Introducing Learner Autonomy in Teacher Education

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Preface

Learner autonomy has become a central theme in language teaching and learning. It is part of a wider development in education that aims at preparing young people for life-long learning through the ability to organise and direct their own learning inside and outside the school context. In language learning, learner autonomy is particularly significant as learners prepare themselves for communication in international settings. In learning to communicate learners need to acquire skills of independence in intercultural and interlinguistic interaction. No school or programme can provide its students with all the knowledge they will require later on in life, but it can provide them with a more wholesome understanding of themselves as learners, of the learning process, and of what is involved in communication, as a means for continuing development. Learner autonomy is seen as pivotal in the communicative approach to language learning developed by the Council of Europe. In this sense, learners are expected to carry the responsibility for their own learning, to negotiate and cooperate with each other and with the teacher in selecting objectives and ways of achieving them, sharing knowledge, experiences and feelings while respecting the individuality of others, and learning to monitor and evaluate their own progress.

Teachers acquire a new role in this context. As learner autonomy becomes a pedagogical ideal, and as it attracts an increasing number of classroom-based research projects, the greater the need there is for teachers to be adept at encouraging its practice. Most teachers have never had the opportunity to learn autonomously themselves and will, therefore, find it very difficult to implement it as a methodology in their classrooms. We believe that it will be very difficult for teachers to introduce a new approach in teaching unless they have some first-hand experience of it. Teachers need to experience learner autonomy as learners first. In fact, the contributors to this publication describe how they have tried to give teachers an opportunity to experience learner autonomy themselves first, before encouraging them to implement it in schools.

This publication is largely the result of a research and development network established in the context of Workshop No. 3/97 of the European Center for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe *Language and Culture Awareness in Language Learning/Teaching for the development of Learner Autonomy* (Graz, 4-8 March, 1997). An international network was set up and supported by the ECML with the aim of producing and testing in-service and pre-service teacher-training modules implementing learner autonomy, as a means of (i) providing teachers with the opportunity to experience learner autonomy; and as a result (ii) enhancing learner autonomy in the secondary school classroom.

This book is divided into two parts. Part A describes the projects that three members of the international network carried out in their own setting: one in pre-service teacher education in Malta; and two in in-service teacher training, in Lithuania, and in Malta. The contribution by Nissilä was carried out with two groups of trainee teachers in

Finland. It was developed as part of a research and development project following New Style Workshop 15A and 15B *The Initial Training of Modern Language Teachers*.

The chapters in Part A serve as an encouragement to teacher educators working in a variety of settings who wish to introduce and to encourage learner autonomy in language teaching and learning. All four projects had a similar aim, but varied in planning and implementation. There is no one correct way towards learner autonomy. Each contributor has received very positive feedback from participants not only in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, but especially with regard to enthusiasm and interest in learning.

A few words of caution, however, are in order. Learner autonomy is a process, sometimes a slow one, and one where the social aspects in learning are as important as the cognitive and the metacognitive. Preparation is needed both on the part of the trainer and of the trainees to ensure the desired outcomes.

Part B presents a range of activities for use with either teachers or learners. Each activity is intended to enhance on learner autonomy in a different way. Activities 1 – 5 encourage participants to take control of their learning by giving them opportunities to reflect about themselves as learners, about their attitudes to autonomous learning, and about their own learning and professional needs. Activities 6 – 9 illustrate specific ways of reflecting about one's own learning needs and processes. In activities 10 and 11 participants take an active role in formulating needs, describing interests, and consequently in collecting materials and organising knowledge. Activities 12 – 17 provide ideas for implementing learner autonomy in a variety of language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading and writing. The last two activities, 18 and 19, show how difficult but essential concepts in learner autonomy, like metalanguage and evaluation, can be introduced to young learners through metaphor and discussion.

The activities presented in Part B are a collection of work developed by Lione Galiniene, Frank Gatt, Antoinette Camilleri and her postgraduate students Sandro Spiteri, Audrey Galea, Sharon Camilleri and Linda Buttigieg. Two other contributors are Natalia Sokolova and Maria Morosova, who worked in a project co-ordinated by Victoria Saphonova as a follow-up to Workshop 8/97 *Aspects of Teaching Methodology in Bilingual Classes at Secondary School Level* (Graz, 6-10 May, 1997).

It is the hope of all contributors to this volume that many educationalists will find their work interesting and inspiring. It is their wish to have, as a result of this publication, helped to promote learner autonomy not only in teacher training, but also in the classroom.

Antoinette Camilleri
Project Co-ordinator
Malta, April 1999

Part A

Reflective practice in teacher education and the need for autonomy

Säde-Pirkko Nissilä, Finland

A. The Context

New teachers are expected to possess many competences: knowledge of subject matter, flexibility in thinking, positive attitude to self-directed and continuous learning, creativity, good communication skills, ability to work in a team, risk-management and ability to take initiatives, among others (OECD 1992).

These skills include those essential targets for an autonomous learner, the abilities required in planning tasks, carrying it out either alone or in a team, evaluating it. To reach these aims, a new orientation in teaching is needed. It necessitates an essential shift from the view of teaching as transmission of knowledge, to transactional teaching whereby learners are facilitated to autonomous, active thinking, and learning, for and by themselves.

The context of the present study was multi-subject teacher education both in a university and in a vocational arena. The first group consisted of forty students aged 22 to 28 taking a nine month initial teacher education course during the fifth year of their subject studies in 1995-1996. Besides language students of English, Swedish, German, French and Finnish, there were students of Biology, Geography, History, Mathematics and Chemistry. The second group consisted of fourteen students, also undertaking a pre-service teacher education course on a full-time basis in 1997-1998. They had all finished their degree studies and had two or more of work experience. They came from a variety of backgrounds, and were older than the first group with an average age of 32 years.

Both courses give equal importance to teaching competence. The difference lies in their profile as follows: the university programme teaching practice takes place mainly in comprehensive schools and sixth form, while the vocational teaching practice naturally takes place in vocational schools and polytechnics.

Foreign language learning in Finnish schools starts at the age of 9. The first foreign language in schools is most often English, although in the bigger towns it could also be German, French or Russian. These classes run through all school forms from the third year of the primary school onwards. Swedish is a compulsory language, and there could be a choice of other language. In vocational schools, colleges and polytechnics the choice of foreign languages is often wider than in comprehensive schools and sixth form.

B. The Project

Pre-service teachers bring to their teacher education their personal beliefs about good teaching and teachers, images of themselves as teachers, and memories of themselves as pupils in classrooms (Kagan 1992). These personal beliefs and images generally remain unchanged and appear in the teachers' own classroom practice. The research findings of teacher education (eg. Kohonen and Ojanen 1993) give reason to ask what kind of processes the pre-service teachers undergo during their teacher education, how their professional growth could be facilitated, and how they could be lead to understand and accept new knowledge, not only about theory but also about a practice that should become an integral part of their teaching.

This project focuses on reflection as a tool leading us to better understanding of the kind of processes that pre-service teachers experience. The purpose of reflective work is to integrate beliefs and images, programme knowledge and classroom experiences, both on a personal and a collective level. New understandings are thus created in the intra- and interactive processes by sensitizing existing constructions, analyzing them soliciting perspectives, and resolving conflicts into new, better constructions (Mäenpää 1997). Reflection is very individual on the one hand, but is built collectively by nature on the other.

Because reflection needs time and space, it was integrated in all pedagogical studies like educational science, didactics and teaching practice.

The aims of the study

Autonomy and responsibility are desirable goals in teacher development. If teachers are expected to master these objectives, they need to be given the opportunities to internalize them experientially as part of their teacher education. Learner autonomy is a prerequisite for the teacher's own professional growth. Professional autonomy gives the freedom to the teacher to enhance the learning of others as it gets rooted in professional ethics (White 1990, Huttunen 1986).

The main aim of this study was to encourage a positive attitude among pre-service teachers toward learner-centred teaching and learner autonomy. As autonomy is not a method but an approach, it presupposes metacognitive skills, and the self-consciousness of learners, in addition to subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge. This study does not focus on the trainees' thinking levels (see Nissilä 1999) but to find answers in the reflection documents, through qualitative content analysis, to the following questions:

1. Are self-understanding and professional identity developed during the pre-service teacher education period?
2. Is the pedagogical content knowledge increased during teachers' education?

3. What is the student-teacher's conception of educational purposes and values?

4. Do the pre-service teachers reflect on curricular goals, materials, programmes and evaluation in school teaching and teacher education?

5. Are trainees ready to give freedom for autonomous learning to their pupils?

The data

The data was collected from the written reflective documents of the two groups of student-teachers mentioned. The two separate collections were used to test if the tools for analysing reflective documents were valid despite the different time, place, and age groups.

At the beginning of the academic year, in September, the student-teachers were informed about portfolios and learning diaries. They were told the 'what, why and how' of diary writing. Individualized working methods were encouraged. Students were asked to recollect their past school days, and to become aware of their experiences as pupils, as well as to describe the qualities of a good teacher and learner. They were asked to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as future teachers, and to refer to methods that encourage their 'learning to learn' processes. Their reflective texts were collected three times during the research period in October, in December/January, and in April/May.

Since the students' ways of reflecting are personal, the written documents were presented in original ways and show different levels of consciousness and thinking, ranging from the mechanical and pragmatic styles to conceptual ones. The topics, which students were allowed to title themselves, range widely from those of self-image and of various aspects of teaching practices, to professionalism and teaching as a moral and ethical career.

The research procedures were similar to those described in Nissilä (1997). As the data collected consisted of a substantial volume of written documents, the preliminary analysis was restricted to a random sample of six documents from the university programme, and ten from the vocational one. The thematic analysis shows that the categories presented by Schulman (1987) could be adapted to this sample of material. The subtitles below indicate how the data has been classified.

