



PARTICIPATORY PEDAGOGIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: BEST PRACTICE AND CASE STUDIES

**Coaching-Oriented Online Resources for Autonomous Learning
Learn to Change International Symposium on Participatory Pedagogy**

Conference Proceedings 2022

Participatory Pedagogies in Language Learning: Best Practice and Case Studies

Coaching-Oriented Online Resources for Autonomous Learning (CORALL)

Learn to Change International Symposium on Participatory Pedagogy

Conference Proceedings 2022

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Introduction

Cognitive and Educational Competences, such as autonomous learning, self-reflection and management, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving in combination with Digital Competences are among the 21st century skills recommended by the Council of Europe in *Transversal Competences in Foreign Language Education* (The Council of Europe, 2022). Other recommendations include international collaboration in the development and implementation of training modules, case studies for educational purposes, and an emphasis on continuous learning. The sudden move to digital and online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the urgency in creating an educational environment conducive to continuous and collaborative self-learning.

In that vein, the following proceedings represent a collection of academic essays based on presentations delivered by the participants of the dual **CORALL** and **Learn to Change** Teaching Conferences held at UCT School of Business, Prague on June 16-17 2022. The conference was organised as part of the Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of Languages for Specific Purposes (CORALL) Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education project 2019-1-HU01-KA203-061070 and the Collaborative Digital Storytelling for Sustainable Change (Learn to Change) Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education project 2020-1-FI01-KA226-HE-092760.

While the overall aim of both projects was to support educators and learners within the framework of autonomous learning, participatory pedagogies, collaboration, and coaching, the two projects differed slightly in their primary focus. The CORALL project aimed to support students in becoming more autonomous learners and train teachers of LSP (languages for specific purposes) in how to help learners acquire these skills in their studies via a coaching-oriented approach in an online environment. Project partners included Berliner Hochschule für Technik, Berlin (Germany), the Budapest Business School (Hungary), Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki (Finland), Instituto Politecnico da Guarda in Guarda (Portugal), the University of Chemistry and Technology, Prague (Czech Republic), and the University of Economics in Bratislava (Slovakia).

Among the CORALL project outcomes was the creation of resources to support autonomous language learning which are not only available for the language teachers and students of each participating institution but constitute open educational resources (OER). While the observation of international good practices revealed that many universities in Europe have online self-access centres to enhance their students' autonomous language learning, no international joint initiative had been realised in this field. Consequently, the CORALL International Conference sought to provide a space for international cooperation where the experience of partner universities could be discussed and analysed, resources could be shared on a common platform which would allow further cooperation between students and educators of universities with a similar profile, the experience of the partner universities could be integrated, and the impact of the resources created in the framework of the project could be disseminated so as not to be limited to one institution's teachers and students.

The Learn to Change project aimed to foster participatory pedagogy support for educators and learners in applying open-access digital tools and platforms more widely and creatively for high-quality and impactful digital content creation in line with the EU Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu). Project partners included the Budapest Business School (Hungary), Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki (Finland), Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco (Portugal), Saxion University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands), and the University of Chemistry and Technology, Prague (Czech Republic).

Among the Learn to Change project outcomes was bringing together educators, life-long learners in universities and companies, and industry players to co-create agile and easy-

to-use mobile learning assignments and modules that introduce variation and meaning to online learning and build learners' competencies and confidence in collaborative digital storytelling, digital collaboration, and social engagement.

In these proceedings, the article "Tools for supporting autonomous language learning developed in the CORALL project" by Reka Asztalos and Alexandra Szénich of the Budapest Business School, provides an apt summary of the CORALL project and its outcomes as well as the online resources and coaching tools created during the project as part of its objective to contribute to the effectiveness of LSP course work, promote language learner responsibility and awareness, and provide support for language learning outside of the classroom.

As it is generally accepted that autonomous language learning is more effective than non-autonomous, when students become more autonomous language learners, they also become more effective learners. In this regard, the article, "Learner autonomy in the age of Covid-19: how we should prepare for the next pandemic" by professor David Little of Trinity College, Dublin presents both an apt summary of autonomous learning as a participatory pedagogy and how its tenets can be properly utilized by educators and students alike to offset the challenges created by mandatory online study, as was the case during the Covid-19 pandemic. Continuing with the theme of difficulties experienced by students and teachers alike during the Covid-19 pandemic, the article "Participatory Pedagogy as a Source of Motivation for Grammar School Students" by Věra Tauchmanová Jr. of the Faculty of Science, University of Hradec Králové describes the effectiveness of features of autonomous learning in raising student participation levels and motivation during mandatory online language lessons among grammar school students.

Further examples of the effectiveness and implementation of learner autonomy are developed in the following articles which focus on specific LSP courses. The article "Learner autonomy, electronic portfolios and project-based (language) learning: connecting the dots" by Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Sudhershnan of Berliner Hochschule für Technik (BHT) describes the interrelationship between learner autonomy, electronic learner portfolios, and project-based language learning and their impact in giving civil engineering students a choice and a voice in their learning while also providing an authentic context for the use and development of language skills. Next, the article "Aware and autonomous: Raising learner autonomy in deaf and hard of hearing learners" by Mgr. Jitka Sedláčková, Ph.D and Mgr. et Mgr. Lenka Tóthová, Ph.D of Masaryk University, Brno present the challenges in developing learner autonomy for deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students as well as effective techniques developed by the authors' own teaching practice as well as through the use of an e-learning course developed for DHH learners in fostering DHH learner autonomy in an LSP environment.

Additionally, the article "Learning Centres for Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity" by Mgr. Lucie Podroužková, Ph.D. of Masaryk University, Brno gives an apt description of learning centres as an extremely effective, flexible and versatile tool for autonomous, self-directive and diversified learning where learners learn to regulate and take responsibility for their own learning within a university setting. Finally, the article "Participatory pedagogy in training future translators" by Olga Kubinska of the University of Gdansk, Poland describes the benefits of project-based learning via group collaboration and combining a theoretical approach to translation with practical work experience in enhancing student involvement at the university level.

Tools for supporting autonomous language learning developed in the CORALL project

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Abstract

In this study, we present the current results of the Erasmus+ Strategy Partnership in Higher Education project CORALL (Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of Languages for Specific Purposes). The aim of the project is to create a set of tools to support autonomous language learning in English, German and Spanish, which can be used in an LSP teaching and learning context. The project addresses language teachers and language learners, aims to contribute to the effectiveness of language course work by developing language learner responsibility and awareness, and supports language learning outside the classroom. In addition to LSP teaching, many of the good practices and tools developed can also be used to inspire general language teaching. After presenting the theoretical background, the paper gives an overview of the project results so far and briefly presents some of the tools produced in Outputs 1 and 2. The tools are available in an editable format on the project website.

Keywords: autonomous language learning, international project, teaching methodology

Biodata

Reka Asztalos is associate professor and the Deputy Head of the Department of Languages for Business Communication at the Budapest Business School, responsible for study affairs and student support. She teaches courses on Business English, English for Tourism, English Study Skills and Research Methods. Her research interests include blended learning, which was the topic of her PhD dissertation. She is also interested in autonomous learning and how to enhance students' ability and willingness to study independently, including informal learning. She has participated in 3 Erasmus+ KA2 international projects: INCOLLAB, CORALL and Learn&Change.

Alexandra Szénich is associate professor at the Department of Languages for Business Communication at the Budapest Business School. She delivers courses on Business German, German for Tourism and Research Methods. Her research interests include language testing and autonomous language learning. She is a regular conference presenter and an author of academic publications on these topics. Recently she has participated in two research projects and in an Erasmus+ KA2 international project (CORALL) on the topic of autonomous language learning.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, a number of initiatives have been taken to promote autonomous language learning. Nevertheless, international conferences, workshops and journals on the subject (e.g. *Relay Journal*, *SiSAL Journal*) suggest that the goal of making this a generally adopted approach in institutional language teaching is still a long way off.

The Institute of Foreign Languages and Communication at Budapest Business School (BBS) has had a number of projects over the last ten years aimed at pedagogical culture change and methodological development in the field of language teaching. This paper presents the intellectual products of the Erasmus+ Strategy Partnership in Higher Education (2019-1-HU01-KA203-061070, 2019-22) project CORALL (Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of Languages for Specific Purposes), which aims to support autonomous language learning. This project was based on the earlier project *Supporting autonomous*

learning of the institute's research team, in which the knowledge and attitudes towards autonomous language learning among university students were investigated through a large-scale questionnaire survey. The results showed that some of the respondents had difficulties related to autonomous language learning in areas such as: motivation, managing emotions, planning the language learning process, using certain basic language learning methods and strategies, monitoring the learning process, and self-evaluation (Asztalos & Szénich, 2018). Another part of the research explored the perceptions, experiences and practices of colleagues teaching professional languages at BBS in relation to autonomous language learning support through interviews. In general, although to varying degrees, the teachers who participated in the study considered the development of language learner autonomy important, while at the same time they considered it necessary to develop methodological tools and support for language teachers in this area (Asztalos & Szénich, 2019). Based on these needs, the autonomy working group of the BBS Department of Languages for Business Communication initiated the CORALL project.

The aim of the CORALL project, which brings together six partner universities, is to create a toolkit for autonomous language learning in English, German and Spanish which can be applied in higher education institutions without self-access language centres (SALCs). The project will target language teachers and language learners, aiming to contribute to the effectiveness of language course work by developing language learner ownership and awareness, and to support language learning outside the classroom. The forced transition to distance learning in the wake of the COVID-19 virus situation has given the project a particular relevance, as the willingness and readiness of students to learn languages autonomously has been enhanced during this period.

The paper first discusses the concept of autonomous language learning and the coaching-oriented approach of the CORALL project, and then presents the results of the project so far: the first two of the five intellectual outputs to be developed in the project, which will be finalised and available on the project website by January 2023.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Autonomous language learning

In recent decades, a lot of research has been devoted to autonomous language learning and the development of theoretical frameworks. Widely accepted and central to many other definitions is Holec's (1981) early definition of language learners as increasingly taking control of their own language learning process (e.g. Benson, 2007, 2011; Csizér & Kormos, 2012; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013; Szócs, 2016; Tassinari, 2012). Little defines autonomy as "a basic human behaviour" (1996, p. 3) and considers that all successful learning is based on the autonomous learning skills of the learner (2017, p. 15). In his view, becoming an autonomous learner requires that the learner takes responsibility for his own learning, is able to critically reflect on the process and content of learning and is able to continuously evaluate the results achieved (1996, p. 4).

The starting point of the CORALL project, based on Oxford (2003, cited in Sudhershnan, 2012), is the four approaches to language learner autonomy: technical, psychological, socio-cultural and political-critical. While the technical perspective focuses on the learning process and its stages (objectives, methods and strategies, monitoring of the learning process and assessment of the learning outcome), the psychological approach focuses on the learner characteristics that enable the learner to carry out the necessary activities and behave in an autonomous way (metacognition, reflection, openness to autonomy, motivation). The sociocultural approach emphasises the role of interaction in the process of knowledge creation and language acquisition. Autonomy in this context is characterised by the concept of interdependence rather than independence (Benson, 2011; Little, 2020; Oxford, 2003) and

includes aspects of learning from teachers, peers and other (native) language users. The fourth dimension, the political-critical dimension, can be understood as learner control over the content and process of learning and emphasises the impact of autonomy in shaping individuals and social structures.

Based on Benson's article reviewing research on autonomous language learning (2011), it is widely accepted that autonomous learning skills can be developed. In language teaching that supports language learner autonomy, learners are empowered to actively participate in shaping the learning process. This is unusual for many language learners, so when introducing this approach, it is important to thematise autonomy with learners and to use the principles of gradualism, that is starting with small steps in the beginning (Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Tassinari, 2017). The development of autonomous language learner behaviour also requires expert support in the context of institutional language teaching. The teacher plays a crucial role in this process (Benson, 2011; Everhard, 2016; Lamb, 2017; Little, 1996, 2020).

2.2 Coaching-oriented support

The change in the traditional role of the teacher is reflected in the various English language terms: advisor, coach, consultant, counsellor, facilitator, guide, mentor, tutor (Lennon, 2020). This development has been accompanied by the development of a system of language advising, linked to SALCs, in which advisors help language learners to make informed decisions about their own learning (Benson, 2011; Mynard, 2012). In addition to advising, language coaching has become increasingly popular over the last 10 years and has been defined in a number of ways. A common element of these definitions is supporting learners in achieving their goals, in the process of building on their own resources and abilities and gradually taking responsibility for their language learning (ICC, n.d.; ITTA project; Kleppin & Spänkuch, 2012; Kovács, 2020). It is also important to note that language coaching is not a substitute for institutional language teaching, but can serve as a complement to it (Kovács, 2020). It can help language learners to better understand their learning circumstances through continuous reflection and to find the most appropriate solutions for their own language learning situation (Spänkuch, 2018).

However, the proper application of coaching techniques requires a longer training period, thus the coaching-oriented approach to language teaching represented in this project focuses on a coaching perspective that promotes the development of language learning autonomy. The aim of coaching-oriented language teaching is to use elements of language coaching that "permeate the whole teaching/learning process" (Kovács, 2019). For us, this means treating language learners as partners and supporting them in making informed decisions about their language learning, and gradually taking responsibility for their own language learning process. In addition to individual responsibility, it is important to take into account individual learner characteristics, needs, goals and preferences. As far as possible, the personalised learning process includes the promotion of continuous self-reflection and positive feedback. Coaching-oriented language teaching can be applied in a variety of educational contexts, taking into account the context of the project partners, whether the higher education institution has its own language learning centre, whether the teachers are qualified coaches and whether the language courses are linked to a curriculum. The materials produced under the CORALL project include tools used in coaching processes to help implement this coaching-oriented approach.

The CORALL project

It is also important to stress that there is no one-size-fits-all method for developing language learner autonomy: there are many approaches depending on the specific context (Benson 2001; Little 1996). Different educational contexts may have different levels of constraints (e.g.

curricular, institutional requirements) that make it difficult to support autonomous language learning, but it is nevertheless important to emphasize that it is worth starting in small steps (e.g. by using a tool) to move towards autonomy. The CORALL project, coordinated by BBS and based on a collaboration among six European universities, aims to support this:

- Budapest Business School (BBS), Department of Languages for Business Communication
- Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- Beuth University of Applied Sciences (Beuth), Germany
- Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (IPG), Portugal
- University of Economics in Bratislava (EUBA), Slovakia
- University of Chemistry and Technology (UCT) in Prague, the Czech Republic

The partners were selected on the basis that the institutions should offer LSP courses (business, tourism or technical languages) in English, German or Spanish.

