Autonomy in language learning: the learner, the teacher and the institution

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To Frank and Lisi for our autonomous choice to depend on each other.
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Since Holec’s (1981) seminal work on autonomy in language learning, a great deal has been researched, theorized and published in the field. Much of this is positive and supportive to the concept of learner autonomy, and the arguments presented are indeed powerful and persuasive.

Recent work on learner autonomy has broadened the field to include teacher autonomy (c.f. Sinclair, McGrath & Lamb, 2000; Lamb & Reinders, 2008). These works are edited volumes in which theorizing and empirical inquiry by different authors is brought together around the central themes. It is some time since a book length work on language learning autonomy by a single author has been published, and the present work seeks to present an integrated overview of this increasing broad field of research.

The advantage of single authorship is that some effort must be made to provide a coherent view of the field. The disadvantage is that it is inevitably shaped by the author’s search for coherence that goes beyond what others have theorized or researched. Thus, this book is inevitably a personal view of how the autonomies of learners, teachers, institutions and societies interrelate, and seeks to advance the field by presenting a possible framework for autonomy rather than simply repeating the scholarship and research of others. Indeed the field has always been marked by a lack of scholarly consensus, and the present work fully acknowledges the difficulties. Some authors have expended much effort, for example, in exploring the ways in which assessors’ roles in independent learning differ from teachers’ roles. But surely both teachers and assessors’ work towards support learning in different contexts, and the roles they share, or ought to share, may be more interesting than their differences. In the search for coherence, the literature consulted has been wide-ranging, including work on learning autonomy in different cultures and educational contexts. The result is not a manual for promoting learning autonomy, which would inevitably be context specific, but rather a map of the relationships among the different actors in learning autonomy which may help with
The development of appropriate context specific educational policy and action.

The chapters of this book broach the difficulties in the field as they have revealed themselves in the course of writing. While much of the literature makes rather uncritical and wide-ranging claims for learner autonomy, there is also a substantial body of scholarship that presents arguments against autonomy. As the role of teachers is increasingly acknowledged in the support of learner autonomy, the question of teacher autonomy and its interface with the workplace and the society has acquired a new importance, and the resulting revised and more nuanced balance of autonomies among learners, teachers, institutions and the society indicates new directions for research and theorizing.

Chapter 1 explores the concept of autonomy in language learning, seeking a working definition of the concept in the relevant literature. Defining autonomy involves not only making comparisons between different definitions, but also distinguishing between autonomy and related concepts such as self-instruction, for example. This chapter looks at the origins of the construct of autonomy and the related concept of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). It also presents a review of other concepts such as individualization, self-instruction, independent learning, self-direction, learner-centred education, and self-access and its link with education, particularly in language learning.

In Chapter 2 some of the most relevant criticism in the literature at autonomy and self-determination is discussed. Objections to the desirability of autonomy and self-determination theory (ASDT) come from three main directions. Firstly, from the fields of psychology and philosophy, questions have been raised about the construct of autonomy. Secondly, from the educational field, there are studies that find autonomy an unsatisfactory educational goal and thirdly, other studies suggest that some forms of autonomy may be pedagogically undesirable in certain cultures. It is argued that these objections need to be taken seriously in seeking a coherent view of autonomy.

In Chapter 3, autonomy in language learning is revisited as a concept, taking into account more nuanced views as well as the objections to autonomy explored in the previous chapter, in an attempt
to integrate an operational definition of autonomy with the roles of learners, teachers and institutions.

Chapter 4 explores the relationship between teaching autonomy and learner autonomy. In this chapter, the preparation of learners for autonomy is discussed as well as the purposes claimed for teacher autonomy. These purposes are linked to definitions of teacher autonomy and instruments for measuring the phenomenon, leading to a discussion of autonomous teachers’ roles and duties.

In Chapter 5 the interaction between teacher autonomy and the workplace is discussed, looking at how teachers may be educated to assume their responsibilities in the promotion of learning and learner autonomy, as well as the impact of teacher autonomy in the workplace. Issues related to teaching professionalism are also addressed, in particular the constraints on teachers’ professionalism and job satisfaction, as well as the positive and negative effects of teacher autonomy.

Chapter 6 provides a personal overview of learner, teacher and institutional autonomy and suggests future directions in theorizing and research. The chapter draws upon concepts of autonomy developed in the field of education as well as language learning.

This book will be of interest to teachers, institutions and policy makers, whether or not they are personally committed to autonomy in language learning. While the main thrust of this volume is a search for coherence in an increasingly diversified field, it is a beginning for further research and theorizing rather than a final conclusion to the extant body of work on learner autonomy in language learning.
The purpose of this chapter is to explore the educational, philosophical and moral bases for autonomy in preparation for proposing an integrated view of learner autonomy in language learning.

This chapter explores the concept of autonomy in language learning, seeking a working definition of the concept in the relevant literature. Defining autonomy involves not only making comparisons between different definitions, but also distinguishing between autonomy and related concepts such as self-instruction, for example.

First, I will look at the origins of the construct of autonomy; second I will discuss Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and autonomy. Third, I will discuss the understanding of learning autonomy in education and present a review of related concepts such as individualization, self-instruction, independent learning, self-regulation, self-direction, learner-centred education, and self-access and its link with education, particularly in language learning.

1.1 The background of the idea of autonomy

It has been claimed that autonomy is central to liberal values such as freedom, rights, democracy, legitimacy, justice, and equality. The construct of autonomy understood as the capacity to think and act independently has been studied for centuries, and is nothing new. However, a better understanding of the concept of autonomy may help its promotion in educational institutions, and the reflections of philosophers of education like Dearden (1972), Callan (1988) and Strike (1982) provide elements for clarification of the concept in an educational context.
Dearden’s (1975) understanding of autonomy is related to the essential character of human nature as exercised in daily life. It is intrinsic to humans, and can be exercised by everyone in different activities. Dearden (1975, p. 453) argues that autonomy is an activity of the mind and is present in ‘making choices, deliberations, decisions, reflections, judging, planning, or reasoning’. These activities of the mind occur within a context where the necessary conditions of independence and freedom exist for the exercise of autonomy.

For Dearden, the ability to reason displayed by individuals in the course of explaining their thoughts and actions are acts of autonomy. These thoughts and actions are equally autonomous whether they come originally from one’s own mind or from others and have subsequently been incorporated consciously by the individual through reflection and understanding.

For Callan (1988), autonomy in education is an ideal with intrinsic value, with freedom as an important component. Freedom and autonomy are directly connected. Autonomy in education plays a central role in a liberal society and it is freedom that gives a framework for evaluating our values and freedom itself. Callan’s understanding of autonomy is described essentially as the self-regulation of will, that is, the control individuals exercise over a ‘set of propensities which gives general shape to the individual self’ (Callan, 1988, p. 26) throughout our lives.

Callan’s description of autonomy as regulation of the will of the individual in pursuit of his or her own interests with realism and independence of mind could not be expressed without taking into account the interests of others. The interests of one individual exists at least partly in the context of another individual’s interests, so that in any situation calling for autonomous action we have at least two human beings with the opportunity to exercise their autonomy.

Strike (1982) argues that autonomy is the opportunity that individuals have to make decisions for themselves, to exercise rational judgment and self-control, that is, the right to individual and collective self-determination, and psychological freedom. Humans have a right to autonomy because they are responsible for their actions and decisions.
1. The nature of autonomy in language learning

Strike’s definition of autonomy is an explicitly moral one. He describes autonomy as the condition of self-government which implies taking moral responsibilities for our decisions. In this conception of autonomy the relationship between autonomy and community is important, as freedom brings responsibilities to others and ourselves.

Kerr discusses these conceptions of autonomy in particular to the extent of how far or close they are related to social context. Kerr (2002, p. 15) argues that ‘autonomy is best understood as describing a particular kind of relation between individuals and their community’. For Kerr, there are aspects of Dearden’s, Callan’s and Strike’s understandings of autonomy that may give rise to problematic questions, such as the quality of the bases of an individual’s reasoning and what counts as autonomous actions. Kerr argues that Dearden’s conception of autonomy as an individual giving reason for his or her own actions implies that at some time the individual has acquired, for instance, the skills of reasoning and has access to the information needed to support his or her decisions. Therefore, what individuals have learned from others about exercising independent decision making, reasoning, and planning, they have learned from the shared history of their community.

It is important that the conception of autonomy goes beyond the individual to be meaningful for guiding educational policy and practice. The understanding of autonomy must be related to a conception of community, the social context and therefore moral principles which would strengthen it. In Kerr’s words:

The individual alone on an island is not bound by any moral rules since there is no one else present to whom she has to justify her decisions, or be honest to, or ensure her actions do not harm. Therefore we have no way of knowing whether they are able to “legislate for themselves” in accordance with moral rules. A display of morality may not be necessary for autonomy to exist, but an important component of autonomy is the ability to operate in the moral sphere (Kerr, 2002, p. 22).

The analysis of individual or isolated cases of autonomy does not add much to our understanding of autonomy. The autonomy of an individual is explained with reference to the relationship with others.
in his or her context. The conceptions of autonomy described above imply that all individuals are self-directing and self-controlling their lives within a context which includes the autonomy of others, so that this autonomy is a matter of degree because its exercise is connected to the extent of freedom afforded, the individual will, and skills for the exercise of autonomy.

1.2 The concept of autonomy in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Recent studies have extended the scope of enquiry beyond the field of philosophy, expanding research on autonomy into the fields of politics, science, psychology and sociology. For instance, research has been carried out in the area of business and work (Stone, Deci & Ryan, 2008; van Ruyssveeldt & van Dijke, 2011), education (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991; Wielenga-Meijer, Taris, Wigboldus & Kopier, 2011), psychology (Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 1985b), sports (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007), medicine (Ross, Blair, Godwin, Hotz, Katzmarzyk, Lam, Lévesque & MacDonald, 2009; Williams, McGregor, Zeldman, Freedman & Deci, 2004), entertainment (Tamborini, Bowman, Eden, Grizzard & Organ, 2010), and leadership (Neck & Houghton, 2006; van Knippenberg, D., van Knippenberg, B., De Cremer & Hogg, 2004). This expansion of studies on autonomy has led to a better understanding of the term.

Of particular interest in illuminating the concept of autonomy in learning is the work of Edward L. Deci’s and Richard M. Ryan on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). They have researched the construct of autonomy and self-determination and their work has been presented in several publications (for example, Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 1985b; Ryan & Deci, 2004, 2006). They describe two main philosophical traditions supporting autonomy or self-determination: the phenomenological and the analytic approach. The phenomenological approach to the topic of autonomy is based on the experience of autonomy and non-autonomy and its capacities, conditions and consequences. The analytic approach to autonomy is focused on the usage, plausibility and value concepts of autonomy.
The phenomenological approach to autonomy defines autonomy or self-determined acts as those that reflect will. Acts of will refer to those acts initiated and experienced by the self and not external others (Pfänder, 1967). However, the experience of acts of will carried out by a different agent, become an act of will of the self only if the self-endorses the action. These autonomous acts of others that become autonomous acts of the self are not necessarily responses to external influences, but must be fully endorsed by the self to become autonomous (Ricoeur, 1966). In Ryan and Deci’s (2006, pp. 4-5) words ‘autonomy is not restricted to “independent” initiatives but also applies to acts reflecting wholehearted consent to external inputs or inducements … for an act to be autonomous it must be endorsed by the self, fully identified with and “owned”.

The analytical approach proposes degrees of autonomy (Taylor, 2005), where acts may be placed on a continuum between fully autonomous and non-autonomous. Acts are fully autonomous or self-determined if they are fully endorsed at a higher order of reflection (Dworkin, 1988). This process of self-endorsement is shared by both the phenomenological and analytical approach. For the analytical approach a full endorsement, reflecting motives wholly attributable to the self, is required for true autonomy.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has provided an explanation of as well as empirical evidence for the relationship between the field of autonomy and self-determination and human motivation (Reeve, Ryan, Deci & Jang, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In SDT, Ryan and Deci have developed an approach to the study of motivation and personality where autonomy is a central concept for understanding self-regulatory behaviour. For Ryan and Deci, the meaning of autonomy refers to regulation by the self, to self-governance. A person’s level of autonomy may be located on a continuum from controlled external regulation to true self-regulation or autonomy. Dearden (1975, p. 453).

1. Extreme forms of motivation for autonomy as being externally regulated.
2. Partial assimilation of external controls.
3. Personal valuing of the actions of outside controls.
4. Both valued personally and well synthesized with one’s values and beliefs integrated.

5. Intrinsic motivation for self-governance, or rule by the self, highly autonomous.

In Ryan and Deci’s (2006) view, SDT is concerned with understanding the nature and consequences of autonomy, and detailing how autonomy develops and how it can be either diminished or facilitated by specific biological and social conditions. It is with autonomy and self-determination in the field of social influence within educational institutions that this book is concerned, the functional significance of people’s social acts for their goals and motives in language learning.

Self-Determination Theory identifies three core principles for sustainable motivation; these are competence, relatedness, and autonomy. It describes competence as the belief that we have the ability to influence outcomes; relatedness as the experience of satisfying and supportive social relationships; autonomy as the experience of acting with a sense of choice, and self-determination. SDT does not see autonomy as independence because a person may well be dependent on others while acting autonomously (Stone, Deci & Ryan, 2008). There are studies supporting the importance of fulfilling the human need for these core principles to promote sustainable motivation for productivity, creativity, and well-being (e.g. Baard, Deci & Ryan 2004; Williams, Deci & Ryan, 1998).

Autonomy and self-determination in educational institutions implies the functional significance of people’s social acts for their goals and motives in learning. Stone, Deci & Ryan (2008) proposed six actions for the implementation of sustainable autonomous motivation in organizations:

a) Asking open questions including inviting participation in solving important problems.

Creating a supportive dialogue among the students and with the teacher making open points or questions to invite exploration of topics and consideration of the possible answers of important problems about the learning aims.
b) Active listening including acknowledging students’ perspective.
Promoting active and reflective listening acknowledging students’ points and views and showing empathy on their perceptions on the topics.

c) Offering choices within structure, including the clarification of responsibilities.
A key issue to promote autonomy and self-determination is offering structured choices, a list of possible actions in order to deal with the topics and problems of the learning aims. Also providing clear responsibilities in their engagement of the task and acknowledging their contributions.

d) Providing sincere, positive feedback that acknowledges initiative, and factual, non-judgmental feedback about problems.
Effective feedback on participations and tasks is genuine when acknowledgement is provided on particular and creative actions. Avoidance of mere compliance as feedback can support autonomy. Feedback effectiveness comes from two ways teachers-students students-teacher and it is best communicated with openness, averting criticisms and judgments.

e) Minimizing coercive controls such as rewards and comparisons with others
Promoting more intrinsic motivation, minimizing extrinsic rewards and control, and promoting more autonomous motivation for learning and personal satisfaction. Putting emphasis on marks, external rewards, and differences among students’ achievements promotes a low quality of motivation for learning and may lead to cheating for obtaining these external rewards.

f) Develop talent and share knowledge to enhance competence and autonomy.
Providing opportunities for students to develop new skills and collaborate with others contributes to developing autonomy and self-determination. Offering opportunities to develop students’ personal interests in their learning, not as external rewards but as an answer to students’ needs, promotes autonomous motivation.
The promotion of autonomy in educational organizations and institutions may be achieved through the practice of these measures designed to sustain intrinsic motivation, an essential factor for the development of autonomy. This topic of educational institutions and the promotion of autonomy in learning will be discussed further in a later chapter in this book.

1.3 Autonomy in education: how learning autonomy differs from related concepts

The term autonomy has been increasingly used in the educational field since the last century and has become an important element in education. It is seen today as an effective alternative to traditional education that has greatly enriched educational practice. It would be an impossible task to write an exhaustive list of the social contingencies and currents of thought which contributed to the inception and the increased attention of autonomy in education.

Three authors, Freire, Illich and Holec, have been especially influential in the theory and practice of the learner’s participation in the educational process. Freire has questioned strongly the idea of education as ‘banking’, that is, learners conceived as ‘containers’ receiving, filing and storing what the teacher ‘deposits’, instructing and imposing ideas on the learners (Freire, 1970). The more the learner accumulates, the better the learner becomes and the more teacher deposits, the better the teacher becomes. Freire’s work supports learning autonomy. He pointed out that people, as members of society, should be aware of their own actions and the consequences of these actions to themselves and others in their environment. In a learning process, essentially interactive and social, reflection is essential to action because it helps the learner to be aware of his actions and their influence on society. Learning is something learners do rather than being done to them (Freire, 1998).

One of the most relevant Freire’s arguments for understanding the concept of autonomy is the link between freedom and responsibility. In Freire’s work autonomy is understood as freedom, and freedom also implies behaving freely within the limits imposed by responsibility.
1. The nature of autonomy in language learning

(Nicolaides & Fernandes, 2008). In this view, individuals need to be aware of their responsibilities and active in the search for improving their environment. It is through the development of autonomy that students have the opportunity to develop their ideas and exercise their abilities to change the world around them.

Illich in his book Deschooling Society (1970) presents a systematic analysis of the educational system. One of his main criticisms is the dependency on teachers and institutions that the educational system creates. It is assumed that learners learn because only teachers are capable of teaching and learners can learn only in an institution. In the structure of an educational institution teachers are the professionals and students are the consumers, so any learner’s attempt to exercise autonomy in learning is structurally undermined. The educational system weakens learners and prevents them from controlling their own learning. Learners do not trust their own abilities and this in turn affects their autonomy (Illich, 1970). Illich’s work has proposed the liberation of education, preservation of autonomy, and increasing reliance on self-learning to achieve an educational society where learning happens in autonomous events.

Holec’s work in the field of language learner autonomy started at the end of the 1960s as a member of CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogiques en Langues) at the University of Nancy in France. Many studies on autonomy in learning start by quoting Holec (1981) from his report on Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning for the Council of Europe (see for instance, Dam, 1995; Dickinson, L., 1987; Sinclair, 2000). Holec’s frequently cited definition of learner autonomy refers to ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning… and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning...’ It is the learners’ responsibility to make decisions about their learning in determining objectives, defining the content and progression of their studies, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Because of the importance of Holec’s definition on language learning autonomy, his work is more fully discussed later in this chapter.
These ideas have permeated educational research and practice and lead to a search for other ways to promote meaningful learning, particularly in the teaching and learning of languages. The emphasis has been on the learners’ role and participation in the educational process, considering learners capable of doing things for their own learning, rather than things being done to or for them.

In the context of language learning, Gremmo & Riley (1995) identified and examined the ideas and historical contingencies behind the idea of autonomy that have shaped analysis and debate on the topic. These influences include minority rights movements demanding changes in society for their rights; changes in educational philosophy searching a more humanistic education and considering the learner as the centre of more meaningful learning processes (Freire, 1970; Illich, 1970; Rogers, 1969); the questioning of behaviourism, rejecting the mechanistic and reductionist interpretation of human behaviour; linguistic pragmatism, where language is considered essentially pragmatic and social, as a tool for communication; the expansion of access to education and educational technology which have contributed to facilitating autonomy, and the promotion of a global world with demands for flexibility on educational and training services because of political developments and the rise of multinational corporations and tourism.

Furthermore, in language learning and teaching, the emphasis has moved from teaching grammar and vocabulary to prioritizing communicative functions, individual needs, social norms and autonomy, and an understanding of learning as essentially an interactive and social phenomenon. The characteristics of more demanding language learning with different purposes for different learners have led to a change in the language education provision towards more flexible learning programmes.

The term ‘autonomy’ in language learning has been used together with terms like individualization, self-instruction, independent learning, self-direction, independent learning, self-regulation, learner-centred education, self-access. These terms are related to autonomy in language learning but they are not the same. A short exploration of the definitions of these terms follows.
**Individualization**

L. Dickinson (1987, p. 11) explains that the term individualization is neutral in regards to who takes the responsibility for the learning: ‘Individualized instruction refers to modes of learning… it is concerned with the activities of the learner, the teacher and their interaction.’ In Dickinson’s definition, the teacher is involved with, but not directly in control of the learning process. In Chaix and O’Neil (1978) individualized learning is described as ‘a learning process that (as regards goal content, methodology and pacing) is adapted to a particular individual, taking this individual’s characteristics into consideration’. Individualisation seems to be a reasonable response to the realization that learners are different in many ways and that it may be appropriate to allow learners the freedoms they may need while not withdrawing teacher support. However, for Tudor (1996, p. 11) individualization is a somewhat unsatisfactory attempt to address the process side of learning. In his view, in practice, individualization tends to be excessively materials- and teacher-centred and not sufficiently concerned with empowering learners to take control of their learning.

Individualisation, then, can be seen as an approach to teaching and learning that takes learner differences into account but does not necessarily seek to develop autonomous learning capacities or allow learners to take control of their learning.