Development of self-understanding and professional identity

This category includes pre-conceptions, memories, personal beliefs, images, feelings, experiences of oneself as a teacher, as well as the view of one's strengths and weaknesses as a future teacher.
The documents show that student teachers are very concerned with their own image as teachers. In fact, over a third of the statements in both groups dealt with this issue. Students reflect on their past school days, their present qualities and skills, and imagine what kind of teachers they will become. They compare themselves with competent

teachers and mentors and define their idols and their aims. Having had unrealistic or vague expectations in the beginning, they become more realistic and able to analyse their action later on. The development is apparent in the successive reports of the same students, as the following example from a student in the first group shows:

> "I wonder how I will get on as a teacher. She must be able to do anything" (September)

> "A good teacher is expected to do a lot. It is impossible to meet all the demands. I think I am good spirited, have a sense of humour, I am considerate, encouraging, honest, friendly and have a sound self-image. However I feel that I have to learn a lot before I am a good teacher" (February)

Development of pedagogical content knowledge

Pedagocical content knowledge is here sub-divided into three: subject matter knowledge, knowledge of general pedagogy, and knowledge of learners in specific learning contexts. Pedagogical content knowledge is a unique domain of knowledge possessed by teachers. It can be seen as a teacher's internalized procedural knowledge of how particular topics, problems and issues can be organised, adapted and presented to learners with diverse interests and capabilities (Schulman 1987). Pre-service teachers need to be acquainted with this domain. They also need opportunities and tools to reflect on their prior beliefs and support in their metacognitive processes of self-understanding (Kagan 1992).

The importance of this domain is evident: 52% of the university students' statements and 63% of the vocational group fall into this category. Their statements are discussed in the sub-categories below.

Subject matter knowledge

This concept is here widened to comprise the metacognitive awareness of task oriented skills, teaching methodologies, subject knowledge and its adaptation to learning purposes. This is because the statements usually combine subject matter knowledge with how to teach it. The concept of metacognition is here used in terms of the student teacher's ability to plan, structure and organise learning experiences to pupils in the classroom.

Of all the statements, 22% (Group 1) contra 9% (Group 2) deal with subject matter knowledge. Students of Group 1 tell how the trainee teacher comes to notice that:

> "everything is not so easy in class as it seems on paper"

> "I understood how important it is to see the globality of ideas in planning"

> "Later I noticed that I have tried to invent too complicated methods" and

> "However, there is no right or wrong way to teach"

Knowledge of general pedagogy

An important area that the student teachers are usually worried about seems to be classroom management and teaching strategies in general. The sample chosen for this study includes, however, only 14% (Group 1) contra 29% (Group 2) of the statements, possibly because there was an overlap with the former category. Motivating pupils is seen as an essential skill in teaching, alongside good class control especially in unpredictable situations (university students). On the other hand, the higher vocational student teachers reflected mainly on different teaching methods and learning how to use them.

> "To sum up, one of the factors of a good lesson is how well the teacher can react to un-foreseen changes and change her teaching and plans" (Group 1)

Knowledge of learners and specific learning contexts

This area of knowledge includes knowledge of learning environments, learners with different abilities and interests, varying communities and cultures, and the governance of school districts. Understanding the learners, as well as any aspects that help the teacher to know and to empathize with pupils, are also included in this category.

Sixteen per cent (Group 1) contra 22% (Group 2) of the statements referred to pupils. Most often the pre-service teachers reflected on the children with different abilities and backgrounds, as the following example shows:

> "I rely on the discussion with the disturbing pupils between us two. I try to think of my pupils as individuals. The most difficult thing is to notice the diversity of the individuals in the class, for all do not learn in the same way. Is it possible to pay attention to all different learning styles?" (Group 2)

Knowledge of educational purposes and values

Besides reflecting on their self-image and beliefs, as well as on methodology and pedagogy, the pre-service teachers strive to clarify and define educational purpose and values and try to explain their teaching philosophies. Teaching is not about tricks. It is meaningful action with a purpose. It promotes cognitive, social and emotional learning within the framework of commonly accepted values.

These issues might seem distant to trainee teachers. However, their personal teaching philosphies begin to be formed during teaching practice. The statements about values and philosophies in the documents studied are mostly of the following nature:

> "Our aim is to educate and support human growth. We should internalize this purpose and put it into practice in our work" (Group 2)

Sometimes students add their personal evaluative aspects to their comments:

> "If the purpose of foreign language teaching is to provide an individual with as good tools as possible for communication with other cultures in the target language, my own education has not prepared me for that" (Group 1)

Knowledge of curricular goals, materials, programmes and evaluation

Curricular knowledge includes a grasp of the goals, materials, programmes and their evaluation. Since in Finland the National Curriculum has given way to schools and teachers to compose their own curricula within a general framework, it is important to make pre-service teachers aware of choices and alternatives. This awareness is clearly visible in the reflection statements. Nearly 10% (Group 1) and 8% (Group 2) of the total were about the following concerns:

> "All teaching, every lesson must be meaningful…It is traditional to follow a textbook, but, fortunately, the teacher may use her own judgement and choose other material as well, if it is more suitable to the class" (Group 2)

> "I think it is fine that teachers can follow their own plans, set the goals themselves. On the other hand, you must decide everything yourself. But you can also work with colleagues" (Group 2)

> "When a teacher gives marks to her pupils, she should remember to be absolutely fair and objective" (Group 1)

C. Evaluation and recommendations for teacher autonomy

The results of the two groups studied are remarkably similar. Although the 'self' in teaching is strongly emphasized in the students' texts, there is also common ground consisting of reflection about pupils' backgrounds, interests and abilities, and their way of seeing things. Classroom management and teaching strategies and methods are also reflected upon. While student teachers feel unsure about them, they believe that they will be able to manage them in the future.

A pre-service teacher's professional growth implies making the implicit explicit. The level of explicit pedagogical awareness among student teachers in this project is promising. For example, at the end of their teacher education they all acknowledge the importance of learner-centred, autonomous approach in teaching. To them the more difficult aspects are related to the organization of autonomous learning in skills.

Since there won't be autonomous learners without autonomous teachers, the learning concepts need to be clearly understood in pre-service teacher education. Those students who had good chances of observing and practising autonomous work noticed the difference between autonomous and individualized work. They said that they will try to cultivate the idea of meaningful and autonomous approach in their future teaching:

> "In the future I would like to learn more of the ways to make the pupils do the learning themselves. I do not want to be a teacher who directs and structures everything in class" (Group 1)

Changing meanings means changing realities. This is an active and ongoing process. It means active involvement in sharing and understanding. It also means negotiating aims

and content. An active learner is like a constructor of a road map, a map that includes learning goals, tasks, learning processes, and knowledge of oneself as a learner. Developing a learner's awareness on all these aspects is suggested by experiential learning theory (Kolb 1984) to which is added a mode of learning from the viewpoint of metacognitive strategies. Developing learning strategies, of which metacognitive strategies are of utmost importance to a reflective practitioner as well as an autonomous learner, can also be called learning to learn.

Within the framework of experiential learning it is possible to understand the changes that are called for in teacher education. Learning is seen as a cyclical process integrating concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract coneptualization and active experimentation, into balanced and holistic understanding. The changes do not take place automatically; they require the courage to face problems, deal with them and solve them, and to evaluate personal action. They also imply cooperation with colleagues (Niemi et al. 1995).

Systematic reflection seems to be an important tool in autonomous learning, as well as in teacher education in general. All the findings of this study point to the necessity of seeing professional growth to autonomy as a dynamic, active process, whose elements are commitment, enquiry and reflection. The earlier this starts in (teacher) education, the better.

Practise what you preach:
learner autonomy in pre-service education

Antoinette Camilleri, Malta

A. The Context

The Faculty of Education at the University of Malta is responsible for the pre-service training of teachers through the B.Ed. (Hons.) degree programme and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education. The project described here was conducted during academic year 1997-1998 with a group of twenty-six, third year B.Ed. (Hons.) students taking Maltese[1] as a main subject. The four year B.Ed.(Hons.) programme consists of work in the areas of content, methodology and foundation subjects, as well as a dissertation and teaching practice. Emphasis is increasingly placed on students' personal development.

The course on learner autonomy was given as part of the methodology component. The normal duration of a course, referred to as a 'unit' is one semester, i.e. fourteen weeks, with a minimum of one contact hour between the lecturer and the students per week. This unit, however, lasted longer as individual meetings continued to be held with students during the second semester, before they went out on a six-week teaching practice in a secondary school for the first time. A couple of plenary sessions were held after the teaching practice where students had the opportunity to present their work to colleagues, and to discuss their attempts, successes, and failures in trying to instil autonomous learning in the secondary classroom. Units are usually evaluated at the end by the tutor on the basis of a test or written assignment. In this case the learners were encouraged to grade their own work on the basis of (i) continuous participation, and (ii) the final product in the form of a project.

This unit provided an initial opportunity for students to interact for the first time with the concept of learner autonomy. While they had been exposed to a variety of educational philosophies and practices and had done some theoretical ground work on child-centred learning during the first two years of their course, they found the experience of actually implementing learner autonomy in their own studies quite innovative and difficult.

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1   Maltese is the national language of the Republic of Malta. It is a compulsory school subject and used as a medium of instruction alongside English. (See Camilleri, A. 1995. *Bilingualism in Education: The Maltese Experience*. Heidelberg: Julius Groos Verlag).

B. The Project

The aims of the unit were the following:

1. To expose teachers in their initial training to the concept of learner autonomy through a variety of readings.

2. To help them become aware of their own attitudes toward, and practice of, learner autonomy, and to experience autonomous learning themselves.

3. To be creative in applying learner autonomy in the production of materials and lessons for schools, hence improving classroom practice.

The project developed in stages. During the *introductory* sessions in October 1997 I presented an overview of the concept of learner autonomy. I did this, by, for example, changing the seating arrangement of the lecture room from one of rows to a semi-circle. I asked students to reflect upon how the seating arrangement affected communication. Similarly I moved from a lecturing (monologue) mode to a question and answer period, and eventually to a discussion mode where more students interacted among themselves with fewer turns taken by the lecturer. This helped them become more involved and active in what was going on, and they realized how factors like seating arrangement and classroom interaction affected learner participation, and motivation.

