Survey Review: *recent publications on autonomy in language learning*

Barbara Sinclair

Collections of articles

Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning
R. Pemberton, E. S. L. Li, W. W. F. Or, and H. D. Pierson (eds.).
Hong Kong University Press 1996
ISBN: 962 209 407 4 337pp. £27.50

Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning
P. Benson and P. Voller (eds.)
Longman 1997
ISBN: 0 582 28992 0 270pp. £17.50

Practical guides

Establishing Self-Access: From Theory to Practice
D. Gardner and L. Miller
Cambridge University Press 1999
ISBN 0 521 58445-2 paperback 276pp. £13.95

Helping Students to Learn: A Guide to Learner Autonomy
R. Lowes and F. Target
Richmond Publishing
ISBN 84 294 5447 0 96pp. £12.20

From Here to Autonomy: A Helsinki University Language Centre Autonomous Learning Project
L. Karlsson, F. Kjisik, and J. Nordlund
Yliopistopaino Helsinki University Press 1997
ISBN 951 570 344 1 158pp. FIM 158

Collections of tasks

Learner Independence Worksheet
L. Harrison (ed.)
IATEFL Independence Special Interest Group 1997
ISBN 1 901 09525 8 83pp. £12.00

Tasks for Independent Language Learning
D. Gardner and L. Miller (eds.)
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages 1996
ISBN 0 939791 65 X 200pp. US$ 24.95

Introduction

This survey review considers seven recent publications relating to autonomy in language learning. For the purpose of this review, they have been grouped into three categories, as follows:

1) Collections of articles about autonomy in language learning, and research studies in the field
2) Books intended as practical guides on implementing specific aspects of autonomy in language learning
3) Collections of materials or tasks intended to inspire practitioners of autonomy in language learning.

All of these publications have in common a concern with autonomy in language learning. Some focus on the practical application and manifestations of autonomy in a variety of contexts, while others reflect more abstract aspects of the concept. The aims of this review are to consider the extent to which these books make a contribution to our understanding of autonomy in language learning, and to assess the usefulness of each publication for a variety of readers, such as novice teachers, experienced teachers, students on teacher education programmes, and managers of language learning facilities.

Background

Educationalists in the West have been advocating the development of learner responsibility as an educational goal since the early sixties, since when there has been an increasing interest in developing 'learning skills', 'key skills', and 'life-long learning' in all sectors of education. Rather later, the language teaching profession took up the cause, and in the last 20 years or so has made great progress in the exploration and implementation of the promotion of learner autonomy. This has led to a growing focus on what has been called by some 'learner training' (or 'learning to learn', 'learner development', etc.) in language courses and published materials. In addition, the establishment of self-access and learner resources centres, the increase in distance learning programmes, and a greater involvement of IT in language teaching, all demonstrate this professional concern with empowering learners to be more effective and more independent in their language learning. A closer look at the ways in which autonomy is described in different educational contexts around the world, however, reveals variations in its interpretation as a concept, both in relation to education and to its wider social and political context. The study of learner autonomy is not, then, a simple matter, but one which requires careful interpretation of the particular cultural, social, political, and educational context in which that study is located.

One view is that autonomy in language learning is principally concerned with providing learners with situations and opportunities for exercising a degree of independence. These might range from activities in class which provide learners with opportunities for choice or decision-making about their learning, to independent study in self-access learning centres, or participation in out-of-class learner-directed project work. In other words, autonomy means being self-directed. Another view is that

autonomy is a capacity for making informed decisions about one's own learning, and that this capacity needs to be developed through introspection, reflection, and experimentation in the form of 'learner training' or some other kind of intervention by a facilitator, such as a teacher or counsellor. Learners may develop this capacity, or knowledge, about their learning, but at times may choose not to be self-directed. In other words, autonomy is a capacity for potential self-directed learning behaviours. Yet another view considers that such a capacity can only be developed through social and collaborative learning, rather than through any kind of teacher intervention. For others, autonomy is a question of learners' rights, or freedom from constraint, and represents an opportunity for social transformation. It is also possible to find views which encompass one or more of the above. The publications reviewed here reflect a variety of these views.

Collections of articles

Pemberton et al.

This lengthy book contains 18 papers from 'Autonomy in Language Learning', a conference held in Hong Kong between 23 and 25 June 1994. The event was jointly organized and sponsored by the Language Centre of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the Independent Learning Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The focus of the book is on 'fostering autonomy within educational institutions', a process which it believes will make autonomy an achievable goal within such institutions (p. 4). Its aims are (1) to examine key aspects of current theory and practice in the field, (2) to exemplify the range of learning and research projects that are already under way, and (3) to highlight some of the problems and possibilities that lie ahead.

In his introduction, Pemberton presents a solid basis for the rest of the book by clarifying and raising important issues, and by previewing topics discussed in greater detail by the individual chapter authors. For example, he provides a useful overview of the reasons for the growth of interest in autonomy in language learning over the last 20 years, and of related terminology, such as 'self-directed learning' and 'individualized instruction'. He goes on to discuss definitions and interpretations of the term 'autonomy', as well as some of its characteristics. The section concludes with a review of a number of important issues of current debate, such as: 'In what situations is learner autonomy an appropriate goal?', 'What type of autonomy should we aim at?', and 'What approach or approaches to research methodology should be taken when investigating aspects of autonomy?' This introduction, then, provides clear orientation to the reader embarking on the book, and is highly recommended.