3. Results

The aim of the project is to create a toolkit for language teachers and learners to support autonomous language learning in an LSP teaching environment, through the creation of five intellectual outputs:

1. Conceptual framework for a coaching-oriented approach in teaching and autonomous learning in LSP (Haaga-Helia University)
2. Tools and resources to support students' autonomous learning of LSP (BBS)
3. Sample materials and modules for self-study and to integrate into LSP classes or LSP related projects to enhance autonomous language learning skills (Beuth)
4. Case studies (EUBA)
5. Training material for teachers of LSP (UCT)

The materials will be made freely available on the project website. The first three of the five intellectual products were completed by October 2022. As the third one is still being tested and finalised and has not yet been uploaded to the website, examples of only the first two intellectual products are presented below.

3.1 Conceptual framework for a coaching-oriented approach in teaching and autonomous learning in LSP (Output 1)

The conceptual framework was developed to provide a basis for the development of specific tools, based on an analysis of theoretical background, existing good practices and the needs of project partners. Accordingly, the framework is based on three pillars:

- a brief theoretical overview of autonomous language learning and language coaching,
- a collection of good practices,
- a needs analysis based on interviews

As the framework contains several embedded presentations due to the complexity of the topic, they are presented separately on the website for user-friendliness. The theoretical overview is complemented by a glossary of definitions of terms and phrases related to the topic, and more information can be found on the linked websites and in the bibliography provided in the reference list.

3.2 Tools and resources to support students' autonomous learning of LSP (in English, German and Spanish), available online (Output 2)

The toolbox created under the second output includes two larger units:

- a collection of links to existing and free tools for teaching and learning English, German and Spanish,
- a collection of new tools created in the project to support autonomous language learning, which can be used in LSP courses and for individual language learning

The aim was to collect and create materials, ideas and tools that can be used in a variety of language learning contexts, can be adapted and developed according to the needs of each teaching context, and can be used in accordance with the principle of gradualism and small steps mentioned above.

3.2.1 Link collection

One of the aims of creating an annotated links collection covering relevant linguistic fields (business, tourism and technical) for the project partners was to provide easier access to available linguistic content. As the language level of learners varies from language to language, the links collection also contains links to learning the general language to a varying extent. The collection covers the following areas: dictionaries, media, language skills development, vocabulary, grammar, complex language learning websites and autonomous language learning development. The comments and recommendations will provide users with information on the language level required, the target group and the linguistic field, as well as keywords describing the material available on the link. The complex material is available in the form of a Google spreadsheet, but there are several good examples of user-friendly presentation of links relevant to a specific language group. The Czech team, for example, has produced a separate document with its own design elements to provide the material needed for its groups.

3.2.2 Collection of new tools

The collection currently contains nearly 40 tools to promote autonomous language learning created during the project, related to the following areas: needs analysis, time management, learning plans, learner awareness and reflection, learning diary, portfolio, tips and strategies, and assessment. All tools are available in English, with some tools also available in Hungarian, German or Spanish. As some tools may need to be adapted to the specific educational context, these materials can be downloaded from the website in an editable format. The most important information describing each tool (purpose, target group, type of language use, time needed, working format, resources, lessons learned from piloting, instructions for use) is provided on the first page. The tools are diverse, ranging from short questionnaires to support individual reflection to exercises which provide a basis for group discussion in a language course and complex portfolio ideas.

Rather than listing the tools in detail, the following is a brief introduction to some of the different types of tools that the BBS team has developed and tested in English, German and Spanish language courses.

For language courses at the beginning of a semester or for individual language learning at the beginning of a longer learning period, it is worth using the *Needs analysis at the beginning of the term* tool, which is available in English, German and Hungarian. The tool includes a task sheet to be completed in individual work, covering the following areas: language level, areas of foreign language use, energy and time to be devoted to language learning in the given semester or language learning phase, and language learning objectives. Experience shows that

students do not always have a clear idea of their language level. The first part of the task sheet is an awareness-raising exercise, which gives students the opportunity to compare their presumed language level with their results in the *DIALANG* diagnostic test, and thus to establish a starting point for formulating their individual language learning objectives for the semester. Among other things, it asks about the level of effort and time planned for learning outside the language classroom, making them aware that, in addition to attending language classes, time and energy should be devoted to language learning outside the classroom, depending on individual priorities. The task sheet completed at the beginning of the semester should be consulted in the middle of the semester, possibly after a test or an exam, to assess the extent to which previous expectations have been met or changed.

Also, at the beginning of the semester, the *Course book quiz* is a useful tool to raise students' awareness. For effective language learning, it is essential that learners are aware of the content in the common textbook (e.g. grammar summary, glossary, workbook exercises) and in the course learning management system (additional material uploaded by the instructor, e.g. answer key, transcriptions for listening comprehension exercises). The tool contains a set of questions which can, of course, be adapted to your needs. It can be used in a variety of ways in a language course (e.g. in pairs as a competitive game), but it is also useful to think through the questions for individual language learning. Further topics related to autonomous language learning can be discussed at the beginning of a semester using CORALL tools, e.g. self-assessment (*Tips for self-assessment*) or awareness raising (*How long does it take to learn a language?*), which can also help language learners to think about their, sometimes unrealistic, language learning plans from this perspective.

Another dimension of the tools is the interlocking tools on autonomous language learning (*Autonomous learning 1 and 2* in English, German and Hungarian). The varied material collected as input in the first exercise helps to stimulate reflection on the topic and, in the case of a language course, group discussion. The second exercise provides an opportunity for individual self-reflection.

The assessment tool *Gamification in course assessment to enhance learner autonomy*, which outlines an assessment system to promote the principle of gamification and autonomous language learning, can provide an idea for the design of an assessment system for language courses. The assessment system aims to encourage students to learn more intensively in and out of class, by giving more scope to individual needs, commitments and activity, and to include tasks related to autonomous language learning in the assessment system. This latter element represents the added value compared to commonly known gamification systems. The extent to which language learners find autonomous language learning tasks useful or likable varies according to their individual characteristics. The optional tasks allow students to decide how to earn points according to their own interests, while many students also discover the pleasure of producing texts in a foreign language, for example, through written self-reflections or language learning diaries. In line with the principle of transparency, the tool describes in detail how to earn points, how to convert points into marks, and what can be done, but the description needs to be adapted to the course.

Time management is a problem for many language learners. This topic is addressed in the *Time management* tool, which contains informative material and exercises on topics such as the efficient use of time, distractions to in-depth work and planning learning.

The *Learning project and learning plan* tool, available in English and German, provides ideas on how to give room for individual learner choices in typically non-homogeneous language groups and combine conscious learner planning with coaching-oriented teacher support.

In addition to the materials presented here, a number of other tools related to Output 2 can be found on the website. Without wishing to be exhaustive, we would like to close this

chapter by mentioning the English language materials developed by the Portuguese team on the topic of needs analysis, which help language learners to deepen their knowledge of language learning. The German and Czech project partners' materials provide ideas for the introduction, design and evaluation of portfolios, among other things. The materials developed by the Finnish partner provide recommendations on language learning diaries.

4. Summary

In our study we have briefly presented the theoretical background of the CORALL project and provided an insight into the materials produced so far. Some of the tools are available on the project website, and documents related to the three other intellectual products currently under development will be available after the project's completion (November 2022). These will include case studies of the tools presented, summarising the experience gained from testing the tools.

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Learner autonomy in the age of Covid-19: how we should prepare for the next pandemic

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Abstract

When Covid-19 forced the closure of schools, colleges and universities around the world in 2020, the internet quickly replaced the classroom. Soon there was an abundance of anecdotal reports to the effect that learners at all educational levels found it difficult to study at distance, especially when they received only limited support from their teachers. Covid-19 was also responsible for the widespread cancellation of public and institutional exams, which created serious problems for learners, especially school-leavers. This article argues that these two challenges require a single response: a pedagogical approach that fosters learner autonomy in the classroom and is embedded in a Comprehensive Learning System (O’Sullivan, 2020). The article begins by expanding on the twin challenges that Covid-19 posed to language education. It then develops a response to those challenges, first by elaborating on the concept of learner autonomy, then by offering three pedagogical principles that foster its development, and finally by proposing the integration of curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment in Comprehensive Learning Systems informed by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) and its *Companion Volume* (CV; Council of Europe, 2020).

Biodata

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Covid-19 and language education: two major challenges

When Covid-19 swept round the world in early 2020, it posed two major challenges to language education. The first was immediate: the need to substitute virtual learning environments for classrooms and lecture halls. Schools and colleges scrambled to master the electronic delivery of learning materials, learning activities, and lessons, lectures, seminars and workshops. The success of their efforts was predicated on the availability of appropriate technology, a secure internet connection, and the availability of space in which learners of all ages could study in quiet and comfort. Meeting these conditions, however, did not guarantee that learning would proceed as intended. A wealth of anecdotal evidence suggests that in all educational sectors large numbers of learners struggled to cope with the unaccustomed burden of autonomy. Clearly, in preparation for the next pandemic, education systems need to do much more to develop learners’ skills of self-management – their ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning in relation to curriculum goals.

Covid-19's second challenge to language education arrived after a delay of several months but was no less devastating: the widespread cancellation of public and institutional examinations. School-leaving exams, which often determine entry to third-level education, were especially badly hit. In most countries, grades are norm-referenced; that is, a student's score situates her performance in relation to the performance of her peers but tells us little, if anything, about the knowledge and skills she has acquired. In Ireland, the State Examinations Commission used a complex algorithm to calculate student grades on the basis of a variety of factors, including the grades predicted by teachers and each school's exam performance in previous years. Public outrage, however, caused calculated grades to be replaced by teachers' grades. This led to significant grade inflation, because in a norm-referenced system teachers' grades are no more than guesses at where each student stands in relation to the rest. To the best of my knowledge, this state of affairs has not attracted critical debate, and 2022 saw the return of school-leaving exams in which grades continue to be norm-referenced.

In this article I argue that Covid-19's two challenges demand a single response in preparation for the next pandemic: a pedagogical approach that fosters learner autonomy and is embedded in a Comprehensive Learning System (O'Sullivan, 2020). I develop the argument in three stages. First, I explain what I mean by learner autonomy; second, I offer three pedagogical principles that foster its development; and third, I propose that we integrate curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment by developing Comprehensive Learning Systems informed by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) and its *Companion Volume* (CV; Council of Europe, 2020).

Two views of learner autonomy and the primacy of learner agency

Learner autonomy first became a topic for discussion in language education in 1979, when the Council of Europe published Henri Holec's report *Autonomy and foreign language learning* (Holec, 1979). At that time the Council was especially concerned with adult education, and its early work in modern languages was designed to support the language learning of adults with clearly defined communicative needs. In Holec's definition, autonomous learners accept responsibility for their learning in all its dimensions: planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation (Holec, 1979, p. 4). Historically, this concept coincided with the establishment, especially in universities, of self-access language learning facilities and resources, typically a language laboratory, a library of books and audio recordings, and an advisory service. According to Holec, the ability to take charge of one's learning "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way" (Holec, 1979, p. 3). He distinguishes clearly between teacher-directed and self-directed learners and views the development of target language proficiency and the acquisition of skills of self-management as two quite separate processes (Holec, 1979, p. 28). When learner autonomy is on the agenda, the teacher's task is to support the transition from non-autonomous to autonomous learning.

In 1979 I was responsible for setting up a self-access language learning service at Trinity College Dublin, so I was among Holec's earliest readers. I already knew that most of our students were not much interested in proactive self-management, being content to follow whatever directions their lecturers gave them. Those students who used our facilities were mostly taking a language degree, and when they came individually to our language laboratories, they were mostly performing "private study" tasks assigned to them by their departments.

I first began to engage critically with the concept of learner autonomy in the mid-1980s, when I heard Leni Dam talk about her approach to teaching English to Danish teenagers. Working within the framework provided by the curriculum guidelines, she required her learners to share responsibility for planning and organizing their learning, monitoring progress, and evaluating the learning process and its outcomes. The examples she shared of their work –

written texts and video recordings of classroom interactions – showed that her students were not only thoroughly autonomous but also unusually proficient in English. I began to suspect that each of these two facts depended on the other.

As a parent I already acknowledged the truth of Phillida Salmon's anatomy of family life:

To parents, even babies seem to have a will of their own; they are hardly passive creatures to be easily moulded by the actions of others. From their earliest years, boys and girls make their active presence, their wilful agency, their demands and protests, very vividly felt. In every household that has children, negotiations must be made with young family members: their personal agendas have somehow to be accommodated. (Salmon, 1998, p. 24)

For each of us, as I quickly learnt from the work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, autonomy is a basic need and urge, a vital source of self-motivation (Deci & Flaste, 1996). Even the youngest learners already know, at least implicitly, what it is to behave autonomously. Our task as teachers is not to help non-autonomous learners to become autonomous, but to find ways of focusing our learners' capacity for autonomous behaviour on the business of (language) learning.

At the heart of autonomy is agency, our ability to make choices, take decisions on the basis of our choices, act in accordance with our decisions, and evaluate the results of our actions. In daily life we do these things mostly without thinking; they comprise the recursive cycle that drives experiential learning more or less from birth. In contexts of formal learning, learner autonomy is the result of making that cycle explicit and intentional.

Agency is a matter not of being but of doing and becoming; it is fuelled by intrinsic motivation and implicates the individual's subjective identity – the complex of experience, attitudes and beliefs that shapes her self-concept. Agency is also socially mediated: we exercise it not in a vacuum but in the multiple overlapping social contexts in which we live our lives. Learner autonomy is assuredly an individual, cognitive, organizational phenomenon, as Holec argued; at the same time and to the same extent, however, it is social, interactive and collaborative. Autonomy's defining characteristic is not independence but interdependence.