The *second* stage involved the students in shouldering more responsibility for their own learning. As Knowles (1975) had explained in the early days of experimentation with learner autonomy, it is:

> "a process in which the individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning outcomes".

At this point I asked students questions like:

- What is learner autonomy?

- What happens in autonomous learning?

- Who is the autonomous learner?

- Who is the teacher of the autonomous learner?

Students felt that they were unable to answer these questions. They realized that their notions of learner autonomy were rather vague and hence *identified their need* to learn more about it. They wanted to clear the ground before going further by doing some reading on the topic. In this way they *set their learning objective*. In response to this I suggested a number of readings in English on learner autonomy (eg. Dickinson 1995, Wendon 1995, Holec and Huttunen (eds.) 1997). I also encouraged them to (i) work in pairs or groups of three if possible, and (ii) make an oral presentation as a group on the basis of their readings. Now they had to take decisions like:

- Do I want to work on my own or with others, and why?
- Whom do I want to work with, and why?
- Which reading shall we choose?
- When shall we make our presentation?
- How shall we make our presentation

Students were free to choose a date and a mode of presentation. Some of the presentations were very creative, and consisted of, for example, a puppet show simulating one teacher-centred classroom and comparing it with one where learner autonomy was practiced; interviews with secondary school students who were brought over to university to talk to the whole group; and a video tape of an activity that one of the groups conducted in a secondary school.

The presentations of each group in plenary took up until the Christmas holidays. During this second phase of the project, students experienced what Balbi (1993) defines as:

(i) A pedagogy of time: over a period of two months they assimilated the concept of learner autonomy through readings and group discussions, as well as a presentation in plenary.

(ii) A pedagogy of resources: they read articles and books, used puppets, videos, schools and pupils as part of the learning process.

(iii) A pedagogy of choice: they chose to work with others and not on their own; they chose their partners; they chose the readings; and also the time and manner of presentation.

By January 1998 I felt that the students were better equipped for a more advanced practice in autonomous learning, and moved from aim 2 to aim 3 listed above. Teaching practice was also fast approaching and students as usual started to get anxious about it. It was decided, therefore, to use this time of preparation for teaching practice by trying to be a little bit more innovative in their lesson planning.

Through this process, I helped them become aware, once again, of a specific learning need and consequently to set a new learning objective. My basic question was this:
While you are planning your scheme of work and lesson plans for the teaching practice, in which area of the syllabus that you have to teach do you feel weakest?

Once they identified an area or a topic, I encouraged them to formulate their learning objective and define a learning task that would help them acquire the knowledge or skills they felt they were lacking. In fact, almost half the group, chose aspects related to the teaching of literature. As a result I had to enroll the help of a colleague [2] specialized

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2   I would like to thank Mr Terence Portelli who accepted to tutor these students in addition to his
     workload.

in the field, to tutor these students, while I worked with the other students individually who chose a variety of topics ranging from the teaching of speaking skills, to the teaching of culture.

The aim of the project work was twofold. On the one hand the student-teachers enjoyed expanding their experience of autonomous learning as they looked up information, discussed the materials, and finalized it for presentation. On the other hand, the end-products were useful pedagogical tools ready for use in the classroom environment. In each case, the product consisted of a pack of resources, including materials and a description of the relevant methodology, for use in the classroom

The following are examples of some of their projects:

1. A comparison of life-styles in the period following the second world-war in Malta, Britain and Italy. This involved researching information in libraries, interviewing older people, listening to music and watching films from that era.

2. A description of the way of life in a particular local community as it is effected by geographical features like population density, distance from the capital city, lay-out of housing estates, and employment.

3. The creation of a list of attainment targets related to cultural awareness for secondary schools, based on the topics listed in the syllabus.

4. The collection of a bibliography of books, journals, articles etc. that contain information related to traditions and cultural aspects of life in Malta, in the past and at present.

C. Evaluation

Student-teachers were asked to evaluate their own learning processes and outcomes of this unit on learner autonomy at the end of April 1998, after they had returned from teaching practice. They were also given the freedom, for the first time, to give them-selves a grade on the basis of participation during the unit and their satisfaction with the final product. Their evaluations were written and handed in to me.

Practically all students evaluated themselves very positively both in terms of learning and understanding of the concept of learner autonomy, and in terms of satisfaction with the end product as a tangible result. Apart from a couple of students who admitted that they found the concept of learner autonomy very hard to understand and to practice, especially at the beginning, all the other students reported that they were immersed in this unit and "would have liked it to be the only one they had to do this year" so that they could give it their undivided attention.
The two students who found it difficult, however, also commented that in the end they did their best and one of them admitted that *"what I learned during this process will come of use again in the future"*. Another student who had opted to work on his own throughout the course was finally converted to the belief that *"after all I realized that*

working in a group is better because of the sharing that goes on". Another couple of students credited the unit with being *"the most enjoyable experience so far at university"*, and one of them confessed that he got so interested that he bought several books on the subject! Another student reported that he was happily applying autonomous learning skills in other areas of study.

All in all students showed a high degree of maturity not only during the year by taking responsibility for their own learning, but also by writing honest evaluations of their work.

When it comes to the application of learner autonomy at the secondary classroom level by student teachers one has to proceed cautiously. As student-teachers themselves commented, the current school culture is closer to passive participation on the part of learners, and hence, rather difficult for a novice teacher to instill a new culture of learning that demands the shouldering of more responsibility on the part of the learner. At the same time, most students confirmed that although learner autonomy is a new, difficult, and time-consuming process, there are multiple benefits to be reaped by pupils and teachers alike. The following comment by one student is typical:

> "I intend to use this methodology again in the classroom because I have already tried it out and it had many positive effects on the students. The choice of group, as well as of topic is left in the hands of the pupils although they can ask for advice when necessary. The teacher serves as a guide, and ascertains that the work is carried out. At the end, each group makes a presentation to the whole class. Pupils show more interest in the subject-matter when they are allowed to choose it themselves. The work is carried out more successfully when the pupils within a group know each other beforehand".

For my part, as participant observer during the year-long process, I feel I have grown especially in relation to my understanding of student-teachers and of how they experience their own learning and teaching. By reading through the students' reflective comments during the term at university and their continuous self-evaluations during teaching practice, I feel I have come much closer to my students' world. In fact, one of the main conclusions I would like to draw as a result of this project relates to the importance of encouraging student-teachers to freely and openly reflect in writing about their successes, problems and solutions, and what goes on in a classroom day in day out. Rather than asking for a formal self-evaluation report loaded with references, I would rather have my students engage in an honest explanation outlining the whys and the hows of their professional development in relation to the classroom realities they face.

Another important aspect that struck me was the emphasis placed by these student-teachers on the social dimension of school, and classroom relationships. I was pleased to discover that student-teachers realized that above all they need to know their pupils on an individual basis so that they could prepare more motivating and enjoyable lessons.

In fact, this project has shown me that autonomous learning, rather than rendering learning an individualized activity, highlights the social dimension, not only among learners, but more so between the learner and the teacher. Pupils in schools felt that their student-teachers *"really cared"* about them. Finally the learner had become central in the learning process.

Learner Autonomy Through Project Work

Lionė GALINIENĖ, Lithuania

A. The Context

This chapter describes a project that was developed with a group of thirteen teachers of English from different secondary schools in Lithuania. They were in-service trainees aged 35-50. All of them had been working as English teachers since they graduated from university, and had between 15-28 years of teaching experience each. They all worked at secondary schools, teaching students from the 4th form (age 10) up to 12th form (age 18).

The teaching of English as a first foreign language in Lithuania is compulsory. It starts when the children are in the 4th form (age 10-11). There are some variations to this: there are schools that start teaching English in the 2nd or 3rd forms (age 8-9), but this is optional and is decided by the parents in agreement with the school. English as a second foreign language starts in the 7th form (age 13-14). Other languages taught are German, French, and Russian. I will look specifically at English as the first foreign language.

The teachers involved in this project taught in different types of schools. Seven of them taught in secondary schools (to 12th form); three taught in gymnasiums (also to 12th form), where more emphasis is placed on the humanities or science; and another three taught in so-called bias schools where more emphasis is placed on languages (most often English), where languages are taught at a higher level, are given more time, and where students are provided with a variety of language learning programmes.

The module described here was part of a Teacher Training Programme of INSETT (In-service Teacher Training) at the INSETT Institute of the Republic of Lithuania in Vilnius. At the beginning of 1997 the ELT Consultant from the British Council, in agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science, and the In-service Teacher Training Institute developed a new Teacher-Trainer Training Course with the objective of preparing teacher trainers in Lithuania for regions most in need. The course started in August, 1997.

I became involved in the activity with several topics, the major one on 'learner autonomy', which I report here. From August 1997 to November 1998, the group of teachers involved in this project on learner autonomy met for five sessions. During this time I conducted five workshops and every session lasted for a week. Towards the end of the Project, in September, 1998, the group started their activities as teacher trainers in different areas of Lithuania, giving workshops to other English teachers while they

continued to teach English at their schools at the same time. They became the second group of trainers in the PDP (Professional Development Project). The teachers were not paid for running the workshops, but chose to do it out of their own interest.

B. The Project

At the very beginning I established the main objectives for my workshops in this way:

- To present some theory on learner autonomy

- To find out the participants' level of autonomy

- To try out some activities aimed at enhancing learner autonomy

- To encourage the teachers to involve their students in autonomous learning

- To discuss the notion of a 'good' language learner

- To discuss teacher and student roles in learner autonomy

- To help participants become aware of learning strategies

- To introduce project work

- To evaluate the process

The project was carried out according to the following time-table:

August, 1997	- What is learner autonomy?
November, 1997	- Learning strategies and learner training
January, 1998	- Introduction to the Project
January to November 1998	- Developing learner autonomy through the Project
November, 1998	- Evaluation

What is Learner Autonomy?

When I came to the first workshop it was very important for me to find out what experience of learner autonomy, if any, this group of teachers had. In fact, most of them had very unclear ideas about learner autonomy as a concept. Two teachers had read some articles on learner training and participated in a seminar. One teacher seemed to know more about the subject, because she participated in several projects with her students including a project via INTERNET with a school from Japan. The rest of the teachers didn't feel very comfortable with the topic.

