Fostering Autonomy Through Syllabus Design: A Step-by-Step Guide for Success*

El fomento de la autonomía a través del diseño del sílabo: una guía paso a paso hacia el éxito**

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Promoting learner autonomy is relevant in the field of applied linguistics due to the multiple benefits it brings to the process of learning a new language. However, despite the vast array of research on how to foster autonomy in the language classroom, it is difficult to find step-by-step processes to design syllabi and curricula focused on the development of learner autonomy. This paper presents a model of a successful English course, implemented at Universidad del Valle (Colombia), which is expected to serve as a practical guide to articulate the stages of design, implementation, and evaluation of an autonomy-fostering syllabus.

Key words: Independent learning, learner autonomy, learning strategies, self-access centers, syllabus design.

La promoción de la autonomía del aprendiz es relevante en el campo de la lingüística aplicada, dados los múltiples beneficios que trae en el aprendizaje de una nueva lengua. Sin embargo, a pesar de la gran cantidad de investigaciones sobre cómo promover la autonomía en el aula de lenguas, es difícil en-

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* This article is issued from the research study "*Diseño, implementación y evaluación de dos cursos básicos de inglés basados en el fomento y desarrollo de la autonomía*" [Design, implementation and evaluation of two elementary English courses based on fostering and developing autonomy], which was carried out in the preservice teachers program *Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés-Francés*, at *Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje, Universidad del Valle*. It was sponsored by the research vice-rectory from Universidad del Valle under the registration code CI-4329.

** Received: May 31, 2015. Accepted: August 26, 2015.

How to cite this article (APA 6th ed.):
Ramírez Espinosa, A. (2015). Fostering autonomy through syllabus design: A step-by-step guide for success. *HOW, 22*(2), 114-134.

contrar procesos "paso a paso" para diseñar cursos centrados en el desarrollo de la autonomía. Este artículo presenta un modelo de curso de inglés, implementado con éxito en la Universidad del Valle (Colombia), que se espera sirva como guía práctica para articular las etapas de diseño, implementación y evaluación de un syllabus que promueva la autonomía.

Palabras clave: autonomía del aprendiz, aprendizaje independiente, centros de autoacceso, diseño de syllabus, estrategias de aprendizaje.

Introduction

> The mission of education is creating the conditions that will enable learners to develop into autonomous and responsible individuals who have access to and are able to contribute to a democratic and tolerant society. (Errey & Schollaert, 2003, p. 14).

Learner autonomy can be briefly defined as the set of skills that allows students to be willingly responsible for their own learning process (Benson & Voller, 1997; Dam, 1995; Sinclair, 2000). The concept of learner autonomy is relevant in the field of applied linguistics, not only because autonomy allows the learner to take the lead of his/her learning process, but also because it empowers him/her to be an independent user of the language. In other words, a student needs to be autonomous to learn and use the language (Pennycook, 1997). Learner autonomy is highly desirable for many reasons: It makes students aware that the teacher will not always be present to lead the learning process and therefore helps the former to become more effective (Cotterall, 1995); autonomy makes learners become motivated and enthusiastic towards learning (Dickinson, 1995; Fukuda, Hiroshi, & Takeushi, 2011; Littlejohn, 1985); an autonomous student is more secure in his/her learning (Joiner as cited in McCafferty, 1981; Scharle & Szabó, 2000), and therefore it is plausible that he/she will, eventually, be prepared for functioning effectively in society (Cotterall, 1995).

However, as much as it is desired, autonomy should not be incorporated into an ongoing language course whenever teachers want, neither should it be attached to old course designs. In other words, autonomy cannot simply be "clipped on to existing learning programmes" (Cotterall, 1995, p. 220) but needs to be conceived as the core around which a new course will be designed. Moreover, for designing such a course, a whole new approach is needed. This new approach implies the support of an institutional authority figure (for instance, the school, a department, a college program, or even the course syllabus as an official document) that will act as the sponsor of autonomy. Thus, all processes and activities required for the development of the course will have an official backing. This new course represents an innovation and, as such, it must be considered that

> an innovation needs to be incorporated into the structure and functioning of its host institution within a short time if it is to survive: it needs to be institutionalized. If it is not institutionalized but

> merely tolerated as a minor aberration, it is unlikely to be taken seriously by learners or faculty, and may well fail completely. (Hammond & Collins, 1991, p. 208).

