ENHANCING METACOGNITION IN SELF-DIRECTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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In recent years, learner training has been undertaken in many programmes aiming to achieve learners' autonomy. Quite often, however, this training has only focused on the teaching of tactics and strategies, overlooking other important factors such as students' attitude towards autonomy, beliefs and expectations about language learning and teaching, personal needs and objectives, learning styles and self-evaluation. One of the premises of any self-directed programme, we believe, should be that of enhancing students' metacognition to prepare them for approaching their own learning autonomy. Such a programme should involve cyclic diagnosis of learners' beliefs about language learning, preferred styles, learning needs and objectives in order to endow the learners with criteria for choosing optimum strategies, resources and activities for their individualized programmes. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to highlight the unifying role of metacognition in all levels of learner training. This paper describes an application of this principle including two examples in which the counsellors have made extensive use of this principle. Finally, we suggest some resulting pedagogical implications and several areas for future directions.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of second language learning, autonomy has been defined as the ability to take responsibility for one's learning (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987). This ability, however, is not innate in individuals, who are often helped in pursuing this end by learner training.

The several components of learner training have been pinpointed in studies on the good language learner (Rubin, 1975; Naiman and Frohlich and Stern, 1975), learning strategies (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1987, 1991; Oxford, 1990), self-directed learning (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987) together with research and practice from other disciplines such as general education and psychology. Accordingly, learner training should help the learner develop a self-directed learning approach whereby he can eventually set his own needs and objectives; choose materials and resources in accordance with his goals; and monitor and evaluate his own progress over time (Metacognitive strategies).

Likewise, such training should expose learners to a range of strategies that allow them to handle different task types and learning situations efficiently and with confidence (cognitive strategies).
Finally, a number of researchers (Rubin, 1989; Brookfield, 1985; Wenden, 1987; 1993; Horowitz, 1985; Victori, 1992) also highlight the importance of dealing with the students' attitudes towards and knowledge about language learning so that they can learn about their own learning styles and preferences as well as about their beliefs and expectations about language learning (metacognitive knowledge).

While each of the three mentioned areas plays an unquestionable role in learner training, few of the current applications of such training take metacognitive knowledge into account. In the classroom, the application of learner training often focuses exclusively on learning strategies. Students are often induced to use strategies (usually cognitive strategies) without receiving any rationale as to why it might be helpful to use them (Turner, 1989; Campione, 1987). Moreover, task knowledge is rarely considered although this is decisive in guiding their choice of strategies (Wenden, 1991, 1993).

In self access centres, it is also common practice to give little consideration to students' metacognitive knowledge. Most learners in institutions with self-access centres receive little or no counselling in self-directed language learning (SDLL), other than basic information on navigating the centre. Thus, it is not surprising that learners perceive self-access centres as a resource for materials (e.g. grammar texts, novels, videos and computers) rather than as a place where they can fully develop their language learning skills and one which can provide them with an individualized learning plan.

Furthermore, since students are not usually prepared to assume responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981; Wenden, 1987; Dickinson, 1987), when they come to the self-access centre, they are faced with an unusual situation, with which they cannot cope. Consequently, not being able to handle this new and autonomous learning “model”, after a trial period they eventually withdraw from the self-access centre. Finally, all too often students develop wrong beliefs about the usefulness of using certain materials or doing certain tasks, or else they approach a task in the most time-consuming and ineffective way. All of this seems to suggest that some kind of metacognitive training or "psychological preparation," as Holec (1981) calls it, is necessary.

All in all, one of the main problems with learner training provided in self-access centres, is that what the students themselves bring to the learning task, i.e. their metacognitive knowledge, is ignored. The purpose of this paper, is, therefore, to highlight the importance that enhancing students’ metacognitive knowledge has for promoting autonomy, and to describe one application of learner training which attempts to take into account metacognitive knowledge as well as all the other dimensions of learner training described above.

**METACOGNITION: AN AREA FREQUENTLY SLIGHTED**

What a person believes about his or her cognitive processes has been referred to as metacognitive knowledge. Applied to second language learning, metacognitive knowledge refers to the general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature of language learning and teaching.