During the first meeting with this group of teachers I discussed the following issues:

- Why learner autonomy?

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- What is learner autonomy?
- How is learner autonomy a social process?

First of all the teachers were asked to introduce themselves as most of them did not know each other. In order to break the ice they were asked to draw their linguistic biographies. They were given sheets of paper with a drawn body shape. They agreed as to which colour they were going to use for which language (eg. mother-tongue in red, English in blue etc.), and finished their 'self-portrait' by painting themselves in as many colours as languages they felt they knew or were able to understand. The sharing that followed served as an ice-breaking activity.

Learning strategies and learner training

They then filled in a questionnaire 'What sort of language learner are you?' (based on the work of Ellis & Sinclair 1989: 6-9). They grouped themselves into three main types: 'analytic', 'relaxed' and a 'mixture'. According to Ellis & Sinclair, for analytic learners it is very important to be as accurate as possible all the time. Such learners prefer learning in ways that make them think carefully. Relaxed learners seem to 'pick up' languages without making too much effort and enjoy communicating with people. A 'mixture' type learn in different ways at different times, depending on the situation and what it is they are learning. All teachers in the group appeared to be a 'mixture' type. Probably this is because as teachers of language they had become quite flexible and sophisticated as language learners.

They then completed the questionnaire 'How do you like to learn best?' (see Nunan 1989:51). The main objective at this stage was to get them to think of what kind of language learners they are themselves and evaluate how they like to learn best. Very often, when the teachers are very busy, they don't have enough time to think about themselves. This activity gave them the opportunity to reflect in ways that their hectic lives do not normally permit. They found a partner and talked about the best ways of learning for themselves. The teachers categorised themselves as any of these types:

1. Concrete learners: those who like games, pictures, films, video, using cassettes, working in pairs.

2. Analytical learners: those who like to study grammar, read books and newspapers in English, find their own mistakes, work on problems.

3. Communicative learners: learn by watching, listening to native speakers, talking to friends in English, using English out of class, learning by conversation.

4. Authority-oriented: prefer the teacher to explain everything, like to have their own textbook, write everything in a notebook, learn by reading, learn new words by seeing them.

By filling in this questionnaire the teachers had the opportunity to reflect about who they are as language learners, and to become more aware of a variety of strategies and styles that their students use when learning languages.

Furthermore, they filled in a questionnaire to help them establish their personal level of autonomy (Appendix 1). The teachers evaluated themselves as being motivated, co-operative and willing to participate in classroom events and to discuss their own progress. They also preferred to learn by discussing with colleagues and working in a group. However, the teachers scored lower when it came to taking the initiative in their own learning or in being self-confident in their academic work. They also thought it rather difficult to carry out self-evaluation.

They then tried out the activity 'Learner Autonomy and Myself?' (see Part B). Later, when we discussed the activity, they said it was rather difficult to choose their position. Some teachers wrote the following in their diaries about this activity:

> "I don't know much about learner autonomy. It seems to me that it has to be something connected with being independent and learning individually".

I recommended articles on learner autonomy (eg. O'Laoire 1994; Benson 1995; Cotterall 1995; Hedge 1993). The teachers were asked to skim over the articles, divide themselves up into groups and decide which article to read and prepare for presentation. It was interesting for the teachers to experience this kind of activity where they had to decide for themselves which article to choose, since previously they had always been told to read this or that.

For the presentation of the articles in plenary the teachers prepared interesting posters with the main ideas given in point form. The presenters were asked questions by their colleagues. I think it was very important for the teachers themselves to read the articles, to synthesize and to talk about the most important ideas. The discussion that ensued was focussed on the following issues:

- What happens in autonomous learning?
- Why do it?
- Who does what?
- Who is responsible for what?
- What are teacher/learner roles?

They also used readings like Camilleri (1997) and Thavenius (1990) to discuss the following topics:

- A 'good' language learner.
- Teacher and student roles in learner autonomy.
- Studying learner strategies.
- Introducing project work.

As a result of this discussion, it was agreed that 'good' language learners would have the following characteristics:

- Find their own way of learning
- Use every opportunity to speak English: at school, at home, in the streets etc.
- Take risks and are not afraid of making mistakes
- Use guessing and other strategies
- Use different materials for improving their knowledge
- Learn a little every day and use it all the time
- Are communicators in the language
- Are able to practice and use the language consistently
- Have the will and determination to accomplish the task
- Must be active learners

The teacher's role was described as that of a

- Facilitator
- Co-participant
- Advisor
- Encourager
- Monitor
- Resource person
- Patient person

The learner role was described as that of a person who is

- Interested in his/her learning process
- Eager to participate in discussions
- Happy to interact with other learners
- Respectful of other persons' ideas
- Able to accept correction from the teacher and classmates
- Able to plan his/her learning
- Able to find ways of remembering new language forms
- Able to evaluate the learning process and the results

Then the teachers discussed which area from the syllabus could be chosen for trying out learner autonomy in the classroom. There were several suggestions: vocabulary development, grammar practice and project work that would be more holistic in approach. The majority concentrated on project work.

The Project in Process

In the January Seminar 1998, I introduced project work and the implications for its use in the classroom. Though project work is known to teachers, it is practised to varying degrees in different schools. Some of the teachers thought that it is too time consuming and that it doesn't give the expected results. They used to believe that they had a lot of other more serious work to do like preparing for tests and exams. One teacher wrote:

> "I know about project work, but I have never done any project with my students, because I think it takes too much time, too much preparation from the teacher and gives too little benefit, because there's always a danger for the students to use their mother tongue when they are involved in the activity. I think I have something more important to do".

Together with the teachers we tried out 'Reading Journal Project Work', and 'Visual Aids Project Work' (adapted from Piasecha and Piechurska 1996, see Part B).

The teachers were encouraged to involve their students in autonomous learning. They carried out several activities with the learners. First of all they decided to give them the questionnaire from Nunan (1989:51) 'How do you like to learn best?'. For example, from a group of nineteen students that filled in the questionnaire there were: 6 concrete learners, 2 analytical, 8 communicative, and 3 authority-oriented. These results helped the teachers to get to know the learners better and to become more aware of the need for a diversity of teaching strategies in class in order to give all learners an equal chance.

It was very important to make the students understand that nobody can teach them the language, they have to learn it themselves: '*I don't remember what I was taught, I only remember what I learned*'. For this the teachers were advised to use another question-naire by Ellis & Sinclair (1989), 'What sort of language learner are you?'. According to Ellis & Sinclair, if your total score is 14-22, you are a mixture type. Here again, as in the case of teachers, students scored between 15 and 21.

We considered it very important to help students identify how they like to learn best, to think about what works and what does not work for them, and to compare their approaches to learning with those of other students. The students were asked to complete the sentences taken from Nunan (1996: 36):

This week I studied_____ .

This week I learned_____ .

This week I used English in these places _____ .

This week I spoke English with these people _____ .

This week I made these mistakes _____ .

My difficulties are _____ .

I would like to know _____ .

I would like help with _____ .

My learning and practising plans for next week are _____ .

When students had to write what they studied on one hand, and what they learned on the other, the replies were not the same for both questions. They wrote many more things about what they had studied (eg. words, synonyms, grammar patterns, some topics from literature) than about what they had learned. Most of the students used their English at school, during English classes, some of them spoke with their friends and at home, and only a few happened to meet foreigners. They could define their mistakes as mostly connected with grammar (eg. verb tenses, articles, phrasal verbs). Most of them wanted to know more about the usage of words, synonyms and usage. Their wishes for help were related to what they wanted to learn as a result of their mistakes (eg. use of English and grammar). When planning their learning aims and activities for the following week they mentioned: 'to improve my vocabulary and grammar' (and specified which areas), 'to work on pronunciation', 'to listen to some materials and practise speaking skills'.

Teachers shared their experiences of how they presented project work to their students, and how their own attitudes toward project work had changed after they had understood how it was related to learner autonomy. One teacher wrote:

> "Though I didn't believe in some great benefit of the project work, I decided to try it out. My students became interested, but maybe because this was something new. Then I noticed that some "shy" students also had something to do and felt responsible for that. I was happy. I could also see that the students can find answers to different problems themselves, can foresee the problems".

C. Evaluation

A workshop in November 1998 was organised in order to evaluate the year-long process. The most difficult thing for the teachers was to carry out self-evaluation, because they were more used to being evaluated by others. Besides, the teachers said

that very often they preferred to give a negative opinion about themselves, because they did not consider it modest to praise oneself. Through this module they experienced self-evaluation for the first time. They first tried it when they evaluated their own presentations of the chosen article in the first phase of the module. That was a very successful activity because it gave them a sense of responsibility and an opportunity to experience co-operation.

At the end of the module, then, the teachers filled in the questionnaire about the training course, their understanding of learner autonomy and its impact at classroom level (Appendix 2).

The answers to the questionnaire show that the teachers improved their knowledge on learner autonomy and its impact at the classroom level; they also realised how autonomous they are themselves, and developed a greater sensitivity to learner needs.

I could understand that the teachers had grown professionally. I was especially happy to notice that the attitude of some teachers who had started off with a negative disposition, had, by now, changed their outlook. For example, after the first workshop (August 1997) one teacher wrote:

> "Dear Lionė, I am very sorry, but I have no idea what learner autonomy means, and I am not sure I will ever understand it".

Later, in the comments on the training sessions she wrote:

> "Dear Lionė, thank you very much for having much patience for introducing this rather complicated topic to us. I am happy to recognise that I have understood some stages in learner autonomy and project work".

Furthermore, with regard to the roles of teachers and learners in autonomous learning, at the beginning they wrote that learner autonomy is connected with studying independently and individually. At the end of the project, however, they expressed their ideas about the implementation of learner autonomy in the classroom in the following ways:

- it is very important to be able to evaluate one's own progress
- the situation in the classroom changes from teacher-centred to student-centred
- the students feel more responsible for what they decide themselves
- they can understand better what learning a foreign language involves
- students realise that to satisfy their needs they must depend on their own performance.