Finally, the exercise of agency in social contexts, including contexts of formal learning, depends on language; and when the goal of learning is proficiency in a second language, that language should itself be the channel through which – to begin with in a very simple and preliminary way – learners' agency flows. This is the essential feature of Leni Dam's version of learner autonomy: her learners developed proficiency in English because English was the medium in which, from the very beginning, they planned, organized, monitored and evaluated their own learning – of English (the fullest account of Dam's classroom practice, its theoretical underpinnings and its empirically verified achievements is provided by Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017; see also Little, 2022).

Three pedagogical principles that foster the development of learner autonomy

What I have said so far amounts to this: if we want our students to develop as autonomous learners, we must teach them in ways that from the beginning engage and extend their agency. This is not a matter of helping them to develop skills of self-management that they add to whatever other learning behaviours they may have acquired; the exercise of agency should be intrinsic to every encounter they have with whatever it is they are learning (what I have argued with particular reference to language learning applies with equal force to any other curriculum subject). This implies a radical shift in teaching methods and may seem to invite a sceptical response. My purpose in this section is to propose three pedagogical principles that

any teacher can deploy to initiate and maintain autonomous learning, the principles of dialogue, reciprocity and collaboration.

Principle 1: Dialogue

Because our agency is socially mediated, autonomous learning is social as well as cognitive and belongs to the group as well as the individual. Whether in the classroom or as leader of an online learning community, the teacher's role is to involve her learners in the business of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating their own learning: helping them to create and sustain a community of practice in Lave and Wenger's (1991) sense. The teacher does this by embedding all teaching and learning in *dialogue*: oral interaction that she leads and guides, but in which all participants are expected to take initiatives. It is a defining feature of this dialogue that the teacher continuously seeks to yield control to her learners. When the goal of learning is proficiency in a second language, the teacher enacts her dialogic role *in the target language*, at first in very simple terms

Alexander (2020, p. 131) argues that a dialogic dynamic of classroom interaction is shaped by six features: it is *collective* (the classroom is a place of joint learning and enquiry), *supportive* (students can express their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment), *reciprocal* (students listen to one another, share ideas, ask questions and consider alternative viewpoints), *deliberative* (students discuss and seek to resolve different points of view), *cumulative* (students build on their own and one another's contributions), and *purposeful* (classroom talk is structured with specific learning goals in view). Dialogue in this sense characterizes individual episodes of learning – lessons and online encounters – but it also characterizes whole courses and learning programmes that seek to engage and exploit learner agency and develop learner autonomy.

Principle 2: Reciprocity

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, reciprocity is “the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit”; it is also a habit of mind. From the perspective of learner autonomy, *reciprocal* is the most important of Alexander's six features of dialogic talk. Behaving reciprocally in the context of autonomous learning means accepting responsibility to participate, listening to the teacher and one's fellow learners, sharing ideas, asking questions, volunteering answers to the questions of others, and considering alternative viewpoints. Reciprocity is a precondition for effective interaction and mediation.

In second language learning (as in child language acquisition), the reciprocity of *target language dialogue* creates the web of communication that supports proficiency development (this idea is expanded at length by Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017).

Principle 3: Collaboration

Collaboration is both the goal and the product of *dialogue* and *reciprocity*; and like reciprocity, collaboration is a habit of mind as well as a behaviour. Effective collaboration in a language learning community, online as well as in the classroom, requires reflection, regular evaluation and documentation. Documentation should be individual, in the form of a logbook, learner diary or portfolio (for learner logbooks, see Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017), but it should also be collaboratively and interactively compiled (for example, the posters that Leni Dam used to stimulate and capture whole-class discussion of learning; Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017).

In pedagogies that seek to develop learner autonomy, collaborative evaluation of the process and outcomes of learning is an essential component of collaborative learning. All evaluation should be criterion-referenced, that is, focused on clear descriptions of learning goals and the tasks they embody. It should be informed, moreover, by self- and peer-assessment

based on the same descriptive criteria, which should also underpin whatever assessment of her learners the teacher undertakes. This consideration provides an essential link between learning community, learning outcomes and assessment and brings me to the third part of my argument.

The Comprehensive Learning System

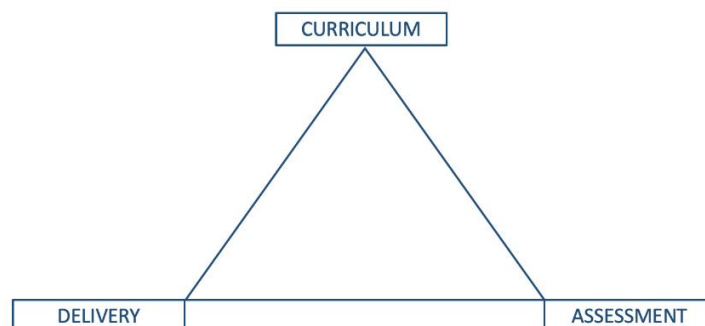


Figure 1 O’Sullivan’s Comprehensive Learning System

O’Sullivan’s Comprehensive Learning System (Figure 1; O’Sullivan, 2020) entails the integration of three essential components: the curriculum, delivery (teaching and the structures and resources that support teaching), and assessment. His essential argument is that unless these three components are explicitly interdependent, any effort at educational reform is likely to fail. Changes in the curriculum are unlikely to be successfully implemented without corresponding changes in delivery and assessment; pedagogical innovation (including the promotion of learner autonomy) needs the support of corresponding innovation in curriculum and assessment; and changes in assessment need the support of changes in curriculum and pedagogy.

This argument is applicable across the curriculum. In language education the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020) and its *Companion Volume* (CV; Council of Europe, 2020) challenge us to develop Comprehensive Learning Systems in which curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment are fully integrated with one another in O’Sullivan’s sense. As is well known, the CEFR and CV use “can do” descriptors to define second language proficiency, and each descriptor can be used simultaneously to specify a learning outcome, provide a teaching/learning focus, and imply an assessment task. What is more, the behavioural orientation of these descriptors means that learners themselves can participate fully in such a system because from early childhood we know what we can and cannot do. The Council of Europe conceived the European Language Portfolio as a way of helping learners to manage and document their own language learning on the basis of reflection driven by self-assessment that is based on checklists of “I can” descriptors.

In order to build a learner-centred, CEFR/CV-based Comprehensive Learning System, we must first define the body of knowledge and skills that our curriculum aims to develop and use the illustrative scales of the CV to draw up a detailed description of the target repertoire. The CV itself provides an example of this, a target repertoire for lower secondary CLIL (Figure 2). The developers of this curriculum have identified the scales in the CV that are relevant to this domain and for each scale the level of proficiency to be aimed at. This target repertoire and the scaled descriptors that lie behind it provide the essential foundation for everything that follows.

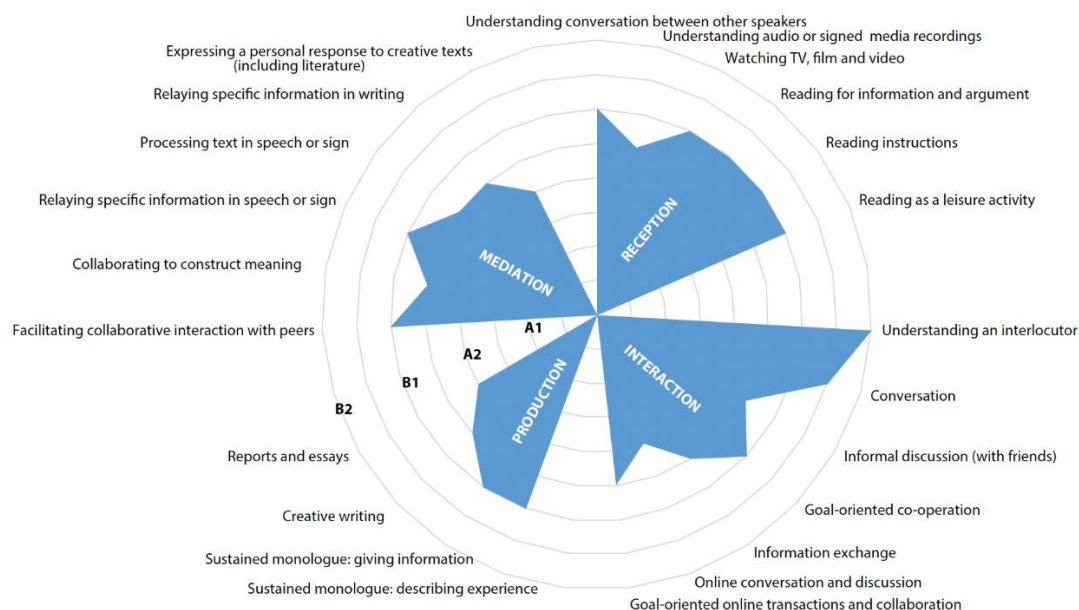


Figure 2 A target repertoire for lower secondary CLIL (CEFR CV; Council of Europe, 2020, p. 38)

The next step is to provide teachers and learners with tools that help them convert an action-oriented description of curriculum content into action-oriented teaching and learning – language teaching and learning, in other words, that is driven by language use. The European Language Portfolio is one such tool; checklists of “I can” descriptors derived from the “can do” descriptors that define the target repertoire are another (Figure 3).

B2 WRITING
I can write clear detailed text on a wide range of subjects relating to my personal, academic or professional interests
I can write letters conveying degrees of emotion and highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences, and commenting on the correspondent’s news and views
I can express news, views and feelings effectively in writing, and relate to the views and feelings of others
I can write summaries of articles on topics of general, academic or professional interest, extracting information from different sources and media
I can write an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons to support or negate a point of view, weighing pros and cons
I can write clear detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences in a detailed and easily readable way, marking the relationship between ideas
I can write a short review of a film or book
I can write standard formal letters requesting or communicating relevant information, with appropriate use of register and conventions

Figure 3 Checklist of “I can” descriptors for B2 writing

The third step is to agree on an approach to teaching that fosters learner autonomy as I have described it in this article. This means following the principles of dialogue, reciprocity and collaboration; involving learners in planning, managing and evaluating their learning; showing them how to support these processes by using a logbook or portfolio to document their learning; using “can do” and “I can” descriptors to develop their reflective understanding of the capacities the curriculum wants them to develop; and assigning a central role to a recursive cycle of goal setting and self-assessment based on “I can” checklists. If they work in this way, teachers and learners gradually accumulate a body of evidence about the learning process and

learning outcomes that can easily be related to the “can do” specification of the curriculum. This enables teachers to make clear criterion-referenced judgements regarding the progress of individual learners and the class as a whole.

The fourth step is to design exams that reflect the action-oriented, task-based nature of the curriculum and acknowledge the central role that learner agency plays in the language learning process.

Although for clarity’s sake I have referred to four steps in sequence, it is important to insist that the design of a Comprehensive Learning System along these lines is a recursive process that involves simultaneous work on all four steps.

Conclusion

This, then, is how I believe language education should respond to the dual challenges of Covid-19 that I identified at the beginning of this article:

At the level of policy and curriculum, we should (i) specify the range of spoken and written texts learners are expected to work with at the various curriculum levels; (ii) state or restate communicative curriculum goals in “can do” terms and summarize them in a learner profile; and (iii) use checklists of “I can” descriptors to capture the learning trajectory of the curriculum and support detailed record-keeping by teachers.

At the same time, we should ensure that public and institutional exams are an adequate measure of the learning outcomes described by the curriculum. Rating criteria and scoring schemes should be shared with teachers so that they in turn can share them with their learners. In this way, teachers and learners can develop a clear understanding of the interdependence between curriculum and assessment.

At the level of practice we should (i) use checklists of “I can” descriptors to help our learners to understand the communicative repertoire they are expected to develop; (ii) engage them in the development and use of tools – learner diaries, logbooks, portfolios – that help them manage their own learning; (iii) adopt learning activities that are easy to relate to the checklist descriptors; and (iv) develop learners’ skills of self-assessment by embedding the teaching/learning process in a recursive cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation.

In assessing our learners, we should use exams but also alternative modes of assessment, for example, collaborative projects that require students to use their skills of speaking, writing, interacting and mediating to demonstrate their critical grasp of curriculum content. Work of this kind should be assessed using rating criteria and scoring schemes derived from those used for exams. Networks of schools and universities could be established to provide independent moderation of learners’ course work.

If we do all this, we shall be well prepared to withstand the next pandemic. Learners of all ages will be adept at autonomous learning before the pandemic strikes and should adapt more easily to virtual learning environments; formal and informal assessment will be very explicitly criterion-referenced; and if formal exams are again suspended, teachers will be able to draw on a substantial body of criterion-referenced data to grade their students.

I am not aware, however, that any national education system or university has launched a review of its response to Covid-19 along these lines.

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Participatory Pedagogy as a Source of Motivation for Grammar School Students

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the impact of increased ratio of participation and autonomous learning on students' motivation. As the author of the present paper used to be a grammar school teacher and used to teach students from the two different classes which were the subject of the research, she chose the case study approach, allowing her to explore more in depth how the motivation of her students changed.

In the school year 2020/2021, from October 2020 to May 2021, distance learning was (with the exception of the two weeks before Christmas 2020) compulsory in the Czech Republic due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the year 2021, it could be observed all around the country that students felt less and less motivated. The lack of motivation was observed by the author of the paper during online lessons. The purpose of this paper and this research is to identify what was motivating for grammar school students and what was not. Afterwards, features of autonomous learning were implemented into English lessons. The paper moreover introduces suggestions of general modifications in syllabi for English lessons presented in the School Educational Programme of the grammar school where the author of this paper used to teach.

Biodata

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Introduction

In the school year 2019/2020, distance learning at secondary schools in the Czech Republic was, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, compulsory from March to May. Distance learning was compulsory again from October 2020 to May 2021 with the exception of two weeks before Christmas 2020. Since the beginning of the year 2021, it could be deduced from opinions of teachers, parents and learners all around the country that learners felt less and less motivated. From the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, various recommendations have been made and advice given on how to make online education, both synchronous and asynchronous, more enjoyable and effective for both learners and teachers. Some of these tips have been based on conclusions from academic studies while some are from teachers' personal experience. During the period when distance learning was compulsory, the author was an English teacher at a private language grammar school where emphasis was put on the product of learning. In particular, all students were obliged to pass Cambridge Exams and all teachers were obliged to prepare them for the exams. The emphasis did not change during the pandemic; therefore, teachers needed to continue in their lesson plans without any significant modification. This can be regarded as an unfortunate fly in the ointment as, besides the fact that teachers and students had no other option than to get used to the online platforms,

neither group had enough opportunities to discover what computer assisted language learning could offer.

