Learner Strategies
for Learner Autonomy

Planning and implementing learner training
for language learners

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This book is dedicated to my mother, Anne
Lanthier — who inspired me to be a teacher

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General Editor's Preface

One of the most important outcomes of the movement towards more communicatively oriented language learning and teaching has been the enhancement of the role of the learner in the language learning process. Old adages that teachers teach and learners learn (and the increasing recognition through empirical research that learners regularly don't learn what teachers teach), have compelled both classroom researchers and curriculum developers to focus their attention on the process of learning. Since one cannot empirically observe learning in action, the necessary indirectness of such attention has, in turn, encouraged teachers as well as researchers to take the issue to the learners themselves, to attempt, albeit vicariously, to experience through them what the nature of this process might be. This shift of orientation of research and teaching does not, of course, exist in some curricular vacuum, it is itself part and parcel of concurrent changes to the curriculum itself towards more learner-centered and participative models. If you focus on the learner, you at the same time focus on the curriculum itself and the practices of the classroom.

In particular, the traditional curriculum distinctions between content and methodology are no longer as sharp as they previously were. *How* and *why* learners learn (or don't learn) become as important as *what* they learn. As the early writings on the communicative curriculum presaged, the *process* of language learning becomes in part the *content* of learning. More than this, however, this focus on learning and the learner changes quite radically the typical distribution of power and authority in the classroom. How learners go about making meanings and making sense of language data becomes of central importance, and it is the learners who are the sources of information on and insight into this process. They inevitably become partners in the curriculum in quite different ways than was the case earlier.

Becoming partners, however, imposes its own responsibilities, ones which have again not traditionally been accorded to the 'recipients' of teaching. Important among these responsibilities is that of consciousness about one's own learning processes and strategies, knowing how one learns. Neither teachers nor learners can take this awareness for granted. It may be cognitively latent, but it needs to be realized into appropriate action: it needs training. Awareness, however, is not on its own enough: learners need awareness with a purpose. The idea of effective partnership depends both on learners knowing about themselves and their learning and also knowing how to act *autonomously* as learners within the structures of learning imposed by whatever institutional arrangements they participate in.

It is this twin focus on strategy and autonomy, then, which is crucial and which is at the heart of Anita Wenden's long-awaited new book in the **Language Teaching Methodology Series**. Readers of her and Joan Rubin's earlier book in the Series: *Learner Strategies in Language Learning* (1987) by now the standard introduction to the research literature in this field, will have been prepared for the particular contribution of this new volume. Research now shifts to action, in teacher education and training and towards classroom and program implementation. She sets out the key themes: of learner training, of teaching strategies for learning, of the needs to change the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and learners, to estimate

the impact on the curriculum and its syllabuses, and to develop these insights into the creation of appropriate learning tasks and materials development.

What is more significant perhaps than the themes themselves is the way in which they are realized and explored within the text. This is no mere theoretical account, but a task-based curriculum for teacher development. Throughout the book the overarching themes of *strategy* and *autonomy* are applied not only to learners but also to teachers and readers of the book itself. Data from the relevant literature, from learners' classroom accounts, from teachers' lesson plans and from mini case studies are made the subject of analytical and applicational tasks specially designed to engage the teacher/reader in exploring and critiquing the themes and their associated data. Anita Wenden offers her own commentary on these themes enabling the reader to focus and see the relevance of the tasks and to suggest ideas for new tasks and new activities that they can devise for their own learners. Perhaps most importantly in this consciously crafted book is the way the reader can construct his or her own pathways through the material. It is in many ways a *resource book* for developing and exploring learner autonomy, not a linear account.

Implicit in the approach taken to the roles of the teacher and the learner in this book is that of education for change. Autonomy, like awareness, needs a goal. The problematic issue of the impact of teacher education on classroom change is, of course, well-known. There have been panaceas and wild expectations in plenty. At times it has seemed as if the most debilitating influence on educational and curriculum change has been the enthusiasm of proponents. There is a need, then, for a measured approach and one which is firmly linked to different curriculum contexts and which goes to the heart of teaching and learning: the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Anita Wenden's book achieves this focus. It does so because it sees how close this partnership has to be. Learners need to learn how to learn, teachers how they teach, and both need to learn these things of each other. Both need the tools for description, interpretation and explanation: *what* happens, *how* it happens and most important of all *why* it happens. For that they need a critical guide. **Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy** will become a classic in the literature in the eyes of teachers mainly, I suspect, because it is such a guide and because above all it practises what it preaches.