**Self-instruction**

Self-instruction, ‘deciding to learn without a teacher means that the learner, with others, or alone, is working without the direct control of a teacher’ (Dickinson, L., 1987, p. 11). Nunan (1997, p. 192) takes up Dickinson’s point about direct control and observes that a teacher figure, without being present in the learning situation, may still effectively make all the key decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, and how it will be assessed. Self-instruction, then, falls significantly short of the goals of autonomy in the areas of both capacity and control.
**Self-direction**

Self-direction in learning describes an attitude to learning, ‘where the learner accepts responsibility for his (sic) learning but he (sic) does not necessarily carry out courses of action independently in connection with it’ (Dickinson, L., 1987, pp. 11-12). In this definition, learners accept control but may lack capacity. Learners may be able and willing to determine their objectives and monitor progress, but may need expert support in getting there. Dickinson’s definition therefore implies elements of both process and product. Dickinson (1987, p. 11) describes self-direction in terms of attitudes rather than techniques or even modes of instruction, and this is consistent with Candy’s analysis (1991). Candy identifies two processes in self-directed learning: learner-controlled instruction which takes place in formal learning contexts, and autodidaxy, that is, self-directed learning which takes place outside of formal institutions. Candy also identifies two personal attributes associated with self-directed learning, namely self-management, which is the ability to be self-directing in learning within the constraints of the context, and personal autonomy, which is the exercise of freedom on a broader scale.

A learner may be self-directed and yet attend and participate in a conventional teacher-led class or alternatively may follow any one of the possible self-instructional modes. For Dickinson and Candy then, self-directed instruction is not a synonym for learning autonomy, and this view is supported by others (Little, 1990; Riley, 1986).

Tudor (1996, pp. 26-27) takes a different view and holds that self-direction is synonymous with autonomy as defined by Holec. Tudor sees it as ‘the strategic and attitudinal traits of a learner who is able, or who is in the process of developing the ability to make informed decisions relative to his language learning, and who accepts the responsibility in a free and willing manner.’ This view is consistent with the meaning of autonomy as a long-term self-initiated learning process, and is less concerned with accomplishment than with attitude. According to this way of thinking, then, self-direction seems to be connected with aspects of both capacity and control and in some respects it seems to be synonymous with autonomy. As an attitude
relating to the process of learning, many researchers would agree that self-direction is the same as autonomy, but Dickinson’s observation that there may still be a role for others in the implementation of the learning, distinguishes his definition of self-direction from his own definition of autonomy (see above), but not from Benson’s (2001).

**Independent learning**

Autonomy is not equivalent to independent learning as the latter may or may not be initiated by the self (Pfänder, 1967). Conversely, merely doing independent learning does not necessarily imply having taken a conscious decision to do it (Ryan & Deci, 2006). For instance, learners who have been instructed to work independently can hardly be said to be autonomous in their learning.

**Self-regulation**

According to Zimmerman (1989), self-regulation is self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions used to attain goals. Zimmerman suggests that self-regulated learning involves the regulation of three general aspects of learning: the active control of material and human resources, the control and changes of motivational beliefs, and control of various cognitive strategies for learning. Therefore, self-regulated learning refers to an integrated and constructive process developed by the learners and consists of the control of metacognitive, motivational and behavioural actions to pursue a set of goals in a specific environment. The term ‘self-regulation’ emerged in the work of health psychology, educational psychology, and organizational psychology.

Ryan & Deci’s Self-Determination Theory (1985a) is a central concept for understanding self-regulatory behaviour. According to SDT, autonomy refers to regulation by the self, to self-governance. A person’s level of autonomy may be located on a continuum from controlled external regulation to true self-regulation or autonomy. Learning autonomy, in this view, is a synonym of self-regulated learning. In the context of language learning, Benson & Voller (1997) defined learner autonomy as the ability to take personal or ‘self-regulated’
responsibility for learning. In educational contexts, learner autonomy implies reflective involvement in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating learning.

I lastly focus on two terms, learner-centred education and self-access, which, although they are not used interchangeably with ‘autonomy’, are sometimes associated with it.

Learner-centred education

Learner-centred education is a general paradigm in education, which may include individualization, self-direction, self-instruction, autonomy, and independence. According to Gardner and Miller (1999), learner-centred methodologies ‘encourage teachers to relinquish their traditional roles as controllers of students’ learning.’ For Tudor (1996, p. 12), learner-centred education has developed as a principle for organizing activities, as a manifestation of learner autonomy and as a perspective for course design. However, in Tudor’s version there seems to be a mismatch between the controlling role of the educator and curriculum designer and the development of learner autonomy. Discussing autonomy, Tudor (1996, p. 20) seems doubtful that students can acquire the ‘impressive array of learning skills’ required. This may explain the emphasis on control while not discounting the ‘central role which learners can and should play in the management of their language study’ which Tudor considers the most important aspect of autonomy.

Self-access

Self-Access Centres are based on the idea of providing language learning didactic materials (for instance, textbooks, practice exercises, dictionaries, grammar books, reading, etc.) in writing, audio and visual forms, as well as specific learning advice for students. CRAPEL in France and Cambridge University established self-access language centres in the 1980s to facilitate access to a wide range of learning materials and promote self-directed learning, assuming this would lead to autonomous learning (Benson, 2001, p. 9). Self-access is a methodology where students have access to appropriate materials
for self-instruction. The term is neutral as to how self-directed or other-directed the learners are. Self-access learning or individualized instruction refers to modes of learning (Dickinson, L., 1987, pp. 11, 27) rather than where the locus of control may lie. For Gardner and Miller (1999, p. 8) self-access is a way of encouraging students to be more autonomous and less teacher dependent. This relativism with regard to autonomy is prevalent in the literature (see for example Dickinson, L., 1987 on systems; Kelly, 1996 on counselling; Nunan, 1997 on materials).

In self-access, there is broad support for some kind of tutor support for the learner in their interactions with the materials and equipment as well as in organizing and monitoring their learning. Self-access is often associated with learning autonomy in languages, but even though the potential of the setting is high for the promotion of learning, self-access does not guarantee autonomy. Developing autonomy depends on the freedom that learners have to take control of their learning and on devising a system through which students have the choice of learning in their own way (Cook, 2001).

1.4 An integrated view of autonomy in language learning

The importance of the concept of autonomy in language learning is reflected in the extensive literature devoted to the theme and the constant evolution and refinement in thinking about the subject. The redefinition and therefore the clarification of autonomous learning have awakened the interest of language teachers and of the language teaching profession, has shown more interest in the promotion of autonomy in the teaching and learning process in recent years (See for instance, Barfield & Delgado, 2013; Lamb & Reinders, 2008). The implications for education in language learning are considerable, calling into question not only concepts of pedagogy but also the very existence of teachers and learning institutions as the apparatus for supporting learning; nor are the implications of autonomous learning restricted to education. A society of learners that does not depend on institutions and teachers may be capable of questioning political authority too.
Little (1999, p. 1) has pointed out that in order to maintain a coherent overview of any field the definition and redefinition of terms is central to all theory. This is the case regarding the concept of ‘autonomy’ in language learning. He has elaborated what he sees as five common misconceptions about autonomy:

- Autonomy is used as synonymous for self-instruction: It is understood as simply working without a teacher.
- In order to encourage autonomy the teacher must relinquish all control in the classroom. However, autonomy is still possible in a class where the teacher remains in control.
- ‘Learner autonomy’ is a new methodology, that it is something that can be programmed into a series of lesson plans.
- Autonomy is a single, easily described behaviour. However, autonomy can take many different forms (age, stage of learning, goals, etcetera).
- Autonomy is a steady state achieved by certain learners the permanence of autonomy cannot be guaranteed and autonomy can be in one area and not be in another. (Little, 1999, p. 1).

These misunderstandings may have deterred teachers from attempting to foster autonomous learning in the classroom. Macaro (2003, p. 7), in his survey of what language teachers in England wanted from research, stated that informants wanted learner autonomy to be a focus, but none of these teachers were able to give an explanation of autonomy.

In order to clarify his definition of autonomy, Little (1999, pp. 3-4) stated that it is necessary to know what autonomy is not:

- Autonomy is NOT exclusively or primarily a matter of how learning is organized.
- Autonomy does NOT require the teacher to relinquish all initiative, intervention and control.
- Autonomy is NOT something that teachers do to learners. It is not a new methodology.
- Autonomy is NOT a single easily described; behaviour autonomy can manifest itself in a very many different ways.
1. The nature of autonomy in language learning

- Autonomy is NOT a state achieved by certain learners… autonomy is likely to be hard-won and its permanence cannot be guaranteed; and the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another.

It is clear from Little’s comments on what autonomy is not, or is mistakenly believed to be (and there are certainly teachers –and researchers– who would disagree with Little in their conceptualizations of autonomy) that defining autonomy is not a straightforward matter.

One of the (apparently) simplest definitions of autonomy, as the capacity to take control over one’s own learning (Benson, 2001, p. 110), may provide a starting point for exploring the concept. This definition of autonomy contains two key elements, namely the capacity of the learner to take autonomous action, and the application of that capacity to control learning. Examining the capacity for autonomy and the exercise of that capacity raises many questions, however, I will begin by looking at learner autonomy as a capacity then move on to examine aspects of control over learning. I will then discuss degrees of autonomy and the purposes of autonomy.

*Autonomy as a capacity*

Researchers of autonomy have tended to concentrate their efforts to define autonomy either on the capacity or in the control elements implicit in the general definition above. Of the two, capacity may be taken to be the more fundamental: without the capacity to take control, the freedom to take control is worthless.

In the field of applied linguistics, many authors start by quoting Holec (1981) from his report on Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning for the Council of Europe (see for instance, Dam, 1995; Sinclair, 2000, Dickinson, L., 1987) so that Holec’s description of autonomy has been the base for work in the theory and practice of language learning autonomy.

Holec’s definition of autonomy referred to ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning…and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning…’ (Holec, 1981, p. 3). This definition includes the elements of capacity and control linking them with the
personal attribute of responsibility, which may be taken as one of the capacities needed to exercise authority or control. It is capacity, then, or its synonym – in this case ‘ability’ – that is emphasized rather more than control. He goes on to say (Holec, 1981, p. 3) that ‘…this ability has to be learnt consciously or unconsciously…’ suggesting that it is capacity or ability that he means to prioritize in his definition. Other authors have also focused on capacity in their own definitions.

For instance, Dam’s definition of learner autonomy is ‘characterized by a readiness to take charge of one’s own learning in the service of one’s needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others as a socially responsible person.’ (Dam, 1995, p. 1). Here, Dam makes explicit use of ‘capacity’ in her definition, linking it with ‘willingness’ and ‘readiness’ which may also be understood as capacities. Riley (1987, p. 84) defines autonomy ‘as the capacity to initiate and successfully manage one’s own learning programme. An autonomous learner is one who has learnt how to learn. He or she is capable of identifying needs, defining objectives, obtaining materials, selecting study-techniques and evaluating progress.’ This definition includes several capacities as the abilities held by a person to do or understand something, and capabilities, that is, the abilities that can be developed and improved and clearly prioritizes them over their application to the learning programme.

Little (1999, p. 4) offers the following definition: ‘essentially, autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning.’ Little here is only concerned with capacities.

Learner autonomy as a capacity is problematic in research in two ways. Firstly it is not susceptible to direct observation, and secondly it is a potential that may or may not be used. Although there are difficulties in identifying and measuring capacities in learners, the exercise of any control over learning clearly requires the capacity to do so. The key theoretical issues of where the capacity for autonomous learning might come from and how it may be supported and developed are discussed in later chapters.
Autonomy as control

Autonomy, viewed as control over learning, has the advantage of being more observable than a capacity, which may be present but not used or used selectively (Dickinson, 2001). Control, on the other hand, is linked to observable behaviours and potentially to documentary evidence. For instance, where Holec (1981, p. 3) refers to autonomous learners taking charge of their learning, we might expect to see not only independent behaviour but also documents such as statements of personal objectives, plans of work, learning diaries, or evaluations of progress and achievements. Where teachers or institutions seek to promote autonomous behaviour, there will also be documents that record specific actions and perhaps specific statements of policy and definition of responsibilities.

Benson’s (2001, p. 50) definition of autonomy differs from that of Little’s (1991, p. 4) who sees autonomy basically as a capacity. Benson prefers to think of autonomy as ‘...the capacity to take control of one’s learning’. At first sight this does not seem significantly different from Holec’s (1981, p. 3) definition. However, Benson criticizes Holec for taking a purely technical view of decision-making and not making explicit the cognitive skills needed to manage learning effectively. Benson seeks to overcome what he sees as an imbalance in the views of both Holec and Little by elucidating what he means by control more precisely. Autonomous language learners, he maintains, exercise control over cognitive processes through an understanding of the psychology of learning, over learning management through their learning behaviour, and over learning content through their choice of learning situations. This extended description of what an autonomous learner may exercise control over, gives an indication of the areas where a researcher may look for evidence of autonomous behaviour.

Benson is not alone in drawing attention to the control element of autonomy. L. Dickinson (1987), Holec (1981) and Riley (1987) all make reference to elements of control in autonomy. Pierson (1996, p. 50) holds that: ‘a fundamental principle of autonomous learning is that the locus of control is in the hands of the individual learner’. Esch (1996, p. 35) suggests that autonomy is ‘the notion that language learners should
be encouraged to be in control of their own learning path’, which fits well with Benson’s three areas of control. Voller and Pickard (1996, p. 115) see the path towards autonomy as ‘learning how to learn in order to take control of one’s own learning’, which may be taken to relate to understanding and managing the learning process as described by Benson. Gardner and Miller (1996, p. vii) define autonomous language learners as those who ‘initiate the planning and implementation of their own learning program’, a clear endorsement of control as the principal attribute of autonomy. Johnson and Johnson (1999, p. 25) hold that autonomous learning ‘is based on the principle that learners should take maximum responsibility for and control of, their own learning styles and strategies outside the constraints of the traditional classroom’. The key words in this definition are ‘responsibility’ and ‘control’. The concept of responsibility is closely linked to authority in organizational theory (for instance Weber 1947), and the exercise of control implies having the authority for independent action. L. Dickinson (1987, p. 11) describes autonomy as ‘the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy there is no involvement of a ”teacher” or an institution. And the learner is also independent of specially prepared materials’. Dickinson’s definition includes both responsibility and implementation of decisions which may be taken as an aspect of control.

Through all these definitions there is a thread that indicates that autonomy may not be an all or nothing concept but may be present in different learning situations in different degrees.

Degrees of autonomy

If autonomy has elements of both capacity and control, it may be supposed that different degrees of autonomy exercised will be the result of different capacities or degrees of capacity, different opportunities for taking control, and different degrees of motivation to take control in different learners.

Three researchers in particular refer to autonomy in terms of degree. Nunan (1997, p. 193) argues that autonomy is not an absolute
1. The nature of autonomy in language learning

cconcept and has degrees of realization depending on a range of factors related to the personality of the learner, his goals, and the institutional and cultural contexts. And L. Dickinson (1987, p. 28) is careful to point out that learners should not be required to take more responsibility for their learning than they can cope with, suggesting that degrees of autonomy exist and should be respected. Lastly, Sinclair (2000, p. 8) says that ‘promoting learner autonomy…is a matter of empowering learners so that they are in a better position to take on more responsibility for their learning than before, if they so desire’.

All of these observations on degrees of autonomy assume the locus of control to lie with the learner, and variable elements are the capacity and opportunity to control learning.

The purposes of autonomy

It is argued that the aim of autonomy is both to promote effective learning and to develop autonomous learners, better prepared to participate actively and responsibly in their communities. For some, autonomy in language learning is a goal in itself (Benson, 2000; Esch, 1996). It is also seen (Benson, 2000, p. 17; Chamot and O’Malley, 1994; Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander & Trebbi, 1990, p. 102; Littlewood 1997, p. 83) as a transferable skill which, once acquired through language learning, can be applied in other learning projects. In contrast however, Esch (1997) and Wenden (1995) hold that language learning skills, including autonomous learning, are task specific, and by implication not necessarily transferable in whole or in part.

For some researchers, the development of learner autonomy is almost a moral imperative. The philosophy and ideology behind autonomy suggest a plan of activities on a long-term basis to achieve a specific goal of self-determination. According to Crabbe (1993, p. 443) ‘the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices, in learning as in other areas, and not become a victim… of choices made by social institutions’. Similarly, Benson (2000) sees autonomy as a fundamental human right, and elsewhere (Benson, 2001, p. 46) highlights the political and philosophical assumptions that lie behind promoting autonomy in learning.
Autonomy is therefore linked to a number of purposes. For some it is a tool for learning a language, while others think it leads to deep personal transformations. Others see autonomy as a human right, and still others think it is a fundamental characteristic of human beings. These views are clearly related and not mutually exclusive, but the differences call into question the kind and amount of support learners may need in order to exercise their autonomy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored briefly the background of concepts that may illuminate ideas of autonomy in general and in language learning in particular. In the field of autonomy in language learning, definitions abound, but remain inconclusive as no one definition has been universally accepted. One way to proceed is to look at concepts related to but distinguishable from learner autonomy, and in that context individualization, self-instruction, independent learning, self-direction, learner-centred education, and self-access were examined to see in what way they might diverge from autonomy. In searching for an integrated view of autonomy in language learning, different constructs of autonomy were discussed, including autonomy as a capacity and as control; other attributes of autonomy, such as degree and purpose, were also discussed. This chapter has not developed a working or operational definition of autonomy, however. Before such a definition is attempted, it is necessary to consider the objections to the desirability of autonomy and the circumstances in which autonomy may be challenged as a legitimate goal. This is the issue addressed in Chapter 2.
In Chapter 1 different aspects of learner autonomy in language learning were discussed. Within the field of language learning, autonomy is generally viewed as difficult but desirable, but it must be acknowledged that there is also a body of literature that questions the desirability of autonomy and these criticisms need to be addressed in any study of the field. In this chapter I will discuss some of the most relevant criticisms in the literature at autonomy and self-determination. In the previous chapter these two concepts were discussed separately, but if the two are not identical, they are at least so closely related that it is convenient to consider them as a single entity as proposed by the autonomy and self-determination theory (ASDT).

Objections to the desirability of ASDT come from three main directions. Firstly, from the fields of psychology and philosophy where questions have been raised about the construct of autonomy that arise from studies of human behaviour, for example in the field of behaviourism and reductionist neuroscience (Pinker, 2002; Skinner, 1977) as well as from studies on non-conscious behavioural processes (Burton, Lydon, D’Alessandro & Koestner, 2006; Ratelle, Baldwin & Vallerand, 2005) and research on the effects of making choices (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven & Tice, 1998; Schwartz, 2000). Secondly, from the educational field; there are studies that find autonomy an unsatisfactory educational goal (Hand, 2006; Laurillard, 2002). And thirdly, other studies suggest that some forms of autonomy may be pedagogically undesirable in certain cultures (Jones, 1995; Riley, 1988).
2.1 On the construct of autonomy

The behaviourist explanation of behaviour is that it is caused by the environment, where an external set of reinforcement contingencies control actions (Skinner, 1971). Behaviourism does not recognize self-determination understood as the integrative processes leading to the self-endorsement of actions prompted externally (Ryan & Deci, 2006). A similar approach has been taken by some reductionist interpretations of neuroscience where it is claimed that behaviour is caused by internal mechanisms in the brain and not the autonomous will of the actor (Pinker, 2002).

The behaviourist refusal to accept autonomy or self-determination to explain intrinsic motivation with internal processes has been challenged by some researchers; sometimes using the same research that behaviourists have used to deny autonomy or will (see Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999a). ASDT accepts that reinforcement contingencies have an effect on behaviour, but it goes beyond a simple cause and effect relationship and explains the negative consequences of external control of learning behaviour. For example, ASDT explains why dependency on the external reinforcement of learning behaviour leads to low intrinsic motivation. It further claims that there is a function of the brain which supports the internal processes of the endorsement of actions by the self when autonomy is taking place in the context of external influences. Behaviourism and reductionist neuroscience tend to ignore the effect of the multiple and interacting levels of causation of actions that help to understand and explain the functioning of autonomy and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2004).

Some studies on non-conscious behavioural processes have shown that people are not always conscious of the factors that make them act (Wilson, 2002). This calls into question the issue of autonomy or self-determination and has suggested that autonomy in actions and self-motivated acts are an illusion (Wegner, 2002). Both autonomous and controlled behaviour can be provoked by implicit motives and non-conscious elements, and ASDT explains that implicit and explicit motives as well as non-consciously and conscious actions are different when linked to autonomous and controlled motivation.
In this context, Deci & Ryan (1980) distinguish between automatic and automatized acts. They argue that automatic acts, those instigated by controlled processes, do not involve an active choice, whereas automatized acts are those that fit with people’s needs without conscious reflection or planning. As Ryan & Deci (2006) pointed out, contrasting non-conscious and conscious deliberateness does not inform us well about the autonomy of actions. They concluded that some habits and reactions would be experienced as autonomous, while others will be seen as alien, imposed, or unwanted. ASDT has stated that people’s autonomy is shown when they exercise their capacity to reflectively endorse or reject an urge or a prompt and consent to its enactment (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Another interesting criticism to autonomy or self-determined actions is the view that too many choices can be overwhelming and may be debilitating (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000) leading to doubts about the benefit of autonomy. Schwartz (2000) pointed out that too many opportunities for choice promote the ‘tyranny of self-determination’. In ASDT, providing choices is an important element for the functioning of self-determined actions, but the provision of these choices is intended to facilitate the exercise of autonomy. How many choices are too many will depend on the person exercising autonomy and the context. These researchers confuse autonomy with choice and present an over-simplified view of autonomy as making decisions among limited options.