That being said, if learner autonomy is to be implemented, our cornerstone will be both a new design and the institutionalization of such an endeavor. On the basis of the academic literature currently available, there seems to be plenty of research about the characteristics of autonomous learners, measurements of the degree of autonomy reached by certain students at a certain school, and the influence of autonomy on language proficiency, just to mention a few topics (Cárdenas, Cardona, Frodden, Luna, & Villamizar, 2001; Dafei, 2007; Dixon, 2011; Mynard, 2006; Zarei & Zarei, 2015). Despite the extended theoretical references on autonomy in language learning, it seems there are not enough models to enlighten teachers about the steps to follow in order to design courses that foster autonomy; or about the essential elements that need to be articulated within the syllabus design in order to attain the so desired learner autonomy. Along similar lines, Bárbara (2007) expresses the same concern by saying:

> If autonomy is to be understood as a solution to effective learning one can consider the constraints and work out solutions, namely that there are several degrees for autonomy and that it can be gradually introduced in syllabuses in order to achieve change . . . but we do not have recipes, we only have strategies to try to foster autonomy. (p. 23)

Bearing this in mind, Cotterall's works (1995, 2000) offer five elements and five principles to be taken into account in the design of any language course whose main objective is to foster learner autonomy. Such works report the successful experience at the language Institute of Victoria University of Wellington implementing autonomy based English courses for over 30 years. These are 12-week-long English for academic purposes (EAP) courses for international students who need to start undergraduate and graduate studies, hence, they need to reach, at least, an intermediate proficiency in academic English in a short period of time. Autonomy, then, seems to be the key for such a time constraining situation, and the five elements proposed by Cotterall seem to be the foundations for the design of a syllabus that intends to develop learner autonomy within the class.

Elements and Principles for Designing Language Courses

Cotterall (1995) proposes the following elements:

1. Learner/teacher dialogue
2. Learning a language study theme
3. Classroom tasks and materials
4. Student record booklet

5. Self-access center

The first element, *learner/teacher dialogue*, implies constant communication between the teacher and the learners, which allows for constant assessment. Constant communication results in confidence, as constant assessment involves a continuous monitoring of the learning process by both the teacher and the learners. The second element, *learning a language study theme*, refers to raising students' awareness about how languages function, how they are learned, and how autonomy optimizes such a process. Regarding the third element, designing *classroom tasks and materials* in an autonomy-based course requires, on the one hand, the modeling of activities that students can reproduce on their own; and on the other hand, to explicitly state metacognitive and metalinguistic information in favor of the learners' self-monitoring and self-regulation. These latter are also an objective of the *student record booklet*, the fourth element, which aims at providing the student with a space for reflection, for keeping track of his/her learning process, and for collecting thoughts, doubts, and ideas to be discussed in the learner/teacher dialogue sessions. Finally, the use of *self-access centers*, the last element that Cotterall (1995) recommends, implies providing learners with opportunities, tasks, and materials (third principle) that they can choose and access on their own for the development of autonomous behaviors during the learning and practice of a foreign language.

