A TESOL Symposium

Learner Autonomy:
What Does the Future Hold?

Faculty of Languages, University of Sevilla

Sevilla, Spain
Saturday, November 8, 2008

Featured Speakers

Phil Benson
Leni Dam
Lienhard Legenhausen

Closing Session Facilitator

Rosa Manchón

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symposium Agenda</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers Bios and an Overview of the Presentations</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomy In and Out of Class</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Benson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leni Dam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arguments for Learner Autonomy:</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing Linguistic Developments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lienhard Legenhausen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closing Remarks:</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy: Learners, Teachers, and Contexts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Manchón</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants List</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy: What Does the Future Hold?

Overview

From technological developments to the fundamental objectives behind the Council of Europe's Common European Framework, learner autonomy is a key issue in English language teaching (ELT). Although learner autonomy has received a great deal of attention from researchers and policy makers, 2008 presents an opportunity to pause and reflect on what has been achieved and, based on that experience, to explore the areas in the field of learner autonomy that ELT professionals need to research and develop in the future.

This one-day symposium provided an opportunity for ELT professionals to learn from and interact with leading professionals in the field on the important topic of learner autonomy.

TESOL’s affiliate, TESOL-SPAIN, chose the theme for this symposium. TESOL acknowledges and appreciates the assistance of TESOL-SPAIN in organizing this event.
TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy: What Does the Future Hold?

Symposium Agenda

November 8, 2008

Faculty of Languages, University of Sevilla
Sevilla, Spain

10:00 am–11:00 am  Check in/Tea and Coffee and Networking

11:00 am–11:15 am  Welcome and Opening Remarks

Shelley Wong, 2008-2009 President, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

Hilary Plass, President, TESOL-SPAIN

11:15 am–1:45 pm  Featured Speakers: Introductory Presentations

Autonomy In and Out of Class
Phil Benson

How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited
Leni Dam

Arguments for Learner Autonomy: Analysing Linguistic Developments
Lienhard Legenhausen

1:45 pm–3:45 pm  Lunch

3:45 pm–5:30 pm  Featured Speakers: Concurrent Discussions

Autonomy In and Out of Class
Phil Benson

How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited
Leni Dam

Arguments for Learner Autonomy: Analysing Linguistic Developments
Lienhard Legenhausen

5:30 pm–6:30 pm  Closing Session, Questions & Comments
Rosa Manchón

6:30 pm–7:15 pm  Symposium Participants Are Invited to Participate in an Informal Networking Cocktail in the Registration Area Hosted by TESOL-SPAIN
Autonomy In and Out of Class

Although a great deal of research has been done on classroom language learning, relatively little research has been done on language learning outside the classroom. The aim of this presentation, therefore, is both to reassert the fundamental relevance of the world of learning beyond the classroom to the idea of autonomy and to address certain problems that arise in the conceptualisation of this world. The presentation will address three central questions:

1. How can we conceptualize learning beyond the classroom in its own terms (without, for example, using the term classroom)?
2. How can we conceptualize learning beyond the classroom independently of particular settings and modes of practice?
3. How can we best describe the relationship between the classroom and the world beyond the classroom?

I will argue that, in the 21st century, second language learning increasingly tends to straddle the divide between institutionalised education and daily life, such that the development of autonomy is best understood as an outcome of relationships between learning in and out of the classroom, rather than engagement in one or the other.

Phil Benson is a professor in the English Department at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. He has published widely on the subject of autonomy, including the book Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning (Pearson, 2001) and a recent article in Language Teaching (vol. 40, no. 1). His current research interests include language learning histories (he is co-editor with David Nunan of the recent collection, Learners’ Stories: Difference and Diversity in Language Learning, Cambridge University Press, 2005), popular culture and language learning, and language teacher education.

How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited

In 1994 my article “How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?” appeared in Die Neueren Sprachen. It was based on my own teaching experience of developing learner autonomy. Since then, I have supported many teachers in developing learner autonomy in their classes via workshops, talks, in-service teacher training courses, and so on. While trying to help these teachers to integrate the concept of learner autonomy into their teaching and learning, and consequently into their classrooms, I have realized that, although some of the tools mentioned in my original article seem less important today, many of the principles are still valid. This presentation will give an overview of what I see as important issues in today’s autonomous classroom.

Leni Dam took the first steps toward developing learner autonomy in language teaching and learning in her own classes in 1973, at the secondary school level in Denmark. These early experiences have informed her subsequent writing, lectures, and workshops as well as her research. Her post as educational adviser at University College, Copenhagen, which she took in 1979, has provided new insights into learner autonomy and excellent opportunities for
implementing its principles in teacher education. In 2004 she was awarded an honorary doctorate in pedagogy from Karlstad University, Sweden.

Arguments for Learner Autonomy: Analysing Linguistic Developments

Today we see too little learner autonomy in our classrooms. We need to recognize the necessity of intensifying our efforts to disseminate the basic principles of learner autonomy and to encourage their implementation in foreign language classrooms. One strategy is to provide empirical evidence to convince practitioners and educational authorities that autonomous language learners are highly successful when pursuing core objectives such as communicative competence. This presentation will report on a longitudinal study of the linguistic development of autonomous language learners.

Lienhard Legenhausen is a professor of language pedagogy and applied linguistics at the University of Münster, Germany. Together with Leni Dam he carried out the research project Language Acquisition in an Autonomous Learning Environment (LAALE), which systematically followed the linguistic development of an “autonomous class” over a period of 4 years. His publications include "Language Acquisition Without Grammar Instruction?—The Evidence From an Autonomous Classroom," Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, 38 (1999).

CLOSING SESSION

Rosa Manchón is an associate professor in applied linguistics at the University of Murcia, Spain. Her research interests include the sociocognitive dimension of second language acquisition, particularly second language writing processes, and research methods. She has published extensively both nationally and internationally, and her publications have appeared in journals such as Communication and Cognition, Learning and Instruction, Journal of Second Language Writing, Language Learning, and Modern Language Journal. She serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Second Language Writing and the AILA Applied Linguistics Book Series (published by John Benjamins).
Autonomy In and Out of Class

Phil Benson
Hong Kong Institute of Education
Hong Kong SAR, China

From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in the school.

John Dewey (1899/1959, pp. 76–78)

It is widely acknowledged that high levels of foreign language proficiency are seldom achieved in the classroom alone and that acquisition probably takes place most rapidly through a combination of instruction and exposure (Ellis, 1994, p. 617). We also have evidence that learners who achieve high levels of proficiency often attribute their success to engagement with the foreign language beyond the classroom (Nunan, 1991; Pickard, 1995). But perhaps we should take pause to consider the implications of statements such as these. Where exactly is the world beyond the foreign language classroom? How much do we really know about this world? And, at the end of the day, can we really make a distinction between the kinds of learning that take place outside and inside classrooms?

Research on learner autonomy is one area in which we might reasonably expect to find answers to these kinds of questions. Indeed, autonomous learning originally implied alternatives to the classroom, and the term is still used from time to time to refer to modes of learning such as self-access, CALL, and distance learning. Within the field of autonomy, however, this usage has fallen out of favour and the term autonomy now tends to refer exclusively to an internal capacity of the learner: the capacity to take charge of, responsibility for, or control over one’s own learning (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981). Arguably, this shift in usage arises from a shift in attention towards classroom applications of the idea of autonomy in the 1990s (Benson, 2008). More recently still, it has been argued that the development of learner autonomy depends upon teacher autonomy, and to the extent that we focus on classroom teaching and learning, this may be true. But does this also imply that foreign language learners cannot become autonomous without engagement in classroom learning? Or would we rather argue that it is self-directed engagement with the target language beyond the classroom that makes the greater contribution to the development of autonomy?

The issues that I want to discuss in this paper arise from the somewhat problematic status of the world beyond the classroom in foreign language teaching theory and, more specifically, the theory of autonomy. One of the key issues that I want to address is how we might provide coherent accounts of a world that is apparently highly fragmented. This fragmentation was evident, for example, in a recent review paper that I wrote, which contained two major sections covering applications of autonomy, entitled “Autonomy Beyond the Classroom” and “Autonomy in the Classroom” (Benson, 2007). By placing the sections in this order, I was in a small way trying to subvert the assumption that classroom learning now somehow has
priority over learning beyond the classroom in the theory and practice of autonomy. But I remained less than satisfied with the section "Autonomy Beyond the Classroom," which included subsections on self-access, CALL, distance learning, tandem learning, study abroad, out-of-class learning, self-instruction, and blended learning, each containing a brief review of recent literature related to autonomy. It was particularly difficult, I felt, to make connections across these categories, partly because the literature in each of these areas now tends to be self-referential and self-contained. Each category, it seemed, represented an area of research and practice that was, but should not be, isolated from the others. Autonomy may be the idea that ties these different areas together, but the bulk of the literature in these areas is not, in fact, greatly concerned with autonomy. Research on autonomy, meanwhile, is much less concerned with learning beyond the classroom than it once was. I concluded, therefore, that in view of its importance to language learners, we perhaps need to theorize the idea of language learning beyond the classroom in much the same way that researchers have theorized the idea of classroom language learning in recent years. This paper attempts to begin that process by discussing some conceptual tools that might be used to map out the field.

In the quote that I used to begin this paper, John Dewey, a distinguished American philosopher and educational reformer who is often cited as one of the father figures of autonomy in learning, deplores the separation of schooling from the daily life of the student outside the school. The need to integrate learning with the experience of everyday life is also a key idea within the notions of autonomy and self-directed learning. Yet it also occurs to me that Dewey did not find it especially difficult to conceptualise the distinction between in-school and out-of-school experiences, and this may be because the distinction was more clear-cut a century ago than it is today. One of the difficulties that we will encounter, therefore, in getting to grips with the world beyond the language classroom lies in the fact that we are not simply dealing with the ways in which experiences of daily life might be integrated with classroom learning, but rather with complex social arrangements for learning that often straddle the distinction between the classroom and the world beyond it. What are we to make, for example, of after-school attendance at extra “tutorial” classes or the kinds of lessons that students often attend during periods of study abroad? Both of these clearly take place in classrooms, but they also take place outside what we might think of as the students’ “normal” classrooms. And what are we to make of voluntary but formal extra-curricular activities that take place outside these “normal” classrooms, but in school? The point here is that although classroom learning is very often separated from learning outside the classroom as Dewey suggests, from the point of view of the individual learner the two usually exist in some kind of relationship with each other.

The three central issues dealt with in this paper flow from these observations. First, I ask how the world beyond the classroom is related to the classroom by looking at some of the basic assumptions of classroom language learning research. Second, I explore how the “setting” and “mode of practice” might serve as useful tools for mapping out this world. Third, I look at the notion of language learning in the everyday life of the learner as a potential overarching construct covering both classroom learning and learning beyond the classroom.
LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM AND CLASSROOM RESEARCH

Over the past few decades classroom research has emerged as a distinct domain of research within the field of second language acquisition research. Since our interest is in the possibility of carving out a space for research on learning beyond the classroom, we can perhaps begin by inquiring into the scope of classroom research and asking whether our field can be constituted in a similar way. According to van Lier (1990), classroom research “investigates what happens in second language classrooms” (p. 174). Allwright and Bailey (1991) describe it as cover term for a range of studies focused on classroom language learning and teaching. The unifying factor, they suggest, is “that the emphasis is solidly on trying to understand what goes on in the classroom setting” (Allwright & Bailey, p. 2). The phrases “what happens” and “what goes on” indicate a focus on process, and we might reasonably suggest that research on learning beyond the classroom is concerned with the processes that take place when learners engage in language learning in settings other than the classroom. One major difference between the two fields could be that classroom processes are more likely to involve teaching than the processes investigated in the world beyond the classroom. But this will not always be the case and it would be wrong to suggest that the two fields can be defined by the presence and absence of teaching.

Allwright and Bailey (1991) refer to the classroom as a “setting” and this is, in my view, the crux of what classroom research is about: In principle, it is the investigation of teaching and learning in the classroom setting. But Bailey (2006, p. 8) also suggests that “the classroom is both the setting for and the object of investigation in language classroom research.” What Bailey means by this is that classroom research takes place in classrooms (i.e., researchers are interested in processes within the classroom setting), but there is also interest in the classroom setting itself (i.e., researchers are interested in the nature of classrooms and the kinds of processes they support). This suggests that research on learning beyond the classroom may also have two aspects: one concerned with the processes that take place in settings other than the classroom and the other with the nature of these settings. An important difference is, perhaps, that although classroom researchers recognize that there are many kinds of classrooms, the classroom tends to be treated as a single type of setting. The world beyond the classroom, on the other hand, consists of many different settings, which may have little in common with each other apart from the fact that they are not classroom. As a field of research, therefore, research on learning beyond the classroom is likely to involve a much stronger focus on the nature of various settings and the kinds of processes they support than we find in classroom research. This is essentially what I mean by mapping out the world of learning beyond the classroom. At present we are not exactly sure what we will find when we set out to explore this world.