Autonomy and self-determination is central to human functioning, and the lack of autonomy, that is, the excessive external control of behaviour, has a negative effect in human development of well-being, healthy development, performance, creativity, and social integration (Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello & Patrick, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2006).

The external control of actions may be openly or subtly exercised in everyday life. Coercion may be an open way to control behaviour, but there are more subtle ways to obstruct autonomy, for example the use of rewards. Deci & Ryan (1985b) and Kasser (2002) have worked on experimental research contrasting the effects of rewards on the facilitation and undermining of intrinsic motivation. They found that intrinsic motivation is a necessary condition for autonomy. Therefore
extrinsic rewards lead to less autonomy, less well-being and less healthy relationships.

Teachers and tutors in educational institutions often use external rewards to control students, thus undermining intrinsic motivation. This control may use a range of open or subtle instruments, for instance grades, certificates, public lists of achievements or honours, ignoring students’ participation, or highlighting mistakes negatively on student’s production.

2.2 Criticism of autonomy as an educational goal

The general thrust of the literature suggests that autonomy in language learning is desirable even though there may be differences in how it is conceptualized. Schmenk (2005, p. 107) comments on the development of autonomy as a new and fashionable field of study worldwide but in the wider field of educational thinking, however, there is less general agreement on the benefits of learning autonomy.

Laurillard (2002, p. 196), discussing pedagogy, states: ‘…beneath the rhetoric of “giving students control over their learning” is a dereliction of duty’. Laurillard’s book is about the use of technology in university teaching in general and any application in language learning is purely incidental. She does not criticize autonomy as such, but in the literature, students taking control of their learning is one of the fundamental principles of autonomy. Her above cited comment is all the more surprising as educational technology is usually thought to enhance and support autonomous learning (Little 1996, p. 203; Milton 1997, p. 247; Schmenk 2005, p. 112) although Milton (1997, p. 293) is critical of much commercially available computer assisted language learning (CALL) software. Milton’s criticisms are relevant in the discussion of Laurillard’s apparent opposition to autonomy. For Milton, attempts to mediate learning by replicating the roles of human tutors through electronic resources are inherently unsatisfactory and limit rather than enhance learning experiences. Farmer (2006a, p. 105) suggests that the role of human tutors in managing the learning process does not invalidate student autonomy but rather provides the
professional support learners need regardless of the degree of autonomy they may have. He considers that Laurillard’s apparent opposition to autonomy may be seen as an objection to the withdrawal of teacher support for learners rather than an objection to any assertion of independence by the learner. Pennycook (1997, p. 439) is also critical of versions of autonomy that propose the withdrawal of teacher support. Interpreted in this way, Laurillard’s seeming opposition to autonomy may be a timely warning that failing to provide adequate support for learners is professionally negligent, and does not imply that all learners need complete and constant expert attention.

Hand’s (2006) criticisms of autonomy as an educational goal are more wide-ranging and explicit than Laurilard’s. He is not against autonomy as such, but rather against setting autonomy as a goal for education, and he presents two arguments to support his position. Firstly, he argues, autonomy in the sense of being free to exercise choice is desirable, but autonomy is a process and a product of circumstances rather than a goal for education. If not actually under surveillance or physically constrained, people are able and willing from quite a young age to take appropriate action in pursuit of their aims. Secondly, he questions whether it is desirable for educators to seek to develop in learners a disposition to rely on their own judgment rather than that of experts or to resist legitimate authority. Hand is discussing education in general and makes no allusion to language teaching.

If the questions posed by Laurillard and Hand do not, upon close inspection, amount to a rejection of autonomy and self-determination, they nevertheless have a bearing on those versions of autonomy which treat it as a product and advocate learner training in the use of learning strategies as a requisite for exercising autonomy. There are several examples of researchers advocating training in learning strategies to facilitate autonomy in learning (see Ellis, G. & Sinclair, 1989; Holec, 1981; Oxford, R., 1990; Rubin, 1975 for instance). Llaven-Nucamendi & Farmer (2012) have documented how strategy training has been developed in a Mexican context, where learner training has been shown to be effective in some circumstances. Some researchers have taken learner training to extremes. Ravindran (2000), for instance,
describes a course lasting up to three years designed to certify learners as competent to learn autonomously.

On the other hand, some strategies intended to promote learner autonomy may have the opposite effect. Clemente (2003, p. 213) describes counselling sessions which may serve to limit rather than enable learner access to self-access activities in a Mexican university. While it may be professionally negligent not to provide learners with information that could help them (Farmer 2006a, p. 107), that is a different matter from assuming deficiencies in learners which must be made good by training, and even further from certifying learners as competent to learn autonomously. In Clemente’s study, counselling sessions were dominated and directed by counsellors with the intention of steering learners towards appropriate autonomous behaviour as perceived by the counsellors. Such attempts to influence behaviour are incompatible with the autonomy that learners may develop for themselves, and is perhaps inherent in all attempts to ‘teach’ autonomy to learners.

2.3 Cultural influences on the exercise of autonomy

Riley (1988) raised concerns about the cultural implications of autonomy in language learning, and whether students from different cultures find different degrees of difficulty in adopting autonomous learning. Riley found that the readiness of students to adopt autonomy depended on their ethnic background, but the measure of what constituted autonomy was determined by the researcher, so that there must be doubts about the validity of the findings. Nevertheless, there are widely held assumptions about different cultures and the effect of cultures on the autonomy of their members.

The terms “western” and “non-western” are widely used in many academic debates in the social, cultural and political fields, although there is no consensus on their meaning and content. These words as a system of classification, mechanism of identification or point of reference are confusing and ambiguous and unhelpful in understanding or explaining the world, because they do not clarify what is included
and excluded. In addition, they tend to underestimate significant differences putting diverse countries such as Mexico, countries in Africa and India in the same group for example. The generalization of the use of “western” and “non-western” means they very often do not correspond accurately or usefully with the geography, social or cultural characteristics of the groups they are intended to describe.

In the literature on autonomy and self-determination a lot has been said about the western (whatever that means) ownership of the functioning of autonomy, and further, it has been concluded that autonomy, individualism and independence are Western cultural values and therefore difficult to promote in non-Western cultures. (Cross & Gore, 2003; Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Culture is considered very important in the development of societies and yet it is not easy to see and count it in any obvious way. To understand culture rigorous ethnographic observation is needed since the lack of ethnographic knowledge will make it difficult to understand the social meaning that the members of a community have built (Ochs, 2002, p. 115). Culture is difficult to define, and researchers in the field have pointed out that there has been more or less a consensus that it is not possible to lay down an ‘authorised’ definition of culture that would be applicable in all contexts (Risager, 2006, p. 42; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Western and non-Western cultures are unclear terms and do not lead a helpful understanding of their relationship with autonomy for two reasons. First, these terms are too wide and treat different nations and their cultures as one, ignoring the identity of individual cultures in the ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ regions; second, this classification disregards culture as an entity in constant movement in a global world. Culture is not something static as suggested by its classification and use as a noun, but rather dynamic, ‘culture is a verb’ according to Street, (1993). ‘Culture is not fixed and frozen, but a process of constant struggle as cultures interact with each other and are affected by economic, political and social factors’ (Sarup, 1996, p. 140).

In a Japanese context, Kubota (1999, p. 14) notes that Western culture is often characterised by western educators as promoting individualism, self-expression, critical and analytic thinking, and
extending knowledge. Asian culture, by contrast, values collectivism, harmony, indirection, memorization and conserving knowledge. These are all positive terms and may aim to describe cultures as equal but different, but the power relations involved in western dominated English language teaching tend to favour Western values. Other researchers have differentiated between different cultural conceptualizations of autonomy. For instance, Pennycook (1997, p. 43) argues that certain kinds of autonomy may be a peculiarly western construct, and that other manifestations of autonomy in different cultures may be difficult to detect for western observers. Holliday (2003) takes this idea further and proposes autonomies that make no prior assumptions about cultures or the individual members of cultures, he is particularly critical of standardized Western pedagogy which prioritizes oral participation and sees that as the main indicator of learner autonomy (Holliday, 2003p. 124). An apparent clash between western and local cultural values in relation to autonomy is also addressed by Jones (1995), who describes a Self-Access Centre (SAC) in Cambodia where autonomy is not the goal, but where individual learning styles are supported through group activities. The reason Jones gives for steering away from striving to achieve autonomy is the supposed unsuitability of autonomy in Asian cultures. The research indicates that any apparent lack of autonomy in different cultures may mean either that autonomy is not possible in that culture or simply that it is not easily recognized by outside observers.

Research in Mexico on the topic of learning autonomy has been scarce. However, there are some interesting studies, for instance, the work of Clemente (2003) on advising language learning; the studies of Castillo on advising in multilingual settings and plurilingual learning (2011); Fabela Cárdenas (2009) on teachers’ attitudes to learning autonomy in SAC and Llaven-Nucamendi (2012) on students, teacher and senior administrator beliefs in learning autonomy. It is not surprising that most of the studies are in the setting of Self-Access Centres, since awareness of language learning autonomy came to Mexico through a British Council programme for the establishment of SAC services in public universities.
Clemente (2003) explores cultural factors in self-access counselling in a Mexican university. The counselling situations she describes are dominated by mainly native speaker counsellors occupying a position of power in their relationship with Mexican students. She identifies cultural differences as one of the elements that caused problems in directing counselling sessions, agreeing appropriate discourses, and defining learning objectives. Clemente’s study is especially interesting as there is little published research in autonomy in language learning in Mexico. There is surprisingly little literature about Spanish and Portuguese culture and autonomy in spite of the large number of Spanish speaking immigrants attended in ESOL programmes in the USA. TESOL Quarterly is one of the leading refereed journals in the United States; in a special issue on racism (40 (3), 2006) there were no articles from Central or South American authors, and no articles on linguistic issues from these countries. Between 2001 and 2009, the journal carried no articles on autonomy, and only three from Central or South America. Between January 2010 and January 2013, the journal has published one article per year on linguistic issues related to Central and South American immigrants in the United States, of which half are by authors of these countries. While this indicates a small shift in interest, the overwhelming majority of articles reflect the relative importance of Japan, China and other Far Eastern contexts. There may be good reasons for a lack of academic production from Central and South America of an internationally recognized standard, but surely the lack of interest in the United States is significant. A possible explanation is that Central and South America is not yet acknowledged as economically powerful, in comparison with Japan for instance, and culturally, the USA may find Central and South America to be of negligible interest. Kubota (2002) finds the TESOL community to be well meaning and sympathetic, but deeply racist at bottom. Clemente (2007) reports on English as a commodity with political value in publicizing the protesters’ case in a bitter and lengthy strike of teachers in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. This is compatible with an uncomplicated functional view of English as simply a means whereby those with the misfortune to be born elsewhere can be heard by the
people who matter in the USA, but acknowledges that Mexicans may have good reasons for learning English apart from those given in university curricula.

The relative lack of interest in autonomy in the USA is noted by Schmenk (2005, p. 107), and the works she cites as rare examples of academic interest are those which advocate learner training. This suggests a culture like the one described by Clemente (2003) where the native speaker assumes a natural superiority to which the learner must submit in order to be trained for autonomy. In this interpretation, autonomy is a gift bestowed by the superior culture and its representatives on the inferior culture of the learner in the particular form preferred by the bestower, even if autonomy in the non-native culture may be expressed and practised differently. However, things are not so simple. Holliday (1999) introduces the notion of ‘small cultures’ which are distinguished from large cultures in several ways. Large cultures tend to be generalizations of behaviours and beliefs attributed to ethnic, national or international groups. Small cultures are distinguished from large cultures not as subcultures within the larger one but as overlapping social groupings, membership of which is often deliberate rather than accidental. Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) may be examples of one kind of small culture that is particularly appropriate in an educational context. In Wenger’s conceptualization, belonging to a community of practice involves being accepted as a novice in the group so that the practices of expert members can be observed and adopted. Within learning communities or other kinds of small cultures, there do not have to be master or apprentice roles. The value of expert practice is assessed and validated by the novice, not imposed by status. In Clemente’s (2003) study, counsellors assumed they were and should be in control of the counselling session, but several learners used these sessions for their own purposes either openly defying direction, or subverting it by telling the counsellor what they wanted to hear while pursuing their own ends. In Clemente’s (2007) study, using English may assume that the strikers’ problems cannot be solved in Mexico, or it may be that globalizing the protest ensures the personal safety of the protesters,
so that the use of English can be interpreted as empowerment rather than cultural domination.

Even within small cultures, individual differences including identity and multiple group memberships (Riley, 2003) can be powerful forces in resisting or adopting the assumptions which others may attempt to impose on a person. It may be a fundamental part of human nature to classify and group fellow human beings in order to explain or predict their behaviour, but any such tendency may be unhelpful where we are dealing with the full social complexity of learning situations. Holliday (2003) suggests adopting an approach to counselling that sees learners as whole complex individuals rather than representatives of supposed cultural types, and acknowledges and combats the cultural preconceptions that the counsellor brings to the learning situation. At this level of individuality, it is clear that no culture, large or small, determines either the capacity or willingness of learners to take control of their learning. What can be expected of a counsellor is awareness of the ways in which their actions may support, impede or obscure the exercise of control by the learner.

The way the conceptualization of autonomy interacts with different cultures is both important and complex. For instance, including learning the language itself in the curriculum can be seen as cultural imperialism, or alternatively as a means of escaping from a different cultural imperialism (Clemente, 2007). As far as autonomy in language learning is concerned, there are three points to note here. Firstly, where autonomy is encouraged in an institutional setting it does not provide an excuse for teachers to abandon their dedication or professionalism. Further, autonomy is not a universal construct which takes the same form all over the world. What some individuals may see as autonomy and what they may strive for to make them autonomous will be different to others. This will vary according to culture, but also according to many other factors from individual to individual. Finally, even teacher or tutor behaviour that seems to inhibit learner autonomy can create unexpected spaces for learner autonomy.
Conclusion

This chapter has examined objections to autonomy and self-determination from the field of psychology and philosophy, from education, and from cultural perspectives. The objections raised are important, but rather than invalidating autonomy and self-determination, they have drawn attention to some of the issues which may shape an operational and desirable form of learner autonomy in language learning.

Autonomy is not equivalent to independence and may be better explained as a way of behavioural regulation. Conceiving autonomy as a cultural object produced by human beings or as a cultural value of independence or individualism may suggest that some human groups may be lacking in autonomy or self-regulated behaviour. Cultures have their own ways of valuing independence and individualism and within these differences they may endorse autonomy in different ways.

Some studies have challenged assertions that autonomy or self-determination is not valued in some cultures. These studies have shown the relevance of autonomy as well as similarities in the understanding and functioning of autonomy in people of different ages in diverse cultures (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim & Kaplan, 2003; Chirkov, Ryan & Wellnes 2005; Hayamizu, 1997; Kim, 2004; Yamauchi & Tanaka, 1998). In Autonomy and Self-determination Theory (ASDT), relatedness, competence and autonomy are considered essential to the full functioning and mental health of individuals and the optimal functioning of organizations and cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, Deci, Grolnick & La Guardia, 2006), while the lack of autonomy and self-determination affect human performance negatively (Amabile, 1983; Utman, 1997). Further research on understanding cross-cultural differences and similarities will surely contribute to understanding how the exercise of autonomy and self-determination is universal and transcends culture and context.

Other studies have shown that in large and small companies, centrally and non-centrally controlled, which provide an environment supportive of autonomy, competence and relatedness, employees were more participative at work and better adjusted psychologically
2. Challenges to autonomy and self-determination theory (ASDT)

(Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov & Kornazheva 2001). In the field of education, other studies have found consistency in participants’ goals among graduates in 15 different cultures (Grouzet, Kasser, Ahuvia, Dols, Kim, Lau, Ryan, Saunders, Schmuck & Sheldon 2005).

To be useful in education, concepts of autonomy and self-determination need to be formulated and made operational, guarding against versions of the concept that have been validly criticized. The concept of autonomy in education, in particular in language learning, needs serious consideration of the impact that it may have within the cultural and political context. Autonomy is not a universal and neutral concept, but it embraces a critical awareness of the learner’s own possibilities and limitations within particular contexts (Schmenk, 2005). The promotion of autonomy in diverse educational environments may be problematic if the characteristics of local environments do not shape the meaning of autonomy and therefore the actions to be taken to foster it. In Schmenk’s words:

> Intercultural dialogue on its potential meanings and implications in the field of TESOL, therefore, not only requires reconsidering cultural whereabouts, but also reframing autonomy with respect to specific local language learning environments. Such dialogues may trigger a process of glocalizing autonomy, which will enable people to negotiate what an education for autonomy could mean under specific local conditions and in particular personal, institutional, social, and cultural environments. [2005, p. 116]

Chapter 3 looks in detail at how autonomy in language learning may be made operational and justifiable.
The discussion of language learner autonomy in the first chapter of this book has tended to highlight the lack of general agreement in the literature regarding what it is and how it may be observed. In Chapter 2, objections to autonomy were considered, as a result of which operational definitions of autonomy may be developed which take into account psychological, educational and cultural criticisms. I will start with an attempt to synthesize the areas of agreement in the literature on positive aspects of the dimensions of learner autonomy, and then move on to the roles required of learners, teachers and institutions to make learner autonomy operational. Finally in this chapter, I will look at how the emerging operational definition of learner autonomy may fit with Self-Determination Theory and avoid the pitfalls identified in Chapter 2.

In spite of a lack of consensus on the definition of autonomy, there have been attempts to synthesize the areas of agreement, and Sinclair’s (2000, p. 7-13) description of 13 aspects of learning autonomy provide a useful framework for integrating the different strands of autonomy explored in this chapter. These descriptions have contributed to a better understanding of the autonomous learning concept, which will help the development of empirical work in the field.

3.1 An operational definition of autonomy

Sinclair’s (2000) headings for the different characteristics of learner autonomy are presented and supported by Sinclair’s own arguments as well as those of other researchers.
Autonomy is a construct of capacity

Sinclair relies here on Holec’s (1981, p. 3) definition given in the first chapter, where the ability of learners to make informed decisions about their own learning is highlighted. It is important to emphasise, as in Little’s (1999, p. 4) definition of learning autonomy, that it is ‘a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action’. Learners must have knowledge about learning in order to possess this capacity according to Sinclair. While many researchers in the analysis agree with her, aspects of learner control are also important for autonomy.

Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning

‘Learner autonomy presupposes a positive attitude to the purpose, content and process of learning’ (Little, 1996, p. 204). For Sinclair, developing positive attitudes towards this is crucial to the success of the development of learner autonomy and is an essential, long-term aim of any learner-training programme. Responsibility has been linked to aspects of learner control and it has been noted that control as an aspect of autonomy is observable through learner actions and possibly documentation.

The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate

According to Sinclair, it is assumed that this ability is acquired; that is, learners learn by learning to develop their own techniques and procedures for learning. Learning to learn has been linked in with both strategy training, where learners are taught specific learning techniques, and with psychological preparation, where learners are enabled to discover what works for them.

Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal

Sinclair cites Boud’s (1981, p. 23) words, ‘autonomous learning is not an absolute standard to be met, but a goal to be pursued… the direction
towards student responsibility for learning. She points out that the development of autonomous learning is always constrained in some manner by the rules, cultural conventions, and political aspirations of the society to which the learners belong and draws attention to the implication, that if complete autonomy is hypothetical, there must be degrees of autonomy. Studies on language learning autonomy in higher education have found evidence for the existence of degrees of both capacity and control (Llaven-Nucamendi, 2009), but identifying and measuring capacity may be difficult, suggesting that more observable aspects of control may be helpful.

**There are degrees of autonomy**

From one extreme of ‘complete lack of autonomy’ to the other extreme of ‘complete autonomy’, individual learners will find themselves at different points along the continuum for different tasks according to Sinclair. She suggests that the degree of autonomy will depend on levels of language competence, affective factors, prior learning and experiences of the task itself and so on. The degree of learner autonomy has also been linked to both motivation and opportunity.

**The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable**

‘Degrees of autonomy fluctuate according to a wide range of variables, such as affective factors (e.g. mood), environment (e.g. noise, temperature), physiological factors (e.g. tiredness, hunger), motivation (e.g. attitude towards the task, the subject matter, the teacher, materials, co-learners) and so on’ (Sinclair, 2000, p. 8). Sinclair maintains that in this way, even learners doing similar tasks on different occasions will display different degrees of autonomy. This apparent inconsistency in the performance of individuals needs to be taken into account when researching on autonomy.

**Autonomy is not a simple matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent**

‘Learners can be encouraged or left to work on their own without organised support, but there is no guarantee that they will benefit
from this experience in terms of developing a capacity for making informed decisions about their learning or in terms of improving their competence’ (Sinclair, 2000, p. 8). Sinclair links unsupported learning with situations where learners have control over and responsibility for their learning, and suggests that teacher support is required for both encouraging learners to take more responsibility and the development of metacognitive awareness. Learner control is thus related to appropriate teacher and environmental support rather than the withdrawal of expert support (Llaven-Nucamendi, 2012, p. 23). Expert support in Llaven-Nucamendi’s study is more closely related to specific actions than to the development of psychological traits.

Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process

Sinclair again highlights the need for the development of metacognitive awareness in learners. Metacognitive processes, according to Sinclair, involve reflection on learning: planning learning and setting goals, self-assessment and monitoring of progress, evaluating learning activities, and exploiting learning resources. Developing awareness will involve awareness of various kinds: that of learner-awareness, (including awareness of the social, cultural and political context), subject matter awareness (i.e. of the target language), and learning process awareness (i.e. how to learn a foreign language). Llaven-Nucamendi (2009) found that senior administrators in a higher education context put the responsibility for these areas of awareness squarely on the teachers’ and policy makers’ shoulders, while welcoming learners’ own growing awareness as they become more autonomous.

Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies

‘Learner training aims to help learners consider the factors which affect their learning and discover the learning strategies which suit them best and which are appropriate to their learning context’ (Sinclair, 2000, p. 11). The role of training in developing learning strategies in autonomy is accepted, but as part of a broader learner awareness and
control of learning opportunities. Sinclair is prioritizing metacognitive learning strategies over cognitive or affective strategies training, and training as a necessary or even a desirable part of supporting learner autonomy as well as strategy teaching are not necessarily indicators either of learner autonomy or of its absence.

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Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom

According to Sinclair, learner autonomy can be developed to encourage learners to reflect consciously on their learning in different learning contexts and through a variety of different learning modes, including classroom instruction, self-access learning, distance learning, and self-instruction. For Sinclair, the key features of learner autonomy are planning, experimenting and reviewing, and having the opportunity to make decisions regardless of the setting. Learner decision-making is prioritized partly because control elements are easier to detect and partly because they are manifestation of capacities in any learning environment.

Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension

For Sinclair, developing learner autonomy is not only concerned with the individual. Individual autonomy stresses the importance of individual learning styles over collaborative learning; in contrast,
‘social autonomy’ recognises that awareness raising and learning takes place through interaction and collaboration, as well as through individual reflection and experimentation, Sinclair cites Benson (1996, p. 34) and Little (1995, p. 178) to support this.

The promotion of learner autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension

Autonomy is a concept with philosophical and ideological implications. In Crabbe’s (1993, p. 443) words, ‘the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices, in learning as in other areas, and not become a victim… of choices made by social institutions.’ While this freedom is an essential human need, however, just as individual freedom in the political dimension is tempered by the need to act collectively and/or the limitations involved in acting collectively, so in terms of language learning autonomy, individual freedom is tempered or limited by the demands and expectations both of our L1 community and of the target language community (Macaro, 2003, p. 96).

Benson (1996) suggests that a ‘psychological view’ of autonomy focuses on the importance of the psychological or ‘internal’ capacities of the learner, such as cognitive and learning styles, motivation, attitudes, aptitude, and so on. Its goal is, ultimately, to confer responsibility on the learners for their own success or failures in learning. Benson (1997, p. 34) argues that ‘the apolitical stance of technical and psychological version of autonomy represent a reductive approach to a concept which is a root highly political’. The social component of language learning is essential and cannot be removed from the process because of the political character that language teaching and learning has. Activities in learning and teaching such as interaction with other language users, selecting learning material, pair or group work in the classroom, discussion of personal goals and experiences learning a language, planning and educational policy for language, are all related to the political version of autonomy. Llaven-Nucamendi’s (2012, p. 22) analysis of the students and senior
administrators’ views on learning autonomy in higher education accept the existence and importance of both political and personal aspects of learner autonomy, where responsibilities of both teachers and policy makers in relation to learner autonomy are highlighted.

**Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures**

When describing what learning autonomy is, it is important to identify the different emphases placed on learner autonomy by different cultures. Practitioners and researchers in the field of learner autonomy need to exercise great care, particularly if working within cultural contexts which are not their own. Pennycook (1997, p. 44) suggests that to ‘encourage learner autonomy’ universally, without first becoming acutely aware of the social, cultural and political context in which one is working, may lead at best to ‘inappropriate pedagogies and at worst to cultural impositions’. Research in language learning autonomy should look at the complexity of cultural issues and the implications for determining what is or is not autonomous behaviour in the context.

It is clear that no single definition of autonomy with observable characteristics can be drawn from the literature. However, that does not mean that autonomy is a meaningless concept or is not practiced or cannot be researched. The concepts explored in previous chapters develop a range of meanings and implications of autonomy that will allow a useful analysis of the roles of learners, teachers and senior administrators in educational institutions. The range of definitions offered by different researchers of autonomy suggest that by applying criteria of learner capacity and learner control over learning, it is possible to distinguish between different views of autonomy and between autonomy and closely related concepts. In addition, the literature has been explored to illuminate other aspects of the nature of autonomy: whether and how far autonomy may exist to different degrees; what it is for; where it comes from; whether it is always desirable; who benefits from it and in what way and how much.
3.2 Learning autonomy and the roles of learners, teachers, and institutions

The purpose of this section is to explore the literature on teacher and learner roles and their relationship with the concerns of senior administrators from an autonomy related perspective. It discusses whether autonomy is natural to human beings or needs to be developed through specific actions of teachers, learners and institutional structures. Further, the contributions of these actors are considered with regard to the origin and development of autonomy in language learning.

Researchers differ on where autonomy comes from and how it may be developed. Benson (2001, p. 106) identifies sources of restraint on autonomy such as government, educational institutions, conceptions of language, language learning, and language teaching methodologies. Learners, teachers and institutions work within these restraints.

In the context of autonomy in language learning, it may be supposed that learners operate in an environment partly of their own creation, but within the opportunities and limitations provided by teachers and the institution, which in their turn have to meet the expectations of society. While learners themselves may be aware of these opportunities and limitations and hold opinions about current and ideal learning situations, it is unlikely that they will have read the literature on these matters. On the other hand, both teachers and senior administrators may hold opinions about learners and about each other that will be, to some extent influenced by their reading. Senior administrators, for their part, will be interested not only in facilitating effective and efficient teaching and learning, but also in the quality of learning outcomes measured through valid and reliable evaluation.

Learners’ roles

Learners’ contributions to their own autonomy are of two kinds: their own will or motivations to act and the actions they may decide to take by exercising their autonomy. Little (1999, p. 13) sees autonomy as a universal human capacity. In this view, all learners are autonomous, and if full autonomy is not achieved it is due to the application of restrictions. Drawing on Benson’s (2000) framework to describe
restrictions on autonomy that comes from the learner, probably the most influential of these would be conceptions of language. This may be manifested in learners’ views of what language learning is like, what language is like, and notions of the ‘correct’ use of language. Sturtridge (1997, pp. 76-78) suggests that in a self-access context learners can be trained to minimize constraints by:

- Learning how to recognize unsuitable materials
- Learning how to use materials most productively
- Being aware of different types of materials
- Perceiving the purpose of tasks
- Evaluating tasks
- Using peers and others as resources

The effect of learners’ actions is also brought to the fore in much of the literature on self-access and self-instruction, which emphasizes the individualization of learning possible through autonomous behaviour (see for instance Dickinson, 2001; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Sheerin, 1997). However, there is also an acknowledgement of the role of socially constructed meaning in autonomous learning (Benson, 1996; Little, 2001), and the value of collaborating and interacting with others, following on from the theoretical work of Vygotsky (1978) and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. The choice of learning alone or with others is within the control of learners, especially outside the classroom.

Accepting that learners have a role in learning means seeing learners as more than simply recipients of a service provided by others, and is necessarily linked to conceptualizations of autonomy. The study of learner roles has been carried out in different ways. Learners may actively use conscious strategies in their learning which they are able to articulate to researchers, and which in some cases may be linked to observable behaviours. Taxonomies of learning strategies have been proposed by O’Malley & Chamot (1990), R. Oxford (1990), Rubin (1975), Wenden (1995) and although these differ somewhat, O’Malley & Chamot’s classification of strategies into socio-affective, cognitive and metacognitive has proved robust and adaptable, allowing the other taxonomies to be analysed in these
terms. Affective strategies are those, which learners bring to dealing with the emotional issues involved in language learning, while social strategies are those, which involve other people in some capacity as guides, models or collaborators for example. These are closely related and affect learners’ self esteem. Learners have reported feeling vulnerable and deficient, and these feelings affect learning outcomes negatively. Cognitive strategies harness the learner’s mental skills to facilitate language learning, so that learning languages becomes more like learning other subjects, at least within the scope of application of these strategies. Metacognitive strategies are used for planning, monitoring and evaluating learning, and are therefore key elements in autonomous learning. Learning strategies, then, are available to learners if they are aware of them and feel comfortable about using them in the learning situation.

As suggested above, learners not only need to make sense of language and how to learn it, but they also seek to understand themselves and other actors in the process of learning and what these other actors expect from them. Ellis (2001) has explored the metaphors learners may use to conceptualize themselves. In Ellis’s study, it was found that the same learner may hold simultaneously positive, negative and neutral self-images, so although the metaphors identified may be useful, they do not give a complete picture of the complexity or present balance of feelings constituting the self-image of the learner. Oxford (2001, p. 106) has looked at how learners view teachers, also using metaphors, this time derived by the researcher from narratives provided by learners. Oxford’s analysis identifies various approaches described as autocratic, laissez-faire, and democratic/participatory. Learners, according to the author, are quite clear about the approach to teaching they require from their teachers, even though the learners in her study came from very different cultural backgrounds. They all appreciated:

- Interest, enthusiasm, clarity and stimulation of curiosity
- Concern and availability
- Provision of obvious structure
- Provision of useful structure
Towards an operational definition of autonomy in language learning

Perhaps more remote from the learner, but no less pervasive, are the expectations of society as expressed in the language curriculum, the evaluation of achievement, and the regulations of the institution. These are personified for the learner by the senior administrators of the institution, and to a lesser extent, by teachers. Learners are all too aware that their autonomy is really restricted, perhaps not so much with regard to how they learn where teachers and senior administrators are sympathetic, but more so with regard to what is to be learnt and how that learning is evaluated. Learners who for any reason do not regard these restrictions as threatening may find them acceptable and compatible with their own learning agenda. Students, who object, may choose to exert their autonomy by withdrawing from education (Breen & Mann 1997, p. 138) or withholding participation in class (Norton, 2001, p. 170). For the learners who do submit to the requirements and procedures of the institution, such as examinations and compulsory attendance in classes, these requirements may still be seen as fundamentally incompatible with learner autonomy.

Learners who choose to cooperate with teachers or institutions, which seek to promote autonomy, may be asked to adopt unfamiliar roles. For their part, Scharle & Szabo (2000, p. 101) provide a list of possible learner roles that does not depart too drastically from common practice in the communicative classroom. For instance, they may supply or choose material and activities; self evaluate, and participate in organising activities and maintaining discipline in the class. However, Aoki (2002, pp. 112-113) is more demanding in her list of knowledge/skill areas, which the autonomous learner should master. She lists 15 knowledge areas concerning language and learning, setting objectives, evaluating achievement, self-awareness and cultural awareness; for instance, the third item reads: ‘Knowing what the nature of language and language learning is’. Numerous books and doctoral theses have failed to provide acceptable answers to this question, so it is unlikely to be solved by a learner. It seems more appropriate that the demands on the students should be measured and balanced according to the characteristics of the learner and the context. Nevertheless, Aoki’s list may reflect roles that could be assumed by a learner with appropriate teacher support.
Teachers’ roles

Some students may appear passive and show lack of motivation, but this may be learned behaviour acquired throughout their past and present experiences of education. Teachers’ contributions can affect the development of learner autonomy in two ways. Firstly, a teacher’s pedagogical procedures may promote or hinder autonomy, and secondly, teachers may seek to teach autonomy to learners. Although the literature does not discount Little’s assertion that autonomy is innate, there is considerable support for the view that teacher or tutor intervention is essential. Kelly (1996) and Riley (1997) both see counsellor or tutor roles in self-access as extraordinarily complex and requiring great sensitivity, so that a counsellor would have to be an exceptional kind of person by nature and by training. Others also see tutor roles as essentially different from and more difficult than classroom teaching (see for instance Breen & Mann, 1997; Dickinson, L., 1987; McGrath, 2000; Voller, 1997) and requiring new responsibilities and training. However, not all researchers see counselling as fundamentally different from or more difficult than classroom teaching. According to Ramsden (1992, p. 5) ‘the aim of teaching is simple: it is to make student learning possible’. In the field of language teaching, Stern (1983, p. 21) interprets language teaching ‘widely so as to include all activities intended to bring about language learning.’ Farmer (2006a, p. 121) concludes that it is ‘normal’ classroom teaching we should regard as deficient, from a professional viewpoint, rather than seeing the role of providing learning support for autonomous learners as being too difficult. Farmer’s approach is to explicate a range of feasible teacher actions, which as a whole provide full learning support, rather than concentrating excessively on the areas requiring special and exceptional skills. He argues (Farmer, 2006a, p. 105) that support for learning need not inhibit the development of autonomy. The actions Farmer thinks are necessary for learning support include administrative and managerial functions that teachers are not normally educated for, such as providing programme structures and administration, programme evaluation, curriculum design, evaluating learners’ needs, goals and proficiency levels, recommending the next
stage in learning, documenting progress, and, providing access to support services, as well as giving classes and preparing learners for assessment (Farmer., 2006a, pp. 137-139). Breen & Mann (1997, pp. 145-146) call on teachers of autonomous learners to:

- Know your beliefs about teaching and learning.
- Reflect on how your decisions affect each learner.
- Act on the assumption that each learner is able to learn and is fully capable of taking an autonomous stance to their learning.
- Be prepared to adapt your practice to foster learner autonomy.

These injunctions may imply an adjustment of attitudes on the part of teachers, but are light on specific actions.

In self-access settings, tutor roles have been described in detail by Gardner & Miller (1999), Kelly (1996) and Riley (1997). Both Gardner & Miller and Riley provide lists contrasting counselling with teaching, but such lists are inevitably skewed to show how much more sensitive and collaborative counsellors have to be compared with teachers. Kelly claims (1996, p. 112) that who counsellors are as people, is more important than who they are as practitioners. From this perspective, she gives lists of micro- and macro-skills for counsellors with a strong humanistic element but light on specific actions. Her lists are reproduced in Gardner and Miller, and may be said to have acquired a measure of general acceptance.

One way in which learners may acquire autonomous behaviour is through training. Support for the view that learners need to be trained to be autonomous is found throughout the literature (see for instance Dickinson, L., 1987; Sheerin, 1997; Sturtridge, 1997) and the Self-Access Centre is often used as the setting for training. However, training for autonomy also takes place in classroom contexts (Dam, 1995; Miller & Ng, 1996; Scharle and Szabo 2000). Training may be directed at learning strategies (Oxford, R., 1990; Rubin, 1975; Wenden & Rubin, 1987), while other researchers call for methodological preparation (Dickinson, L., 1987) or psychological preparation (Dickinson, L., 1987; Holec 1981; Riley 1997). As Sheerin (1997, p. 63) points out, ‘it is the paradox of independent learning that almost
all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path towards greater autonomy by teachers’. She goes on to point out that there is a danger of teachers maintaining their controlling role while attempting to promote learner autonomy.

There is almost complete agreement among researchers that teacher, advisor and counsellor roles in autonomous learning are different from those required in conventional classrooms. It is reasonable to assume that teachers in the institution have encountered at least some texts describing these differences either as undergraduates or as practicing teachers.

Teacher roles have been mentioned in Chapter 1 in general terms as part of understanding the nature of autonomy, and it is now appropriate to look in more detail at how teachers or counsellors in the institution may see their role in autonomous learning.

Gremmo (2009) defines language advising as ‘a pedagogical device based on human interaction’. In particular, in advising for self-directed learning in an educational institution, this pedagogical device should facilitate learners in taking their own decisions and making conscious and meaningful choices in the learning process. Further, in order to ensure learning competence, Gremmo presents four aims for language advising:

a) focused on the learning process more than the learning content,

b) non-decisional, and not founded on a power relationship,

c) retroactive, negotiable, non-programmable and not programmed,

d) dealing with a specific coherent conceptual framework, that of language didactics. These aims are compatible with those of a language teacher fostering language learning autonomy and teachers would do well to take them into account if they want to facilitate students’ autonomy in learning.

Mynard (2011), discussing the role of the learning advisor in promoting autonomy, pointed out that the term ‘learning advisor’ is by no means universal and advisors maybe called counsellors, helpers, facilitators, mentors or consultants. Carson and Mynard (2012, p. 4) have described advising in language learning as ‘the process of assisting students in directing their own paths in order to become better, more autonomous language learners’. This assistance is also part of the role of
the teacher in fostering autonomy in learning. Mynard (2011) provides a list of ten functions of a learning advisor:

1. Raising awareness of the language learning process
2. Guiding learners
3. Helping learners to identify goals
4. Suggesting suitable materials by offering choices (rather than prescribing activities)
5. Suggesting suitable strategies by offering choices
6. Motivating, supporting and encouraging self-directed learners
7. Helping learners to self-evaluate and reflect
8. Assisting students in discovering how they best learn
9. Actively listening to learners
10. Helping learners to talk through their own problems

Two differences between a language teacher and a learning advisor were identified by Mynard (2011). The first concerns differences in the skills needed to advise in and out of the classroom (Voller, 2004) and the second concerns differences in the discourse employed by teachers and advisors (Kelly, 1996). However, these are not clearcut differences between teaching and advising. In the real world, teachers cannot avoid advising students individually or in groups in and outside the classroom, and the language used to do these tasks takes the forms needed in the learning process to promote autonomy, so that the discourse of advising is not exclusive to advisors. What is clear is that advising is not a teaching task, though teaching is not necessarily prohibited in the advising situation if it makes the advising session more effective.

To facilitate learning autonomy teachers have to be teachers, counsellors, and advisers helping students through the process of self-assessment, goal-setting, planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own language learning. In the process of acquiring learning autonomy any help for the learners is to be welcomed so that the roles of the teacher and advisor can and should overlap. Where the role of the advisor plays an important role in achieving autonomy in language learning it may be helpful for language teachers to develop the skills
needed to perform a similar role. Mozzon-McPherson & Dantec (2006) refer to the figure of the “teacher/advisor”, underlining the argument presented here that the roles are not and should not be exclusive and different.

Advising is a relatively new area in the promotion of language learning autonomy in educational institutions, and may be expected to grow rapidly where learners have easier access to technology that opens up new resources and tools in language learning and freedom to follow their own learning programmes or to reinforce their classroom learning; in both situations they will require guidance.

There are essentially three positions on teacher or counsellor roles in the literature. For instance, Kelly (1996) lists micro- and macro-skills in self-access counselling, presents a flowchart of counselling activities, and discusses each activity in detail. This view calls for counsellors to hold and develop specific humanistic attitudes, and by implication, counsellor training to develop the required knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The second position is that specific actions are less important than the approach taken by counsellors. This view is adopted by those who feel that there are serious risks of counsellors imposing unsuitable pedagogies on learners out of ignorance or prejudice. This approach to counsellor or teacher development (see for instance Smith, 2003) is accordingly more related to developing personal awareness and reflective practice, rather than to training or re-training them.

The third position is based on the assumption that all learning is autonomous in the sense that only the learner can do it, and that supporting learning must be essentially the same regardless of the circumstances of learning. This view holds that teachers should accept responsibility for the whole of learning support, not just the parts traditionally delegated to teachers by their institutions. This is the position developed at length in Farmer (2006a) in relation to professional approaches to language teaching. The position taken by Farmer therefore differs from the others, who hold that teaching or counselling for autonomous learners is different from teaching other learners.
3. Towards an operational definition of autonomy in language learning

As individuals in an institutional context, teachers are subject to rules and policy objectives, but as members of academic committees they also help define and implement these policies. It may be expected that teachers feel resentment if they are being subjected to pressure to adopt roles that they do not agree with, or alternatively they may feel empowered to shape their own practice. The institution influences teachers through documentary edicts and it will be helpful to explore how senior administrators, who compose these documents, interpret their role in influencing teaching.

The institutional role

Any negative effects of either the political or institutional environment could in principle be overcome by appropriate teacher action. However, as Breen & Mann (1997, p. 140) argue, that in certain contexts, teachers ‘sense that the locus of control over their work is shifting away from themselves and their immediate institutions to centralized bureaucracies.’ According to Farmer (2006a, p. 155) this trend can be explained by teachers’ reluctance to adopt professional systems of responsibility, so that bureaucrats are not only empowered but also obliged to apply their own systems of accountability. Teachers, then, may be subjected to administrator-led evaluations related to learning outcomes specified by administrators and measured through external criterion-referenced exams, such as those developed by Cambridge ESOL.

Environmental contributions to autonomous learning come from society in general through attitudes and expectations regarding education, and from specific institutional settings. Self-Access Centres are an institutional manifestation of a willingness to support autonomous learning. This is done through a systematic combination of materials, technical and human resources that allow each learner to interact with the environment in a unique way (Gardner & Miller 1999, p. 11). No particular type of Self-Access Centre can be described as best for all learners, and Gardner & Miller (1999, pp. 51-64) provide a typology of Centres that permit a closer fit between learner characteristics and the self-access provision. Self-access may be the
most obvious institutional provision for learner autonomy, but where a teacher still has the authority to reach institutional and societal goals in an independent way, the classroom can also be a setting for establishing and developing autonomous learning.