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Acknowledgments

Thematic groupings

Theme	Chapter
Significance of learner training	1
Content of learner training	2, 3, 4
Getting information on how students learn	2, 3, 4 and 6
Teaching strategies	2 and 7
Changing learner beliefs	3 and 8
Changing learner attitudes	4 and 8
Syllabus development	2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
Developing tasks	5, 6, 7 and 8
Materials development	5, 7 and 8
Program models	9

Introduction

Aim of the book

Give a man a fish and he eats for a day.
Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime.
An ancient proverb

Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy aims to help teachers acquire the knowledge and skills they need to plan and implement learning that will help language learners become more autonomous. This is a goal with which few teachers will disagree. In fact, since the early 1970s, our language teaching practices have become increasingly learner centered.

Influenced by insights from humanist and cognitive psychology, classroom teachers and language teaching methodologists have looked at how the tasks we set for our students and the materials we ask them to use can be improved or changed. Humanist psychologists have stressed the importance of self-concept and affective factors in adult learning. According to Dubin and Olshtain (1986) language teaching objectives that draw on such humanist views on learning will encompass the following:

1. Emphasize meaningful communication.
2. Place high respect and value on the learner.
3. View learning as a form of self-realization.
4. Give learners considerable say in the decision-making process.
5. Place teachers in the role of facilitator whose task is to develop and maintain a supportive class atmosphere.
6. Stress the role of other learners as a support group.

Cognitive pyschologists, on the other hand, emphasize learners' mental processes. They have recognized that learners are actively involved in the process of learning — selectively attending to incoming data, hypothesizing, comparing, elaborating, reconstructing its meaning and integrating it with previously stored information for future use. Language learning tasks on the cognitive view of learning strive to give learners the opportunity to do the following:

1. Test their hypotheses.
2. Draw upon their prior knowledge.
3. Take risks.
4. Use the language to communicate (cf. Prator and Celce-Murcia, 1979; Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

If humanist and cognitive psychology has encouraged the development of learner-centered teaching methods, new insights from sociolinguistics have led to learner-centered language content. Emphasizing the pragmatic function of language, these insights have brought to our attention the need to make learners' special purposes for learning a language a determining factor in the selection of content (cf. Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). As a

result, courses and materials that focus exclusively on the needs of specific learner groups have been developed.

Teaching practices reflecting ideas from humanist and cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics can now be seen in many 'eclectic' classrooms. However, while these practices give the learner a more central role, in fact, they focus on teachers, striving to make them better by changing what they teach and how they teach.

A third set of learner-centered practices has focused on changing the learner — on making the learner a better learner. Writings describing this approach recommend that learner autonomy be included as an objective in language programs. They encourage teachers to help learners learn how to learn and outline methods for providing 'learner' training (cf. for example, Abe, Stanchina and Smith, 1975; Stanchina, 1976; Hosenfeld, 1976, 1981; Moulden, 1978, 1980; Dickinson and Carver, 1980; Holec, 1981; Sinclair and Ellis, 1985; Dickinson, 1987; Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Cohen, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy advocates this third approach; its purpose is to help teachers learn how to implement it.

Overview of the content

Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy provides teachers with tasks, data and commentary to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to help their students become more autonomous as learners. Some of the concepts and the terms used to talk about them may be new. However, the skills will not be, for teachers already use most of them in the planning of their language classes. Working through *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*, they will learn to apply these skills to learner training, and as they do, they will be able to approach the task of promoting autonomy in their classrooms more autonomously themselves. It will not be necessary to depend on pre-planned procedures from textbooks to decide what to teach (as regards learner training) and how. Teachers will be able to devise their own learning plans and evaluate those that already exist.

Chapter content

Each chapter in the book is based on a question that teachers will need to clarify as they set out to help their students become more autonomous. The intended outcome of each chapter is a planning resource or specific understandings implied by the question. Table I outlines the questions and related resource or understandings.

Information formats

Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy provides information on the chapter content through five different kinds of formats.

Chapter overview

The first page of each chapter includes an overview of the chapter content. The *focus* question indicates the topic of the chapter in general terms. The focus questions for each chapter have

TABLE I
Overview of content

Focus	Outcome
1 Why should I help students learn how to learn?	Rationale for promoting autonomy
2 How can I help my students deal with their learning problems?	An inventory of learning strategies
3 What beliefs about language learning do students hold? What should they know about it?	Resource file of materials on language and the learning process
4 What attitudes will encourage students to take responsibility for their learning?	An understanding of two attitudes necessary for autonomous learning
5 How do I decide *what* to teach students about how to learn?	A planning guide
6 How can I find out how my students actually go about learning?	Ways of obtaining, analyzing and recording information on students' learning processes
7 How can students be helped to learn to use strategies?	Guidelines for strategy training
8 How can learner beliefs about language learning be changed? How can learners be encouraged to be more autonomous?	Guidelines for changing learner beliefs and attitudes
9 How can learner autonomy be incorporated on a program level?	Illustrations of different ways of incorporating learner autonomy into a language program

already been listed in Table I. The *process* outline shows how the topic will be developed. The *outcome* refers to what the reader is supposed to 'get out of the chapter'. These are the understandings and planning resources which are listed in Table I.

