

*PROPOSAL FOR A RESEARCH NETWORK ON LEARNER
AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING*

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(Interim Committee)

Proposal documentation

Background

The **AILA Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning (LALL)** has been one of AILA'S most successful SCs over the past thirteen years. It is a large international community of researchers working on a range of issues relating to learner autonomy. It is also an umbrella organization which offers a forum for regional organizations working in the field, and, as such, offers space for debate and dissemination of research through its website and e-discussion forum (AUTO-L). It enables the identification of current trends and research priorities, which makes it a dynamic SC, ever-evolving in both a responsive and proactive way.

For these reasons, an argument was put forward at AILA 2005 for the sustained existence of the SC under the auspices of AILA. At its Business meeting in Madison, members of the SC were clear in their commitment to continuing as a community, either within or outside AILA, recognizing the value of the work done by the conveners. Members attending that meeting expressed concern that an ReN may be narrower both in focus and geographical range, and that the synergies which are made possible by a broad SC may thus be lost.

We are grateful that these arguments were heard by AILA, and that continuation as a broad ReN was made possible. This proposal offers an overview of the work of the SC to date, and suggests the ways in which an ReN on learner autonomy in language learning would operate.

Aims of the ReN

At its August 1993 meeting, the AILA International Coordinating Committee established a Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy in response to a proposal developed by Anita Wenden and Leslie Dickinson. The proposal stated the purpose of the Commission as follows:

- to develop and establish a methodology of language learning;
- to stimulate further research in the area of learner strategies, self-directed learning, and self-instruction;
- to encourage the development of curricula (including appropriate materials and tasks) to incorporate language training with learner training in a variety of instructional contexts, and to evaluate these projects.

At the 1999 AILA SC Business Meeting in Tokyo, David Crabbe, Naoko Aoki and Jonathan Shaw were asked to produce a revised statement of aims for the SC. Members were sent a copy of the revised statement of aims (which appear below) in March 2000 and were invited to contact one of the SC conveners with any suggested modifications. None were received and the revised statement of aims and objectives was presented in December 2002 at the AILA SC Business Meeting in Singapore, where it was formally adopted.

It is envisaged that the ReN will continue to work to the same purpose and aims as the SC.

Purpose

To advance understanding of the role of learner autonomy in successful language learning.

Aim

To promote research and disseminate findings on:

- the nature of learner autonomy
- the conditions under which learner autonomy develops in individuals
- processes by which teachers or advisors might encourage or enhance learner autonomy in specific learning contexts

Objectives

The objectives of the Commission are:

- to maintain a data-base of its members and the research projects undertaken by them and other researchers
- to maintain a website and a bibliography of material related to learner autonomy
- to prepare an annual newsletter
- to hold forums at the International Congress of AILA and at other appropriate times in which research is presented and discussed.

The first meeting of AILA's Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy was held at the AILA Congress in Amsterdam on Thursday 12 August, 1993, at which Leslie Dickinson (UK) and Anita Wenden (USA) were elected as co-conveners for 1993-1996. Anita Wenden (USA), Leni Dam (Denmark) and Sara Cotterall (NZ) were elected as co-conveners for 1996 – 1999, Anita for a second term and Leni and Sara for a first. Leni Dam (Denmark), Sara Cotterall (NZ), and William Savage (Thailand) were elected co-conveners for 1999-2002, Leni and Sara for a second term and Bill Savage for a first. Ana Maria Barcelos (Brazil), Terry Lamb (UK) and Richard Pemberton (HK) were elected co-conveners for 2002-2005.