The embodiment of the institution is its senior administrators, who interpret and apply institutional statutes in the way that seems to best serve the institution’s objectives, or more cynically, their own. Unlike teachers, the senior administrators enjoy no measure of academic freedom. They are required to work within the legislation to achieve objectives prioritized by the institution in ways that meet the evaluation criteria of local and national stakeholders. They also contribute to creating the environment in which teachers and learners do their work. Vieira (2003) discusses the impact of national policies on autonomous language learning in schools. Although national policy is supportive in her Portuguese context, she finds that in reality there is a tendency to adhere to conventional teaching and any individual institutions attempting to innovate and introduce learner autonomy are isolated and their work goes unnoticed. Whatever the institution’s documents claim about the encouragement of autonomy, then, the reality may be somewhat different on the ground.

Benson (2000, p. 116) notes that constraints on the exercise of learner autonomy may come from four sources: policy constraints, by which he means national policies on education; institutional constraints, which are the regulations discussed above and the physical and social organization of the institution; dominant conceptions of what the target language is like; and expectations about language learning methodologies.

### 3.3 Learner autonomy and Self-Determination Theory

It was claimed in Chapter 2 that Self-Determination Theory and learner autonomy are for most purposes the same thing. It is now appropriate to see whether Self-Determination Theory can add anything useful to the development of an operational definition of learner autonomy in language learning.
According to SDT, three psychological human needs need to be considered in the promotion of learning: competence, relatedness and autonomy (Deci & Ryan 2002). To facilitate the exercise of these elements motivation plays a key role. Understanding motivation as movement, where people feel moved to act on something, is a requirement for self-determined action. This motivation may be intrinsic or extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation for learning comes from the self, not from high marks. To facilitate learning, teachers and educational institutions should empower students, foster decision participation, and support self-initiation and autonomy of acts (Stone, Deci & Ryan, 2008). Currently, an external rewards scheme for motivation is a common practice in educational institutions. This ‘carrot and stick’ motivation in education, with a marks system and certification for achievements, is exercised by the teacher in relation to students in the classroom and by the academic authorities to the teachers. This practice is not fulfilling for any of the parties: students, teachers, academic authorities and the educational system’s goals. Instead, what has been achieved is that students and teachers lose motivation in their tasks of educating and learning. This reward system often generates mistrust about what the product is that is really being rewarded and neglects the core principles of sustainable motivation, autonomy and self-determination. External rewards contingencies rather than the intrinsic value of the learning itself can motivate students’ behaviour, but this is a short-term behaviour resulting in poor quality motivation and dependence on the reward (Amabile, 1993; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999b). Students working on a task from intrinsic motivation choose and endorse the action; they exercise their autonomy and create a sustainable motivation because it comes from the student’s self. According to Deci & Ryan autonomy or self-determination promotes effective motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 1991).

Teachers can support students’ autonomy in many ways, for instance reducing the control they have on the students’ learning, providing choices for learning activities and materials, and holding students accountable and responsible for their own learning (Jones, 2009).
Supporting students’ autonomy helps them to acquire knowledge and skills but also learning strategies to learn how to learn in different situations.

Short-term rewards are an obstacle for the implementation of autonomous motivation. In the educational field, teachers are under pressure from academic authorities to work within a course programme and to a timetable, so teachers tend to pressure their students to do the work. If students comply with the teachers’ instructions, and the teacher complies with the authorities’ orders to respond to the pressure of accountability for results, the issue of learning is left behind.

In a study on whether teachers under pressure would pressure students (Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner & Kauffman, 1982; Ryan & LaGuardia 1999), it was found that teachers who were pressured with accountability for learning results pressure students using controlling words, spend more time instructing and criticizing. They show less satisfaction in their work and achieve less success in finding answers in the topics they worked upon. Short-term rewards affect the quality of motivation; it fails to empower students by supporting autonomy and self-determination.

**SDT** does not reject the idea of accountability in education, but supports the implementation of the self-determination principles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to achieve autonomous motivation. One example of success in the implementation of these principles in the educational field is the study reported by Gambone, Klem, Summers, Akey & Sipe, (2004). The First Things First (**FTF**) programme promoted changes in the school structures in order to give opportunities for students and teachers to implement the principles of **SDT** in their teaching and learning. Teachers received training in facilitating more engaging learning and students’ autonomy. Academic authorities were trained to provide autonomy support to teachers. In five years the **FTF** programme achieved significant improvement in school attendance, teacher-students’ relationships, engagement in learning, achievement and, higher graduation.

In the literature on language learning autonomy, learner motivation is not a prominent issue. Research on **SDT** suggests that intrinsic
3. Towards an operational definition of autonomy in language learning

motivation is an outcome of autonomy in learning, and that other external reward systems may be demotivating for learning achievement. Farmer & Llaven-Nucamendi (2009) hold teachers responsible for all actions intended to do good, and need to take into account that such actions may in fact do harm. They explain that every teaching act needs to be assessed for how much harm it may do, to whom and under what circumstances. The demotivation of learners as a result of inappropriate reward systems would be the kind of harm that Farmer & Llaven-Nucamendi cautions against. Overall, SDT may be said to support the operational definition of learner autonomy developed here, but the additional emphasis on motivation needs to be taken into account.

3.4 Learner autonomy and the objections to autonomy

Three important groups of objections to learner autonomy were examined in Chapter 2. The first concerned the nature of free will, and the question of whether such a thing can exist. The second questioned the validity of autonomy as an educational goal, while the third highlighted the cultural limitations to the acceptability of learner autonomy. The operational definition of learner autonomy and the roles of teachers and institutions developed in this chapter may be tested against these objections.

First, objections based on questioning the existence of free will seem to clash with educational research highlighting the necessity of learner choice and autonomous decision-making. In the discussion in Chapter 2, this clash was dismissed as irrelevant to education. Where all parties to educational projects (teachers, learners and institutions) know they mean something by the term learner autonomy, there can be no doubt that it exists for all practical purposes. The concerns of neuroscience and behavioural psychology are quite different, and different lines of enquiry are pursued in these disciplines for different purposes.

Second, one of the objections to autonomy as an educational goal was shown in Chapter 2 to be less of an objection to autonomy than an objection to the withdrawal of teacher support for learning and the formulation of the operational definition and roles developed in
this chapter strongly emphasize learner support. A second objection to learner autonomy as an educational goal raised the possibility of autonomous learners learning to trust their own judgment rather than that of expert advisors, and learning to resist legitimate authority. Here, SDT provides a robust counter argument in explaining the circumstances in which external influences, when fully endorsed, become self-determined motives for action.

The cultural objection to learner autonomy was also discussed in Chapter 2. Again, this is less an argument against learner autonomy than a note of caution about who may be harmed, how much and under what circumstances by crude attempts to promote or measure learner autonomy. No general operational definition of autonomy can foresee all the ways in which harm may be done through cultural insensitivity, and it is undoubtedly important to bear these objections in mind.

**Conclusion**

The operational definition of learner autonomy developed in this chapter and the roles it implies for teachers and institutions has been drawn mainly from the literature on language learning autonomy but checked against ideas from SDT and objections to learner autonomy. The operational definition has proved fairly robust in meeting objections, and is enriched by the contribution of SDT.
Teaching autonomy is an ambiguous term which could mean teaching learners to be autonomous, or alternatively, the autonomy enjoyed by teachers in taking control of their teaching or professional development. This chapter focuses on the second meaning, but the discussion impacts on issues of learner training too. In this chapter, I will explore the purposes claimed for teacher autonomy, and relate those to definitions of teacher autonomy and instruments for measuring the phenomenon. Purposes and definitions naturally lead on to a discussion of autonomous teachers’ roles and duties.

4.1 Definitions and characteristics of teacher autonomy

Defining teacher autonomy

Barfield, Ashwell, Carroll, Collins, Cowie, Critchley, Head, Nix, Obermeier & Robertson (2001), working in a Japanese context, propose a multifaceted definition of teacher autonomy which arises from a perceived need to deal with institutional constraints as well as to foster teacher professional development and promote learner autonomy. The “Shizuoka” definition of teacher autonomy is:

Characterised by a recognition that teaching is always contextually situated, teacher autonomy is a continual process of inquiry into how teaching can best promote autonomous learning for learners. It involves understanding and making explicit the different constraints that a teacher may face, so that teachers can work collaboratively towards confronting constraints and transforming them into
opportunities for change. The collaboration that teacher autonomy requires suggests that outside the classroom teachers need to develop institutional knowledge and flexibility in dealing with external constraints. It also suggests that teacher autonomy can be strengthened by collaborative support and networking both within the institution and beyond. Negotiation thus forms an integral part of the process of developing teacher autonomy.

Teacher autonomy is driven by a need for personal and professional improvement, so that an autonomous teacher may seek out opportunities over the course of his or her career to develop further. Teacher autonomy is a socially constructed process, where teacher support and development groups can act as teacher-learner pools of diverse knowledge, experience, equal power and autonomous learning.

Within the classroom, developing teacher autonomy will overlap with principles of fostering learner autonomy and with an evolving body of professional knowledge, skill and expertise. Because society confers teachers and learners with different roles, rights and responsibilities, it is not possible to identify a perfect match between the processes of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. The interrelationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy becomes clear when the values of co-learning, self-direction, collaboration and democratic co-participation are consciously highlighted in relation to the following three critical principles of action: Critical reflective inquiry, Empowerment and Dialogue.

It is the quality of interdependence between these values and actions that links the development processes of teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. The processes by which those principles of action can be achieved centre on observing, inquiring, negotiating, evaluating and developing in collaboration with one’s learners and colleagues. These action research processes are made explicit through dialogue and critical reflective inquiry, the richness of which empowers teacher autonomy and helps it develop further.

Crucially, developing teacher autonomy involves questioning and flexibly re-interpreting the exercise of authority within the classroom. An autonomous teacher works with his or her learners openly and
accountably in ways that will best stimulate their learning. An au-
onomous teacher continually searches, in collaboration first and fore-
most with his or her learners, for better answers to the different
problems inevitably arising in developing and re-interpreting learner
autonomy further.

Barfield et al.’s description of teacher autonomy is given here in
full as it covers a wide range of issues taken up by later authors. These
authors tend to seek a condensed and more manageable definition,
but the Shizuoka definition is valuable as a starting point and as a
reference for what might be included in more compact statements.

According to Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira (2007, p. 1) the definitions
of teacher and learner autonomy are the same: ‘the competence to
develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and aware participant
in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education
as (inter) personal empowerment and social transformation’.

Smith & Erdoğan (2008) build upon the Bergen definition of learner
autonomy (Trebbi, 1990) for their definition of teacher autonomy. Their
working definition is: ‘an ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge
and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others’. Smith
& Erdoğan (2008) find that there is a pressing need for clarification of
the meaning or meanings of teacher autonomy. Clarity is needed for
meaningful professional discourse among language teachers, for the
credibility of ideas on autonomy outside that professional community,
for setting appropriate goals in language teacher education, and for
researching teacher education and professional practice. They suggest
a set of dimensions of teacher autonomy that distinguishes between
professional practice and professional development which share
certain constructs (table 4.1)

Smith & Erdoğan’s understanding of teaching autonomy emphasizes
the bonds that learners, institutions and teachers share in the meaning
and exercise of autonomy in education and highlights the political
character of teaching and learning autonomy.
**Table 4.1. Constructs of professional practice and professional development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional practice</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed action</td>
<td>Teacher autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(capacity to self-direct one’s teaching)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity for self-directed action</td>
<td>Teacher-learning autonomy (capacity to self-direct one’s learning as a teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom from constraints to self-directed action</td>
<td>Teacher-learning autonomy (freedom to self-direct one’s learning as a teacher)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Smith & Erdoğan (2008, p. 84-85)

**Measuring teacher autonomy**

Pinter (2007) measured the autonomy of 16 experienced teachers against themes that she drew from the literature: willingness to change, collaborative learning, building confidence, reflective attitude and practice, and moving towards learner centredness. These themes emphasise change, which as Pinter points out is only relevant in experienced teachers who have had the time and opportunity to develop a teaching repertoire and beliefs. In a qualitative research project, she found evidence of change in all five themes following the teachers’ collaboration in writing teaching materials together.

**Table 4.2. McGrath’s indicators of teacher autonomy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Self-focused</th>
<th>Other-focused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Achievement of imposed goals (e.g. covering the syllabus, completing textbook, preparing students for exams)</td>
<td>Inspectors/school head/ head of department, student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Own role in managing students’ learning</td>
<td>Students’ needs/wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Own professional development</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
McGrath (2000, p. 105) proposed a three level scale of teacher autonomy, the first two of which have both an internal and an external dimension, while the highest level has only an internal dimension (table 4.2).

Llaven-Nucamendi (2009, pp. 207-208) used this scale to measure teacher autonomy in an institution of higher education in Mexico, and found that while on paper the institution required teachers to meet level 3, teachers themselves felt they lacked the training required to reach level 2 and the institutional support needed for reaching level 3.

Sinclair (2008) expands level 2 of McGrath’s indicators to position teachers as managers of their own teaching contexts, with their constraints and their resources. At level 3, she expands the teachers’ control of their own professional development to include the roles of reflective practitioner and reflective learner. She developed an instrument to measure the autonomy of experienced teachers taking an MA course in a British university as reflective learners. Her instrument explores the following areas of learner autonomy using yes/no, Likert scale, and open-ended items as appropriate:

- Self-directed preparation for the module.
- Handling of readings and study tasks.
- Handling of session materials.
- Types of class participation.
- Self-assessment of level of activity in classes.
- Reasons for lack of participation in class.
- Self-directed study activity.
- Time devoted to self-directed study.
- Self-directed preparation for assignment.
- Finding and using resources.
- Dealing with problems on the module.

Sinclair’s instrument is particularly relevant for courses of teacher education and may be applied to both pre-service and in-service student teachers. It explores students’ engagement with the course in both cognitive and affective dimensions, and would allow an autonomous course tutor to make constructive modifications to both the course and to institutional policy.
The taxonomy of teacher autonomy based on Smith & Erdoğan (2008) given in table 4.1 has the potential to clarify the issues and permit suitably bounded research parameters, extending teacher autonomy to include teacher learning as well as teacher practices.

Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan (2007) developed an instrument for measuring autonomous motivation for teaching based on self-determination theory. Their questionnaire identified four different types of motivation: external, introjected, identified and intrinsic. They found that these types of autonomy lie on a continuum from low to high levels of motivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation level</th>
<th>Motivation type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>Introjected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure A. Levels of autonomous motivation for teaching (Roth et al., 2007)

Pearson & Moomaw (2006) report a validation study of an instrument designed to measure teacher autonomy in general school teaching in the USA. The instrument calls for responses on a four point Lickert scale to a series of 18 positively or negatively worded items related to:

- Selection of activities and materials.
- Classroom standards and conduct.
- Instructional planning and sequencing.
- Personal on-the-job decision making.

In spite of lacking a definition for teacher autonomy, the study found that high levels of autonomy, as detected by the instrument, were consistent with high levels of job satisfaction, the professionalization of teaching and the empowerment of teachers in making educational policy operational.
4.2 Promoting learner autonomy

Teacher autonomy is often linked to learner autonomy in an unproblematic way. For McGrath (2000, p. 110) it is a precondition of learner autonomy, and Benson (2000, p. 117) holds that learners cannot develop autonomy without autonomous teachers. However, the link between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy is not really self-evident. As Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira (2007, p. 49) point out; teachers freed from constraints may use that freedom for ends other than the autonomy or indeed any kind of education of their students. For Thavenius (1999, p. 160) teacher autonomy is necessary both for helping learners take responsibility for their own learning and for permitting students to exercise autonomy. Teacher autonomy in this context means having the freedom to support both the development and exercise of learner autonomy, including not only appropriate pedagogies and learning objectives, but also appropriate evaluations of learner achievement and the teacher’s active participation in the design and structure of language programmes and policies. This kind of teacher autonomy is remote from most institutional teaching, and La Ganza (2008, pp. 75-77) presents specific instances in which teacher autonomy in relation to institutions is restricted in some way.

The impact of teacher autonomy upon learner autonomy may be as much affective as practical, and the author explores the affective dimension in relation to his concept of dynamic interactional space (DIS). For La Ganza, teachers and learners together create the opportunity for the development of learner autonomy, and in the process the required teacher autonomy is made specific. According to DIS theory, the learner’s capacity to take control of their learning or take responsibility for it, their use of learning strategies, and willingness to direct their own learning depend on the learning environment mutually constructed by learners and teachers, but the creation of which depends on the teacher’s capacity to direct the process. Teachers need to be (La Ganza, 2008, pp. 70-71):

- A “perceptive” resource, with the learner’s work in mind;
- a participant-observer in the learning process, keeping in mind
what is meaningful for the learner in the learner’s educative development; and
· supportive of each learner’s individuality, so that it might be voiced through the learning process.

These responsibilities give some indication of the teacher’s capacities La Ganza has in mind and are similar in scope, though less detailed, than those identified by Farmer & Llaven-Nucamendi (2009) as the responsibilities of all professional teachers, not just those concerned with supporting autonomous language learners. The teacher’s responsibilities are linked with Farmer & Llaven-Nucamendi’s concept of professionalism in La Ganza’s formulation, but without the legal enforcement framework central to Farmer and Llaven-Nucamendi’s construct. La Ganza considers autonomy in relation to the teacher’s own internal dialectics with teachers and other mentors; learners, who might support the teacher’s freedom; those in the institution in which he or she is teaching who may take decisions influencing teacher’s practice; and those in the institutions and bureaucracies of society at large who affect the practice of teaching. The autonomy La Ganza (2008, pp. 71-72) considers necessary for teachers to meet their responsibilities are so formulated that one wonders how these autonomies may be consistently harnessed for the benefit of learners rather than to fulfil the personal preferences or even the caprices of teachers.

Without some mechanism for ensuring that teacher autonomy is used consistently to support student autonomy and learning, teachers may find it difficult to negotiate with their institutions the autonomy needed to support learners. The tensions between different autonomies, such as those of teachers, institutions, governments, and learners, will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan (2007, p. 771) found a strong role for institutions and educational policy in supporting autonomous motivation for teaching among in-service general school teachers. In Roth et al.’s study, a positive relationship was found between autonomous motivation for teaching and self-determination in learning.

However, claims that learner autonomy depends in some way upon teacher autonomy are not universally supported in the literature.
Benson (2008) reports his own decision to learn a second language by taking a language class; in acquiescing to the teacher’s syllabus and using the teacher’s materials, he considers that he exercised appropriate autonomy in relation to his overall life goals, and his own evaluation of the teacher’s capacities to direct his learning towards learning goals compatible with his own. In Benson’s example, learner autonomy took place without any apparent change in the teacher’s approach to learning or the institutional context of instruction.

Chan (2001) reports a study of learner autonomy in Hong Kong in a context where learners suppose teachers to be in complete control of the learning process. She found that even in this context, a high proportion of the learners (84%) welcomed opportunities to discover things by themselves. There may be some doubt as to whether the teachers are really as all powerful as learners suppose, but this study presents evidence that autonomous teachers would find their learners willing, though needing support, to assume a degree of learning autonomy.

Furtak & Kunter (2012) investigated the effects on learning and motivation of school teaching intended to support learner autonomy in a science lesson. The role of teachers was seen as providing guidance and scaffolding for student learning, and two different kinds of support for learner autonomy were identified:

· Procedural autonomy support: learners select and make use of learning materials; and

· Cognitive autonomy support: learners find multiple solutions to problems, get informational feedback, and support in the evaluation of errors.

Motivation was measured by an instrument designed to measure dispositional interest towards science, and learning was measured by a pre- and post-test. It was found that procedural autonomy support had no effect on learners’ motivation or learning, but that where cognitive autonomy was not supported, learners learned significantly more, perceived significantly more choices, and rated their instruction more positively.

This study may indicate that the supposed advantages of supporting learner autonomy may be illusory or even damaging to learners, but
the sample was small and perhaps not representative. An alternative interpretation of the results could make the case for continuing to provide whatever support learners may indicate that they need, but not forcing learners to assume responsibilities for which they are unprepared.

Railton & Watson (2005) addressed the problem of inducting school leavers into the autonomous learning behaviours expected of university students. In the context of a first year module on media studies, they found that students shaped their perceptions of what was required of them in ways that did not tend towards learner autonomy. As in school, tutors were seen by students as both the holders of valid knowledge and of the power to decide exam grades. In that context, it is rational for students to focus on hiding their limitations rather than improving learning practices. The authors claim some success in modifying student participation in meaningful learning by adopting the following measures:

- Incremental assessed tasks starting with those that require only shallow learning and progressing to those requiring deep learning.
- Setting small discussion groups of six students to work alone but in a set time and place, with the tutor in a ‘drop in’ role.
- Reinforcing the six-student group identity in the lecture room as well as in discussion groups and out of class activities including a tutor monitored virtual learning environment.
- Double the contact time so that both disciplinary content and learning strategies and concepts can be covered.
- Set learning materials and assessed and graded activities.

Railton & Watson’s (2005) study acknowledges the real difficulties inherent in providing the conditions of trust needed for students to be autonomous clients of a professional teaching service (Farmer, 2006b)

In the field of language teaching, Yang (1998) described a language learning project in a Taiwanese context which combined content instruction with learning strategy instruction. In this project, the teacher set out to change unhelpful learner beliefs about second language acquisition, and to provide explicit strategy instruction. The project ran over four years and the process included learner self-
4. Teaching autonomy and learner autonomy

assessment, goal setting, planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own language learning. There were six steps in the learning process:

1. Learners carry out structured peer interviews about their learning backgrounds, experiences and learning ‘tricks’. It was supplemented with an individual learner questionnaire designed to inform the teacher about the learning strategies, beliefs, attitudes and preferred learning styles of learners.

