Chapter 8
Exploring Pedagogy for Autonomy in Language Education at University: Possibilities and Impossibilities

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8.1 Introduction

Lifelong learning, initiative and personal creativity are acquiring increasing relevance to occupational life. "The 'information' in the last decade of the twentieth century is that we are entering the age of information and that our social and cultural life will become restructured as we 'evolve' into the information society" (Marshall 1996: 268). As Marshall (1996) accurately observes: "… knowledge has been replaced by skills and *learning.*" Thus, the transition from the industrial to the knowledge society calls for new capacities and competencies typically associated with the notion of autonomy and lifelong learning, namely, self-awareness, critical thinking, advanced cognitive and self-regulatory competencies, tolerance of ambiguity, cooperation and dialogic communication, among others (Jiménez Raya 2008). Consequently, a reorientation of our relations with this world seems to be required: how can we possibly remain citizens of this rapidly changing world, if we are incapable of changing along with it? We must, then, update our knowledge and skills constantly in order to keep up with the pace of the ongoing transformations.

Autonomy is regarded as one of the most essential values in contemporary Western culture. This centrality can be traced back to the moment when St. Augustine wrote his *Confessions.* From that moment on, a morally self-reflective, autonomous soul has, in our tradition, been prevalent in the conceptualization of the individual. Kant's contribution to moral philosophy was also an important landmark. Hill (1991) quotes Kant's definition of autonomy as "the foundation of human dignity

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and the source of all morality" (1991: 43). For Kant, each individual possesses a rational mind and has the ability to govern himself/herself, as opposed to being governed by his/her inclinations. In education, the Kantian *rationalist* tradition of autonomy gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. His influence is evident in the work of such philosophers of education as Robert Dearden, Richard Peters, Paul Hirst, and Charles Bailey (see Bonnett and Cuypers 2003). In fact, since the publication of Dearden's paper in 1972, autonomy has become the primary goal of all educational endeavour in Western countries and the central topic of some of the most renowned publications in philosophy of education in the last 30 years (Brighouse 2000; Callan 1988, 1997; Levinson 1999; White 1990).

There is no doubt that autonomy occupies a relevant position in theoretical accounts of persons, conceptions of moral obligation and responsibility, social policies, and many other areas of political theory. This, though, does not imply the absence of criticism. A concern for autonomy, then, is intrinsic to such important values as freedom, democracy, human rights, justice, and some versions of equality (Kerr 2002). The notion of autonomy conveys a conviction that all citizens, in some sense, have the right to participate in democratic life, and to choose for themselves how to live their own lives.

The notion of autonomy in education can be regarded principally as a concern about the freedom and well-being of the individual. Consequently, any liberal democracy would have the ideal of the "autonomous individual" as the primary goal of education (Callan 1988). Piaget (1965) reminds us that learners construct their thoughts through the interaction of new and existing knowledge, that they use what they already know to make sense of new information. For him, the ultimate aim of education was intellectual and moral autonomy. This goal is in sharp contrast with the goal of traditional education, which is to transmit knowledge and values from one generation to the next. For Piaget, intellectual autonomy is about helping the individual to develop the independence of thought to create new, original ideas rather than just recycle old ones. The autonomous individual is someone who determines the course of his/her life, establishes his/her own goals by evaluating their options in order to select the most worthy ones, and acts in a rational and effective way to realize them, while remaining at all times within the limits of what is possible. Nevertheless, as Boud (1988a:19) maintains, "autonomy is more than acting on one's own." It also implies the capacity to respond creatively to one's environment. This implies that autonomy grows from interacting in and with the world, and not in isolation.

European universities are introducing new pedagogies in response to changing social demands. Society is demanding students who have acquired competencies, knowledge and skills that will translate across disciplines and careers. In this sense, universities have become aware that employers are looking for young men and women possessing the capacity to think critically, analyze issues, solve problems, communicate effectively, and take leadership. These demands are motivating universities to experiment with new ways of educating students. To this end, many higher education institutions are focusing on what Ramsden (2003: 18) refers to as "general aims and higher level abilities",

including skills in self-direction[1]/autonomy in learning, learning how to learn, collaborative problem-solving, and team-building, as well as the more traditional abilities of identifying, accessing, assimilating and communicating information. The range of new pedagogical approaches being fostered and implemented is wide and diverse. The change that many universities are introducing in their courses and programmes is a shift towards a more learner-centred paradigm, including approaches such as experiential learning, task-based language teaching, communicative language teaching, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, discovery learning, and cooperative learning. Although we still lack sufficient evidence to assert the superiority of these approaches, Migletti and Strange (1998) observed a relationship between learner-centred teaching methods and student success.

