ROLES IN AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING
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ABSTRACT
The literature on autonomous learning indicates that role is a critical dimension in implementing learner autonomy. This paper examines the roles adopted by learners and teachers in language learning settings where the objective of promoting learner autonomy has been adopted. It does this first by exploring the ways in which different writers committed to autonomy have characterised learner and teacher roles. It then focuses specifically on language learning and considers how three variables - culture, learning mode and individual differences - might influence the roles which individuals actually adopt. The paper concludes by considering how new or modified roles might most effectively be presented.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of developing learner autonomy is a fundamental purpose of education (Boud 1988:18). In language learning contexts, autonomy has been defined as the ability to take responsibility for one's learning (Holec 1981; Dickinson 1987). A central implication of adopting autonomy as a goal in institutional settings, is the need to redefine the relationship between learner and teacher. Boud (1988:39) emphasises the importance of the teacher-learner relationship in attempts to foster learner autonomy:

> What is important ... is the attitude of teachers towards their students. It is not any technique or teaching methodology which is primarily needed, but an attitude of acceptance and appreciation of the views, desires and frames of reference of learners. Perhaps the single central quality which fosters autonomy is the quality of the relationship between teachers and learners which develops through this acceptance.

But the teacher-learner relationship does not operate in a vacuum. Important variables in the learning context influence the roles which learners and teachers adopt. This paper explores roles in autonomous language learning first by examining ways in which different writers committed to autonomy have characterised learner and teacher roles. It then focuses specifically on language learning and considers how three key variables in the context might influence the roles which learners and teachers adopt. The first of these variables is culture, since roles are viewed and played out differently in different cultural contexts. The second variable is the mode of learning adopted. It is argued that as the circumstances of learning change, so potentially do the responsibilities of the individuals involved in the learning process. Finally it considers individual differences which might influence the roles learners and teachers choose to adopt. The discussion concludes by proposing a strategy for introducing alternative roles in the language learning process.

EDUCATIONAL ROLES - WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE TELL US?

Where the objective of fostering learner autonomy is adopted, learner and teacher roles differ from the traditional ones of dependent learner and teacher expert. This section of the paper explores the way in which writers on learner autonomy in various fields have characterised learner and teacher roles. The literature is discussed under three headings: self-directed learning, autonomous learning in institutional settings, and autonomous language learning. For the purposes of this paper, self-directed learning refers to individual learning projects initiated by the

learner and carried out with or without assistance. The other two sections discuss the roles adopted by learners and teachers within formal learning programmes which identify the promotion of learner autonomy as an explicit goal. First, programmes in a range of subject areas are considered; then language learning programmes. The discussion identifies key behaviours and values associated with the roles and contrasts these with more traditional learner and teacher roles.

Roles in self-directed learning
In self-directed learning, learners attempt "to acquire skills, knowledge, and self-insight through educational experiences that they are responsible for arranging" (Brookfield 1986:149). This type of learning usually takes place outside formal learning settings in the learner's own time. Self-directed learners display varying degrees of autonomy. While attempts have been made to identify the defining characteristics of self-directed learners, the only characteristic they all share is their choice of this mode of learning and the demands it implies.

It has been pointed out that the self-directed learner represents *simultaneous role occupancy* (Clark 1973 cited in Candy 1991:166). In other words, the learner is responsible for both the tasks of the instructor and those of the proficient learner. However, some writers claim that attempts to define the self-directed learner's behaviours by cataloguing instructor and learner tasks run the risk of distorting the nature of the process. For example, Candy (who uses the term "autodidaxy" rather than self-directed learning) explains (Candy 1991:167):

> Autodidaxy certainly involves aspects found in teaching: some sort of goal setting, finding and utilizing appropriate resources, attempting different ways of attacking the subject matter, responding to feedback, and evaluating and moving on. Such functions definitely need to be performed, but they are identified in retrospect, and the fragmentation of such a holistic process as self-teaching is like that of "vivisecting the nightingale to prove the secret of its note" (Laidlaw, quoted in Welton 1987).

Characterisations of the role of those who assist self-directed learners are also of interest. Just as autonomous learning does not imply isolation, neither does self-directed learning. According to Tough (1967, cited in Candy 1991:181), some self-directed learners obtain assistance with major tasks and some of the help they receive influences their progress. The contribution of these "helpers" or "facilitators of learning" therefore warrants investigation.

