become aware of the importance of aligning their work with their needs on an ongoing basis.

### ***Setting goals***

Just as the needs analysis helps students take the first step in understanding their strengths and weaknesses, goal setting helps them to be specific about the outcomes they are aiming for. As Nunan says: ‘learners who have reached a point where they are able to define their own goals and create their own learning opportunities have, by definition, become autonomous’ (1999,145).

However, most traditional courses are very prescriptive in what learners are expected to learn. It may not be possible or desirable for teachers to ignore existing curricula and required learning outcomes (such as, for example, in the case of national exams), but learners should be encouraged to view the course as one element in achieving their own goals, and to seek out additional support or opportunities for practice, if needed. In addition, having clear goals allows learners to focus on those aspects of the class that are most relevant to them.

In the longer term, it may be feasible for teachers to encourage the school to move toward a degree of learner-choice in the courses:

*[...] the key difference between learner-centred and traditional curriculum development is that, in the former, the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught.*

(Nunan, 1999, 2)

The only way to move toward learner-centredness, then, is for students to have some say over what they are taught.

### ***Planning learning***

Setting goals and planning learning are different sides of the same coin. Whereas one’s goals help to specify one’s destination, planning is like finding the best road to get there. Planning involves drawing up practical plans and allocating time to them. This step is often not made explicit by teachers, who tend to direct classroom practice in the following respects:

- 1) content and activities
  - 2) the order of the content and the activities
  - 3) the ways in which learners are expected to participate and interact
- In other words, most classrooms prescribe the ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ of the learners’ actions. Learner-centred approaches will aim to (gradually) encourage learners to make these decisions for themselves. This could mean giving learners a choice over, for example, whether to use a model argument essay to do cohesion-building exercises, or to write a rebuttal essay. This may mean offering different types of activities for the same set of materials or language content. It may also mean that certain activities do not have to be completed in a fixed order.



### *Selecting resources*

Normally this is the task of the teacher, but many teachers have experimented with involving learners in the selection and preparation of resources for learning (Aston, 1993; Benson, 1994). For example, Dam (1995) asked students to locate authentic materials from outside the school to be used in the classroom and the self-access centre. Many of the activities that could be classified as tasks (c.f. Ellis, 2000) could involve the production or sharing of materials by learners.

### *Selecting learning strategies*

Many learners are content to leave the teacher to decide how activities are to be completed, but will still need to develop the ability to use a wide range of strategies and to choose strategies appropriate to the task, if they are to take full responsibility for their learning.

Generally speaking, strategies are divided into *cognitive* strategies (e.g. ways of memorising vocabulary), *metacognitive* strategies (e.g. being able to self-assess), and *social-affective* strategies (e.g. being able to find opportunities to speak the language, or to motivate oneself) and it is important that teachers consider how they will cover each of these in class through examples, modelling and practice (for a practical overview of strategies in language teaching, see Cotterall & Reinders, 2004).

A good starting point is to ask students to identify their current strategy use. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990), is a good tool for this (an adapted version is available on line at <http://homework.wtuc.edu.tw/sill.php>). By completing the questionnaire again later in the year, learners can see if they have expanded their repertoire. An important related point is to recognise the improvements learners make in their choice and use of learning strategies, by giving regular feedback and by awarding credit on the basis of progress in this area.

### *Practice*

In classroom situations, teachers provide opportunities for practice and give frequent feedback. Alternatively, many teachers give homework consisting of exercises for drilling. Many of these materials do not offer students any choice in which aspect of the new knowledge they have learned they will practise. Nor does it give them any choice in how they will use or implement their new knowledge. An important aspect of autonomy is the ability to experiment with the language, and to take risks (c.f. Schwienhorst, 2007). It is important then for practice materials and activities to encourage students to find ways to move beyond the confines of the pedagogic environment (the classroom, the self-access centre, the school) and to incorporate new knowledge into their lives. The challenge here is to find a balance between giving students freedom, while still giving them support. This support can be in the form of carefully-structured tasks that require students to practise the language on their own terms, but then to input their experiences back into the task itself (for example, through a webquest, or by accessing a corpus, where students need to find examples of particular language use). In this way, the materials can ensure that language is recycled and that regular presentation and revision take place, while still leaving a degree of choice with the student.

