

Meeting curricular goals while developing language learner autonomy

- Some practical classroom examples from beginners to intermediate students

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Content of talk

- The autonomous learner and a model for developing language learner autonomy
- The argument: "The curricular guidelines are a constraint"
- How to combine the achievement of curricular goals with the development of language learner autonomy:
 - At all levels
 - At beginners' level
 - With intermediate / advanced learners
- Final remarks

An autonomous language learner – a definition

“An autonomous language learner is a learner who is willing to take charge of his / her own language learning - and who is capable of doing so.”

(LD 1995)

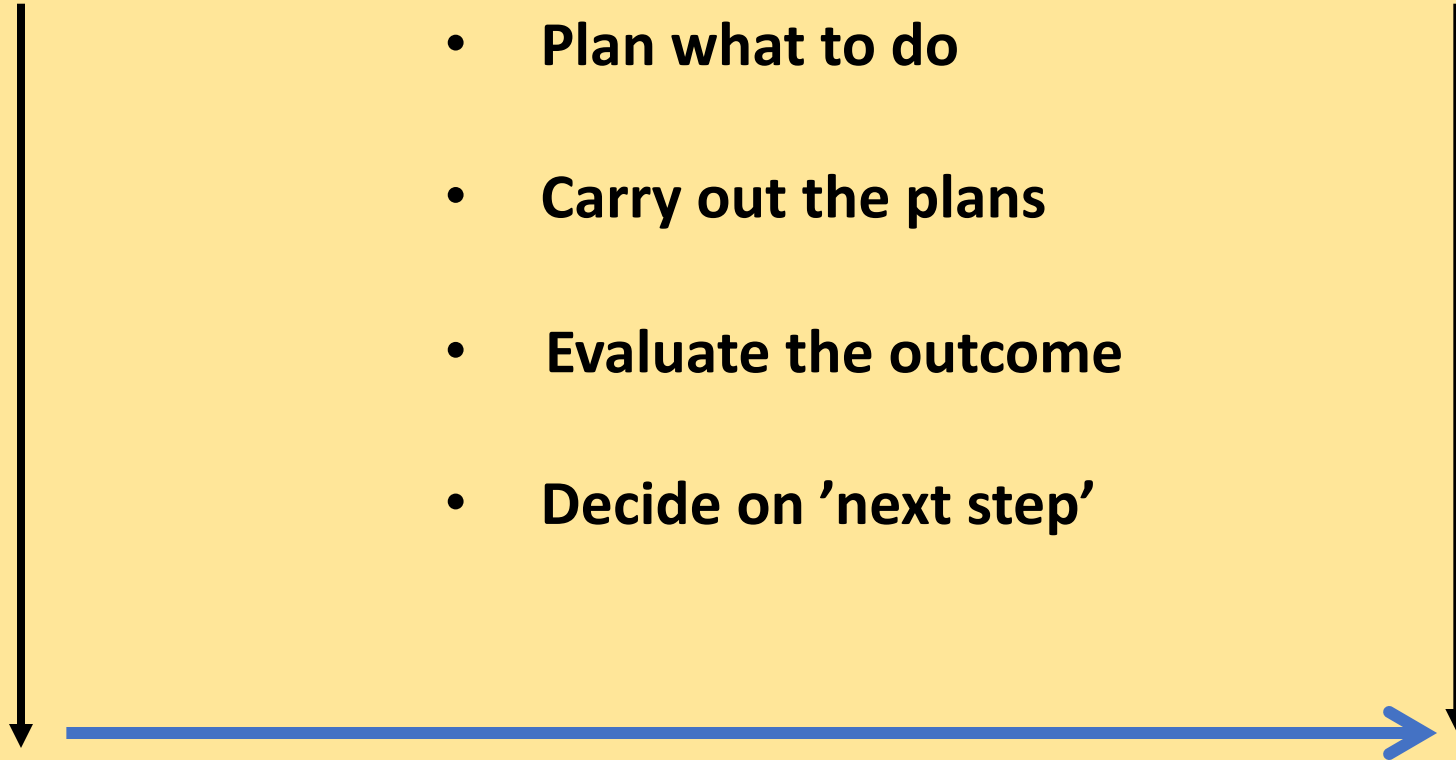
Developing language learner autonomy - a model