According to Brookfield (1986:63), facilitators are individuals who:

> see themselves as resources for learning, rather than as didactic instructors who have all the answers. They stress that they are engaged in a democratic, student-centred enhancement of individual learning and that responsibility for setting the direction and methods of learning rests as much with the learner as with the educator.

Tough's (1979, cited in Brookfield 1986:63) characterisation of "ideal" helpers or facilitators emphasises affective aspects of this role:

> They are warm, loving, caring, and accepting of the learners.
> They have a high regard for learners' self-planning competencies and do not wish to trespass on these.
> They view themselves as participating in a dialogue between equals with learners.

> They are open to change and new experiences and seek to learn from their
> helping activities.

The facilitator also requires knowledge of the subject matter and of learning techniques. In working with the learner - a novice designer of learning programmes - the facilitator has a responsibility to challenge and to open up new ways of thinking. However, a certain tension derives from the fact that in questioning the goals or methods selected by the learner, the facilitator must not threaten the learner's confidence or control of the learning project. Self-directed learning is a mode of learning which entails substantially new roles for both learner and teacher.

Roles in autonomous learning in institutional settings

Learners' experience of autonomy in institutional settings is somewhat different from that of the self-directed learner, in that it is often constrained by factors such as time, class size, pressure to follow a curriculum and externally-imposed assessment procedures. Furthermore, the learner's autonomous learning experiences are sometimes restricted to one subject area in the absence of an institution-wide commitment to autonomy. Nevertheless, reports of learning programmes which offer learners the possibility of assuming responsibility for significant aspects of their learning exist in a number of fields. Subject areas covered in a recent collection of case studies include health science, education, medicine, information technology, history, nursing, engineering and agriculture (Boud 1988).

Learners in programmes committed to learner autonomy are encouraged to assume responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating the outcomes of their learning. This takes place within the framework of supportive learner-teacher and peer relationships. Tompkins and McGraw (1988:189) comment that "the involvement of peer support for more dependent learners has ... been found to be helpful in creating an environment in which risks can be taken and learner confidence can develop". The writers also reflect that the innovative roles and relationships implicit in autonomous learning approaches are more likely to succeed if they are supported by appropriate pedagogic interventions. One such intervention which has become a major object of research is the learning contract (see, for example, Knowles 1986; Anderson, Boud and Sampson 1996).

Higgs (1988) conceives of the teacher's role in autonomous learning contexts primarily as that of manager and resource person. She follows Hersey and Blanchard (1982, cited in Higgs 1988:56) in identifying technical skill, human skill and conceptual skill as three essentials contributing to effective performance of the manager's role. She also emphasises the teacher's responsibility for creating and managing a learning environment which supports the delegation of much of the "power, responsibility and choice in learning to the student" (Higgs 1988:55). The learning environment, she explains, needs to be safe, trusting, accepting and supportive.

Knowles (1986:246) emphasises the need for teachers committed to fostering autonomy to redefine their roles in such a way that they see themselves "primarily as designers and managers of procedures for helping learners acquire the content and only secondarily as content resources." In other words, the teacher's role in autonomous learning settings reverses the traditional view which valued content knowledge ahead of other teacher characteristics. The learner, on the other hand, is encouraged to assume significant responsibility for some aspect of learning "over and above responding to instruction" (Boud 1988:23).

Roles in autonomous language learning

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As in the settings already discussed, autonomous language learners are charged with designing their own language programme. Learners are encouraged to clarify what they want to learn, set goals, identify problems, and propose and implement solutions. Kenny (1993:435) sees this as a shift towards cooperative and experiential learning which:

> requires a changed view both of knowledge and the curriculum. In the changed understanding the learners use knowledge for their own negotiated and cooperative purposes. In other words they use the language rather than study it. And the curriculum becomes a way of organizing what the learners want to do, rather than a sequencing of knowledge.

Little and Singleton (1989:31) believe that reflection is an important aspect of the learner's new role. They claim that the learner has a responsibility to "gradually develop the capacity to reflect on the learning he or she has done and the ways in which he or she has done it, and to draw conclusions that help to determine the content and shape of future learning". Where learners require assistance in adopting these new behaviours, naturally, teachers can provide support. Crabbe (1993) discusses a kind of support which centres on classroom discourse about tasks, and their design. In his paper he shows how such discourse can be used to provide a bridge between the "public domain" of classroom language learning and the "private domain" of the learner's personal learning programme.