So far so good, but before finally setting up the world beyond the classroom as an alternative domain of research to the classroom, I want to look briefly at what I see as certain problems in the conceptualization of classroom research. The first concerns what classroom researchers mean by the classroom. For most people, the prototypical classroom will be of the kind found in a school with a teacher standing or sitting in front of a chalkboard, whiteboard, or projections screen, facing a class of 30 or more students. But this does not describe all classrooms, and for this reason, it is difficult to say exactly what a classroom is. For van Lier (1988), “the L2 classroom can be
defined as the gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning” (p. 47). What van Lier is trying to do here is to detach the concept of the classroom from any particular institutional or architectural setting and to foreground the teacher–learner relationship as its essential feature. But at the same time, such a definition seems to leave little room for the world of learning beyond the classroom, especially if we assume that the two or more people do not have to be in the same physical space or if we adopt a broad view of the role of instructor. For example, a one-to-one counselling session in a self-access centre or an online distance learning session might well constitute a classroom in van Lier’s sense, although I suspect that many who organize teaching and learning activities of these kinds would be inclined to resist the suggestion that they are engaged in classroom teaching and learning.

The second problem that I want to note is that classroom research is, in practice, often concerned with much wider issues that the nature of classrooms and what happens in them. Nunan (1990) states that, “classroom research can focus on teachers or on learners, or on the interaction between teachers and learners.” Research that focuses on the learner, he then goes on to say,

looks at, for example, the developmental aspects of learner language, the learning styles and strategies used by different learners, the type of language prompted by various types of materials and pedagogic tasks, the classroom interaction that takes place between learners, and the effect of this interaction on learner language development. (p. 2)

These are, of course, all important areas of research in language learning, but although some are specific to the domain of classroom research, others are not. Language learning styles and strategies, for example, can be investigated both inside and outside the classroom, although most studies have been conducted among classroom learners using instruments administered in classrooms (Benson & Gao, 2008).

In this way, classroom research has, in a sense, captured for the classroom many of the processes that would otherwise come under the heading of second language acquisition research. Clearly, research on language learning beyond the classroom is also concerned with these processes and there would, therefore, be considerable overlap with classroom research in respect to both processes and settings. We should not, perhaps, be thinking of separate fields with independent objects of inquiry, but of different perspectives on very similar objects of inquiry. This would also seem to accord with recent work by van Lier (2007) and Allwright (2003, 2005), which also points to the need for classroom researchers to broaden their focus to take account of out-of-class learning. We may nevertheless reflect on the difficulty of finding a name for the field that I am discussing which does not use the term classroom or express the area of inquiry in terms of what it is not. Alternatives to the term I am using include out-of-class learning, out-of-school learning, informal learning, and noninstructed learning; but all of these terms express the area of inquiry in terms of what it is not. The terminology itself seems to declare the centrality of institutions and formal processes of instruction to learning. It also seems to cast doubt, in our own area of inquiry, on what countless numbers of people have been doing for many centuries: learning foreign languages without the aid of institutions or formal instruction.
SETTINGS AND MODES OF PRACTICE

In the last section, I suggested that, as a field of research, learning beyond the classroom is a matter of both process and setting. I also suggested that we might need a stronger focus on the nature of the various settings and the kinds of processes they support than we typically find in classroom research. In order to develop this idea further, in this section, I want to discuss the notion of setting in more detail and in contrast to the notion of mode of practice, which I use to refer to routinized processes that take place regularly in particular settings.

Earlier, I referred to a list of subheadings that I used to categorize language learning beyond the classroom in Benson (2007): self-access, CALL, distance learning, tandem learning, study abroad, out-of-class learning, self-instruction, and blended learning, to which we might add others that were not included simply because there was no recent literature in these areas that discussed autonomy. What exactly do these terms refer to? On the surface, they appear to describe types of learning, but on closer examination this seems unsatisfactory if only because terms such as “self-access learning” or “study abroad” do not really describe particular kinds of learning at all. The strongest answer we can give, therefore, is that they refer to settings for learning. Although “self-access learning” and “study abroad” are rather vague in respect to how learning takes place, they do tell us where the learning takes place. This is also true of terms such as CALL, which at the minimum specifies that the student is near a computer, and naturalistic learning, which specifies the setting in a very broad sense as being outside the frame of educational institutions.

Setting is, of course, a widely used term and I have used it freely up to this point. But I now want to offer a somewhat technical definition for the purpose of research into language learning beyond the classroom:

**Setting:** A particular kind of arrangement for learning involving one or more learners in a particular kind of place, and situated in particular kinds of physical, social, or instructional relationships with others (teachers, learners, others).

This definition can, no doubt, be improved upon and my main point is really to suggest that research into language learning beyond the classroom will not get very far without at least a means of describing the features of different settings comparatively. In regard to the definition I have offered, two points need to be clarified. First, a setting for learning is not quite the same thing as a classroom in van Lier’s (1988) inclusive sense because the van Lier assumes the presence of at least two people with one participant taking the role of instructor, but a setting for learning does not share those assumptions. According to my understanding, the classroom is, even in this inclusive sense, one setting among others. Second, settings may incorporate each other. For example, in regard to “study abroad” there is perhaps little more to be said than that it takes place in a country other than the one in which the students habitually live and study and that it typically involves both formal and informal relationships with habitual speakers of the target language. Study abroad may also involve other settings, such as the classroom, self-access, and CALL, and we might also want to consider the host family as a particular kind of setting for informal learning. Conversely, because CALL seems to indicate nothing more than
the use of a computer alone or with others, it can be incorporated in a number of different centres: the classroom, self-access, distance learning, and so on. The notion of setting, therefore, provides us with a rudimentary mapping tool to make sense of the overlapping terrains of language learning beyond the classroom. But it does not describe the activities that take place on these terrains, because the potential that a setting holds for different kinds of activities is a very different thing from the activities themselves.

How then do we describe the kinds of activities that take place in various kinds of settings for learning beyond the classroom? Here I want to bring in the notion of mode of practice which I have used in earlier work (Benson, 2001) and now define in the following way:

**Mode of practice:** A typical set of routine processes or interactions that deploy the elements of a particular type of setting and are characteristic of it.

Again this definition can, no doubt, be improved upon, but the point I want to highlight is the essential difference between viewing a category such as self-access as a setting and viewing it as a mode of practice. Although there are certainly many different kinds of self-access centre, if we discuss them for long enough we will no doubt be able to come up with a description of self-access as a setting for learning that covers its key features. Yet we also know that self-access centres can be used in very different ways. For example, some students may be using self-access material freely during their lunch break without in any way being directed what to use or how to use it, while others may be part of a class which has been moved to the centre in order to use prescribed materials to complete prescribed tasks. Other students may be working alone, but carrying out some kind of remedial programme prescribed by a teacher or advisor. There are, in other words, different ways of using a self-access centre and, insofar as these are relatively routinized and typical of self-access, I would describe them as modes of practice. In as much as self-access centres tend to be set up to serve a relatively limited number of modes of practice, we might also speak of the modes of practice that are supported by self-access as a setting.

The important point, here, is that any given setting is likely to support a number of different modes of practice. This is certainly true of self-access but also true of the classroom. This is why terms such as self-access language learning or classroom learning can be misleading. Because settings support a variety of modes of practice, it is often far from clear what is meant when the word learning is added to the name of a setting. Similarly, it does not make a great deal of sense to ask whether self-access learning or classroom learning are effective for learning, because everything depends upon the meaning of these terms, or in my terminology, upon which of the modes of practice supported by self-access and the classroom is being deployed.

This distinction between setting and mode of practice is one that I have found useful in a number of situations, most notably in dealing with questions about the effectiveness of learning in various settings beyond the classroom. I have also found it helpful in thinking through certain historical developments in, for example, the area of CALL. When I first encountered this term in the early 1980s, it typically and unambiguously referred to both a setting and a mode of practice: a student sitting alone in front a computer working with some kind of language teaching software.
This was, of course, the best that could be done with a computer for language learning at the time. At some point in time, however, the idea of grouping students together in the classroom to use non–language learning game-type software came into play. Then word processors and desktop publishing arrived. Nowadays, with the advent of networking and the Internet, the same CALL setting (the student alone with his or her computer) supports a much wider range of modes of practice involving both direct interaction with computer software and mediated interaction with others through computer software. Viewed as a setting, CALL has also diversified to some degree. In my observation, students now group around computers more readily than they did in the 1980s. They can share their screens with others through networks and projectors. And with the growth of blogging and social networking, a great deal of language learning no doubt takes place in the furthest recesses of the world beyond the classroom away from the prying eyes of teachers and researchers. The modes of practice supported by this diversified setting have, however, increased to a much greater degree. In any inquiry into the world of learning beyond the classroom we are, in fact, likely to be dealing with diversified settings that support an even greater diversity of modes of practice. Yet because modes of practice deploy the elements of settings, this variety is necessarily constrained by settings and the diversity within them. In this sense, much of the interest in the world of learning beyond the classroom lies in the ways that settings and modes of practice interact with each other.

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE EVERYDAY WORLD OF THE LEARNER

Useful as they may be, the risk in using the analytical tools that I have discussed in the previous section is that we can easily lose sight of the reality of the language learning process as it appears to learners themselves. We may be involved in research and practice on, say, self-access or study abroad, but in the end these are really no more than constructs abstracted from the complexity of multiple individual’s lives. For example, students who are engaged with self-access or study abroad may well not think of what they are doing in those terms: they may, for example, simply think that they are going to a particular room or to visit a particular country. In most cases, these kinds of activities will also be combined with other kinds of activities carried out in particular contexts for particular purposes, the meaning of each activity being related to experience as a whole. In addition to analytical tools, therefore, research on language learning beyond the classroom also calls for more holistic constructs that can somehow capture relationships between the parts and the whole in specific contexts of learning.

In this respect I believe that we can learn a great deal from recent work in literacy studies, which, although it is primarily concerned with first language acquisition, is increasingly concerned with out-of-school experiences and practices (see, e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Evans, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Marsh, 2005). Schultz and Hull (2002), having noted that literacy is strongly associated with schooling, suggest that when we widen the lens of what we consider literacy and literate activities, homes, communities, and workplaces become sites for literacy use. It was in fact in these out-of-school contexts, rather than in school-based ones, that many of the major theoretical advances in the study of literacy have been made in the past 25 years. (p. 11)
Researchers in the area of new literacy studies, they argue, “have embraced out-of-school contexts, almost to the exclusion of looking in schools” (p. 27). They have done this, moreover, not simply in order to broaden the scope of research, but because literacy practices are changing as new types of literacy and contexts for literacy practices have developed, particularly in relation to the use of new technologies and popular culture. These new literacies are also typically developing outside the context of schooling, leaving teachers with the often difficult choice of adapting instruction to their students’ competencies or simply ignoring them. Ethnographic and biographical investigations of out-of-school learning also tend to show that young people are more literate, in both the traditional and new senses, than they appear to be in the classroom.

The key question here, of course, then, is whether these comments on literacy also apply to foreign language learning. I should perhaps avoid trying to answer this question, placing it instead at the heart of the research agenda for language learning beyond the classroom. However, it is worth noting that studies of language learning beyond the classroom do often show that there are more activities and more learning taking place outside the classroom than the researchers suspected (see, e.g., Hyland, 2004; Lam, 2000; Lamb, 2004). They also show that students often display more initiative in creating opportunities for out-of-class learning than expected. The sense of surprise that we tend to experience on carrying out or reading such studies is, perhaps, the consequence of a kind of tunnel vision that we have acquired from primarily examining language learning within the walls of classrooms. Possibly, we should be less surprised by learners’ ability to create language learning opportunities beyond the classroom and more surprised by our own ability to suppress this creativity through classroom teaching.