Years later, Cotterall (2000) proposed five other principles that closely relate to the previous elements:

1. Learner goals
2. Language learning process
3. Tasks
4. Learner strategies
5. Reflection on learning

For Cotterall (2000), a course which aims at fostering autonomy has to allow students to identify what they deem important to learn, and to set *learner goals* according to their own needs. This is one of the main characteristics of autonomous beings: They identify what they need, and they plan how to get it. But in order to plan effectively and manage their own learning, the students need to be aware of how the *language learning process* works. The course has to promote the use of *tasks* that, according to Cotterall, have to replicate real-world communicative situations. These tasks should articulate some *learning strategies* so that the students can learn explicitly and choose the ones that fit their learning styles and preferences. Finally, all of these principles imply *reflection on learning*, which has to be constantly promoted throughout the course. Such elements and principles should be adapted according to the context where the course will be implemented because context is indivisible from culture

(Breen, 2001) and culture determines the interpretation of autonomy (Palfreyman, 2003), as well as the characteristics and behaviors that the teacher wants to foster in his/her students.

Context and Participants

Taking all this into account, a course was designed and implemented at Universidad del Valle (Colombia) with pre-service English teachers as part of a research process. This research intended to foster leaner autonomy through the first two English courses (basic) offered to freshmen in the foreign languages program. An action-research methodology was implemented in three phases, as shown below:

a. A diagnosis phase, which included the freshmen's autonomy profiles and self-perception, and an analysis of self-access centers provided by the institution, their materials and opportunities for language learning and practice, and their relationship (or lack of it) with the syllabi designed by the faculty.

b. A design and implementation phase, based on Cotterall's principles, which included the design of the course syllabus, the preparation of tasks using authentic material, the design of self-access activities for the self-access centers, and a series of talks that provided an initial learner training program (Sturtridge, 1997).

c. An evaluation phase which assessed the experience and was useful to improve the design of a second course. During this phase, new profiles of autonomy were established among the group of students in order to determine the impact of the course in the acquisition of new autonomous behaviors, learning strategies, and study habits.

The research was carried out with a group of 20 freshmen from the undergraduate program of Foreign Languages: English and French, at *Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje, Universidad del Valle* (ECLUV).

The research results indicated relevant gains in the acquisition of the 30 learning behaviors comprised in the survey (Appendix 1) that was applied before and after the course implementation. Such behaviors were gathered under five categories: (1) setting objectives, (2) metacognitive processes, (3) development of skills, (4) self-monitoring and self-evaluation, and (5) selection and design of materials and learning activities.

Table 1 roughly[1] synthetizes the progress in the development of autonomous behaviors by the 20 students who participated in the course. Using a scale with the options *always*,

[1] Since the essence of this paper is to show the step-by-step guide, the research results that sustain the design have been presented briefly. However, a thorough report on the results will be published in a different paper.

occasionally, *rarely*, and *never*, the students selected the one that best described the presence of each behavior in their learning experience. The first column of the chart shows the categories that comprise the 30 autonomous behaviors gathered in Appendix 1; the second column indicates the percentage of students who answered "always" to the behaviors comprised in each category in relation to their experience as language learners at school; the third column indicates the percentage of students who answered "always" to the same behaviors once they had taken the first English course at the university.

Table 1. Students' Progress in the Use of Autonomous Behaviors

Category	Initial Percentage	Final Percentage (End of Course 1)
Setting objectives	3%	80%
Metacognitive processes	5%	15%
Development of skills	11%	52%
Self-monitoring and self-evaluation	9%	42%
Selection and design of materials and learning activities	3%	60%

In the following section, I intend to show how the research process was intertwined with Cotterall's principles. All the reflections and advice presented in each step are the result of both the literature review and the implementation experience at ECLUV. The main objective is to provide other language teachers with a step-by-step guide that might serve as a flexible model for designing syllabi based on the promotion and development of learner autonomy. Since this model is the result of a validation of Cotterall's principles (1995, 2000), a prominent part of the references throughout the text has to do with her work, although a variety of authors have also been taken into consideration.

The Step-by-Step Guide

More than just a long rigid list of steps, this guide proposes three main stages that can be adapted by adding or eliminating steps at the students' and teachers' convenience and according to their social and cultural background.

