Assessment for autonomy, assessment for learning, and learner engagement

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Overview

- Introductory comments
- Assessment of autonomy? Why?
- Assessment for Learning
- Examples from the classroom
- Assessment for Autonomy?
  - Theory: how to describe
  - Accessing young learners’ voices
- Implications for the classroom

- Phil Benson, *Measuring autonomy: should we put our ability to the test?*

- Leni Dam, *Learners reflecting on learning: evaluation versus testing in autonomous language learning*

- Terry Lamb, *Assessment of autonomy or assessment for autonomy: evaluating learner autonomy for formative purposes*
Problems with measuring autonomy (from Benson)

- The multidimensionality of autonomy

- Autonomy as a capacity is not observable

- Autonomy as a developmental process

- The ‘mask of autonomous behaviour’ (Breen and Mann (1997))
So why might we want to measure autonomy?

- To enable us to research e.g. impact of a programme of learner training
- To enable us to research how it relates to other concepts, e.g. motivation
- To enable us to assess someone’s level of autonomy
- To facilitate assessment of autonomy in order to develop it further
Assessment for Learning

- Black and Wiliam’s (1998) *Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*

- “AFL is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.”

  (Assessment Reform Group 2002)
Assessment _for_ Learning

NOT

Assessment _of_ Learning
Five key principles

- The provision of effective feedback to pupils
- The active involvement of pupils in their own learning
- Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment
- A recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning
- The need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve

(ARG 1999)
Support materials for secondary teachers

(DfES 2004)

Sharing learning objectives with pupils

Helping pupils to know and recognize the standards they are aiming for

Involving pupils in peer and self-assessment

Providing feedback that leads pupils to recognising their next steps and how to take them

Promoting confidence that every pupil can improve

Involving both teacher and pupil in reviewing and reflecting on assessment information
Assessment for Learning: *Formative assessment in action*

- Awareness of purpose
- Sharing learning objectives
- Sharing of criteria for success
- Self-assessment
- Support for self-assessment
  - (peer assessment/comment only feedback/error correction)
Assessment for Learning: *Formative assessment in action*

- Individual target-setting
- Formative use of summative assessment
- Reflection on achievement, e.g. plenaries
- Implications for record keeping
Autonomy and Assessment for Learning?

Central to such a form of assessment is the pupil’s own active involvement in the learning process through the development of metacognition, i.e.

‘the power to oversee and steer one’s own learning so that one can become a more committed, responsible and effective learner’ (Black and Jones 2006: 8).
The Invisible Child

According to Lee et al (1998), pupils appeared to have little understanding of the nature and processes of language learning itself: they did not know what they were supposed to learn from activities or from the lesson as a whole; they did not understand what constitutes progress (in linguistic and learning terms) and as such were unable to define in anything other than broad terms what they had learnt.
How, then, can autonomy be described in such a way as to provide a useful tool for needs analysis and specific target-setting, in order to facilitate assessment for autonomy, and lead to the further development of an individual’s autonomy?
EuroPAL: A European Pedagogy for Autonomous Learning

*Pedagogy for autonomy in language education in Europe: a framework for learner and teacher development.*

Setting targets for the development of autonomy

*What is autonomy?*

Self-management
Self-management...

Here the aim is for learners to manage their own learning by **planning** what they wish to or need to achieve (both short- and long-term goals), making choices from a range of learning activities and resources about how they are going to achieve this, and **monitoring** and **evaluating** their progress.
Setting targets for the development of autonomy

*What is autonomy?*

Self-management

Self-regulation
Self-regulation…

… the aim is to enhance the processes and outcomes of learning through awareness of their learning strategies as well as ways of planning, monitoring and evaluating their individual learning activities (Wenden, 1991).
Setting targets for the development of autonomy

What is autonomy?

Self-management

Self-regulation

Metacognitive knowledge
Metacognitive knowledge

- Person knowledge
- Task knowledge
- Strategic knowledge

Wenden 1999
Metacognitive knowledge

- Learners’ voices speaking about...

- ...the role of the learner (including themselves) in language learning, specifically in terms of control over learning

- ...the task (i.e. the nature and purpose) of language learning, both generally and in their own experience, including how it relates to their own lives

- ...the individual tasks involved in language learning, and how might this inform the ways in which they take control of their learning

- ...the strategies they use in order to learn, and how might these contribute to their learning
Accessing metacognitive knowledge through focused group conversations

- Learners as experts in voicing their own understandings of learning

- Focused group conversations:
  - Support the articulation of what may be difficult constructs
  - Rely on interaction within the group
  - Have a spirit of openness, dynamism and spontaneity
  - Researcher as facilitator
  - Enjoyable
  - Each FGC with a different focus
  - 6 participants; 50-60 minutes
Protocol design

- Questions and stimuli which would be meaningful to the pupils
- Tomlinson’s (1989) hierarchical focusing to minimise my influence
- Wide variety of activities similar to classroom activities, e.g.
Activities

- Brainstorms
- Concept mapping
- Contextualised questions (think back to…)
- Direct questions
- Projective techniques (to stimulate the imagination and to allow ‘unsafe’ opinions to be offered in a ‘safe’ way)
- Drawing
- Questionnaires
- Self-rating scales
Introducing the groups

A1: Motivated, lower achievers
B1: Motivated, higher achievers

A2: Unmotivated, lower achievers
B2: Unmotivated, higher achievers

The Grafters
The Angry Victims
The Sophisticates
The Frustrated
Person knowledge

Problem

Learner doesn’t recognise that s/he can make a difference, and expects the teacher to take responsibility for his/her progress, telling him/her what to do in order to improve.
The Sophisticates – whose responsibility?

