

GUIDING STUDENTS TO BECOME INDEPENDENT LEARNERS

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In the past decades, the concept of independent learning has been the center of many discussions in the language education field. There are different interpretations of this concept given by different scholars, in different contexts, and by various implementations. There are also other terms used for the same basic concept such as autonomous learning, self-regulation, and self-management. The authors point that it is “the capacity to take charge of one’s own learning” [3;65] and “capacity to take control of one’s own learning... a multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times.” [2; 47]

Many researchers have examined learner autonomy in theory and practice (Barfield & Brown, 2007; Benson, 2001; Benson & Voller, 1997a; Boud, 1981; Broady & Kenning, 1996; Cotterall and Crabbe, 1999; Dam, 1995; Dickinson, 1987; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Holec, 1980, 1988; Knowles, 1975; Little, 2007; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003; Wenden, 1991). According to Holec, this form of learning is an individual’s ability to make the decisions concerning his learning in regard to the following levels:

- determining the objectives
- defining the contents and progressions
- selecting methods and techniques to be used
- monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly
- evaluating what has been acquired [3; 4]

Dr. George Betts and Ms. Jolene Kercher developed a model which is called “The Autonomous Learner Model” and it equips students with “skills, concepts, and positive attitudes within the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains”, creating lifelong learners over the long run [2; 19]. The purpose of this model is to take the power to learn away from the teacher and give that power to the students. This means that students should discover information on their own, navigate the increasingly complex world of learning. Only in this way students will develop responsibility, positive self-esteem, decision-making and problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, critical and creative thinking skills, and a passion for areas of learning that interest them, which facilitate the growth of students as independent, self-directed learners.

There are five dimensions in the model. They are: orientation, individual development, enrichment, seminars, and in-depth study.

1. Orientation — the student learns about the program in order to be oriented towards his actions.

2. Individual Development — in order to become a learner the student develops necessary skills, habits, and attitudes.

3. Enrichment — the students learn extra information in order to have full idea of the concept.

4. Seminars — the student collaborate with others, taking part in different tasks to demonstrate his ability as a learner.

5. In-Depth Study — the student goes deeper in his learning to become a life-long learner, work with mentors, learn to present, and assess his own learning.

It is not an easy task to develop students' autonomous learning skills, that's why we think it is the teacher who directs the learner to this path. If teachers encourages the students to reflect his intelligence through various programs and teaching methods in the orientation period, and explain the value of their intelligences in guiding their future, students will be motivated and know where to go and how to act.

In the individual development stage students should be equipped with the tools they need to be independent learners. Teachers should facilitate the acquisition of skills needed to obtain, and the organizational and productivity strategies necessary to accomplish their goals, life and time management.

Enrichment should provide opportunities for students to work with materials which they can easily relate to and are interested in. They can explore new ideas, investigate phenomena, take part in a cultural activity, do service work, or take an adventure trip in order to find out what is out there for learning, and bring what they have found on their own. They learn to collect data through different sources of information, make presentations and evaluate their activity, reflect on how they learned so that they are able to talk to other students about formulating questions, gathering and organizing information, and developing a final mini-product.

The seminars should change the students' role to learners. They should present their information to their classmates through the use of lectures and then engage the rest of the class in generating new ideas and opinions, they discuss the topic, and finally through a discussion of what has been learned, they bring the discussion to a closure.

The final stage, the in-depth study is considered the highest level of autonomous learning. This is the stage in which students synthesize the information, skills, and strategies they have learned to demonstrate what they have learned--largely on their own and submit their proposals.

Using this kind of models we, teachers can develop our students' ability to work independently and have the emotional maturity to reflect on themselves as gifted individuals and learners.



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