Teacher
directed
teaching

Work cycle

- Plan what to do
- Carry out the plans
- Evaluate the outcome
- Decide on 'next step'

Learner
directed
learning

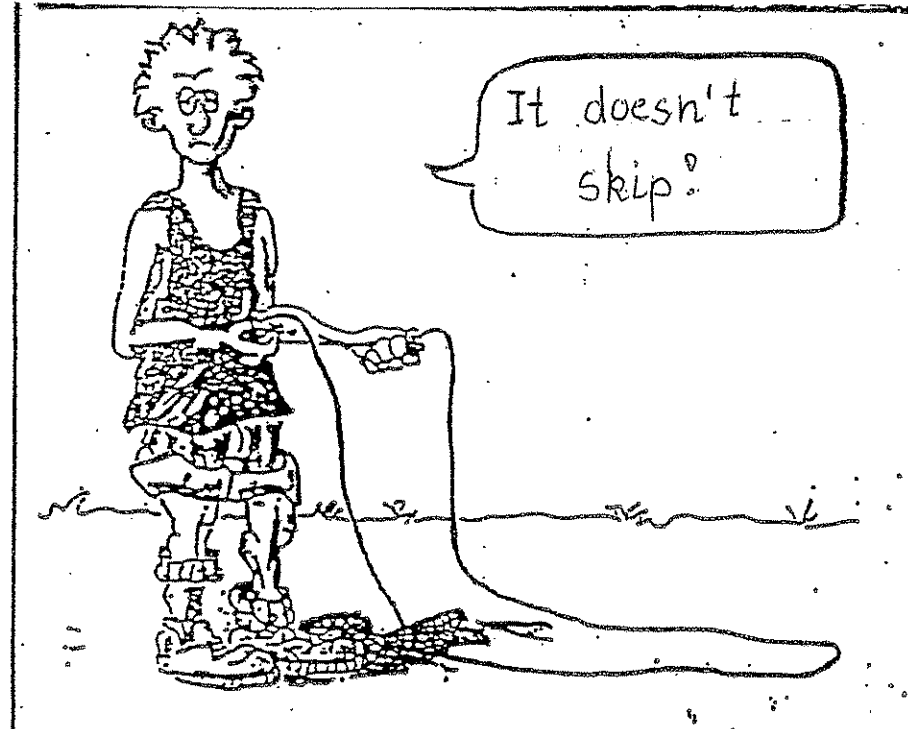


Important issues in this process

- Possibility of choice
- Awareness raising activities
- Making use of learners' previous knowledge
- Focus on social learning and peer-tutoring
- The teacher's responsibility for initiating the process - from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.
- The teacher's responsibility for making sure that the curricular demands are met! (And she should tell her parents this!)

The result of a 'teaching-fed' learner

• Bored



• In-active

• Not motivated

1973

Curricular guidelines

- Aims for learning the language in question (the 4 skills, communicative abilities, vocabulary, etc.).
- Guidelines as regards **how** to learn the language (active, engaged, motivated, interested learners).
- A passage about the importance of the cultural aspect of learning a second or third language (e.g. insight into English, French, German culture).



Open guidelines for teachers and learners to manoeuvre within
– not constraints.



Problem: The teacher believes that the coursebook **IS** the curriculum!

Questions asked by students at the Pädagogische Hochschule, Luzern, 2015 – having read my book and watched my video

- *How do you follow the curriculum? **Is it possible to cover all topics?***
- *How do you justify your teaching if you don't use **the official learning material?***
- *How can you follow the curriculum if you let them do whatever they want and **without any support from a course book?***

How to combine the curricular goals and guidelines with the development of language learner autonomy?