Only recently has metacognitive knowledge begun to receive attention in second language research. A number of these studies have pointed out that the way in which learners perceive language learning may have a significant impact on their learning outcomes (e.g. Reid and
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Hresko, 1982; Weinert and Kluwe, 1987). According to these findings, successful learners develop insightful beliefs about language learning processes, their own abilities and the use of effective strategies that may compensate for possible weaknesses (Anstey, 1988). This, in turn, has a facilitating effect on students’ learning, for they see themselves as initiators of their own learning and it helps them to rely on their own potential as good language learners. Needless to say, these students tend to develop a more active, and thus, autonomous attitude that allows them to take charge of their learning whatever the situation may be.

The opposite effect has been observed when counterproductive beliefs are held by the learner. Some studies have indicated that poor learners often develop negative or limited beliefs about their capacity to perform certain tasks; about the nature, demands and difficulties of learning tasks; and about adequate strategies they may use to compensate for possible deficiencies. These unconstructive thoughts often lead to indifference toward learning, poor cognitive performance (Reid and Hresko, 1982; Anstey, 1988), classroom anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), and, of course, a negative attitude to autonomy. Hence, conclusions derived from these and other studies (Victori, 1992; Wenden, 1987, 1982; Gradman and Hanania, 1992) put forward the need for dealing with these beliefs by enhancing students’ awareness of their personal weaknesses and strengths, as well as of their task and strategic knowledge.

Some studies have also shown that many of the beliefs students hold are naïve. A study conducted by Victori (1992) found that many of the surveyed subjects held beliefs not supported by empirical research. For example, many students believed that one had to be an extrovert, have a fair degree of intelligence, and start learning a language as a child to learn a foreign language successfully. However, as Victori points out, although some advantages have been attributed to these factors (see Ellis, 1985; Van Els et al., 1984), research has also shown advantages in learning if one is an introvert or starts learning as an adult.

The implications of these studies are that if students develop or maintain misconceptions about their own learning, if they attribute undue importance to factors that are external to their own action and do not see themselves as causes of their own learning, they are not likely to adopt a responsible and active attitude in their approach to learning and may never become autonomous. These insights further point to the importance of confronting students’ metacognitive knowledge with real facts in order to modify and reconstruct possible misconceptions they may have (Victori, 1992; Cranstone and Baird, 1988).

In sum, students develop accurate or inaccurate beliefs about how cognitive factors, such as intelligence, attitude, age and motivation influence language learning as well as beliefs about their weaknesses and strengths and their self-concept as learners (person knowledge). They also have some knowledge about the task of language learning, its difficulty and their role in the whole endeavour (task knowledge). Finally, learners develop some ideas about using certain strategies and about their potential effectiveness (strategic knowledge). Learner training should start by considering this knowledge, which students themselves bring to the task of language learning, and help learners modify it if it (their metacognitive knowledge) is potentially impeding their learning and their potential for autonomy.

ONE APPLICATION OF LEARNER TRAINING

Soluciones is a division of Lockart College (LC), which offers a series of language learning services, such as audits, consulting and training programmes, to local industry and to commerce and
public institutions. Soluciones, clients, all busy professionals, tend to demand quick observable results and need very flexible structuring of time.

Described below are the general counselling procedures LC has developed to meet these needs. The counselling, which aims to enhance students’ metacognition, has increased the proportion of students directing their own learning (i.e. using the self-access centre) to those using contact classes. It also permits most learners quickly to observe an increased rate of progress.

Gathering of preliminary data
Prior to designing programmes for the trainees, the following data are gathered for each learner: (i) linguistic proficiency, (ii) linguistic needs and (iii) a profile of feelings, motivation, cognitive style, beliefs and assumptions about language learning.

The first approximation of the learner’s feelings about and motivation for language learning and of his/her cognitive style is gathered with AmbiMoti, an LC-developed, 16-item questionnaire that measures: (i) self-esteem, (ii) degree of motivation, and (iii) tolerance/intolerance of ambiguity in language learning/use situations. To measure students’ metacognitive knowledge a questionnaire is used: ALL (Assumptions about Language Learning). The questionnaire explores the following areas: person (22 items), task (26 items) and strategy knowledge (182 items) ordered according to the taxonomy provided in Table 1.