SC activities to date

The range of activity in which the SC is engaged can be seen on the website at

<http://lc.ust.hk/~ailasc/>

1. The SC has maintained a database of members which is constantly updated (see Appendix 1)

2. Members are invited to submit their publications for inclusion in a comprehensive bibliography maintained by Phil Benson which can be reached via the SC website. A form is available on the website for this purpose. In the past, the newsletter has also contained a list of autonomy-related publications from the previous year, and we plan to re-introduce this useful service in the next newsletter.
3. The website contains information on and links to conferences organized around the world on the theme of learner autonomy, resources related to learner autonomy, related websites such as AILA, language centres, and organizations focusing on learner autonomy such as the IATEFL SIG on Learner Independence, Professional Language Advisors Network, TESOL Arabia SIG on Learner Independence, the Independent Learning Association of Oceania and the Ciel Language Support Network. (Please note that we are in the process of finding a new home for the website as Richard Pemberton has now moved from Hong Kong. Until the new website is launched, updating is slow so information is being passed on via Auto-L.)
4. The LAPI (Learner Autonomy Project Inventory) is maintained by Hayo Reinders on behalf of the SC, and can be reached via the SC website. It is a searchable resource for those seeking fellow researchers for information or potential collaboration.
5. 8 newsletters have been produced since the beginning of the SC and these can all be found on the website in a variety of formats. The [next] newsletter for 2006 is already being prepared.
6. The SC has organized symposia at each AILA conference since its inception, and publications have arisen from all of them (see below, and appendix 2 for the description of the 2005 symposium).
7. Auto-L is an e-discussion list directly linked to the SC. Regular discussions are held, either spontaneously or facilitated by guest conveners. The next discussion will focus on ways of evaluating learner autonomy in learners undergoing learner training courses.
8. The SC has publicized a range of conferences carried out by institutions and organizations around the world, such as the Open University Conference on Learning Strategies held in 2004, the Brunets Seminars, the Independent Learning Association of Oceania (ILAO), the JALTCall Conferences, and the 2004 conference on learner autonomy held in Hong Kong and Hangzhou, China. The SC has publicized these conferences and been represented at them (see flyer available on the website). Terry Lamb and Sara Cotterall are members of the General Committee of ILAO, and Sara Cotterall is the convener of the 2007 ILAO conference, to be held in Japan.
9. The SC has held regular Business Meetings at AILA Congresses (see website for minutes of the 2002 meeting, and appendix 3 for the agenda of the 2005 meeting), and properly constituted elections have been organized in order to identify conveners. Continuity has been ensured by at least one convener continuing to work for two terms of office. For the next period, Terry Lamb will continue as convener of the SC (and later ReN). A call for nominations for the second convener has just been made, to be in place when the ReN is officially accepted (see appendix 4 for the call and a list of criteria for proposed conveners).

Recent AILA Symposia organized by the SC.

AILA 1996

Implementing autonomy

AILA 1999

Promoting autonomy: New insights

AILA 2002

Relationships between learner and teacher autonomy: realities and responses

AILA 2005

Learners' voices in language learning

Publications

The following are publications which have emerged directly out of AILA Symposia:

Cotterall, S. & Crabbe, D., eds. (1999) *Learner autonomy in language learning: defining the field and effecting change*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang

Dam, L. (2001) 'Learner autonomy: new insights/Autonomie de l'apprenant: nouvelle pistes'. Special Issue of AILA Review, 15

Lamb, T.E. and Reinders, H. (eds.) (In press) *Learner and teacher autonomy: concepts, realities and responses* (to be published by AILA Benjamins, 2006)

The papers from the 2005 AILA Symposium will appear in the new journal founded and edited by Terry Lamb and Hayo Reinders, to be published by Multilingual Matters from 2007, entitled *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*. The focus of this journal is on learner-centred approaches to language learning for the 21st century, and as such will be of interest to those working in the field of Learner Autonomy.

The following are a list of selected publications of SC members on topics that define the broader field of learner autonomy.

BOOKS

Barfield, A. & Nix, M. (eds.) 2003. *Autonomy you ask*. Tokyo: Learner Development Special Interest Group of JALT.

Benson, P. 2001. *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education.

Benson, P. and Toogood, S. (eds.) 2002. *Learner autonomy 7: challenges to research and practice*. Dublin: Authentik

Benson, P. and Voller, P. (eds.) 1999. *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London: Longman.

Cohen, A. 1998. *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. London: Longman.

- Dam, L. 1995. *Learner autonomy 3: from theory to classroom practice*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Dickinson, L. 1987. *Self instruction in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kalaja, P. & Barcelos, A.M.F. (eds.) 2003. *Beliefs about SLA: new research approaches*. Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Jiménez Raya, M. and Lamb, T.E. (eds.) 2003. *Differentiation in the modern languages classroom*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang
- Lamb, T.E. and Reinders, H. (eds.) forthcoming 2006. *Supporting independent learning: issues and interventions*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang
- Little, D. 1991. *Learner autonomy 1: definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik.
- McDonough, S. 2002. *Applied linguistics in language education*. London: Arnold.
- Mozzon-McPherson, M. & Vismans, R. (eds.) 2001. *Beyond language teaching: Towards language advising*. London: CILT.
- Murphey, T. & Dornyei, Z. 2003. *Group dynamics in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. 1988. *The learner-centred classroom: A study in second language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Palfreyman, D. & R. C. Smith. (eds.) 2003. *Learner autonomy across cultures: language education perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pemberton, R., S.L.Li. W.Or, H. Pierson, H. (eds.) 1996. *Taking Control: autonomy in language learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Sinclair, B., McGrath, I. & Lamb, T. (eds.) 2000. *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: future directions*. London: Longman.
- Ushioda, E. 1996. *Learner autonomy 5: the role of motivation*. Dublin: Authentik
- Victori, M. (ed.). 2000. *Autonomy in second language learning*. Links and Letters, 7. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Servei de publicacions.
- Vieira, F., Moreira, M.A., Barbosa, I. & Paiva, M. (eds.) 2002. *Pedagogy for autonomy and English learning: proceedings of the 1st conference of the working group - Pedagogy for Autonomy*. Braga: University of Minho, Portugal.
- Wenden, A. 1991. *Learner strategies for learner autonomy*. UK : Prentice Hall.
- Wenden, A. 1999. Special issue on research in metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning. *System: An International Journal in Educational*