Speaking about myself, I have grown professionally as well:

- I read lots of articles on learner autonomy

- In order to present the materials to the teachers, I had to select the best articles and ideas

- I had to work on different questionnaires, decide how to use them, obtain results and summarize them and draw conclusions from them

- I learned how to construct a questionnaire and how to use it

- I learned how to act as a tutor for my colleagues.

There are lessons to be learned from every experience. In this case, for example, to get more stable results, the teachers and students need ample time. Learner autonomy needs to be a long-term experience. Participants require plenty of opportunities to review the relevant materials. Our teachers themselves need further training and the students need more practice. The teachers who worked with me were too busy to enjoy the experience to the full, because they were involved in many other activities at the same time, all connected with their preparation for becoming teacher trainers. The more time and concentration one can afford for a project on learner autonomy, the better the results will be.

Finally, through this project we have witnessed the development towards more autonomous learning not only by the teachers themselves, but, as a result, also in the classroom, by the secondary school students.

A questionnaire to help you establish your personal level of autonomy (see Camilleri 1996).

Answer the questions given below. Do not write your name. Choose from (1) the lowest score to (5) the highest score.

Are you afraid of taking the initiative in your own learning, that is, of going further than what is imposed?	1 2 3 4 5
How self-confident are you, especially in your academic work?	1 2 3 4 5
What level of interest and motivation do you have?	1 2 3 4 5
How co-operative are you as a person?	1 2 3 4 5
Do you like to participate in classroom events?	1 2 3 4 5
How willing are you to discuss your own progress?	1 2 3 4 5

How flexible are you when it comes to adapting yourself to:
   -   new ways of learning
   -   new environments
   -   new colleagues
Under which conditions do you feel more confident to do the above?
	
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5

Have you ever had to establish your own learning goals?	
Were you ever able to list your learning needs?	

How do you prefer to learn?
   -   By listening passively to lectures
   -   By reading on your own
   -   By discussing with colleagues
   -   By working in a group
   -   By talking to the teacher
	
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5

How often do you use the following resources?
   -   The school library
   -   A public library
   -   A resource centre
   -   Newspapers, journals, magazines
   -   Audio-visual material
Kindly comment about your answers to the previous two questions.
	
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5

Do you think you are able to be objective in your own evaluation?	
Have you ever carried out self-evaluation?	
What did you learn from it?	

Evaluation questionnaire

Note: Answer the questions below. Chosse from (1) the lowest score to (5) the highest score.

Ealuation of the training course

1. How do you feel about this training course?	1 2 3 4 5
2. Were the topics relevant?	1 2 3 4 5
3. How much did you participate in the group discussions?	1 2 3 4 5
4. How important is the subject in your teaching situation?	1 2 3 4 5
5. Did you notice your personal growth after this course? How would you describe it?	1 2 3 4 5
6. What did you expect to find but missed during the course?	

Evaluation of your improved understanding of learner autonomy and its impact at classroom level

To what extent do you feel you have understood the concept of learner autonomy?	1 2 3 4 5
To what extent did you try to develop your own autonomy?	1 2 3 4 5
How motivated do you feel about your own learning?	1 2 3 4 5
How difficult do you find it to evaluate yourself?	1 2 3 4 5
Are you satisfied with the way languages are taught at school?	1 2 3 4 5
Would you like to try out new methods in the secondary school classroom?	1 2 3 4 5
Are you satisfied with the materials you are using for teaching English?	1 2 3 4 5
Please write any other comments here.	

DIVA: learner autonomy for in-service teachers

Frank GATT, Malta

A. The Context

The Maltese educational system still places a lot of importance on examinations and selectivity. Streaming starts in the primary school and an 11+ examination determines whether one proceeds to a Junior Lyceum or to an ordinary secondary school. Time is limited to cover all the content of rather prescriptive syllabuses, and therefore teachers generally find it less time-consuming to use top-down teaching methods. This results in a predominance of teacher-dominated classes.

Notwithstanding this, one does find examples of good practice of bottom-up and child-centred pedagogy at all levels. Indeed, we have teachers who are democratic, child-centred, inclined to adapt the syllabus to the learner, and who do not endeavour to fit the poor child inside the straightjackets of a prescriptive scheme of work.

A new core national curriculum has been drafted recently and is currently under discussion. It could be described as a praiseworthy attempt to place the child at the very centre of the educational process. Among other things this curriculum draft states clearly that in schools fundamental values like social justice, solidarity, democracy, respect and tolerance should reign and where each member is heard and respected. It is all for a less selective system and puts the stress on a holistic and inclusive education. Though the draft document does not do away totally with summative systems of assessment, it proposes a structure based on continuous assessment.

It also states that quality education should recognize that students learn differently and that they pass through different phases of development. In this sense there seems to be a move towards learner autonomy, and this would naturally require a teaching force that is fully aware of the implications of these new directions being taken nationally.

As Education Officer responsible for the teaching of French in Malta, I was anxious to help teachers of French to become sensitive to learner autonomy in their teaching. I know quite well, however, that mentalities do not change easily and that reculturing is a slow process which needs time, patience and resources.

B. The DIVA Project

As a first strategy leading to the DIVA project, I initiated an exercise whose aim was to democratize the process of syllabus preparation. Before embarking on some major autonomy project in the classroom, I wanted teachers to experience for themselves the joys of being autonomous and directly responsible for what goes on. I invited them, on a voluntary basis, to review parts of the existing syllabus and to devise materials to go with what they were proposing. As many as 45 teachers of French from a total of 120 in seven different schools, agreed to take part in this experiment. I would like to point out that the teaching of French in Malta starts at post-primary level at age 11.

The Aims

The aims of the DIVA project were:

- To raise the awareness of teachers regarding autonomous learning through a review of the syllabus by the teachers themselves, working in groups on a voluntary basis

- The distribution of a questionnaire to raise awareness about the teachers' own autonomy as learners

- The circulation of reading material including project reports on learner autonomy

- Regular discussion among participants and sharing of ideas and materials

- Evaluation of the project by students, teachers and project coordinator

- Presentation of the project during an in-service course

- Dissemination of the project and its findings

The philosophy behind this first attempt at teachers' autonomy was simple: if teachers are shown trust and empowered with autonomy themselves they could, in turn, pass on a sense of autonomy to their students. This reminds one of what Michael Fullan (1993) calls 'positive contagion' in his book *Change Forces*.

Why DIVA? The explanation is simple: *D* stands for Democracy, *I* stands for Individuality, *V* for Vie (French for 'life') and *A* for Auto-sufficiency. DIVA is a catchy word. DIVA was used as a means for encouraging democratisation in the Maltese educational system so that learners would become more independent and better prepared for life outside the classroom.

The preparatory phase

In order to introduce participants to this project I gave a presentation. I explained to them that as teachers we often have to put on different 'hats' in order to cope with

different situations (see DeBono 1993). Hats, in fact, often define a role we play at particular moments.

When we think and teach we often put on black hats, which can be taken to symbolize hats of critical thinking. The black hat stands for what is true and correct, for judging the validity of a line of reasoning, and for pointing out errors. If we don't pay attention, we, as teachers, have a tendency to overuse the black hat in pointing out why something will not work or cannot be done. This does not mean that wearing the black hat is a bad thing in itself, but if it is overdone, it can kill motivation and make out teaching to be a negative and boring experience.

An autonomous teacher should, whenever possible, wear red, yellow and green hats.

Red is a warm colour. It represents emotion, feeling and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is important when dealing with students. Teachers should be role-models of enthusiasm for their students because enthusiasm is positively contagious. The aim of wearing the red hat is to allow us a way of putting forward our positive feelings so that they can participate in our thinking. Autonomy needs the red colour of thinking and enthusiasm which urges pupils to work harder to achieve their goals.

Think of sunshine and optimism: the yellow hat is full of hope. The yellow hat is very forward-looking, it shows the benefits behind an idea, it explains why it should work. When teachers put on a yellow hat they are necessarily positive because they are only seeking advantages and beneficial values. Positive thinking is essential in our teaching especially with autonomous learners as it can spur them on to higher achievement.

Enthusiasm and positiveness generate energy and bring growth in our teaching. It is now time for us to wear the green hat of fertility and creativity. The green hat is concerned with proposals and suggestions. It also generates ideas, alternatives, solutions, inventions. Green means growth and action. Autonomous learning encourages students to be more creative and more active.

According to Holec (1980) autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning. That is to say, that the learner is responsible for all decisions concerning all aspects of his/her learning, i.e., determining the objectives, defining the contents, selecting methods and techniques and self-evaluation. According to Dickinson (1987), self-direction is a particular attitude in the learning task: self-directed learners retain responsibility for the management of their own learning but *they also use expert help and advice*.

This last point is important because thanks to it teachers can really begin to understand how they fit in the whole process. I explained to the teachers that autonomy does not undermine their authority or status. It is simply a novel way of looking at things. Instead of imparters of knowledge, teachers become facilitators, catalysts, real partners in the learning-teaching process.

Then I focused on certain factors that could enhance autonomy, namely, the adoption *of bottom-up processes* which imply the element of discovery through personal work instead of the distribution of ready-made input: a *pedagogy of choice* as communication implies conscious and unconscious choices about what to say and how to say it and therefore choosing what to say and how to say it prepares students for real communication tasks; a *pedagogy of time*, that is, giving students time to answer questions, to solve problems, to understand new input in an atmosphere of tolerance of error; a *pedagogy of co-operation* based on the exchange of ideas, opinions, information with other learners and learning from their peers, pair-work and group-work being forms of social organisation that can lead to autonomy; and finally, a *pedagogy of resources* where learners are trained and train themselves to use available resources (after Balbi 1993).

Autonomy dovetails with the humanistic and cognitive views about learning and language teaching. In fact, the humanistic view advocates respect for the learner, learning as a way of self-realisation, giving learners the opportunity of taking decisions about their own learning. Cognitive views stress the importance of involving the learner actively in the process of learning and of constantly using strategies suitable for processing information.