Lamb’s (2004) study of independent learning among young Indonesian high school students in a provincial town in Sumatra offers us a particularly vivid illustration of the kind of complexity that emerges once we widen the frame of learning beyond the walls of the classroom and the school. In order to capture some of this complexity, I will cite a fairly long extract from Lamb’s paper that sums up the broad pattern of language learning activities that he observed:

I believe a clear picture emerges of sustained autonomous learning behaviour among these 11–12 year-old Indonesians. Much of their learning of English takes place outside of formal school English classes, either at afternoon private courses or at home. A variety of sources of exposure to the language now exist in the environment, and motivated learners can and do turn these into opportunities for study and practice, despite having had no overt ‘training’ in learning strategies. School lessons are also important sites of learning, and there is evidence of pupils manoeuvring to try to maximise their practice opportunities, although actual lesson content may not be so significant in the long run as the relationship a pupil establishes with a teacher, and the encouragement to continue learning independently which (s)he thereby receives. (p. 239)

Among the many interesting issues that emerge from this extract, I would like to highlight three. First, in describing an individual’s learning we are likely to be concerned not with one setting, but with learning within a configuration of several
settings. Although learning may be situated within one setting at a particular moment in time (for example, when we observe learners in the school classroom), the meanings of the setting at that moment will be difficult to interpret without knowledge of all the other settings in which the students learn. Second, configurations of settings are typically localized and need to be understood locally. In this case, it is of some interest that the 11–12 year-olds that Lamb observed were engaged in activities that older students in the same school had not engaged in at the same age. The configurations of settings that characterised these students’ language learning efforts were conditioned by social changes that had made English more visible and more desirable to young people in the locality, apparently over a relatively short span of years. Third, the elements that make up particular configurations of settings appear to be interwoven through modes of practice. In other words, the nature of each setting and the meaning of the configuration depend very much on the kinds of activities that are taking place in each setting and how they fit together. Lamb’s study also suggests that these modes of practice and their meanings are co-constructed by participants within local and historical contexts. One of the most interesting findings of the study, for example, was that although the students’ school teachers believed that school lessons did not contribute much to their learning, some of the students felt that they did help, because it was their teachers’ encouragement that led them to engage in additional learning outside school.

My main point here is really to suggest that settings for learning do not define the learners that we find in them. There is a general tendency, it seems to me, for researchers to place the classroom at the centre of the language learning endeavours of young people. This is perhaps because the school day is so central to their lives and to processes of socialization which are, in fact, designed to inculcate the idea that socially valued learning is primarily the kind of learning that occurs in schools. There is no a priori reason, however, to assume that the classroom is the primary site for language learning, simply because so many young people are compelled to attend foreign language classes in school. In the case of adult learners, this assumption would seem to be even less justifiable. Yet we should perhaps be equally wary of notions such as the distance learner or the self-access learner, which may carry the implication that other kinds of settings are equally central to the lives of other learners. What ethnographic and biographical studies are beginning to show us above all is that we need to pay more attention to the language learning in the everyday lives of learners and the roles that various settings and modes of practice play in these everyday lives. When we adopt this perspective, we will often find that classroom learning, or perhaps the particular type of learning beyond the classroom that is our own focus of attention, is only one of several forms of engagement with language learning from the student’s point of view.

CONCLUSION

In writing this paper, I have been to some extent suggesting that the distinction between classroom learning and learning beyond the classroom could profitably be collapsed under more open-ended investigations of the ways in which individuals engage with language learning in their daily lives (for a somewhat different approach to this argument, see Rampton, 1999). One of the difficulties here, of course, is penetrating beyond observed or self-reported behaviours, into the ways in which people actually learn languages in different settings. However, I also want to suggest
that a shift in focus from classroom language learning towards language learning beyond the classroom would be no bad thing, if only because of the need to challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the centrality of classrooms to learning. In this paper, I have outlined some possible elements of a research agenda in this area: a focus on the characteristics of settings for learning beyond the classroom and variations within them, the modes of practice that these settings and their internal variations support, and the importance of attention to what we might call the \textit{ecology} of settings and modes of practices within the lives of language learners as they are lived in local contexts at particular historical moments. Recent work on literacy has begun to uncover the complexities of the construct of literacy only by focusing research efforts on out-of-school literacy practices. This focus has begun to reveal, in particular, the narrowness of constructions of literacy based on what has traditionally come under this heading in schools. Similarly, through a shift of focus towards language learning beyond the classroom, we might hope to disturb school-based constructions of language learning and expand our conceptions of what language learning entails.
REFERENCES


HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE AN AUTONOMOUS CLASSROOM?—REVISITED

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In 1994 the article “How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?” appeared in Die Neueren Sprachen. It was primarily based on my own teaching experience of developing learner autonomy with school kids (see Dam, 1995). Since then I have supported many teachers in developing learner autonomy in their classes via workshops, talks, and in-service teacher training courses. Furthermore, I have over the years expanded my own teaching experience also to include primary school children as well as adult refugees and immigrants. From today’s point of view, the principles as well as many of the tools mentioned in 1994 are still valid and relevant. However, changes in the curricular guidelines in many countries such as early beginning of foreign language learning, increased focus on and use of tests, the introduction of the European Language Portfolio, as well as the rapid development of various technical devices used in language teaching and learning have, of course, had an impact on the autonomous classroom, its organization as well as its contents. This paper gives an overview of what I see as important issues in the organization of and the ongoing processes in an autonomous classroom today.

PRINCIPLES AND MOTIVES UNDERLYING THE ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS OF AN AUTONOMOUS CLASSROOM

Before going into the organization and the contents of an autonomous classroom, however, I find it of importance to clarify the terms autonomous learner and autonomous classroom.¹

In 1981 Henry Holec described an autonomous learner in his book Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning (Holec, 1981). As I in those days was using similar principles in my own teaching, but with school kids and without calling it autonomy, I adapted and simplified his description for my own purposes as the aim for my learners in language learning. Today, I still make use of this definition²:

An autonomous learner is a learner who is willing to take charge of his/her own learning and is capable of doing so. This involves among other things that the learner—independently or together with others - is capable of:

- specifying aims and purposes for the work undertaken
- choosing relevant methods, tasks, and materials for the aims set up
- organizing and carrying out the tasks, and
- choosing criteria for evaluation and applying them.

² For the original description see Holec 1981, p. 3ff.
From my work with teachers I know that apart from enabling the learners to take charge of their own learning, the biggest hurdle when developing learner autonomy is to make the learners willing to take over the responsibility for doing so.

An autonomous classroom is to me an institutional teaching and learning environment in its broadest sense, from ordinary classrooms to self-access centers, where the learners are given the chance to be autonomous learners as defined earlier. What we are aiming at is a move from an exclusively teacher-directed teaching environment with a focus on teaching to a possible learner-directed learning environment with a focus on learning as illustrated in Figure 1.

![Developing learner autonomy](image)

Figure 1. Developing learner autonomy—a simplified model.

In the centre of the illustration are the three elements generally involved in any teaching and learning sequence:

- Planning, based on previous teaching and learning experiences.
- Carrying out the plans
- Evaluating the work undertaken and insights gained, leading on to a new planning phase.

This sequence can, of course, be directed solely by a teacher without involving the learners. However, developing learner autonomy, that is, supporting the learners in their awareness and consciousness of being autonomous learners, is a matter of getting the learners actively involved in the three phases of this teaching and learning sequence. This involvement is a prerequisite if we, the teachers, eventually want them to be capable of and thus co-responsible for carrying out the sequence on their own—to be in charge of their own learning—also outside the institutional context. Let me in this connection quote John Trim (1988):
No school, or even university, can provide its pupils with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their adult lives. Adult life, in its personal as well as its vocational aspects, is far too diverse and too subject to change for any educational curriculum to attempt to provide a detailed preparation. It is more important for a young person to have an understanding of himself/herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and to have learned how to think and how to learn. (p. 3)

Helping the learners to administer and take care of their own learning is a matter for the teacher to move from the left-hand side of the illustration towards the right-hand side; from an exclusive focus on her teaching to a focus on how best she can support her learners in being actively involved in their own learning. However, it is not an *either/or*, but a *both/and*. Furthermore, the move demands close cooperation, negotiation, and openness between the participants in the learning process, and at the same time it demands clear definitions of the power given to the various participants in the process of learning. What are the teacher’s rights? What are her responsibilities? What are the rights and responsibilities of the individual learner? What is expected of peers? Well, let us enter an autonomous classroom.

**THE AUTONOMOUS CLASSROOM**

*“If you are to describe an autonomous classroom, what would you point at?”*

This question was given to four different groups of in-service teachers attending my courses during the years 1990–1994, teachers who had all set out to try to develop learner autonomy in their classes. Most of the answers and observations from this investigation are, in my view, still of current importance in 2008.3 As in my article in 1994, I have organized the points made then according to two main characteristics of an autonomous classroom:

1. What can actually be seen and heard when entering the learning environment? (The physical frame or setting.)
2. What is being said and done by the teacher, by the learners? (Important issues as regards the ongoing activities and processes.)

**The Physical Frame or Setting**

The description in this paragraph is a combination of the main points made by the teachers then and additional aspects included by me because of changes and developments that have taken place over the years in foreign language teaching and learning. Then as now, learners are placed in groups. There is an intensive student activity and engagement which creates what could be called a continuous humming. Learners are engaged in many different activities. Logbooks, which, in reality, are just extended exercise books, can be seen lying open next to the learners who either make notes or drawings in them as the lesson proceeds.4 The teacher is moving

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3 The complete sample of answers from the groups can be seen in Dam (1994, p. 508).
4 In cases where the learners have their own portable computers, they might be using electronic logbooks as well as electronic portfolios. A recent detailed description of the use and contents of logbooks can for example be seen in Dam (2003; in press).
around or sitting down, engaged in discussions with individual learners or groups of learners. On the wall, posters display requirements as well as help in the form of guidelines for work. In some cases, the written text on the posters is supported by drawings or symbols, such as a book for reading, a pencil for writing, or an ear for listening. Examples of student products are also posted on the wall. Various materials to be used by the learners on their own, such as dictionaries, extra readers, newspapers and magazines, and learner-produced games, can be found on the shelves.

Major contrasts between 1994 and 2008:
- Access to computers—often portable ones—either at the back of the classroom or in front of the learners.
- The blackboard might have been exchanged with a white board.
- Learner’s portfolios appear on the shelf next to the English materials, which in 2008 have been extended with picture books for the very young learners.

Important Issues as Regards the Ongoing Activities and Processes

But what can be seen is only what strikes you when entering the teaching and learning environment. More important is, of course, the content. What is the role of the teacher in the autonomous classroom? What kind of activities are the learners engaged in? Why are the learners placed in groups? How are the posters on display created? By whom and for what?
In the following subsections, I deal with what I would claim are the most important issues of the content of today’s autonomous classroom:

- Roles of teacher and learners.
- Activities taking place, including evaluation.
- The social aspect of the ongoing processes.
- Documentation of the learning process (logbooks, portfolios, posters).
- Materials used.

Each subsection starts out with the observations made by the groups of teachers reported in *Die Neueren Sprachen* (Dam, 1994, p. 508) that are still valid today.

**The Role of Teacher and Learners**

*A changed teacher role, the teacher’s role as a consultant and a partner, taking hold/letting go, shared decision making, more definite awareness about aims, reduced teacher dependence, increased student independence, the knowledge of the learners and the teacher is important and of value, responsibility.*

It has been emphasized again and again by me as well as by others (see, e.g., Little, 1991, pp. 44–46) that the role of the teacher in an autonomous classroom differs markedly from her role in

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5 This will be the case with young learners as well as with adult refugees and immigrants.
6 The possibility for using online dictionaries is of course growing.
7 A title of a CILT publication from 1992 (see Page, 1992). The title refers to the point that in developing learner autonomy, the teacher has to let go and the learners have to take hold.
How Do We Recognize An Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited - 17

a traditional teacher- and teaching-directed environment. There has often been the misconception that in the autonomous classroom the teacher is superfluous; that “autonomy is synonymous with self-instruction, [and] that it is essentially a matter of deciding to learn without a teacher” (p. 3). Nothing could be more wrong. Getting the learners actively involved in their own learning is primarily the teacher’s responsibility (Dam, 1998, p. 135). This change cannot be effected in one go, of course. The teacher has to think of ways in which she can gradually get her learners engaged in decisions to be made and actions to be taken in the three phases of a teaching and learning sequence (see Figure 1) for them to be able to take over. In previous publications, I have given numerous examples of how it can be done (see Dam 1995, 1999, 2000). However, the number of autonomous classrooms—or rather the lack of them—might indicate that the message has somehow failed. In this section, I will therefore focus on aspects of the teacher’s role that I might not have stressed enough over the years.

**Make learners aware of the demands and conditions for and when planning.** The teacher has got certain information about what is expected of her as a teacher, such as an insight into curricular guidelines and requirements (what should be learned), information that is normally kept from the learners. In the autonomous classroom, the teacher is responsible for making these insights public and known to the learners. This can be done on posters or in the learners’ logbooks. It can begin with “You must be able to . . .” followed by possible objectives or requirements taken from the guidelines for the specific learner group in question. Again, this process, of course, presupposes that the teacher herself is fully aware of these objectives and can formulate them in a language understandable to her learners. Some examples taken from classroom work with different levels of learners:

- “You must be able to say a nursery rhyme.”
- “You must be able to say at least 10 words in English beginning with ‘b.’”
- “You must be able to explain new words from the text in English and use them in a sentence.”
- “You must be able to carry on a conversation for two minutes with your partner.”
- “You must be able to rewrite a newspaper article in 50 words.”

