

Designing Professional Development to Promote Learner Autonomy



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Objectives



- **Define and provide rationale for learner autonomy**
- **Determining the degree of Instructor Autonomy**
- **Suggest pathways to learner autonomy:**
 - Understand how your students learn
 - Show students how to set SMART goals
 - Provide choices in learning tasks
 - Teach learning strategies
 - Use technology to flip the classroom

What is learner autonomy?



- **“The capacity to take control of one’s own learning.” (Benson, 2011, p. 58).**
- **“Autonomy is a *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action.” (Little, 1991, p. 4).**
- **“A defining characteristic of autonomous learners is their ability to make decisions about their learning which take account of the context⁶ in which they are learning.” (Cotterall, 2008, p. 118).**

Why does autonomy matter?



- **Motivation**
- **Engagement**
- **Self-knowledge**
- **Self-regulation**
- **Differentiated learning**

What the instructor can do



- **Determine own degree of autonomy:**
questions to consider
 - Do you have to follow a specific curriculum, syllabus, and/or textbook?
 - To what extent can you plan/do your own instruction?
 - Do you have an understanding of which types of classroom activities are best-suited for which students?
 - Are you comfortable with differentiating instruction?

What the instructor can do



- **Determine own degree of autonomy:**
questions to consider
 - In general, how successfully do your students learn outside of class (assignments, self-study, interacting with target language resources, etc.)?
 - How much contact outside of your class do your students have with native language speakers?
 - How comfortable are you using technology in the classroom, and for assignments?

What the instructor can do



- Start with small changes.
- Understand how your students learn.
- Reflect on your own teaching.
- Take advantage of technology.
- Encourage student reflection and self-evaluation.

Pathways to Learner Autonomy 1: Find out more about your students



- Determine students' current autonomy levels.
- Have students rate their preferences for different types of class activities and assignments.
- Identify learning strategies already used by students for different language tasks.
- Determine students' technological skills and attitudes.
- Ask students to rank order their goals for increasing their proficiency in the target language.

Pathways to Learner Autonomy 2: Provide choices in learning tasks



- Begin with binary choices for learning tasks.
Example: Oral or written responses to a prompt.
- Expand number of choices according to student preferences and needs.
- Have students evaluate effectiveness of their choices.
- Eventually, ask students to identify learning task preferred to attain specific goal.
- Suggest trying different learning tasks when goals are not achieved.

Pathways to Learner Autonomy 3: Help students set short-term goals



- Explain SMART Goals:
 - Specific
 - Measureable
 - Attainable
 - Realistic
 - Timely
- Have students write 1 (or more) goal(s) they will achieve in the next two weeks.
- Work with each student to ensure his/her goal meets the SMART criteria.

Pathways to Learner Autonomy 4: Teach learning strategies explicitly



- Model how you use the strategy.
- Name the strategy and explain the specific tasks for which it is useful.
- Ask students if they already use the strategy; if so, ask for specific examples.
- Provide language tasks with which students can practice the strategy.
- Have students evaluate how well the strategy worked for them.
- Ask students to describe other tasks in which they could use the strategy.

Pathways to Learner Autonomy 5: Use technology to flip your classroom



- Class preparation work instead of homework.
- Explain new concepts (goal setting, learning task preferences, learning strategies, grammar, vocabulary, culture) in English through videos or online texts with examples in target language.
- Assign videos or online texts as class preparation – include exercises (in English) to assess comprehension of concepts.
- Provide target language practice with new concepts.
- Use class time to practice the concepts using target language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



- Raising instructor awareness of the learning process
- Research into practice
 - Knowledge base of learner autonomy
 - Opportunities to share experiences
- Microteaching
- Promote self-evaluation
 - Criteria to measure instructors' own effectiveness with implementing classroom strategies
- Institutional support
 - Curriculum, materials