At all levels: Why do I learn English?

Answers from 11-year-old students, 1st year of English (written in Danish, translated by the teacher):

- Then you can tease the small ones without them understanding a word; I think that is fun.
- Because when I am abroad then I can talk to people, and if something has happened to our car I can tell somebody.
- It is fun and you can watch Euro sport and understand it.
- Sometimes they show English films on TV without Danish sub-titles; therefore I want to learn English.

Answers from 14-year old intermediate students, secondary level:

- To be able to talk to foreigners.
- It is good to know another language when you travel, when you meet people.
- I need it for my job and my further education.
- It is good to be able to communicate with other people in other countries; to learn more about them.

At beginners' level

- A list of 'Goals for learning English' is produced, starting with the learners' own 'Why do I learn English?' and extended with simplified curricular guidelines at this level: be able to speak, read, write the language - added by the teacher. The list is made public as a poster.
- Taking the curricular guidelines into account, the teacher introduces so-called '**umbrella-activities**' (activities where every student can take part and where every student will learn something) to ensure differentiation e.g. make word cards, play word cards, make board games, picture+text (stories /small books), making plays. All learners have to try out each activity.
- The activity is evaluated by the individual learner in his/her logbook (documentation of learning): I liked it because!

Type of evaluation at this level: smileys, 0-----10, single words.

Integrating curricular guidelines at beginners' level - continued

Activity

- Make / play with word cards
- Make / play with dominoes
- Find a picture /write a text
- Make a play

Things I learn by doing this activity

- New words
- New words, make sentences
- Write a longer text / a story
- Write English, speak English

Logbook entries:

- *I want to make a play because I want to be better at speaking English*
- *I want to make a play with Anders and Lars because it is fun and we work well together and we learn a lot of English*

At intermediate level

- The students are given a copy of the guidelines for the year in question to be placed in their logbooks. They are then asked to underline issues, important to their own learning. The result is discussed with a partner. (Awareness-raising. Insight!).
- Any official demands for tests, markings, exams are treated in the same way. In general at this level: Whatever I get from official side regarding language teaching / learning are passed over to the students – and their parents!
- At this level personal contracts (monthly) are introduced:
*My personal contract for April: I will read aloud from my book when I am sharing homework to practice my **articulation**. I will write some stories as homework, to **practice my spelling and written language**. (Karsten, 4th year of English)*

Examples of contracts for work in groups

Who: Torben Peter.

What: Australia: Natur, Aborigine
etc.

How: - Look for materials, and perhaps
find new topics to work with.
• Decide for topics to work with
• Make a book for ourselves
And others to read

Why: It's an official demand to work
with culture and life in other
English speaking countries, and
because we found Australia
interesting

Timing: 4 weeks.

5th year of English. (4)

Who: Soren, Klaus, Bonnesen

What: Human rights

Why: Spelling, learning new words,
translating and obtaining more
knowledge about Human rights

How: We will work in 2 groups, with the
common goal of a book based
on Human Rights and the rights of
animals, Amnesty International,
refugees, South Africa and about
prisoners of conscience

Outcome: A book

Dam, 1995, p.65

Final remarks

The schools that kids love have the quality of active learning environments, allowing students to become shareholders of their own learning.

(Carl Rogers, 1969, p.9)

References, and further reading

- Dam, Leni (1995). *Learner Autonomy 3: From Theory to Classroom Practice*. Karlslunde: Askeladden.
- Little, Dam, Legenhausen (2017). *Language Learner Autonomy: Theory, Practice and Research*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Rogers, Carl (1969). *Freedom to learn*. London: Merrill Publishing Company.
- Video on YouTube: Language Learner AutonomyIn action!
English at intermediate level.

Time for questions