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Independence in Language Learning: How can Teachers Encourage it?

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INDEPENDENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: HOW CAN TEACHERS ENCOURAGE IT?

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This paper documents a teacher's exploration of independence in language learning before, during, and after an eight-week English teaching internship at the Instituto Cultural Americano in Orizaba, Mexico. It examines what independence means for language students, and it defines student and teacher responsibilities in a classroom where learners are encouraged to become more self-reliant. Three strategies are outlined for promoting independence in the classroom. These strategies are: increasing communication between student and teacher to ensure that the course is relevant to the student's and teacher's goals, making the student's full range of resources more recognized and used, and having students take on more initiative and control. The author relates particular successes and struggles during her own teaching experience in Mexico as she prodded students to assume more responsibility for planning, directing, and evaluating their learning.

Language Teachers Teaching Experience Teacher Responsibility Student Responsibility Independent Study

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE NATURE OF THE PROJECT

The focus of this project is learner independence. This paper is the culmination of three phases of the project that began the summer following my coursework at the School for International Training in Vermont. Phase I started in the summer as I did some reading from three books by Caleb Gattegno and Earl Stevick. I also kept a journal of my thoughts regarding both the ideas in the reading and my anticipation of a teaching internship that would begin in the fall. Phase II consisted of my eight-week stay in Orizaba, Mexico. In addition to planning and giving English classes, I kept another daily journal of what took place in the classroom. Here I also recorded the questions and ideas that I was dealing with through interaction with my students. After I returned home, the third phase of the project began. Reading over both my summer and fall journals, probing the same books to further explore the ideas that had begun in the summer, and reflecting on the teaching experience all led to writing this paper. Each phase of the experience contributed substantially to the ideas I present here.

The internship itself entailed teaching four courses in Orizaba. I taught three eight-week courses at the Instituto Cultural Americano, a small foreign language center. I also

taught a two-week course at the Montezuma Brewery. At the Instituto, I worked with a low-intermediate group (Class IV), an intermediate group (Class V), and a low-advanced group (Conversation Class). Each group consisted of 17-20 students. The names of the groups that I refer to here, such as Class IV, are the labels that the Instituto gave the courses. These students voluntarily came to the language center after a day of regular academic classes in public or private schools or after a day on the job. I met with each of the three groups every week night for one hour.

At Montezuma, I taught a 12-hour beginning course to four engineers over a period of two weeks. One of the supervisors in the brewery asked these four engineers to take the course because they would need English language skills in connection with their work. The supervisor didn't ask me to teach the course until the very end of my stay in Orizaba; hence, I only taught the course for two weeks.

All four of these courses gave shape to my teaching experience as a whole, and each had a definite impact on my emerging views of learner independence.

B. EARLY MUSINGS

As I set off for my second internship in Mexico, I was determined to explore and change a common belief about education. I saw many in American society clinging to the belief that getting an education meant passing courses, earning good grades and test scores, and finally, completing a

degree. I was impatient with this view of education because: 1) It encourages teachers to teach to standardized tests so that their students will produce high scores. Consequently, a few test-makers control curricula for classrooms throughout the country. 2) It encourages students to give the teacher what they think she wants instead of engaging in a genuine thinking process that centers on exploring the unknown. 3) It encourages parents and employers to view tests and diplomas as the crucial yardstick of what students have or haven't learned. This view of education forces us to sacrifice a more personalized kind of learning that shouldn't be centrally prescribed and that can't best be measured with standardized tests.

I realized how rarely I had heard students talking in excited voices about what they were exploring inside or outside of the classroom. Instead, any topic of conversation that alluded to education usually led them to recite the course titles they had signed up for or the grades they were getting. I thought back on my own classes in high school that had felt so programmed and lifeless.

Convinced that I would never impose the same purposeless drudgery on my students, I wondered how I could bring more energy and meaning to my language classes. I wanted to show my students in Mexico that effective learning involved them. I wanted them to have a definite say in a course's design, implementation, and evaluation. I reasoned that if education in the classroom were to involve more student decision making

and self-reliance, then it would come nearer to the genuine learning that we have all experienced ever since we began learning our native language.

Truly meaningful education, I believed, would allow students to develop strategies of independence. In other words, the student would be developing skills and awarenesses to foster and recognize her[1] own growth. As the student began to break away from an addiction to the teacher's control, she would learn to maintain her own direction and development. I saw my first task as helping students gain an understanding that education is not, in its truest sense, something that is imposed upon them. Rather, it is something that they may control and benefit from in a very personal and efficient way. Neither is education merely an accumulation of knowledge that they may absorb through a series of courses and tests. Instead, it is a process inside them touching the needs, concerns, and goals of their daily lives.