Data

Data refers to information that illustrates the concepts or themes that develop the topic of each chapter. The four kinds of data used in the book are listed in Table II.

Tasks

Tasks, the third kind of format used in each chapter, will suggest ways for working with the data. The idea of including tasks to help readers clarify some of the ideas presented in

TABLE II
Data types

Chapter(s)	Data type
1, 3, 7	*Excerpts from the literature*: brief passages from the writings of language educators and researchers, cognitive psychologists
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	*Learner accounts*: learners' descriptions of how they approach their language learning in general or what they do to complete a particular language learning task
5, 7, 8	*Lesson plans*: procedures that illustrate guidelines to be used in the devising of tasks to promote autonomy
9	*Mini case studies*: descriptions of language programs that include learner autonomy as an objective in their curriculum.

a chapter or to apply them to their teaching is not new to the literature on language teaching methodology. Ordinarily, the tasks are listed at the end of each chapter and are a supplement for those who feel the need to think further about what they have read; readers may or may not do them.

In contrast, tasks are central to the methodology of *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*. Their purpose is to involve readers (teachers) more intensely with the content. Of course, good readers are active readers, and, as they reflect on their reading they will initiate their own tasks. It is not intended that the tasks in *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* discourage such personal initiative. However, they do provide ways of structuring reflection and of making explicit the concepts and themes that underlie the content of a chapter. Generally there are two kinds of tasks — analytic and application.

Analytic tasks encourage an inductive approach to learning about the content of each chapter. Some of these tasks will ask readers to reflect on their experience as learners and as teachers in order to elicit their prior knowledge on the subject and to initiate discussion. Others will suggest ways for working with the data that will lead to an understanding of the concepts and themes presented in the chapter. Finally, analytic tasks should prepare readers to evaluate the author's analysis of the same tasks, which follows in the commentary.

Application tasks ask readers to evaluate the planning resources they learn about in the various chapters. They will suggest ways of using these resources in a teaching/learning setting to test their usefulness. Application tasks usually follow the author's commentary.

Commentary

The author's commentary follows the data and the analytic tasks. It explains the concepts and themes that are the focus of the chapter using illustrations from the data (e.g. learner accounts, lesson plans) and making reference to the related theory and research. In Chapter 2, for example, two kinds of learning strategies are defined and classified, with examples from the two learner accounts presented at the beginning of the chapter. In Chapter 7, guidelines for strategy training are explained by referring to the lesson plan included in the chapter. In effect, the commentary is the author's response to the analytic tasks, which readers can compare with their own.

Valuable readings

At the end of each chapter there is a short annotated list of valuable readings relevant to the chapter focus for those who wish to pursue the topic further.

How to use the book

It is true that the content of the book is organized in such a way that later chapters build upon earlier ones, and, as noted earlier, there is a logic to the order in which the tasks, data and commentary are presented within a chapter. However, the time that teachers can set aside to pursue self-study may be limited. They may not be able to work through the chapters consecutively. Besides, they will probably be most interested in what is relevant to the problems or needs that their students are actually facing at any given time. Therefore, they are encouraged to work through the book according to an order that reflects these interests using the time they have available.

In other words, *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* should not be approached with the same set of expectations one has when setting out to read or study most other methodology books. It may best be viewed as a set of resources for an autonomous seminar on learner autonomy. Typically, in a teacher training or professional development setting, the seminar leader is the 'expert' (the college professor, the invited workshop leader), who is expected to select and set the tasks and to determine their order and purpose. Seminar participants can turn to the leader for help in clarifying questions and for (expert) views on the topic. In *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*, the book is a substitute for the expert in a seminar, but its role is somewhat different. It provides the tasks: the commentary is a synthesis of 'expert' opinion and can also be referred to for clarification. However, the teachers are the seminar leaders. They can choose the tasks and order them according to their particular needs and interests. They may turn to each other for clarification and for alternative opinions. The following suggestions take this general approach into account.

The learning group

The tasks should be done with one or more teachers. In this way it is possible to benefit from several views and different experiences. On the other hand, if for some reason it is necessary to work through the book alone, I have been assured by teachers who have used the material in this way that this can also be a valuable experience.