### *Monitoring progress*

In a teacher-directed environment, such as in a course with a set curriculum, progress is generally measured by others; the teacher will give feedback and perhaps there are regular mini-tests and assignments. For the development of autonomy, learners will need to develop the ability to monitor their own progress and revise their learning plans accordingly. This includes reflection on their motivation levels and other social-affective aspects of the learning.

Learning diaries (for example, in the form of a learning blog) are good tools to encourage this process. These could be private or shared with other learners and, if they are on line, the teacher could give feedback too. Learners need to be encouraged, however, to develop the necessary vocabulary. Generally, many learners' reflection is limited to surface-level language and learning issues (c.f. Reinders, 2007). Learners might, for example, write about having a problem with understanding a native speaker, without going into detail and without exploring the reasons behind their difficulty. It may be that the learner did not hear the speaker properly, because she has not learned to distinguish between 'p' and 'b', or it could be because she did not notice or recognise the use of a connector, e.g. 'however'. Similarly, most reflection tends to focus on problems. It is important to encourage students to record their successes too, and to identify the reasons for them. Providing students with a model diary or practising reflection in class may be helpful.

### *Assessment and revision*

Whereas monitoring one's progress is an ongoing task that takes place as part of every learning episode, assessment is usually less frequent.

Many students, understandably, want to have a sense of achievement and test scores can provide a kind of external validation that is important to them. Denying this entirely may not be feasible or desirable. However, at the same time learners need to be given opportunities for alternative assessment, so as to enable them to feel confident in their own learning when they no longer have the support of the institution. Many teachers use portfolios for this purpose. The Council of Europe has developed the European Language Portfolio, which is available as a free download ([www.coe.int/portfolio](http://www.coe.int/portfolio)). On-line tools, such as Ning ([www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)) and Eduspaces ([www.eduspaces.com](http://www.eduspaces.com)), are more recent 'Web 2.0' applications that can be used for the same purpose. Other options include self-assessment worksheets and activities that encourage students to put into practice what they have learned, e.g. to have a conversation with a native speaker or to read an academic article without a dictionary. It is important that the assessment be linked to the learners' previous work. In some cases, materials (and teachers) make the mistake of individualising the learning and then use a blanket test to assess that learning. Some teachers experiment with alternative forms of assessment, for example those in which the students' own assessments contribute to their final grades (c.f. Pierson & Ekbatani, 2000).

### *Underpinning autonomous learning: reflection and motivation*

A crucial aspect of the autonomous learning process is the reflection that underpins all of the stages discussed above.

The final reflection that takes place after monitoring one's progress and assessing one's learning is a key phase, as it links one's accomplishments with future work through a revision of one's goals and plans. Therefore, learners should be encouraged to think about

what went well in their learning, what did not go well, why this was so, what alternatives there are and how these affect their objectives. In this way, reflection is the 'glue' that holds autonomous learning together. The final reflection changes the learning process from a one-shot sequence, to a cycle of learning where previous experiences are the building blocks for future learning. As Little says: 'the pursuit of autonomy in formal learning environments must entail explicit conscious processes; otherwise we leave its development to chance' (2001, 34).

Of course, learning is not only a cognitive but also an eminently social process. Interaction and collaboration are now seen as crucial to the development of autonomy (van Lier, 1996; Schwienhorst, 2008). I have given suggestions above for points in the learning process where students could benefit from interaction and collaborating in their (self-directed) learning. This applies equally to activities involving reflection. Although we often think of reflection as an individual activity, there are many ways in which learners can communicate with others about their learning and help each other become more aware of their roles in the language learning process.