The role of the teacher in autonomous language learning contexts reflects a shift in focus from teaching to learning. Sheerin (1991:151) explains:

> Changing roles for teachers and learners has always been seen as an essential process in any move towards learner independence. Teachers need to become facilitators of learning rather than dispensers of knowledge and learners need to become active agents, taking responsibility for their learning and participating in the decision-making which affects learning.

The new teacher role implies a positive attitude to learner initiatives, greater attention to individual learner needs and a focus on problem-solving (see Cotterall and Crabbe 1992:16). Teachers are responsible for creating conditions favourable to learning, for modelling good learning behaviour and for providing feedback on learners' efforts to solve their own problems. This approach allocates a central role to discourse about learning - arguably a new kind of teacher talk.

Little (1995:178) emphasises the interdependence of teacher and learner roles in learning contexts which seek to foster autonomy. The teacher's task is to:

> Bring learners to the point where they accept equal responsibility for this co-production [of classroom language lessons], not only at the affective level but in terms of their readiness to undertake organizational (hence also discourse) initiatives.

The relationship between teacher and learner roles is not only interdependent; it is also dynamic. As learners demonstrate their ability to assume responsibility for new aspects of their language learning, the teacher relinquishes responsibility. It is likely that overt discussion of the responsibilities of learner and teacher will facilitate a smooth transfer of responsibility.

VARIABLES IN THE LEARNING CONTEXT WHICH AFFECT ROLES

Now that the salient characteristics of learner and teacher roles in different autonomous learning settings have been presented, let us consider the varied contexts in which much language learning takes place. In this section, three key variables in language learning contexts - culture, learning mode and individual differences - are investigated. It is argued that by exploring contextual variables, an abstract understanding of role can be converted into an appreciation of potential role variations in particular circumstances.

Culture and role

It is important to examine the interaction of cultural beliefs about learning and educational roles, since much language learning involves learners in cultural settings other than their own (e.g. Japanese learners learning English in New Zealand) or learners whose teacher is from a cultural background other than their own (e.g. Arab students learning English with a British teacher in their home country). Culture can cause resistance to new educational roles since cultural identity is made up (in part) of a set of valued beliefs about education. Observation of negative reactions to autonomy prompted Henner-Stanchina and Riley (1978:78), twenty years ago, to observe:

> The angry rejection by many people of any suggestion of autonomy shows clearly
> that we are not dealing with just another new methodology of language teaching.
> Autonomy clearly implies a challenge to social roles, starting with that of the
> teacher-expert. So deeply-ingrained is this role in our culture that any change in it
> is difficult to contemplate.

The challenge of attempting to introduce autonomy is magnified in cross-cultural learning situations. In some cases, individuals hold beliefs about education which are diametrically opposed to notions of learner autonomy. Such beliefs have been expressed by learners in the English for Academic Purposes courses on which the writer teaches. Learners frequently report different expectations of tertiary education to those espoused by the teacher and (more significantly) by the institution in which the learners will eventually enrol. Kirkpatrick (1994:33) comments on his experience in Australia:

> For example, many students come from cultures where the role of the teacher is
> to transmit `correct' knowledge and information, while the role of the students is
> simply to absorb it ... Different behavioural expectations can often lead to
> misunderstanding. In some cultures, to question a lecturer is not only *not*
> expected, it is a type of behaviour that is regarded as extremely rude.

How then might culture-based beliefs about learning be investigated? Hofstede's (1986) model of cultural difference provides one possible tool for doing so. Hofstede (1986:303) believes cross-cultural learning situations are fundamentally problematic because "teacher/student interaction is such an archetypal human phenomenon, and so deeply rooted in the culture of a society". He identifies four dimensions along which cultures vary. Two of these dimensions, **individualism/collectivism** and **power distance** are discussed here to illustrate the potential for conflict which exists in cross-cultural learning situations.

In **collectivist** societies (amongst which he cites Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Japan), Hofstede (1986:312) suggests that there is a "positive association ... with whatever is rooted in tradition", that "students are expected to learn how to do", and that "individuals will only speak up in small

groups". In **individualist** societies, on the other hand (amongst which he cites New Zealand and Australia), he asserts that there is a "positive association with whatever is `new'", "students expect to learn how to learn" and "individuals will speak up in large groups".