The learning journal

Teachers are encouraged to keep a learning journal. The journal can be a record-keeper of different kinds of information. Here are some suggestions:

- Evolving understandings and opinions about learner autonomy.
- Questions that need to be answered.
- Ideas to try in the classroom.
- Unclear concepts.
- Answers to the tasks.

Teachers can write in their journal after completing one set of tasks or a series of tasks. Alternatively, they may use it only at the outset of a chapter to briefly record a few ideas about the focus question and again at the end to summarize what has been learned. As teachers progress through the book, earlier notes in the journal can be examined and compared with later ones to see whether one's questions have been answered; to reflect on ideas one has tried out; to note how one's insights evolve. For teachers who work through the book on their own, using the journal in this way is a substitute for discussion with a learning group.

Order

Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy addresses questions about learning that may be of particular interest to teachers as students of learning or that may deal with learning problems their students have. Therefore, to decide in which order to work through the book, it will be necessary to identify these problems and questions. Teachers can, then, examine (1) the table of contents, (2) the list of thematic groupings and (3) the overview of each chapter

to find the chapter that relates to these interests and begin there. If concepts introduced in earlier chapters appear, it is possible to refer to the glossary for a short definition or to the index to locate the chapter(s) where they are discussed in more detail.

The order in which readers work through a chapter is also flexible and their approach will reflect their learning style. That is, having examined the overview, some may prefer to go directly to the commentary and then to do the tasks, ignoring some and spending more time on those which they consider more useful or interesting. Moreover, in reading the commentary, they may wish to limit themselves to the definitions and classifications and return to the analysis once the tasks are done or even at a later time. On the other hand, others may prefer to work inductively and do the tasks in exactly the order in which they are listed before reading the commentary.

Once again, I wish to emphasize that it is the reader/teacher who should decide how to work through the book. It is not necessary to start at the beginning and proceed page by page.

Procedures for completing a task

The following procedures are suggested for working through a set of tasks. They assume that teachers are working in a group of two or more and that they have set a time for meeting on a regular basis.

Data analysis tasks

Before the meeting:

1. Read and think about the tasks before meeting with your learning group.

During the meeting:

2. Do the task analysis.
3. Discuss and identify differences of opinion.
4. Reach a consensus on differences or an understanding of why there is disagreement.
5. Compare your insights with my commentary.

Teachers who are working through the tasks alone may wish to think about them or jot down their ideas in their learning journal. They can, then, compare their insights with the commentary.

Application tasks

1. Plan the application with your group.
2. Implement the applications using your whole class or selected students.
3. Implementation may be done in teams and other members of the group may be invited to observe.
4. Analyze your experience together with members of your group, comparing insights, problems and outcomes.
5. Discuss together possible revisions.
6. Make any revisions suggested by the evaluation and discussion.
7. Implement a second time.

A final note

Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy is a task-based approach to teacher education. Its contents will not be mastered in one quick reading. Of course, teachers can look at the table of contents or the chapter overview and skim the commentary sections in each chapter. This will provide them with a theoretical notion of what the book is about. To appreciate the theory, however, they will need to work through the tasks. This will allow them to relate it to their own experience-based insights and so to deepen their understanding of its significance.

Underlying the aims of *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* is the belief that teacher education is an essential ingredient in the management of educational change. In the promotion of new methods and materials, the teacher is the main change agent — not the materials or techniques in which innovations are packaged. Their acceptance and success will depend on the teacher. In other words, however teacher-proof new materials or techniques may be, they will be used inappropriately by an untrained teacher and not at all by unwilling teachers who may be unwilling because they are unaware of their relevance. Finally, because educational change is human change, the specific needs of learners and the particular learning tasks which respond to these needs will vary. The implementation of new methods and the use of new materials will depend on the creativity of a committed and informed teacher. Therefore it becomes important that opportunities be provided for teachers to educate themselves in the classroom applications of research-based educational innovations.

Certainly, when it comes to acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to help learners become more autonomous, participating in a weekend workshop or reading through a manual of suggested techniques will not be sufficient. Teachers will need time to reflect, experiment and evaluate. *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* is intended to guide such reflection and experimentation. It is a teaching resource that teachers can turn to time and time again in search of tasks that will enable them to gain insight into the questions that emerge as they do so.

Chapter 1

Reasons for promoting learner autonomy

Focus   Do you agree that helping students learn how to *learn* a language is as important as helping them learn how to *use* it?