Related to this, the affective aspect of learning is also crucial to success, especially in independent learning, where the traditional classroom environment with its regular feedback and contact with other learners is replaced with, for many learners, a less-familiar context where learners are themselves responsible for maintaining their interest and motivation. Independent learning is likely to challenge learners' beliefs about what language learning entails, and may lead to frustration. Therefore (self-) motivation, as a blanket term covering the affective aspect of learning, is a key pillar of the model presented below. Teachers know that learners need affective support, but do not generally model techniques for self-motivation and collaborative techniques for learners to draw on each other for support outside the classroom.

This cyclical nature of the autonomous learning process is shown in Figure 3, with reflection, motivation and interaction providing the cognitive, affective and social backbone.

**Figure 3: Cyclical nature of the autonomous learning process**



### **Implementing the framework**

Developing autonomy is a lengthy process and the successful implementation of the framework described above therefore depends, to a large extent, on the persistence of the teacher.

It is not realistic to expect students to take responsibility for their learning from one day, or even month, to the next. Autonomy develops gradually and is a mind set that calls for certain skills, not the other way around. The overall classroom atmosphere needs to value and encourage reflection and the students' own views and roles in the learning process.

In many cases, teachers report that students are unwilling to take on a more active role (Brown, Smith & Usioda, 2007; Hiemstra & Brockett, 1994; Huang, 2006; Tsang, 1999) and they may be disappointed that their efforts were unsuccessful. However, it may well be that the experience of being asked to guide their learning is entirely new to students. Some of my students were stunned when I asked them how *they* thought we could best tackle a particular learning task. They had never considered the question. As a result, some learners may criticise the teacher for not doing their job. It is therefore crucial to start with a clear rationale

for any changes in the language classroom. Talk to students about what you aim to do and why. Perhaps invite an older student to talk about the importance of independent learning after the course (I have, for example, successfully enlisted the help of PhD students to talk to undergraduates about the skills they need in their studies).

Cotterall (1995) has developed a survey that aims to measure students' readiness for autonomy. This could be a starting point for determining how much preparation students are going to need.

In addition to giving students a rationale, start slowly by occasionally allocating some reflection time, or by modelling one of the skills in the framework. Once students are comfortable with these breaks from (what they perceive to be) regular classroom teaching, you can gradually move toward implementing the entire framework, perhaps initially in the form of a project.

In addition, students will need support while acquiring these skills. Ask them to work together in teams or pairs and give regular feedback on their learning plans or the resources they have selected. Students need to know that you are there to guide them when needed, and will need to be motivated to persist with what may be a new and at times frustrating process (Dickinson 1995, 168). It is important to connect the work students do by themselves with what happens in the rest of the class. You can make this connection by asking students to talk about their experiences, either in public or by sharing their learning diary with you. Encourage students to talk about what worked for them and what did not, and help them to identify reasons for this. Share success stories with the other students. In other words, implementing autonomy should never be a case of sink or swim, but a gradual testing of the waters with a lifeguard on hand, before actually diving in.

An example of this process of 'acculturation' to what is, in essence, a new form of learning for many students is the development of a 'guided self-study programme' at the University of Auckland. The University has a significant number of students who have been diagnosed as being 'at risk' for underachieving academically as a result of insufficient (academic) language proficiency. Many of these students do not have time built into their programmes and so it is important to give them flexible opportunities for accessing learning resources and support. The University therefore established a self-access centre that students can visit whenever they want and where they can find self-study materials, but perhaps more importantly also meet with a dedicated 'language advisor' who will help them to plan their learning and who will give them feedback on their progress. In addition, an online learning environment was developed, based on the model above. The programme encourages students to plan their learning, helps with the selection of resources, suggest appropriate strategies, facilitates practice, and upon completion, encourages students to monitor their own progress and reconsider their learning goals and methods. It prompts students at every decision point to reflect on their choices, their success and difficulties, and encourages regular interaction with language staff (see for a description Reinders 2006).