The Bologna Process is an opportunity for universities to adopt research-supported models that promote more significant and transformation-oriented learning goals such as autonomy and initiative, motivation, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and creativity, rather than the "common-sense" approach of outcomes-based assessment that places the emphasis on the role of knowledge transmission and "measurable outcomes under the banner of accountability" (Salinas et al. 2008: 25). The most outstanding description of transformative learning theory is to be found in Mezirow (1997, 1998), who asserts that through the transformational learning process, individuals may liberate themselves from prejudiced or distorted ways of thinking and engage in more rational assessment and action. Transformational learning is especially relevant to andragogy[2] in that adults, by virtue of having both depth and breadth of life experience, have already formed particular frames of reference through which they interpret the world.

For adults to effectively engage in a learning experience that is transformational in nature after encountering a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational discourse are essential. Critical reflection is the process through which adults evaluate their frames of reference by assessing the credibility of the latter, in the light of new experiences or information (Cranton 2002). Mezirow (1997) defined rational discourse as a dialogue in which individuals defend reasons supporting their beliefs and examine evidence supporting and refuting competing interpretations.

8.2 Defining Autonomy in Learning and Teaching

In an outstanding review and examination of the literature on the notion of self-direction, Candy (1991) suggested the existence of four major meanings of the word 'autonomy' in the literature. The four distinct but related phenomena

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[1] Brockett and Hiemstra (1991: 29) define self-direction as the "characteristics of an individual that predispose one toward taking primary responsibility for personal learning endeavours".

[2] Andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn. As Jarvis (1985) puts it, for Knowles, education from above is pedagogy, while education of equals is andragogy.

are: (1) personal autonomy, i.e., autonomy as a personal attribute; (2) self-management, i.e., autonomy as the willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education; (3) learner control, i.e., autonomy as a mode of organizing instruction in formal settings; and (4) autodidacticism, i.e., autonomy as the individual, non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities in the natural social setting. This paper focuses on two different but related phenomena: *autonomy as an instructional process* (pedagogy for autonomy), where the learner is given the opportunity to assume responsibility for the learning process; and *autonomy as a personal capacity* for the assumption of this responsibility.

In real life, people usually take responsibility for their autonomy in many ways and in varied contexts. Autonomy often refers to independence in an economic sense, but also to the right of self-determination in a broader sense. In the literature on learner autonomy, there is a general consensus that autonomy refers to the individual's capacity and freedom to be psychologically, morally, and socially self-governing.

Autonomy can be displayed by any individual in the different daily activities and decisions for which they are responsible. Thus, the concept of 'autonomy' stands for 'personal freedom', as this underpins scores of practices and ideals in a democratic society. Autonomy's most important aspect, according to Dearden (1975), is intrinsic. For Dearden, what is involved in autonomy is the ability to use reason in making one's own choices. The exercise of such autonomy is said to be an important source of satisfaction and motivation. "The accomplishment of what we want or intend, under the description embodied in the intention, is necessarily a satisfaction, and our satisfaction is the greater the more there is of what we intend in what we accomplish" (Dearden 1975: 460). Autonomy is also an important component of a person's self-concept. *Self-concept*[3] refers to a student's perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and non-academic (e.g., social, behavioural…) domains, and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains. Thus, 'self-concept' is the cognitive aspect of self (closely connected to one's self-image) and commonly refers to "the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence" (Purkey 1988). For Baumeister et al. (2003), it appears to be a consequence, rather than a cause, of high achievement. Individuals develop and maintain their self-concept through action informed by, and reflecting on what they have completed and on what others tell them. This reflection takes, as a starting point, actual and potential actions relating to our own expectations and those of others, and also to the characteristics and accomplishments of others (James 1890). The immediate implication is that self-concept is not innate, but is constructed and

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[3] By far the most influential and persuasive voice in self-concept theory was that of Carl Rogers. He introduced an entire system of helping built around the importance of the self. In Rogers' view, the self is the central ingredient in human personality and personal adjustment. Rogers described the self as a social product, developing out of interpersonal relationships and striving for consistency. He maintained that there is a basic human need for positive regard both from others and from oneself. He also believed that individuals tend towards self-actualization and development so long as this is permitted and encouraged by a conducive environment (Purkey and Schmidt 1987).

developed by the individual through interaction with the environment and through reflecting on that interaction. This dynamic aspect of self-concept (and, by corollary, self-esteem) is crucial because it shows that self-concepts are potentially modifiable. Franken (1994: 443) comments on the existence of

> [A] growing body of research which indicates that it is possible to change the self-concept. Self-change is not something that people can will but rather it depends on the process of self-reflection. Through self-reflection, people often come to view themselves in a new, more powerful way, and it is through this new, more powerful way of viewing the self that people can develop possible [alternative] selves.