At least, one other factor that reinforces this orientation towards autonomy is the belief that language teaching should not be limited to the tuition of a particular language but should also include activities aimed at the acquisition of language learning skills.

Then I put forward my idea of the DIVA project. The main aim of the project was to break the monotony of teacher-centred classes and to help students view their role more actively. What I was asking teachers to do was to choose a part of the syllabus, even one dossier, and exploit it autonomously with their students, bearing in mind, the pedagogies of choice, time, co-operation, resources and the bottom-up processes already mentioned. I stressed the point that small was beautiful and that the project should be simple, clear and effective.

I also dwelt on the benefits of project work regarding autonomy: project work motivates students and gives them a chance to use the target language in a real, functional situation. Besides, learners have the opportunity to participate actively in their learning: not only do they have the opportunity of thinking for themselves, but they can also negotiate with their teachers and classmates and decide for themselves. Often, individual and group work complement each other to help the learner to choose for himself/herself where he/she can be most useful and ask for help when and where it is needed. Furthermore, during a well-planned project, students discuss, learn to listen to, and respect, the opinions of others, read and research, write and publish results.

The teacher becomes a co-participant, a co-learner, a guide and a most valuable resource; the teacher puts forward ideas like the students and then allows them to decide for themselves and carry on as best they think.

The Questionnaire

Prior to the DIVA project I distributed a questionnaire containing twelve closed questions on how teachers felt regarding Autonomy, and two open questions asking teachers for a definition of 'the autonomous teacher' and 'the autonomous learner'. This was in preparation for DIVA and was meant to raise teachers' awareness of learner autonomy. Fifty teachers handed in their questionnaires. Below is a brief analysis of the results overall.

There was 100% agreement that

- students have the right to take an active part in the lesson

- teachers should not be afraid to negotiate with their students

- lessons should be child-centred and not teacher-centred

- syllabuses should be prepared in close association with teachers

- teachers should not hesitate to take some risks to enhance their teaching

- discussion and sharing of ideas with one's colleagues can be of benefit for one-self

- students should be given the time and the opportunity to put forward their suggestions

- learners should be encouraged and helped to undertake personal research

- learning to learn and autonomy help to increase motivation

- we *should not* return to traditional teaching where teachers prepared everything themselves and the learners just followed instructions.

The overall attitude is undoubtedly positive. Therefore, even if classes in Malta remain rather teacher-dominated, there is the general feeling that things should change and room be given to the learners and, why not, teachers' active participation. Teachers are ready to take risks and embrace methods that are learner-centred and more meaningful. Teachers also feel that they need to be given time and space to share their ideas and approaches with other colleagues. They emphatically disdain teacher-centred classes and this augurs well for autonomy and future educational policy in Malta.

Twenty-five per cent agreed, however, that the teacher's main aim should be to help students pass their exam; 37.5% don't agree at all, while 37.5% agree with reservations. Exams feature very highly on the Maltese teachers' and parents' agenda. Few teachers and parents would ever think of doing away with summative examinations. The fact that 37.5% of the teachers who answered the questionnaire feel strongly that examinations should not totally dictate what should be done in class is encouraging and very forward-looking judging by our standards.

Very encouraging as well is the fact that 50% fully agree that

- teachers should involve students in lesson preparation
- teachers should not blindly follow the syllabus prepared by inspectors.

As yet I have experienced very few cases where the student actually has a say in lesson preparation. Teachers are under the impression that this would waste a lot of the precious time needed to finish the prescribed syllabus.

Also very positive is that

- 75% think they should continuously try to improve their methods of teaching
- 87.5% fully agree that they should not hesitate to use new resources.

Autonomy needs teachers who are constantly reviewing their methods, who are not afraid to take risks, and for whom teaching and learning are not events but processes that can always be improved.

The following are some of the replies to the questions asking for definitions of (a) the autonomous teacher, and (b) the autonomous learner.

(a) The autonomous teacher is /can….

- take decisions on his/her own without depending on those higher in rank
- the one who should have a say in all educational fields including syllabuses and national core curricula
- not hindered or restricted by syllabuses; can do everything within his/her power to promote and enhance creativity and motivation on the student's part
- very flexible; does not follow blindly prepared syllabuses; does not stick to one teaching method or to one text-book
- ready to try his/her own methods in the classroom and prepare the necessary resources to achieve the aim

(b) The autonomous learner is one who

- refuses spoon-feeding, is capable of undertaking personal research and is able to assess his progress while being aware of his difficulties
- takes his own initiatives, does his own research and does not depend totally on his teacher who serves only as a guide
- has the right to decide what and how to learn. He should be informed and have a say in decision-making
- is trained to carry out a thoroughly active role in class
- is thirsty for knowledge and is willing to acquire the necessary skills to achieve this on his own.

I think that these definitions demonstrate that these teachers have a true concept of what the autonomous teacher and the autonomous learner should possess in terms of skills and resources.

The DIVA Project in Process

The project was planned to take place during the school year 1997. During the summer holidays I sent to the participants various material on autonomy in preparation for the project. Among the material I sent them were various projects on autonomy that I had at hand (eg. Jones & Legutke 1984; Fullan 1993; Holec 1980; Dickinson 1987).

When school year 1997 started, I met the various teachers alone or in groups where we discussed what we had to do. At first, there was some scepticism but as we progressed teachers and learners became more enthusiastic and things improved considerably. The project lasted about seven weeks after which the teachers could revert to their own usual methodology if they so wished.

A good number of teachers opted to cover at least 25% of the French syllabus in an autonomous way on the grounds we have already explained, that is, that their students would

- be aware of their short and long-term objectives

- determine their own level and establish their own rate of learning

- be encouraged to correct their mistakes

- assess their own learning progress

- use self-access materials

- bring whenever possible their own materials in class

- be given opportunities to work in small groups

- be encouraged to make use of their own knowledge of the world

- be allowed to use their own learning strategies

- be taught how to use time in a rational way

For various reasons, only five teachers managed to complete the project. One male teacher worked with boys aged between 12 and 13 coming from a secondary school where motivation is not so high. Four female teachers worked with girls aged between 12 and 13 years of age in Junior Lyceums where students are more positively-disposed to learning. All of them chose to work on a dossier in the text-book which dwelt on French cuisine and the eating habits of Frenchmen in general.

The following is a list some of the activities that were actually worked out by the students to enhance autonomy at classroom level.

- Finding pictures, preparing flash-cards, bringing materials to use during lessons.

- Preparation of exhibitions as a final evaluation of the work (eg. one class prepared a French meal and invited the Head of School and senior staff).

- Questionnaires: a particular group of students carried out a survey on the eating habits and preferences of some of their friends. They took a sample of thirty students of the same age. They planned the questions, analyzed the answers and reported their findings to the class.

- Organizing a party: writing an invitation in the target language, making lists of different French food items at home such as quiche lorraine, croissants, baguettes, etc.

- Quizzes: as a consolidation exercise, another group had to prepare a set of questions in the form of a quiz. Evaluation and organisation was the responsibility of the students.

- Formal letter writing: letters were written by the students to invite people to their classes. One such letter was sent to the French Ambassador in Malta. The Ambassador answered the letter and referred them to the *Attaché Culturel.*

- Interviews: the French *Attaché Culturel* was interviewed. Students prepared and asked questions about French eating habits. They recorded the interview and later played and discussed it in class. Those who did not take part in the interview were very proud to act as technicians.

- Traditional exercises: dictations, listening comprehension exercises were prepared and read out by students working in groups or in pairs. Peer correction followed.

- School magazines: school magazines were exploited to the full and became part of the course.

- Crossword-puzzles to revise vocabulary.

C. Evaluation of the Project

The taste of the pudding is in the eating. It was evident that the students and teachers were enjoying the work. Demotivated students found a new lease of life and participated actively in the project as was remarked by Heads of Schools and parents.

The coordinators met regularly and discussed and shared the work until finally the whole document was brought together and owned by all the participants. This process generated synergy and enthusiasm. The participants, some of whom were rather sceptical at the beginning, agreed, almost unanimously, that it was a most positive experience.

Evaluation by students

Some students noted that the French lesson suddenly came alive and that they were sorry that each lesson lasted only 40 minutes. Others thought that at last schooling started making more sense because they started feeling responsible for their own learning. From passive they became active participants anxious to suggest something that could make the French lesson more interesting and worthwhile.

Others remarked that they felt much closer to their teacher who really became their friend. They even approached their teacher during break-time to ask questions. They felt that their teacher had become a real partner and an invaluable resource. Another group could not see why autonomous learning was present only during the French lesson. They wrote to the Headmaster suggesting that this type of methodology becomes cross-curricular. Yet another group realized that autonomy demands more work on their part. But who cared? They were prepared to work harder because they had a say in the planning and delivery of lessons.

Evaluation by teachers

One teacher remarked:

> "On the whole I think that learning was much more fun because the children were directly involved and they seemed to appreciate their friends' efforts. They looked forward to presenting their task because it was completely their work. I simply checked what they were doing and whenever they needed they asked for my advice. Thus, direct participation led to higher motivation. Besides, I really enjoyed watching their presentation and noticing how eager they were.

> Other advantages were learning to learn as a team, although they were free to work with whoever they wanted to, they had to share ideas, discuss and decide on their own. Moreover, the fact that both their class-mates and myself enjoyed and appreciated their work was rewarding in itself."

Another teacher had this to say:

> "L'élève tient sa responsabilité, il se débrouille mieux, il a plus de confiance et donne une grande importance à la langue française, langue internationale. Sa rencontre pour la première fois de sa vie avec des personnages, tel l'attaché culturel français à Malte a signifié beaucoup pour mes élèves provenant d'un milieu plutôt modeste…

> A mon avis, il faut généraliser le projet DIVA dans toutes les écoles maltaises pour avoir beaucoup d'idées, d'expériences et de méthodes dans ce domaine pédagogique…

> Après cette expérience, je préfère continuer les autres dossiers sur le même rythme en utilisant cette nouvelle méthodologie axée sur l-auto-apprentissage."