Due to the fact that the author witnessed how unmotivated her students felt, she decided to inquire into what motivated them in order to understand their study concerns better and to improve the relationship between her students and herself. She reasoned that modifications in syllabi for English lessons would make students more active and more focused on what they actually studied. This is why she asked her students one multiple choice question, one ranking question about their motivation, and one ranking question about their feelings while making presentations. Consequently, she gave the students the opportunity to choose the topic of the lesson, present what they wanted and then prepare some activities for their classmates. As the final part of the empirical research, students once again ranked what motivated them and how self-confident in terms of their presentation skills they actually felt.

Theoretical background

Out of various definitions of motivation and types of motivation, the one proposed by R.C. Gardner and W.E. Lambert was chosen as theoretical background for this study. Gardner & Lambert (1972) introduced two types of favourable motivation - integrative and instrumental. "The integrative motivation reflects whether the student identifies with the target culture and people in some sense, or reject them. The more a student admires the target culture - reads its literature, visits it on holiday, looks for opportunities to practice the language and so on, the more successful the student will be in second language learning" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, 114). On the other hand, students who are motivated instrumentally learn the language for an ulterior motive unrelated to its use by native speakers - to pass an examination, to get a certain job, and so forth (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). For students of a grammar school where reaching formal success is considered to be the goal of the whole learning process, instrumental motivation seems to drive students. With high demands on students and a high number of exercises which must be completed successfully, there is not enough time for teachers to develop a deeper understanding in their classroom and present the target culture.

Gibbs & Habeshaw (1988) introduced various tips for lecturers to make their presentations and explanations more understandable for their listeners, among which the following are included: briefing (to brief students at the start of a lecture to tell them what sort of lecture they are going to participate in); flagging (to explain what a lecturer is doing and why); ground rules (to inform students about specific lecture rules); students' questions (to present a lecturer's attitude to questions); and orientation (to make students familiar with a detailed programme of the lecture and its structure). In the first weeks of distance learning, with only two synchronous online lessons and three asynchronous ones, teachers, including the author of this paper, spent significant parts of the lessons presenting and explaining new content, which students then practiced on their own. To make the situation easier for students, the author made sure that she introduced the topic and the content of the lesson, its goals and what was anticipated from students. When students were about to present in front of the class later that school year, it was repeated how they should introduce their presentations.

Together with integrative motivation, it was desired that lessons should be more communication-oriented. The author contemplated the following features of the communicative orientation of language teaching: activity type, participant organization, content and materials (Chaudron, 1988; Nunan, 1992). With the intended increased participation of the students in lessons, the author prepared how the four features would be implemented in the lessons:

- a.) Activity Type:** students decided on their own how they would organize the lessons. It was anticipated that most of them would first present and then give their classmates exercises as well as other tasks to be completed;

- b.) Participant Organisation:** the student who was presenting during a particular lesson for which his or her topic was chosen was asked to prepare activities for his/her classmates;
- c.) Content:** each student proposed one topic in which he or she was interested; therefore, students decided about the content of the lesson themselves;
- d.) Materials:** having been instructed about online sources students worked on their own. They were recommended to work with authentic materials.

If opting for learning-oriented assessment in classrooms, the aim of the assessment is to promote productive student learning (Carless, 2009). Formative assessment and summative assessment complement each other as learners fulfil a task and, based on the assessment, teachers can set new goals and directions for further development of lessons (Purpura, 2004).

Research

The First Private Language Grammar School was established in 1992 and is situated in Hradec Králové. With a total number of 300 students, the school is the smallest secondary school in the city. From 49 teachers, eight are English teachers, including one native speaker. The aim of the school is to prepare students for a fully-fledged life. The School Educational Plan is called *Having good language skills is a way for further education* and the school motto is *Find the desire within yourself to be the first*. In the first year of their studies, students have four English lessons a week and from the second year, the number of English lessons increases to five. Before taking their school-leaving exam, students are obliged to pass an international English exam - the lowest accepted level is B1. About 60 per cent of students pass the B2 First Exam, 35 per cent pass the C1 Advanced Exam and 5 per cent pass the C2 Proficiency Exam.

There are two opposing attitudes to the objectives of the English lessons at the First Private Language Grammar School - parents and school authorities are for it, while teachers and students have certain objections. If we compare these two groups, it is obvious that teachers and students are elements of the learning process and, consequently, should be listened to - modifications in the School Educational Plan should be made based on their opinions. From numerous objections towards online education, which the author of the paper collected during the 2020/2021 school year, the most common are complaints by the teachers that there should not be such focus on Cambridge Exams when there is no certainty to even pass them.

The students

The students who were the subject of this case study were students in the second year of their studies in the B1 level group and students in the fourth year of their studies in the B2 level group. The first group was comprised of eight students: four girls and four boys between the ages of 14 and 15, while the second group was comprised of 11 students: eight girls and three boys between the ages of 16 and 17. In both groups, falling scores could be observed. The average mark was 1.38 in March 2021. The average score for the students of the second group was 1.45 in March 2021. During the distance education of the 2019/2020 school year, both groups had two synchronous online lessons and three asynchronous ones; during the 2020/2021 school year, both groups had three synchronous online lessons and two asynchronous ones.

First phase

Data collection

The author's aim during the first phase of data collection was to understand the students better and therefore to arrange lesson plans for the rest of the school year 2020/2021 during the period when secondary schools in the Czech Republic were opened again after the distance education.

To get to know what motivated them, the students were distributed a short questionnaire via MS Teams in the middle of April 2021. They were asked a multiple-choice question: *What motivates you in your studies during the COVID-19 pandemic?* They were given the following options: *a positive attitude to English language and culture - money parents pay for education - a plan to obtain a certificate.* At the end of an online meeting, the students were asked to rank their current motivation and their self-confidence on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest.

Data analysis

The sources of motivation *money parents pay for education* and *a plan to obtain a certificate* were ranked the highest by most students in both groups. The results are presented in the following charts, which show how many students ranked each motivation option as the most important.

From the results, we can state that the motivation was mainly external and instrumental. From the responses of the older students, we can claim that they enjoy learning for the reason that they enjoy English lessons because of the language itself. This can be connected to the fact that the students of the second year were about to take their first Cambridge Exam, B1 Preliminary, at the end of April. Students of the fourth year, on the contrary, still had two more years of preparation for the B2 First exam, which meant that they were not yet completing sample tests for the exams all the time and were not yet subject to repeated entreaties by school authorities about how necessary it was to pass the exam.

	1	2	3	4	5
a positive attitude to English language and culture	1 s	3 s	3 s	1 s	0 s
money parents pay for education	0 s	0 s	0 s	3 s	5 s
a plan to obtain a certificate	0 s	0 s	0 s	4 s	4 s

Figure 1: What motivates students in the second year of their studies

	1	2	3	4	5
a positive attitude to English language and culture	0 s	0 s	2 s	6 s	3 s
money parents pay for education	2 s	1 s	3 s	3 s	2 s
a plan to obtain a certificate	0 s	2 s	7 s	1 s	1 s

Figure 2: What motivates students in the fourth year of their studies

Students of the second year regarded themselves as less motivated and less self-confident than the students of the fourth year. This again can be considered to have a connection with the approaching Cambridge Exams for the students of the second year and the fact that with the number of sample tests, there was not enough time in lessons for them to make self-presentations.

	1	2	3	4	5
students of the second year	1 s	3 s	3 s	1 s	0 s
students of the fourth year	0 s	0 s	3 s	3 s	5 s

Figure 3: Motivation of students in the middle of April

	1	2	3	4	5
students of the second year	4 s	2 s	2 s	0 s	0 s
students of the fourth year	0 s	0 s	2 s	3 s	6 s

Figure 4: Students' self-confidence while presenting in the middle of April

Second phase

Data collection

Data collection of the second phase of research was conducted after the students had given their presentations in the lessons. The students were presenting in May and June when schools were open again. Enough marks for the final classification of the school year had already been obtained which meant that if the presentation was not of a high quality, it would not worsen the final mark from English. Students did their presentations in pairs. Two lessons a week were devoted to this and there were two presentations per one lesson unit. The students of the second year had presentations about their favourite pastimes while the students of the fourth year chose individual topics which then led to discussions such as: *What happens after we die?* or *Vegetarians and vegans and their respective social positions*. Presentations were followed either by activities prepared by students or by discussions.

After all students had presented their topics, they were distributed a short questionnaire at the end of June, this time at the end of one of the lessons, and were again asked to evaluate their level of motivation and self-confidence while presenting.

Data analysis

After analysis of the answers in the questionnaires, we can claim that presenting and active participation of the students in the preparation of exercises for their classmates had a positive effect on the motivation as well as on the level of self-confidence in both groups of students.

	1	2	3	4	5
students of the second year	0 s	0 s	2 s	4 s	2 s
students of the fourth year	0 s	0 s	1 s	3 s	7 s

Figure 4: Motivation of students in June

	1	2	3	4	5
students of the second year	4 s	2 s	2 s	0 s	0 s
students of the fourth year	0 s	0 s	2 s	3 s	6 s

Figure 5: Students' self-confidence in June

While completing the questionnaire, some students also had statements, for instance: *Now I understand how time-demanding preparations are; I enjoyed that contrary to other lessons, we did not only revise after the end of the distance education, but we also learned something new.* One student also expressed a certain criticism: *If I had known that this task would not influence the mark a lot, I would not have devoted that much time to complete it.*

Conclusion

The presented case study showed that with an increased ratio of active participation of students, they feel more motivated and get better marks. In the introduction to this paper, the author presented her opinion that the school where she did her research ought to have changed gears and focused more on the process than on the product. The results of the research carried out after the distance learning which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic can be applied while creating new strategies for language learning at the First Private Language Grammar School. From the two types of motivation proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972), it can be concluded that it is integrative motivation which had a better impact on the language learning process. It has been already quoted that if a student identifies himself / herself with the target culture and language, he / she is more likely to succeed in language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Therefore, the author of the paper is convinced that when students find their own way towards whatever aspects of the language and then present it to their peers, they feel more motivated and more integrated in the language learning process. This might be missing if the goal of the lesson is to learn something new just to pass an exam or to get better results and reach the desired success. Giving students more space to be active in lessons also increases the level of their motivation and their self-confidence while presenting.

The author of this paper managed to complete the academic plan for the year by the end of April and hence had two months to try something new with her students. Usually, English teachers at this grammar school struggle with the lack of time needed for completing their school plans. We can attribute three reasons for this: during asynchronous learning, students did time-consuming reading and listening exercises at home; they recorded their performances; and studied new grammar at home. All of these reasons share a common feature: students were given more tasks to be done at home. This did not influence their marks in a negative way and also saved time in lessons. We can therefore claim that students should complete more exercises at home.

Three main recommendations for English as a second language lessons can be pointed out: less focus on Cambridge Exams, less focus on the product in general and an increase in student participation during lessons as well as at home. The first recommendation is closely connected to the second one as Cambridge Exams are the most desired product at the grammar school where the research was carried out. Besides making lessons more stressful with the constant repetition of what everyone must learn in order to pass the exam, another issue are textbooks which are designed for Cambridge Exam candidates and contain topics and exercises which are not appealing for students.

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Learner autonomy, electronic portfolios and project-based (language) learning: connecting the dots

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the interrelationship between learner autonomy, electronic portfolios and project-based (language) learning in the context of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes at the tertiary level. The article describes how an electronic portfolio and project-based language learning were used with a cohort of civil engineering students to give them choice and voice, while also providing an authentic context for the use and the development of their language skills. Lastly, the paper briefly discusses some of the common challenges concerning the use of electronic portfolios and project work and offers a few suggestions for how to overcome them.

Key words: learner autonomy, electronic portfolios, project-based learning (PBL), project-based language learning (PBL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Biodata

Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Sudhershnan is Head of the Language Competence Centre at the Berliner Hochschule für Technik (BHT), where she also teaches Business English and Technical English. Her research interests include learner autonomy, project- and problem-based learning, electronic portfolios and flipped learning. She was involved in two EU-funded projects aimed at promoting learner autonomy at the tertiary level (*Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of Languages for Specific Purposes* and the *Language On-Line Portfolio Project*). The current project she is involved in concerns the use of electronic portfolios in higher education for assessment purposes and was awarded a “Prüfung hoch III Drei” Fellowship sponsored by Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft e.V. (see <https://pruefunghochdrei.de/fellowship/fellows-1-generation/> for more information).

Introduction

Being able to cope with the unexpected is a vital skill that students need to acquire if they want to succeed both during their formal education and once they have graduated. According to Schinkten (2017), adaptive thinking and, by extension, “learn[ing] how to learn” is among the top ten skills students need to develop to be successful “in a future filled with uncertainty”. The development of such a “learning to learn” skillset has been at the heart of the theory and practice of learner autonomy since its inception over four decades ago with the publication of Henri Holec’s (1981) seminal work that defined the concept as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p.3). Over the years, definitions and models of learner autonomy have multiplied, as have the approaches, methods and tools to support educators in the deceptively simple task of letting students “take charge”. The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential of two of them – project-based learning (PBL) and electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) – for promoting learner autonomy in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) settings.

Learner autonomy, project-based (language) learning and e-portfolios

As can be expected from a concept that has been central to the theory and practice of foreign language education for so long, a detailed discussion of what learner autonomy is (and what it is *not*) goes beyond the scope of this paper. Broadly speaking, however, it seems to involve a complex interplay of technical, psychological, socio-cultural and political-critical perspectives (see Oxford, 2003) and can be conceptualised *inter alia* as a capacity to take

control of learning management, cognitive processes (attention, reflection and metacognitive knowledge) as well as learning content (Benson, 2001). Based on this very broad overview, it is therefore not surprising that:

autonomy may take various forms. Fostering autonomy does not, therefore, imply any particular approach to practice. In principle, *any practice* that encourages and enables learners to take greater control of any aspect of their learning can be considered a means of promoting autonomy.
(Benson, 2001 p.109; emphasis added)

In line with such complexity and diversity, the CORALL project (Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of Languages for Specific Purposes; an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership for Higher Education 2019-1-HU01-KA203-061070), which the author was involved in, examined a vast number of ideas put forward in the literature as helpful for fostering learner autonomy, from specific tools, such as learner journals, to well-established methods including problem-based learning and, in addition, collected examples of best practice¹. Moreover, the rapid technological developments of the last two decades have opened new doors for both researchers and practitioners. This is because, as pointed out by Lewis, Cappellini and Rivens Mompean, “the advent of networked digital technologies, in enabling language learners to *collaborate* and *create* content online, has given rise to new ways in which learners are able to express their autonomy” (2017, p. 1; emphasis added).