To resume our discussion of the notion of personal autonomy, it is important to state that it also involves the *power* to choose one's goals in life. For Winch (2002), it entails a complex of propositional, personal, and practical knowledge, because it involves the propositional knowledge of what is sanctioned as either a reasonable or a valuable life-choice, the personal knowledge indispensable to deciding what ends are proper for oneself, and the practical knowledge needed to evaluate the relative intrinsic worth of potentially suitable ends, as well as the various means appropriate to achieving them.

In the context of formal education, Jiménez Raya et al. (2007: 1) define autonomy as "the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation." The major assumptions underlying the definition are:

- Autonomy is developmental, so it varies across circumstances and time and is both a personal and a social construction. It is not an absolute concept because it involves a continuum in which different degrees of self-management and self-regulation can be exercised at different moments and in different aspects of learning. 'Disposition' and 'ability' are also of a developmental nature. In education, autonomy can be acquired through practice and experience. It is not something that individuals either have or do not have. In fact, different learners may have developed autonomy to varying degrees.
- Learners develop autonomy "naturally" (as part of general human development). Further, educational environments may assist or hamper the development of autonomy, but not impede it. Accordingly, autonomy can develop in spite of, in reaction to, or in line with educational goals and action.
- Both learner and teacher autonomy are viewed as a competence. 'Competences' are empowering and involve *attitudinal dispositions* (e.g., positive beliefs about learning, willingness to take on responsibility), *knowledge*, and *abilities* (e.g., strategic power) that develop self-determination, social responsibility and critical awareness. 'Competences' may or may not be translated into the actual exercise of autonomy, as autonomous behaviour is only an indirect sign of autonomy and is not to be equated with it.
- Self-determination and social responsibility are like the two sides of a coin; the exercise of both is influenced by, and influences, circumstances (it "results" from circumstances but also "creates" circumstances). Self-determination and social

responsibility can be defined in psychological and/or political terms, with obvious implications for pedagogical choices.

- Agency is central to autonomy. To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions. Agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised; it does not reside in a particular place as a discrete entity. The core features of agency enable students to play a significant part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal in changing times.
- The definition is anchored on a democratic view of education, which places emphasis on (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation as cross-disciplinary educational goals. This way, autonomy becomes a collective interest and a democratic ideal, so that the autonomy of teachers and learners should be regarded as two sides of the same coin.

The strength of this general definition of learner- and teacher autonomy, from the author's point of view, resides in the fact that it is intended to highlight the internal nature (competence) and the critical components (e.g., self-determination and social responsibility) of the concept of autonomy, thus emphasizing their focus on learner development and growth and providing an open environment for pedagogical reasoning and action.

8.3 Developing Learner Autonomy: Pedagogy for Autonomy in Higher Education

There is considerable agreement among educators that autonomy ought to be taken as a highly desirable aim of (modern language) education, (e.g. Benson 2001; Berka et al. 1998; Boud 1988b; Brookes and Grundy 1988; Dickinson 1987, 1992; Ellis and Sinclair 1989; Esch 1994; Holec 1981, 1988; Holec and Huttunen 1997; Jiménez Raya et al. 2007; Jiménez Raya and Lamb 2008a; Lamb and Reinders 2006; Pemberton et al. 1996; Vieira 1998; Wenden 1991; Wenden and Rubin 1987; Winch 2006). Accordingly, within pedagogy as a discipline, the goals of education are often formulated in terms that imply familiarity with concepts related to the notion of autonomy, such as personal responsibility, responsible self-determination, critical thinking, and the ability to make independent choices. As an educational aim, the development of autonomy equates to "the development of a kind of person whose thought and action in important areas of his life are to be explained by reference to his own choices, decisions, reflections, deliberations – in short, his own activity of mind" (Dearden 1972: 70). Accordingly, personal autonomy in a formal education context refers to the condition in which a person is able to choose and act responsibly upon the range of decisions concerning learning. It therefore entails developing the understanding, skills, and dispositions necessary to become critically reflective of one's own assumptions and to engage effectively in discourse to validate one's beliefs through the experiences of others who share universal values in the Kantian sense.