Stage 1: Setting the Mood for Autonomy

Step 1. *Diagnose your institution in terms of the opportunities that it offers (or might offer) for the development of autonomy*. If autonomy is to be fostered, the institution should provide students with appropriate resources and spaces for them to develop autonomous behaviors (Sheerin, 1997), which brings us to the idea of self-access centers (Element 5, according to Cotterall, 1995). Providing self-access centers does not have to be a synonym for implementing a brand new high-budget project. Self-access centers can be the result of evaluating and adapting previous facilities with new purposes and goals. Most institutions have a small library, a reading room or a modest collection of books and materials that could be revived in favor of learner autonomy. In this regard, Sheerin (1997) and Miller and Rogerson-Revell (1993) present interesting models with which to evaluate pre-existing facilities and beget self-access centers. On the other hand, a self-access center does not always have to function in a facility: the digital era we live in is the ultimate allegory of self-access! Therefore, the self-access center for independent learning and language practice can take the form of an online community in any of its expressions: a blog, a forum, or even a digital cloud.

Step 2. *Establish the initial autonomy profile of the students*. As a starting point, it is necessary to have a clear picture of who our students are in terms of their various degrees of autonomous behaviors. They come to the language classroom with an idea of what a "good student" is, and that idea is often mistaken as a synonym of an "autonomous student." They also bring a cultural background that dictates to them fossilized conceptions of the students' and teachers' roles. Therefore, you should poll your students in order to determine their definition of autonomy and their self-perception regarding autonomous behaviors. The survey could also inquire into their learning strategies, study habits, and autonomous behaviors in previous learning experiences without mentioning these terms as such. An adaptation of the work of Dam (1995), Dickinson (1992), Aparicio et al. (1995), and Cárdenas (2003) gives us a model with which to elicit students' autonomous behaviors in their previous learning experiences (see Appendix 1).

In the particular experience at Universidad del Valle, for instance, all freshmen considered autonomy as a synonym for responsibility as regards homework and academic duties, and 90% of them perceived themselves as being highly autonomous, although the survey on autonomous behaviors revealed something different.

Step 3. *Equip your students with some learner-training workshops before starting the course.* The notion of *training* has been mistakenly associated with a connotation of automatic behavior, which sounds contradictory in the field of autonomy. However, autonomy and learner training have always been closely related and has been proved that the latter does not compromise the concepts of independent learning, freedom, or autonomy itself (Dickinson, 1992; Esch, 1997; Holec, 1980). Learner-training workshops, in support of developing

autonomy, aim at helping students know how languages are learned, who is a successful language learner, and why autonomy is desirable in language learning. In other words, these sessions are intended to raise awareness, which is the first condition for eventually changing roles. Along similar lines, Sturtridge (1997) argues that:

> Those who have received learner training will have already been made aware of the need to be aware of their own goals, to be able to monitor their own progress and evaluate their own performance. All these skills were formerly in the providence of the teacher. (p. 76)

The notion of learner-training integrates Elements 1 and 2 from Cotterall's principles: On the one hand, it officially establishes an environment for constant teacher/learner dialogue, and on the other hand, it addresses language learning topics. In the case of Universidad del Valle, a one-week-long learner-training program was offered before the English course officially started, and it included six workshops, to wit:

a. What are languages? How are they learned?
b. Importance of autonomy in language learning
c. Language learners: Recognizing students' archetypes and profiles of autonomy
d. Strategies in language learning
e. Self-access: What is it? How can I make the most of it?
f. Literature and culture: Their importance in language learning

Since the workshops were conducted by different professors from the languages program, the training served as a strategy to institutionalize the autonomy-fostering endeavor and to make a clear statement among students and other staff members. At the end of the training the students expressed how surprised they felt. They felt surprised because, although all of them had already been language learners in different contexts, they had never been so aware that learning a language implied so much responsibility on their part. They felt surprised to realize that behind every activity, task, material, or learning experience there is a complex construct that requires reflection and metacognitive processes. But most importantly, they all expressed they felt surprised to learn that the traditional role of learners could be challenged and eventually changed. Esch's work (1997) reports a similar experience, and presents a model of learner-training workshop.