The chapters which follow discuss a range of different topics, and are divided into three sections: 'Learners and the Learning Process', 'Materials', and 'Technology and Evaluation'. Each section is introduced and previewed by the contributor's 'Introductory Perspectives'. The authors include: Phil Benson, Rocío Blasco García, Elsa Christopher, Leni Dam, Edith Esch, David Gardner, Susanna Ho, Lienhard

Legenhausen, Rena Kelly, Chihiro Kinoshita Thomson, Winnie Lee, David Little, Lindsay Miller, John Milton, Raymond Ng, David Nunan, Valerie Pickard, Herbert Pierson, James Purchase, Philip Riley, Diana Simons, Barbara Sinclair, Ian Smallwood, Vance Stevens, and Peter Voller.

It is not possible here to review each chapter in detail, but the reviewer would like to draw readers' attention to the following contributions, which raise a number of important issues for debate:

Chapter 2: 'Concepts of Autonomy in Language Learning' by Phil Benson

Benson's chapter, which has already been widely quoted, has also been influential in provoking much thought—and some controversy—about the philosophical and political aspects of autonomy. In this chapter he discusses the concept of autonomy in language learning and calls for a critical approach, at the centre of which lies the issue of control (rather than responsibility) of the management of learning processes, resources, and language use. He maintains that greater control of these aspects 'cannot be achieved by each individual acting alone according to his or her own preferences. Control is a question of collective decision-making rather than individual choice' (p. 33). Instead of avoiding issues of power and social change, the language teaching profession should recognize the transformative character of learner autonomy, and the relationship between language autonomy and social autonomy.

Chapter 3: 'Promoting learner autonomy; criteria for the selection of appropriate methods' by Edith Esch

The main thrust of this chapter is to suggest that learner autonomy can only be promoted by providing a *learning environment* which is specifically supportive of autonomy, rather than through 'methods'. Such an environment would demonstrate five criteria, namely 'choice', 'flexibility', 'adaptability/modifiability', 'reflectivity', and 'shareability'. Three factors Esch regards as vital for the development of learner autonomy are stressed: 'learning by doing'; 'reflection and conceptualization', and 'interaction and negotiation'. Esch writes from the perspective of self-access learning in tertiary education and makes a number of cogent points. The extent to which her five criteria may be constrained by different learning contexts (e.g. secondary school; more 'traditional' learning situations; classroom learning) is not discussed. A useful read, however, particularly for those interested in self-access learning.

Chapter 4: 'Learner culture and learner autonomy in the Hong Kong Chinese context' by Herbert Pierson

In this article Pierson explores, with special reference to the Hong Kong and Chinese contexts, the relationship between culture and the acceptance of educational practices which promote learner autonomy. He argues that the stereotype of the Chinese learner as a passive, rote-learning, teacher-dependent student with a surface approach to study, was not produced by thousands of years of Chinese culture, but by the realities of social pressure, large classes, and a centralized education system with standardized syllabus and examinations. There has been much discussion amongst the profession of the cultural appropriacy of promoting autonomy in different contexts, and this chapter represents a

clear response to those who suggest that autonomy is only appropriate for western cultural contexts.

Chapter 7: 'Language counselling for learner autonomy: the skilled helper in self-access language learning' by Rena Kelly

In this chapter, Kelly describes the macro- and micro-skills required by teachers to support self-access learning through one-to-one therapeutic counselling of the Rogerian model. She highlights the necessity of providing targeted learning support for students attempting self-directed learning. This chapter highlights the growing awareness of the importance of the role of the language counsellor, and has already been much cited.

Chapter 13: 'Freedom to learn and compulsion to interact: promoting learner autonomy through the use of information systems and information technologies' by David Little

Little looks at how the processes involved in learner autonomy might be developed and supported by computer-based information systems. The author argues from a Vygotskian point of view that the distance required for reflection and analysis—crucial for the development of learner autonomy—can only come from the ability to interact with others, to discuss and negotiate, so that the learning processes are made explicit. An information system can develop learner autonomy if it is able to facilitate collaborative interaction and reflection (through interaction) on language and language learning. He considers three kinds of interaction involving information systems: interactions with, interactions around, and interactions via information systems, and illustrates these with reference to currently available computer programs and systems. This is another erudite offering from Little which emphasizes the importance of social learning for autonomy—a theme which has been taken up by other writers in the field.

Chapter 15: 'From word-processing to text processing' by John Milton, Ian Smallwood, and James Purchase

This chapter describes in detail an impressive and developing computer program designed to aid tertiary students at the Language Centre of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology through the processes of planning, composing, and reviewing academic writing of specific genres. It goes beyond spell-checkers and grammar-checkers and encourages learners, individually and collaboratively, to make use of discourse analysis techniques at various levels. It also provides a corpus of academic writing for learners to access, and highlights the growing potential of IT for developing autonomy in language learners—another theme which is a focus of current interest.

Chapter 16: 'The blind man and the bubble: researching self-access' by Philip Riley

This is an important article for those considering research in the field of learner autonomy. In it Riley considers a range of research approaches which bridge or stand outside the quantitative/qualitative divide and which are appropriate for research projects in the field of learner autonomy.

Chapter 17: 'The acquisition of vocabulary in an autonomous learning environment—the first months of beginning English' by Leni Dam and Lienhard Legenhausen

This chapter is of interest because it is one of the first to offer evidence suggesting that learner autonomy leads to language proficiency gains. Dam and Legenhausen suggest that their research demonstrates convincingly that 'vocabulary acquisition in the autonomous approach is very successful and compares favourably with results from more traditional textbook-based approaches' (p. 280).

There is, of course, much more in this book that is worth reading. Scholars may be interested in the design and outcomes of the research studies described in some chapters, while materials designers might find the chapters on task design and materials use helpful. Because of its wide range of themes and levels of discussion, this book can be recommended for a wide audience, although it must be said that most of its chapters refer to the context of tertiary language learning. Nevertheless, it is likely to be extremely useful for tutors and trainees participating in Masters programmes and other in-service teacher education courses. There is much food for thought in this book, which takes the reader beyond the immediate practicalities of teaching and encourages deeper reflection. The editors have managed to provide a coherent framework for a complex range of themes.