2. Learners read about success in language learning and are instructed on concepts of language proficiency and communicative competence. Learners self-assess their language proficiency.

3. Learners set their own proficiency objectives and plan their learning strategies for vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking. The teacher gives support in forming and modifying learner’s proposals.

4. Learners keep a weekly diary recording self-observation, learning strategies used, thoughts about learning activities and important learning events, in the physical emotional and intellectual context.

5. The teacher instructs on and models language learning strategies for different purposes including test-taking, report writing, giving oral presentations and reading material with different purposes.

6. Learners evaluate the effectiveness of their language learning and use of strategies in relation to their learning goals, and share their personal projects with the group.

Yang found that the project raised learners’ awareness and use of language learning strategies, and increased learners’ autonomy, including assessing their own proficiency, setting goals and evaluating progress. The teacher’s role was to facilitate and structure the process of modification of beliefs and development of strategies for learner autonomy.

The purpose of teacher autonomy in the papers discussed here is the promotion of learner autonomy and there are other purposes, such as the professional development of teachers and the professional practice of teaching which will be discussed in Chapter 5. What emerges from these papers is a need for caution in making claims for teacher
autonomy as a necessary condition for student learning. While a case may be made for learner autonomy enhancing learning (Railton & Watson, 2005; Yang, 1998) there is also evidence to the contrary (Furtak & Kunter, 2012). Many authors consider that teacher autonomy is necessary for learner autonomy (Benson, 2000; Chan, 2001; McGrath, 2000; Roth Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan, 2007; Thavenius, 1999), yet the personal experience of Benson (2008) suggests that for some learners teacher autonomy is irrelevant. A possible conclusion would be that the exercise of teacher autonomy is justified if the result is the enhancement of student learning, but is conditional on the short- or long-term evidence for learning.

4.3 Teacher roles and duties

Teachers are increasingly aware of the forces that control and direct the roles they play in supporting learning. Among these, teachers’ beliefs perhaps have the strongest influence on how they interpret their roles in any given situation. There are a number of factors that frame these situations: learners’ identities, educating learners to assume more autonomy, learners’ individual differences, and the increasing normalization of the use of technology in education and in distance learning (where apparently there are new opportunities for autonomous learning). I will now look at each of these in turn to explore how they impact on teachers’ roles and duties.

Teacher beliefs

Teacher beliefs about learner autonomy are behind what they may do to promote it or, consciously or unconsciously, to inhibit it. They also affect the role teachers may adopt towards institutional or wider political initiatives which may have an impact on learner autonomy.

Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) studied the beliefs of teachers of English in an Omani university with a view to offering development workshops relevant to their needs. Among the findings of the study, it is notable that while more than 90% of teachers believe learner autonomy to have a positive effect on learning, fewer than half
believe their students to be autonomous, although almost 80% of teachers believe they promote learner autonomy. Learner autonomy in each of the areas of classroom management, teaching methods, assessments, topics, activities, materials, and objectives was believed to be less feasible than desirable, and in none of these areas was learner autonomy believed to be more than moderately desirable.

In Borg & Al-Busaidi’s study, teachers believed that impediments to the development of learner autonomy were in different degrees due to the learners, the institution and the teachers. Learners were believed to lack motivation and study skills, while the institution inhibited learner autonomy by having an overloaded curriculum and limited resources. Teachers believed that lack of teacher autonomy and low expectations of students also affected learner autonomy.

Llaven-Nucamendi (2012, p. 22) found in her study on a Mexican higher education context that students, teachers and senior administrators believe in the value of autonomy in learning, and they recognize the desirability of this goal, but they have doubts that it can be fully achieved because of the many significant problems they face. Their understanding of what autonomy in learning is, encompassed some positive as well as negative attitudes towards it. Among the impediments to learner autonomy identified by learners, teachers and senior administrators, were students’ learning preferences, dependency on the teacher, lack of training for students, teachers and senior administrators, lack of time to study, attitudes towards autonomy in learning, teachers’ skills and profiles, and national educational policies.

Trebbi (2008) reports a teacher-training project in Norway where student teachers were initially doubtful about the value of learner autonomy in schools. Specifically, student teachers considered pupils to be too immature to make decisions about learning objectives, and that the variety of individual learning objectives and processes would be unmanageable. These are legitimate concerns for student teachers whose beliefs have been formed by their own teachers. While the innovative training course for student teachers reported by Trebbi showed dramatic short term changes in the participants’ beliefs regarding the feasibility of learner autonomy, her study obtained no evidence of the long term effects of the course, or how similar courses
may help experienced teachers come to terms with learner autonomy.

Martínez (2008) explored the beliefs about learner autonomy held by student language teachers in Germany. She found that her subjects, who had received lectures on the theme of autonomy, approved of learner autonomy but thought of the autonomous learner as an ideal that does not and cannot exist in reality. Her subjects conceptualized autonomy as an alternative new teaching and learning method which is supposed to improve the language learning process in the classroom, often equated with individualization or differentiation, and with learning in isolation. Martínez was able to link her subjects’ beliefs with their own past learning experiences in single subject case studies, and makes suggestions on how student teachers may be trained to realign their conceptions with achievable learner autonomy.

Chan (2003) found that a large sample of teachers (nearly 1000) in Hong Kong had a generally positive view of their students’ capacity for exercising autonomy in learning English, but considered it their duty to take responsibility for many of the relevant decisions. Over 70% of the sample believed they were mainly or completely responsible for:

· Identifying students’ weaknesses in English.
· Choosing what materials to use to learn English in English lessons.
· Choosing what activities to use to learn English in English lessons.
· Stimulating students’ interest in learning English.
· Evaluating students’ learning.
· Making sure students make progress during lessons.

Between 45% and 70% of the sample believed teachers were mainly or completely responsible for:

· Deciding the objectives of their English course.
· Deciding what students should learn next in their English lessons.
· Deciding how long to spend on each activity.
· Evaluating the course.
· Making students work harder.

Fewer than 10% of the sample considered that teachers were mainly or completely responsible for:
4. Teaching autonomy and learner autonomy

· Deciding what students learn outside class.
· Making sure students’ progress outside class.

Chan’s study highlights teachers’ concern for fulfilling their responsibilities as authorities in the classroom, but also reflects the pressure exerted on teachers by their institutions to deliver the service that policy makers may have prescribed.

Teacher beliefs, including any belief that learner and/or teacher autonomy may be a good thing, clearly have both wide and deep impacts on teaching practice. Where not actually contradicted by research, they are susceptible to change only through reflective practice or the imposition of policy by authorities. When teachers exert their autonomy to counter or ameliorate the effects of policy decisions with which they disagree, they may be able to cite research in support of their position, but the conviction that such policies must be opposed comes from their beliefs. However, the credibility of opponents of policy decisions depends on their accountability for the consequences of their alternative proposals. The legitimacy of teacher autonomy in teaching acts as well as policy matters depends on their accountability to learners, institutions and to society in general. Where teachers work within a bureaucratic institutional structure, they are permitted neither the responsibility nor the authority to determine policy.

Learner identities

The teacher’s responsibilities go beyond cognitive aspects of autonomy associated with language learning, and include affective, socio-cultural and political dimensions. Language is intimately connected with identity, and learning a new one might be expected to have a deep effect on it. Van Lier (2007) links the concepts of learners’ identity, voice, agency, motivation, and autonomy since there is a chain of connections between these concepts as they occur within a model of action-based teaching. Voice, by which he means making new sounds and meanings, is the learner’s property and is at the core of identity; having a voice is achieved through agency. Agency leads to motivation to act and to actions, so that motivation and autonomy are closely related. Van Lier (2007, p. 58) defines identity as ‘ways of
relating the self to the world’, developed through cycles of perception, action and interpretation. Identity is not fixed in any learning context but changes constantly to accommodate new selves with pasts, presents and intended futures.

Sinclair (2008) found that students who appeared un-participative in a Masters level course for experienced teachers attributed their behaviour to personality traits and their cultural expectations. These may be factors that are not readily observable, unlike differences in learning styles and strategies for the detection of which instruments are available.

In language teaching, teaching acts have an important effect on learners’ identities, including their feelings of confidence and competence. Only directed and purposeful reflective practice founded on the acknowledgement of learner identities can prevent real harm being done to vulnerable learners. This area of teaching practice has been little researched, perhaps because of the general tendency of supporters of autonomy to see learner autonomy as an unmitigated benefit.

**Teaching learner autonomy**

Little (2009) identifies teachers’ roles in preparing students for autonomous learning. For him, teachers (rather than learners or institutions) have the main responsibility for ‘creating and maintaining an interactive learning environment.’ Specifically, teachers need to help learners to identify their needs, both individually and collectively, and find ways in which those needs may be met. In addition, according to Little, it is the teacher’s responsibility to initiate, model and support forms of discourse which meet the need for learner involvement, reflection and target language use.

While Little’s approach is predominantly practical, dealing with needs analysis and learning activities, La Ganza (2008) highlights the teacher’s role in creating with learners a suitable learning environment in which learner autonomy may flourish.

Trebbi (2008) sees autonomous learning as taking the opportunities available within the inevitable set of institutional and personal constraints, so that the teacher’s fundamental role in preparing learners for autonomy is raising the consciousness of learners. Trebbi (2008, p. 37)
found that an effective framework of supportive constraints for autonomous learners includes:

- Awareness raising about the nature of languages, cultures and language learning.
- Reflective experience-based learning.
- Learner initiatives and exploration of the target language.
- Relevant choices of learning activities.
- Learning to learn activities.

**Learners’ individual differences**

Learner differences have rarely been linked to teacher autonomy, but where teachers enjoy a measure of freedom from external control in their teaching, they must also take responsibility for the effect of their practices on individual learners (Farmer 2006b).

Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford (2003) give a useful overview of the field of learner differences and their implications for teaching. Individual differences may be categorized in three main areas: learning styles, learning strategies and affective variables. Ehrman and her colleagues outline the main issues and their implications for teaching in each area. According to them, learning styles are generally used to categorize some innate aspect of learners. Models of learning styles may seek to place learners somewhere on a continuum between two extremes, such as in the Myers-Briggs indicator, while other models may take a more multidimensional approach, such as the multiple intelligences model (Gardner, 2011). Learning style categorizations are used to document learners’ personality and cognitive style and teachers use the recorded data to determine ability and predict performance, and also to improve teaching.

Learning strategies are conscious actions taken by learners to reach a learning goal. For Ehrman and her colleagues (2003), they are neither effective nor ineffective in themselves, but become more or less useful to learners according to their compatibility with their learning styles and the task at hand. The implication for teaching is that learners need to be introduced to learning strategies which
may be suitable for them in the context of the task to which they are applicable.

According to Ehrman Leaver & Oxford, affective variables include a number of factors, most of which are related in some way to motivation and include such categories as anxiety, defence mechanisms, internal attitudes, self-esteem, willingness to act, and emotional intelligence. Many others are listed but may be difficult to distinguish from one another, and research continues to identify and describe new categories of affective variables. The implications for teaching remain uncertain, but what a teacher does or omits to do may impact positively or negatively on individuals or the learning group.

Overall, Ehrman Leaver & Oxford (2003, p. 324) recommend an individualized and consultorial approach to language teaching ‘in which each learner’s purposes, learning styles, interests and resources are considered’. Teaching styles, they point out, may sometimes clash with learners’ learning styles and cause unintended harm, so that the self-awareness of the teacher should inform the teacher’s actions in relation to learners’ needs. Farmer, Llaven-Nucamendi & Chuc-Piña (2010) draw attention to the professional responsibilities of teachers to ensure that what they do or do not do takes into account who may be harmed, how much and under what circumstances. While research continues and remains inconclusive, it may nevertheless be reasonable to require teachers to account for what they decided to do or not do where learning outcomes deviate from reasonable expectations.

**Educational technology**

Zou (2011) suggests that the provision of computer support for language learning does not automatically lead to learner autonomy, but may provide affordances for different ways of being autonomous. These could include opportunities for learners to direct their own learning and to collaborate and communicate with others, as well as promoting engagement with the learning material. In order to make computer assisted language learning (CALL) an instrument for developing learner autonomy, learners need to be able to choose and personalize learning.
4. Teaching autonomy and learner autonomy

tools and content, as well as having access to scaffolding including counselling on what to study, where the materials are and which of them may be copied; scaffolding requires teachers with appropriate attitudes adjusted to support learner autonomy.

Zou (2011) researched learner autonomy in CALL environments in two different contexts in order to uncover where there may be barriers to the development of learner autonomy. The two contexts were an English as a Foreign Language (EFEL) programme in a UK university aimed at overseas students, and an EFEL programme at a Chinese university. He found that students on both contexts were equally positive in their attitudes to CALL and to learner autonomy, but that students in China did far fewer learning activities using the educational technology. Overall, the principal reason for the difference between the two contexts could be attributed to the lack of scaffolding in China. The informal atmosphere of learning in the UK contrasted with formality in China. In the UK, there was open access to the materials and equipment, while in China access was restricted to 2 hours a week per student. In China, too, classes were teacher centred with the presentation of content and activities controlled by the teacher, whereas in the UK the approach was more student centred, featuring group work, contexts where student generated issues and opinions could be discussed with tutors, and open ended activities where learners needed to do documental research in their own time. The scaffolding requirement uncovered by Zou goes beyond teachers giving feedback on oral and written outputs, and includes institution wide facilitation of learner autonomy through more open access and less formal learning situations as well as teacher attitudes which provide implicit support for learner autonomy.

For Trebbi (2008), the use of educational technology is fundamental for facilitating learner autonomy. She gives examples of 14 year old learners of French in Norway, for whom open access to material and opportunities for real communication with French speakers depends on information and communication technologies. However, she also found that access to materials and communication media were unproductive without teacher facilitation in negotiating learning
objectives with students and providing a supportive framework of constraints.

Distance learning

One of the outcomes of innovative work on CALL and distance learning has been the new attention to what is essential in supporting learning. In a distance learning context, Candlin & Byrnes (1995, p. 13) identified a number of teacher roles:

- Select learning experiences that encourage choice and expand learning opportunities.
- Provide a supportive climate for learning.
- Encourage risk-taking in making efforts to change.
- Provide constructive judgements and evaluations.
- Involve learners actively in posing problems.
- Provide opportunities for learners to communicate about learning.

This list of roles could apply equally to promoting learner autonomy in classroom practice. White (2003) identifies the traditional relationship between students, teachers and education providers in distance education as one that promotes learner independence, but where learning objectives and the learning programme are controlled through teacher designed materials by the provider. She points out that distance learning materials and systems by themselves do not automatically promote learner autonomy, while making strong demands on learners’ resourcefulness in meeting the demands of the course do. White argues that independent learning skills in any case are not sufficient to achieve learner autonomy, and that full learning support teacher roles as identified by Candlin & Byrnes (1995) need to be provided. She points out that these roles are impractical in a distance context unless there is a corresponding sharing of teacher input among students through learner networks set up and maintained by the education provider.

The shift towards a virtual classroom, albeit an innovative one, and away from learner independence in distance education may be seen as
enhancing a more realistic learner autonomy where institutions and teachers take on more clearly defined responsibilities while allowing learners the meaningful choices they may wish to make.

Lamy & Goodfellow (1999) categorized student-teacher communication in a distance learning programme as either socially or cognitively orientated depending on the tutorial style preferred by the teacher. They suggest that each style promotes part of the programme’s learning objectives and speculate that it should be possible to combine both social and cognitive elements in tutors’ communications to cover learning objectives fully and efficiently.

Murphy (2008) studied the difficulties experienced by distance language course writers in designing materials that promote metacognitive learning strategies with the objective of developing learner autonomy. She found that open university course writers have made progress in building the development of metacognitive strategies into courses, but the time dedicated to developing learner autonomy takes time and energy from the acquisition of the target language, and needs to be credited as part of student learning.

Conclusion

Teachers hold a key position in the influence they may have on their institutional policies as well as on their learners. Teacher autonomy may be necessary for promoting learner autonomy, and for the practice of teaching to meet diverse learner needs in diverse teaching situations. This chapter has looked at the definitions of teacher autonomy that have been proposed and some definitions of purposes and teaching situations that teachers may need a degree of autonomy to respond to.

The range and diversity of research on teaching autonomy may not permit the identification of firm and clear paths forward. Nevertheless, this chapter has shown how work on autonomy in different situations and cultural contexts may be classified according to the purpose of the autonomy claimed as well as some of the legitimate limitations to teacher autonomy. This chapter has concentrated on teacher autonomy in relation to learners, and Chapter 5 will explore teacher autonomy in relation to the workplace.
In this chapter I will look at how teachers may be educated to assume their responsibilities in the promotion of learning and learner autonomy, as well as the impact of teacher autonomy in the workplace. Issues related to teaching professionalism will also be addressed, in particular the constraints on teachers’ professionalism and job satisfaction, as well as the positive and negative effects of teacher autonomy.

Autonomous language learning has been linked to teacher autonomy in different ways. For instance, if autonomy is taken to be a universal human right, it is the right of teachers as much as of learners. However, teachers working in educational institutions cannot be said to have autonomy in setting learning objectives; that prerogative belongs to either institutions or autonomous learners. Teachers working in educational institutions may have the opportunity to design or influence the curriculum offered to learners, and learners may sometimes have the opportunity to choose between different educational offers. But on what basis can autonomous learners choose their learning support?

Supporting learning happens within a complex mix of different autonomies, in which each of the actors may seek to shift the boundaries of their areas of control. Teachers have a duty to support learning and need the freedom to do that, but they are also agents of their employers. Students may wish to take more or less responsibility for their learning, and institutions may wish to exert more or less control over the details of what teachers do.
5.1 Educating teachers

For Little (2009, p. 155) there continues to be a mismatch between teacher education and the roles required of teachers in supporting learner autonomy. In his article on the relationship between learner and teacher autonomy, Little (1995) argues for learning autonomy in teacher education. In order to promote learner autonomy, and perhaps model it too, teachers need to have experienced it. He argues that teacher education needs to be negotiated, just as learner autonomy needs to be negotiated in the language classroom. The range of the negotiated syllabus recommended by Little includes the aims and learning targets, course content, the way in which course content is mediated, learning tasks, and the assessment of learning achievement. However, Little takes as given the need for student teachers to engage with the study of empirical research into second-language acquisition (SLA) learning strategies and classroom discourse, and to carry out individual or collective research projects.

Trebbi (2008) describes a project designed to educate 12 student school teachers from universities in Norway and Cameroon for introducing classroom practices intended to support learner autonomy. She found student teachers resistant to the introduction of learner autonomy, posing concerns such as:

- How teachers can control the learning of 30 pupils doing different activities.
- How the teacher can guarantee the quality of learning in learner autonomy.
- How pupils working autonomously can learn everything they should.
- How slow learners can cope with the extra work required for autonomous learning.

Activities intended to address these concerns were facilitated by teacher trainers from the three participating universities and a practitioner experienced in supporting learner autonomy.

The course used a framework of supportive constraints including compulsory participation, in which student teachers experienced
autonomous learning about supporting learner autonomy and participated in study activities offering innovative learning experiences. The use of synchronous and asynchronous electronic forums by student teachers was compulsory and the final examination consisted of an essay and a digital portfolio of theoretical reflections upon practical experiences.

Martínez (2008, p. 118) found positive attitudes among German student language teachers towards learner autonomy, but accompanied by a sense that it could not be achieved. She proposed a teacher education programme which uses subjective learning theories to develop:

- a) Metacognitive awareness of the self as learner.
- b) Metacognitive awareness of the language learning process, and
- c) Learning to learn competence.

Martínez suggests raising metacognitive awareness by integrating student teachers’ verbal reports, questionnaires and diaries in pre-service training. Trainers may use this information to share subjective theories among the trainees and to confront individual student teachers. Competence in learning to learn may be acquired through reading current research in the field and reflecting upon the student teachers’ own knowledge and subjective concepts about teaching. Similarly, reading research on autonomy may lead to its application to their own language learning, further developing competence in learning to learn.

Cakir & Balcikanli (2012) investigated the use of the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) in an English teacher training programme in Turkey. The authors argue that the development of teacher autonomy is central to teacher education, and the EPOSTL instrument was used in this study to develop autonomy in student teachers through reflection, self-assessment and awareness. They found that the instrument was effective, but the number of descriptors and the difficulty of self-assessment made for a heavy workload.

In Central and South America, action research is widely practiced. Perhaps the lack of proper funding for research obliges teachers to do what they can in action research, but in any case, this research
approach falls within their teaching activities. In seeking a pathway to teacher and learner autonomy Fabela-Cárdenas (2009) discusses the need for teachers to engage in critical reflection through action research. She argues that the development of teachers’ pedagogical knowledge in support of socio-affective aspects of learner autonomy is a relevant issue in teaching and learning in the Colombian context, and describes a study carried out in an EFL classroom at the Centro Colombo Americano in Bogota, Colombia. The main purpose of the study was to identify affective factors and socio-affective language learning strategies accessible to and usable by beginner EFL students. A semi-structured interview was applied to 17 students to find out the factors and strategies that needed to be addressed. Teachers were then trained in the use of socio-affective language learning strategies through affect-related activities and the usefulness to learners of affect-based instruction was assessed. Fabela-Cárdenas found that reflective practice aided the development of teachers’ pedagogical knowledge in support of socio-affective aspects of learner autonomy and reports no particular difficulties with reflective practice. This study shows that teacher professional development and the opportunity to exercise their autonomy in the learning of methodological and pedagogical issues can be beneficial to learners and the development of learner autonomy.