In what way can pedagogy promote autonomy? The current accepted view of modern education maintains that it should respond to the fragmenting tendencies of modern society with a shift towards universalism and formalism. Although it may be more economical, both in time and energy, to stick to the lecture method, some higher education lecturers think that their students learn less when the lecture is the only modality by which they deliver instruction. This traditional approach to lecturing does not give students the opportunity to be enriched by the material because they are incapable of making connections to their own life experiences (McCombs and Whisler 1997). Yet we have to acknowledge that the notion of autonomous learning has become, in many cases, something of a slogan – a buzz word – which few would doubt to be praiseworthy and necessary as a goal for all learners, in particular graduates. Pedagogy for autonomy represents an educational approach that involves theoretical and practical choices, but also political and moral positions and purposes. Moreover, it needs to be understood as a collective endeavour that involves various actors – lecturers and learners, educational researchers, politicians and managers – which is affected by various 'cultural' factors – personal, institutional, socio-political.

The way the argument for autonomy has been developed so far implies that autonomy requires knowledge and skill in choosing learning goals for it to be meaningfully exercised. In addition, it suggests a certain degree of intellectual, practical, and affective engagement with potential choices and decisions regarding learning, so that they can be made with the seriousness and responsibility that any choice about learning requires. To exercise autonomy (to be independent) is to enjoy the power and the permission to act according to one's own choices in the determination of ends and means. In this sense, pedagogy for autonomy grows out of the individual's acceptance of his or her own responsibility for learning. In fact, the learner is regarded as a decision maker who has the capacity to assume responsibility for learning decisions (Dickinson 1995; Holec 1985). Inherent in this ideal is the claim that learners should be capable of rationally forming, revising and pursuing a particular conception of the good life (Clayton 2001). In fact, the idea of producing rational humans is central to what has been called by Wardekker (1995) the "project of modernity.[4]"

Some educational philosophers, such as Peters and Scheffler, have formulated a revised, 'modern' version of this educational ideal, combining it with a cognitive developmental view of ontogeny (Wardekker 1995). In their view of formal education, learners appropriate various forms of thinking which have a universal validity. Since autonomous choice has to be rationally informed, the development of autonomy requires a number of developmental conditions, such as an appropriate education which enables individuals to reflect critically on the various choices available to them and assess which of these best fits with their essential goals in life. Thus, 'educating' implies showing the necessity to make choices and trying to choose

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[4] In this model of identity, the upper, higher level of rationality controls the lower level of personality, the domain of choices, plurality and even contradictions.

authentically what one finds worthwhile (Lambeir 2005). Winch (2006) analyses several themes, but the most prominent of these is the character of autonomy and critical thinking. Critical thinking is, according to Siegel (1988), coextensive with rationality and a necessary condition of the exercise of autonomy. It goes without saying that the rational choice of a life-course requires the ability to critically appraise the different alternatives available. Critical rationality is indeed a necessary requirement of such choice, so that rational choice in learning requires the critical appraisal of the different possibilities available; such appraisal requires knowledge (including self-knowledge), as well as the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information. Universities are considered to have the task of teaching logical thinking procedures and transmitting universally valid knowledge on which these procedures can operate, producing *rational individuals* who are able not only to rationally control their desires, but also to critically evaluate the prejudices and unnecessary ideas of everyday culture.

In the knowledge society, overloaded with information, more traditional instruction promoted through the closed and neatly-defined content-based curriculum can hardly meet all the needs of the learner. Besides, it is impossible to establish a closed and stable list of what a well educated person should know (Schank and Cleary 1995). In the knowledge society, as Marshall (1996: 269) observes, "…knowledge has been replaced by skills and *learning*. Everything which might have been seen as obtaining knowledge – an *object* of an activity – seems to have moved into an activity mode, where what is important is *process*". Accordingly, education and learning are redefined in terms of a process, because what once was understood as knowledge, has now become *information*. Therefore, what learners have to continuously re-learn is information. This has to be constantly "readjusted and restructured to meet the demands of the consumer in the service information industry" (ibid.).

Deciding how to promote autonomy depends upon what is meant by the word. Jiménez Raya et al. (2007) provide a conceptual analysis of learner autonomy that highlights its multidimensionality. For them, learner autonomy consists of several sub-competences grouped into the following:

1. Learning competence
2. Competence to self-motivate
3. Competence to think critically

These categories of the notion of learner autonomy, the authors argue, can help educators analyse their teaching practice, compare it with alternative ones, and by so doing, expand it in the direction they find most appropriate.

Pedagogy for autonomy is an educational process that takes diverse forms for different learners, forms that vary according to lecturers' views on the teaching and learning process and the students' interests and abilities. In this sense, Jiménez Raya and Lamb (2008b: 64) identify two main traditions with regard to classroom interventions:

- Manifestations of pedagogy for autonomy focusing on external factors that facilitate the learner taking responsibility for different aspects of the learning

process, such as planning, implementation and evaluation of learning and learning decisions (flexible learning, project work…), and

- Those that centre on internal factors that predispose learners to accepting responsibility and controlling one's thoughts and actions as a learner (learning to learn, self-regulated learning, strategy training).