Benson and Voller (eds.)

This is another weighty collection of 17 chapters by different authors. The blurb on the book's cover claims that it provides a 'systematic overview of the field and a coherent development of themes from the theoretical to the practical', although it has to be said that the focus is mainly on the theoretical. Topics include the political and social implications of autonomy and independence and their effects on educational structures, and, to a lesser extent, such practical aspects as the design of learner-centred materials, and a methodology for implementing autonomy and independence. It also claims to offer new insights into the principles of autonomy and independence.

The editors, Benson and Voller, who are based in Hong Kong, provide a thoughtful introduction to the book, covering such topics as the different interpretations of autonomy in language education, the relationship of autonomy to the individual and the group, the purposes of fostering autonomy, and whether autonomy is culture-bound, i.e. a predominantly western ideology. They also consider the differences between 'autonomy' and 'independence', as reflected in the title of the book. They make the point that there is confusion between the two terms, since they are often used synonymously. Sometimes, however, the terms are used differently, as with Dickinson, who 'associates 'autonomy' with the idea of learning alone, and 'independence' with active responsibility for one's own learning' (p. 2). They further state: 'These are problematic concepts because they carry with them meanings from other discourses and from their applications in particular instances of language education. Because different usages relate to different underlying perspectives, it is unlikely that applied linguists will arrive at single agreed definitions of these terms' (ibid.). In using both terms in the title of the book, and in pairing the terms almost continuously in their introduction, Benson and Voller

seem to be 'hedging their bets' somewhat!

As an introduction to the chapters which follow Benson and Voller pose three major questions to be addressed: 'What kinds of autonomy or independence are aimed at and how can they best be achieved?'; 'What changes are envisaged in the roles and relationships of teachers and learners?'; and 'What specific methods and materials might contribute to overall goals?' (pp. 2–3)

The book is divided into three parts: 'Philosophy and Practice', 'Roles and Relationships', and 'Methods and Materials'. Authors include Guy Aston, Phil Benson, Michael Breen, Edith Esch, David Little, Andrew Littlejohn, William Littlewood, Sarah Mann, John Milton, David Nunan, Felicity O'Dell, Alastair Pennycook, Philip Riley, Stephen Ryan, Susan Sheerin, Gill Sturtridge, and Peter Voller. As can be seen, a substantial number of these authors feature in the previous collection reviewed here, and it is interesting to note the development of some of their arguments from one volume to the next.

As with the previous collection, each section of the book usefully starts with an introductory synopsis highlighting the points to be developed in the following chapters. This provides a guide for the reader, and gives a coherent structure to the book. Rather than focusing on specific contexts or research studies in a descriptive manner, the majority of the chapters tend to be thoughtful and thought-provoking in nature, which many readers may find interesting and appealing. The earlier chapters discussing philosophical, ideological, social, and political aspects of 'autonomy and independence' are more abstract than the later ones. Interestingly, ten of the 17 chapters refer to self-access learning, rather than to other contexts for autonomy, which possibly reflects the fact that this book has largely arisen from the tertiary scene in Hong Kong.

It is not possible to review each chapter individually here, but the reviewer would like to highlight the following for bringing new insights to the field of autonomy.

Chapter 2: 'Philosophy and Politics of Autonomy' by Phil Benson

As part of the section on Philosophy and Practice, this chapter is concerned with the theoretical roots of the concepts of autonomy and independence. It attempts to analyse the historical and political bases of these concepts, and relates three 'versions' of autonomy, namely 'technical', 'psychological', and 'political', to three corresponding approaches to knowledge and learning: positivism, constructivism, and critical theory. Benson argues that the first two approaches are inadequate, with neither taking into consideration the ideological context in which the learning takes place. He suggests that learners need to reflect on and understand the relationships between their beliefs and actions in language learning and the social context in which they occur. This is another thought-provoking offering from Benson, though it is somewhat less self-assured and more tentative in expression than his chapter in 'Taking Control'.

Chapter 3: 'Cultural alternatives and autonomy' by Alastair Pennycook

Pennycook convincingly brings his insights from the cultural politics of language learning to a discussion on learner autonomy. He suggests that autonomy in language learning has become 'a psychologized, technologized and universalized concept', and emphasizes the importance of looking at language learning in terms of 'voice' and the struggle for 'cultural alternatives' (p. 35). Once again, this is thought-provoking stuff, but his views may seem unrealistic to many practitioners caught within the various constraints of their teaching contexts. Indeed, Chapter 9, 'Shooting arrows at the sun; perspectives on a pedagogy for autonomy', by Breen and Mann, offers an alternative view: '. . . might we be indulging in an even greater self-deception in assuming we can work with our learners upon processes of awareness and questioning that may ultimately lead to cultural change? To participate in a genuine cultural transformation unavoidably leads us to question the integrity of the classroom as an institutionalized location for learning and the current definition of what it is to be a teacher. Do we seriously seek to fire our arrows as far as this?' (p. 142) The inclusions of such opposing views within the book make it a stimulating read.

Chapter 6: 'Self-access: why do we want it, and what can it do?' by William Littlewood

This chapter suggests two main dimensions that need to be included in a theoretical framework for the role of self-access in language learning: the analytic and the experiential. Littlewood considers how these may be implemented in self-access learning, and concludes that there are some aspects of language learning that typically do not benefit from a self-access approach, most notably, productive skills and authentic communication. He suggests that new ways will need to be found to incorporate what he calls the 'essential aspects of the human response (in particular, its creativity and unpredictability)'. (p. 89) Until then, self-access learning is most effective as a complementary part of a language learning programme. Littlewood provides a clear analysis and thoughtful, feasible suggestions.