Technology and Applied Linguistics 27(4) Elsevier Press.

Wenden, A.L. and Rubin, J. 1987. *Learner strategies in language learning*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall

White, C. 2003. *Language learning in distance education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ARTICLES/BOOK CHAPTERS

Aoki, N. & Smith, R. 1999. 'Learner autonomy in cultural context: the case of Japan.' In Cotterall, S. & D. Crabbe (eds.) *Learner autonomy in language learning: Defining the field and effecting change*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 19-27.

Bellingham, L. 2005. 'Is there language acquisition after 40? Older learners speak up'. In P. Benson & D. Nunan (eds.) *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 56-68.

Cotterall, S. 2005. 'It's just rules ... that's all it is at this stage'. In Benson, P. & Nunan, D. (eds.) *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 101-118.

Crabbe, D. 2003. 'The quality of language learning opportunities'. In *TESOL Quarterly* 37 (1), 9-34.

Hart, N. 2002. 'Intra-group autonomy and authentic materials: A different approach to ELT in Japanese colleges and universities.' In *System* 30 (1), 33-46.

Lamb, T.E. and Reinders, H. 2005. 'Learner independence in language teaching: a concept of change.' In Cunningham, D. and Hatoss, A. (eds.) (2005) *An international perspective on language policies, practices and proficiencies*. Belgrave, Australia: FIPLV

Littlewood, W. 2000. 'Do Asian students really want to listen and obey?' In *ELT Journal* 54 (1), 31-5.

Murray, G. 1999. 'Autonomy and language learning in a simulated environment'. In *System* 27 (3), 295-308.

Nix, M. 2003. 'Writing autonomy; or 'It's the content, stupid!' In A. Barfield & M. Nix (eds.) *Learner and teacher autonomy in Japan 1: Autonomy you ask!* Tokyo: Learner Development Special Interest Group of the Japan Association of Language Teachers.

Riley, P. 1996. 'The blind man and the bubble: researching self access.' In Pemberton *et al.* (eds.) *Taking control: Autonomy in language learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 251-264.

Rubin, J. 2001. 'Language learner self-management'. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 11 (1), 25-37.

- Sakui, K. 2004. 'Wearing two pairs of shoes: language teaching in Japan.' In *ELT Journal* 58 (2), 155-163.
- Spratt, M, Humphreys, G. & Chan, V. 2002. 'Autonomy and motivation: which comes first?' In *Language Teaching Research* 6 (3), 245-266.
- Ushioda, E. 2001. 'Language learning at university: Exploring the role of motivational thinking.' In Dornyei, Z & Schmidt, R. (eds.) *Motivation and second language acquisition*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Centre.
- Usuki, M. 2002. 'Learner autonomy: learning from the student's voice.' In *Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) Occasional Paper (Trinity College, Dublin) No. 60*.

Proposed ReN activity

The increase in alternative forms of delivery of courses and support of students has seen an increased interest in the issues addressed by the ReN. Recent research suggests that in the UK alone, approximately 80,000 Higher Education students (who are not specialist language students) are learning languages autonomously in Language Centres, either as part of their degree or as part of an institution-wide language learning programme. This figure is increasing, and is supported by the National Languages Strategy. This increase is, however, not limited to the UK. The EU Bologna agreement envisages that all Europeans will speak their mother tongue plus two others, and such an increase is linked to the development of independent learning opportunities. In many parts of Asia and Africa, multilingualism is a fact of life, and autonomy is being explored as a way of building on this.