The relevance of these dichotomies to cross-cultural language learning situations is plain. Where a group of learners from collectivist societies find themselves confronted with a teacher committed to learner autonomy, major differences in conceptions of appropriate classroom roles and behaviour may exist. For example, learners who have a profound respect for tradition are likely to wonder why the teacher eschews the published text book in favour of her own "in-house" teaching/learning materials. Similarly, the learners' desire to focus on the target language is likely to give rise to feelings of frustration when class time is devoted to apparently less relevant topics such as the acquisition of learning-to-learn tactics or discussion of the communication process. The teacher, on the other hand, may become discouraged when learners fail to respond to open questions and invitations to express personal views.

In discussing differences related to the dimension of **power distance**, Hofstede (1986:313) notes that in large power distance societies (he cites Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Japan), "a teacher merits the respect of his/her students (according to Confucius, `teacher' is the most respected profession in society)", "students expect [the] teacher to outline paths to follow" and the "effectiveness of learning is related to [the] excellence of the teacher". In small power distance societies (such as New Zealand and Australia) on the other hand, he suggests that "a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students", the "teacher expects students to find their own paths", and the "effectiveness of learning [is] related to [the] amount of two-way communication in class" (Revans 1965; Jamieson and Thomas 1974; Stubbs and Delamont 1976; all cited in Hofstede, 1986:313).

Hofstede's characterisation of differences associated with power distance, provides a compelling explanation for much misunderstanding. Many learners brought up in societies which accord teachers high respect, find it difficult to engage in activities which are premised on a relationship of social equality between learner and teacher. Furthermore, the idea of making decisions about their learning can appear, to some learners, to encroach on the teacher's field of expertise. Classroom discussions aimed at eliciting learner views could appear to learners from high power distance societies to threaten the "face" (see, for example, Chang and Holt 1994) of the teacher, and to undermine her authority. Such differences in role expectations are likely to pose a challenge to educators who seek to promote autonomous learning.

While this application of Hofstede's model provides some insight into the way in which ideas about learner autonomy might be perceived by learners from certain cultural backgrounds, it must be admitted that not all individuals who belong to the same culture subscribe to the same views. We must be cautious in applying knowledge of culturally salient expectations and values to our efforts to understand individuals. Pedersen and Ivey (1993:34) comment:

> Our natural tendency is to construct simplified labels of complex reality in order to manage that reality more conveniently without necessarily considering the complexity ... It is dangerous to confuse labels with reality, especially when considering culture.

Nevertheless, attempts to foster learner autonomy must always take account of the cultural predisposition and beliefs of the individual learners and teachers, and of the context in which the learning is taking place. A recent paper by Ho and Crookall (1995:237) illustrates how this might be done. The writers discuss two traits associated with Chinese learners which they initially

considered to be potential threats to learner independence and then report on an intervention which was "able to deal with ... constraints to the promotion of autonomy presented by culture".

The lesson seems to be that those who wish to propose new educational roles need first to familiarise themselves with the beliefs about learning of the individuals with whom they intend to work, regardless of where they come from (see Cotterall 1995a, Cotterall, forthcoming). Their second task is to identify assumptions shared by teacher and learners and to use these to define mutually acceptable roles in classroom learning.

Language learning mode

A second variable which influences the roles which learners and teachers adopt is the setting in which the learning takes places. Language learning increasingly occurs in a variety of modes other than traditional classroom learning, and it seems reasonable to expect that variation in the mode of learning will cause variation in the roles that learners and teachers adopt. Two alternative modes of language learning will be considered in this section. The first of these is self access learning, which often (but not always) complements the learning done by an individual in a teacher-fronted setting. The other mode is a form of self-directed learning with built-in support from a language counsellor. The discussion seeks to determine to what extent the nature of the roles adopted in each of these modes differs from those already described.

Self access language learning

Learners who work in self access mode are generally considered to be practising the skills or seeking the information which a needs analysis has indicated they require. Because of the "unspoken etiquette" of the self access centre, learners are unlikely to be interrupted by staff or challenged in their choice of material or activity. The role of the self access learner presupposes therefore a greater degree of initiative and self-management than that of the classroom learner. This explains why much has been written of the need to prepare learners for self access learning (see for example, Dickinson 1994) and why learner training is considered an essential companion to self access learning.