Part II of the book provides five interesting chapters on the roles of teachers and facilitators. All too often, terms such as 'helper', 'facilitator', 'consultant', and 'counsellor' are used to describe the roles that teachers take in supporting autonomy in language learning. Chapter 8, 'The guru and the conjurer: aspects of counselling for self-access', by Philip Riley, is excellent in the way it probes the role and aims of the 'counsellor' in supporting the development of autonomy, a theme which is highly topical. His consideration of the ethics of 'counselling' is eye-opening, and adds a new dimension to the discussion of this complex type of learning support, bringing insights from therapy, psychology, social sciences, and philosophy. Finally, he describes procedures for training language counsellors.

Part III: 'Methods and Materials' contains six chapters on more practical aspects of autonomy and independence. Chapter 12, 'Self-access work and curriculum ideologies', by Andrew Littlejohn, is interesting for its discussion of the wider issue of the ideologies embedded in teaching and learning contexts and activities. He asserts that language teaching is a

highly political activity which positions learners in their relationships with learning, teaching, and themselves. He argues that, rather than requiring self-access learners to simply 'respond' and 'reproduce' language—a typical positioning of the learner which goes against the aim of developing autonomy—certain task types could be used which call for learners to initiate and be creative. This, he also suggests, has enormous implications for language teaching in general.

To summarize, this collection of papers is notable for its focus on the more abstract aspects of autonomy and independence. The insights and ideas provided are general enough to be of interest to most readers, although some of the chapters are easier to follow than others. This is a book which would appeal to academics interested in the field, researchers seeking theoretical and epistemological bases for their work, and experienced, rather than novice, teachers wishing to develop as reflective practitioners.

Comparison Both of these collections represent important additions to our understanding of the theory, principles, and practice of autonomy in language learning. 'Taking Control' provides a broader range of topics and foci, and different levels of discussion, while 'Autonomy and Independence' is remarkable for the consistency of its depth of reflection on a number of complex and more abstract issues. Both are highly recommended.

Some important themes have emerged from these collections. First, the profession has been made to think more clearly about the political, philosophical, and macro-social aspects of autonomy. However, the concept of autonomy as having socially transformative potential needs to be tempered by a clear and pragmatic understanding of the various factors constraining the teachers and learners in different contexts. What is useful is the profession's growing awareness of all of these.

Second, there is a growing focus on the importance of social and collaborative learning for the development of learner autonomy, demonstrating the influence of Vygotskian theories of learning. There is also huge interest in the use of the new technologies for encouraging and supporting the development of learner autonomy. These two volumes also focus quite heavily on the context of self-access learning, particularly in the tertiary sector of education, where in some countries—Hong Kong, for example—there has been heavy investment in the establishment of self-access language learning centres. In particular, it is recognized that learners in a self-access context require a good deal of support for their developing autonomy that hi-tech facilities alone cannot provide. The resulting focus on the role and training of the language counsellor has been a useful and interesting development.

Another theme which occurs regularly is the dismissal by some writers of 'learner training' or 'learning to learn' as a reductive and inferior approach to developing autonomy. In many cases, the interpretation of 'learner training' by writers in these volumes has been an extremely

limited one, equating such procedures with 'study skills' or 'strategy training'. While it is clear that the term 'learner training' is problematic in itself, it should be remembered that there are as many different approaches to it as there are contexts. Approaches to 'learner training' may range from the highly teacher-directed (the interpretation often used by writers in these volumes) to the learner-negotiated and learner-led. A broader, more educational definition of 'learner training', such as that described by Sinclair (1996: 7 adapted from Ellis and Sinclair 1989) can certainly encourage learners to become aware of the many factors (including the personal, social, and political) which affect their learning, and to re-evaluate the learning approaches and strategies which work best for them within their specific context. Interestingly, although there is much critical reflection on the nature and interpretation of learner autonomy, there has been relatively little to parallel this with regard to 'learner training', or whatever we may decide to call it.

Practical Guides
Gardner and Miller

This book, once again written by authors based in Hong Kong, 'aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice in self-access language learning (SALL). While much of this book presents practical ideas dealing with issues relating to SALL, they are supported by references to relevant literature and research' (p. 1). The book aims to provide a useful resource for anyone wishing to establish and run self-access facilities.

The 275 pages of this substantial addition to the Cambridge Language Teaching Library series are divided into three parts. The first of these, 'Theoretical Perspectives', has four chapters: 'Background to self-access language learning', 'Learners' and teachers' beliefs and attitudes about language learning', 'A typology of self-access learning', and 'Management of self-access facilities'. Part 2, 'Practical Perspectives', has eight chapters: 'Learner profiles', 'Materials for self-access language learning', 'Self-access activities', 'Physical settings and resourcing', 'From teacher-directed to self-access learning', 'Counselling'; 'Assessment in self-access learning', and 'Evaluation of self-access language learning'. Part 3, 'Case Studies', contains descriptions of four self-access learning contexts: a primary school in Malaysia, a secondary school in Malaysia, a university in Hong Kong, and a private language school in the UK.

Every chapter in Parts 1 and 2 contains numerous figures and tables which helpfully summarize important information. The end of each chapter in these two sections provides tasks for the readers (presumably teachers or others involved in plans to set up self-access learning contexts) to carry out, and relevant discussion topics that may be used in teacher development sessions. The case studies in Part 3 include layouts of the self-access facilities, which are informative for those in similar contexts who wish to set up self-access learning.

With respect to the organization of the book as a whole, the reviewer found the sequence of chapters somewhat idiosyncratic at times. Perhaps Chapter 3, 'A typology of self-access', might have been better

divided between Chapters 2 and 4, with 'Management of self-access facilities' placed in Part 2 of the book, for instance. However, the actual sequence of the chapters will matter less to those who dip into the book for information on specific topics than to those who read it from cover to cover. The important thing to note is that the range of topics related to self-access learning covered within the book is truly extensive.