It is not until the learners are aware of what is expected of them that they can be precise about their own aims and objectives within the overall curricular demands. Here an example from one of my classes: “I want to improve my pronunciation. I will do it by using ’2 minutes’ talk’ as suggested by Leni and by talking to my mother at home.”

**Present some kind of structure in connection with carrying out the plans.** It is important that the teacher gives her learners an insight into and an awareness of possible ways in which a task or a lesson can be structured and carried out. This is likely to happen if the learners have experienced a transparent structure of a task or a lesson run by the teacher before they are to carry out any plans themselves. This demand may sound obvious and easy enough. However, when asked, many language teachers are not able to describe the structure of their lessons, either because they have followed a course book and have not in detail thought about what they were doing or why, or because they deliberately do not want to have a fixed structure in their work as

8 Official descriptors can be seen in the Common European Frame Work (Council of Europe, 1996).
9 More examples of learner’s aims can be seen in Dam (2006).
How Do We Recognize An Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited - 18

one teacher in one of my courses claimed: “I structure my lessons and our work in class differently as often as possible in order for the learners not to get bored.”

The problem is, of course, that if this is the case, then it will be extremely difficult, almost impossible, for the learners to take over the work on their own. The teacher has to present her structure for a task or a lesson, or if using a course book, she has to make the structure in the book clear to the learners. When introducing a task to be done, she has to tell her learners what she expects them to do, why she has chosen this task, how she wants it done in detail, and what results might come out of the work. In this way, she provides her learners with a model for carrying out a specific task, a model that they can relate to and eventually use or change for their own purposes. Similarly to aims and objectives, the model can be written on a poster—open for discussion and changes. And/or it can be placed in the learners’ logbooks. When the learners have taken hold, then it is time for the teacher to “be consultant and partner,” as noticed by the teachers in 1994.

Evaluate the work undertaken, during as well as after a task or a period. In the article in Die Neueren Sprachen (Dam, 1994, pp. 523–525), I stressed that to me, evaluation and, in that connection, reflection is the pivot of the whole process in an autonomous classroom (see also Dam, 1995, pp. 49–50). Unfortunately many teachers feel that evaluation detracts time from the “real” teaching and learning—it is too time-consuming, they think. This opinion is fundamentally flawed because evaluation is an integrated and important part of the learning process. Furthermore, their attitude often implies that evaluation is hardly integrated into the teacher-directed sessions and is therefore very difficult for the learners to take over. This is extremely unfortunate, especially because the results from evaluations seem to be a good starting point for discussions and negotiations between teacher and learners or between learners. This interaction is a good place to cross the water, so to speak, to move from teacher direction to possible learner direction. However, here as in connection with planning, it is essential that the teacher take the first step and use evaluation herself. By doing so, she can provide her learners with an insight into different approaches to evaluation and make them aware of evaluative criteria. Only in this way will the learners be capable of successfully taking over evaluation themselves(cf. Dam, 2006, pp. 276–280; Dam & Legenhausen, 1999). Moreover, evaluation becomes an activity in its own right and gives scope for authentic communication and reflection, two crucial criteria for a good activity in the autonomous classroom.

Reduce teacher’s talking time (TTT). In dealing with one of the last issues regarding the teacher’s role, I want to emphasize the big difference between a traditional classroom and the autonomous classroom: the teacher’s talking time. A prerequisite for active learner interaction and communication is that the teacher stops talking in front of the whole class for a longer period of time and makes space for the learners to talk among themselves. Unfortunately, this is extremely difficult for teachers. In some autonomous classrooms, for example, the teacher takes over when participating in a group discussion. Therefore, reduction of TTT must be at the back of every teacher’s head when entering the classroom in the same way as the dictum, “Don’t ask questions that you can answer yourself.”

Be prepared to let go. If the teacher succeeds in showing the way as well as letting go, then it is my experience that we can rely on the learners’ ability to take hold. If the learners fail to take
over, then it is because it is extremely difficult for the teachers to let go. As mentioned earlier, developing learner autonomy is the teacher’s responsibility (cf. Dam, 2003, p. 135).

**Activities in the Autonomous Classroom**

Interested/happy/engaged/satisfied learners, greater linguistic activity, communication, authentic/real dialogue, many varied activities, possible choices, differentiation as opposed to sorting, what you do is meaningful, responsibility, development via dialogue, evaluation, awareness of own resources and the resources of others.

But it is not enough that the learner is capable of taking charge of her own learning. It is also important that she is willing to do so. So what makes a learner willing to do something, for example to learn a language that is not of interest to her, or that she cannot see the need for? Many Irish children having to learn Irish and many adult female refugees having to learn Danish, for example, are learning a language that they have no interest in or see no need for. It seems as if the personal involvement in the learning processes, together with the social aspect of learning, have involved Irish children in learning Irish as well as Danish immigrants in learning Danish.

Fortunately, most learners wish to learn a foreign or second language, and they can see the need for doing so. In many traditional classrooms, however, they quickly lose interest and get bored with the language lessons, no matter how creative the teacher tries to be. Furthermore, the learners often experience that they are not capable of carrying on a conversation in the target language outside the classroom, not least because they lack confidence and self-esteem for doing so. In the autonomous classroom, by contrast, the learners are, according to one of the teachers in the inset courses from 1990 to 1994, “interested, happy, and engaged. There is great linguistic activity and the communication taking place is a real, authentic dialogue.” David Little has nicely described the contrast between the two types of classrooms in his book: *Learner Autonomy: Definitions, Issues and Problems* (Little, 1991, pp. 29–35).

Apart from being highly engaged in communicative activities inside the classroom, we know that the autonomous learners are willing to engage themselves in real communication outside the classroom and are capable of doing so (see Legenhausen, 2001). This state of affairs has to do with the set-up of the learning environment in the autonomous classroom and the activities and communication taking place here.

As regards the development of the learners’ communicative competence, it is important that the teacher makes use of the target language from the very beginning. Moreover, it is important that she, herself, is the model for real communication—that she, for example, never asks a question that she can answer herself. This is extremely difficult for language teachers because they are used to being in control, either when teaching vocabulary (“What is this?”) or when working their way through a text prepared by the whole class (“What happened when the girl left the house?”). In the first example, the teacher could have asked: “Do you know the English word for this?” In the second example, she could have said, “We know that the girl left the house. We also know what happened. What else could she have done?” Basically, it is a matter for the teacher to enter into real communication with her learners and not some kind of rehearsal. In any case, the examples just described seem a waste of time and should hardly or never take place in an
autonomous classroom. Authentic communication can, for example, take place between the teacher and her learners

- when she wants to get to know her learners and their attitude to the target language and language learning (“Why do you learn English [Irish, Danish]?” “Where can you make use of English?” “How can you learn English?” “What is a good teacher? What is a good learner?”)
- when she is engaged in discussions with individual learners or groups of learners about their work (“Have you decided which topic you want to work with within ‘culture’?”)
- when evaluating the work carried out with her learners (“Did you like the activity?” “Why?” “Why not?” “Did you have a good group work?” “Why?” “Why not?” “Were you satisfied with your own participation in the task?”).

In addition, it is important that the learners are engaged in real communication when working in pairs or in smaller groups. This is possible if the activities can be related to their own lives and to their own learning. Examples:

- 2 minutes’ talk, where the learners in pairs talk about topics of interest to themselves: “What did you do yesterday?” “Did you read about the fight in town?” “What will you be doing on Saturday?”
- Deciding on and planning a task or a project: “What are we going to do?” “What would you like to do?” “What do you want to become better at?” “What are we going to do at home?”
- Evaluating the work undertaken in the group: “Are we satisfied with the result of our work?” “Why?” “Why not?” “What can we do to make it better?”

Furthermore, it is important that the activities, either suggested by the teacher or by the learners or in negotiation between the two, give space for real choice. Moreover, it is important that there is space within an activity for differentiated input and differentiated outcome; the activity must give scope for the use of existing knowledge and at the same time for the development of this knowledge for every learner. It is also important that the activities introduced in the autonomous learning environment give scope for and support cooperation and peer-tutoring. The following are a few examples that take these demands into consideration:

- **Make a (picture) book for others to see, read, and use.** For adult refugees, this could be a recipe book.
- **Make a play.** For the young ones, just to be shown to the class. For the older ones, including the written dialogue. For adult immigrants, situations from their daily lives.
- **Make a PowerPoint presentation in pairs.** It can be either a presentation of the learners’ own choice or it can be related to a given topic within which the learners have their choice.

Apart from developing the learners’ communicative competence, an overriding issue behind what has been said so far is the importance of supporting and developing the learners’ self-

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10 For more ideas see Dam (1995, pp. 36–40).
esteem. Much literature has been concerned with self-esteem and its characteristics. A model that I am in favour of is presented by Barbara Reider in her book, *A Hooray Kind of Kid—a Child’s Self-esteem and How to Build it.* (Reider, 1988). She claims that there are three aspects involved when a feeling of high self-esteem is at play:

1. A feeling of power. (“I am capable of doing things.”)
2. A feeling of being someone special. (“I am special.”)
3. A feeling of connectedness. (“I belong to a group.”)

In my view the set-up of the learning environment as described in this paper takes all three issues into consideration. In addition, supporting and developing the learners’ self-esteem can also be an activity in itself when focusing on the social aspects of learning. It can be an activity where the learners involve their own feelings, where they “speak as themselves,” and where what they say is of importance to an audience. In the next subsection, such an activity will be described.

**The Social Aspect of Learning**

*Taking care of / paying attention to, group work, joint responsibility.*

The activity meant to support self-esteem as well as the social aspects in the classroom is called “Feeling at Ease.” The learners are asked individually to answer the following simple questions anonymously:

- What do you like in class?
- What do you dislike in class?

All the answers are then listed and given to every student to look at, first individually, then in pairs. The answers, which can be real eye-openers to students as well as the teacher, are then the point of departure for a negotiated list of “Dos and Don’ts,” which will be put on a poster as well in the logbooks. Apart from being an authentic and excellent language activity in itself, it adds, without doubt, to the learners “taking care of / paying attention to each other,” as the teachers in the study observed.

Another important factor for supporting the social side of learning is to place the learners in groups. This does not necessarily imply that everybody in the group does the same thing. However, a seating in groups has many advantages, some of which are as follows:

- The physical focus has moved from the teacher to the learners.
- It is less threatening to talk to peers in small groups than to the whole class.
- Being placed in groups makes peer tutoring easy and manageable.

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12 The activity is meant for learners who can write—either in their native language, or—preferably—in the target language.
13 For more considerations and ideas as regards group work see Dam (1994, pp. 509–511) and Dam (1995, pp. 42–47).
One problem about this organization, though, is that teachers are afraid of leaving the use of the target language to the learners when working on their own: “What if they make mistakes when talking together?” Let us admit it. Teachers also make mistakes. So let the learners talk as much as possible in their groups and rely on peer support and peer correction if and when needed. Furthermore, talking in small groups gives much more talking time to the learners, thereby reducing TTT, and many errors will take care of themselves in the course of linguistic development.

Another problem is that teachers fear that the learners do not work when being on their own. Documentation of the ongoing processes is therefore important for the teacher in the transition phase from teacher direction to learner direction. On the other hand, how can learners take responsibility for their own work if they are not given the opportunity for exercising it?

**Documentation of Processes and Products**

*Posters, learners’ products, a process of development, awareness raising.*

Documentation is, as mentioned earlier, vital for the teacher when letting go. In the autonomous classroom, however, allowing learners to document their own learning is even more important. “What do I do? With what results?” This is where the use of logbooks and portfolios come in. A logbook is essentially an exercise book that has been elevated to cover more than exercises. The logbook does contain exercises, but it is also a real logbook (known from sea voyages where it is kept by the captain or shipmaster) because learners add day and date, as well as aims and objectives for a learning sequence, as specified by the teacher (the official demands) or the learner: “I will read a chapter in my book and find and learn 20 new words.” On a ship, a log contains reports on things that happen on the voyage; in class, it describes the activities carried out during the lesson. On a ship, incidents of importance for the voyage are also kept in a ship’s log; in class, the log might contain an evaluation of the day or the reason for choosing a specific activity. In this way the logbook is a tool for keeping track of one’s own work, one’s personal learning voyage. In the English classroom, as is the case on a ship, the logbook is furthermore used for communication between those who have an interest in the voyage, that is, communication between teacher and learner, between peers, and for younger learners, between learners and parents or between teacher, learner, and parents. This communication can take place by writing in the logbook itself, or the logbook can give scope for oral communication about the work done and the things learned. With very young learners, the logbook will to a large extent consist of symbols for the various activities that have taken place during a lesson and drawings showing the outcome of or reflections about the day. Adult immigrants also consider the logbook an important document and learning tool. They experience it as a personal book that they are proud of—something new to them. “I can show my children and my husband what I do at the centre. And that is very good,” said a woman to me not long ago. Dam (2006) has extracts from logbooks showing intermediate learners’ ability to plan, carry out the plans, and evaluate their work.

