Autonomy and Motivation

The profession seemed to discover the value of learner autonomy in the form of allowing learners to do things like initiate oral production, solve problems in small groups, practice language forms in pairs, and practice using the language outside of the classroom. Keeping with a popular social trend of more and more "self-help" manuals for everything from weight loss to how to feel that you're "okay," the language teaching profession began to encourage learners to "take charge" of their own learning,and to chart their own "pathways to success" (see Brown, 1989, for example).

The process of developing within learners a sense of autonomy required the use (and sometimes invention) of strategies, as aptly demonstrated by Wenden (1992). After all, how many students enter a foreign language class knowing anything at all about the process of language learning, or about the "tricks of the trade" in successfully acquiring an additional language? With the aid of research on achieving autonomy (Schmenk, 2005; Palfrey man, 2003; Benson & Toogood, 2002; Benson, 2001; CotteraU & Crabbe, 1999; Benson & Voller, 1997; Pennycook, 1997; Pemberton, 1996: Riley, 1988) language programs and courses increasingly emphasized to students the importance of self-starting and of taking responsibility of one's own learning.

The literature on the topic raises some caution flags. Schmenk (2005) appropriately described the nonuniversality of the concept of autonomy, and Pennycook (199?) warned us about the potential cultural imperialism involved in assuming every culture equally values and promotes autonomy, especially in educational institutions. For language teaching in sub-Saharan Africa, Sonaiya (2002, p. 106) questioned "the global validity of the so-called *autonomous* method of language learning ... which has obvious origins in European and North American traditions of individualism."

However, some recent studies are more encouraging. Underscoring the need for teachers to be sensitive to the cultural background of students. Carter (2001) suggested that while learners in Trinidad and Tobago traditionally rely heavily on teachers as managers of their learning, autonomy can nevertheless be fostered through what she described as a "context-sensitive" model (p. 26). SimUarly, Spratt, Humphreys, and Chan (2002) found that autonomy could be promoted among learners in Hong Kong, as long as an appropriate level of motivation was present. Schmenk (2005, p. 115) recommended a "glocatization" (a combination of both global and local considerations) of the concept of autonomy in non-Western cultures, one that involves "a critical awareness of .., specific cultural backdrops and impacts" as teachers involve students in autonomous learning.

Closely linked to the concept of autonomy is the demand on learners to become aware of their own processes of learning. Do you remember the first foreign language course you ever took? To what extent did your teacher or your textbook help you to become aware of what language learning was all about? Were you offered activities that would help you to monitor your own learning process? To help you to assess your own strengths and weaknesses? *To* suggest strategies that might help you to become more successful?

Until recently, few courses in languages provided such opportunities for learners to become aware of what language learning was all about and what they could do to become better learners. Now, with the backdrop of a good deal of research on awareness and "consciousness raising," language programs are offering more occasions for learners to develop a metacognitive awareness of their ongoing learning. In fact, a whole new journal. *Language Awareness,* has been devoted to the concept, and research findings are coming in. Lightbown and Spada (2000), for example, showed that English learners in Quebec displayed no awareness of their own intuitions about language learning, and suggested further attempts to help students to increase awareness. Simard and Wong (200-4) described an awareness-of-

language programs in the United Kingdom which helped students to engage in metalinguistic reflection. Nakatani (2005) trained English learners in Japan to focus explicitly on oral production strategies, which resulted in improved performance in speaking. Rosa and feow (2004) found that learners of Spanish as a second language in the United States showed improved performance under conditions of awareness-raising.

What we are Learning from these studies is that learners can indeed benefit from raised awareness of their own processes of learning. Undoubtedly, there is an optimal level of awareness (Lightbown & Spada, 1990) that serves learners. In other words, too much awareness, too much explicit focus on grammar, or too much devotion to rules, coupled with not enough intuitive, sub-conscious communication, will smother learners' yearning to simply *use* language, unfettered by overattention to correctness. But some levels of awareness are clearly-warranted.

On the other hand, motivation is defined as the inner drive, incentive, impetus or desire that some learners have in acquiring a language. Success in SLA is intrinsically linked to motivation. There are two types of motivation including integrative and instrumental. When a learner wishes to integrate or assimilate himslef with the people and culture of L2, he is said to have an integrative motivation. But when a person learns an L2 as a means to achieve a high educational social and economical status, he is said to have an instrumental motivation