Much of the first Part, 'Theoretical Perspectives', provides an overview of useful *principles* rather than theory *per se* . . . There is no discussion of the theories of learning which support the concept of self-access language learning, for example, and the review of definitions in Chapter 1 treats the concept of 'learner autonomy' and the 'autonomous learner' rather briefly. Also, there seems to be no convenient definition of self-access language learning, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is not an easily describable phenomenon. The authors make the point that self-access consists of a number of elements with which learners interact. An extended, descriptive definition of self-access can be found in the first paragraph of section 1.4 (p. 11). Chapter 2 might have been better placed in Part 2 of the book, dealing as it does with learners' and teachers' beliefs about learning, and the use of various instruments to investigate them.

Despite the relative lack of theory in Part 1, there is much useful background information related to the issues involved in setting up self-access learning. The most useful and original chapter is Chapter 3, 'A typology of self-access'. Here, the authors have provided a categorization of 15 different variations on self-access learning contexts, and have used the analogy of 'shopping' to describe them. This works well. For example, the 'mobile shop' is a system which provides self-access materials on a trolley, so that it can be moved from class to class. The 'bring and buy sale' is a less structured self-access context which relies on learners bringing materials into the class to share with others, and the 'supermarket' system displays materials under clearly marked categories, so that learners are able to look around and choose what to do. Chapter 3 not only provides a useful typology, but makes the point that self-access settings can include the classroom, the library, and any purpose-built or separate suites of facilities. The authors continue to emphasize the diversity of self-access contexts throughout the book. Chapter 4, 'Management of self-access facilities' seems more academic in tone, since it reviews a good deal of literature on the principles of good management and successfully relates it to self-access contexts—a very useful chapter for those interested in management issues.

Part 2 of the book, which deals with practical aspects of establishing and setting up self-access language learning, contains a wealth of detail that can only have come from the authors' extensive experience in the field. One of the themes which occurs throughout is the involvement of learners in various aspects of setting up and running self-access learning, as well as in the learning itself. Some of the ideas, such as getting learners to write materials, design assessment tasks, or act as peer

learning counsellors, may surprise some readers. This is one of the great strengths of this book, however. While providing enormous amounts of detailed information (e.g. a list of the possible facilities that could be included in a self-access centre), some of which may seem obvious to some readers, the authors do constantly push the frontiers of what might have become common practice in self-access. There are new ideas here, even for highly experienced self-access facilitators or managers. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 on 'Counselling', 'Assessment', and 'Evaluation', are excellent in this respect. Other chapters either deal with more obvious matters, e.g. Chapter 8 'Physical settings and resourcing', or can only give a brief overview of topics which perhaps require more extensive attention, e.g. Chapter 6, 'Materials', and Chapter 7, 'Self-access activities'.

The case studies in Part 3 of the book provide interesting examples of different self-access settings, although three of the four are situated in Asia. Much interesting work is being carried out in different parts of Europe, Australia, and Latin America, for example.

To summarize, this is a book which provides enormous detail on issues concerning the establishment of self-access facilities, the systems within such contexts, and their daily running and evaluation. It is clearly the result of the authors' substantial experience, and certainly meets its aim to provide a useful resource for anyone wishing to engage in such activities. There is less detail concerning how to prepare learners for self-access learning, and on how to design materials and tasks, though these are areas which would probably require books of their own! As such, then, the book is a highly valuable resource to managers and those wishing to set up self-access, to those who are likely to be involved as counsellors or facilitators in self access, to teachers on in-service development programmes on the topic of self-access, and to tutors on Master's courses, such as the reviewer.

Lowes and Target

This book is one of a new series from Richmond Publishing aimed at teachers of English in primary and secondary schools. The book claims to be a practical guide for teachers, providing new ideas for immediate classroom use with lower-level learners, and it contains photocopiable templates and activities which teachers can adapt for their own contexts. To support the teacher who may not be familiar with the concept of learner autonomy, the book provides a brief introduction, covering 'What is learner autonomy?' and 'Why do we want our students to be more autonomous?' There is also a series of Development Tasks (with a partial answer key) to encourage teachers to reflect on their own practice and development, as well as a glossary of necessary terms, suggested further reading, and a list of 'useful' addresses (mainly publishers and general ELT websites). Two of the most important claims for this series of books are that it is 'jargon free' and 'accessible'.

The book has 13 chapters divided into four sections, as follows: Part A: 'Changing attitudes'; Part B: 'Raising awareness'; Part C: 'Developing

skills', and Part D: 'Making decisions'. The book is almost A4 in size and includes black and white line drawings, charts, and shaded sections. The layout is clear, and the sections are transparently labelled.