T: What do you think then makes a good learner?

Jodie: Somebody who’s willing to learn really, somebody who’s going to put their mind to it. … somebody like who will mess about but you know concentrate as well so it makes lessons a bit more fun.

Jimmy: You want ‘em both really don’t you, a bit of fun and…

Jodie: Somebody who can get on well with the teachers as well because if you can’t get on well with the teachers, you’re stuck then aren’t you. (B1)

Jimmy: You have to want to learn. If you don’t want to learn you just don’t bother. (B1)
Mark: I know I can do just about everything. Everything I’m asked to do I find it... I know I’m quite, I know I’m clever, but I’ve been told that I lack concentration... Because all my teachers put me down because of my concentration so I want to do well, so at the end of the year, when I get a better grade than what was predicted I can take it to them and say I’ve done better than you thought, and put them in their place. (Smiles.) (B1)

Annie: Just to get a good job, I work hard, so I don’t have to work in a shop.

Jodie: I don’t wanna work in a shop.

(10B1FGC6)
As for the Angry Victims…it’s never their responsibility

_T: What would be a good learner?_  
Candice: If they encouraged you more.  
Penny: Make it fun. (10A2FGC6)

Peter: It’s a talent you’re given I think.
Implications – educating learners to take control and develop their autonomy

1. **Challenge any belief that learning is not their responsibility** e.g. de Charms (1976, 1984)

   - read and discuss learner self-report
   - identify together what learners and teachers can do to enhance learning
   - classify what action needs to be taken
   - letter offering advice to a friend about to learn a language
   - Look at definition of a good language learner and compare with letter
   - produce questionnaire
   - draw up action plan (drawing on Wenden, 1991)
Task knowledge

Problem

Learner has a specific target for improvement, but does not know which type of resource will enable him/her to address it.
Helen: [...] It’s cos it’s like different from listening to t’teacher. You can, say if you’ve got a choice between things, you can pick a choice, which you’d like prefer, whereas like if she says, right you’re doing some tasks, you might not want to do that [...] (10A1)
Reasons for choosing tasks

• random choice
  “whatever comes out of the box” (Peter, Angry Victim)
  “whatever I haven’t done” (Helen, Angry Victim)

• easy tasks
Reasons for choosing tasks

- quantity not quality

Carl: I should pick hard ones cos I’m quite clever me, but I don’t I pick easy ones.

T: Don’t you find that boring?

Carl: No, then you get right more done don’t you, and they say “ahh well done Carl – just keep on.” (9A1)
2. Opportunities for choice/self-management

(but introduce gradually and systematically, teaching how to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning)

3. Teach how to choose appropriate tasks

• Teacher always to explain why they are doing something

• Activities to identify the purposes of tasks

• Pupils creating tasks for others

Implications – educating learners to take control and develop their autonomy
Strategic knowledge

Problem

Learner’s target involves learning vocabulary for active use, but learner doesn’t know how to ‘get it into my head’.
Examples of learning strategies: the Sophisticates

*Comprehension strategies*

Skim through text, look at questions, then go back in detail

Work it out from the rest of the sentence

When you ask a question you have an idea of what they are replying

*Practising strategies*

Use computer, e.g. listen and repeat to French programmes

Record and listen to self

*Memorising strategies*

Use computer, e.g. listen and repeat to French programmes

Record and listen to self

If you forget a word, try to remember before looking up
Strategic Knowledge: The Frustrated

Where their strategies really differ from the Sophisticates, however, is in the absence of self-monitoring and self-evaluating strategies; there is no sense of testing themselves in order to know whether the language has been internalised or not. Even when a reference is made to learning from mistakes, it is dependent on the teacher to correct the mistakes rather than on finding ways of identifying them themselves, not because they believe that it is not their role, but because they sense their own lack of strategic knowledge in this aspect of learning. The group’s frustration is fed, then, by their lack of strategies to enable them to do that which they value most highly.
Strategies – what strategies?

Practising strategies

Used by at least one
Revise
Work
Speak
Write

Suggested but not used
Books
Television
Homework
4. Develop learning strategies, through reflection and sharing

5. Offer opportunities to evaluate lessons, reflecting not only on what has been learnt but also how it has been learnt (participation, tasks, strategies, planning etc) – and how they may learn better next time
Support materials for secondary teachers revisited...

- Sharing learning process objectives with pupils
- Helping pupils to know and recognize the autonomous behaviours they are aiming for
- Involving pupils in peer and self-assessment of how they have learnt
- Providing feedback that leads pupils to recognising their next steps and how to take them, in order to become more autonomous
- Promoting confidence that every pupil can improve and become increasingly autonomous
- Involving both teacher and pupil in reviewing and reflecting on assessment for autonomy information

(adapted from DfES 2004)
“Autonomous language learners are by definition motivated learners.” (Ushioda, 1996: 2)

“enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning…and perceiving that their learning successes and failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control.” (Dickinson, 1995: 173-174)
References