Language portfolios belong to a group of autonomy-focused tools that have benefited from embracing such technological advancements. An educational portfolio can be described as “a collection of information by and about a student to give a broad view of his or her achievement” (Mabry, 1999, p. 17). The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is perhaps one of the best-known examples of a language portfolio and one that has evolved over the years to take advantage of the benefits afforded by technology. The ELP, designed to complement the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), is an initiative launched by the Council of Europe in the 1990s that “embodies a set of principles – reflective learning, self-assessment, learner autonomy, plurilingualism, intercultural learning – which stimulate good practice in a multitude of educational contexts and help to develop skills of life-long learning” (Little, Goullier and Hughes, 2011). Early pioneering projects such as the Language On-Line Portfolio Project (LOLIPOP), a Lingua Action 2 project under the Socrates Programme of the European Commission which ran from 2004 to 2007 and in which the author was involved, aimed to “harness[...] the potential of ICTs for the enhancement of the ELP” which, at that time, was not well explored (Language On-Line Portfolio Project, n.d.) and led to the development of a multilingual, on-line and interactive version of the ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension.

In addition to being a collection of student work aimed at highlighting achievement (see Mabry, 1999 p.17), e-portfolios allow students to use multimedia (see e.g. Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Mahara² is one e-portfolio tool that has been successfully used in foreign language teaching and learning settings at the tertiary level (see e.g. Kühn, 2016). The three main functions of Mahara include “creating”, “sharing” and “engaging” with the purpose of *inter alia* letting users “create their personal learning stories by uploading evidence of activities they have participated in” as well as submit “reflections on their experiences that frame this evidence” (Mahara, n.d.). Therefore, Mahara can be said to support the development of learner autonomy in relation to giving learners control not only over their learning

¹ See <https://corallprojecteu.wixsite.com/presentation/presentations> for more information on the outcomes of the CORALL project.

² <https://mahara.org/>

management and cognitive processes / reflection (see Benson, 2001) but also by providing them with the tools to communicate and collaborate with one another, thus fostering the key social dimension of learner autonomy, in line with a move “away from a focus on the individual learner working independently towards individual learners *working collaboratively* in order to *learn with and from each other*” (Murray, 2021, p. 89; emphasis added).

The transfer of control over learning is also important to project-based learning (PBL) and its application in the field of language education, project-based language learning (PBLL). PBL can be described as “a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in *real-world* and *personally meaningful* projects” (Buck Institute for Education / PBLWorks, n.d.; emphasis added). Extended to the field of foreign language teaching and learning, PBLL views projects as a reaction to a challenging issue that can lead to:

a *transformative* learning experience designed to engage language learners with real-world issues and *meaningful target language use* through the *construction of products* that have an *authentic purpose* and that are *shared with an audience* that extends beyond the instructional setting. (National Foreign Language Resource Center, n.d.; emphasis added).

The main features of PBL are summarised in the “Gold Standard PBL”, according to which project design should pay attention to seven key elements, from the already mentioned “authenticity” involving a “challenging problem or question” and leading to a “public product”, to projects being a result of a “sustained inquiry” that considers “student voice & choice”, while also providing opportunities for “reflection” as well as “critique & revision” (Buck Institute for Education / PBLWorks, n.d.). The above description of good practice in PBL shows clearly its compatibility with the concept of learner autonomy and its emphasis on fostering reflection and providing students with opportunities to take control of their learning. For example, Díaz Ramírez (2014, pp. 56-57) states that project work *inter alia* “increases student responsibility, fosters participation when making decisions concerning projects, facilitates the gradual acquisition of autonomy and the use of the language, and promotes interdisciplinary and cooperative work”.

It is not surprising therefore that PBL has also been applied in ESP contexts to foster learner autonomy at the tertiary level. For example, in her action research project, Díaz Ramírez (2014) used group-based project-based learning with a cohort of undergraduate students of environmental engineering in a public university in Columbia and observed the development of learner autonomy in three areas, from decision-making via cooperative work, through growing self-regulation, to the development of intrinsic motivation. Le Van and Tien (2021) in their project involving PBL in an ESP course focused on Business English / Marketing found that the students *inter alia* observed a growth in their own responsibility.

Connecting the dots in an ESP class: a project example

PBL was used with a cohort of first-year students of business administration and civil engineering at the Berliner Hochschule für Technik (BHT) to promote learner autonomy and to encourage authentic language use. During a single semester, the students worked on three different projects related to their course of studies, one of which concerned the development of a smart campus strategy for the university. Having analysed the concept of a “smart city”, from new technologies and their potential for improving the quality of life in urban spaces, to problems that they may pose, for instance, in relation to data privacy, the students were then provided with a definition of a smart campus as one that can “help improve three important factors: experience, efficiency, and education” and “reshape how students study, how they learn, what they learn, and how they interact with an institution” (Deloitte, 2019, p.8).

In the first stage of the project, the students, in groups, brainstormed their own experiences with various aspects of the university campus to identify those ideas that needed improving and discussed concrete measures that could be implemented, particularly in relation to the technologies they had already explored in relation to the concept of a smart city (*critique & revision*). They were asked to consider aspects such as: sustainability; teaching, research and learning facilities; mobility and transport; safety and security; equality and inclusion; extracurricular activities; healthcare and well-being; student services and facilities; as well as communication and administration. However, the students were free to consider additional aspects which they considered important (*student voice & choice*). Following this warm-up task, the students were then asked to take part in a made-up “student competition” organised by the university. The competition involved students submitting a competition entry consisting of their assessment of two challenges of studying on campus and ideas outlining how various smart city solutions could help overcome those (a *challenging problem* and *authenticity*). To this purpose, they had to research various technologies that matched the problems they identified and use correct citation and referencing (*sustained inquiry*). In line with the *public product* standard of PBL, the students were asked to submit their entries (approx. 600 words) via the e-portfolio Mahara so that they could – if desired – share their competition entries via the “share” function with a wider public. They also had the opportunity to support their analysis and concepts with multimedia (e.g. self-taken images) to take advantage of the features offered by an e-portfolio. Forty students in total submitted their smart campus “competition entries”.

For most of the students who participated in the project, their university experience had only started eight months prior and the first months of their university education may have been affected to some extent by pandemic-related restrictions. The “smart campus” project provided them, therefore, with opportunities to *reflect* on their educational experience up to that point and analyse – first with their peers and then individually – the challenges they had to deal with on a daily basis. The range of issues they addressed in their competition entries was quite wide but broadly speaking, the three main issues concerned: study rooms (e.g. with regard to access and equipment); difficulties with orientation on campus; and unavailability of parking spaces. The following extract illustrates well student voices concerning the first two issues:

If you try to find a specific room at the campus it is *challenging* and mostly you need to search on the website of the University. Especially if you have to be there in a few minutes this can become *stressful*. Furthermore many students do not have the opportunity to concentrate at home so they come to the campus to find a silent room. This is *not easy* since official learning rooms are *often full*. Additionally empty rooms are *mostly locked up*, probably due to feared vandalism and stealing.³ (emphasis added)

While not among the top few challenges identified by the students in their competition entries, obstacles to learning created by the use of traditional teaching methods were also mentioned by a few students, as illustrated by the following example:

Moreover, many students have expressed their difficulties paying close attention to lectures due to unappealing ways of teaching. This does not come as a surprise as the *classical way of teaching does not engage students in participating*. Moreover, complex theories and models are often tough to imagine and presented in ways that *do not aid in understanding* these concepts. Ultimately, a *suboptimal* way of transferring knowledge *hinders* an optimal learning outcome. (emphasis added)

³ The extracts have not been corrected.

Since learner autonomy can be considered to be the opposite of traditional teaching methods focused on the transmission of knowledge and passive learning (see e.g. Scott, 2015), it is interesting to note that some students had developed an awareness of the problems posed by the latter in relation to academic success. In the following example, the same student who was dissatisfied with conventional teaching suggested that:

the integration and implementation of augmented reality (AR) within lectures would make lectures *more engaging* for students, and complex theories and models could be presented in ways that make it *easier* for students to *understand and imagine* complex topics. New interaction methods as well as gamification will certainly *boost motivation* of BHT students to learn in a *playful and explorative* way. (emphasis added)

To conclude this section, the project provided the students with an opportunity to critically examine the current issues with the university campus and to explore a wide range of technologies to improve it. As pointed out by this civil engineering student, “Our campus is our biggest construction site, so we should focus on it to make our university life even better”.

Overcoming some common problems with using e-portfolios and PBL

Even though e-portfolios offer a lot of potential for fostering authentic language use, collaboration and learner autonomy and, generally speaking, students belonging to the “net generation” tend to be technology-savvy (see e.g. Mărculescu, 2015), teachers should not assume that students will automatically be able to use and navigate an e-portfolio, especially since individual features can vary from tool to tool. It is therefore recommended to guide students through its main functionalities in the early stages of project work and give them an opportunity to try them out prior to using the tool for project submission.

Secondly, whereas this particular project involved students interacting with one another only during the brainstorming stage, in the previous edition of the smart city project students were required to complete the project in groups. However, groupwork may pose another challenge when implementing PBL (see for example Le Van and Tien, 2021). On a positive note, much advice is available in the literature on how to deal with this issue. In one of the most recent publications, Ivone & Jacobs (2022) discuss eight basic cooperative learning principles that can also be applied to using group work in the context of PBL and e-portfolios. These include: “positive interdependence” (1) and “individual accountability” (2); “equal opportunity to participate” (3); “maximum peer interactions” (4); acquiring “cooperative skills” (5); “heterogeneous groups” (6); fostering “group autonomy” (7); and lastly, “cooperation as a value” (8).

Conclusions and recommendations

The development of life-long learning skills in general, and self-regulation in particular, is vital in engineering programmes (Reyes-Viviescas et al., 2019, p. 899) and beyond. One of the challenges of teaching ESP at the tertiary level is developing authentic scenarios that will not only engage students and resemble real-life tasks they will have to deal with upon graduation, but also providing them with opportunities to take control of learning processes and for meaningful communication and interaction. As Schinkten (2017) points out, “There is an increased demand for self-directed workers who can adapt and learn quickly, think critically, communicate and innovate”. As argued in this paper, combining PBL with e-portfolios in ESP classes can be a highly valuable tool to achieve this goal.

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Aware and autonomous: Raising learner autonomy in deaf and hard of hearing learners

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Abstract

The Council of Europe regards the development of learner autonomy as one of the keystones of education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning (Council of Europe 2011). The independent learning and self-regulation skills required at university level, let alone independent online learning such as during Covid-19 pandemic times, present a specific set of challenges and requirements for learners. The concept of learner autonomy holds particular importance for deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) learners who tend to employ dependent learning styles. Yet precisely low levels of learner autonomy alongside social and literacy issues represent key factors in academic failure (Scherer & Walter, 1988). After providing a short introduction into the specifics of DHH learners and their characteristics, the paper discusses possible approaches to fostering DHH learners' autonomy, giving importance to motivational factors, effective strategy investment, progressive assuming of responsibility for one's learning, self-reflection and confidence building. Examples are based on the authors' teaching practice, and particularly their experience with the e-learning course *Online English for International Mobilities*.

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Introduction

The Council of Europe regards the development of learner autonomy as one of the keystones of education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning (2011). However, with the rapid changes in the world, preparing students for a world that does not yet exist is a daunting task. Targeting the development of autonomous learning skills as one of the tools to face and overcome present and future challenges, therefore, seems like a key factor for success in education and life overall.

It is generally held that higher education students should differ from school pupils based on their ability to navigate the university environment actively and autonomously, pursuing their own education agenda (Henri, 2018). Yet not all learners studying at universities have entered them fully equipped with efficient study and self-regulation skills or use them effectively enough. The autonomous learning which is required in higher education and lifelong learning, let alone independent online learning such as during Covid times, presents challenges for learners and requires inventive solutions.

The concept of learner autonomy holds particular importance for deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) learners who have been characterized as dependent learners, a feature possibly reinforced by necessary reliance on adults for disproportionate amounts of information, as well as a tendency of educators of DHH learners to teach in highly structured, explicit manners (Kahn, et al., 2013).

The past few decades have brought improved awareness of the foreign language (FL) learning characteristics and needs of DHH learners and their implications for a foreign language classroom (Domagala-Zysk, 2015). Teaching practice as well as research conducted in the field of FL learning and teaching for DHH learners show the importance of paying due attention to introducing and fostering their learning strategies and setting them on a path to becoming autonomous learners. As noted by Csizér and Kontra, “Teaching the foreign language should be coupled with introducing effective learning strategies to [DHH] learners as well as familiarizing them with autonomous ways of practicing the FL” (2020, p. 246).

The paper discusses the crucial importance of encouraging and giving DHH learners the tools to take control and responsibility for their foreign language learning. A holistic attempt to do so was the design and implementation of the e-learning course *Online English for International Mobilities* (Tóthová, Sedláčková & Barnová, 2020) and the subsequent international summer school for DHH learners, supported by the European Union funded project LangSkills (2021-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000023473). The course was designed and developed to support DHH university students in their efforts to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a meaningful way individually and in a collaborative way if used in a group. At the same time, the course motivates them to reflect on their learning and provides them with opportunities to self-regulate their studying and to develop confidence as successful FL learners.

Theoretical underpinnings

Hearing loss can be considered from various viewpoints. First is the degree of the loss, according to which the impairment can be categorized from moderate to profound (World Health Organization, 2012). Compared to the biological perspective, social and cultural views are based on language preferences and identification with a particular cultural and social group. These different perspectives also represent, to some extent, different aspects in which DHH individual development, needs and abilities may differ from hearing individuals.