The introduction starts with a paraphrasing of Confucius, cited as 'Traditional': 'Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them to fish and you feed them for life.' An apt sentiment, but why not quote it properly? The introductory section itself briefly covers a number of important issues in learner autonomy, such as general educational aims, language learning aims, the ways people learn, motivation, degrees of autonomy, and the challenges of developing autonomy. It offers the following simplistic definition of autonomy: 'An autonomous learner is someone who is able to learn on their own.' (p. 5), and suggests that, in the language classroom, learners need to be given the chance to work on their own, correct their work together, and then experiment for themselves. Despite making some important and sound points about autonomy, the introduction is very thin. The five tasks for the teacher/reader to carry out offer greater scope for developing an understanding of the issues raised, and would be useful for inclusion in an introductory course for teachers on learner autonomy. The final activity, where teachers identify their attitudes towards autonomy and are then directed to other chapters in the book, is well executed. The first two chapters in Part A, which cover 'teachers' attitudes and students' attitudes', are very useful in that they encourage greater reflection on the part of the teacher, and include a number of thought-provoking tasks. Part B has three chapters on raising awareness about learning, the learner, and language. Once again, the tasks in these three chapters provide the meat for reflection and for developing an understanding of the issues, while the text provides a rather simplistic—and sometimes confusing—account of themes of major relevance, such as 'the learning process', 'approaches to learning', 'memory', 'motivation', 'learning style', 'multiple intelligences', 'working out rules', and so on. These accounts are generally too brief to be of much use, and often do not provide references to the sources of the ideas, such as Biggs (1979; 1987) and Kolb (1976; 1984), so that the reader is denied the opportunity to follow them up in any depth. Part C is rather more successful, in that it deals with the more immediate and practical aspects of developing autonomy in the classroom, by providing ideas and activities for 'learning vocabulary', 'learning with others', 'the four skills', 'listening and speaking', 'reading and writing', and 'finding and using resources'. The tasks for the teachers and the activities suggested for learners are generally well-designed and eminently usable. Part D, 'Making decisions', covers some very important ground in the two chapters on 'Giving learners responsibility' and 'Self-evaluation'. Amongst the ideas presented and discussed are learner contracts, negotiating shared assessment criteria, getting students to make action plans, record-keeping, how to evaluate a lesson, and how to get students to assess themselves. Once again, the tasks and activities presented are useful, while the explanatory text is rather too simplistic.

At the end of the book there is a series of photocopiable classroom worksheets related to the various chapters, and these are likely to be welcomed by teachers wishing to try out practical new ideas in their own classes. In the glossary 28 terms, mostly general in nature rather than autonomy-related, such as 'accuracy', 'phonemic script', and 'cognitive', are explained very simply, and under 'Further reading', nine books are recommended.

To summarize, this book appears to meet its aim of providing a practical introduction to the topic of learner autonomy for teachers who may be unfamiliar with the concept. The tasks and activities are worthwhile and well-designed. The authors are clearly aware of the issues involved in implementing autonomy in the language classroom, and are obviously experienced at introducing these new ideas to teachers. What is worrying, however, is the insistence on a 'jargon-free approach' to teacher education. The authors cannot be held responsible for what must have been a publisher's decision, but to what extent can a book claim to provide teacher development if the level of discussion is so simplistic? The notion of the development of a 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983) is only partially served by asking teachers to reflect on their practical experience. The withholding of more theoretical information and useful metalanguage denies the reader the opportunity to delve more deeply into issues which may be of interest, and thus, paradoxically, constrains teacher autonomy. The language used to introduce new ideas and theories can be simple without the content being simplistic and, possibly, patronizing. It may be that Richmond Publishing is misguided in this aim for their otherwise helpful handbook series.

Karlsson et al. The title of this book is not only witty, it is intended by the authors to stand as a metaphor for the experiences of one group of teachers over several years. The book chronicles the processes of interactional change between a group of learners and teachers participating in the Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) at the Helsinki University Language Centre from 1994-6. The authors have chosen to present the project through a series of reflective accounts by the teachers and learners involved, underlining their view that the project was a process of personal development—an experiential journey for all of those who participated. The book also provides a descriptive account of the context, that of a Finnish university where all students are required to develop their knowledge of their second national language (either Swedish or Finnish) and one other foreign language (usually English). The Language Centre offers the students the opportunity to become involved in self-directed language learning through the ALMS project.

The book has an introduction by Henri Holec which usefully reviews the concept of autonomy and sets the scene for the project. For the team of teachers who set up the ALMS project in Helsinki, autonomy relates to 'capacity for action' (p. 9), and they see their role as helping interested learners to acquire the capacity to learn efficiently, personally, and

independently. The programme they have set up integrates learning to learn and language learning by enabling the students to experiment with the specific language they need to develop in their own subject areas, and by the implementation of individual learning counselling. In addition, the writers have highlighted the human and experiential elements of learning in this way by focusing on individuals' accounts of the process.

In Chapter 1, 'The Journey', Kjisik reviews the context for the introduction of the ALMS project, and her own personal journey of development along the way. She describes ten principles of autonomy that form the basis for the project: autonomy is a capacity that has to be learnt; the road to autonomy is a process; autonomy inevitably involves change in power relationships; autonomy requires supportive structures, both internal and external; autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process; autonomy has both individual and social aspects; autonomy is not limited to the classroom; autonomy has to be adapted to different cultural contexts; autonomy is closely related to social identity. Chapter 2, by the same author, describes the ALMS project in detail, including some of the materials used to encourage learners to reflect on their language learning, and information about documentation, counselling, and support group formation. Chapter 3, by Nordlund, describes research into the attitudes towards autonomy among teachers and learners, and the process of change. The results seem to indicate that teachers began to accept student responsibility and a concomitant loss of their own power and control. Student attitudes were mostly positive, and demonstrated increases in motivation. In Chapter 4, Karlsson presents student and teacher case studies from the ALMS project. These incorporate student logs and writings, and are interesting to read. Chapter 5, by Karlsson and other writers, describes how the skills areas of reading, listening, speaking, writing, and academic writing, were dealt with in the project. These sections provide useful practical ideas, and examples of materials and students' work.

To summarize, this is a book which can be read relatively quickly and which provides a useful case study of the implementation of a programme to encourage self-directed language learning at tertiary level. The account has two points in its favour; first, it provides information that will be useful for teachers in a similar context wishing to initiate self-directed learning. Second, it presents examples of personal accounts of self-development, not only of learners, but also of teachers and, as such, provides interesting insights into the processes of learning and development which might inspire similar reflection in others. This book is recommended as background reading for those wishing to set up self-directed learning in a tertiary context, as well as for teachers who may wish to become more reflective about their own practice. It will be a useful book for teacher education courses where such reflection is encouraged.