On the negative side there were remarks like the following:

"We have to consider the constraints posed by the syllabus, hence, time, by the content tested in the examinations which ultimately students have to sit for, and by the large number of students in the class. Such factors make it difficult for the teacher to teach all the content through learner-based activities which are very time-consuming."

"Unfortunately, we were short of time and we often had to rush through an activity especially since exams were fast approaching. Furthermore, at times I had to help them express themselves because they still find it hard when it comes to use French. I realized that they needed reassurance and relied on me for help. With certain topics autonomy can be more difficult."

"No matter what methods are used, the same (or almost the same) results are obtained. It all depends strongly on the students' mental abilities, interest and the teacher's personality, relationship with students and the ability to motivate the learners."

My own evaluation

In my view, thanks also to the DIVA project we were moving from teacher-centred classes to learner-centred classes where teachers help students by advising, negotiating and where little is imposed. Students, on the other hand become agents of their own learning, and use a multitude of resources. Priority in the foreign language classroom now shifts from the writing to oral communication. All participants become more willing to experiment with new methods of learning and from exam and syllabus-centred, participants develop a practice that is more appreciative of learning in a wider sense. For instance, the classroom atmosphere changes from one of competition to one of collaboration and sharing.

I noticed that teachers and learners were now teaching and learning and having fun. The DIVA project brought some colour to our classrooms: the red colour of enthusiasm, the yellow colour of positiveness and the green colour of hope and creativity.

Part B: Activities

Activity 1:

Learner Autonomy And Myself

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	10 minutes
Aim	1. To find out how participants feel about learner autonomy.
Materials	A closed box with the words "Learner Autonomy" on it.
Procedure	1. A chair with the "Learner Autonomy" box on it is placed in the middle of the room.
	2. Participants are asked to look at the box and to try to reflect about what they know on learner autonomy.
	3. Participants are asked to stand at a distance from the box that represents their level of confidence/knowledge of the concept. The more they feel they know, the closer to the box they stand.
	4. Each participant tells the others why he/she chose that position.
Comments	1. The time needed depends on the number of participants.
	2. Instead of a box, a poster or a book on learner autonomy can be used.
	3. The same activity can be repeated at the end of the course to find out how each participant's position has changed.
	4. As a variation participants could be asked to write something about learner autonomy connected with the knowledge they have acquired and put it into the box, either as feedback for the trainer, or for sharing in the group.

Activity 2:

A Talking Statue

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	15 minutes
Aims	1. To revise knowledge on learner autonomy.
	2. To develop participants imagination and co-operation.
Materials	None
Procedure	1. Participants are asked to think of a word, phrase or sentence in relation to learner autonomy.
	2. Then they are told to create a statue called "learner autonomy" in a way that each participant's position somehow illustrates how they feel about the concept.
	3. When the "sculpture" is ready, the statue will be made to speak. Each participant in turn utters a phrase that he/she prefers on the topic of learner autonomy.
Comments	1. The time needed depends on the number of participants.
	2. The statue could be created individually, in small or in large groups.
	3. This activity could be more successfully carried out at the end of the course as a creative way to give feedback on what was learned or enjoyed most.

Activity 3

A Letter To Myself!

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	15 minutes
Aims	1. To develop skills of self-evaluation.
	2. To monitor participants' progress.
	3. To provide an opportunity to participants to express their hopes and ambitions.
Materials	Paper for letter writing
	An envelope for each participant
	One large envelope
Procedure	1. Participants are asked to write a letter to themselves expressing their feelings, worries and expectations in relation to the course on learner autonomy. They begin the letter "Dear Me".
	2. When they finish writing the letter, they put their letter in an envelope, seal it and address it to themselves.
	3. The trainer collects all the envelopes in a large envelope and writes the name of the class and the date when it is to be opened.
	4. When the trainer thinks that enough time has passed, he/she can open the large envelope and deliver the letters to participants.
	5. Each participant reads his/her letters in silence.
	6. An opportunity for sharing in the group can be given.
	7. Another letter following the same procedure can be written if appropriate.
Comments	1. No one will be allowed to read anyone else's letter unless so desired.
	2. Emphasis must be placed on monitoring own progress, and self-evaluation.

Activity 4

Tasting The Pudding

Participants	Teachers
Time	Varies, but a few months are usually required.
Aims	1. To develop teachers' autonomy.
	2. To review and develop the syllabus.
Materials	The syllabus

Procedure

1. Teachers are invited by the inspector or national subject officer, through a circular, for example, to team themselves up with the aim of reviewing the syllabus or part of it.

2. Each participating school elects a co-ordinator.

3. Co-ordinators meet with inspector to discuss the aims of the exercise, to select the part of the syllabus that needs reviewing, and to establish a time-frame for the required procedure.

4. Each co-ordinator plans the work with his/her team.

5. Co-ordinators meet regularly to report on the work in progress in their respective teams.

6. The new syllabus is collated and disseminated in schools.

Comments

1. Good planning is essential especially in the early stages when it takes longer to gather momentum for things to start moving.

2. It is important to insist that deadlines be kept.

3. A national or regional seminar can be organised for teachers as part of their in-service training to give the opportunity to participants and/or co-ordinators to talk about their experience.

Activity 5

Choose Your Course-book

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	30 minutes
Aims	1. To compare course-books.
	2. To develop skills in choosing course-books.
Materials	Several course-books
Procedure	1. Start with a brainstorming session during which partici-pants express their needs and wishes in relation to course-books. The trainer writes down the list on the board.
	2. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Give each group a number of course-books so that each member of the group will have a different one.
	3. Participants skim their book and tell the others in the group whether they think it would be an appropriate course-book for them.
	4. Groups present their ideas to the rest of the class. They need to give reasons for their choice of course-books.
	5. Other group members can ask questions especially if they came to a different conclusion regarding the same course-book.
	6. A class decision can be made regarding a number of course-books.
Comments	If not enough course-books are available photocopies of the contents pages can be used (if allowed by copyright).

Activity 6

My Learning Needs

Participants	Students
Time	1 hour
Aims	1. To develop students' responsibility for their own learning.
	2. To give them an opportunity to identify their own learning needs.
Materials	Slips of paper
Procedure	1. Students sit in a circle (or circles depending on the number of students) of about 8-10 students.
	2. Each student is given a slip of paper and is asked to write a sentence about the area of language in which he/she would like to improve his/her competence or knowledge.
	3. Each student passes the slip clockwise to the next student who reads the sentence.
	4. If the sentence is also true for the reader he/she ticks the slip.
	5. The slips circulate around until each student gets his/her original one back. If there is more than one student interested in the same topic, they form a group.
	6. Each group discusses and identifies the objectives and strategies for improving competence in their chosen area.
	7. Each group presents their plan in plenary.
Comments	1. If only one student is interested in a particular topic he/she might choose to join another group or to work by himself/herself.
	2. Other group and/or plenary sessions could be organised to report on their progress.

Activity 7

My Language Learning Diary

Participants	Secondary school students/Adults
Time	A course in progress
Aims	1. To encourage students to reflect about their own methods of learning.
	2. To emphasise the 'process' of learning.
Materials	Handout (below)
	Student Diary
Procedure	1. At the beginning of the course, the teacher explains the idea of having a 'Language Learning Diary' (see Aims above).
	2. Students are given the handout as a guideline.
	3. Students are encouraged to keep their own diaries and to write them regularly.
Comments	1. It is useful if the teacher looks at the diaries at regular intervals to discuss with each student his/her own progress and process of learning.
	2. The diary can be used for continuous self-evaluation and/or final assessment by the students.

Handout

My Language Learning Diary

For every language learning activity that the students want to write about in their diary, they include the following information:

- The date

- The time when the learning activity takes place

- A description of the activity

- A description of the context

Other detailed information such as:

Use of the dictionary

- To look up the meaning of new words

- To check the meaning of a familiar but difficult word

- To check pronunciation

- To find examples of the use of the word in phrases and expressions

- Etc.

Use of a grammar book

- To search for a detailed explanation about a grammatical structure

- To be more precise in the use of a grammatical structure

- To look up new information about a grammatical structure

- To revise one's knowledge

- Etc.

Students may also write comments about the rate of difficulty and degree of satisfaction about particular learning activities:

Task	Give your opinion about the level of difficulty of the task	Rate the degree of your satisfaction on the task
Learning activity 1		
Learning activity 2		
Etc.		

Activity 8

How I Would Like To Improve My Language Skills

Participants	Secondary school students/Adults
Time	20-30 minutes
Aims	1. To encourage students to establish their own learning objectives.
Materials	Handout (below)
Procedure	1. Distribute the handout to each student.
	2. Conduct a class discussion about ways of improving language learning.
	3. Each student fills in his/her own handout.
Comments	This activity could be carried out at the beginning of each term. At the end of term it could be used to check one's progress.

Handout

How I Would Like To Improve My Language Skills						
Situation	**Vocabulary**	**Grammar**	**Listening**	**Speaking**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Shopping						
Using the telephone						
Socializing						
Listening to the radio						
Watching T.V.						
Reading the newspaper						
Writing letters						
Doing school-work						
Working on a school project						
Extra-curricular activities						
Other						

Activity 9

Finding Information

Participants	Students
Time	15 minutes
Aims	1. To encourage students to organise their own learning.
	2. To be creative in looking up information.
Materials	Handout (below)
Procedure	1. Students work independently on an activity that is slightly at a higher level than their ability.
	2. At some interval that the teacher decides, each student is given the handout to fill in.
	3. Each student looks up the missing information.
Comments	1. This handout can be used with any learning activity.
	2. The teacher may wish to check with students the information they have searched for.

Handout

Finding Information

Title of Task			
I do not feel certain about:	I can find the necessary information:		
	In the following books:	By asking the following questions to my teacher:	By looking it up in resources like Internet, CD-ROMs, etc.