Process
- Characteristics of autonomous language learners
- Reasons for promoting learner autonomy

Outcome   Rationale for promoting learner autonomy

Characteristics of autonomous language learners

1.1 Describing autonomous language learners
The following are excerpts from the accounts of two language learners, Laszlo and Ilse, who were asked to talk about how they helped themselves learn English.

(a) As you read each account, try to determine whether they are auto-
    nomous learners.

(b) Use illustrations from the accounts to support your views.

LEARNER ACCOUNT 1.1

Laszlo immigrated to the United States from Hungary, where he had begun his English studies on his own. Once in the United States, he began to work. At the time of the interview which formed the basis for this account, he was also taking formal courses in English for seven hours a week while he continued to work.

I didn't learn English in school. I learned it in a private way, so I had problems with my spoken English and the practical way of expressing my thoughts to put the ideas into forms was my problem. I understand by reading much more than speaking. In the first [when he had arrived in the United States], I couldn't catch [what] other people said because it was very strange for my ear.

After reading . . . it's difficult. I couldn't speak to anybody . . . my problem [is] I understand a lot of words . . . that is only the passive way of improving my knowledge . . . . But . . . here I have [the] opportunity to speak more to practise the theoretical knowledge I acquired in Hungary . . . . I had some improvement.

In Hungary I read and I learned alone. I didn't have a good method though . . . a system. I bought a book. It's English, a verb book. Then I went through it . . . four lessons. I learned the verbs, the grammar, but one of my deficiencies was I didn't resolve the exercises. I only accumulated a great deal of the words and expressions. I didn't take the trouble. I was impatient . . . in a short time I wanted to . . . [acquire] a very large quantity of knowledge.

When you found something you didn't understand, how did you deal with it?

I looked it up in the dictionary. I had a good dictionary though it was English–Hungarian so I didn't eliminate the Hungarian language. Here I have an English dictionary . . .

Webster's . . . so the explanation of the word is in English; it's much better. I don't have to think in my native language.

I came here in March . . . so two months I spent in Ohio. I worked, I got a job . . . I was [an] aluminium polisher. I didn't have the chance to speak. I was silent all day. That was not pleasant.

After work, I had some friends . . . Americans . . . it was very good. Whenever I didn't understand anything, I asked, I inquired and they explained. I was not ashamed to ask. That was the main point. I tried to overcome this shame . . . this fear and . . . . This is the only way to learn to ask always . . . learn . . . .

What did you do after they explained it to you?

I kept it in my mind. I practised . . . I tried to keep it in my mind.

You tried to remember it?

Yes, memorize and to recollect it more times in a day . . . and to use it to build a sentence by myself and in conversation.

Did you have any other ways to figure out the meaning?

Sure . . . the word is not isolated. It's in the environment of other words. Sometimes I inferred the meaning. Sometimes I didn't ask because I found it out on my own.

What do you do when you want to say something in English? Do you plan before?

When I talk . . . I try to eliminate my native language so the idea and the word are almost simultaneous. I concentrate on what I say but I don't formulate it from the Hungarian language. It's the best. A language has to reflect the reality and not in another language.

I remember in Hungary three years ago, at the very beginning I used the method where I connect the English word to the object and not to the Hungarian word, so I made an associative relation — the objects and the English word . . . . I think of the idea, the image and not the Hungarian word.

Of course, when I talk, I always have the feeling that I'm making a mistake, so I ask my friends to correct me.

After they corrected you, what did you do?

I noticed . . . I kept it in mind. I fixed it in (my) mind. I try to remember. I think about the meaning. I never imitate without understanding. There is always movement in my mind.

Sometimes I try to figure out my mistakes myself by connecting the word or phrase to the situation where I learned it.

It's a good way to learn from those kind of mistakes . . . good because I learned by that. I became aware of my mistakes. [But] . . . that's not a good feeling to know how little I know and how much I have to improve to reach a good level . . . [but] it gave me power, it gave me energy to get over these difficulties and at the same time it was despairing how much I have to learn but usually it gave me an energy and a motivation to work [on] these problems.

What about when you don't know how to say something, for example ordering a sandwich in a restaurant? What do you do?

I hear how others ask. Not that I couldn't [ask myself] but it wouldn't sound American. My version wouldn't be the highest level. So I always pay attention to people's speech. My mind is always open to accept information about the language. I always concentrate because I have to learn.

I plan to acquire this language perhaps in another ten years.

LEARNER ACCOUNT 1.2

Ilse, who had learned English in high school in Austria, spent a year or more living and travelling in the United States shortly after completing her high school. Then she returned home.

I came here in May mostly to learn English and study the language where I can watch the culture and background.