Since learners differ in terms of their willingness and ability to assume responsibility for their learning, assistance (in a variety of forms) is available in most self access learning centres. The role of the self access helper essentially consists of "performing acts which facilitate learning" (Riley, Gremmo and Moulden 1989:55). Some of these acts relate directly to the learners, others less directly. Amongst the helper's tasks, Riley et. al. (1989) list learner training, the selection, processing and production of materials, research and development and liaison with the learners' other teachers or employer. Cleary and Makin (1994:76) elaborate on the learner training functions of the self access helper:

> to help learners specify their learning needs, to analyze their motivation, help
> them manage their learning in a way appropriate to their learning style and to
> achieve valid self-evaluation.

To some extent, the functions of the self access helper overlap with those of the classroom teacher. This has led some writers to suggest that, where self access learners are also involved in a teacher-fronted language programme, the class teacher is the most appropriate person to advise them (see Cotterall, 1995b:226). But for language learners who work solely in self access mode, these functions may be fulfilled by the self access helper. This analysis of the helper's role emphasises familiarity with learning resources, and awareness of a variety of approaches to

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learning. Furthermore, specific interpersonal skills are required for one-to-one interaction with learners. Esch (1994:51) sees interaction as the key function of the helper in self access learning:

> The teachers' role changes along with their modes of intervention, from a proactive initiator's role to that of a listening negotiator's role. They need to find means of responding to learners' questions and of helping them manage their own learning. This requires that they not only find means of eliciting learners' talk and listen to them very carefully but can interpret learners' discourse … before responding and offering possible solutions. In other words they need to interact with learners.

Self access learning therefore demands that learners be able to identify their own needs, initiate requests for help and manage their learning. The helper's role combines some of the traditional language teacher responsibilities with new ones which relate specifically to materials production and systems development. Furthermore, the self access helper is often required to advise and assist individuals about whom she knows very little. The interactive skills needed by those who assume this role are likely to require special training.

Self instructional language learning

The second mode of language learning to be considered here has been referred to by Dickinson (1987) as "supported self-instructional learning". This type of learning is distinguished from self access learning in that it concerns learners who are not enrolled in any formal language learning programme, but who seek advice on their self-directed efforts to learn a language. Makin (1994) describes one example of this type of learning in a paper on e-mail language advising for self-directed language learners at the University of Cambridge. Another example is described by Henner-Stanchina (1985) who writes of the autonomous learning scheme at the CRAPEL of the Université of Nancy. This scheme provides learners with support from a range of resources which include a language learning counsellor.

The learner's responsibilities in self-directed language learning settings are much the same as those of any self-directed learner. The learner needs to set goals, find and make use of appropriate resources, attempt different ways of learning, take account of feedback, reflect on learning as it takes place, evaluate progress and so on. A high degree of commitment and drive is required of the learner, since it is she who initiates and manages the learning programme. A positive attitude to taking control and a quality of persistence are also likely to characterise self-directed learners. This mode of learning may also demand from the learner a special facility for articulating learning needs and problems.

Dickinson (1987:123) believes the ideal counsellor to support self-instructional learning requires knowledge and skill in:

> the learners' mother tongues … the target language … needs analysis … setting objectives … linguistic analysis … materials … materials preparation … assessment procedures … learning strategies … management and administration … librarianship

Gremmo (1994) stresses that the counsellor in self-directed learning projects is there to help the learner learn and to use dialogue about learning to develop the learner's knowledge and ability. It is not part of the counsellor's role, she maintains, to take decisions on behalf of the learner. Gremmo refers to three aspects of counselling activity. Counsellors may provide conceptual

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information (about language itself, communication, or language learning); they may provide methodological information (advising learners on materials, ways of using them or criteria for evaluating their performance); or they may provide psychological support (helping learners cope with the successes and failures of their learning). Gremmo and Riley (1995:159) contrast the counsellor's with the teacher's role in this way:

> From the beginning, it has been clear that being a counsellor is different from being a teacher and that this new pedagogical role implies a new professional competence ... The role of the counsellor ... is to help learners develop an adequate set of values, ideas and techniques in the fields of language and language learning.