Fostering learner autonomy among undergraduates calls for a continuous effort to help students process information in meaningful ways and become independent learners by developing effective strategies and transfer skills, as well as a greater sense of responsibility and agency in learning. One of the most outstanding features of pedagogy for autonomy is its emphasis on students' participation in curricular decisions by encouraging the assumption of a more proactive role in defining what and how they want to learn; this way pedagogy becomes curriculum-in-action (Barnett and Coate 2005) in which learning is always based on the interaction between student and educator within varying contexts of control.

In fostering autonomy, the emphasis is on creating an environment in which learners become increasingly adept at learning from each other, and helping each other learn, in problem-solving groups. The educator needs to act as a mediator concerned with empowering and facilitating the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and strategies students will need in order to progress, to learn independently, and to function effectively in a changing society, thus enabling them to meet new, emerging and unpredictable demands.

The aim of fostering autonomy is not to create environments without rules, but to generate structures that provide students with alternatives and information that will support their own learning process. Autonomy can only be developed through careful design, not by chance, since becoming autonomous entails an ongoing process which takes time, effort and support. In this crucial process, the teacher's role is to get to know the students, understand how they think, discover how to push that thinking forward, and negotiate with them a framework for teaching and learning. Obviously, what is implied here is a form of mediation, whereby student and tutor work collaboratively to arrive at a mutually agreed point of understanding. This necessarily implies a shift from student to learner and from teacher to educator.

Inescapably, the identification of a methodological framework that allows for the development of learner autonomy becomes a priority. The framework I am going to present was suggested by Jiménez Raya et al. (2007). It assumes that pedagogy for autonomy is operationalized through nine pedagogical principles. These are viewed as interrelated conditions that favour the development of autonomy and that can be used to analyse practical approaches to pedagogy for autonomy. The principles are:

8.3.1 Encouraging Responsibility, Choice, and Flexible Control

When students hold responsibility for their own learning, they develop self-regulation skills and intrinsic motivation, and also learn to value learning for its own sake and not because of external rewards. Research suggests that students should have

increasing responsibility for the learning process, including for attendance, choosing content, and setting and keeping their own objectives and timetables for projects. Accepting responsibility entails recognition of our social nature and that what we do has consequences for other members of society. "Responsibilisation" (Peters 2001: 59) means self-determination and self-responsibility in educational tasks.

Thus, pedagogy for autonomy requires the creation of a teaching-learning atmosphere that enables individuals to participate responsibly in the learning process, allowing them to assume responsibility for determining together with the lecturer what, when, and how they learn in formal as well as informal settings, and creating opportunities for learners to be sensitive to their responsibility. Autonomy is thought to be best supported through the provision of choice and the removal of external controls, such as pressures or rewards (Deci and Ryan 1994). Research on individuals' differences has also shown that students have varying skills, interests and concerns, so they should have choice, with support and scaffolding from a mediator/facilitator, regarding their own projects and graded assignments, and be able to select areas that are personally relevant. The assumption of responsibility helps them feel in control of their learning and their development. Control, that is, the extent to which students can direct their learning, is the prevailing framework of the self-directed learning process. The extent to which students self-regulate their learning process influences all other aspects of teaching and learning. Several factors affect the amount of control students exert on learning: curriculum constraints, educator characteristics, environmental characteristics, and student characteristics. The interplay of these factors requires a synthesis between personal agency and collaboration that mediation theory (Williams and Burden 1996) and scaffolding theory (Bruner 1996) consider essential to developing understanding. When working efficiently, scaffolding should "achieve not unanimity, but consciousness" (Bruner 1996: 97). As Bruner puts it, "more consciousness always implies more diversity" (ibid.). In addition, extra diversity implies greater levels of choice. This element of choice can only make sense in a classroom culture that promotes autonomy. Environments that support autonomy allow personal choice while providing structures that support individuals' success in learning.