For many DHH learners, limited accessibility of spoken language and proficient sign language users presents a poor start in terms of the acquisition of literacy and language, which inevitably influences language proficiency, cognitive development and, in the long run, academic success (Foster, 2003; Gregory et al., 1995; Spencer & Marschark, 2010). (Early) language development complicated by the lack of accessible language input and subsequent shortcomings in language proficiency, previous educational experiences and lack of incidental learning possibilities are the main factors that contribute to DHH learners developing dependent learning styles.

Our understanding of autonomy as the ability to take charge of one’s own learning follows Holec’s (1981) perspective which has been further developed by Benson (2001), Little (2017) and many others. Learner autonomy encompasses, on the one hand, components that can be related to learner strategies such as self-assessment, goal setting and reflection and, on the other hand, features connected to individual character and social qualities such as responsibility towards oneself and others and self-discipline. There is clearly a direct link between the learner’s ability to assume autonomy and their use of learning strategies, particularly metacognitive and social strategies (Oxford, 2001).

Learner autonomy is a process that can and needs to be developed (Benson, 2001; Little, 2017). Adoption of autonomy does not seem to be a mostly natural process, particularly in a

formal educational setting, and thus needs to be externally supported. In view of the findings that point to the link between autonomy and positive postsecondary outcomes, college graduation rates, general academic success and better employment for all including DHH learners (Algozzine et al., 2001; Chambers, Rabren & Dunn, 2007; Scherer & Walter, 1988), it is the teacher's role to support the gradual development of autonomous and self-regulatory abilities of their learners.

As described above, DHH learners tend to be overly dependent on their teachers (Marschark et al., 2002; Sedláčková & Kontra, 2020) and parents (Karovska Ristovska, 2020). On the other hand, according to Lang's (2002) findings, the DHH learners that succeed in higher education seem to possess qualities such as self-awareness, persistence and self-efficacy, as well as the ability to advocate for interpreting, tutoring, and note-taking services. Such self-regulatory traits, as well as volitional and self-directed behaviours, are clearly linked to autonomy (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

In addition to personal characteristics and abilities, autonomy is also fostered by access to information and appropriate study materials. The use of technology thus constitutes a key factor. In the case of DHH learners in particular, technology represents a major advancement in the accessibility of information and materials and enables them to take charge of their own learning (Bricker, 2015; Karovska Ristovska, 2020). Research on the relationship between autonomous learning and the use of technology brings evidence of the positive role of technology, particularly when support on how to use it is available, teachers provide scaffolding and the responsibility is shifted onto learners gradually (Figura & Jarvis, 2007; Groß, A. & Wolff, D., 2011).

Online English for International Mobility: an accessible e-learning course

One aspect of teaching DHH individuals is the fact that after completing formal school education, it is complicated for students to find suitable individual courses that would be led by teachers experienced with teaching DHH learners or knowledgeable about suitable teaching approaches that cater to this group of learners. Group courses complicate the matter even further as nowadays most courses include a considerable portion of different speaking activities, use role plays, group or pair work. It follows that for a DHH person it might be very difficult to join in and benefit from them.

Another aspect is the lack of suitable teaching and study materials for DHH learners. Despite the plethora of existing coursebooks, workbooks, CD-ROMs, and applications which may be of great help in the classroom for teachers as well as students, it needs to be said that their emphasis on speaking, listening and pronunciation, crucial for hearing learners, are of little use in the case of DHH learners. Also, the choice of topics that frequently include references to music, singers and the hearing world culture in general may not always be accessible and/or interesting for DHH learners⁴.

This was one of the reasons the e-learning course *Online English for International Mobility* was created as part of the LangSkills project. The aim was to offer DHH learners an accessible English language course which provides them with authentic material and leads them to improve their English language skills through a series of activities and guided practice. The topic revolves around studying and traveling abroad, as the course simulates the experience of going for an Erasmus+ stay. It uses authentic materials from the university setting related to both study and administrative procedures.

⁴ Given the diversity of hearing loss, from mild to profound, perception of music differs. Some people can hear and recognize words in a song while others can only perceive bass tones or vibrations, depending on the volume level.

To ensure easy access, the course was mounted on the open space platform OpenMoodle and there is no fee to use it. The course is suitable for approximately B1 to B2 users of English, which is the typical level learners can reach after completing their secondary studies and later develop further at universities. It offers an accessible and culturally relevant learning environment, all videos are subtitled/captioned, and the course has a clear and logical structure.

The course offers the practice of reading comprehension based on authentic materials such as study stays related texts, lecture transcripts or study materials. A lot of attention is given to development of writing skills, as the participants are required to work with typical academic writing assignments as well as with informal and formal e-mail communication. Speaking skills are simulated using real-time chat interaction between participants, as the use of sign language would not lead to producing English.

The course also helps the participants acquire new vocabulary related to higher education and study abroad as well as special needs services, and also contains grammar practice exercises at the intermediate level. Most of the tasks and activities are automatically corrected and the learners know immediately if any mistakes occurred and where. The course can be used for self-study or as material for an instructed online or blended learning course. In the following text the experience of students who completed the 'Online English for International Mobilities' within a university course is shared.

Supporting learners' autonomy in the course

To foster learners' autonomy, the course creators opted for a series of pedagogical approaches.

a) Using motivation to improve learning achievement

The first one relates to the learners' motivation to learn a FL. One of the premises of increased motivation is the use of material and activities that are seen by learners as meaningful and relevant (Skehan, 1998). Course activities deal with different stages of the process of studying abroad: starting from discussing the potential (dis)advantages of taking part in an exchange programme, the learners get to practise filling in application forms, searching for accommodation, taking notes from a lecture, and taking part in discussion fora. Attention was also brought to negotiating services such as sign language interpreting, speech-to-text reporting, note taking, additional time to sit exams, individual learning pathways, etc., as these traits are considered tightly related to DHH student autonomy (Kahn et al, 2013; Lang, 2002).

As most students with or without hearing loss, DHH learners enjoy interaction with their peers and look for opportunities to meet within the community. An added value in cases where the online course is used as study material for a group of students are the interactive features such as fora and synchronous and asynchronous chats. For some of the tasks, students have to independently arrange online chat sessions and follow instructions to meet the requirements. During two pilot runs with international groups of students, the opportunity for natural interaction in English was greatly appreciated by the participants: "Especially the interaction between the participants of the course was great. It seemed that they enjoyed it as well. It is also a good practice to interact directly with people and to get used to it." It should also be mentioned that the course participants were offered to take part in an international summer school for DHH learners and their teachers in the UK, another project partner, which was a strong motivational incentive for them to work on their FL competency.

b) Capitalizing on strategy investment

For Brown (2001), strategic investment entails the investment of time, effort and attention made by learners during the learning process. An inherent component of the course are sections called Study tips. The study tips were designed by taking into account the typical areas where DHH learners tend to struggle, based on the course creators' teaching experience.

Their aim is not only to improve students' awareness of different tools and strategies they can benefit from, offering choices, but also explaining the benefits of using them while providing enough practice to apply them. The tips are meant to be helpful not only while proceeding through the course but, ideally, via equipping the course participants with the relevant study skills that would support their lifelong learning, enabling them to continue to study and use English on their own. The areas covered are checking spelling and grammar, using dictionaries effectively, making reading more effective thanks to scanning and text marking, and note-taking.

Presently, study skills recommendations are in the spotlight and universities, educational institutions and internet-based initiatives share tips and guidelines for students. Owing to language proficiency and reading comprehension issues and also the tendency to rely on external support, DHH learners, however, might not be able to find the relevant sources, assess them critically, or navigate through them efficiently. Secondly, DHH learners often consider materials created primarily for the hearing student population as detached from their experience and, instead, tend to look for experiences and tips from and for DHH learners, which are, however, lacking in this area. Finally, Wingate (2006) finds instructional texts not sufficient to encourage experiencing and reflecting. DHH, even more than hearing learners, need practical experience, feedback and scaffolding.

The Study Tips sections are therefore built using input that is in line with the visuality and preference for deductive learning of DHH learners (Tóthová & Sedláčková, 2021) by way of videos, practical illustrations, and examples. After the presentation, students fulfil highly practical tasks. At the end of each section, there are reflection questions which invite participants to consider their approaches and strategies at a deeper level. Learners are allowed to make their choices according to their learning preferences and styles; for instance, when invited to practise note taking skills, learners can complete the task by choosing any of the presented systems, i.e. using the outline method, mind mapping, or other.

Participants of the pilot runs appreciated the study tip sections: "What I really liked was the input given such as on scanning a text, note taking, opinion expression, agree/disagree. I think this is helpful for the students." Another course taker added: "This course was very great for me. Because I learned how I should write essays. I didn't like it but at now I haven't a problem write it. I know to at now I need minimal three hours of free time, dictionary and positive thinking."

c) Shared responsibility

The course creators share the belief that for successful learning, it is important for the learner to be aware of his/her own contribution to the process and outcome of their learning. This belief has substantial implications for teaching DHH individuals. It is a shared goal of teachers to set their learners onto independent learning pathways by giving them suitable tasks and activities, guided practice and advising. While this course attempts to share responsibility with learners as to time management, choice of tasks and their execution or vocabulary items to learn, the major shift of responsibility occurs in activities dedicated to building writing skills.

Writing is a multi-stage process and the feedback is a two-way dialogue. During the first, preparatory stage, background knowledge of the topic, vocabulary, and form rules (e.g. opinion essay, formal letter, ...) are activated. Learners then hand in the first draft of their assignment and receive formative feedback from the teacher. The teacher provides formative feedback and the learners are asked to redraft their assignment. The teacher again provides feedback and, if necessary, the learners might need additional feedback before handing in the final version of the assignment. As highlighted by Ávila Caica, DHH learners particularly enjoy immediate feedback, and feel that they learn better when they are taking an active part in the learning process (2011). As a pilot run course participant commented: "Another great advantage

is of course the direct feedback of the teachers to essays/letters and the possibility to develop through it.” This feature of the course, however, is only available when the course is used in an instructed rather than self-study setting. The feedback for written assignments cannot be produced automatically.

d) Self-reflection as a tool for self-directed learning

Self-reflection, defined by Gläser-Zikuda as “a conscious mental process relying on thinking, reasoning, and examining one's own thoughts, feelings, and ideas” (2012, p. 312), has an irreplaceable role in education. Thanks to reflection tools such as journals or diaries, learners may record, look back on and assess their learning. Course creators wished to provide DHH course takers with such a useful tool to help them notice the development of their learning. Thus, learners are invited throughout the course to reflect on their English skills, the learning strategies they use and to formulate their learning goals at the end of the course. This should ideally help them to introduce the necessary changes to enhance future performance.

Activities in the last unit are designed to make the learners more aware of their foreign language competence, to track their progress, and to articulate their future language learning goals. Learners are asked to look back at the assignments, emails, and fora posts that they have completed since the beginning of the course, and peruse the teachers' feedback files and comments, if available. Based on this material, they self-assess their performance by noting down their strong points as English learners and areas they believe need some improvement. To conclude, they should name their plans to develop their English skills further. During the pilot runs the self-assessment activity seemed to surprise some of the participants who found it at first difficult to answer. It was clearly a new experience for many of them.

e) Confidence building

What affects DHH learners' performance is not only their awareness and knowledge of study skills and strategies in itself, but also their confidence in being able to become a successful FL learner that underpins the whole process of learning (Pandya, 2020). Therefore, another key concern of the course developers was the creation of a safe and supportive environment, where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning, learners feel secure, and they can enjoy the company of people with similar hearing loss experience. The aim was to seek ways to reduce negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration and boredom and shift attention towards willingness to communicate, boosting their confidence as FL learners and providing a space where they can enjoy success while completing the tasks. Such pedagogical intentions were particularly kept in mind when giving feedback to learners on their assignments but also in the responses to their discussion fora contributions.

Finally, importance was placed on setting attractive but attainable goals so as not to discourage learners from proceeding through the course but, at the same time, offering enough of a challenge.

Course takers were appreciative of such measures, leaving in the feedback form comments such as the following: “I found out what I would do when I could go abroad to ERASMUS. I leave this course with a smile. Because I more believe in me”.

Conclusion

The paper introduced the online course *Online English for International Mobilities* and the ways in which it was designed to support autonomy in DHH learners. DHH learners seem to be reluctant to adopt responsibility for their learning and often navigate their learning journey independently. One of the factors that seems to play a role in the development of dependent learning styles is the above cited highly structured and unchallenging teaching style that is typical for education of DHH learners coupled with low expectations from teachers (Kahn, et al. 2013; Spencer & Marschark, 2010). The learning styles of students in higher education and

adult learners are based on their previous educational experiences. As, for example, Henri and colleagues found in their study: “Variation in autonomy between individual (university) learners is highlighted by the fact that levels of autonomy and engagement of first-year undergraduates tend to reflect learning approaches taken during secondary education” (2018, p. 508). Naturally, any later changes in learning styles need enough time, a supportive environment, and appropriate materials if they are expected to be permanent. The course *Online English for International Mobilities* constitutes an attempt to contribute to the change. Its design and objectives were awarded by the European Language Label, an award for high-quality innovative projects in the field of language education, in 2020⁵.

The course was developed as part of a larger project focused on the language education of DHH learners, LangSkills (2021-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000023473). The project also included, for example, the organization of summer schools for DHH students which provided space for development and use of the English language as a shared means of communication. Such short term mobilities are beneficial for DHH students for many reasons. Firstly, they present a chance for DHH learners to meet their international peers. Secondly, they constitute a strong motivation for language learning. And thirdly, they provide a chance to test learners’ skills in the abilities necessary for a study stay abroad in a safe environment. The experience of success is a very strong motivational factor: “Experiences such as exchange visits, participation in international conferences, trips abroad and other forms of social contact across national boundaries offer great potential for boosting self-esteem in D/HH students and increasing their motivation” (Domagała-Zyśk & Podlewska, 2019, p. 171).

The successful LangSkills project is followed by LangSkills 2 (2021-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000023473), where the focus lies even more on the development of learning strategies and self-regulation abilities in DHH language learners.

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⁵ More about the European Language Label Award here: [European language initiatives | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](#). Winning projects in 2020: [Seven Schools Received the European Language Label Award | Dům zahraniční spolupráce \(dzs.cz\)](#).