Smith & Erdoğan (2008) recognize that beliefs are commonly regarded by researchers as static, so that teacher beliefs regarding autonomy are supposed to be somewhat intractable. However, constructs as conceptualized in Kelly’s (1955) theory of personal constructs, refer to the ways individuals anticipate events to make sense and take control of their world, and are supposed to be more malleable. Smith & Erdoğan’s research is based on eliciting constructs rather than beliefs because constructs may give a better understanding of a student-teacher’s thinking and may be open to change. They investigated students’ personal constructs in relation to particular elements of the course design intended to promote the ‘ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others’ using repertory-grid interviews (Kelly, G. A., 1955). Providing an education programme that worked
with students on their constructs was positively appraised by the students. They found that self-directed activities were productive in pre-service teacher learning, but that they need to be balanced with effective support.

Viera, Barbosa, Paiva & Fernandes (2008) describe a pre-service teacher education project in which reflective journal writing was intended to give student teachers the opportunity to adapt their teaching practice to the demands of promoting learner autonomy. Both student teachers and their supervisors acknowledge that while there were benefits for student teacher awareness, overall results were not what had been hoped for. The difficulties identified were student-teacher resistance, lack of time for journal writing, inadequate depth of reflection, and the traditional working culture of the schools where students did their teaching practice. The combination of the workplace resistance to ideas of learner autonomy with the supervisors’ passionate commitment to it appear to have placed student teachers in an untenable position, in which they are evaluated as students on criteria that they cannot possibly meet as trainee teachers.

Sinclair (2008) reports her experiences in designing and teaching a module on Learner Autonomy as part of a Masters level programme for experienced teachers in a UK university. Most of the group were not British citizens, but the course had to comply with the demanding criteria for quality assurance required by British universities. Sinclair found that it was possible to design a course that responded to the autonomy of students within the constraints set by the university, and apparently relished the challenge. Students were able, in discussion with the course tutor, to decide the content of the course and select appropriate reading. While student participation seemed to be disappointingly passive, the students considered themselves to be actively involved and Sinclair acknowledges that there are forms of active participation that may not be evident to observers. These forms of participation, she found, may be culturally determined or due to individual personality differences. In a post course reflective session, students and tutor together explored the apparent asymmetry of relations between tutor and taught, not just in terms of relative power but also in terms of the validity of co-constructed knowledge.
Students resisted collaborative learning, believing they needed tutor feedback to validate or reorient their ideas.

Teachers and groups of teachers undergoing training display a range of different characteristics. In the studies described above, teachers varied in their cultural backgrounds, the educational settings for their training, their level of teaching experience and individual differences. Like any learner being introduced to learning autonomy, teachers display a range of attitudes. Some teachers engage willingly with training, sometimes after initial resistance (Cakir & Balcikani, 2012; Fabela-Cárdenas, 2009; Martínez, 2008; Smith & Erdoğan, 2008) while others maintain and reinforce their resistance (Sinclair, 2008; Trebbi, 2008; Vieira, Barbosa, Paiva & Fernandes, 2008). It is not surprising that teacher education should be problematic and displays many of the successes and limitations associated with language learning autonomy. Designing a teacher education programme requires sensitivity to individual teachers’ affective needs as well as feasible learning objectives set within the constraints of the educational programme, and the studies discussed above may help to suggest what approaches may work in particular circumstances.

5.2 Teacher professional development

The professional development of teachers is one of the purposes of teacher autonomy (Smith & Erdoğan, 2008; Iida, 2009). For Iida (2009) teacher autonomy is necessary for keeping up with innovation in the field, and for underpinning changes in teachers’ practices and attitudes. Iida suggests a range of individual and collective activities for professional development in which teachers and groups of teachers are the driving force rather than the institutions they work in. He suggests:

- Action research
- Self-observation
- Peer observation
- Reading professional journals
5. Teacher autonomy and the workplace

- Taking courses
- Keeping a teaching portfolio or journal

These suggestions are broadly in line with more general recommendations for professional development (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005), but in the context of teaching autonomy, the responsibility for professional development lies with the teachers and their associations rather than with employing institutions.

Lamb & Simpson (2003) claim that teacher autonomy for professional development may be channelled through particular forms of practitioner research. A nine stage procedure for classroom action research is described: Find a focus, Collect data, Reflect on data, Devise experiment/intervention, Record event, Collect data, Compare, Implement, and Review. An example of an ‘intervention lesson’ is given to illustrate stage 4 of the procedure, namely devise experiment/intervention. In the application of action research, the authors assume that teachers exercise autonomy in deciding what to research and how. They suggest that teachers should be willing and able to research teaching acts intended to support technical, psychological and political learner autonomy (Benson, 1997) as part of their own autonomous efforts to avoid falling into a repetitive teaching routine. What is not clear in this proposal is an acknowledgement that interventions may unintentionally cause negative effects to learners, which needs to be offset against the possible benefits of teacher development and motivation.

Borg & Al-Busaidi (2012) used a study of teachers’ beliefs regarding learner autonomy to identify the teachers’ professional development needs. They found that their study provided the basis for a series of professional development workshops with a high degree of relevance for the participants, and aimed at aligning teachers’ belief in the efficacy of learner autonomy with their teaching practices, as well as reinforcing and orientating positive attitudes to learner autonomy.

The workshops encouraged teachers to voice, share and debate their beliefs and practices, and adhered to seven guiding principles:
1. Instructional change needs to be driven by teachers themselves.

2. The change process is likely to be more effective if it involves teachers in collaborative forms of reflection and action.

3. Collective change is facilitated when teachers have a shared understanding of the change desired (for example, of what learning autonomy is and why it is important).

4. Lasting change in what teachers do cannot occur without attention to the beliefs teachers have in relation to the change desired.

5. For this reason, top-down directives for change (for example simply telling teachers how to promote learning autonomy) will have limited impact on what they do.

6. Proposed changes need to be feasible and grounded in a clear understanding of the context in which they are to occur.

7. Effective institutional change depends not just on creating initial enthusiasm but also on sustaining this momentum over the longer term.

Participants’ reactions to the workshops were positive, but any long-term effects on teaching practices will only be detected in a future study.

Teacher autonomy is linked with professional practice where teachers have the freedom to carry out the teaching acts they consider necessary (Little, 2000; Smith & Erdoğan, 2008). Autonomous professional practice is the overarching goal of teacher autonomy, which may justify and direct teaching decisions on learner autonomy and teachers’ professional development.

5.3 Teacher autonomy and working conditions

In a review of the research literature on teacher autonomy, Pearson & Moomaw (2006) found a positive relationship between teacher autonomy and motivation, job satisfaction, professionalism and empowerment, and an inverse relationship with stress and burnout.

Pearson & Moomaw (2005) investigated the relationship in a US school setting between teacher autonomy and stress, job satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism. In developing their survey
instrument, the authors developed definitions and subdivisions of each of the concepts measured.

Teacher autonomy was split into two distinct categories: a) curriculum autonomy, defined as autonomy in the selection of materials and instructional sequencing and planning, and b) general autonomy, defined as autonomy in classroom standards of behaviour and on-the-job decision making.

Stress was defined as a construct of teachers’ perception of their instructional load, their paperwork load and the work environment.

Work satisfaction was defined as a construct of the teachers’ perception of their salary and employment.

Empowerment was defined as a construct of teachers’ perception of their relationship with the administration in three areas: attention to teachers’ opinions in matters directly affecting them; involvement in developing school policy; and frequency of taking teachers’ opinions into account in administrative decisions.

Professionalism was defined as a construct of teachers’ perception of recognition for high performance, the openness and accessibility of the administration, and activity on school level committees.

Pearson & Moomaw (2005) found that increases in curriculum autonomy correlated with a decrease in stress, but found little relationship between general autonomy and stress. Increases in job satisfaction, empowerment and professionalism also correlated with decreases in stress, and greater job satisfaction was associated with greater professionalism and empowerment. The strongest relationship found, was between empowerment and professionalism, while no significant relationship was found between curriculum and general autonomy and job satisfaction.

Chan’s (2003) study of teachers in Hong Kong found that while many teachers considered their students capable of developing autonomy, they considered that teachers were mainly responsible for many aspects of student learning, including in a few cases, learning outside class. Chan suspects that institutional constraints on curriculum and the pace of learning inhibits teachers from passing control to students, while students feel comfortable with teacher centred classes, leading to levels
of learner autonomy below those which teachers believe students to be capable of.

Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan (2007) found a positive correlation between teachers’ level of autonomous motivation for teaching and teachers’ sense of accomplishment, while feelings of exhaustion decreased as autonomous motivation increased.

The articles discussed above show consistently the importance of teacher autonomy for job satisfaction and stress reduction, suggesting that there are not only advantages for individual teachers in having a suitable environment for autonomous action, but also for institutions which will benefit from more engaged and satisfied teachers.

5.4 Professionalism

Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira (2007, p. 52) identify and elaborate upon four dimensions of teacher professional competence for a pedagogy of autonomy:

a) Developing a critical view of language education.
b) Managing local constraints so as to open up spaces for manoeuvre.
c) Centring teaching on learning.
d) Interacting with others in the professional community.

In their formulation of the dimensions of professional competence, the authors acknowledge that the relevance and importance of each dimension will be different for different teachers and different contexts. Teachers are invited to reflect upon their willingness, ability and opportunity to meet aspects of each dimension, so that the gap between a perceived reality and the teacher’s view of an ideal situation may be bridged or at least brought closer. Jiménez Raya, Llamb & Vieira’s (2007) view of professionalism requires teachers to enter into conflictive situations in institutional contexts with only their capacity for reflection, selected reading and personal educational convictions for support. This falls short of the kind of accountable professionalism proposed by Farmer (2006b) who describes a detailed learning support service which is the teacher’s duty to provide and document.
Hegløy & Homme (2007) carried out a study of school teacher autonomy in Norway and Sweden that linked autonomy broadly with professionalism. They found that professionalism in teaching in each country involved different autonomies. In Norway, the teaching profession followed what the authors call a traditional model, where teachers enter the profession following a prescribed course in higher education leading to certification and a monopoly of practice, and subscribe to a code of ethics. In this model, teachers have autonomy in the classroom and the position of the profession in society is achieved by the teachers’ collective organization or profession. In addition to classroom autonomy, Norwegian teachers also influenced government policy through their professional organization.

By contrast, teachers in Sweden follow what Hegløy & Homme (2007) call a ‘new professionalism’ where the focus is on the individual’s personal competence, regardless of how that competence has been acquired, and is characterized by being implicit, individual and contextual. In this model, accountability is individual rather than collective and is extended to key local stakeholders such as individual students, parents and school management. Status and recognition, including pay, is negotiated individually and the lack of any collective autonomy leads to a lack of influence on government policy.

While the Swedish model fits well with market forces and systems of transparency and accountability, it demonstrates a collapse of trust in the teaching profession as a collective force for good in society. Swedish teachers estimate that they spend a disproportionate amount of time on matters unrelated to teaching, and it may be that society is not best served by this form of professionalism, in spite of the accountability and transparency it appears to afford.

Pinter (2007, p. 117) adopts McGrath’s (2000) link between teacher autonomy and professionalism. In this view, teacher autonomy is situational (Benson, 2008) since it is conceived as the freedom from external constraints supposed to be necessary for taking appropriate action in supporting learner autonomy.

Farmer (2006b) proposed a statement of professional services in English language teaching developed from TESOL’s (2000) lists of quality indicators, measures and performance standards for language
programmes. For Farmer, the value of service statements is to remind practitioners of the range of their responsibilities, while leaving to the practitioner how these responsibilities may be discharged at a particular time or place bearing in mind how learners may be helped or harmed, how much and in what circumstances. Farmer’s service statements are not specifically aimed at supporting autonomous learning, but nevertheless give a framework within which teachers can develop their work and be accountable for their performance. Following TESOL (2000), Farmer’s service statements are grouped under eight headings:

**Program structure, administration and planning**
- Providing programmes with a mission statement, philosophy, and goals, with input from internal and external stakeholders.
- Providing effective administration and accountability in all programmes.
- Providing effective evaluation of programmes and planning for future needs.

**Curriculum**
- Setting goals, objectives, outcomes, approaches, methods, materials, technological resources and evaluation measures that are appropriate for clients’ needs and goals.
- Evaluating and revising the curriculum.

**Instruction**
- Promoting active client participation in the learning process.
- Taking account of diverse client needs and cultural backgrounds.
- Focusing on the functional use of language.
- Integrating the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening).
- Taking account of different clients’ learning styles.
- Developing authentic communication skills.
- Preparing clients for formal and informal assessment situations.
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Recruitment, intake, and orientation
- Identifying and recruiting client learners to meet needs.
- Evaluating recruitment procedures.
- Planning recruitment programmes.
- Evaluating clients’ needs, goals, and language proficiency level.

Retention and transition
- Encouraging clients to stay in the system or transfer to other programmes in accordance with their goals and needs.

Assessment and learner gains
- Assessing clients’ skills and goals for placement into the programme, documentation of progress within the programme, and exit from the programme.
- Collecting and reporting data on educational gains and outcomes.
- Providing appropriate facilities, equipment and conditions for assessment activities.
- Identifying clients’ needs and goals as individuals, family members, community participants, workers, and lifelong learners.
- Assessing clients’ language proficiency level in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Using an appropriate variety of reliable and valid instruments for assessment.
- Obtaining information through needs assessment to aid in developing curricula, materials, skills assessments, and teaching approaches that are relevant to clients’ lives.
- Explaining and sharing assessment results with clients.
- Documenting clients’ progress towards attainment of other goals.
- Helping clients identify their short and long term goals.
- Helping clients demonstrate skill level improvements in listening, speaking, reading and writing.
Helping clients demonstrate progress towards their short and long term goals.

Helping clients demonstrate progress in non-linguistic areas identified as important toward their goals.

Helping clients attain their personal short and long term goals within time frames compatible with client and programme expectations.

**Staffing, professional development, and staff evaluation**

- Recruiting, hiring and inducting suitably qualified administrative, instructional and support staff.
- Developing a professional development plan based on staff needs and developments in ESOL, with suitable follow up.
- Training in assessment procedures and in the interpretation and use of assessment results.
- Maintaining an up to date resource library of materials on teaching methods and previous course syllabi.
- Evaluating administrative, instructional, and support staff.
- Giving clients the opportunity to evaluate programme staff anonymously.

**Support services**

- Providing access to a variety of services related to barriers to learning directly or through referrals to other agencies.
- Identifying learner disabilities and providing appropriate services directly or through referrals to other agencies.

Professionalism is a contested term, both within the literature on language teaching and beyond. For some authors, it is situated in the community of practitioners and serves to maintain a focus on doing what is possible within institutional and broader political contexts to serve the educational needs of service users (Hegløy & Homme, 2007; Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, 2007). For these authors, institutional and governmental authority is acknowledged as inevitably limiting the responsibility and autonomy of teachers, but that it is legitimate for teachers to seek to influence institutional and political policies in support of learning. On the other hand, Benson (2008), McGrath (2000) and Pinter (2007) see teacher professionalism as the freedom
to do the job without institutional or political interference. Farmer (2005) suggests that freedom from constrains requires teachers to accept full responsibility for the educational service, including the parts that are normally considered to be institutional responsibilities. While the link between teacher autonomy and professionalism seems to be generally accepted, there is still some way to go to reach a consensus on the nature of professionalism in language education.

5.5 Negative effects of teacher autonomy

Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira (2007, p. 49) point out that the freedom to teach how and what teachers may want, can lead to reinforcement of teacher power rather than the support of learner autonomy. Such teacher autonomy may be even more damaging if it leads to teaching which meets neither learners’ nor institutional objectives.

Jansen (2004) gives an example drawn from school teaching in South Africa, in the context of the government’s attempt to measure school quality exclusively with reference to students’ success in nationally applied university matriculation entrance exams. In response, schools and teachers have claimed autonomy in how they comply with the government’s sole indicator of school quality. The result is that schools are free to attend only to the indicator, the matriculation exam, and not to the quality of education that the indicator is supposed to measure. As a result, students are routinely placed in grades below their ability in order to ensure high success rates in the final exam. Similarly, students are channelled towards academically less challenging subject areas, and repeat students are excluded from the schools. Opportunities to deepen and extend learning are thus lost due to the autonomy afforded teachers and schools in complying with one specific government directive which presumably is not intended to reflect the whole of education policy.

Trebbi (2008) found institutional support for learner autonomy in the learning of modern languages in Norway. A new national curriculum was drafted with the intention of making modern languages more accessible to more pupils through support for learner autonomy. However, these changes were opposed by teachers who
considered them unworkable and preferred to continue the tradition of teaching modern languages to only the most able pupils. Further, teachers perceived the new curriculum as an imposition by authorities detrimental to their own autonomy and an obstruction to the legitimate exercise of their expertise.

Smith (2003) accepts that abuse of teacher autonomy can occur, and suggests as a condition of overarching professional legitimization of teacher autonomy that it is exercised only in the interests of student learning.

While Smith’s (2003) suggestion seems sensible, and the concerns raised by Jansen (2004) Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira (2007) and Trebbi (2008) are clearly valid, it would need a professional framework like that proposed by Farmer, Llaven-Nucamendi & Chuc-Piña (2010) to make it operational. There is no point in obliging teachers to routinely demonstrate how they meet the requirements of the professional framework, but any complaint made by a learner could be expected to be analysed in relation to the documented evidence which professional teachers could be expected to be able to produce.

**Conclusion**

How teachers are educated to assume their responsibilities in the promotion of learning and learner autonomy, as well as to assume responsibility for their own learning, teaching autonomy and professional development has an impact in the institutions they work in and therefore affect education. Teachers may have positive and negative influences in their educational institutions depending on the skills, knowledge and attitudes they have for working in cooperation with learners, other teachers, educational administrators and policy makers. It has been argued by researchers in the field of autonomy that the promotion of learner autonomy requires the promotion of teacher autonomy. It seems that the promotion of learner autonomy is particularly closely related to teacher autonomy where learning is taking place in an educational institution, and language teacher education programmes need to take this relationship into account.
Research in language learning and teaching has provided evidence that shows the relevance of autonomy in language education. The examples reviewed above present a variety of ways in which teachers could exercise their autonomy as learners, as teachers and in their professional development. These studies also show the need for further research into the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches that teachers may use to promote learner autonomy as well as the need for research into the language teacher education programmes which aspire to provide tools for teachers to exercise their own autonomy and the autonomy of their learners.

If we accept that enhancing learner and teacher autonomy for learning is a goal in education, language education programmes should have a design that offers the opportunity for student teachers to experience autonomy in learning as well as to learn how to promote learner autonomy. Teacher autonomy may also be necessary for managing the teacher’s own professional development and for the practice of teaching to meet diverse learner needs in diverse teaching situations, and it also has an impact on working conditions, job satisfaction and professionalism.

Teachers hold a key position in the influence they may have on their institutional and governmental policies as well as on their learners, but that influence is conditional on establishing the professional authority of teachers acting in their learners’ interest. It is by no means settled that everything autonomous teachers do in fact supports learning; the possible negative effects of teacher autonomy have also been addressed in this chapter.
In this chapter I will discuss the importance of autonomy in education in general and language learning education in particular. I will present some relevant issues for the promotion of autonomy in language learning and finally I will make further remarks about the themes that are urgent in the research on language learning autonomy in formal education.

6.1 Learner autonomy in formal education

In Chapter 1, positive views of learner autonomy were examined and discussed. Although different authors provided different definitions of autonomy as well as different claims about what it can do for learners, these views of autonomy did not take on board the criticisms of learning autonomy raised in Chapter 2. The discussion of autonomy in education has taken a somewhat doctrinal path in which positions are adopted either in favour or against the proposition. It may be useful to try to reconcile these different positions since some of them may come from either cognitive or socio-cultural approaches, so that authors might not be discussing the same thing when they use the word ‘autonomy’. It seems that not all claims made for autonomy are valid for all learners and that it may be that some dangers in promoting autonomy need to be taken into account, but these do not necessarily invalidate the benefits of autonomy (Llaven-Nucamendi, 2012, p. 23). Any practical innovation in the promotion of learning and teaching autonomy needs to be clear about the cultural context and educational goals and applied with due attention to the extent and character of benefits or harm done to learners.
All language learning, including its autonomous forms, takes place in a social, economic and political context that is related to intercultural communication (Zotzmann, 2007). For the author, ‘any theory of intercultural communication requires a discussion of the nature of well-being and an explicit commitment to values such as social equality, fair distribution of resources, and social welfare’ (Zotzmann, 2007, p. 266). Positive positions on learner autonomy centre on human rights (Strike, 1982), human nature (Dearden, 1972) and freedom (Callan, 1988). These may appear rather individualist concerns, but as Kerr (2002) points out, the skills and moral values needed to exercise autonomous rights must come from the community which the individual is part of, and surely the formal education system of that community is where people learn their rights and how these interact with the rights of others. Ryan & Deci (2006, pp. 4-5) describe how the autonomy of the individual includes choosing to endorse actions mandated by the society: ‘…autonomy is not restricted to “independent” initiatives but also applies to acts reflecting wholehearted consent to external inputs or inducements… for an act to be autonomous it must be endorsed by the self, fully identified with and “owned”’.