Step 4. *Design self-access materials for the self-access center and introduce your students to both of them.* We cannot expect our students to make full use of self-access centers, resources, or materials if they do not even know they exist. In his work, Sturtridge (1997) puts forward the claim that introducing students to self-access reinforces the notions of how fundamental these resources (or facilities) are in language learning and their new active role as language learners. Self-access centers and resources need to be promoted if they are to be successful; otherwise,

as Sturtridge suggests, an underutilized center may be considered a failure, as well as a center full of students who do not use it for language learning.

These centers are either rejected or accepted by students based on the significance of the materials they offer (Sturtridge, 1997). This does not imply, though, that the institution or the teachers must obsess over buying a great amount of new material when they can use the materials they have and design tasks to accompany them. These tasks and materials should mirror the kind of tasks and materials used in class. In fact, the most suitable kind of materials for a self-access center is the one that keeps a close relation with the kind of processes that the student is experiencing in the classroom.

These tasks and materials have to be clear and explicit in terms of the linguistic objectives to be fulfilled, the language skill that is being targeted, and the learning strategy that is being reinforced. Such directness or specificity aims, on the one hand, at refining students' metacognitive and metalinguistic skills, and on the other hand, at equipping learners so that they are able to eventually design and propose their own tasks and materials. In fact, Cotterall's (1995) view is grounded on the assumption that when teachers adopt a particular approach (Task-based learning [TBL] or Content and language integrated learning [CLIL], for instance) "without explaining their reasons for doing so, [they] are denying the learners access to valuable information" (p. 224). Therefore, tasks and materials which aim to foster learner autonomy "must incorporate a frank discussion of objectives, methodology, roles and expectations" (Cotterall, 1995, p. 224).

Stage 2: Design and Implementation

Step 5. *Lead a needs-analysis with your group.* No matter how many times we have taught the same course, every class poses a new universe of needs, expectations, and previous knowledge. This needs-analysis constitutes the foundations for learners to set their own goals, and it creates a good habit that will eventually result in autonomous behaviors. In fact, Cotterall's statements (1995) support the claim that learner autonomy implies a conscious appreciation of the link between learners' needs and the classroom practices. Similarly, Sheerin (1997) claims that "before learners can engage meaningfully in self-access work, there needs to be an initial analysis of needs so that short and long-term objectives can be set, a program of work planned and suitable activities and materials selected" (p. 63).

Step 6. *Design a blueprint of your course syllabus in terms of contents, sequence, and evaluation.* As teachers, we already know the topics to be taught in a particular course, the sequence of such topics, and an effective way to evaluate them. However, in an autonomous classroom the complete design of the course syllabus will be the product of a joint construction between the teacher and the students. The joint construction emphasizes the transfer of responsibility and control from the teacher to the students, thus, challenging the teachers' previous conceptions

of their students' role that they might bring from cultural background. Allowing our students to have a say in the design of the objectives, the contents, and the evaluation of any activity will get them aware they are expected to be the managers of their learning process.

Step 7. *Have students select the goals of the course and let them have a say in the contents and the evaluation proposed in your syllabus blueprint.* Once you have designed the blueprint, the joint construction of the syllabus begins. Based on the needs analysis, the students should discuss what the general and specific goals of the course will be. Help them set attainable goals according to the level of the course and explain to them that some goals might be shared by all participants, whereas other goals might remain personal. As far as the contents of the course are concerned, you might feel reluctant to let your students decide what they need, because the traditional role of the teacher dictates that you are the expert, after all, so you have to make this decision for them. However, your expertise and authority will not be compromised by transferring responsibility to the students. You, as a facilitator, should propose a sequence of contents and let the students decide to what extent they need to amplify it. In the experience at ECLUV, for example, the teacher proposed a series of basic topics for Level 1: the family, the neighborhood, likes and dislikes, etc. Although all the participants were first semester students, they had an intermediate level of English, so, they manifested they already knew the vocabulary related to those topics but they lacked experience on debating about them. Then, the needs-analysis and joint construction of the syllabus led to a discussion in which students decided to keep all the topics proposed in the syllabus blueprint, but they tailored the depth of each topic and language functions associated with them.