Comparison

These three books represent very different approaches to practical guides for developing autonomy in language learning. If the detailed tome on self-access (Gardner and Miller 1999) represents the 'yang', then *From Here to Autonomy* (Karlsson, Kjisik, and Nordlund 1997), with its personal, experiential accounts, represents the 'yin' of the genre. Both are recommended for their differing approaches. *Helping Students to Learn: A Guide to Learner Autonomy* (Lowes and Target 1998), while recommended for its practical suggestions and tasks for the reader, disappoints with its simplistic and brief theoretical rationales.

Collections of Tasks

Harrison (ed.)

This modest A4-sized collection of photocopiable worksheets in a ring binder aims to promote learning outside the classroom. Its 40 worksheets and accompanying notes have been contributed by members of the IATEFL Special Interest Group on Learner Independence. The list of contributors does not always state the place of work, but most seem to come from the UK, with four from Brazil and one each from Turkey, Slovakia, and the Ukraine.

The worksheets are divided into three Sections: 'Teachers and Learner Independence', 'Learning to be Independent', and 'Learner Independence Worksheets'. The contents page provides the worksheet title, suggested level, and timing for each of the sections, which begin with a collection of very brief notes for each worksheet, covering the suggested level, aim of the worksheet, approximate time needed, and remarks. Having all the notes for the teacher together at the front of each section is awkward, but this was probably a result of publishing constraints. It would have been more convenient for the reader if the notes had been interleaved with the relevant worksheets, but that would have required more pages, and hence increased the cost of publication.

The tasks included in this collection are rather mixed, with some quite detailed and others rather simplistic. Most of the tasks, whether for teachers or learners, focus on reflection, i.e. on metacognitive development, rather than on reflection and experimentation (i.e. a combination of metacognitive and cognitive development). Some tasks, as their link with learner independence, provide an opportunity for learners to work without a teacher.

Section 1, 'Teachers and Learner Independence', is aimed at developing teachers' awareness of learner independence, and could be used in a teacher education setting. However, it is rather disappointing in content, and contains only six worksheets dealing with teacher training and setting up a self-access centre. Task 1.3 on self-access, for example, is not really a worksheet. It provides some brief points on setting up self-access centres, but an activity which enabled teachers/trainees to experience self-access learning might have been more valuable. Task 1.4 on self-access materials is more useful, although the comment, 'Reflect on the results', needs further prompts. Task 5 consists of a suggested reading list for teachers, and Task 6 is a feedback form for teachers to fill in when they have used worksheets from the collection and to send back to

IATEFL. (Has that organization received any?)

Sections 2 and 3, 'Learning to be independent' and 'Learner independence worksheets' are aimed at learners. The majority of tasks are intended for an intermediate to upper-intermediate level, there being only one for beginners, and five for advanced learners, while eight are listed as being appropriate for 'all levels'. The 16 worksheets in Section 2 aim to promote independent learning in listening/watching, reading, writing, speaking, and vocabulary learning. There is no focus on learning grammar. The timing for the various activities ranges from a recommended ten minutes to a series of lessons. There are 18 worksheets in Section 3, most of which provide tasks that learners could undertake on their own, such as Task 3.11 ('reading newspapers'), task 3.14 ('peer-prepared reading texts'), and task 3.18 ('learning vocabulary visually').

There are some very good worksheets in Section 3, such as task 3.1 ('Listening quiz', for advanced learners), 3.10 'Reading articles' (for upper-intermediate plus), and 3.17 'Learning vocabulary' (for advanced learners), all by Lorraine Smith. These worksheets tend to be fuller than the others, they provide information for learners to reflect on, and encourage experimentation. Further worksheets worth mentioning for providing learners with a clear framework for generic tasks are: 3.8 'Talking to yourself' (intermediate plus) by Chris Sion, and 3.11 'Reading Newspapers' (intermediate plus) by Russel Whitehead.

To summarize, this collection of worksheets is 'a collaborative effort by teachers from all over the world wishing to share ideas that have been tried, tested, and found to work' (Foreword). It does not aim to be comprehensive, and since the worksheets were solicited by the SIG, it has only been able to work with the contributions it has received. Creating a linked, coherent 'whole' can be a problem for the editor when worksheets come from different places. It may be somewhat unfair, then, to criticize the range of contexts represented in the book. As a former editor of this particular journal once commented: 'You can only publish what you get!'

Most of the notes accompanying the worksheets are very brief indeed, perhaps assuming a readership of teachers already familiar with the principles and practice of learner independence. This may be a reasonable assumption, since the collection is published by a Learner Independence Special Interest Group. Nevertheless, this approach is not particularly useful for novices. This collection may be better viewed as a selection of worksheets for teachers to browse through and get inspiration from, or as examples of tasks for teachers to evaluate and adapt for their own purposes. Indeed, while reflecting that every teaching context is different, and that views of what constitutes learner autonomy will also vary from context to context, the introduction to the collection makes the point that readers will have to evaluate each worksheet in the light of their own situation, and make necessary adaptations to meet the needs of their own particular learners. It would

have been useful, however, to have had information on each worksheet pertaining to where and how it had been used, and the extent to which it had been successful.

Gardner and Miller (eds.)

This publication is introduced to the reader as 'an 'ideas' book of recipes for independent language learning tasks', which are described somewhat idiosyncratically as 'a stage between teacher-dependent learning and autonomous learning'. The collection of 81 tasks ranges from those for beginners to those for advanced learners, and aims to give learners control over their studies, while also serving as guidelines for teachers in preparing materials for independent language learning. The tasks are usefully and transparently grouped under nine chapters or categories: 1. Learner training; 2. Reading; 3. Writing; 4. Listening; 5. Speaking; 6. Vocabulary; 7. Grammar; 8. Paralinguistics; 9. Self-assessment. The 42 contributors of the tasks are listed in the contents pages, and further biodata is included with the teachers' information on each task.