The logbook includes, roughly speaking, the processes of learning, whereas the portfolio includes primarily the products of learning. The portfolio contains examples of work done over a period of time, in principle selected by the learners themselves and according to certain criteria:
Examples of written work (stories or essays), examples of speech (recordings), examples of progress in reading (a copy of a page in a book), examples of tests, and so on. The products as well as criteria for their choice will vary according to the level and age of the learners (see Pinter, 2006, pp. 136–137, for the use of a portfolio with young learners). The European Language Portfolio (ELP), mentioned at the beginning of this paper and developed by the Council of Europe, is now used in many European countries. Whichever form or format is used, the selection of products in the portfolio will show progress made. Together the two, logbooks and portfolios, give a good insight into the individual learner’s learning process for learners and teacher alike.

Another important form of documentation in the autonomous classroom is the collection of posters. The posters can be created and set up by the teacher or by the learners. Often a poster displays the result of an activity, or it can include the outcome of discussions and negotiations between teacher and learners. In the classroom it has proved useful to group the various posters under some headings:

- **Aims and objectives** (for an activity, group work, a period)
- **Plans** (for the lessons, ongoing activities, teacher’s help)
- **Ideas** (for useful activities, homework)
- **Things to remember** (Dos and Don’ts, various rules)
- **Our own experience** (a good teacher, good group work, good presentation)
- **Help** (new words, useful expressions, list of voluntary helpers among the students)

The importance of publicly sharing requirements, guidelines, decisions made, and experiences in class cannot be stressed enough. Apart from documenting joint processes in class and therefore being of value to everybody, it is specifically important for young learners, chaotic learners, and adult immigrants who are not used to schooling. Furthermore, the posters provide the learners with useful and authentic language.

**Materials**

Many different materials.

Teachers who would like to develop learner autonomy in their classes often complain about materials: “But I have to use a course book.” “I haven’t got many, different materials.” Obviously, there seems to be the misconception that a coursebook cannot be used in an autonomous classroom. That is, of course, not the case. It can be done, but it is not easy.

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14 The basic idea behind the use of a portfolio is that the learners select a product to show their progress in a field. Many teachers, though, have set up rules for entering products into the portfolio: Your best essay, an essay once a month, and so on. Therefore “in principle.”

15 Pinter’s book, *Teaching Young Language Learners*, is highly recommended in connection with developing learner autonomy with young learners.

16 For documentation about the European Language Portfolio, see Council of Europe (n.d.).

17 For a detailed description of the use of posters, see Dam (1995, pp. 41–42).

18 For a report on how posters helped my chaotic learner, who I’ve dubbed “Dennis the Menace,” see Dam (1998).
However, it is a matter of using the coursebook according to the principles mentioned and suggestions for activities presented in this paper.

As regards the second problem, let me stress that having different materials does not necessarily mean having many materials. It is rather a question of having materials that can be used in many different ways, for many different purposes, and by learners with different abilities. It could be a collection of various texts (which often can be found in coursebooks) and a collection of pictures or photos. If not available at school, the two types of materials can often be provided by the learners, for example, magazines, song lyrics, as well as photos taken with their mobile phones or digital cameras. It is then the teacher's responsibility to set up possibilities for language work with these materials and together with her learners to further develop ideas for their use related to the official aims and objectives for the age group in question. This use also includes the demands set up for tests. Examples:

- When working with a text you can find your own new words, you can turn the text into a play, you can make discussion points connected to the text to be discussed with your partner or with your group, or you can illustrate the text (especially for the young ones).
- With a picture or series of pictures (the pictures might be photos that you have taken), you can tell a story and record it (a good activity for young learners and adult immigrants); you can make a picture book and add a little text, for example, “My Day,” “My Home,” “My Favourite Food,” to be seen and read by your peers; you can write a story alone or together with a partner, also to be read by your peers, and so on.

Making a PowerPoint presentation is a combination of using texts and photos. The suggestions just given will obviously result in learner-produced materials on the shelf, to be used by peers. These materials also include games.

If possible, the shelf will also have extra readers to be enjoyed individually or in pairs. If not available in class, the policy of the school library could be to include English Readers. If not available at school, at the local library might have them. In the classroom there will, furthermore, be some reference books, such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and grammars (for the older pupils).

As mentioned earlier, technology has had an immense impact on the materials available in the autonomous classroom in 2008. I have already mentioned the potential incorporated in the computers: Access to the internet with all its online facilities (e.g., Blogs, Wikis, Google), the possibility for electronic dictionaries and thesauruses, various corpora to be used by the learners on their own, and learner-produced texts to be used by peers. In addition, I think that materials also should include a number of digital cameras, which are extremely useful for taking photos as starting points for oral or written production, not least for the young learners and the adult immigrants. Technical gear, such as mobile phones and iPods, brought along by the learners, should also be considered essential materials in the autonomous classroom.

CONCLUSION

An autonomous classroom will and should always be open to new demands and possibilities in its educational as well as social surroundings and change accordingly. However, as the teachers’
observations from the early 90s show, some basic principles of developing learner autonomy have not changed.

Neither has the situation changed for the teacher who decides to develop learner autonomy in her class. She will enter a long and often troublesome journey. She might, like so many teachers before her, experience the “octopus syndrome” when trying to help her learners (a feeling of being everywhere and nowhere). She might also be overwhelmed with a feeling of insecurity: “Do my learners learn enough when I am not in charge all the time?” Then she has to remember that “Rome was not built in one day.”

In addition, she has to remember that an autonomous classroom gives scope for “interested/happy/engaged/satisfied learners, for personal development for teacher and student, for a feeling of security” (teachers’ classroom observations, 1990–1994). Moreover, it develops good language learners19 who “have an understanding of himself/herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and have learned how to think and how to learn” (cf. John Trim 1988, p. 3). What else can a teacher ask for? Perhaps the following evaluation from a Spanish teacher many years ago:
“I have become a human being in my classes!”

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19 Cf. the results from the LAALE project (see, e.g., Legenhausen, 2001).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Answers to Questions on Posters From Workshop: Steps Toward an Autonomous Classroom

During the workshop “Steps Towards an Autonomous Classroom,” a number of questions were formulated and written on posters by the participants. However, time constraints made it impossible to answer all the questions.

Evaluation

How can you encourage students’ self-evaluation and peer-evaluation? Normally the students refuse to do it as they feel they lack the knowledge.

See paper.

How often is evaluation?

As often as possible, daily or when it fits into your plans.

Teacher led feedback versus students led feedback: How willing are students to feedback on classmates’ work?

Both types are crucial, cf. paper. For both parts the sequence of evaluation should be: self-evaluation, “together-evaluation”, evaluation by others. In general: Start out with the positive things, then continue – not to negative things – but to “ideas for improvement”.

How do you coordinate/organize evaluation with other teachers?

If this is necessary I will tell them what I do and why. Otherwise it is part of my way of teaching.

Means for evaluation: Questionnaires or just reflections, portfolios, etc.

Anything that can support evaluation and reflection, including the use of logbooks.

Decision-Making

To what extent can you negotiate everything with the students? What do the students actually decide?

Not everything can be negotiated with the students due to curricular requirements that have to be followed. But within these official requirements it is possible to find a host of possibilities for the individual learner or groups of learners to decide in connection with their own learning cf. the paper: what to focus on, who to work with, which competence area to improve at a certain time, etc.
Project Work / Group Work

How long will their project last?

This depends on the schedule set by the teacher or negotiated with the teacher. See Dam, 1995.

What do they do when they have finished their projects?

We talked about this.

Are the groups made up of the same members?

No. According to the focus of their actual work.

Do students choose topics in general?

Yes, but based on the official requirements, their own needs, and within the overall structure of the lesson-plans.

How does one keep the students speak English in small groups?

Make it a competition within the group and/or for the individual learner and include it in evaluation: How much English did we use today? 0–10?

How do they learn the grammar to do the project?

See Legenhausen’s paper.

How is project work corrected?

Written and/or oral self-correction, peer-correction, teacher-correction – or – when and if asked for.

How much classroom time is spent on project work?

To me every learning sequence taking place is a project. Does that answer the question?

How can we make groups work in text-based classrooms?

In the same way as without a coursebook. In this case, though, the starting point very often has to be the coursebook.

Logbooks

How much do you direct the way you use the logbooks?
I make clear to the students what I need in order to help and support them with their learning including giving them feedback: Day and date, clear description of their personal aims, an overview of their daily work including homework, as well as numbered pages and margins to make it easier for me to comment on their work.

Who decides what to include in the logbook (e.g. compositions, vocabulary, etc.? The teacher or the student him/herself?

Both! See above and the references in my paper.

What is the sense of having a logbook?

See my paper.

How often are students writing in logbooks during class? How long does it take?

Whenever they start on a new activity and during this activity: new words, expressions learned, etc., as well as homework and evaluation at the end of a lesson.

How do teenagers/children feel about these logs? Have they got notebooks beside these logs?

When the teacher manages to help the students making their logs personal and useful for the individual learner cf. paper, then everybody can see the use of a logbook.

How do you get them to keep such consistent logbooks? Don’t they get bored of repetitions?

See above.

Speaking the Target Language

I think that my paper answers the following questions.

- How can you avoid students with a poor level of fluency turning to their mother tongue?
- How do you stop them reverting to L1 when you are not monitoring them?
- How can we keep the students speaking together in groups using the target language?

Classroom Organization

How many students are there per class? What about number of students per class? More than twenty?

In my classes in varies. Normally I have twenty or more. Sometimes less. But I prefer 24 to 16. It gives more dynamic in the class.

Differentiations among different countries, schools, level of students?
The basic principles are the same!

Curricular Guidelines

What age do they start studying English?

In Denmark they start at the age of 9.

What if the academy says they have to pass exams based on specific vocab/grammar areas?

Then those areas are demands to be learned!

Is the syllabus negotiated or imposed?

Both!

Error Correction/Teacher’s Role

“Teachers look for mistakes, not for good points.” Is there place for error correction in your classroom?

Of course. See under evaluation and/or paper. But remember that correction is only received if and when the learner is prepared for it cf. Legenhagen.

When, where and how do you correct?

A paper on error correction is needed here, if not answered already.

Materials

I think that my paper answers the following questions.

Where do you find materials to support research?
Where does so much classroom material come from?
How do they find information sources?

Adults

Putting this into practice with adults?

Exactly the way I have described it in my paper.

Adults don’t like evaluating each other: It’s your job!!!

Some kids also say this!
Additional Questions

How much extra work is involved?

Eventually less work than in the traditional classroom, but continuous thinking and reflection as regards possible improvements. In order to negotiate these with the learners.

Discipline problems?

Of course. But they, too, are “a project” to be coped with.

Possible negative outcomes?

I cannot find any!

“Overconfidence,” lack of the respect for “superior” knowledge?

I have not experienced this.

Resistance?

See my conclusion!

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ARGUMENTS FOR LEARNER AUTONOMY: ANALYSING LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENTS

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The question of how best to teach a foreign language has dominated language pedagogy ever since languages were taught systematically in institutional contexts, and there has been little consensus on the answers. Scholars of the history of foreign language teaching, for example, have come up with the slightly disillusioning finding that “the parameters of the discussion on teaching methods have remained surprisingly constant” (Stern, 1983, p. 85) or as Louis Kelly (1969) expressed it a bit earlier: “The total corpus of ideas accessible to language teachers has not changed basically in 2,000 years” (p. 363).

So what are some of these perennial issues and bones of contention?

- What to do with grammar? Should we teach rules explicitly, or are there more efficient ways of dealing with the forms and structures of language?
- Should we allow the learners to use their first language (L1), or should we organize the classroom in more or less strictly monolingual terms?
- How useful are, for example, fill-in exercises and the whole range of form-focused exercise types? This raises the question of what is to be understood by authentic language use.
- To what extent can and should the learners themselves be involved in influencing the many methodological decisions? Is it not the teacher who knows best, since she has been professionally trained and educated to deal with all these issues?

The list could easily be prolonged.

The question of how best to teach a foreign language has a time-honoured history. It was in the late sixties and early seventies of the last century that one of the most expensive research projects in the history of the humanities, the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Project, was undertaken to resolve the question once and for all. The results of this large-scale research undertaking are amply documented in Smith (1970). Although at first glance this project might not seem to have anything to do with promoting the development of learner autonomy, a brief comment on its outcome is in order.