Arguments against learner autonomy centre largely on concerns about the rights of individuals as they interface with those of others and the institutions of the community, and also question whether individual autonomy is neurologically or psychologically possible. Among the neurological and psychological problems attributed to autonomy is the question of how far individuals may be said to have free will (Pinker, 2002; Skinner, 1971). The problem here for proponents of autonomy is to distinguish between the different scales of operation of neurons on the one hand, and the whole human organism on the other. Arguments in favour of autonomy in education centre on the whole person, and neuroscience is less of a determining force in important matters such as the motivation to learn. Another psychological objection to autonomy comes from a concern for the capacity of individuals to cope with the decision-making demands of autonomy (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2000). To counter this observation, proponents of autonomy need to be able to make provision for the support of learner decisions within their concept of
autonomy. Laurillard’s (2002, p. 196) comment that ‘...beneath the rhetoric of “giving students control over their learning” is a dereliction of duty’ (on the part of educators) underscores the importance of this misuse of the concept of autonomy.

Objections to learner autonomy as an educational aim focus on relations between the individual and the society. Hand (2006) pointed out that people in fact do enjoy autonomy unless they are constrained in some way, so that autonomy is a political construct rather than an educational one. He also questions whether it is appropriate for education to encourage self-reliance to the extent that individuals come to resist legitimate authority exercised for the public good and to rely more on their own judgments than those of experts. Winch (2002) concedes that individuals in a free society need to contribute to reforms to the values of their community, but that the exercise of freedom requires intellectual, practical and affective engagement with the choices to be made. He concludes that public education needs to concentrate on preparing citizens to choose between worthwhile alternatives. He is concerned that in the absence of a public education the ends of which are properly determined by the society, a preference for arbitrary action will be promoted both by the system and by example.

The objections to autonomy presented by Hand (2006) and Winch (2002) are reactions to an uncritically enthusiastic endorsement of autonomy by some proponents. Their objections need to be taken seriously and integrated into workable and philosophically defensible formulations of the purposes of autonomy in education. To some extent, the more socially rather than individually grounded versions of autonomy, such as those presented by Ryan & Deci (2006) and Kerr (2002) meet this requirement. Motivation to learn is one of the problems faced by educators, and proponents of autonomy in education may claim that motivation can only realistically be an intrinsic characteristic of individual learners facilitated by the educational system. Ryan & Powelson (1991) present a range of empirical evidence supporting an organismic view of learner motivation, in which learners are supposed to be primarily intrinsically motivated to learn, assisted by autonomy supportive teaching, a sense of competence, and a strong sense of
relatedness to teachers and friends. Competence in this analysis is the sense of accomplishment achieved by addressing problems just beyond the learner’s current capacity and leading to confidence and self-esteem, while relatedness concerns the emotional and personal bonds between individuals leading to processes of cultural transmission and internalization of values.

For Ryan & Powelson (1991) autonomy and self-determination are equivalent terms, and autonomous action sees the self as the cause or agent. They claim that education has both cognitive and affective goals, and the evidence they present shows that cognitive goals may be unachievable without attending to the affective ones of developing appropriate relationships with teachers and peers. Ryan & Powelson (1991) suggest that teaching styles may be placed on a continuum ranging from learner autonomy supportive at one extreme to control of learners at the other. The empirical studies they analyse, demonstrate how autonomy supportive teaching leads to the development of both competence and appropriate affective relationships, while controlling behaviour by teachers inhibits their development. Silliman & Johnson (2011) further develop the opportunities and limitations of autonomy in education while remaining clearly in favour of the highest degree of autonomy that may be afforded to learners guided by educationalists. In fact, the authors doubt whether teaching in the conventional sense of transmitting knowledge can take place at all.

Explications of the relationship between individuals, society and education such as those put forward by Ryan & Powelson (1991) and Silliman & Johnson (2011) go a considerable way towards meeting objections, both by including social and affective dimensions, and by gathering together empirical evidence against excessively limited learning opportunities. To the extent that objections to autonomy attack a ‘straw man’ they may be discounted. But in the field of language learning, there has been a history of excessively simplistic and uncritical endorsement of learner autonomy, which may benefit from a more socially and philosophically aware perspective.
6.2 Autonomy in language learning

While advocates of autonomy in education generally have claimed that learner autonomy is essential for the motivation of learners and that the development of autonomy is necessary for the participation of citizens in democratic societies, rather more claims have been made for learner autonomy in the field of language learning. One of the reasons for this is the evident incapacity of existing educational provision to meet what will be a lifelong and quite unpredictable need for learning opportunities. In the context of considering the role of technology mediated language learning, Lamb (2003) gives a list of claims made by different authors for the benefits of independent learning, presented here with some of Lamb’s specific examples removed:

· Autonomy as an educational goal, autonomy as universal capacity (Little, 1999).
· Individual differences e.g.: ability, personality, learning styles, motivations (Jiménez Raya & Lamb, 2003).
· Affect - fewer inhibitions; self-assessment for learning, differentiation leading to success leading to confidence/motivation.
· Individual learning needs.
· Autonomous learning skills as transferable key skills e.g.: planning, monitoring, evaluating.
· Reflecting, decision-making, accessing and organising information - way of coping with explosion of knowledge.
· Languages as a key skill.
· Improvement in learning – the Good Language Learner: active involvement and improved.
· Metacognitive awareness.
· Improvement in motivation – intrinsic motivation involves autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991), intrinsic motivation as ultimate aim of extrinsic motivation, choice and decision-making (Lamb, 1998; Little, 1989).
· Access – distance learning provision, greater flexibility.
Lamb here uses the term independent learning to include autonomy; a strategy made necessary by the context of technology mediated learning support. The literature supporting his claims includes both empirical and theoretical work, so that some of the supposed benefits of independent learning are conjectural rather than proven by research.

Little (2007), citing different authors, claims that autonomous language learners in formal education:

- Are able to take charge of their own learning (Holec, 1981).
- Develop a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action (Little, 1999).
- Can manage the affective dimension of their learning experience to motivational advantage.
- Become more autonomous in language learning as they become more autonomous in language use, and vice versa (Little, 1999).

Little (2007) is careful not to exaggerate the independence element of successful autonomous learning and points out that ‘formal learning itself can happen only on the basis of explicit plans and intentions’, which are at least partly formulated in institutional curricula. Holec (1981) had complete autonomy in mind, where ends as well as means are controlled by the learner, a position becoming increasingly incompatible with the relativistic view of beneficial autonomy emerging in the field of education generally and language education in particular.

It seems there may be a need to address theoretical issues in language learning autonomy that embraces a more nuanced approach and is prepared to leave behind some of the heroic declarations that initiated work in the field.

### 6.3 Autonomy, teachers and institutions

The role of teachers and institutions in autonomous learning was discussed at length in Chapter 3 and further developed in Chapters 4 and 5. Learner autonomy supportive teaching forms an important part of preparing learners for autonomy, developing the exercise of autonomous learning, and advocating for learner autonomy at
institutional and governmental levels. The form that these educational interventions may take is shaped, constrained and facilitated to different degrees by the culture within which they take place. While it is generally held that teachers themselves need autonomy in order to fulfil these roles, there is no guarantee that once afforded, teachers will use it for the benefit of learners.

In so far as teachers are employed by institutions which in their turn are financed either directly by learners in the private sector, or by government in the public sector, their opportunities for influencing policy appear to be somewhat limited. At least some of the literature on facilitating learner autonomy does represent the teacher as battling against what they see as restrictions to learning opportunities, imposed either by the institution or by reactionary colleagues. Little (2007) describes the usual impediments:

- Teacher scepticism;
- lack of teacher know-how;
- the supposed tyranny of the curriculum and/or the textbook.

Little suggests using the European language portfolio (ELP) as an instrument to overcome these difficulties, but as with other teaching initiatives, simply adopting a practice does not guarantee it being used for the benefit of learners.

Dam (1995) draws on her extensive experience of successfully supporting learner autonomy in the classroom to suggest the following principles for teaching:

- The target language is the preferred medium of communication – the teacher must scaffold negotiation with and between learners;
- the teacher involves her learners in a non-stop quest for “good learning activities” – she must help them to develop criteria for critical evaluation;
- within whatever larger agenda is imposed by the curriculum, Learners set their own goals and choose their own learning activities – the teacher must help them to be focussed in their aims and to be realistic in their choices;
- individual learning goals are pursued partly via collaborative
group work – the teacher must show her learners how to support one another in collaborative discourse;

· All learners keep an individual written record of their learning – this facilitates a focus on form, encourages memorization, and stimulates a two-way interaction between speaking and writing;

· All aspects of learning are regularly evaluated in the target language – to begin with, in very simple terms.

Little and Dam are experienced and research oriented teachers, the former working in Ireland, and the latter in Denmark. Practitioners working in other environments will need to make the adjustments or wholesale changes they consider necessary in their own working environment. There is guidance in the literature on cultural issues connected with learner autonomy. In Palfreyman’s (2003) introduction to a collective work on learner autonomy across cultures the scope of cultural considerations is outlined. Palfreyman’s analysis highlights the complexity, indeterminacy and variable impact of culture on language learning. For instance, individuals may belong to a culture, but may be more or less well integrated into its values and beliefs, or may belong to a number of subcultures accommodated within a larger one, or indeed to a number of small cultures that cut across any larger cultural boundaries.

Educational practitioners usually work in educational institutions which are embedded within the cultures they serve and support and validate the teaching acts that take place within them.

Lamb (2003) and Lamb & Reinders (2005) identified issues related to educational institutions raised by independent learning:

· Expansion of provision.

· Diversification – response to market forces.

· Broader markets – more flexible, increased access for more students.

· Financial constraints – more economical.

· Teacher recruitment problems.

· Changes in language learning theory.

· Response to technological developments.
Lamb & Reinders’ list of pressures on institutions reflect a powerlessness on their part, so that on this view, institutions can hardly be said to be exercising any kind of autonomy in support of their learners. These are reactions to forces that are beyond the control of educational institutions, and institutions in this position are hardly well placed to aid teachers in supporting learning. Lamb (2003) also identifies issues in independent learning related to the society:

- Economic.
- Entrepreneurism.
- Right to European mobility.
- Rapidity of change – need for flexibility and new skills (life-long learning).
- Citizenship – becoming an active participant in democratic decision-making.
- Voice and influence (political empowerment).
- Social justice and inclusion.
- Cosmetic (low cost, high visibility).

Again, on this analysis, the society reacts to the mix of external pressures over which it has no control. It is in this context that governments are elected and enact policies intended to deal coherently with what may seem an arbitrary mix of opportunities and limitations.

One of the strong claims made for learner autonomy in language learning is that it can adjust to individual needs, which appears to be necessary on cultural grounds as well as educational ones. How teachers support learner autonomy within complex learning environments points to a teaching service which cannot be based solely on recipes worked out by others, and calls for both teacher autonomy and accountability to the learner for providing appropriate learning opportunities. Farmer (2006b) gives an account of professional systems of accountability; for him following Freidson (2001), professionalism in language teaching does not mean simply being trained to do a difficult job, but may be seen as a system for practitioner accountability where the practitioner diagnoses learner’s needs as well as supplies the service that meets them. In such circumstances,
neither market forces (where the customers decide what they want and go shopping for it) nor bureaucracies (where an organization decides and supplies the service it considers necessary) serve learners adequately. In the professional system of accountability, practitioners do not promise results but do guarantee that the service given is fit for purpose. The main areas of professional responsibility described by Farmer are knowledge about language; diagnosis, where learner needs are identified; prescription, where a strategy is developed for attending to learner needs; general practice, where learner needs are attended by the practitioner; referral, where learners may be attended in ways that are different from those the practitioner can provide; administration, where diagnoses, prescriptions, professional actions and referrals are documented; and professional development, where practitioners maintain their professional competence.

In order to supply the service, practitioners must know how these things are done within the particular learning context in which they work, and where there is no professional guidance, they must take informed action as best they can. Practitioners on this account may decide to go against custom, but in the knowledge that any failure to provide the service is subject to sanctions. For Farmer, following Dingwall & Fenn (1987), the mechanism for ensuring the quality of service is both the adequate education of practitioners to ensure that they are competent to do the job, and vulnerability to legal actions for professional negligence where they in fact fail to provide the service. In this context, professional bodies are not constituted as a sort of trade union to advocate the interests of the profession, but to ensure that professional services are rendered only by those fit to do so, and that members who prove themselves unfit are prevented from practicing.

Such a profession, constituted to protect the learner and safeguard the reputation of teachers, forms part of the apparatus whereby a democratic society attends the needs of the people. Whether it is possible in an educational context is untested, but if teaching really is as complex and important as it appears to be, professional systems of accountability may offer the best guarantee of an adequate service. Learner autonomy continues to develop as an educational tool, quite possibly the best
available for attending the cognitive and affective needs of language learners, but the overarching duty of language teaching professionals would be the support of learning, not the promotion of autonomy at the cost of damaging learners. In that context, a professional body of language teachers would have a legitimate interest in influencing institutional and governmental policy, not in the interests of teachers or teacher beliefs, but as the best advocates of learner interests.

Having raised the question of professionalism in language teaching, it is not proposed to go into further detail here on the implications for the educational system or the structure of educational institutions. It only remains to point out that learners’ views on their education have a legitimate place in a democratic society, and so do those of the government they elect. If teachers also wish to be a legitimate force in directing the purposes and means of education, it is not sufficient to claim expertise, but to demonstrate that their expertise is linked to accountability for the quality of service provided.

6.4 The future of learner autonomy

There is no doubt that the expansion of research in many areas of autonomy and self-determination has been significant in the last twenty years, perhaps arising from the need to provide a better understanding of the ways to improve the well-being of people in different cultural settings. The research done so far has contributed to this issue but at the same time has provided us with new questions to explore in the construct of autonomy and how it may be fostered in society.

In the field of education, the questions of what, why and how to go about autonomy in learning in order to contribute to the changes needed to promote an environment supportive of significant learning has been a relevant issue in the topics of research, particularly in language learning. Surely research in this area will make valuable contributions not only to language learning but also to learning other subjects in formal education.

The research and practice of autonomy in formal education may show the benefits of autonomy in learning explicitly to students, teachers and senior administrators and policy makers. Practitioners
(teachers) and researchers of language learning autonomy should get together to share their experiences. This has been very important in the advances of language learning autonomy as can be seen in the work of the Nordic counties and Europe where there have been fruitful contacts between researchers and practitioners sharing and publishing their research work in workshops, seminars and conferences (cf. Trebbi, 2011), but it needs to be expanded and reinforced in the Americas, meaning all the countries in that continent, as well as in Africa, Asia and the Arab countries. The research and practice of autonomy in language learning among continents will bring inspiration and support in the promotion of autonomy in education and it may bring valuable contributions to education globally in diverse cultural contexts. Researchers and teachers informing each other of their work can provide a rich field for the analysis and development of learning and teaching practices and research which may contribute to the theory of autonomy in education.

As it is today, research in autonomy has big challenges ahead to contribute to innovation in language learning and teaching, as it has been discuss in the earlier chapters of this book. The research questions that have been raised in the area of learning, teaching, institutions and educational policies are a challenge for the future of autonomy in education at all levels.

How learning autonomy is understood depends on the context and the reasons for developing it. To foster autonomy we need to be aware of the context, the learner’s characteristics, the criteria and the value that the system gives to autonomy, and the cultural background. This may bring out different pedagogical and methodological issues which should correspond to the context where autonomy takes place. Questions arising from the cultural aspect of learner autonomy are presently under researched.

What does the exercise and promotion of autonomy in learning look like in different cultural settings and at different educational levels? What is the effect of lack of autonomy in language learning? How are the development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency integrated? Are the key skills used to exercise autonomy in
language learning in fact transferrable to other subjects? What is the place and the role of autonomy in learning in the learning process? How do individual differences affect learner autonomy?

Teacher education is at the centre in developing and sustaining learner autonomy. Some relevant questions in relation to teaching, teachers and autonomy need to be researched. What kind of competences do teachers need to acquire in order to facilitate learners exercise of autonomy in language learning? Do the teachers have power, and if so, under what conditions? Can teachers without experience in learning autonomy as learners promote learner autonomy? What is the teacher’s role in language learning autonomy? What factors need to be considered in teaching methodology to develop learner autonomy? What are the limitations of pedagogy in language learning autonomy? How can teachers be psychologically prepared to deal with students and their own anxiety in an environment hostile towards autonomy? How can teachers provide effective support for learner autonomy? Is teacher autonomy a precondition for learner autonomy? How can teachers identify when their acts harm learners in the learning process? Is teaching learning autonomy skills sufficient to promote learner autonomy? When does teaching autonomy have negative effects?

The research community has argued strongly about the needs and ways to train students to exercise their autonomy in formal education, as well as for teachers to be trained to facilitate autonomy in the classroom. The topics of research in this area are important because they may contribute significantly to the empowerment of teachers and students in the development of autonomy in learning in educational institutions. Do students and teachers need to be trained in learning and teaching strategies for autonomy? Should training in the key skills for autonomy in learning be integrated or separated from the process of learning? What knowledge and skills do students, teachers and policy makers need to promote autonomy? Are knowledge and skills the same?

The future of education is highly linked to technology, as it is becoming more and more integrated in our everyday lives. In education different technologies are mediating in many learning activities and
all levels of education. Technology has shown to be an advantageous tool for learning and for the promotion of autonomy if used for this purpose. Some pedagogical issues linking learning and technology need to be explored. How can the use of new technologies support or undermine autonomous language learning? What other knowledge and skills do teachers, students and administrators need to make the best of the use of the technology in the promotion of language learning autonomy? How can we use future methodology (mobile, tablets, rich media content) in benefit of autonomy in learning?

Some questions need to be explored in relation to the institution and the policy makers in education. The analysis of education for today and for the future indicates the need to work on developing all of our abilities to work autonomously throughout our lives, in formal and non-formal education. Examples of topics where research may help institutions in their educational offers and policy makers to facilitate the future of autonomy in education may be some of the following: What is the value of autonomy as an educational goal? How does the expansion of formal educational services affect the promotion of autonomy? How does the mass-customization of educational products interact with learning autonomy? How can researchers and teachers of language examine and influence educational policy and practice critically? In which ways might national policies support successful promotion of learning autonomy in institutions? How can we empower teachers to assert their voice and influence on institutional policies? What are the characteristics of the educational contexts that facilitate autonomy in learning? What does it imply for the student, teacher and administration to develop a curriculum for autonomy in learning? At what stages of learning education should the fostering of autonomy be initiated and developed?

There are questions about the construct of autonomy that relate to the society. The rapid changes in society demand more flexibility and new skills for life-long learning education; empowering citizens to participate and influence these changes in society and autonomy in education have a contribution to make in these matters. How can autonomy in education prepare learners to become active participants in their communities after they leave formal education? How does
facilitating autonomy empower individuals to use their voices and influence in society? Are we developing more autonomy in language learning environments than in other subjects, and if so, why? What direction are these developments taking? What kinds of pedagogy are being developed in order to promote autonomy in language learning? What are the differences or similarities among learner, teacher and institutional autonomy? How are they related?

Learning autonomy is a key factor in the transition to higher education. Research and practice can show us what autonomy in learning looks like and how it might look in different contexts in the near future. We must aim to expand the promotion of language learning autonomy in formal education. The practices and experiences for fostering autonomy surely will provide us with a better understanding of the construct and the way that autonomy may be promoted in different cultural educational contexts.

Autonomous learning in formal education is growing because more educational institutions are trying to change their delivery of educational services in the direction of fostering autonomy in learning, fuelled by the possibilities of technology mediated learning and the need for life-long learning opportunities. However, understanding learning differences helps to identify those learners who would prefer the routine of the traditional classroom experience, seeking out the face-to-face experience and shared physical space. Some learners may be able to choose their learning environment, but others will not, and both situations will necessitate the provision of appropriate systemic and personal support. The learning environment is changing, sometimes because we are changing it consciously, but in other circumstances because the wave of changes is pushing us in an unintended direction. It will be better to take control of these changes for the benefit of our own communities. The growing demand of flexible offers of education today is showing us the difficulties of managing mass-customization of education. Autonomy in education is a valuable answer, but it will require transforming the services of education and reorganizing the design and delivery of the curriculum.

In the future of higher education the key issue is autonomy. If we
want our students to fulfil their potential and become active participants in decisions taken for the present and future of their communities and society, the exercise of autonomy gives them a voice and empowerment to value and influence social institutions. The future and well-being of society depends on our achievements in the exercise of a healthy autonomy.

While the importance of learner autonomy has been affirmed, the legitimacy of other autonomies, such as those of governments, educational institutions and teachers has also been explored. There are no clear answers to how competing autonomies may be balanced, but continuing empirical research as well as the refinement and integration of theoretical perspectives provide a rich field for further developing an important area of education.
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