The introduction claims that the collection has been written 'for teachers by teachers from secondary and tertiary institutions in the United States, The Pacific Rim and Europe'. However, apart from one Spanish secondary teacher, it appears that all of the contributors work in tertiary education. Furthermore, almost half of the tasks (38) have been provided by authors working in Hong Kong, ten by authors working in the USA, ten by authors working in Japan, eight by authors working in Spain, seven by an author working in Australia, four by authors working in Thailand, two by authors working in the UK and one each by authors working in Korea and Indonesia. Since the two editors also work in Hong Kong, it is clear where the thrust to publish this collection came from!

Sensibly, the editors recommend that teachers adapt these tasks to suit the needs of their learners by changing the content of the worksheets to make them more appropriate for their learners, by varying the degree of 'user friendliness', and by cataloguing the tasks according to their own self-access systems. The tasks exploit a wide range of language resources.

Most of the tasks consist of (a) an explanation of the task, and (b) simple worksheets. The explanation contains information in the form of a tick-list on the following aspects of the task: level (beginner, lower-intermediate, intermediate, advanced); mode of learning (individual, pair, group, tutor-assisted), and place of learning (in class, out of class, self-access centre). Further brief information is given on the aims of the task, preparation time, task time, and resources needed. A short 'Preamble' provides a rationale for the task, and there are step-by-step instructions for the teacher. In addition, a section on 'learner preparation' highlights any necessary pre-training or awareness raising to be done pre-task. Finally, a section on 'variations' suggests different ways of doing the task. The explanation sections for the teacher, which are not over-long, are rich in information and clearly signposted; they

compare very favourably with the almost non-existent notes provided in the IATEFL Recipes.

The task worksheets vary, of course, in their content, sophistication of design, and layout. In terms of content and design, a useful section is Chapter 9: 'Self-assessment', a subject often neglected in the classroom. Most tasks in the book contain a useful pre-task section, 'Before you begin', to orientate the learners, a 'Self-assessment' section to help learners judge their performance, and 'Further suggestions' to provide a stimulus for learners to carry on and try new ideas.

As with the IATEFL worksheets, there seems to be a problem about providing the teacher with information about each task, probably caused by practical constraints on the number of pages. Although it is convenient to place the teacher information together with the task, the two often appear on the same page. Teachers will therefore need to decide whether to photocopy and cut the pages, or give the learners the teacher information, as well. (In learner training terms, this is a good idea in principle, but confusing to the learner if they find the language in the teacher's notes too difficult for them.)

Again, the book is produced without colour, but the design and layout look professional, and the use of photographs of learners at the start of each section is an attractive feature.

To summarize, this is a comprehensive collection of tasks and activities, some better than others, which has been coherently organized and clearly labelled. It is recommended as a resource for novice and experienced teachers, and is useful for teacher education programmes concerned with the design of tasks to develop and support learner autonomy.

Comparison The IATEFL and the TESOL collections of worksheets both provide useful resources for teachers seeking inspiration for their own task design. However, it has to be said that the TESOL collection offers a broader range of ideas, and that these are presented in a more detailed and transparent manner. In particular, the notes relating to each of the worksheets in the TESOL publication have much more useful detail for the teacher intending to use or adapt the tasks than the IATEFL publication, which appears to assume a greater level of proficiency on the part of the teacher. The TESOL publication also looks more professional. Having said that, IATEFL is a much smaller organization than TESOL, and has fewer resources at its disposal. It should be praised for its attempt to provide its membership with publications of this sort.

Conclusions

It is clear that the language teaching profession's concern with developing autonomy of various kinds in language learners is bearing fruit in terms of the number and quality of publications emerging on related topics. In particular, there is a developing trend towards a critical appraisal of the philosophical, political, and social rationales for autonomy in language learning. There is also a recognition of the fact that autonomy is interpreted in different ways in different contexts, and, for this reason, the continued publication of descriptions of programmes, task design, and procedures used in various contexts remain important sources of knowledge and experience. Practical guides based on such experience offer useful sources of advice, although ideas may need to be adapted to suit the readers' own contexts.

It is interesting that there is relatively limited reporting on new research into autonomy in language learning in the publications reviewed here. This is not to say that little research is being carried out. It may be that research is not as immediately appealing to publishers who wish to attract wide audiences for their publications. Research reports are more likely to be published as conference proceedings or as papers in journals. Readers interested in autonomy should be encouraged to look beyond the immediate offerings of the big publishers, and to seek out such reports.

Another omission in the books reviewed here, apart from Lowes and Target (1998), is a concern with the contexts of primary and secondary language learning. Many primary and secondary English language curricula around the world now refer explicitly to the development of learning skills and learner responsibility, and teachers new to these concepts need support.

One of the interesting issues to arise from this review is the growing importance of Hong Kong as a centre for activity in research into and practical implementation of autonomy in language learning. Four of the seven publications reviewed here have their origins in Hong Kong, and a number of the authors and contributors reviewed here currently work there, most notably in the institutions of higher education. The interest in autonomy in Hong Kong seems principally to have arisen out of the recent investment in self-access language learning by the universities there, and the writing reflects this area of interest. A conference on learner autonomy held in Hong Kong in 1994 led to one of the collections of articles reviewed here, and it is has been possible to trace the influence of some of these articles in subsequent writings on the topic of autonomy. The apparent concentration in Hong Kong of researchers and writers working in the field of autonomy is an interesting phenomenon which is reflected in the range of publications available on the topic today. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that there are not other centres of activity around the world which are in a position to provide equally valid insights.

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