8.3.2   Providing Opportunities for Learning to Learn and Self-Regulation

In the learning society, graduates should be able to organize their own learning, including effective management of time and information. From a pedagogical point of view, 'learning how to learn' has been defined as "the procedure by which learners obtain insights about the learning process, about themselves, about effective learning strategies, and by which they develop positive attitudes towards language and language learning" (Jiménez Raya 1998: 14). In turn, self-regulated learning refers to autonomous, academically effective forms of learning that involve metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action (Zimmerman 1989, 1990, 2002). The metacognitive component covers planning, setting goals, organizing,

self-monitoring, and self-evaluating at various points during the process of learning. The motivational component places emphasis on self-efficacy, self-attributions, and intrinsic motivation. Lastly, the behavioural component refers to selection, structuring, and creation of environments that enhance learning (Zimmerman 2002). From an academic standpoint, this includes planning and managing time, attending to (and concentrating on) learning, organising and coding information strategically, and using social resources effectively (Zimmerman 1994). It also incorporates motivational processes such as holding positive beliefs about one's capabilities, valuing learning, and experiencing positive affects with one's efforts. This competence enables learners to identify available opportunities, and instils in them the ability to overcome obstacles in order to succeed.

Learning to learn seeks to engage learners in building on prior life experiences and developing the capability to use and apply knowledge, strategies and skills in various contexts. Here, the emphasis is again on the development of the students' capacity to reflect on and verbalise their own learning process through metalearning activities. In promoting learning to learn, students are given the chance to gather their thoughts with regard to the learning process, and thus gain a new type of awareness that normally results in higher degrees of motivation and efficiency, enabling them to deal with the unexpected and to construct knowledge in their interactions with the world.

8.3.3 Creating Opportunities for Integration and Explicitness

Pedagogy for autonomy involves the integration of communicative and learning competencies, which means that learners *learn to use the language as they learn how to learn it.* We have to make different methodological decisions connected with teaching learning how to learn and self-regulation. The first has to do with the kind of treatment each is going to receive and whether we are going to integrate it with language/content instruction, or if we are going to allocate specific time to it. Various authors (Ellis and Sinclair 1989; Jiménez Raya 1998; Wenden 1986) advocate an integrated and informed approach, in which language instruction and the development of learning expertise take place at the same time because learning in context is generally agreed to be more effective. We say *informed* because the learner has to be conscious from the very first moment of the benefits it will yield; this approach tells learners why a given strategy is useful, as well as why, when, and *where* to use it. This entails pedagogical explicitness – that is, making the rationale, aims and procedures of language and learner development transparent to the learners, as a condition for learning awareness, involvement, and participation.

8.3.4 Creating Opportunities for Cognitive Autonomy Support

The concept of *autonomy support* means that an individual in a position of authority, such as a lecturer, takes the learner's perspective, acknowledges their feelings, and provides them with relevant information and opportunities for choice, while reducing to a minimum the use of pressures and demands (Black and Deci 2000: 742). Stefanou

et al. (2004) contend that pedagogy for autonomy needs to create opportunities for cognitive choices as well as organisational and procedural ones.[5] For these authors, organisational and procedural choice may be necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for deep-level student engagement in learning. Cognitive autonomy support promotes student ownership of the learning and typically includes teacher behaviours such as asking students to argue for their point, to generate their own solution paths, or to evaluate their own and others' solutions or ideas (Logan et al. 1995).

8.3.5   Developing Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence. According to self-determination theory, autonomy-supportive learning contexts tend to preserve or boost intrinsic motivation and encourage identification with external regulations, while controlling contexts usually undermine intrinsic motivation and prevent internalization. Research has also found that autonomy-supportive classrooms are associated with more intrinsic motivation (Deci et al. 1981) and learning (Grolnick and Ryan 1989) than controlling classrooms. The curriculum that best promotes a learner's motivation and perseverance will be one in which the student is told why and how to do what s/he is required to do, and is encouraged to explain why and how s/he is doing what s/he is doing, as well as to ask for the reasons and purposes underlying what s/he is required to do.

Motivation to learn is also affected by dispositions. These dispositions represent readiness to act in a given direction. Skill and will are interwoven in reflections about learning; teachers must help learners believe in their own capacity to control and direct their learning. Otherwise, they will develop negative attitudes toward learning (Johnston and Winograd 1985). Individuals who develop and maintain positive perceptions of their abilities report higher performance expectations, more control over learning, and greater interest in learning (Covington 1992; Harter and Connell 1984). As Borkowski et al. (1990: 53) posit, "Although motivational states often direct and energise human behaviour, they also play more subtle roles in determining the actual strength, shape, or functioning of cognitive processes." Pedagogy needs to foster the idea of self-efficacy as entailing attributions to both effort and ability that result in a positive perception of competence (Paris and Winograd 1990).