New technologies for language learning and teaching are becoming more widely available and accessible. Previously 'alternative' forms of delivery of language such as through virtual learning environments and through mobile networks are becoming more mainstream and their development, implementation and pedagogical implications require critical reflection and investigation.

The proposed ReN on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning will therefore continue to play an important role in bringing together researchers (and teachers, advisors etc) engaged in the type of activity outlined above. Currently close links exist with a range of individuals and organizations devoted to scholarly activity; these will be expanded as appropriate. The following are some examples of work directly connected to the SC:

- The development of the new journal *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*
- The EuroPal Comenius project, currently developing a European Pedagogy for Autonomous Language Learning, including resources for teacher training, books and a Framework for Pedagogy for Autonomous Language Learning

- A conference on learning strategies being organized in 2006 at the University of Oxford
- A seminar organized by the Action Research and Evaluation Group in Colombia (with Terry Lamb as keynote speaker)
- Self-access conference to be held at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (with Terry Lamb as keynote speaker)
- ILAO conference to be organized in Japan in 2007 (with Sara Cotterall as convener)
- Support for the autonomy projects listed on the LAPI
- Collaboration on further publications, e.g. *Best practices in self-access center advisory services*, edited by Joan Rubin and submitted for publication to the Peter Lang series *Modern Language Teaching in Europe* (series editors: M Jimenez Raya and T. Lamb)

The ReN Symposium – AILA 2008

As was always the case with the SC, the ReN will organize a symposium on Learner Autonomy at the next AILA Congress in Germany. Previous foci have been identified by SC members either through Auto-L or at the SC Business Meeting held at the previous AILA Congress.

Following the election of a new convener, discussions about the next symposium will begin. This will include a discussion of current priorities for research around the world. It is envisaged that the symposium will continue to move the research agenda forward in line with developing trends, namely away from an exclusive focus on positivist approaches to measuring aspects of autonomy, and towards more heuristic research using innovative, qualitative and ethnographic methodologies.

Examples of the range of possibilities include:

1. Given the increasing inclusion of learner autonomy in language learning policy around the world, a consideration of different motivations, interpretations and constructions of autonomy in different policy contexts would help us to begin to build a map of autonomy in a comparative way. This could have a specific focus on an educational sector, such as young learners in school, or self-access learners.
2. Alternatively, an exploration of ways of evaluating autonomy would enable us to engage with policy makers, resist reductive approaches to assessment, and propose alternative, principled ways of building on the relationship between autonomy and evaluation to promote more effective learning.
3. A further possibility is to revisit some earlier developments, such as learner training or learning strategies, in order to explore new methods of working with learners.
4. The relationship between e-learning and autonomy would enable us to engage with the rapidly expanding use of new technologies for language learning, and to look critically at curriculum development and learner preparation.

Proposer

On behalf of the interim committee convened to oversee the transition from SC to ReN and to prepare this document, this proposal is being submitted by Terry Lamb, convener of the SC on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning.

Dr Terry Lamb is a lecturer in education and Director of Initial Teacher Education at the University of Sheffield, England. He has carried out research into learner and teacher autonomy, particularly with regard to foreign language learning in secondary schools, and published widely in the field. He has completed several funded research projects in the area of learner autonomy in language learning. One was a major national research project mapping pedagogical models for e-learning in the fields of languages, linguistics and area studies in Higher Education (funded by the LTSN Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies). A second developed virtual links between undergraduate language students and secondary school language learners in order to enhance motivation (funded by the DfES Innovation Unit). A third is exploring the development of autonomous professional development in future language teachers, and its relationship to their beliefs about teaching and learning. A fourth is developing ICT resources to support secondary school language teachers to develop a pedagogy for learner autonomy in language learning across Europe (funded by Comenius).

He has also carried out consultancy work in a number of countries and has delivered many keynote speeches and conference papers around the world. He plays an influential role working with governments both in Britain and overseas to develop language policy which is forward-looking and aware of the implications of new learning technologies for wider language learning (e.g. the UK, Australia, the Czech Republic, Malaysia). As a former president of the Association for Language Learning, he is actively engaged in professional development, and is still Honorary Membership Officer of the Association and member of Executive Council and Management Board. He is also a member of numerous advisory boards and executive bodies, including the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) and the Independent Learning Association of Oceania. He is a Governor of the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT), the National Centre for Languages and a member of the British Association for Applied Linguistics. He is a consultant to the BBC, working on the development of the digital curriculum, and he has appeared on BBC and Teachers' TV programmes discussing language learning.

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