While constructing the program, students were surprised when they understood that letting others decide what you should learn does not make as much sense as deciding yourself, based on your own needs, expectations, and previous knowledge.

Step 8. *Implement the course through a TBL approach.* TBL has proved to be a great ally of autonomous classrooms because, in order to fulfill a task, students need to make autonomous decisions in two different ways: First, they need to put together their previous and new knowledge in order to solve the linguistic challenge, and second, they need to be independent users of the language. Besides, many tasks require interacting with others, which implies the development of certain social skills that result in motivation and a sense of purpose for using the language independently.

Errey and Schollaert (2003) point out that the process of solving a task makes students "co-responsible for setting their learning goals as well as for the strategies to attain these goals" (p. 14). In other words, tasks integrate two of the principles proposed by Cotterall (2000): learner goals and learning strategies. Furthermore, the task sequence proposed by Willis (1996) (pre-task, task cycle and language focus, and feedback), fosters constant dialogue, active role of students, self-monitoring, assessment and reflection upon feedback;

elements that match, in one way or another, Cotterall's elements and principles for fostering autonomy.

Step 9. *Allow students to propose their own materials and activities in the classroom.* Once they had been exposed to self-explanatory tasks and materials inside and outside the classroom, ECLUV students started proposing their own materials and activities for the class. This, of course, is a genuine initial manifestation of autonomous conducts, through which students take control of their learning process and independently choose the kind of activities and materials they want to learn with.

Nevertheless, teachers must make room in their syllabus for this kind of conducts to be manifested. In a research project carried out by Cárdenas et al. (2001) in six Colombian universities, English teachers asserted their desire to foster autonomy in their classrooms, yet, they would not let students actually be in charge of classroom activities, tasks, or content presentations. In fact, "they did not negotiate syllabus design, contents or materials; they did not give many options for tasks, projects or procedures. Many times, they decided who participated. Their role was sometimes paternalistic, sometimes authoritarian" (Cárdenas, 2003, p. 9).

As teachers, we need to understand that fostering autonomy demands a change of roles. We have to think of our classroom as a laboratory-observatory for the development of learner autonomy, therefore, opportunities have to be provided so that our students share their progress with their classmates. This makes a great opportunity for self-monitoring, peer-evaluation, and feedback from both the teacher and the rest of the class. A strategy that suitably worked at ECLUV was to organize a timetable with a 30-minute blank space every week for students to volunteer and share with their classmates something they had discovered or designed on their own.

Step 10. *Provide feedback constantly and promote peer-evaluation in every class*. Providing constant feedback integrates Element 1—learner/teacher dialogue—and Element 5—reflection on language learning—from Cotterall's (1995) work. Thus, it constitutes a mechanism to keep track of the progress and to assess the learning process in terms of strengths and weaknesses, and at the same time, contributes to the continuous learner-training. Once the students are engaged in an autonomous classroom and are working in self-access centers and their materials, they need "support in evaluating their progress, reanalyzing their needs and setting further objectives" (Sheerin, 1997, p. 63). In this sense, feedback allows for a cyclic process in the development of learner autonomy.

Step 11. *Encourage your students to keep a journal.* The literature on keeping learning diaries abounds with evidences of their benefits and rewards in the development of learner autonomy (Brown, 1994; Fulwiler, 1991; Nunan, Lai, & Keobke, 1999; Viáfara, 2005), but the practice of promoting diaries in our classroom might be misleading if we do not understand

their true purpose. Diaries are intended to be an intimate and personal register that will enhance learner's self-monitoring and decision-making based on the information he/she collects. However, a typical mistake found in research processes is that of asking the student to regularly hand in his/her diary to the teacher, making it just another piece of homework students have to comply with. Chances are, subsequently, that students will write down prettied-up registers for the sake of the teacher's acceptance, and the essence of the diary as a mechanism to keep track of personal learning processes would be corrupted.