8.3.6   Accepting and Providing for Learner Differentiation

In a higher education context, uniformity of instruction does little to help those learners who find it difficult to adapt because of their different learning styles, levels, strategies and interests. Accommodating teaching to such learner differences is one of the most

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[5] *Organizational* autonomy support (e.g., allowing students some decision-making role in terms of classroom management issues), *procedural* autonomy support (e.g., offering students choices about the use of different media to present ideas), and *cognitive* autonomy support (e.g., affording opportunities for students to evaluate work from a self-referent standard).

fundamental challenges of education and often leads to politically and emotionally charged policies and reactions (Jiménez Raya and Lamb 2003). To differentiate instruction is to recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, learning styles, and interests and to react to these. The goal of differentiated instruction is to maximise each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where s/he is and designing instruction that matches learners' needs. Research conducted by Malett et al. (1983) found that college students who became aware of their learning styles consciously applied their preferred learning styles to their study skills. This resulted in improvement of work habits, time on task, and an increase in grade point averages. The process of learning for any student determines how they will interact with the curriculum content to arrive at personal understanding.

It is possible to effectively differentiate curriculum process by encouraging:

- Higher levels of thinking and reflection: Pedagogy should stress use rather than acquisition of information; students should apply information to new situations, use it to develop new ideas, and evaluate its appropriateness. Activities should include a greater percentage of open activities – those for which there is no predetermined right answer and which stimulate further thinking and research.
- Freedom of choice: Students should be given freedom to choose, when possible, what to learn, what to investigate and how to study in order to increase their interest in learning. Allowing people the freedom to be who they really are engenders greater responsibility for self-directed action (Deci and Flaste 1995: 72).
- Collaborative learning: According to Johnson and Johnson (1989), individual differences can be accommodated in an undifferentiated curriculum if the organisation of the classroom encourages learners to help each other. When students work in such groups they can work at different levels and at their own pace, but they can share a common sense of overall achievement.
- Discovery and inquiry: Inquiry is the engine of vitality and self-renewal (Pascale 1990). Inquiry typically means both the process of seeking knowledge and new insight as well as the method of teaching anchored in this process. Inquiry learning fosters the development of the processes and enabling skills involved in establishing concepts and facts, preparing the way for students to become researchers and lifelong learners. The active engagement with content results in deeper understanding and greater integration and internalisation of knowledge and learning to learn skills and strategies (Abdal-Haqq 1998). Inquiry as a teaching method aims to develop inquirers and to encourage them to use curiosity, that is, the urge to explore and to understand, as motivators leading to learning through personal engagement.
- Experiential learning: I advocate this approach on the grounds that it facilitates personal growth, helps learners adapt to social change, takes into account differences in learning ability, and is responsive both to learner needs and practical pedagogical considerations. In experiential learning, learning tasks should include a greater percentage of situations in which students use their inductive reasoning processes to discover patterns, ideas, and underlying principles. It comprises: (1) creating a positive climate for learning, (2) making learning purposes clear,

(3) fostering learner participation in the learning process and control over its nature and direction, (4) direct confrontation with practical, social, personal or research problems, (5) balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning, sharing feelings and thoughts with learners, an openness to change, and (6) organising and providing learning resources.

- Pacing, variety and variable support: Rapid pacing, when appropriate, in the presentation of new material, and the use of a variety of methods, maintains students' interest and accommodates different learning styles. Regarding support, differentiation can be achieved by providing different kinds and degrees of support to individual learners.

8.3.7 Encouraging Action-Orientedness

Learning is most effective if it is done actively rather than passively. In fact, students learn better when knowledge has to be applied, synthesized, and discussed (Claxton and Murrell 1987; Felder and Henriques 1995; Prince 2004). Therefore instruction needs to encourage active engagement in learning and participation in individual and group learning activities, instead of passive reception of information in a lecture.[6] Education is definitely best understood as challenging students to be active, because learning is not a spectator sport. This does not only mean providing them with more work to do, or with more complex tasks to improve and maintain their capabilities. It means addressing them in a way that stimulates the exploration of their own ideas and interests.

8.3.8 Fostering Conversational Interaction

Generally speaking, pedagogy for autonomy is fostered by an academic environment which is sensitive, flexible, democratic, and responsive to the needs of the students. Pedagogy for autonomy seeks to involve both lecturer and learner in an interactive process that supports learners' development and their capacity for independent and reflective judgement. Two of the goals pursued are the encouragement of a strong sense of purpose and motivation in the learner, and the *enhancement of discourse power* as learners engage in meaningful interactions among themselves and with the teacher (Jiménez Raya et al. 2007). We can become critically reflective about the assumptions we or others make when we learn to solve problems instrumentally or when we are involved in communicative learning. Learners must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their everyday lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves. As van Lier

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[6] See Prince (2004) for a review of the literature on active learning.

(1996: 180) rightly observes: "Jointly managed talk has the potential to change learning situations, role relationships, educational purposes and procedures."

