

## INTRODUCTION

The articles in this monograph issue offer and discuss different aspects of pedagogy for autonomy, that is, both teacher and learner autonomy. This is the second monograph issue of the *RCEI* on pedagogy for autonomy, the first published in 1999, issue 38. At that time, I wrote at the beginning of the introduction that “learner autonomy has developed into a central concept in foreign language learning in recent decades” (9). Eleven years on, both teacher and learner autonomy have continued to develop and become more well known due, in part, to the European Union’s *Common European Framework of Reference* as well as specific national curricula explicitly including learner autonomy in their agendas. Furthermore, more and more has been published (see the reference sections at the end of each article here), more conferences are held dedicated specifically to pedagogy for autonomy, international language teacher associations have special interest groups dedicated to this area, working groups have been formed and continue to collaborate to share the ways they are working with their students, etc. To mention just one of the latter, the GT-PA (Grupo de Trabalho-Pedagogia para a Autonomia) is a learning community created in 1997 as a “small network aiming at the collaborative development of its members by exploring the idea(l) of a pedagogy for autonomy within the school context.” (Vieira 2).

One difference to be noted between the two editions of the journal from that time to this, and which, I believe, points to a change from 1999 to 2010 is the fact that more of the articles here report on work being done *in* classrooms rather than articles about what we mean by teacher and learner autonomy and how they can be put into practice. It’s not that the theoretical work is not important or necessary; however it also important to hear the voices of those who are trying to put pedagogy for autonomy into practice in their differing and specific contexts. One unifying theme among all the contributions here is expressed by Isabel Barbosa when she writes that “inquiry is at the heart of pedagogy and professional development.”<sup>1</sup>

Three of the seven papers here do not directly give an account of work with language students in a classroom context but at the same time are all related to work with classroom teachers. In the lead article, Flávia Vieira describes one aspect of her work as a teacher educator, in this case with in-service teachers in a post-graduate course using a case-based approach to pedagogical inquiry with them, stating that the teachers’ “active participation in self-questioning and self-evaluation as empowering processes... requires teachers to reject the role of technicians

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<sup>1</sup> Another unifying fact, interestingly, is nearly all the contributors discuss to a greater or lesser degree their use of student portfolios and /or journals.



and assume the role of critical inquirers and constructors of change.” This author here is reflecting on her role as a teacher educator, remarking that teachers must be the intellectual agents of changes that take place in schools.

In the second article in this issue, Joan Rubin also writes from the perspective of the teacher educator, in this case, doing work with teachers through in-service courses on learner self-management in a learner centred perspective. She focuses here on the challenges teachers face when they try to put learner self-management and a learner centred perspective into practice with their students and the challenges the teacher educator faces while doing in-service work helping teachers to move towards a more learner centred approach. This author notes that “teachers often bring a great deal of cognitive baggage that can impede or slow down their ability and willingness to consider a more learner-centered perspective.” and explains teaching strategies she uses that can help teachers begin to consider the values of a learner-centered perspective, and to think about possibilities for this in their practice.

In the third article, again not entirely focused on experiences carried out in classrooms with students, Isabel Barbosa gives an account of her *own* development as a teacher involved in learner and teacher autonomy, from the time when she joined a course aimed at developing teacher and learner autonomy through her move from secondary school to the university and then back again to secondary school. While her aim in this paper is to reflect on the changes taking place in her own view of her role as a teacher, we also see how this evolution takes place not only within herself but working with colleagues and students; it is, at the same time, a both personal and a collaborative trip, another characteristic of pedagogy for autonomy: that it does not occur in isolation. This author also points out that “significant change is never a simple process, as it entails questioning personal beliefs and practices.”

The following four articles of the monograph are written by teachers describing different ways each of them is trying to put learner and teacher autonomy into practice with their students; that is, the articles focus on the work done in their classrooms. Gina Oxbrow and Carolina Rodríguez Juárez write about their investigations into the relation between learner motivation and integrated training in learner strategies, and the influence these have on increasing their learners’ autonomy. They are reporting on partial results of a longitudinal research project on the connections between these elements. Their results show an interesting increase in motivation after working with specific types of learner strategies; they also find that “the relationship between both motivation and learner autonomy is symmetric” because as students gradually acquire greater metacognitive awareness and an increase in learner autonomy, this also serves as a means to motivate them further.

In her article, Lucía García Magaldi focuses our attention on the use of metacognitive strategies, of metacognition as a necessity if we want our learners to become more autonomous of their teachers. She points out that the importance of metacognition is that it is the executive organizer of all the elements which intervene in the whole learning process; furthermore this author enjoins teachers to “accept the fact that learners are capable of metacognition and willing to learn to



use metacognitive strategies and accept responsibility for their learning process” although they obviously need encouragement and help in their work to do so.

María José Coperías Aguilar reports on the concepts of learner and teacher autonomy from a different perspective, that of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Building on the work done by Bryam and others, this author discussed how ICC can support and strengthen our concept of learner autonomy while adding an enriching dimension to it while using portfolios for the students to self-assess the work done. She also emphasises the relationship between learner autonomy and the concept of lifelong learning and “the importance of the foreign language learner as an intercultural speaker.”

In my article, I look at learning management systems in general and one of these, Moodle, in particular, describing/discussing ways in which learner autonomy may or may *not* be increased through using one of these on-line tools. I give an account of two ways I have used the activity of forum on Moodle in different subjects to help students become more responsible for their learning. I also call attention to the fact that we teachers need to learn how to use these systems in order that they do help learners become more autonomous in their learning.

Finally, in accord with the monograph section of this issue, there is also included a review by Susan Cranfield of one of the many books which have come out recently on learner autonomy, *Struggling for Autonomy in Language Education: Reflecting, Acting and Being*. We have here “accounts of personal teaching, learning and research experiences held together by the desire for transformation of educational practice through a critical observation of teaching/learning processes, reflection on implementation and change, and the building of sufficient confidence in our convictions to be able to continue to act, reflect and change in a continued cycle of improvement enhancement and empowerment.”

A common link running through all the papers collected here is a concern for language learners and teachers to find ways to increase their autonomy, taking control of their own learning process. Flávia Vieira, in her article here affirms that a “commitment to a democratic view of society and education implies that only pedagogy for teacher and learner autonomy is acceptable”; I think all the other authors here would agree with this statement as well as with the reasoning that this is one of their motives behind working within a framework of pedagogy for autonomy. I also think that all the authors here would be in accord with Isabel Barbosa’s statement that “Learners must become aware that they are responsible for their learning, and teachers must be prepared to accept that they can no longer control all aspects of classroom life.”

Today I continue to be of the opinion that learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are necessary for improving (language) learning. Furthermore, since working to increase teacher and learner autonomy affects every aspect of the curriculum, each needs to be re-examined. Pedagogy for autonomy is still not as extended as is needed, among other reasons because of the restraints on putting it into practice, some of which are commented within the articles here. Nevertheless, the increase is notable and we need to see how much further we have moved forward in another ten years.



## WORKS CITED

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