I think it's easier to learn the language when you can watch the culture and the people and everything. I especially want to take the habits from the people when I'm in this country. I want to learn everything, all customs and everything.

I studied eight years in high school — but only one or two lessons a week. You don't profit of it 'cause most things are spoken in German; you only learn grammar.

I saw I knew very much grammar [when I came to the United States] but I couldn't speak a word. I didn't dare to speak a word . . . I couldn't express myself in the right way, so I was afraid to speak. But when you are forced to speak, it comes at that time. That's the benefit of studying in the country.

In school in your country, you can study a long time (and never learn) . . . because you have to translate everything into your language. But here, as far as I'm concerned after some time I began to think also in English.

When I first came, I spent most of my time walking. I only walked and listened to the people speaking and went to museums and interesting places. I wanted to know where I was . . . . Little by little I lost the fear of everything foreign and I became accustomed to the sound. It's very important to get the sound and to keep it and then to transfer everything to thinking.

I watched a little TV too. I didn't understand the TV news very well at the beginning . . . a few words but it didn't give me the content. It was very difficult and boring. I didn't get what they spoke. But I tried to understand to get the main idea . . . according to the few words I understood. Maybe there were more words that I knew, but the sound was difficult. It was too fast.

Maybe I didn't increase my vocabulary much, but I got used to the sound. Now I understand with the same vocabulary.

I also listened to people's conversations. Of course, some idioms, those that are very unusual, you can't understand at the beginning. But they are used very often and you ask one day what it is and what it means. Then you know it and get it into your vocabulary. But some things are hard to use because the conversation goes so fast.

Exercises in class were very useful. When the teacher notices the class didn't understand something, then we repeat it over again and I see if what I thought before was not right and then I compare it. I just don't take it as it comes. I change it in my mind. There's always a movement. You don't recognize it exactly. You only know that it becomes better.

When I read, I try to look up as little as possible. I try to avoid memorizing vocabulary. I try to get it out of the context and to get it by using it.

When I don't understand a passage, I read it more and more and I look up only the words that are really important. Then I try to remember the meaning in English and not to translate everything into German.

Sometimes I try to find other examples for it — other meanings to explain the word in English. That's what I mean by using. It's better for thinking in the language. because when you look up every word, you're always in thinking in your language. But when

you try to remember it and try to get it out of the context, you begin to think in English.

I think this is very important because some words don't have the same meaning in different languages. Some have only a meaning in one language. You couldn't translate it 'cause it wouldn't sound very good, so I don't try.

I'm also taking Spanish classes. That's a good way to learn because I also have the exercise in English that I told you about — listening to the people and putting the sound in my mind. I do that there too. Of course Spanish is very different from English. In Spanish you speak like you write. In English pronunciation is different from the writing. But it's not so very difficult. It's difficult but also I compare. Some words are similar in English and Spanish and completely different in German. Some words in German and Spanish are similar and completely different in English.

So when you compare those you also learn because you remember it more easily. This is also an example of using. Using is better than memorizing only.

1.2 Identifying autonomous language learners in your class
Consider the learners you are presently teaching. Are they autonomous learners?

(a) Divide them into the following groups:
    (i) those you consider autonomous;
    (ii) those who would be open to training for autonomy;
    (iii) those who might be resistant to such training.
(b) What criteria did you use for dividing the students?

Reasons for promoting learner autonomy

Few teachers will disagree with the importance of helping language learners become more autonomous as learners. However, while they may often give their students hints about how to learn, learner autonomy is not usually included as a main objective in their lessons plans and course outlines. In this next series of tasks you will consider whether it should be and why.

1.3 Listing your reasons for promoting learner autonomy
Should language teachers systematically include in their lesson plans activities that would help students become more autonomous as learners?

(a) List reasons to support your opinion.
(b) If you answered yes, state whether you consider such activities to be equal in importance with language training.

1.4 Researching reasons for promoting learner autonomy
The following excerpts are from selected writings in second language learning and cognitive psychology. Each one provides information that argues explicitly or implicitly for the educational importance of helping learners learn how to learn. As you read the excerpts identify and summarize their arguments.

EXCERPTS

From 'Learning behaviors of successful adult students in intensive language training'

When interview findings for highly successful students were compared with those for the least successful, they revealed differences between the groups of most and least successful learners in the following areas: the diversity of French practice activities reported per individual, insight into and interest in one's own ways of taking and retaining information, and personal involvement in learning the language. Highly successful learners tended to consciously expose themselves to French and to practise it in different ways. They in most cases appeared quite insightful about their ways of learning, and without exception had strong and multiple reasons for learning French . . . . On the other hand, the types of learning procedures reported were similar for both groups.