Table 1. A taxonomy of metacognitive knowledge in language learning *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>TASK KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal attributes of learners</td>
<td>Sociocultural factors</td>
<td>Metacognitive strategies†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>Educational background (prior education, other language)</td>
<td>Cognitive strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Familiar factors†</td>
<td>Learning grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Intraindividual factors</td>
<td>Learning vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>Self-assessment (proficiency learning strengths, problems, weaknesses)</td>
<td>Reading and comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening and comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking and pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning style</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and goal of learning a FL</td>
<td>Learning in different settings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherent difficulty of languages</td>
<td>In the native country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of language learning</td>
<td>In the classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind of learning</td>
<td>Task responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of difficulty</td>
<td>Roles (teacher/student)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time needed to learn</td>
<td>Language of instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of different skills</td>
<td>Working in groups, pairs alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Error treatment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Materials and media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† These categories were not included in the 1992 version of the taxonomy.
The complete version of ALL is almost never administered in full. Rather ad hoc versions are constructed by the counsellor who selects items and modifies instructions according to: (i) task type, (ii) focus of the counselling session (person, task or strategic), and (iii) students' perception of the strategies they most frequently use, those they consider most effective, and those they prefer to use. 6

In addition, the LC Needs Analysis Questionnaire generates an exhaustive list of operational objectives, i.e. objectives regarding how the trainees need to use English in the workplace (e.g. do they converse with a non-native engineer face to face about packaging machinery?) These objectives are later validated by the trainee's immediate supervisor. Subsequently an LC senior staff member analyses the data for each trainee, together with the different measures of their current language proficiency. Then taking into account each one’s ability to restructure his time for language training, a tentative programme is designed for that company.

This programme specifies the probable number of months it will take each learner to meet each operational objective. Besides the counselling sessions and time in the self-access centre, student programmes may include contact classes. These classes vary from one student to another depending on their interests and individualized programmes. Among the possibilities there are:

1. Intensive five-hour courses offered on a daily basis (Monday to Saturday);
2. Base groups at different locations (e.g. the factory, the school);
3. One-to-one interactions.

These classes may also offer learner training, but it will depend on the teacher.

Counselling sessions

Learners are either met individually or paired for counselling sessions, which are generally held twice a month at the beginning of the programme. Counselling procedures depend on the student, his degree of autonomy and his willingness to receive counselling. However, counsellors most often use variations on three basic procedures, which we shall order from the least directive to the most directive:

1. A pair of learners compare their responses on ALL and reflect on the differences.
2. The counsellor questions the learner on some of his responses and offers alternative points of view, if felt necessary.
3. The counsellor provides information aimed at modifying some of the students' limited or unproductive beliefs orally or in the form of a handout. 7

For example, the counsellor may explain some current psycholinguistic model, such as Krashen's monitor theory (1982, 1985) or Ellis' weak interface model (1993) in a non-technical way. 8 The learner is involved during this explanation, especially when parts of the model that deal with concepts for which the learner has declared negative or counterproductive beliefs on ALL are being described. Subsequently, the counsellor will suggest, yet never impose, alternative task-based strategies that are compatible with the student's learning style and language learning objectives, as determined by other instruments. Finally, the learner and the counsellor together choose a series of materials that enable the learner to use the suggested strategies in a self-access mode. Thus, the learner goes away from the first session feeling he understands better what language learning is about and with a couple of “new” strategies with which to put his new understanding into action.

Task and strategy knowledge are emphasized during the first session: (i) because this knowledge tends to be more easily perceived as useful by the learner, and (ii) because the strategies provide an immediate application of the counselling. Self-knowledge is more fully explored in later
sessions if the learner does not actually begin to use and feel comfortable with the suggested strategies.

In successive sessions the counsellor elicits feedback from each learner about his feelings and his use of strategies by interview and/or with ad hoc versions of ALL. Thus, these sessions provide information on the learner’s metacognitive evolution at the affective or behavioural level or both. All counselling sessions are thoroughly documented and the counsellor is responsible for co-ordinating with the teacher and the company’s training officer. The learner also receives a copy of the updated record, which always ends with an outline of the counsellor’s plan for the next session.

As the learner’s rate of progress increases and the estimated time for meeting each operational objective is shortened, the counsellor adopts a much less directive style. Likewise, as the learner’s metacognition is enhanced and he starts making good use of self-access resources, the counsellor also ceases to urge bi-weekly sessions and leaves the frequency up to the learner. When the learners increase the amount of contact with the language though the self-access mode in the resource centre(s), at home and/or at work, then we assume they are becoming more autonomous.

