Fostering Learner Autonomy through Exam Preparation

Gerardo Valazza
Aims of the Presentation

• To discuss the relationship between learner autonomy, sustainable assessment and exam preparation

• To propose the implementation of a transformation model of learning

• To consider some practical implications for the classroom

• To intrigue teachers to learn more about sustainable assessment and learner autonomy

• To encourage participants to reflect on and question their day-to-day teaching practice
Learner Autonomy
Learner Autonomy

Disbelief!
Understanding and Defining Autonomy

The field of autonomy in language learning has become something of a “secret garden”

Carol J. Everhard, 2015, p. 9
Understanding and Defining Autonomy

“The field of autonomy in language learning has become something of a “secret garden” in the sense that some language teachers apparently remain oblivious to its existence, some are aware of its existence but are unable to see its relevance to their particular teaching situation, some are intrigued by its possibilities, but despite their best efforts they are unable to find either the point of entrance or the key to the “garden”. Then, there are others who believe they have discovered a point of entry to the promotion of autonomy, but find themselves having to contend with a myriad of problems.”

*Everhard, 2015, p. 9*
Understanding and Defining Autonomy

A myriad of problems arising from:

a) the learners themselves and their preconceptions
b) colleagues with different perceptions of their role as teachers
c) management
d) other stakeholders
e) the curriculum and the system of assessment imposed
f) finding ways to justify its promotion through tangible scales of measurement

Everhard, 2015, p. 9
A Wide Array of Definitions

• “A philosophy for learning” (Henner-Stanchina & Riley 1978)
• “A fundamental behavioural capacity” (Little 1995)
• “The ability to manage one’s own learning” (Holec 1981)
• “This ability is learnt through knowing how to make decisions about the self as well as being allowed to make those decisions” (Macaro 1997)
• “A composite of abilities, attitudes or dispositions” (Benson 2009)

Everhard, 2015, p. 10-11
Autonomy is Multidimensional

- Motivation
- Self-esteem
- Strategies
- Self-efficacy
- Identity
- Self-direction
- Agency
- Self-regulation
- Affect
- Self-determination
Degrees of Autonomy

“It is very useful to think in terms of **degrees of autonomy**. Conceptualizing autonomy in this way helps clarify that autonomy is **not something fixed or static**, but is **constantly changing and fluctuating** depending on the activity being pursued, the way it is being pursued and the amount of guidance from the teacher or advisor, from peers and from the technology or materials being used, whether learning is in a classroom context, using self-access resources or at a distance.”

*Everhard, 2015, p. 12*
Degrees of Autonomy

**Heteronomy**
Ruled or regulated by others

**Autonomy**
Ruled or regulated by oneself

*Writing Skills*

*Listening Skills*
Assessment
“Language learning is often subject to assessment regimes that are inimical to learner autonomy.”

“Once an assessment system has been put in place, there is a natural tendency for decisions about curriculum, syllabus and lesson planning, and even the day-to-day practices of teaching and learning, to be ‘reversed-engineered’ so as to produce positive student outcomes within the system.”

“Under these circumstances, it is tempting simply to complain about assessment.”

Benson in Everhard, 2015, p. viii
Language Learning and Assessment

“The alternative is to consider different kinds of assessment, which is largely the solution offered in this book.”

**Summative:**
Assessment of learning

**Formative:**
Assessment for learning

“Advocates of learner autonomy can, perhaps, add to the idea of formative assessment for learning that of greater learner involvement in assessment in the role of assessors.”

*Benson in Everhard, 2015, p. viii*
Learner Involvement in Assessment

“In my experience, teachers often object to self- and peer-assessment, arguing that students’ assessments are apt to be inaccurate and that learners generally prefer to be assessed by teachers. To some degree, however, this misses the point that the process is more important than the product.”

Benson in Everhard, 2015, p. x
“Authentic assessment practices may involve the learner in peer assessment, but particularly in self-assessment, which leads to the awakening and exploitation of inner resources that can be sustained from one task to the next. Such activities are authentic in the sense that they are personally meaningful and can be activated throughout a lifetime of learning and living in a wider community. This is what is also referred to as sustainable assessment, or assessment as learning.”

Benson in Everhard, 2015, p. 17
Sustainable Assessment

“It moves beyond the summative to the formative, beyond the teacher-centred to the learner-centred and away from learning which perpetuates dependence on others and a state of heteronomy to learning which promotes cooperative interdependence, relatedness (or affiliation), autonomy and, consequently, enduring and sustainable lifelong learning skills.”