The tips and suggestions above do not cover the whole story. As mentioned at the start, they do not explicitly address the political aspect of autonomy. Some teachers may find it difficult to implement the framework because their institutions do not allow much freedom in the curriculum.

Nevertheless, it may be possible to select one or more parts of the framework as a starting point. Also, learner autonomy is not only about the development of a set of skills, but is rather about developing a certain mind set that sees learning as an active process of discovery. For teacher educators, a starting point then is to begin by encouraging (group) reflection on what teachers' views are of the key elements of the learning process. By doing so, teachers' deep-seated views of learning can be brought to the fore, and can be used a

starting point to discuss the importance of (asking students to engage with) the different elements of the model above and to generate ideas on ways to put this into practice.

Although implementing the framework suggested above will not guarantee students develop autonomy, the activities do involve a shift of focus from you onto the learners. Knowing that they are valued as individuals and are supported in their learning will mean that students are more likely to develop this mind set, and knowing this, teachers are more likely to consider the importance of student ownership of the learning process.

## References

Allford, D., & Pachler, N. (2007). *Language, autonomy and the new learning environments* (first ed.). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Aston, G. (1993). The learner's contribution to the self-access centre. *ELT Journal*, 47:3, 219-227.

Barcelos, A.M.F. (2008). Teachers' and students' beliefs within a Deweyan framework: Conflict and influence. In Kalaja, P. & Barcelos, A.M.F, *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 171-199.

Benson, P. (1994). Self-access systems as information systems: Questions of ideology and control. In D.

Gardner & L. Miller (eds). *Directions in self-access language learning* (3-12). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Benson, P. (2000). *Autonomy in language learning*. Harlow: Longman.

Benson, P. & Nunan, D. (2005). *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benson, P. & Voller, P. (1997). *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. Harlow: Longman.

Breen, M. P. (2001). *Learner contributions to language learning. New directions in research. Applied linguistics and language study*. Harlow: Longman.

Brown, P., Smith, R. & Ushioda, E. (2007). Responding to resistance. In A. Barfield & S. Brown (eds). *Reconstructing autonomy in language education: Inquiry and innovation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Conacher, Jean and Kelly-Holmes, Helen. (2007). *New learning environments for language learning: Moving beyond the classroom? KFU*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 206.

Cotterall, S. (1995). Readiness for autonomy: investigating learner beliefs. *System*, 23, 195-205.

Cotterall, S. & Reinders, H. (2004). *Learner strategies: a guide for teachers*. Singapore: Regional Language Centre.

- Dam, L. (1995). *Learner autonomy 3: From theory to classroom practice*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Ellis, R. (2003). Task-based language learning and teaching. In *Oxford applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 387.
- van Essen, A. (2002). A historical perspective. In Grenfell, M. *Modern languages across the curriculum*. London: Routledge.
- Gardner, D. & Miller, L. (1999). *Establishing self-access*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gattegno, C. (1963). *Teaching for languages in schools: the silent way*. Reading: Educational Explorers.
- Fotos, S. S. & Browne, C. (2004). *New perspectives on CALL for second language classroom*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hiemstra, R. & Brockett, R. (1994). *Overcoming resistance to self-direction in adult learning*. London: Jossey-Bass.
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Huang, J. (2006). Learner resistance in metacognition training? An exploration of mismatches between learner and teacher agendas. *Language Teaching Research*, 10(1), 95-117.
- Hurd, S. (1998). Too carefully led or too carelessly left alone? *Language Learning Journal* 17, 70-74.
- Jones, F. R. (1993). Beyond the fringe: A framework for assessing teach-yourself materials for ab initio English-speaking learners. *System*, 21, 453-469.
- Kelly, G. A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs*. First ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2.
- Knowles, M. S. (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kohonen, V. (1992). Experiential language learning: second language learning as cooperative learner education. In *Collaborative language learning and teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 14-39.
- Lai, J. (2001). Towards an analytic approach to assessing learner autonomy. *AILA review*, 15, 34-44.
- Laurillard, D. M. (1993). *Rethinking university teaching: a framework for the effective use of educational technology*. Routledge: London.

van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in the language curriculum : awareness, autonomy and authenticity*. London: Longman.