Outcomes

For the learners who choose to work in a self-directed manner, after three to six months their responses to AmbiMoti usually indicate gains in one, two or all three of the parameters measured: (i) more tolerance of ambiguity in language learning/use contexts, (ii) increased motivation, or (iii) improved self-esteem as a language learner. Likewise, their metacognitive knowledge also shows changes in various aspects—if not all—as evidenced by re-administering some versions of ALL, or by changes observed in the learner’s behaviours. In a few cases, however, the learner declares that he understands the model, believes in it, and attempts to modify his strategies accordingly as he initially reports “feeling comfortable” with them. Nevertheless, after a relatively short period of time, he reverts to his previous strategies.

Yet in other cases, the learner reports enhanced metacognition and tries to implement new strategies but does not succeed due to affective barriers. Jose is an example. Initially he was very dependent on the teacher, but through enhanced metacognition he was able to adopt more efficient strategies such as participating in oral communication activities without error correction (which he previously demanded). Yet he was unable to adopt more efficient extensive reading strategies and continued looking up all doubtful words and writing them down in different colours depending on the importance of the word for him. “I am convinced that extensive reading would benefit me more but I just can’t do it. I get too nervous if I don’t look up all these words and write them down.”

In these cases the counsellor generally introduces a different, more cognitive psycholinguistic model and suggests alternative strategies that require less risk-taking, less tolerance of ambiguity, more cognitive learning. Sometimes the teacher modifies her approach to accommodate it more closely to the learner’s; and in other cases, a different teacher with a more cognitive or structured teaching style is assigned to the learner. Although these learners do not progress at such a spectacular rate, some develop a fairly high degree of autonomy, decreasing their dependence on contact classes and on the counsellor, increasing their contact with the language in the self-access centre, taking initiative in choosing their own materials and, in a few cases, using more techniques for self-assessment.
TWO EXAMPLES

Over the last 2 years, 41 professionals have participated in Soluciones' counselling plan for English or German. Some learners are already somewhat autonomous in their language learning upon entering the programme while most demonstrate very little autonomy but are willing to take on the learner training. We shall now present one example of the former and one of the latter, focusing only on those aspects in which the learner's metacognitive profile changed and the way this affected his learning approach.

Jesus. Purchasing manager for an international company, Jesus was a relatively autonomous learner who increased his rate of progress presumably through enhanced metacognition. When he came to Soluciones, he was at an intermediate level of English and reported no progress over the last 3 years in spite of attending contact classes in the factory. Some of his beliefs, however, offered a plausible explanation for his lack of progress.

Data gathered by ALL and at the interview prior to beginning the programme showed that Jesus was already quite autonomous in language learning. He reported investing an average of three hours on his own—with activities of his own design—for every hour of presencial classes he took. He believed that he needed a teacher less than 25% of the time and he perceived the teacher's role to be to clarify whatever the learner did not manage to understand with the textbook, to correct all oral production, to serve as a model for pronunciation, to provide listening practice and to suggest other materials.

As for his self-knowledge, he considered himself a "slow, but sure language learner if I have plenty of time to study". Concerning task and strategic knowledge, he believed that language learning consisted mainly of learning grammar and vocabulary and the most effective strategy was forward and backward translation of written texts. That is, he first translated the reading passages of a text book into Spanish and then translated them back to English and compared them with the original versions in the text book. Jesus stated that he had been assiduously using this strategy for over a year.

After five months and five counselling sessions, Jesus continues to place the main responsibility for learning on himself, but now shows an even more autonomous attitude as he now no longer relies on the teacher and/or counsellor to suggest materials, but checks them out of the resource centre on his own initiative. Furthermore, he believes that to learn a language one must take advantage of extensive input (reading and listening) and use the language (all four skills) extensively—in class and at work. He enjoys reading simplified adventure stories using the dictionary only infrequently while reading.

Likewise, he has discovered "audio-books" (simplified readers with audio recordings) and uses two different general strategies depending on the level of difficulty: (i) listen, read and listen again—for the easier ones; and (ii) read, listen, read again and listen again—for the more difficult ones.