. . . results from interviews with the eleven most successful students suggested that . . . rehearsal, many types of association-making, and practice (retrieval) are important techniques in the learning of new language material . . .

The statistical analyses and interview findings both provide evidence that a number of the learning behaviors and activities investigated were indeed related to the improvement of French listening and speaking skills by these adult students in beginning level intensive French training.

[Wesche, 1979]

From 'Classroom implications of learner diversity'

Nicholas (1985: 181) contrasts: (a) learners who concentrate on meaning with those who concentrate on form; (b) those who practice extensively in the same area with those who move on to new areas immediately; (c) those who control the flow with those who prefer to react to the initiatives of others; (d) those who have a high criterion of accuracy with those who are fluently inaccurate; (e) those who explore functions and those who explore structures.

Whether it is possible to consider cognitive style without analysing personality variables remains to be seen. Each individual will have a unique way of dealing with reality and processing information. Of course, perceptive teachers have always attempted to deal with these differences without being able to analyse them precisely, but, so far, little has been done to incorporate them into programme design.

. . . Brown feels that 'The burden on the learner is to invoke the appropriate style for the context . . . . The burden on the teacher is to understand the preferred styles of each learner and to sow the seeds of flexibility in the learner' (1987: 88). This suggests . . . the burden is on the learner to adjust to the learning context. Perhaps this is the most realistic approach to take until we know more about what is going on in the learner's head . . . we know that making them more flexible is not going to do them any harm. Perhaps good learners are those who are capable of making those shifts themselves anyway.

[Tyacke and Mendelsohn, 1988]

From 'Metacognition, self-knowledge, and learning disabilities: some thoughts on knowing and doing'

A child's personal beliefs, motivations, and affect clearly influence the ways that the child addresses and solves problems. Research on self-esteem . . . has demonstrated a clear link between an individual's judgment of his or her own competence and that

individual's actual performance on school-related tasks. The implication for metacognitive theory and methodology is that attention must be given to 'person variables' such as intentions, attributions, expectancies and beliefs about one's competence and learning abilities.

One area in which these variables may influence how the child approaches a problem focuses on self-perception of ability and the belief that a problem is solvable, given effort.

Self-schemata represents knowledge about one's own social and cognitive features. Both adults and children form self-schemata concerning their capabilities and limitations, their degree of personal control over academic achievement, their reasons for success and failure at different tasks, and their expectancies for the future . . . . The child's view of himself or herself as a learner is an important form of metacognition.

[Hagen et al., 1982]

From 'Cognition and adaptation: the importance of learning to learn'

It seems clear that the ability to learn new information can be important for adaptation. We have focused on people's abilities to learn new information by consulting written documents and texts . . . . Our evidence suggests that academically successful and less-successful students may take different approaches to the problem of learning. The successful students seem more likely to evaluate the arbitrariness of factual content and to spontaneously activate knowledge that can make information more meaningful and significant. When less successful children are explicitly prompted to ask themselves relevant questions (e.g. what's the relationship between this fact and this activity?), their performance improves; so does their enjoyment of the tasks. Our work in the area of intervention is only preliminary, of course, but the evidence is at least consistent with the notion that the activities that underlie learning are subject to modification . . . .

[Bransford et al., 1981]

From 'Comprehension monitoring: the neglected learning strategy'

As Markman (1981) states, 'The ability to monitor one's comprehension is necessary for academic excellence . . . without knowledge about comprehension, comprehension itself will suffer' (p. 81) . . . . Researchers who focus on college student's monitoring skills also come up with results which indicate that children are not the only ones deficient in such strategies (Baker, 1979).

. . . Why is this so? Why do college students lack such skills even after years of schooling? Schallert and Kleiman (1979) offer the explanation that the comprehension-monitoring function is one that teachers typically perform for their students. Teachers try to stay in tune with their students' level of understanding by watching for subtle clues (e.g. facial expressions) and by stopping at appropriate times to ask questions in order to ascertain students' weak spots. In other words, teachers are very often much more active in the learning process than are students. While this may result in very effective teaching strategies, these teaching behaviors do not necessarily help the students gain independence by developing effective comprehension-monitoring strategies of their own.

Successful students, however, learn to adopt active strategies for themselves, incorporating monitoring behaviors into their repertoire of learning skills. Less successful students apparently do not, continuing to rely on teachers for this function. This is, perhaps, why students encounter difficulty in college, where most instructors do not have the time or desire to serve this purpose for students who, by this time, are presumed to be independent learners.