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Learning Centres for Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity

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Abstract

Learning centres are an extremely effective, flexible and versatile tool for autonomous, self-directive and diversified learning. In learning centres, students make a number of independent decisions not only about the content of their learning but also its processes. Learning centres then offer manifold ways in which learners learn to regulate and take responsibility for their own learning. The teacher then has more capacity to monitor the class and provide support to the students individually. Learning centres are conventionally associated with preschool and elementary school education. This paper attempts to introduce various ways in which they can be administered in a university setting, share practical experience with implementing them into different learning contexts, and discuss their benefits.

Key words: learning centres, differentiation, learner autonomy, solidarity.

Biodata

Mgr. Lucie Podroužková, Ph.D. has had over 20 years of teaching experience in a university setting but also in primary and secondary school contexts. Since 2001, she has been teaching at the Department of English Language and Literature, the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno. She has also been a visiting instructor at McLennan Community College, Waco, Texas. Both her academic and personal interests revolve around reading, literacy and education.

Where changes fear to tread: teaching in Czech universities

In Czech universities, even younger members of faculty tend to be products of and replicate teaching styles that focus on knowledge and frontal instruction. This can be attributed to several factors, one of them being the residue of traditional schooling inherited from the Hapsburgian educational system. Another may be the belief that university teachers should be experts first and teachers second. Finally, there is the somewhat automatic assumption that by the time students arrive at university, they already are autonomous learners, equipped with proficient study skills and sturdy study habits. In lieu of this logic, university instructors focus on what is *taught* and only verify what is *learnt* via summative assessment, such as end-of-semester exams.

Although the course design, course aims and outcomes are the responsibility of each individual teacher, university programmes are determined by accreditation conditions which still heavily emphasize content and input over discussion, reflection, and application (see e. g. Hoffmanová, 2022; Malach & Vichterová, 2018; Prudký, Pabian & Šíma, 2010; Šebková, 2008; and Vašutová, 2002). It is then a paradox that, although a high level of autonomy is expected from university students, many of the assignments and tasks they are asked to perform rank among lower order thinking skills. Most specifically, students should “remember” and, ideally, “understand”. Understanding is achieved, many believe, through explanation (Čejková, 2016; Vašutová, 2005). The teacher’s ambition, therefore, is to explain well enough for the students to understand. This, logically, justifies the predominance of frontal teaching in Czech universities, which at best follows the presentation – production – practice (PPP) pattern but more often materializes as PP, i.e., presentation (lecture) and production (exam). At the same time, and again paradoxically, it explains why teaching at universities, the self-professed platforms of innovation, tends to be rather conservative.

The perception of the university instructor as essentially a lecturer, though not wrong per se, is a product of a narrow concept of learning which prioritizes logical mathematical

intelligence over other learning styles and knowledge over skills. This approach may have worked in the past when universities were rather exclusive bastions of higher learning whose nature was inherently competitive. With the democratization of education, however, and a funding policy where student enrolment is a decisive factor in the university budget, this learning philosophy seems no longer tenable. It is more than evident and, in fact, good news that the current incoming students represent a far more heterogeneous group of learners.

Universities have reacted to these new educational trends by broadening the curriculum via attempting to integrate real-life skills into academic programmes on offer (Matějů, Zlatuška & Bartoš, 2011). In practice, however, this often translates into more demands on the teachers, with more outcomes to be achieved and more varied expectations to be met in their courses. As a result, it is rather easy to design a course with an “overflowing” syllabus.

Such is the structural establishment of university degree programmes that even those instructors, such as language teachers, who realize learning is a more complex process than the straightforward “teacher imparts knowledge – student acquires knowledge” model would have it, must, to a large degree, compromise their teaching philosophies and strategies. Ultimately, the teacher is faced with a dilemma as to what to prioritize while being consistent with the programme aims and outcomes and securing the students’ success at the final state examination.

Where then and how can a university course leave space for student autonomy other than via a huge amount of homework and self-study? This article proposes that learning centres represent one possible answer.

Here we go round the mulberry bush: learning centres in pre- and primary education

Learning centres, sometimes referred to as learning stations (e.g. Cheyney & Strichart, 1981; Nakamura & Baptiste, 2006; Pho et al., 2020) are a notion formulated for and largely discussed in the framework of preschool and elementary education. In the world of college education, however, learning centres usually connote a very different concept. They are a form of on-campus student services, a department that provides academic support, usually via individual tutoring and additional learning resources: “A learning center is an amalgamation of four services: library, audio-visual service, non-traditional learning activities (including tutoring), and instructional development service” (Peterson, as cited in Truschel & Reedy, 2009, p. 10).

In the classroom context, learning centres are described as “designated areas of the classroom or arranged ‘stations’” (Baker, 2008; Cheyney & Strichart, 1981; Nakamura & Baptiste, 2006) which offer a variety of materials, activities, assignments and learning tools. According to another definition, they are “small group or individual activities set up to enhance learning about a specific topic” (Olson et al., 2021, p. 124). Their goal, then, is to “practice, enrich, reteach, and enhance” (Gupta, 2022, Description) the pupils’ learning. There are various approaches as to the number, arrangement and content of learning centres but the underlying principle of all learning centres is that they allow learners to work both individually and collaboratively “by accomplishing activities given an allotted amount of time and rotating to the next center after they have each completed a task” (Cox, 2019, para. 1).

As Baker (2008) explains, learning centres became a frequent practice in schools in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s (p. 22). Many studies followed, by e.g. Cheyney & Strichart (1981), Cooper (1981), Espiritu & Loughrey (1985), Hainen (1977), Kenny (1989), Myers & Maurer (1987) and Strickland & Morrow (1988). After a relative decline, there now seems to be a resurgence of learning centres, as seen in the vast number of headwords related to online teacher resource materials, articles, and courses dealing with learning centres. Recent research comes especially from the realm of preschool education (e. g. Aktulun & Kiziltepe, 2018; Bottini & Grossman, 2005), or addresses the use of learning centres in a particular subject domain, e.g. science (Brown & Boehringer, 2007; Chessin, 2007; Nakamura & Baptiste, 2006;

Vincent, Cassel & Milligan, 2008; Wood, 2005) or music education (Baker, 2008); Casey, 2005; Devaney, 2005; Turner, 1999); a particular target group, e.g. gifted and talented pupils (Snowden & Christian, 1998) or, for example, in Montessori education (Copeland, 2005).

One of the reasons why learning centres are typically applied in and associated with preschool and elementary education is that they have been understood as specific work stations around the classroom equipped according to the type of activity done in them (e.g. Brown & Boehringer, 2007; Casey, 2005; Chessin, 2007; Copeland, 2005; Devaney, 2005; Kenney, 1989; Martin, Stork & Sander, 1998; Myers & Maurer, 1987; Nakamura & Baptiste, 2006; Snowden & Christian, 1998; Strickland & Morrow, 1988; Turner, 1999; Vincent, Cassel & Milligan, 2008; and Wood, 2005). This setup, of course, poses challenges in the university environment where no home classrooms or even classrooms in the traditional sense exist. The circular movement, in which students move from centre to centre in pursuit of a particular task or activity, can be difficult due to purely spatial constraints. True as all this may be, this paper proposes that the advantages and benefits of learning centres outweigh these challenges by far, and their potential in tertiary education should thus be keenly explored.

The benefits of learning centres: I true D-I-Y

Learning centres, Baker (2008) argues, place learners “at the centre of the learning” (p. 23). In them, “the student is foregrounded as an active participant in the individualised learning process” (Baker, 2008, p. 23). The very concept of learning centres presumes independent and self-directed learning so much so that “to use learning centres effectively children need to be self-directed and able to work by themselves or in a small group without constant supervision” (Russell-Bowie, 2015, p. 38). Learning centres are “self-checking and self-selecting” (Osowski, 2014, p. 3). Thus, they do not only encourage but are in fact an exercise in autonomous learning.

Learner autonomy is, according to Holec, “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (as cited in Najeeb, 2013, p. 1239) and learn independently without the teacher’s control. In a lesson based on learning centres, the teacher is in charge of preparing the centres and managing the lesson’s framework, but it is the learner who takes responsibility for their own personal and “self-regulated” (Benson and Voller, 1997, as cited in Najeeb, 2013, p. 1239) learning.

According to Najeeb, “learner independence demands learner involvement, and such involvement may lead to a deeper and better learning” (p. 1238). Learning centres help make “learning as self-conscious, deliberate” (Eraut et al., 2000, p. 232). Autonomous learners “take a pro-active approach to the learning process” (Thanasoulas, 2000, What is Autonomy?), which is the very premise of learning centres. For passive learners, learning centres simply do not work at all.

Learning centres are also extremely handy for heterogeneous classes because, although rather demanding on teacher preparation prior to the class, they free the teacher’s hands during the class itself, which allows time for monitoring, supporting individual learners or helping weaker pupils. In other words, the setup of the learning centres allows the class to run itself, while respecting individual learning styles, study pace, interests and day-to-day preferences.

Learning centres are not limited to the acquisition of academic knowledge or even practical skills. Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu (2006) state that learning centres involve “a range of open-ended, multi-level, problem-solving activities” (in Baker, 2008, p. 24). According to Barry and King, by working in learning centres, students “develop better understanding of self, and do develop decision-making capabilities in a way which normally is not available to them in the typical organisation and teaching/learning of classrooms without learning centres” (1994, p. 514). In other words, students exercise an array of different skills, including management and self-management. Learning centres require students to make decisions not only before they start working in them but also throughout. For example, a student

may begin on their own in one centre but proceed to join group work in another. The students can, so to say, “bounce off” the activities and each other.

“I hope someday you'll join us”⁶: social skills and learning centres

Learning centres create a more natural learning environment as, in positioning learners so that they face each other, they allow students to acknowledge each other and their learning processes. In fact, they are more reminiscent of real-life work situations which typically alternate between independent and team work. Even if students decide to work on their own, the learning centre setup ensures that they do not learn in “isolated capsules” (Robinson, 2018, Competition and Collaboration). Eraut et al. (2000) distinguish between so-called “codified knowledge” and personal knowledge where personal knowledge is “more satisfactory” because it derives from “a personal process” which occurs in multi-layered social contexts” (p. 233). Learning centres create platforms for such knowledge and such contexts.

Learning centres are, by definition, cooperative rather than competitive. Often, students find more is achieved by joining forces. From this point of view, too, learning centres nurture social skills, providing situation-types for negotiating, cooperation, fair sharing, trustworthiness and considerateness. These are, according to Lindenberg (as cited in Laitinen, 2014), elements of solidarity.

Types of learning centres and their procedures

Learning centres can be used in a number of different ways and with varying amounts of teacher support, from a high degree of supervision to learning centres which are not only executed but also planned by the students themselves. Myers and Maurer (1987) classify learning centres “according to a continuum of student responsibility, from (i) self-directing/self-correcting, (ii) self-directing/ open-ended, to (iii) teacher instructed/exploratory” (as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 23). Similarly, Snowden and Christian (1998) level learning centres from teacher-planned/teacher-directed through to student-planned/student-directed learning centres (p. 36). Vojková and Collins (2010) divide learning centres into supervised and independent, and timed and time-unlimited learning centres (Různé typy center).

When planning learning centres, the teacher typically decides on 1) the number of learning centres, 2) their content, 3) the time spent in each learning centre, and 4) optionality. Learning centres can take up the whole lesson or only part of it, e.g. 20 minutes at its start (to include revision, homework check and warm-up) or finish (for summary, extension or follow-up exercises). An EFL lesson organized around learning centres may include, for example, a grammar centre, a reading centre, a discussion centre, a writing centre and a presentation centre.

Timed learning centres are *rotating* centres in which a concrete time limit is allotted for each centre. When the time is up, the learners move to the next centre. Untimed or time-unlimited learning centres allow students to decide how long they want to spend in a particular centre. This means a student may go through any number of the centres or stay in one only. If suitable, certain conditions may be imposed (e.g. students need to complete at least two of the five learning centres).

In teacher-planned learning centres students work with materials and complete tasks and activities prepared by the teacher. There can be one task per centre but typically a variety of learning material is provided. This enables faster students to challenge themselves but also, and even more importantly, it allows students to make choices. It is also useful to combine different types of tasks that would, so to say, move up and down Bloom’s levels of learning.

In self-directed or independent centres, it is students themselves who decide on the content and the procedures of learning. This may work through assigning a particular student

⁶ from “Imagine” by John Lennon.

to be responsible for a particular centre prior to the lesson, or via role division in the instruction sheet (e.g. task manager, timekeeper, note taker, encourager and questioner) or left to spontaneous decision making of the students in the centre.

The teacher can also determine if students move from centre to centre as a group, in pairs or individually. Gradually, students should have a choice in this matter, too, to see how they learn best and to cater to their day-to-day needs.

Assigning no time limit for individual learning centres and giving the pupils the options to choose which learning centres they want to visit gives them the opportunity to make independent choices and respects their individual pace and learning style. Instructions for such a procedure may look as follows:

We will now spend 20 minutes in learning centres.

There are 4 different learning centres (the teacher may walk the learners through them to introduce each centre).

Decide if you want to work on your own, in a pair or join one particular learning centre group.

It is up to you how much time you want to spend in each centre and how many you want to visit.

The teacher's role is to monitor and assist whenever necessary. Sometimes, the teacher is in charge of one of the centres, either leading an activity or to offer individual consultations.

Learning centres as a sustainable method of learning

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 caused teachers to switch almost instantly to distant learning and adapt their teaching accordingly. Many faced the challenge of how to engage their learners and how to teach interactively online. To some, the gap and barrier created by the computer screens seemed hard to bridge. Learning centres have proven sustainable even under these novel circumstances. Physical learning stations have simply transformed into breakout rooms in which collaborative and diversified learning continues to happen. It has been the experience of many teachers in the Czech Republic that students used to autonomous work in learning centres did not experience such a radical slump in their work ethic as those students used to constant teacher supervision.

By providing a wide scope of learning material in the learning centres, the teacher does not have to compromise his/her syllabus. On the contrary, the course becomes richer, more inclusive and more engaging. The teacher creates learning opportunities; it is the students who determine their learning priorities and navigate their learning. In the tertiary education sphere, it is more than apt that learners can contribute to the course execution and influence their learning outcomes. By personalizing their learning, the students become empowered and thus, more motivated and engaged in the learning process.