I am not claiming, though, that diaries cannot be consulted by the teacher in order obtain information. In fact, a vast array of valuable knowledge has emerged from learners and teachers' diaries to nourish relevant research in the field of applied linguistics. But a teacher-researcher should only ask students to share their diaries provided that the initial instruction was to write experiences for themselves, not for the teacher to read. Thus, the diary will be understood as a personal element of reflection and not as a class assignment that the teacher collects periodically.

In my experience at ECLUV, diaries were kept as personal registers for students to write down what would eventually be shared in the learners/teacher dialogue sessions. Since it might be difficult to start writing a learning diary without any previous experience, at the beginning, once a week, students were provided with a suggested topic, a prompt, a chart, or a survey as a guide for the writing process. The works of Brown (2002), Rubin and Thompson (1994), and Scharle and Szabó (2000) offer valuable self-access resources for refection and diary writing.

Stage 3: Evaluation of the Experience

Step 12. *Establish the closing autonomy profile of the students*. Much might have changed by the end of the course, including the students' habits, learning strategies, conceptions of autonomy and, of course, autonomous behaviors. Therefore, it is necessary to run the survey from Step 4 again, in order to establish the new autonomous profile of the learners, not only because the teacher and the institution will be eager to see the results, but also because watching the before-and-after picture will raise a sense of motivation in the students. At this point, it may be relevant to get students aware that this new profile is only the first loop of a long spiral of autonomy development. The achievements, in terms of language proficiency and learning autonomy, constitute the foundations for new expectations and new goals.

Step 13. *Evaluate the syllabus structure with your students*. After a whole course, based on the development of autonomy and constant communication between the learners and the teacher, the former might have acquired valuable techniques for the evaluation of the course. Have your students assess the syllabus structure in terms of the initial goals they set, the contents they helped to construct, and the procedures with which those contents were

evaluated versus the outcomes they obtained. At the same time, have students evaluate the course in terms of the elements for developing autonomy proposed by Cotterall (1995, 2000) (see Appendix 2).

Conclusion

This paper constitutes an effort to provide teachers and researchers with a general and practical step-by-step guide for the design of course syllabi, based on the promotion and development of learner autonomy. In that sense, the number of steps is adaptable in favor of the particularities of each context where an application of this model may be considered.

The research carried out at ECLUV followed the model presented in this paper. The results showed that the 20 students enrolled in the course gradually developed or reinforced autonomous behaviors related to their English learning process in and out of the classroom. Similarly, there was a relevant increase in the number of visits to the self-access center as well as a renovation of the type of learning activities performed there. It is worth mentioning that this experience was successful since it led a group of freshmen who were completely passive towards their learning process and helped them become active agents, with plenty of evidence of autonomous behaviors in and out of the institution.

It is recommended to implement at least two courses based on the development of learner autonomy at the beginning of the educational process, so that in subsequent courses the learning process may be entirely the students' responsibility, with little or no intervention from the teacher. However, it is never too late to start fostering autonomous learning when the ultimate purpose is to strive for the development of autonomous beings and autonomous communities.

It is also recommended for teachers to assess to what extent their practice has been transformed by the experience of developing a course based on the promotion of learner autonomy. Therefore, an estimate of what you have learned from both the experience and your students should be pondered. In this regard, Dam (1995) argues that:

> Learner autonomy is also to be seen as the right of teachers to develop as human beings. Teachers have always said that they learn from their pupils. It is time to be more aware of that. It is personal development all the time in negotiation and in combination with learners. (p. 66)

The questionnaire in Appendix 3, adapted from Thavenius (1999) and Cárdenas (2003), intends to guide such assessment.