[Weinstein and Rogers, 1985]

From 'The development of a learning strategies curriculum'

By not stressing learning strategies, educators in essence discourage students from developing and exploring new strategies, and, in so doing, limit students' awareness of their cognitive capabilities. For example, the results of the administration of an extensive learning strategy inventory (Dansereau et al., 1975) indicate that even good college students have very little knowledge of alternative learning techniques. This lack of awareness obviously limits an individual's ability in a situation requiring new learning strategies. In addition, if the strategies that individuals have spontaneously adopted do not match their cognitive capabilities, the emotional toll may be very large. Most of us know individuals who spend inordinate amounts of time memorizing college or high school materials and are still barely 'getting by'. Such an individual's personal, intellectual, and social development must certainly suffer from the pressures created by this use of a relatively inefficient learning strategy.

[Dansereau, 1978]

From 'What do we want teaching materials for?'

. . . the analysis by highlighting the complexity of the teacher's job, also sheds light on a common problem found almost every time that teachers are observed or observe themselves. It is the problem of teacher 'overload'.

Teacher 'overload' often entails learner underinvolvement since teachers are doing work learners could more profitably do for themselves. Involvement does not just mean 'activity', however. It is not just that learners are not busy enough. 'Involvement' means something more akin to Curran's 'investment' (Curran, 1972, 1976) which suggests a deep sort of involvement, relating to the whole-person. This sort of 'whole-person involvement' should be related not simply to 'participation in classroom activities' but to participation in decision-making, and in the whole business of the management of language learning . . . . But we should not expect the learners to be already expert at the sorts of decision-making . . . involved in the management of language learning. We must therefore consider ways of conducting learner-training.

[Allwright, 1981]

From 'Learning strategies as information management'

For the past few years it has been generally acknowledged in ESL teaching circles that an increased emphasis on helping learners learn how to learn would be valuable. Every teacher has encountered students who, although intelligent and adequately exposed to apparently useful and meaningful material, nevertheless seem to learn very little. Such instances of non-learning are attributed to a number of possible causes: the student may be disoriented by the formal learning situation or by Anglo-Saxon cultural assumptions in general; there may be a clash of the student's personality with the teaching approach; the material may be perceived to be irrelevant; the student may be under excessive emotional stress; he may have poor language aptitude; and so on.

Another common way of stating the cause in many of these cases is to say that the student uses inadequate or inappropriate learning strategies . . . . Given the inevitable limitations on time and resources for teaching specific language content, it is now clear that learners could benefit greatly in the long run if a substantial proportion of the formal learning time available were given over to training students in ways of learning for themselves. Given the opportunities for exposure to English which lie all around them,

it would be wise to help learners develop their ability to take advantage of those resources for their own learning purposes.

[Willing, 1987]

From 'Towards task-based language learning'

From what has been said so far, a number of characteristics of communicative language teaching have emerged which impose conditions on task design . . .

From such conditions we can derive some criteria for what could be termed 'good' language learning tasks . . . .

(11) Should allow for co-evaluation by learner and teacher of the task and of the performance of the task.
(12) Should develop the learners' capacities to estimate consequences and repercussions of the task in question.
(13) Should provide opportunities for metacommunication and metacognition . . . .
(15) Should promote learner-training for problem sensing and problem solving . . . .
(19) Should promote a critical awareness about data and the processes of language learning.

[Candlin, 1987]

1.5 Outlining your rationale for promoting learner autonomy
Refer to arguments in the reading and to those you listed in Task 1.4 to outline the reasons you would use to convince a colleague that it is important to help students learn how to learn and so to become more autonomous.

Conclusion

In this chapter, you examined two learner accounts to determine the characteristics of autonomous language learners and read excerpts from the professional literature for insights on the importance of helping learners learn how to learn. The excerpts focused, to a large extent, on why some learners are more successful than others. In effect, 'successful' or 'expert' or 'intelligent' learners have learned how to learn. They have acquired the learning strategies, the knowledge about learning, and the attitudes that enable them to use these skills and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately and independently of a teacher. Therefore, they are autonomous. The literature also argued, implicitly or explicitly, for the need to provide learner training, especially for those learners who may not be as varied and flexible in their use of learning strategies as their successful classmates. This information, hopefully, has stimulated you to develop your rationale for making learner autonomy a twin objective with linguistic autonomy in your learning plans. In the chapters that follow you will examine and evaluate resources that can be used to develop and implement these plans.

Valuable readings

Teachers who are interested in reading further about the theory and research related to learner strategies and learner autonomy may choose any one of the references from which the excerpts in this chapter were taken.