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Participatory pedagogy in training future translators

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Abstract

Enhancing translator training through project-based learning (PBL), seems to meet diverse challenges posited by a professional work environment. Professional translators are expected to work swiftly, indulge seamlessly in teamwork, accept different roles (i.e. translator, editor, project manager, etc.), translate with the help of diverse CAT tools (computer assisted translation tools) and resort to machine translation and post-editing where necessary. PBL may well help in developing desirable traits in students of translation studies. It may well be the case that by anchoring the educational process in a constructivist approach and combining theory with practice, i.e. academic instruction with a professional work environment and theoretical research with praxis, facilitates optimization of the training process and radically enhances student involvement within instruction at the university level. This paper, based on the framework advocated by Dan Kiraly (2000, 2005, 2012), Li and others (2015), argues that group projects (translation of books for publishers), translation and localization of computer games in accordance with market specifications and production of audio-descriptions of films for visually impaired persons, which were introduced into the curriculum of translation studies at the University of Gdańsk, have proved to be particularly valuable as elements of obligatory and optional courses as well as student research projects.

Biodata

Olga Kubinska is Chair of the Translation Studies Department in the English Division at the Institute of English and American Studies. Recently, she co-edited (with Wojciech Kubiński and Maciej Kur) (2021): *Dydaktyka przekładu — nauczanie przez projekty* [Didactics of Translation through project-based learning], University of Gdansk Press. She co-authored, together with Wojciech Kubinski, “Good and bad utopianism in contemporary Holocaust film” (2021) in *Opalescent worlds: Studies in utopia*. Ed. by J. Galant i A.S. Kowalczyk (pp.183-195), University of Maria Skłodowska-Curie Press.

Keywords: participatory pedagogy, project-based learning, translation studies

I. Methodological premises

Translator training requires not only achieving familiarity with the terminology of a particular domain but also mastering skills in handling available computer assisted translation tools using translation memories and achieving proficiency in teamwork, correction and self-correction. The essence of training involves approaches worked out by social constructivism to the educational process, the principles of project-based learning and proposals advanced within dialogue pedagogy. Translator training has been subjected to dynamic change due to, on the one hand, the swift development of translation studies and translator training pedagogy and, on the other hand, the equally swift development of challenges which translators must cope with on the translation market. Emphasis on the practical aspects of academic training, for instance, combining of the curriculum of translation studies with the acquisition of skills advantageous on the translation market, has been postulated by the European Master in Translation program, voiced on the market itself and advocated by academic researchers within the field. Such a change will require constant adjustment of the educational curriculum to the market requirements as well as expectations of the students, who see their own future careers as professional translators working either internationally or on the local translation market in translation agencies as in-house translators or as free-lancers functioning on the publication market. Such a practical approach may seem to be self-evident, but its pedagogical dimension

is crucial here. Numerous factors participate in this process: feedback and its effect on the motivation of students; credibility of the instructor both as an educationist and translator; commonality of aims defined for the training process; and finally, the overall aim (practical utility) of the translation project and its ethical dimension. Furthermore, the completion of a translation project presupposes teamwork and, consequently, a variety of functions carried out by individual students during its implementation.

Donald Kiraly, the pioneer of the social constructivist approach to the training of translators, emphasized the effectiveness of such a pedagogy and, particularly, the need to go beyond the confines of academia in the training process (2012). Students, confronted with the practical aspects of their assignments and the possibility of the marketability of the project, seem to be much more motivated and approach the challenge they encounter with a higher degree of maturity. This is not necessarily always the case and would require detailed research, but on the basis of the heretofore concluded group projects at the University of Gdańsk, we may hazard the opinion that group ventures with clearly set market objectives have had a positive impact on students professionally approaching the tasks set before them.

Highly motivated students, endowed with a superior work ethic, may come under mounting pressure to take over tasks from their less committed colleagues. This last aspect could be viewed as a negative phenomenon, since ambitious and conscientious students may consequently be additionally burdened with the necessity to take over responsibilities from their less committed partners engaged in the group project. However, it could also be perceived as a positive phenomenon with a highly educational, pro-market aptitude, since students are required to adopt alternative roles – translators, editors/post-editors, project managers – thus facilitating better understanding of the authentic work environment of professional translators as the backdrop of the traditional school curriculum, reducing the volume of tutor-student interactions. Here, students embrace multifarious roles throughout the project, actively participating in the unification of terminology, creation of translation memories and communication with agents active on the market. They also assume – in varying degrees, depending on the preliminary premises of the project – the role of the instructor, since at any given phase of the project they assess the quality of the translation work, in turn receiving feedback from other team members. The educational significance of group projects is also manifested in the fact that before the students establish their own market-oriented ventures, they learn how to select appropriate collaborators for a joint translation project, working out common ethical norms for their collaboration. They learn individual and joint responsibility for the success of their project, and also recognize the importance of honest (verifiable and verified on the market) assessment and self-assessment.

Archived commentaries and self-commentaries of the project participants abound in critical and self-critical opinions as well as observations about the inadequate commitment of some participants or those who did not keep to the pre-set deadlines. It may be thus suggested that even if project-based learning, tailored to foster authentic cooperation of the translator with the market, may occasionally overwhelm the students, the positive results achieved via its implementation far exceed the drawbacks, promoting: work ethic, assertiveness, learning to put desirable pressure on collaborators and elimination of unethical behaviour patterns in conjunction with stress management and flexibility in adopting new roles within the project. All of these constitute additional arguments for the implementation of project-based learning (PBL). Establishing networks of professional contacts, which leads to a smooth transition to a professional career, is another advantage, since it combines PBL methodology with the idea of professional practice, also required at the BA and MA level of studies at academic institutions.

Results of group projects pursued on a volunteer basis over the past 15 years of educational practice at the Chair of Translation Studies in English and American Studies at the University of Gdańsk argue for the validity of Kiraly's contention that: "[...]learning, the translator's self-

concept and the working environment co-emerge simultaneously through collaborative learning activities” (2012, p. 92). While Kiraly writes about systematized curriculum, the PBL projects developed at the Chair of Translation Studies were, however, supplementary forms/events accompanying an overall curriculum structured along more traditional lines. In the future it would be worthwhile to conduct research to investigate whether the non-obligatory status of these activities had any influence on a.) the level of commitment of the participating students, and b.) the evaluation of the somewhat “bifurcated” curriculum at the BA and MA levels of studies, which attempted to combine traditional translation studies program (including instruction of practical translation skills) where the agenda was not particularly geared to meet market requirements, with PBL projects developed within student research groups outside the standard teaching curriculum *sensu stricto*.

II. Implementation

The aim of the multiple projects undertaken by the Chair of Translation Studies, Institute of English and American Studies, at the University of Gdansk was to enhance translator training through problem-based learning, management in group projects, or group translation for the publishing market. Preliminary assumptions adopted by the trainers could be spelled out as follows:

- a. meeting the challenges posited by a professional work environment by developing desirable traits in students of translation studies at the university level;
- b. anchoring the educational process in a constructivist approach and combining theory with practice, university training with a professional work environment and theoretical research with praxis to facilitate the optimization of the training process and radically enhancing student involvement within instruction at the university level;
- c. following the rule: combine practice with research, but start with the practice, i.e. translation, and then proceed with the research;
- d. a dialogical approach to the educational process, which follows from both the assumptions of dialogic pedagogy and also the pursuit of a common passion of the instructors and the students involved in the work on several projects.

As Defeng Li, Chunling Zhang & Yuanjian He claim that all variants of PBL are student-centred, students are given the freedom to choose their research questions. (Li et al., 2015, p. 3).

It may well be assumed that the development of the conception of Translation Studies at the University of Gdańsk and its consistent implementation by the team of lecturers was based on PBL methods. However, what was at issue was the activation of the creative potential of the lecturers and students engaged in this didactic experiment based on safeguarding broad freedom in decision making and taking personal responsibility for the assorted projects implemented by lecturers, students and doctoral students. This intention was largely successfully fulfilled. For example, within the first fifteen years of its existence, several projects and initiatives were worked out within the Chair for Translation Studies which frequently required cooperation both within the Staff of the Chair and with numerous external agencies in order to simulate a situation in which students could acquire skills useful in their prospective professional careers. Some of these projects also involved the participation of foreign experts within various European programs (cooperation with the DGT). One of the pursued venues was to work via Student Research Groups in the implementation of cooperative learning, collaborative learning, situated learning and peer learning. Biel and Giczela-Pastwa observed that:

The projects, that have been undertaken by the members of the LINGUANA Student Research Group in the last fifteen years, can be regarded as a response of the tertiary education system to the natural human needs of teamwork and autonomy, expressed by the students. From the perspective of fifteen years, it is possible to observe how the focus of the group has shifted from the development of translation competence to the improvement of soft skills. The strong and genuine commitment of the LINGUANA members vividly demonstrates the advantages offered by collaborative learning. (2021, p. 79)

Some of these projects set their target as the publication of the translated text. Hence, the effectiveness of the formula chosen by the team of lecturers using the PBL projects in their work with students was put to a practical test. As Kaszorek noted:

Thus, research activities undertaken by students associated in student organisations, especially student research groups, offer an opportunity to develop their passions and skills and have a direct influence on their academic as well as professional careers. The projects included a comparative analysis of Polish fragments of Saul Friedländer's *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945*, a translation of English last dying speeches from the 16th and 17th centuries with the use of project management system XTM Cloud, a translation of poems by Desmond Graham, [and] translating short stories of contemporary English and Scottish writers (a case of collaboration with Edinburgh Festival). (2021, pp. 63-64)

Other projects undertaken by the members of the LINGUANA Student Research Group involved a localization project. Kur claims that:

The main aim of the project was to teach its participants about the requirements and rules applicable on the localization market through direct contact with a real-world product. The secondary aim was to verify whether it is possible to deliver a product that meets all standards set by the end client by assigning most work related to project organization and management to the students and by limiting the teacher's role to a minimum. (2021, p. 99)

The project – “Translating *Beholder*” - involved management of the translation project and communication with the client. Its most important aspect was a translation quality assessment which would particularly focus on: missing fragments of the translated texts (elements replaced by supplementary symbols); inappropriate fonts (lack of Polish diacritic marks); inappropriately formatted elements (texts either too short or too long or clipped); punctuation errors and linguistic errors (unidentified at the stage of language correction); lack of cohesion in the usage of forms of politeness (forms of address *pan/pani/ty*); logical errors (sequences of unconnected utterances, lack of cohesion in style); lack of cohesion in terminology (two or more terms used for the same single element).

Some projects were practically oriented and enriched the program of students' instruction at the practical level. Some, however, were at least partly continued within research for BA and MA diploma theses. One other area of implementation of PBL projects was audio-description: i.e. several projects that allowed the students to prepare audio-descriptions of motion pictures or their fragments for visually impaired addressees, and, at the same time, investigate the language of emotions. Gorszczyńska claims that thanks to these research projects it was possible to accumulate valuable data on the interactions between the described

images and the addressees (cf. Gorszczyńska 2021, p. 129). Gorszczyńska further states that the project followed the principles set by:

[...] PMBOK® Guide as developed by the American Project Management Institute. Among the documents used particularly notable was the project card. It contained information grouped in accordance with the following headings: the number of [issuance] of the card, history of the changes in the document, information about the project (project name, [start date], planned [end date], initiator, budget, description of the project: its objective, initial declaration of the project's range, the client(s) and their needs, the addressee(s) and their needs, circumstances, limitations and premises, main participants of the project structure (managing committee, project team, range of responsibilities and licenses of the project manager), communication on the status of the realization of the project (internal and external), milestones of the project, main risks connected with the project, links with other projects and timetable. (Gorszczyńska 2021, p. 132)

Furthermore, some students involved earlier in the project decided to write their MA thesis on audio-description. Consequently, practical experience acquired during work done within student projects had been transposed into research material. As a result, several MA theses were produced in which the authors compared the reception of audio-descriptions prepared in accordance with alternative formats proposed by researchers. Students not only contrived the audio-descriptions but also carried out questionnaire research conducted among the addressees, who could assess the quality of the individually prepared audio material. The students could thereby identify the needs of the addressees, where the skopos, i.e. the aim of the translation, was defined by the addressees with visual impairments, i.e. addressees requiring special competence and empathy. Consequently, this allowed for highlighting the enhanced ethical dimension of the efforts of the translators.

Finally, an ideal case of participatory education in higher education institutions combines translation, research and publication. BA and MA seminars offered at the Chair of Translation Studies by professor Artur Blaim on utopia writings have taken for granted a combination of research on utopia in English language texts with translation options available in the translation of these, often archaic, texts into Polish. This allowed for the development of a series of publications titled *Bibliotheca Utopiana* published by the University of Gdańsk Press, in which the best student translations could be published. The editors of the series, Artur Blaim and Olga Kubińska, are both specialists in Early Modern English Literature. Another effect of the project is the participation of a group of students and graduates in a Polish government grant from The National Programme for the Development of Humanities (NPRH) project called "The Canon of World Utopian Literature in Polish Translation", which features translations produced within the seminars. This seems to constitute a particularly valuable mode of combining academic studies with practice, since it facilitates both an academic degree and, in the case of the best students, publication of the translations by an acknowledged academic publisher, which provides additional motivation for earnest effort on the part of the students and improves the chances of the aspiring translators on the market.

III. Conclusions

The framework advocated by Kiraly (2005, 2012), Li and others (2015), argues that group projects, such as translation of books for publishers, translation and localization of computer games in accordance with market specifications and production of audio-descriptions of films for visually impaired persons, offered to students of translation studies at the University of Gdańsk, have proved to be particularly valuable as elements of obligatory and optional courses,

as well as of student research projects. Additional confirmation of the validity of PBL in student instruction was receipt of the award of the Rector of the University of Gdansk for the publication of *Dydaktyka przekładu* [Didactics of Translation] which documented perennial work with several cohorts of students within this format, and for exceptional commitment to the consistent implementation of the principles of participatory pedagogy in translator training at the Institute of English and American Studies. At prospective stages of this project it would be worthwhile to undertake research allowing for the comparison of the results of feedback given by peers during work on PBL projects with the feedback provided by the instructor – for it is here that we might look for additional arguments for participatory pedagogy, particularly in the version advocated by Farenga (2021).

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