Introduction

Learner autonomy has developed into a central concept in foreign language learning in recent decades. This has come about in part due to language educators' concerns for improving their students' learning process and has certainly been forwarded by at least two sources. On the one hand, work generated from what is generally considered the foundation document prepared by Henri Holec for the Council of Europe titled *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*.[1] At the same time, at least two of the humanistic approaches, Community Language Learning and Silent Way, considered learner autonomy (although without using the term itself) central to their aims for learners. While few, if any, professionals today in the field of foreign or second language learning would argue against the need for learners becoming autonomous in their learning process of the language, there is still a good deal of work to be done to put this desire into practice. The contributions to this monograph issue hope to offer one more step in this direction.

There are many aspects of the complex process we call teaching/ learning and all are influenced by the degree to which we attempt to put a pedagogy of learning autonomy into practice. Although, as Little puts it "the word 'autonomy', with its overtones of independence and self-determination, invites a focus on the individual rather than the group" (78), the fact is that, in the classroom, learners do not work or learn best in isolation. Rather it is the case, as Julian Edge states in his article here, "being autonomous does not mean learning on your own; it means taking responsibility for your own learning" (37)

In a recent article, Thomson[2] asserts that we are all born self-directed learners, but by the time students have been in the educational system for a few years they have become "socialized into more passive learning behaviors", as Legenhausen so well puts it in his article in this issue (67). In part the complexity of applying/using learner autonomy in a classroom can be seen as due to this need to help students become less passive learners. At the same time, since learner autonomy affects every aspect of the curriculum, each needs to be re-examined. In this monograph several of these have been covered. Among them are the role of the teacher, the teacher's own develop-

ment, the use of learning strategies, the treatment of grammar, the social-interactive aspect of the class, the use of tutorials and the role of self-assessment. In spite of this complexity, all the contributors to this monograph would, I believe, roundly affirm that learner autonomy is not only possible but, in fact, appears to be the most successful way to help foreign or second language learners to improve their ability to learn in general and their learning of the foreign language itself.

The first paper in this monograph, by Flávia Vieira, begins looking at the complexity of an autonomy approach to language learning, contrasting a pedagogy of dependence with one for autonomy. The author then suggests pedagogical guidelines for a learner autonomy approach. After going into teacher's and learners' roles and possible types of learning activities, Vieira discusses the implications pedagogy for autonomy have on the pedagogical discourse of the classroom. Finally, she briefly presents a framework for teacher development, considering that "there is a close interplay between reflective practice and a pedagogy for autonomy" (27).

The implications of learner autonomy for change in the teacher's role is the subject of the following article here. Julian Edge proposes that this need for change is, in fact, a positive feature of learner autonomy in that it requires, while helping, the teacher to examine her/his present role(s) in order to grow professionally from there. He states this succinctly in the formula "development = awareness + direction" (40) pointing out that teachers most likely to avoid burnout are those who, throughout their career have been "consistently involved in small scale experimentation" (44).

The paper presented by Leena Karlsson, Felicity Kjisik and Joan Nordlund describes the autonomous language learning project (the ALMS project) now in its fifth year at the University of Helsinki. The only article in this collection to discuss learner autonomy as applied in a language center, the authors here, after briefly describing the features of the programme, specifically focus on the nature and function of the counselling provided to participating students (including e-mail counselling) and then analyze attitudinal changes expressed by students.

Lienhard Legenhausen presents a study contrasting the linguistic progress of two groups of learners, one which has been given explicit grammatical instruction and the other in a classroom setting in which no formal grammatical instruction was given. The data discussed here are taken from a four-year investigation project carried out in Denmark on language acquisition in an autonomous learning environment (the LAALE project). The students involved are Danish and German learners in their early teens. The study contrasts the students' ability to use specific language structures in various tasks. The results appear to confirm the argument against explicit grammar instruction.

David Little's contribution to this monograph explores the social-interactive aspect of learner autonomy arguing that learning "arises from a symbiotic relation between the individual-cognitive and the social-interactive"(83). Little develops here three fundamental pedagogical principles he considers necessary in order to develop learner autonomy: the principles of learner empowerment, of appropriate target language use and of using language as a cognitive tool.

Gina Oxbrow presents results of an investigation concerning explicit training in metacognitive and affective strategies applied to writing skills. The study referred to has been carried out with first year university students majoring in English philology

at the Universidad de Las Palmas and is part of a larger study the author is currently carrying out.

Rebecca Oxford's article also links learner autonomy with the use of language learning strategies, relating the concept of learner autonomy with the psychological theory of self-regulation. She then brings together studies focusing on relationships between language proficiency and language learning strategy use, studies which all have used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (*SILL*) questionnaire, and in the last section raises issues for further research related to language learning strategies and language proficiency.

Lorraine Valdez Pierce goes into another key aspect of learner autonomy, that of self-assessment, relating it to the constructivist approach to learning, discussing the purposes of self-assessment, some of the obstacles to putting it into practice as well as the implications for teachers and suggestions for teaching approaches that promote self-assessment.

José Luis Vera focuses on an aspect of group dynamics related to learner autonomy, in this case, the use of tutorial sessions at university level to improve the students' ability to learn how to learn and how to work in groups. He proposes a series of reflections on the use of tutorials, discusses steps in a group's life, distinguishing between 'grouping' and 'a group' (141). He then considers the factors which need to be taken into consideration. Lastly he offers conclusions reached at the end of an experience studied at university level.

One sees a common chain of thought running through all these papers —a concern for language learners and teachers to find ways to improve their learning process. "Only when autonomy becomes a central notion in all educational contexts can we expect some change to occur in the quality of learning" (Vieira 14).

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Notes

[1] Holec, Henri. *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1979. Oxford: Pergamon 1981.
[2] Thomson, C.K. "Self-assessment in Self-directed Learning: Issues of Learner Diversity." *Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning*. Eds. R. Pemberton, E.S.L. Li, W.W.F. Or and H.D. Pierson. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1996. 77-91.