The findings were disillusioning—if not frustrating—for theorists and practitioners alike. The project conclusions contain the recommendation that “foreign language educators seriously re-examine the theoretical bases for formal second-language learning in the secondary-school environment” (Smith, 1970, p. 240). No matter whether a cognitive, audiolingual, or grammar-translation method was used, no matter whether grammar was taught explicitly or implicitly, all these variables had no decisive impact on the learning results. The outcomes of the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Project were independently assessed by an external expert—John Carroll, one of the most eminent learning psychologists of his time. The statistical calculations regarding the effect of the teaching methodology arrived at the sobering conclusion that it could “at best” explain only 3–5% of the total variance, that is, of the learning success (cf. Carroll, 1969, p. 234).
This finding sent shock waves through the field of language pedagogy. Such a result was simply unacceptable, and experts and stakeholders had to find some flaws in the experimental set-up, which they did. The Swedes took it upon themselves to carry out a similar project, Gothenburg—Methods of Teaching, with the explicit intention to avoid all the previous mistakes. The director of the project, Alvar Ellegard (1973), however, had to admit that their findings also came close to “a colossal insignificance” (personal communication, Stuttgart University, 1972; cf. also 1973).

Since these results seemed to discredit the whole field of teaching methodology, it was quickly agreed that language teaching and learning was too complex an undertaking—with too many variables involved—that global, integrative approaches to researching methodological issues were inappropriate. The findings were discarded as irrelevant and the project reports fell into oblivion.

However, from today’s point of view, the results deserve to be reinterpreted. One of the possibilities of explaining them is to state that the question of how best to teach a foreign language is flawed in the first place. The underlying traditional concept of teaching as transmissive, which implies some kind of knowledge transfer from A to B, might be invalid and not work in the way envisaged.

It is here that more recent insights from psychology, educational theory, and especially second language acquisition research need to be taken into consideration. They might begin to answer why it is that the teaching variable only explained 3–5% of the variation, if it explained anything at all. The point is that there is growing evidence that it is the learners themselves who are the decisive agents in the learning process. It is their involvement in the learning process that decide learning success, and one of the most promising ways of getting the learners involved is to implement principles of autonomous language learning.

The host of arguments supporting a more learner-centred view of learning derive from cognitive psychology, motivational theories, the politics of education, and other areas. I will ignore them for the time being and just focus on the following question: How successful are learners in acquiring a communicative competence

- if they can decide themselves how they want to go about the learning task (i.e., when planning, deciding on activities, choosing materials, goal setting, evaluating)
- when they do not follow a textbook-based syllabus and are not exposed to systematic and explicit grammar teaching
- when the guiding principles are authenticity and awareness raising

Why might this approach to language learning be successful in the first place? What kind of theoretical underpinning can be given from theories of language acquisition?

**HOW ARE LANGUAGES LEARNED?**

It is fairly uncontroversial that children acquiring their L1 construct their own interim grammars, a process which is notoriously resistant to external influences. Caretakers do not see the need to provide negative feedback. They hardly ever focus on grammar and correct mistakes explicitly. The following dialogue between mother and child cannot, therefore, be said to be a typical example of mother–child interaction. The mother is probably a linguist carrying out a mini-experiment and thus trying to confirm one of her hypotheses:
Arguments for Learner Autonomy: Analysing Linguistic Developments - 35

Child: *Nobody don’t like me.*
Mother: *No, say ‘nobody likes me.’*
Child: *Nobody don’t like me.*
Mother: *No, say ‘nobody likes me.’*
Child: *Nobody don’t like me.*

There are supposedly eight repetitions of this type of exchange, and then the mother articulates very carefully:

Mother: *No, now listen carefully; say ‘nobody likes me.’*
Child: *Oh! Nobody don’t likes me.*

(McNeill, 1970, p. 106)

The child was not yet ready for this kind of correction. The children’s grammar develops according to some internal processing principles, which implies that many of the structural features are acquired in a fixed sequence or order.

When it comes to second language learning, then, one of the so-called substantive findings of research into naturalistic L2 acquisition is that also second language learning is characterized by a *creative construction process*, a phrase coined by Dulay and Burt (1974). This finding also implies that many linguistic features are picked up in a natural sequence. The implication is that these internally determined linguistic sequences can hardly be influenced by explicit teaching, a point which has been stressed within the so-called teachability hypothesis (Pienemann, 1984, 1998). The outcomes of Pienemann’s experimental studies can be summarized as follows:

- Explicit grammar teaching cannot change a natural order or sequence of acquisition.
- Explicit teaching cannot make learners skip a developmental stage.
- If, however, the teaching focus co-occurs with the learners’ developmental stage, then it can speed up the process of acquisition, and then this structure is more readily available to that learner in various contexts.

The practical implications for the foreign language classroom with, say, 25 learners are far-reaching. There is little likelihood that these learners pass through the various stages at identical times, and teachers have only limited possibilities for assessing each individual’s learning stage. An additional complication is that we do not know enough about the whole range of structural features and the way they emerge systematically in the learners’ interim grammars. This means that no coursebook can grade the linguistic material according to the linguistic needs of all the learners.

If learners need to be developmentally ready to acquire a certain linguistic form, and if it is the case that we as teachers cannot really tell what the linguistic needs of learners are at the various individual learning stages, then it follows that we have to leave it to the learners themselves to identify their linguistic needs. And we as teachers have to help them.

The very fact that the teachability of languages is heavily constrained does not, therefore, imply a reduced role for the teacher in the foreign language classroom. On the contrary, her role is as important as ever, but the role of the teacher has to change, as has often been emphasized. If it is the learners themselves who have to construct their own grammars, then it is the responsibility of the teacher to set up a rich learning environment in which the learners
have optimal conditions for their learning endeavours and are actively supported in that process.

This is the rationale of an autonomous classroom as outlined, for example, by Dam and others. Since its organization and procedures and the way learners are supported in that learning environment have been extensively described (cf. Dam 1994, 1995), there is no need to go into any details here. I will just provide some arguments from SLA research about why learners from such a classroom are so successful, that is, why they develop an amazing communicative competence. The theory of second language acquisition that might be said to have informed autonomous language learning is the so-called interaction hypothesis.

**THE INTERACTION HYPOTHESIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PROCEDURES**

The seminal statement that is widely assumed to mark the beginning of the interaction hypothesis was made by Evelyn Hatch (1978):

> It is assumed that one first learns how to manipulate structures, that one gradually builds up a repertoire of structures and then, somehow, learns how to put the structures to use in discourse. We would like to consider the possibility that just the reverse happens. One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures develop. (p. 404)

Similar views have, however, been expressed much earlier. The claim, for example, that second language learners can actually construct the relevant linguistic structures themselves without being explicitly taught has been repeated again and again in the history of language teaching. Some of the most explicit statements come from the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), who as early as 1693 wrote that “the right way of teaching that [foreign] Language [. . . ] is by talking it into Children in constant Conversation, and not by Grammatical Rules” (1693/1989, p. 216).

Why is it that conversations are especially suited to promoting language learning? The claim is that in oral interactions certain structural features of the language and their interrelationships often become more transparent than in writing.

1. Susan—she didn’t go to the party, did she?
2. Susan—you have met her at the station?

A second argument is that when teachers interact with learners and, equally important, when learners interact with each other, then conversational strategies can be observed which are especially apt to facilitate and promote the learning process. Here we need to mention Michael Long, who was one of the first to attempt an explanation of the interrelationship between conversational interactions and language acquisition in somewhat more systematic terms (cf. Long, 1996).

What are the implications for the classroom? We need to accept that language learning is by and large determined by language use in authentic communicative situations. However, we know from naturalistic language acquisition by immigrants that there is also a danger of a standstill of development if the learners have reached a stage where they can express their basic communicative needs. The most important safeguard against this danger of fossilization is awareness-raising.
We need to set up a learning environment and introduce activities in which the learners engage in authentic communicative interactions. The challenge is that, in addition, a subset of these activities should also focus the learners’ attention on structural features of the target language and thus lead to awareness-raising and, by implication, to metalinguistic knowledge. However, there is not only the need to draw the learners’ attention to formal aspects of the target language, but also to the learning process as such. There is thus an interdependency between autonomous language learning, authenticity, and awareness-raising, which has also been stressed by Leo van Lier (1996). He claims that the triad of autonomy, authenticity, and awareness forms the foundation of curriculum development (pp. 1–23).

The autonomous classroom is characterized by the fact that the various procedures and processes of language learning are turned into topics of discussion between teacher and learners and between the learners. In other words, the processes become topics in the classroom. It is the explicit discussion of how to go about learning and thereby raising the learners’ awareness. It is the reflection on

- How well am I / are we doing?
- What is lacking?
- What needs to be improved?
- Where are we going next?

Learners become aware of their needs and turn into intentional, conscious learners. The components of a language-learning model also underlying autonomous classrooms could look something like Figure 1.
THE LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNERS—THE LAALE RESEARCH PROJECT

The data to be discussed next derive from the research project LAALE, an acronym for language acquisition in an autonomous learning environment. We observed the language development of a mixed ability class of Danish learners who were taught English according to the principles of autonomous language learning (cf. Dam, 1994, 1995). Starting with the very first day of learning English, we administered tests at regular intervals for a period of four years and elicited data in so-called peer-to-peer talks: We had learners talk in pairs about topics of their own choice.

To better interpret our findings, we collected the same type of data, at exactly the same time intervals, in traditionally taught classes. The phrase “traditionally taught” here means that these classes followed a textbook-based communicative language course. These classes cannot be considered control groups in the technical sense of the term, since we had no external measure of comparability and some of the classes were located in Germany. However, the comparative data did help us assess and interpret the linguistic behaviour and progress of the autonomous class.

The questions to be discussed include the following:

- How do the conversational interactions of autonomous learners compare to interactions of traditional learners following a well-defined syllabus? What impact do the learning and teaching approaches have on communicative attitudes and the discourse quality of interactions?
- What accuracy levels do the learners under discussion achieve? Are, for example, the misgivings of researchers, like Peter Skehan (1998), justified who claim that early reliance on meaning-focused activities detracts learners from a development of formal target language features. Learners might be so focused on getting their meaning across that they just do not pay attention to, say, inflectional endings, because all too often they are not essential for getting the meaning across (cf. p. 11).

A few details on the demographic background of the learners, the institutional prerequisites, and the organisational framework of the class under discussion will be mentioned in the following section.

The Learners and the Institutional Framework

The learners attended a Danish comprehensive school, which implies that they were a mixed-ability group. They started learning English in Grade 5, that is, when they were about 11 years old. In the first two years, they had four lessons per week, organized in terms of two 90-minute periods. They did not use a course book, but were all provided with a learners’ picture dictionary (Parnwell, 1977).

The test results will partly be compared to those of another class of learners from the same school which used an up-to-date communicative textbook. These results will furthermore be interpreted against the background of the test scores of a German grammar school class (Gymnasium).

The German class also followed a textbook-based syllabus which implements a mainstream communicative approach, as did the Danish comparative class. The German students were
highly motivated, as can be deduced from the fact that 83% of the learners mentioned the information in peer-to-peer talks that English was their favourite subject. The German school system is a highly selective three-tier system, with only about 40 percent of the pupils of each year attending a Gymnasium. These learners eventually intend to take A-level exams and then continue with university studies. So, at first glance, it seems to be unfair to compare a mixed-ability class with higher ability students, but the approach is justified by the results as should become clear when discussing the statistics. For reasons of space, I will show only a limited selection of the test results and data.

**The Linguistic Development**

**Vocabulary**

After 7½ weeks of learning English (i.e., after about 30 lessons) we asked learners to write down as many English words as they could think of. In order to stimulate their memory, we gave them some cues: “Think of colours, animals, people, things you can eat, things you can see in the classroom, what you can do at work or during your free time.” The results of this informal spontaneous recall test are shown in Figure 2.

![Graph showing vocabulary development](image)

**DA: Danish Autonomous Group; DT: Danish Textbook Group; GT: German Textbook Group**

This diagram refers to identifiable English words—we disregarded spelling mistakes. One of the Danish students, for example, with a score of 9 at the very lower end of the DA-curve did not get any English word right. The autonomous group (DA) shows significantly better results than the Danish textbook group, whereas the results for the German GT learners lie between these groups.
The very fact that the results of the autonomous class compare so extremely well with those of traditionally taught classes can perhaps be explained along the following lines. For example, the German students only recalled English words that were introduced in the textbook. They did not think in terms of all the English words they are exposed to in their everyday life, for example, those which are widely used in German as loan words. Their lexical store seems to have two compartments: school words and everyday English words from outside the classroom. This split between school knowledge and action knowledge (cf. Barnes, 1976) does not exist in the autonomous class, likely because one of the goals of the autonomous approach is to bridge the gap between the classroom and real life outside the classroom (cf. Dam, 2001). The results of vocabulary tests in the beginning years of learning English are fully documented in Dam and Legenhausen (1996).