Activity 10

'Reading Journal' Project Work

Participants	Teachers
Time	2 hours minimum
Aims	1. To encourage teachers to read professional publications.
	2. To develop teachers' critical thinking skills.
Materials	Various professional journals and academic books for teachers.
Procedure	1. Teachers are asked to skim through the journals and books and choose one or more articles they are interested in.
	2. Each teacher reads his/her chosen article/s.
	3. On a sheet of paper each teacher takes note of the author, title, and source of the articles and answers the following questions:

Why have I selected this article?

What did I expect to learn from it?

What have I learned from it?

Would I recommend it to someone else, and why?

	4. Teachers form groups of 4-5 to share their readings.
	5. Each teacher speaks about his/her chosen article and what was particularly new or striking in it.
Comments	1. Teachers could be asked to write summaries of the articles to be disseminated among other teachers by, for example, displaying them in the library or in the staff-room.

Activity 11

'Visual Aids' Project Work

Participants	Teachers
Time	1 hour
Aims	1. To help teachers develop cognitive frameworks for organising information.
	2. To give them the opportunity of devising a set of visual aids.
	3. To help them develop their creativity.
Materials	Various, eg. old newspapers and magazines.
Procedure	1. Teachers choose a topic (eg. vocabulary, grammar, idioms) for which they would like to prepare a set of visual aids.
	2. Teachers find partners according to their chosen topics and form pairs or groups. Team work should encourage enthusiasm and a desire for achieving higher standards of work.
	3. Teachers look through the various materials and choose pictures etc. appropriate to their topic.
	4. Together in pairs, or in groups, they prepare a set of activities that can go with their chosen visual aids.
	5. The visuals and the activities are shared in plenary.
Comments	If not enough time is available teachers could finish preparing the visual aids at home and bring them along to share in the next session.

Activity 12

Jigsawing

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	1 hour (possibly more than one session)
Aims	1. To encourage participants to work in teams.
	2. To be creative in looking up information.
	3. To practise reporting and giving information.
Materials	Various
Procedure	1. Participants are organised into groups of 4-6.
	2. Each group investigates one aspect of a theme that is introduced to the whole group.
	3. Each participant is allocated one specific aspect of the group's sub-topic, and is designated expert on it.
	4. Each participant looks up information about his/her theme.
	5. Each participant reports to his/her group the information acquired.
	6. The groups organise a presentation incorporating the appropriate information.
	7. Each group makes a presentation in plenary.
Comments	1. This activity has worked better with high-achievers.
	2. Participants could be asked to hand in their work individually if necessary.

Activity 13

Hotseating

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	1 hour
Aims	1. To develop speaking skills.
	2. To improve questioning and answering techniques in a foreign language.
Materials	Varied
Procedure	1. One member at a time is selected to play a role, such as that of a hotel manager or ambassador for a country. The role could be chosen by the participants themselves.
	2. Participants prepare a set of questions.
	3. The member chosen to play the role is asked questions which he/she has to answer.
Comments	1. Emphasis is not on precision but on fluency and creativity.
	2. The question and answer session could be recorded on audio- or video-cassette and reviewed by the whole group.
	3. In different sessions different emphasis could be placed, eg. on pronunciation, on vocabulary, on idiomaticity etc.

Activity 14

Rainbowing

Participants	Teachers or students
Time	1 hour
Aims	To encourage learner interaction in the foreign language.
Materials	Varied

Procedure

1. Participants are organised into groups of 4-5.

2. Each group works on a specific topic, eg. 'The Eating Habits of the French'.

3. At the end of the group work, each participant in the group is assigned a colour.

4. Participants with the same colour from the different groups get together to form new groups.

5. Each member of the new group reports on the work of his/her original group.

Comments Other methods could be used for re-grouping.

Activity 15

When I Finish Writing

Participants	Students
Time	15 minutes (after a writing activity)
Aims	To encourage students to become more responsible in developing their writing skills.
Materials	Handout (below)
	Students' own writing
Procedure	1. Students finish a writing task.
	2. Each student checks his/her writing as indicated in the handout.
	3. They revise their writing as necessary.
	4. They hand it in for correction by the teacher.
Comments	1. Students may wish to check each other's writing as well as, or instead of, their own.
	2. A discussion may be held with the teacher or with peers about a student's piece of writing and the corrections carried out.

Handout

What I Need To Check When I Finish Writing

Name of Student:

Date:

Title of the work:

1. Does my writing make sense to the reader?

2. Is my spelling correct?

3. Is my punctuation satisfactory (eg. capital letters, commas, full-stops, apostrophes etc.)?

4. Do I need to use other resources to improve my writing (eg. dictionary, grammar book, computer, magazines, newspapers etc.)?

5. Have I enhanced my written expression adequately (eg. by using idioms, proverbs, expressions etc.)?

6. What else can I improve in my writing?

7. What do I think my teacher will think of this piece of writing?

8. What do I think my peers will think of it?

9. How do I like it?

Activity 16

My Opinion About My Writing

Participants	Intermediate and Advanced Learners
Time	30 minutes (after a writing activity)
Aims	1. To develop students' self-evaluation skills.
	2. To give students the opportunity to improve their writing.
Materials	Handout (below)
Procedure	1. Students work individually on a writing activity.
	2. At the end of the activity, each student fills in the handout as a means for evaluating his/her own work.
	3. The teacher also fills in his/her comments after reading each student's writing.
Comments	1. Ideally the student and the teacher discuss the work and their comments about it.
	2. Students may also be encouraged to compare their comments.

Handout

My Opinion About My Writing		
	My Opinion	**My Teacher's Opinion**
Was the subject I chose to write about stimulating enough?		
Did my writing have the desired effect on the reader?		
To what extent did the language (vocabulary, expressions) I used have the desired effect?		
Was sentence length and complexity appropriate?		
Were ideas developed in paragraphs as appropriate?		
Was the introduction catchy?		
Was punctuation used correctly?		
Were there any spelling mistakes?		
What can I improve in my writing?		
How can I make my writing more effective?		

Activity 17

After Editing A Book

Participants	Advanced students
Time	30 minutes (after a long-term activity that consists of creating a book)
Aims	1. To introduce the students to the activity of compiling a book.
	2. To encourage students to work in a team.
Materials	Handout (below)
Procedure	1. Students work in teams to collect material on a specific topic for a book that they edit.
	2. When the book is ready they fill in the handout.
Comments	Students should be encouraged to fill in the handout as a means of self-evaluation.

Handout

After Editing A Book

The names of the students who worked in a team _____ .

Who were the?

- Experts in content
- Lay-out experts
- Translators
- Typists
- Etc.

List the difficulties you came across and say how you overcame them.

Mention the three most important things that you have learned from the process.

Mention three things that you have learned about the subject.

What would you do better next time on a similar task?

Describe the experience.

Activity 18

Introducing Metalanguage

Participants	Pupils
Time	45 minutes (×2 sessions)
Aims	1. To give pupils the opportunity of talking about language.
	2. To raise pupils' awareness of variety in language.
	3. To introduce the idea of 'appropriateness' in the use of language varieties.
Materials	Pictures of children wearing a variety of clothing items
	Handouts (below)
Procedure	1. The teacher shows a variety a pictures showing children wearing different clothing items as a starting point for a discussion on the appropriate use of clothes.
	2. Pupils fill in Handout 1.
	3. In the second session the teacher starts by reminding the pupils of the discussion about clothing.
	4. The teacher uses clothing as a metaphor to introduce a discussion on language variety.
	5. Pupils fill in Handout 2.
Comments	1. This lesson is particularly effective in a context where home and school language differ.
	2. Pupils can be encouraged to find more examples of how language use varies according to who speaks what and when.

Handout 1

Let's Talk About Clothes

We dress according to the situation, the weather, the occasion. Complete the following sentences:

1. When we go swimming we wear_____.
2. To go to school we wear _____.
3. At night, when we go to bed, we dress _____.
4. When we go to a restaurant we wear _____.
5. On her wedding day, the bride wears _____.
6. At Carnival people dress _____.
7. Etc.

Handout 2

Let's Talk About Language

We do not talk in the same way to everyone. Think of the following:

1. At home we use _____ .
2. At school we talk _____ .
3. We use very polite language when _____ .
4. We do not think very hard about what we are going to say when _____ .
5. We think hard before we talk when_____ .
6. Etc.

Activity 19

Introducing Evaluation To Young Learners

Participants	Pupils
Time	45 minutes (×2 sessions)
Aims	1. To introduce the concept of evaluation.
	2. To encourage pupils to evaluate the work of their peers.
Materials	Pupils' drawings
	Pupils' pieces of writing
	2 handouts (below)
Procedure	1. Each pupil makes a drawing.
	2. Pupils in pairs or in groups discuss each drawing using handout 1.
	3. Each pupil is encouraged to fill in handout 1 as a means of evaluating a peer's drawing.
	4. In the second session each pupil produces a piece of writing.
	5. Pupils in pairs or in groups discuss each piece of writing using handout 2.
	6. Each pupil fills in handout 2, as a means of evaluating a peer's piece of writing.
Comments	The teacher may choose to discuss the drawings and the pieces of writing with the pupils before asking them to fill in the handouts.

Handout 1

My Opinion of the Drawing by _____

What does the drawing show?

What do you like best about the drawing?

Is there something you dislike about the drawing?

Have the right colours been used?

Would you have used the same colours? Why?

Is the drawing neat?

Would you like to add/change something to the drawing? What? Why?

Handout 2

My Opinion of the Piece of Writing by _____

What is the piece of writing about?

Is the length of sentences appropriate?

Is punctuation used adequately?

What do you like best about the piece of writing?

Is there anything you dislike about the piece of writing?

What title would you give it?

Is there anything you would like to suggest to improve the piece of writing? What? Why?

Notes on Contributors

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Frank Gatt. Education Officer for French and Director of the French Resource Centre in Malta. Before being promoted to the French Inspectorate he taught extensively at all levels. He formed part of the Maltese Committee that prepared the draft of the new National Maltese Curriculum. He followed various courses abroad on pedagogical subjects and has participated in a number of Council of Europe Workshops and projects. Gatt co-ordinated a project on learner autonomy for New Style Workshops 13A-13B.

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