

Book Review: Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning

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Phil Benson & Peter Voller (editores) (1997) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. Candlin, Londres: Longman.

When we talk about autonomy we associate it with language learning and the issues of responsibility and independence; this is linked to the use of self-access centers.

As stated by Benson and Voller in their introduction:

"The aim of the book is to explore the discourses and applications of autonomy and independence for language leaning and clarify where the concepts come from and where they are going".(p.3)

The editors give on overview of the ways to implement autonomy in language learning and teaching; they raise the following issues in the debate on autonomy:

- The theoretical basis for prevailing concepts of autonomy and independence
- Autonomy as a culturally-specific, Western concept
- The role of self-access and self-instruction in promoting autonomy
- The role of the teacher in autonomous language learning
- The potential of new technology in relation to autonomous language learning

The book is divided in three parts

Part I. Philosophy and practice. Deals with the historical, cultural, and political aspects of autonomy, and talks about self-access centers and their role in autonomous language learning.

Part II. Roles and relationships. The authors define what an autonomous teacher is and how he is a facilitator and a counselor what an autonomous learner is and how he/she is introduced to autonomy and the relationship between the two.

Part III. Methods and materials. Autonomy in language learning can be promoted through new technologies as the Internet and computer aided programs and how they meld with traditional self-access materials and books.

The contents of the book are as follows, each section opens with an introduction:

1. Introduction: autonomy and independence in language learning, *Phil Benson and Peter Voller*

Part I: Philosophy and practice

2. The philosophy and politics of learner autonomy. (Phil Benson)
3. Cultural alternatives and autonomy. (Alaistair Pennycook)
4. An exploration of the relationship between self-access and independent learning. (Susan Sheerin)
5. Teaching and language learning in self-access centres: changing roles? (Gil Sturtridge)
6. Self-access: why do we want it and what can it do? (William Littlewood)

Part II: Roles and relationships

7. Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning? (Peter Voller)
8. The guru and the conjurer: aspects of counseling for self-access. (Philip Riley)
9. Shooting arrows at the sun: perspectives on a pedagogy for autonomy. (Michael P. Breen y Sarah J. Mann)
10. Confidence building for classroom teachers. (Felicity O'Dell)
11. Learner training for autonomous language learning. (Edith M. Esch)

Part III: Methods and materials

12. Self-access work and curriculum ideologies. (Andrew Littlejohn)
13. Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy. (David Nunan)
14. Involving learners in developing learning methods: exploiting text corpora in self-access. (Guy Aston)
15. Preparing learners for independence: resources beyond the classroom. (Stephen M. Ryan)
16. Responding authentically to authentic texts: a problem for self-access language learning? (David Little)
17. Providing computerized self-access opportunities for the development of writing skills. (John Milton)

Different authors give cohesion to this volume that all in all encompasses various perspectives in this very current issue. We can find the politics of autonomy in the introduction by Benson: *"an explicitly political version of autonomy supported by critical theories of knowledge and learning"* (p. 31).

Voller, the other Editor, opens the second half of this book and he deals with relationships he proposes that:: a) that language is an interpretive process and autonomy requires a transfer of control to learners, b) that teaching practices are based on negotiation with learners, and c) that teachers are active and reflective observers of their own strategies and interactions.

This volume is very fascinating to read. It provides practical suggestions for promoting learner autonomy and is highly recommended for those who are interested in change and innovation in language education.