The first vocabulary test was a highly informal way of eliciting data. For the design of more formal test formats, a number of unexpected difficulties had to be overcome because some of the autonomous learners had great difficulties with writing in their native Danish language. When administering a vocabulary test battery after 15 weeks, for example, we had to allow them in the listening subtest to represent the meaning of an English word they heard either by writing down the translational equivalent or by making a drawing. Figure 3 shows a page of a test paper in which a very weak learner preferred a drawing to using the Danish equivalent in 10 out of 18 cases.
Grammar

One of the time-honoured issues in foreign language learning and teaching is the place of grammar and grammar instruction in the learning process. The LAALE project aims therefore also included the question: How efficiently do autonomous learners pick up grammatical structures without being explicitly instructed? How accurate are they, for example, when they engage in conversations?

For our data elicitation purposes we therefore had the learners talk about a topic of their own choice, the first after 17 months of learning English and a second time after 3 years. These peer-to-peer talks lasted 4 to 5 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. They were then analysed in terms of grammatical accuracy and conversational strategies (cf. Legenhausen,
1999, 2001, 2008). The following statistics will only refer to the use of do-support question after about 1½ years, which is a notorious problem for beginning learners in Denmark and Germany alike. The German learners had learned the rules and practised questions with to do extensively.

**Table 1: Do-support in questions**

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<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Well-formed Questions</th>
<th>Ill-formed Questions</th>
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<td>f</td>
<td>f %</td>
<td>f %</td>
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<tr>
<td>GT</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>100 74</td>
<td>35 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>99 70</td>
<td>43 30</td>
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GT: German traditional learners  
DA: Danish autonomous learners

The statistics in Table 1 look slightly better for the German grammar school students, but the enormous number of questions in which the two verbs like and live occurred was striking. In the German group, it was almost two out of three questions (61.5 %). This overuse of the two verbs in the German group can easily be explained, since their textbook includes a host of exercises in which the learners were intended to use these two verbs (cf. “Do you like school?” / “Where do you live?”). The autonomous learners also used like and live, but not quite as frequently (27.5 %). Also, in terms of content, the questions with like and live were very similar, which gave them a stereotypical quality.

If stereotypical questions with like and live are eliminated from the statistics, then this gives a clearer indication of the extent to which to do-questions have actually been mastered. It is a more objective measure of the productive use of this grammatical feature.

**Table 2: do-support without the verbs like and live**

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<td>24 46</td>
<td>28 54</td>
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<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>65 63</td>
<td>38 35</td>
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The drop in accuracy figures in the traditional group is amazing. It goes to show that the traditional learners when using the verbs like and live tend to resort to memorized chunks; that is, they resort to stereotypical questions that they have practised in the classroom. This
hypothesis will gain further support if we take a closer look at the communicative behaviour of both learner groups.

COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOUR

It just so happened that the day of the recordings coincided with a birthday of one of the students in each group. This is how the respective partners reacted when finding out about it:

**Excerpt 1: Traditional learners**

J: I’m going to have a family with two ehm chil / childrens, and I’m going to live in a big house.
I: When is your birthday?
J: My birthday is now.
I: Ah, my birthday is on the sixteen ah ja of ehm of May. When is your sister’s birthday?
J: My sister’s birthday is in is on the twenty-seventh of February.
I: What films do you like?

**Excerpt 2: Autonomous learners**

D: . . . What did / what should you do today?
L: Today I ehm I shall have my birthday.
D: Have you birthday today?
L: Yes.
D: Happy birthday.
L: Thank you. So I should home and, and and make made a cake to my-
D: birthday cake?
L: Cake, yes, so I should have this cake and, so to / afternoon my eh my friend is coming and my Dad and Mum’s friend is coming too, so I should have birthday [?].

The difference between the two types of interaction is obvious. The two German 12-year-olds in Excerpt 1 are not at all responsive to what their partner is saying, although they are higher ability students. When student J comes up with an almost emotional confession that she intends to have a family with two children, she gets no reaction. Discourse analysts talk about *naked linkage* between the conversational contributions. The correct phrase from the textbook “When is your birthday?” is, however, noteworthy, since the corresponding L1 structure tends to provoke a question like “When do you have birthday?”

By contrast, the language of the two weakest learners from the autonomous class contains a number of mistakes. For example *should* with reference to future time is largely due to interference from the Danish L1, as is “Have you birthday today?” And yet, the two learners in Excerpt 2 have a genuine conversation, which is characterized by responsivity and hearer support. Excerpts 1 and 2 can be said to point to a prototypical difference in conversational behaviour between the two learner groups.

The question of how the communicative behaviour develops in the next couple of years has been described in work by Legenhausen (1999, 2008). The following two excerpts after 4 years of learning English illustrate the fact that the learners have by then managed to negotiate meaning in the target language.
In Excerpt 3 the students MA and N talk about their pen friends, and student M is not sure about the meaning of *relationship*. Communicative trouble of this kind is widely considered to be very valuable from a language acquisitional point of view. The two learners have to work out the meaning together, which has the effect of emotionally *charging* the input, a term used by Earl Stevick (1980). This in turn leads to what psycholinguists would call *deep-processing* of the language input. What we can witness here is, as it were, learning in progress.

**Excerpt 3**

N: Have you wri- only written one letter to him [pen friend] and that he not-
MA: He did not answer the letter, so I think that it was . . .
N: Yeah, the end of your relationship.
MA: Relationship?
N: Relationship, friendship.
MA: Yes.
N: Friendship, okay.
MA: I’m not gay!
N: Okay. I still have contact with my friend Anieska.

Excerpt 4 offers one more example of an authentic conversation in which meaning is negotiated. After the school year, student M will attend a different type of school. The two learners try to work out the meaning and concept of the Danish term *afterskole*.

**Excerpt 4**

L: What are you going to do in your new school . . . isn’t it a special school?
M: No, it’s just a . . .
L: ordinary school?
M: No, it’s an ‘after school’?
L: ‘After school’? I don’t know what it’s called in English.
M: It’s (pause) I think it’s a kind of private school maybe.
L: Are you going to live there?
M: Yeah, go . . . only going home in the (pause)
L: weekends?
M: Yeah, every second holiday of the weekend . . . I don’t know.

The many sentence completions by student L are indicative of his involvement in the interaction. Discourse analysts talk about *hearer-supportive behaviour*.

The number of illustrative examples in which meaning is negotiated between autonomous learners after 4 years of learning English and in which they support each other could be multiplied indefinitely. However, what is needed in this context is some further proof of successful linguistic developments that goes beyond individual samples of interaction.

**GENERAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

We also tried to get some measure of general language proficiency, and for that reason we also administered a so-called C-Test, whose format looks as follows:
What did we do wrong?

We are a middle-aged couple with a teenage family. We ha___ always wor___ hard a___ our profes___ careers a___ our jo___, have alw___ paid o___ tax a___ tried t___ do t___ best f___ our chil . . . .

Every second word is cut in half and the second part is deleted. If there is an odd number of letters, one more letter is deleted. The text is to be reconstructed, and the format thus belongs to the category of reduced redundancy tests. A complete C-Test consists of four different texts, each containing 25 distorted words. It is considered a very robust test of global language proficiency. We administered the same C-Test in various classes. Table (3) shows some of the results.

Table 3: C-Test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of lessons</th>
<th>Score (max. 100)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DT 7 - tradi</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA 7b - auto</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>440</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DA 8a - auto</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>720</td>
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<td>8b - auto</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GT (bilingual)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>680 + 120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 allows us to compare proficiency scores of the autonomous class under discussion with several other classes. In Grade 7 their scores are higher than those of the traditional, communicative class of the same school (63.5 vs. 54.3, respectively). In Grade 8 the autonomous class’s score has risen to 77.7, a score that equals the score of another autonomous class that started English lessons a year earlier, in Grade 4. The amazing result, though, is that both autonomous classes achieve about the same scores as a German high ability class. The code GT (bilingual) stands for a bilingual grammar school class in which English is also the medium of instruction in subjects like history and biology. This accounts for the additional 120 lessons. The point that needs to be emphasized in this context is that only very high ability students opt for bilingual or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) courses.

In other words, even if a yardstick like a C-Test, in which grammatical accuracy also comes into play, is applied, autonomous mixed ability classes reach the same proficiency levels as high ability CLIL-course students.
A final illustration of the writing competence of one of the better autonomous students completes the picture of the linguistic development of the autonomous learners. After 3 years, in Grade 8 we asked the learners to write a picture story. The title was “Off to the Country,” and it consisted of a series of 6 drawings. This is what the student AM wrote:

Two days before my summer holiday, I received a letter from my mother's aunt and uncle. They live on a farm in a small village, I can’t remember what the name of the village is. Anyway, I read the letter up loud to my parents, and they thought it was a splendid idea. Three days later, my Mom and Dad took me to the train station, my Mom had packed a suitcase for me, it was extremely heavy, I was only going to be away for a week, but my Mom alway pack as if I were going to be away for a whole year.

I managed to get the suitcase up in the train and find a nice (Kupe) compartment. It took three hours to get to the train station in the small village, it was not only a small village, but also a very small train station. I almost couldn’t recognize my mother's uncle, he was actually wearing nice clothes. I have never seen him in such clothes before. Not that I want to be rued or anything, but he is sort of a hillbilly.

My Mom’s aunt welcomed me, and showed me my room, where I was going to live the upcoming week. They have a lot of animals on the farm, such as horses, pigs, chiken’s, and one goose. Every morning I get up early and help feeding the animals.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The focus of this article has been on the linguistic achievements of learners taught according to the principles of autonomous language learning. This might be considered a fairly narrow perspective (for a comprehensive overview, see Benson, 2001; Little, 1991). It can perhaps be convincingly argued that there are more important reasons for trying to develop learner autonomy:

- General educational objectives need to be mentioned in this context. They include, for example, the development of the learners’ self-esteem and self-confidence. On the one hand, self-esteem is a prerequisite for developing autonomy, and on the other hand, autonomy enhances the learners’ self-esteem.
- For Holec and the Council of Europe, the political objectives were of paramount importance when promoting autonomy: They had in mind the interest of democratic societies to develop the capacity of their citizens to act as free and self-determining individuals.
- Furthermore, there are a host of psychological arguments: Learning psychologists emphasize that all learning starts out from the learners’ existing knowledge, and constructivists hold that “knowledge cannot be taught but must be constructed by the learner.” (Candy, 1991, p. 252). Some motivational theories claim that autonomy or, rather, self-determination is a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation, and a first step towards intrinsic motivation is to allow learners freedom of choice.
- As a last argument, it should be mentioned that we need to equip our learners for life-long learning, and having learned how to learn is an excellent investment for the future.
REFERENCES


AUTONOMY: LEARNERS, TEACHERS, AND CONTEXTS

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I would like to start by thanking the organizers of the TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy for their kind invitation to act as closing session facilitator. It was a real honour to be invited to summarize the three plenary presentations, to discuss some of the implications of the ideas put forward by the invited speakers, and to suggest topics for the final discussion.

In what follows I shall first (1) provide a summary of the morning presentations; (2) establish links among the three presentations in terms of learner autonomy; (3) highlight the implications for instructed second language learning that derive from the insights and suggestions advanced in each of the three presentations; and (4) present some of the questions that were posed to serve as a guide for the final discussion. This will be followed by a general conclusion in which I shall pull all the strings together in order to highlight the main message emerging from the symposium for our understanding of autonomy in second language acquisition (SLA).

SUMMARY OF FEATURED PRESENTATIONS

Phil Benson’s presentation, “Autonomy in and out of Class,” touched upon crucial theoretical and pedagogical dimensions of learning inside and outside the classroom, the inside/outside classroom learning issue being in my mind a timely one in discussions of instructed second language (L2) learning.

He started off by acknowledging two well known but nevertheless crucial facts. First, L2 learning is rarely fully accomplished if the contact with the L2 is reduced to the classroom contexts. Second, a rather important part of L2 learning actually takes place outside the classroom. Yet, he argued, little is known about the world outside the classroom and the learning that takes place in it. As a result, the world outside the classroom has a problematic status in both L2 teaching theory and in the theory of autonomy, thus his contention for the need to theorize language learning beyond the classroom.

In line with these tenets, his presentation focused on (1) theorizing these two learning environments with a view to inform research (particularly classroom research) and teaching; and (2) challenging deep-rooted assumptions about the centrality of classrooms to L2 learning. This general aim was accomplished by engaging in three separate tasks. He first explored the possible relationship between inside and outside classroom learning. He then discussed the way in which the concepts of setting and mode of practice can help us make sense of learning outside the classroom. Finally, he explored the manner in which the notion of learning in the everyday life of the learner can be used as an overarching construct to understand classroom learning and learning beyond the classroom, which is, in fact, a very relevant issue given that, as Benson claims, both types of learning “usually exist in some kind of relationship with each other.” It should be added that this is an important dimension of learning somewhat neglected in discussions of L2 learning and teaching.