Finally, the teachers and the students need a constant reminder that a course based on the development of autonomy implies a change as regards their traditional roles. Students need to remember that being autonomous will surely help them surpass personal, institutional, or cultural constraints that might arise during the learning process. Similarly, the teachers need

to remember that their new role demands allowing students to make decisions about classroom issues.

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Appendix 1: Autonomous Behaviors Survey

Read the following statements and choose the option that better describes the degree of certainty, as appropriate	Always	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. At school, you were able to determine your level of English proficiency.				
2. At school, you reflected on the relationship between English and the cultures associated with this language.				
3. You discovered and explored your favorite ways of relating to the language.				
4. At school you discovered your particular learning style and strategies to learn English effectively.				
5. You used your knowledge, preferences, habits, and strategies to select and plan activities to learn English on your own.				
6. You expressed your preferences for certain types of learning activities in class.				
7. You used diaries or language portfolios to monitor your progress in learning English.				
8. You set out short, medium, and long term goals to improve your English proficiency.				
9. You used all resources available to study and practice English on your own (libraries, internet, software, music, literature, television, etc.).				
10. You devoted time to study and practice English while you were not being monitored by your teacher.				
11. You took on extra assignments or academic activities to learn English, even if this did not represent a course grade.				

Read the following statements and choose the option that better describes the degree of certainty, as appropriate	Always	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
12. You looked for opportunities to learn and practice English outside of school.				
13. You carried out extracurricular activities when you considered it necessary to learn or reinforce a particular topic.				
14. You organized an English study group outside of the class.				
15. You made use of your teacher's tutorial schedule to consult, seek advice, and answer questions about your learning process.				
16. You sought and attended courses, seminars, conferences, or conversation clubs to practice English outside of school.				
17. You planned and executed projects related to any of the topics proposed in the English class.				
18. You reflected objectively on your performance as language learner.				
19. You made proposals to change the way class issues were carried out.				
20. You contributed with your ideas to improve the dynamics, activities, and materials of the English class.				
21. You selected and critically analyzed materials and books for your personal use in learning English.				
22. You participated, with your teacher and classmates, in making decisions about program design, contents, and evaluation of the English class.				
23. You accepted responsibility for planning and preparing a class topic or activity.				

Read the following statements and choose the option that better describes the degree of certainty, as appropriate	Always	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
24. You made use of the teacher's feedback on assessments, workshops, and/or tests to study on your own and reinforce a topic.				
25. At school you were aware of your short, medium, and long term level of proficiency you wanted to acquire in English.				
26. You identified your mistakes in English and corrected them on your own.				
27. You cooperated informally in the learning process of your classmates.				
28. You proposed materials for the English class.				
29. You used the technology to learn and practice English.				
30. You discovered materials that best suited your learning process and looked for a way to access these materials.				

Note. This survey has been adapted from the characteristics of autonomous learners proposed by Aparicio et al. (1995), Cárdenas (2003), Dam (1995), and Dickinson (1992).

Appendix 2: Questionnaire to Evaluate the Syllabus Structure

– Was the learners/teacher dialogue really effective?

– Were there enough reflection and feedback on the process of learning a language?

– Were the classroom tasks and materials related to the self-access center?

– Did the process of keeping a learning diary work?

Appendix 3: Teachers' Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (Adapted From Cárdenas, 2003 and Thavenius, 1999)

– Did I reconsider my teacher role through this experience?

_____

_____

– What aspects of an autonomous teacher's role still pose a challenge for me?

_____

_____

– What did I do for my students that they can and should do themselves?

_____

_____

– What did I do to encourage independence and responsibility?

_____

_____

– What did I do to help my students understand their learning processes and strategies?

_____

_____

– What has worked out for me that might help my students in their learning processes?

_____

_____

– Which new goals will I set for myself on my way to developing autonomy in further experiences?

_____

_____