Benson in Everhard, 2015, p. 17
Three Approaches to Learning and Teaching

Transmission

Transaction

Transformation

Benson in Everhard, 2015, p. 19
# Three Approaches to Learning and Teaching: Power and Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission approach</th>
<th>Transaction approach</th>
<th>Transformation approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution or teachers determine syllabus as well as pace, mode and style of instruction</td>
<td>Student-centred; shared control; cooperation among peers; scaffolding</td>
<td>Community of learners; emphasis on learners who establish own goals and targets and choose own materials and pace of learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Three Approaches to Learning and Teaching: Learners and Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission approach</th>
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<th>Transformation approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive recipient of information; transfer of knowledge from teacher to learners; focus on content and product</td>
<td>Negotiation with teacher and other learners; shared ownership, responsibility and development of learning plan</td>
<td>Active participation in cooperative groups; emphasis on process; learning skills, self-enquiry, strategic learning, social and communication skills; meaning-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Three Approaches to Learning and Teaching: Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission approach</th>
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<th>Transformation approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summative; product-oriented; achievement testing; criterion-referencing</td>
<td>Formative or collaborative assessment; internalization of feedback; transparency of criteria, which may be selected by learners</td>
<td>Sustainable; process-oriented: reflection on process, self-assessment and peer assessment; personal monitoring; criterion-referencing; feedforward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three Approaches to Learning and Teaching: Overall Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission approach</th>
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<th>Transformation approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulation by others; dependence on authoritative and more knowledgeable others</td>
<td>Sharing of regulation; mutual guidance and direction; cooperation</td>
<td>Self-regulation; higher order thinking skills; self-knowledge; use of internal and external resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do you feel?
Today Was a Fairytale
Implications for the Classroom
Greater Learner Involvement in Assessment

REMEMBER THAT:
“If assessment regimes close down opportunities for decision-making in the classroom, learner involvement in assessment may be one way of opening them up again.”
Using Assessment Scales

Cambridge English: First for Schools Speaking Examiners use a more detailed version of the following assessment scales, extracted from the overall Speaking scales on page 83.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Grammar and Vocabulary</th>
<th>Discourse Management</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Interactive Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shows a good degree of control of a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on a wide range of familiar topics.</td>
<td>Produces extended stretches of language with very little hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is a clear organisation of ideas. Uses a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers.</td>
<td>Is intelligible. Intonation is appropriate. Sentence and word stress is accurately placed. Individual sounds are articulated clearly.</td>
<td>Initiates and responds appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on a range of familiar topics.</td>
<td>Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is very little repetition. Uses a range of cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Is intelligible. Intonation is generally appropriate. Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed. Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly.</td>
<td>Initiates and responds appropriately. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations.</td>
<td>Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. Contributions are mostly relevant, despite some repetition. Uses basic cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.</td>
<td>Initiates and responds appropriately. Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</td>
<td>Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is very little repetition. Uses a range of cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Is intelligible. Intonation is generally appropriate. Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed. Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly.</td>
<td>Initiates and responds appropriately. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations.</td>
<td>Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. Contributions are mostly relevant, despite some repetition. Uses basic cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.</td>
<td>Initiates and responds appropriately. Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Performance below Band 1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cambridge English TV Channel in YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeenglishtv
Using Assessment Scales

Question 3

Now look at these descriptions of each assessment area. Can you match them with the areas? The first one is done for you.

**Content**
focuses on the way the text is organised; for example, is the information presented coherently and are the ideas connected with cohesive devices or linking words?

**Communicative Achievement**
focuses on how appropriate the writing is in terms of genre; for example, what sort of text do you have to produce – a letter, a report, a review, an essay? Each one requires a different format and has a different function.

**Organisation**
focuses on vocabulary and grammar; for example, how accurate is the text and is there a range of complex and simple structures and vocabulary?

**Language**
focuses on how well the task has been completed; for example, has all the important information been included in the piece of writing?

Using Assessment Scales

http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/resources-for-teachers/
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https://sat.ilexir.co.uk/
https://youtu.be/oO9lE2p8mPw (video)
Concluding Remarks

“As teachers and language advisors, we need to be aware of the means that are available to harness the positive power that assessment can hold for language learning, if used appropriately.”

“This necessarily implies much greater learner involvement and the need for greater assessment literacy on the part of both teachers and learners.”

“With this comes a recalibration of assessment power and a pendulum-swing away from more summative assessment approaches towards a focus on more formative assessment and more sustainable forms of assessment, with the joint aims of promoting more effective learning and greater autonomy in our learners.”
Concluding Remarks

Self-assessment is just the beginning of the journey ...
Concluding Remarks

- Tracking learning
- Evaluating progress
- Measuring development
- Choosing & using resources
- Spotlighting strategies
- Developing a learning plan
- Starting with expectations
- Goal-setting & Diagnostics

Morrison & Navarro, 2014
Concluding Remarks

An Expert Teacher:

Has a detailed understanding of assessment principles and different types of assessment, has a thorough understanding of different levels, and also clearly understands the role of external exams in the wider world.

Concluding Remarks

An Expert Teacher:

**Consistently reflects critically on teaching, regularly taking action as a result**, and actively seeks feedback from a range of sources, is **highly aware of their own beliefs about teaching and learning, recognises areas where there is a mismatch between their own beliefs and good practice, and has a good understanding of the theoretical rationale for their pedagogical decisions**.

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Every journey begins with the first step.

Thank You