Little, D. (2001).. *Learner autonomy and the challenge of tandem language learning via the Internet*. In A. Chambers & G. Davies (eds). *ICT and language learning: a European perspective* . Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger, 29-38.

Lozanov, G. (1978). *Suggestology and outlines of Suggestopedy*. New York: Gordon & Breach.

Macaro, E. (2001). *Learner strategies in second and foreign language classrooms*. London: Continuum.

Naiman, N., Froehlich, H., Stern, H. & Todesco, A. (1978). *The good language learner*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Ekbatani, G., & Pierson, H. (2000). *Learner-directed assessment in ESL*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Reinders, H. (2000). *Do it yourself? A learners' perspective on learner autonomy and self-access language learning*. Groningen: Unpublished MA thesis. Available from [www.hayo.nl](http://www.hayo.nl).

Reinders, H. (2006). *Supporting self-directed learning through an electronic learning environment*. In *Supporting independent learning: issues and interventions*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 219-238.

Reinders, H. (2007). *Big brother is helping you: Supporting self-access language learning with a student monitoring system*. *System*, 35, 93-111.

Reinders, H. (2008). *The what, why, and how of language advising*. *MexTESOL*, 32(2).

Reinders, H. & Cotterall, S. (2000). *Language learners learning independently: How autonomous are they?* *Toegepaste Taalwetenschappen in Artikelen*, 65(1), 85-97.

Reinders, H. and Lewis, M. (2005). *How well do self-access call materials support self-directed learning?* *JALTCALL Journal*, 1(2).

Reinders, H. & Lewis, M. (2006). *The development of an evaluative checklist for self-access materials*. *ELT Journal* 60:2, 272-278.

Rubin, J. & Thompson, I. (1994). *How to be a more successful language learner*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.



Schwienhorst, K. (2008). *Learner autonomy and virtual environments in CALL*. Routledge studies in computer assisted language learning. London: Routledge, 227.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stevick, E. (1980). *Teaching languages: a way and ways*. Rowley: Newbury House Publishers.

Tsang, E. (1999). Resistance to self-access learning. In B. Morrison (ed.) *Experiments and evaluation in self-access language learning*. Hong Kong: Hasald, 25-42.

Ushioda, E. (1996). *Learner autonomy 5: The role of motivation*. Dublin: Authentik.

Vanijdee, A. (2003). Thai distance English learners and learner autonomy. *Open Learning*, 18(1), 75-84.

Winne, P. H., Hadwin, A. F., Hacker, D., Dunlosky, J. & Graesser, A. C. (1998). Studying as self-regulated learning. In *Metacognition in educational theory and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

### **Useful resources**

Auto-L, an on-line discussion forum for people interested in learner autonomy and self-access.

To subscribe to AUTO-L , send a message to:

Wldyc@cunyvm.cuny.edu

Subject line: AUTO-L Request

Message:

Subscribe AUTO-L

Your name

Your institutional affiliation

Your e-mail address

Autonomy bibliography. Approximately 1,700 references in the areas of autonomy, self-access, and advising. <http://www.autonomybibliography.info>

On-line postgraduate certificate in language advising:

[http://www.hull.ac.uk/languages/postgraduate/online\\_PG/index.html](http://www.hull.ac.uk/languages/postgraduate/online_PG/index.html)

On-line examples and videorecordings with worksheets of language advising sessions.

<http://ec.hku.hk/1to1/>