8.3.9 Promoting Reflective Inquiry

Reflection is a fundamental concept in educational theory, and to some extent we could say that it is just another word for thinking. If we accept this, then to reflect is also to think. The transformation of our frames of reference takes place through "*critical reflection on the assumptions* upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based" (Mezirow 1997: 7). The ways learners reflect vary depending on the nature of the subject area and the facilitation strategies used. Inquiry-based learning is one approach that helps improve the quality of undergraduate education by moving toward more student-directed, interactive methods of learning while focusing on learner development. In this way, reflection is linked to elements that are essential to autonomy, meaningful learning, and cognitive development:

- The development of metacognition, e.g., the capacity for learners to improve their ability to think about their thinking.
- The development of critical thinking, problem solving, and the capacity for learners to engage in higher-level thinking skills.
- The ability to self-evaluate, e.g., the capacity for students to form judgments about the quality of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of improving.
- The enhancement of lecturer understanding of the learner, in other words the capacity for instructors to know and understand more about the learners with whom they work. The result should improve the teaching and learning process.

The weighting/choice of the different principles is determined by such factors as (a) the learning environment; (b) students' characteristics; (c) the teacher's views on teaching and learning. Hence, the insistence on the need to establish a flexible pedagogical framework that allows for the transition from teacher control to a situation where shared responsibility is possible. In a sense, then, defining one's practical approach to autonomy requires the definition of the particular route one will follow, "what treacherous curves to negotiate, what institutional speed bumps one has to get through, and what unanticipated detours they have to take" (Kumaravadivelu 2001: 551).

8.4 Concluding Remarks

Thinking as an autonomous and responsible agent is essential for full citizenship in democracy and for moral decision making, particularly in a rapidly changing world. The development of autonomy requires a pedagogy that fosters the promotion of self-managed learning, as well as the acquisition of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, terms that imply familiarity with the concept of autonomy.

Pedagogy for autonomy is a (re)idealistic practice situated between what actually *is*, and what *should be*. Thus, it extends the limits of freedom and fosters the exploration of new territories (what *can be*) (Jiménez Raya et al. 2007). This shortening of the distance between reality and our ideal, in practical terms, often means taking small steps. These steps should be towards greater learner and teacher autonomy.

Improving the quality of learning requires improving the quality of teaching but the quality of teaching can only be improved through the implementation of policies that encourage professional development. To this end, I find Shulman's (2000) idea of the *scholarship of teaching and learning*[7] or the *Scholarship of Pedagogy,* as Vieira (2009) prefers to label it, particularly interesting in their potential to improve pedagogy in universities. The rationale for this concept rests on the assumption that pedagogy at university is a valuable, yet under-researched activity, so it should become a discrete field of inquiry. Such work helps guide our efforts in the design and adaptation of teaching in the interests of student learning. This is precisely the idea behind the notion of 'scholarship of teaching and learning'.

It is too early to fully evaluate the impact of the Bologna Process in universities, but we can say that the curriculum changes being implemented have already brought about an institutional concern with innovation and staff development. Nonetheless, we still need more institutional support for sustained professional development. What we need is professional development policies that encourage higher education teaching staff to become *pathfinders* as opposed to *pathfollowers* (Shulman 2004). Shulman uses these metaphors to refer to "those who behave as most of their disciplinary colleagues expect them to, and those who elect to go against the grain" (2004: vii). This transformative notion of pedagogy presupposes that higher education must concern itself with transforming the life-experience of students by empowering them – surely a fundamental purpose of higher education.

Engaging in pedagogy for autonomy, to my understanding, means cutting against the grain, thereby becoming a pathfinder, which, in turn, involves a self-initiated path to become a better educator. In a world where pathfollowing represents the dominant culture, this is usually motivated by professional concerns related to learner and teacher development; in other words, towards research-supported models that promote more significant learning goals, such as self-determination, initiative, self-efficacy, creativity, motivation, self-regulation and diversity, all of which are concepts related to autonomy.

Only through the continuous study of learning and teaching, and the education of students regarding research in this area, can we hope to turn education's focus away from practices that research has shown are more limiting, and towards accomplishing the crucial learning goals mentioned above, of seeking to facilitate change in institutional cultures and contributing to the advancement of the teaching profession

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[7] "Summarized by three P's, our professional interest, our pragmatic responsibilities, and the pressures of policy. Scholarship of teaching and learning supports our individual and professional roles, our practical responsibilities to our students and our institutions, and our social and political obligations to those that support and take responsibility for higher education" (Shulman 2000: 53).

within a vision of the possible. This will greatly assist in the building of a new, more balanced idea of the scholarly career as a whole in the EHEA.

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