Table 2 compares Jesus’ responses to a selection of strategies (strategic knowledge) for attending to extensive input (e.g. reading simplified books and listening to audio recordings) at the outset of the counselling with his responses five months later.
Table 2. Enhancing reading strategies in self-directed language learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simplified readers</th>
<th>Jan. 1993</th>
<th>June 1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49.1 Start reading immediately</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.2 Before starting, read the title and look at the illustrations to get an idea of the content</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.3 Scan the text to get the general idea</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.7 Use knowledge of the world to understand the context</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.8 Try to discover the overall organizations of the text to facilitate the reading</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.9 Throughout the reading, try to foresee what is coming next</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.10 Look up new words in a dictionary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.11 Guess the meaning of unknown words from the context</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.12 Try to understand all the words</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audio recordings

| 52.7 Concentrate as much as possible                                               | 4         | 2         |
| 52.11 Pay attention to the pronunciation of new words                             | 4         | 2         |
| 52.12 Mentally repeat the new phrases and words that I have just heard             | 4         | 1         |

*Likkert scale: 1, not effective at all; 2, little effective; 3, I don’t know; 4, effective; 5, very effective.

These were the items the counsellor had identified as inefficient or counterproductive at their January data gathering session using Krashen’s input hypothesis as the psycholinguistic model. At the cognitive level, all of Jesus’ responses coincide with the model except item 49.9. Moreover, Jesus reported that he enjoyed reading and listening with these sets of strategies and believed that they were more effective than his previous learning strategies.

Likewise, when retested with Ambimoti after five months he showed significant gains in tolerance of ambiguity in language learning contexts with non-significant gains in motivation and maintenance of a positive self-image as a language learner.

Table 3. Ambimoti pre- and post-test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambimoti</th>
<th>Version 1.1</th>
<th>Version 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parameter</td>
<td>score</td>
<td>score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerance/tolerance</td>
<td>30/60</td>
<td>25/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37/54</td>
<td>33/54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>15/30</td>
<td>17/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/30</td>
<td>20/30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>6/12</td>
<td>9/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/18</td>
<td>14/18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Jesus and his teacher reported significantly increased progress with the language and the average amount of time spent in the self-access centre per week went up from 2.5 to 5 hours; language use at the factory also increased. For example, Jesus no longer avoided telephone calls in English as he felt more confident with his oral skills.

Juan. While Jesus was quite autonomous, albeit inefficient, before beginning the programme, most learners initially assume much less responsibility for directing their own learning. Most become more autonomous, however, when offered adequate supportive learner training/counselling and ample opportunities and resources to reflect on their own learning and practice. Juan, an industrial psychologist and trainer, is an example.
A false beginner in English, he demonstrated very limited autonomy at the beginning of the programme but soon developed a high degree. At the outset, he was well aware that language learning was very different from other kinds of learning but this led him to believe that there was little the learner could do without the teacher. He described the teacher’s role as: assigning and correcting homework, explaining grammar, providing a variety of exercise types to internalize the grammar, correcting all errors (oral and written) and modelling good pronunciation. He felt he was an average language learner and he stated that he learned better by using a variety of deductive, inductive, intuitive and Gestalt tactics. He believed that language learning consisted mainly of learning and internalizing grammar and only later developed the view that it was mainly about learning vocabulary and using the language orally.

After two months in the programme, Juan no longer felt so dependent on the teacher. He dropped his daily class and continued attending five-hour intensive classes sporadically as his work load permitted. He now believed that although language learning is very different from other kinds of learning, most of the things the learner must do require no teacher. He now feels the teacher’s role is to stimulate interesting oral communication activities, be a resource to be consulted and correct written errors. With reference to his feelings and style, re-testing with AmbiMoti after 11 months showed significant gains in motivation and self-esteem as a language learner although gains in tolerance of ambiguity were non-significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AmbiMoti</th>
<th>Version 1.1</th>
<th>Version 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parameter</td>
<td>neutral score 30-IX-93</td>
<td>neutral score 12-VIII-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerance/tolerance</td>
<td>30/60 33/60</td>
<td>55% 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>15/30 15/30</td>
<td>53% 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>6/12 7/12</td>
<td>58% 78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Juan believes he is a good language learner and knows that he learns better by using the language for activities he enjoys. He feels that to learn a language, at all levels, he must make use of enjoyable extensive input (reading and listening) with a variety of media (newspapers, books, audio recordings and video), of which he now makes extensive use; he knows he must also make use of native speaker interlocutors (which he requests LC to provide for him) and use the language to communicate, especially oral language. Referring to vocabulary and grammar exercises, he has recently stated, “. . . unless I’m using the language in a normal way, I don’t see the practice as valuable”.