Individual differences

The third variable which will interact with the roles learners and teachers adopt in language learning is that of individual differences. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to document all the individual variables which might impact on learners' and teachers' predisposition to adopt new learning roles, it is important to acknowledge their existence. All three sources of literature surveyed in this paper cited instances of learner or teacher resistance to the new roles. The literature on self-directed learning, for example, questions whether those traditionally trained as classroom teachers can successfully make the transition to become facilitators of learning. Candy (1991:228) lists a number of obstacles which inhibit teachers' assumption of the facilitator's role. These obstacles include increased demands on their time, removal of the usual "reward system" of the teacher's taking credit for learners' learning gains, and a feeling of inadequacy when faced with the need to negotiate learning programmes with a range of individually different learners. Inevitably, some teachers will choose not to adopt the new role.

Learner anxiety has also been observed in some settings. Writing of learners in tertiary education settings, Powell (1988:118) discusses the fact that some learners may not wish to accept more responsibility for their learning and suggests why:

> The reduction of teacher control as a means of fostering independence involves the creation of a role for the teacher which lies outside the experience of most students. They are thus apt to reject it and exert pressure intended to compel the teacher to behave in a more conventional manner.

There is also some evidence to suggest that factors such as personal self-confidence (see, for example, Stanton 1988) and `learned helplessness' (Diener and Dweck 1978, 1980, cited in Wenden 1991: 57) play a role in learners' readiness to accept more responsibility for their learning. Tompkins and McGraw (1988) recommend that roles be explicitly negotiated as one means of overcoming learner anxiety, for example through the pedagogic innovation of a learning contract. Riley (1997:120) also claims that novel relationships demand negotiation if they are to function effectively:

> Roles often have to be negotiated, especially when the situation type is new to one of the participants ... This largely explains why, in almost all forms of counselling, it is found necessary and worthwhile to spell out the roles, in other words to discuss them explicitly as they form a basis for the distribution of acts, rights and duties during the actions to come.

Instances of learner and teacher resistance to new roles have been identified in autonomous language learning settings too. Learner resistance has often been blamed on cultural difference, but previous educational experience and beliefs about learning are also likely to play a part. Kenny's (1993:438) discussion of teacher resistance suggests that language teachers experimenting with autonomy can become "concerned for their pedagogic respectability ... for their authority and jobs [and] can experience doubts about the legitimacy of what they are doing." He goes on to suggest that although some teachers may find their new role "trying":

> if, as teachers, we see our educational function to be one of allowing and
> assisting learners to grow in their potential ... then the fact that matters are now
> largely controlled by the learners ... only shows how successful we have been.

It is important to recognise, however, that not all will feel comfortable with these modified roles. Candy (1994:174) makes a valid point when he refers to the learner's (and surely the teacher's too):

> right to avoid what one author had dubbed `the tyranny of self-direction' (Frewin
> 1976) ... After all, learners, too, make ideological judgements about the adequacy
> and acceptability of learning situations, based on `pedagogical expectations
> [which] are culturally influenced ideas people have about the kinds of ...
> educational activities that are recognizable ... as valid learning activities ...'
> (McKean 1977, abstract). And in the final analysis, their willingness to accept
> increased control will depend on whether or not ... they judge it to be a valid
> strategy and a situation from which they can learn.

TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR INTRODUCING ALTERNATIVE ROLES

The discussion so far has highlighted the novelty of some of the behaviours and values associated with learner and teacher roles in autonomous learning settings. It has also suggested that culture, learning mode and individual differences will influence the roles that learners and teachers adopt. Given these influences, how should alternative language learner and teacher roles be presented? The four-part strategy suggested here consists of exploring learner beliefs, discussing conceptual and methodological aspects of autonomous language learning, modelling new behaviours and promoting dialogue about learning.

The first element in any strategy which aims at influencing behaviour must be exploration of the beliefs which underpin behaviour. Gremmo and Riley (1995: 158) point to "the central role played in determining learning behaviour by learners' beliefs and representations about language and language learning". But beliefs are difficult to access, particularly when the investigator does not have access to the learners' first language. A major challenge facing those who wish to implement change associated with language learning roles, consists of developing a methodology and instruments for reliably investigating beliefs. Sakui and Gaies (1998) have recently argued for increased rigour in the development and validation of instruments designed to survey learner beliefs about language learning.