Benson approached the analysis of the possible relationship between inside and outside classroom learning by questioning the applicability of crucial concepts in research on classroom learning (particularly those of processes and strategies) to learning outside the
classroom with a view to “carve out a space for research on learning beyond the classroom.
“A crucial point in Benson’s theorizing is his assertion that “we should not, perhaps, be
thinking of separate fields with independent objects of inquiry, but of different perspectives
on very similar objects of inquiry.”

As mentioned earlier, the second task undertaken by Benson was the discussion of the way in
which the concepts of setting and mode of practice can help us make sense of learning
outside the classroom. He defined a setting as “a particular kind of arrangement for learning
involving one or more learners in a particular kind of place and situated in particular kinds of
physical, social, or instructional relationships with others (teachers, learners, others).” He
suggested that this notion might serve “as a mapping tool to make sense of the overlapping
terrains of language learning beyond the classroom.” Similarly, he defined mode of practice
as “a typical set of routine processes or interactions that deploy the elements of a particular
type of setting and are characteristics of it.” Benson then stressed a crucial point: Any given
setting (according to his definition) is likely to support a number of different modes of
practice, thus the need to re-think the unilateral relationship between learning/teaching
contexts and modes of practice. From here he concluded that “much of the interest in the
world of learning beyond the classroom lies in the ways that settings and modes of practice
interact with each other.” At this point, I posed three questions for the discussion that
followed the closing session:

1. Is this interaction similar to or different from the one in classroom learning?
2. How can individual learners cope with diversity in these interactions and what
implications, if any, can this have for the development of learner’s autonomy (understood
as internal capacity to be in control of one’s own learning)?
3. How can we prepare students in one context for the language use needs they may have
in the other context? (eg. class learning and out-of-class uses of language?)

The third issue Benson explored was the way in which the notion of learning in the everyday
life of the learner can be used as an overarching construct to understand learning inside the
classroom and learning beyond the classroom in an attempt to deconstruct the latter. With
this, Benson moved from the world outside the learner, to the world inside the learners and
thus of the learners’ perceptions of learning contexts, settings, and processes. His discussion
took account of (new) literacy studies to draw our attention to a crucial point: the L2 learner’s
ability to create language learning opportunities beyond the classroom and, following from
that, his assertion that “there is no a priori reason, however, to assume that the classroom is
the primary site for language learning.” Benson concluded that it is very relevant to explore
the language learning that occurs in the everyday lives of L2 learners, as well as the roles that
various settings and modes of practice play in their lives.

In my summary, I suggested that these contentions could be linked to the wider issue of
whether current views of autonomy in language learning should encompass the L2 learners
ability to create learning opportunities in the sense of making the most of the language
learning practice afforded in settings inside and outside the classroom, and I posed the
following questions:

1. How can we help learners become autonomous learners in the sense of being in
control of and making the most of the various settings and modes of practice they
encounter in their everyday lives?
2. Do we need new notions of learner and teacher autonomy to account for this ability to create language learning opportunities?

The second question would be part of a more theoretical debate but one that, in my view, nevertheless will eventually have to make its way into pedagogical thinking if we accept the relevance of viewing L2 learning as taking place in settings and contexts both inside and outside of the classroom.

Benson ended his presentation with two main conclusions. One was the need to challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the centrality of classrooms to L2 learning. The other was the claim that in order to understand how settings and modes of practice contribute to learning, we need to look at the ecology of these settings and modes of practice within the lives of individual learners, in their own local contexts, and in view of their personal and learning histories, a position very much in line with current ecological perspectives on language learning and teaching.

In contrast to Benson’s focus on the dimension of learning inside and outside classrooms, Leni Dam focused mainly on teaching by considering various dimensions of the teaching and learning process that takes place in classroom learning, that is, in autonomous classrooms. The main aim of her presentation, “How Do We Recognize an Autonomous Classroom?—Revisited,” was to offer an overview of important issues in and steps towards the organization of and the ongoing processes in an autonomous classroom in 2008, an issue closely linked to Benson’s concepts of settings and modes of practice. She started off by providing some definitions of autonomous learners and autonomous classrooms. She defined autonomous learner as a learner who is willing to take charge of his or her own learning and is capable of doing so (in terms of various dimensions: not only setting aims and purposes, but also being able to choose, implement, and evaluate learning actions). She defined autonomous classroom as a teaching and learning environment in which learners are supported in and given the chance to be autonomous learners. In addition, I suggested that these notions of autonomous learners and autonomous classrooms could (and maybe should) also be linked to the wider issue of autonomy inside and outside the classroom mentioned earlier.

Dam’s characterization of autonomous classrooms included two dimensions that can be linked to Benson’s concepts of settings and modes of practice. Thus, Dam suggested that understanding autonomous classrooms entails, on the one hand, looking into what can be seen and heard when entering the learning environment, that is, the physical setting, and, on the other hand, exploring what is being said and done by teachers, learners, and peers, that is, the activities and processes.

Starting with the setting dimension, Dam characterized autonomous classrooms as including (1) continuous movement and action and (2) physical artifacts (which have changed over the years): computers, blackboards, whiteboards, logbooks, learners’ portfolios, and so on. At this point, I posed two questions that, to my mind, have theoretical and pedagogical relevance in discussions of autonomy in L2 learning and teaching:

1. In what way do these autonomous classrooms differ from nonautonomous classrooms?
2. Do we know in what way the “movement and action” that characterizes autonomous classrooms is conducive to L2 learning? What type of learning? Linguistic development? Social interaction? Mutual scaffolding?

The analysis of the second dimension, activities and processes, entailed the consideration of five different dimensions: (1) the roles of teachers and learners, (2) the activities that take place, (3) the social dimension of classroom processes, (4) the documentation of learning processes and products, and (5) the materials used in autonomous classrooms.

Regarding the roles of teachers and learners, Dam suggested that teachers in autonomous classrooms aim at getting learners involved in their own learning, which entails developing their metacognition in terms of planning, doing, monitoring, and evaluating. Similarly, learners in autonomous classrooms are enabled and willing to take control of their own learning. In terms of the activities that take place in autonomous classrooms, Dam emphasized three crucial issues: (1) autonomous classrooms include plenty of communicative activities (which actually prepare learners for language use outside the classroom); (2) the role of social interaction while performing these communicative activities, and (3) the relevance of taking into account issues of learners’ self-esteem and willingness to communicate. These issues were again related to the two questions posed earlier, particularly the second one: What evidence is there of the way in which these processes and actions contribute to learning? What type of learning? Linguistic development? Social interaction? Mutual scaffolding?

Continuing with activities and processes, Dam discussed three further dimensions. The first one was the social dimension of processes and action in autonomous classrooms, particularly in the implementation and functioning of group work. The second dimension was the central role that the documentation of learning processes and products (via, for instance, portfolios and logbooks) has in autonomous classrooms, such documentation being deemed important for both teachers and learners. I suggested that this dimension could be linked to the previously mentioned issue of the concept of autonomy being made to encompass the L2 learner’s awareness of learning opportunities, as well as his or her ability to make the most of the learning opportunities afforded both inside and outside the classroom. Finally, Dam discussed issues related to the materials used in autonomous classrooms. Two points were especially relevant: Autonomous classrooms entail using a variety of materials and resources, and teachers in autonomous classrooms need to take decisions regarding how to make judicious use of the textbook. The issues suggested for further debate were the same ones as mentioned earlier: the way in which the processes, materials, and actions that characterize autonomous classrooms differ from those of non-autonomous classrooms, and the way in which the processes, materials, and actions that characterize autonomous classrooms are conducive to learning and to which type or dimension of L2 learning.

As in the case of Benson’s presentation, Dam rounded off hers with two main conclusions. The first one was that the teacher’s responsibilities in the autonomous classroom are different from those of nonautonomous classrooms. As Dam noted, the pedagogical decision making engaged in by the teacher in the autonomous classroom entails entering “a long and often troublesome journey,” but a journey that, nevertheless—and this was her second conclusion—is a worthy one because the “autonomous classroom gives scope for interested / happy / engaged / satisfied learners” and for personal development for teachers and students.

The last presentation was Lienhard Legenhausen’s “Arguments for Learner Autonomy: Analysing Linguistic Development.” In line with Dam’s presentation, Legenhausen
considered in-class language learning and teaching. Similar to Benson’s presentation, Legenhausen’s talk looked into learning, although the lens through which he explored learning focused on the manner in which autonomous classrooms can foster linguistic development.

He framed his discussion in theory and research on instructed SLA. Thus, he documented the shift from a mere search for the best way to teach foreign languages, to a focus on learning and the recognition that L2 learners play an active role in the SLA process: “There is growing evidence that it is the learners themselves who are the decisive agents in the learning process.” He then presented the theoretical underpinnings of this position by referring to well known SLA theories, especially the teachability hypothesis and the interactional hypothesis. His arguments were that autonomous classrooms, as defined by Dam in terms of setting, action, and processes, are ideal scenarios to provide the necessary learning conditions to foster L2 development. In particular, he emphasized the active communicative practice required for successful SLA that is actually part of autonomous classrooms. Given these arguments, my questions were the same as those posed in relation to Dam’s presentation, as mentioned earlier.

He then shared with the symposium participants a research project in which the researchers systematically followed the linguistic development of a group of (autonomous) classroom learners over a period of 4 years, this being one of the few extended longitudinal classroom studies to date.

The main aim of the research project was to compare traditionally taught classes and autonomous classrooms. Data were collected from Danish comprehensive schools (11-year-old learners) and a German grammar school class. Two main sets of data sources were used: recordings of peer interactions while talking about a topic of their own choice and vocabulary test batteries. The analyses of these data entailed comparisons of various linguistic dimensions and aspects in the interactions of both groups of learners. It was found that autonomous classroom learners outperformed nonautonomous classroom learners in vocabulary acquisition and use, creative use of grammar rules, and conversational behaviour. From here it was concluded that autonomous language learners achieve higher rates of linguistic development. However, care must be taken to generalize these findings beyond the learning context and linguistic areas investigated.

Given these findings and their interpretation, two questions of a general nature were suggested as points for reflection:

1. In terms of aims in language teaching, where should the emphasis be put: linguistic objectives or strategic objectives? This is in fact one of the perennial questions in discussions of strategies in SLA.
2. How can a balance between linguistic and strategic objectives be achieved, particularly in terms of time constraints and teacher preparation?

Legenhausen finished his presentation by arguing in favour of promoting learner autonomy for reasons beyond those of the benefits associated with fostering language development. These reasons were related to (1) the close connection between autonomy and self-esteem, (2) the democratic objectives of education, (3) psychological arguments related to the nature of knowledge acquisition as well as issues of motivation, and (4) the need “to equip our learners for life-long learning.”
CONCLUSION

The three presentations collectively shed light on learning settings (including those present in contexts both inside and outside classroom), language teachers (particularly those working in autonomous classrooms), and language learners (when engaged in learning processes in settings both inside and outside of the classroom). This three-fold focus led to interesting theoretically and pedagogically relevant discussions of three main issues: (1) the characteristics of learning and teaching settings; (2) the nature of the actions, processes, and modes of practice that characterize SLA in inside and outside of classrooms, on the one hand, and autonomous classrooms, on the other; and (3) the learning outcomes that derive from learning conditions in various settings, particularly in autonomous classrooms.

It can be concluded that some crucial messages emerging from the 2008 Sevilla TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy were the following:

- We need to challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the centrality of classrooms to SLA processes.
- There is no *a priori* reason to assume that the classroom is the primary site for language learning: We need to pay attention to the language learning in the everyday lives of learners and the roles that various settings and modes of practice play in their lives.
- Teachers and learners have different responsibilities and roles in autonomous classrooms.
- There are arguments and classroom evidence to suggest that autonomous classrooms develop happy, interested, good language learners who achieve higher levels of success in their language development.

In addition, a number of questions were posed regarding both the theoretical and pedagogical implications of reconceptualising SLA as encompassing both inside and outside classroom learning, as well as the implications that this reconceptualization would have for current theorizing on learner autonomy in SLA. Similarly, further questions were posed on the true nature of autonomous classrooms, the way in which they differ from nonautonomous classrooms, and the learning that is promoted in them. As rightly noted by one of the symposium participants, we must not forget that we are, first and above all, *language teachers*. Therefore, we have the ethical obligation of finding the best ways of helping our learners learn. One of the messages emerging from this symposium is that promoting learner autonomy is a sound step in the direction of helping our learners in their language learning process.
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