With sporadic four-hour intensive classes (an average of 1.6 per month), a total of 18 counselling sessions and an average of 8.5 hours per week of self-access activities over a period of 18 months, Juan reads industrial training projects and reports, articles on industrial psychology and books on industrial management with sporadic use of a dictionary, handles guided tours of his institution with English-speaking visitors and the “easier” phone calls in English.
PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Some learners reject self-directed language learning until they discover its advantages (Holec, 1981) and start to feel comfortable with it. Our experience with Soluciones has given us a few insights into how to provoke discovery of its advantages and how to help the learner feel comfortable directing his own learning to some degree.

As Cranstone and Baird (1988) have stated, the learner must perceive immediate practical applications. In other words, if the learner does not understand how and why all this extra involvement in and responsibility for his own learning is going to optimize his investment of time and effort, he may feel bewildered by it all. Early enhanced macrostrategies and a feeling of increased expertise in language learning often demonstrate how and why SDLL works. That is, confrontation of initial metacognition with new concepts often leads the learner to increase his repertoire of strategies and skills and to feel that he is a bit more of an “expert” at language learning. If he successfully applies some of these new insights to a task, this feeling of increased “expertise” is reinforced, often increasing his motivation and self-esteem. Furthermore, the quality of learning is enhanced upon perceiving the process as his own. In turn, gains in motivation, self-esteem and quality of learning tend to accelerate the rate of progress. Thus, it is important that the learner perceive these gains before uneasiness with the system leads him to reject self-directed language learning.

Aside from perceiving advantages of SDLL, the learner must also feel comfortable with it. A perception that “this is tailored to me” will usually be a powerful positive affective factor. Likewise, the gathering of extensive individual data, individual needs analysis and enhanced self-knowledge combined with personalized, supportive counselling tend to provoke this perception. Hence, perceiving counsellor, teacher and peer support (Cranstone and Baird, 1988) early on goes a long way in helping the learner to feel comfortable with the system. Counselling by pairs often provides part of this peer support as does well-executed in-class learner training. If the counsellor and the teacher are not the same person, close co-ordination between the two can convey this feeling of support.

CONCLUSION

So far the Soluciones experience has succeeded in achieving some degree of autonomy in 40 cases out of 41. Thus our experience, combining extensive counselling aimed at enhancing metacognition with varying intensities of contact classes and self-access activity has resulted in the learner (and usually the teacher) perceiving an increased rate of progress in learning. How does this happen?

Enhanced metacognition presumably leads to more autonomy through improved self-knowledge, use of more efficient strategies and a wider variety of resources and increased contact with the language. A more autonomous approach, in turn, appears to accelerate the rate of progress. This process seems to interact with the learner’s feelings (less anxiety, more motivation, improved self-esteem) further accelerating the whole process. In summary, we perceive that metacognition, autonomy and learning interact with each other and that the dynamism of this interaction can be seriously impaired if metacognition is not enhanced.
NOTES

1 Metacognitive knowledge (MK) is one of the two components included within the general term of metacognition. Thus, metacognition encompasses knowledge about cognition (MK) and self-regulatory skills (metacognitive strategies). For a more detailed explanation, see Flavell, 1979 and 1981a.

2 These assumptions are based on causal-attributional theory (see, e.g. Weiner, 1980; Strikland, 1989).

3 These categories are based on a taxonomy described by Flavell (1979, 1981a), an adaptation of which can be seen in Table 1.

4 Lockhart College (LC) is a semi-private language teaching institution in Pamplona (Spain) with a strong commitment to providing personalized language learning programmes (the Public University of Navarre, the Provincial Health Service, the local Chamber of Commerce, two local elementary and secondary schools, more than 25 industrial companies, a LINGUA project, a DELTA project . . .).

5 The questionnaire is in Spanish as counselling sessions are held in the learner’s L1. (There is an English version of ALL which was previously used with ESL students at UCLA, reported in Victori, 1992).

6 The specific version of ALL used for gathering preliminary data in Soluciones has a total of 129 items. The instructions for this particular session focus on the learner’s beliefs about strategy effectiveness as explained above.

7 It is worth noting that all of our learners so far expect to be directed at the beginning of the counselling sessions and all insist on seeing the relevance of the counselling right from the start.

REFERENCES


RUBIN, J. (1975), What the Good Language Learner can teach us. *TESOL Quarterly* 9(1), 41–51.