In addition to empirical research, regular learning activities represent another option for investigating learner beliefs. Some examples of activities which raise awareness of learner beliefs include: activities which require learners to rank order statements about roles and responsibilities in the learning process; roleplay tasks where learners are asked to adopt the role of a learner whose beliefs are quite different from their own; and discussion of case studies

where learners' beliefs about their responsibilities in the learning process have conflicted with other elements in the learning situation. Once beliefs have been articulated, they are available for discussion and debate.

Other methods of accessing learner beliefs which have been successfully incorporated into the regular cycle of learning activities at the writer's institution, include the use of language learning journals and regular interviews. Both these methods encourage reflection on learning and stimulate discussion of issues considered significant by the learner. Together with whole-class interventions, these activities aim to raise to awareness values and beliefs which are seldom analysed, but which play a powerful role in determining learners' willingness to assume novel learning behaviours. By making explicit valued beliefs about topics such as "what makes a good learner" and "what makes a good teacher", learners and teachers can begin to negotiate a relationship with which they will both feel comfortable.

The second element in the strategy concerns discussion of the conceptual and methodological aspects of autonomous learning. If learners are to embrace a new role in their language learning, they require an understanding of what that role involves. This element is likely to be novel for many learners, since understanding of the language learning process, and language learning methodology have traditionally been considered the domain of the language teacher. However learners cannot be expected to adopt responsibility for managing a process of which they have little understanding. Therefore, along with learning about the language, would-be autonomous learners also need to learn about the process of language learning - what contributes to it and accelerates it - and about methods of managing and assessing their learning. A common means of imparting this kind of information is to include material on the language learning process (see Cotterall 1995b) and on learning to learn in language courses (see Ellis and Sinclair, 1989).

The third element in the strategy consists of modelling behaviours associated with new roles in the learning process, and providing opportunities for learners to experiment with these behaviours. This allows learners to map their abstract understanding onto the observation of real learners engaged in these behaviours. Two principal ways of modelling behaviours have been attempted by the writer. Firstly, in order, for example, to introduce learners to the activity of setting goals for themselves, videotaped (and transcribed) excerpts of language learners discussing their goals can be presented and discussed. Discussion can usefully focus on differences between the videotaped learner's goals and strategies for achieving those goals, and those of class members. Secondly, the teacher can assume the role of a learner and use a think-aloud approach to model the steps involved in setting her goals. This method has the advantage of allowing learners to interrupt at any point, and of allowing the teacher to model tactics which learners have expressed curiosity about, and discuss goals which reflect those of the learners. The follow-up to modelling, in both cases, must include providing opportunities for the learners themselves to experience the tactics, by roleplaying, by completing records aimed at documenting the process, or by working individually with a peer, a counsellor or the teacher.

A significant feature of the modelling stage of the strategy involves time spent familiarising learners with new pedagogic supports, such as learning contracts or record-keeping procedures. In teacher preparation sessions, this phase of the strategy might focus on new behaviours such as active listening and techniques for eliciting opinions and information from learners. Roleplaying counselling sessions with learners is one common way of offering teachers this kind of experience. Throughout this process, participants - learners and teachers alike - should be encouraged to reflect on their experience, and discuss, for example, how comfortable they feel adopting these new behaviours.

The final element in the strategy consists of providing ongoing opportunities for learners and teachers to discuss their respective roles in the language learning process. A language learning journal (mentioned earlier in relation to methods of accessing learner beliefs) represents an excellent means of encouraging regular reflection on all aspects of the learning process. The focus of journal entries can be determined by individual learners, or can be guided by topics or questions suggested by the teacher. Where a learner feels uncomfortable or unconfident about aspects of their new role, they can be encouraged to express those feelings in the journal as a way of starting a dialogue with the teacher. In this way, the amount of support provided by the teacher can be negotiated and adjusted according to the learner's stated needs. Clearly, face to face discussion about roles would also fulfil this function, but this involves constraints of time and place which the journal overcomes. Whatever means are used to achieve it, dialogue about their respective roles in supporting the learners' language learning will remain at the heart of an effective relationship between teacher and learner.

CONCLUSION

Modifying traditional learner and teacher roles is an essential step in the move towards learner autonomy in language learning. But modified roles cannot be imposed on learners or teachers. What is required is explicit negotiation of the roles each will play in the learning process. This process of negotiation may take time, and for some it may represent unfamiliar territory. But given the crucial role of the learner-teacher relationship in attempts to foster learner autonomy, such dialogue is essential for effective learning.

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