C. IDEAS THAT SPARKED MORE IDEAS

The reading I did before and after the internship centered on two authors and three books: Earl W. Stevick's A Way and Ways and Teaching and Learning Languages and Caleb Gattegno's The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages. I chose these two authors because I knew from previous exposure to them that they both dealt with the issue of learner independence in some way and that they both had ideas that intrigued me. I felt that the close contact with these two

teachers/thinkers through their writing would help me define my own beliefs and questions.

Reading and reflecting over the summer helped in two ways. First, I gained more insight into the idea of independence as I looked particularly at how Gattegno and Stevick defined and related to the term. Secondly, the reading led me to specific teaching ideas that helped me focus my objectives for the internship.

According to Gattegno, a goal that the teacher should be working toward in any learning situation "is to make students independent, autonomous, and responsible."[2] He speaks of independence as the "notion of our being aware that we can only count on ourselves" and as the result of "the awareness of our being in control."[3] Gattegno's faith in the language student's ability to be independent stems from his conviction that we all, as speakers of our native tongue, have innate abilities for learning a second language that are waiting to be recognized and tapped to their fullest. He says:

> Our independence results from our carrying within ourselves all that is required to learn any existing language . . . . We can therefore grant our students that they know how to be independent learners even before we meet them in our classroom.[4]

Stevick also mentions three educational goals that I can easily relate to the idea of personalization and independence in learning. These three goals are freedom, uniqueness, and tolerance. He states:

> If education is to be a liberating, or freeing, experience, then it must enable the students to see

> the world more clearly for themselves, so as to be able to choose how to use what energy they have, and act less impeded by blindness or distorted images that do not correspond to reality. By choosing and acting more freely, we become, each of us, closer to what only we can become, not pounded or squeezed (or inflated!) into the same shape as everyone else around. This is uniqueness. But my uniqueness will be unlike yours . . . and the two may not obviously fit together. Each of us must allow the other some of this uniqueness, and that is what I mean by 'tolerance'.[5]

I saw freedom in learning as an independence that allows a learner[6] to consciously map out his own chosen direction instead of blindly following the path of another. An understanding of our uniqueness is a prerequisite to learning that is blessed with the freedom to grow in our own individual ways. Only by thoroughly understanding our individual abilities, preferences, and tendencies are we able to freely engage in learning that is uniquely suited to our own needs and desires. Tolerance includes an appreciation for one's own individuality. It also includes a golden rule acceptance of the individuality of others and enables all to pursue a type of education that is personally relevant.

Just because Stevick and Gattegno support the idea of self-reliant learners, they do not expect language learners to be without teachers and without classrooms. They both speak of a relationship between teacher and student and of a carefully constructed learning environment. This discovery confirmed a growing realization in myself that promoting learner independence doesn't have to mean that we expect the student to go it alone. Few educators would deny that there

should be a relationship between teacher and learner that acknowledges the teacher has something to give which the student cannot receive on his own. And doesn't this relationship assume some kind of dependency?

I realized that I was trying to find the point at which an acceptance of a dependent relationship between teacher and student merges with the student's developing independence. Like Gattegno and Stevick, I was interested in exploring what place the teacher and the character of the classroom have in a learner's progression towards more self-reliance. I decided that we weren't necessarily contradicting ourselves by linking the goal of learner independence with the idea of a classroom teacher playing a definite role in that goal. It is only because we are accustomed to associating with the teacher's or system's role an overload of planning, control, and authority that we force students into an inhibiting, overly dependent position.

The readings and the ideas they sparked led me to a question that became a focus for this project: What should the character of the student-teacher relationship be in order to allow students to discover and use more of their own capacities? This question highlights two important points: 1) I needed to better understand the relationship between teacher and student, which included some aspects of dependency. Part of my responsibility as a teacher in this relationship involved determining where the student would get the information and guidance he needed and expected. 2) Even

as I acknowledged this relationship between teacher and student, I could actively prod the student to use more of his innate abilities and to determine the direction of his own learning. Promoting independence in the classroom in this way would include exposing the student to the full range of resources available to him and clearly identifying both his and my responsibilities.

At the end of my reading and reflecting period and before I began the internship, I was searching for a way to connect my beliefs and questions with my teaching. One of the requirements for my internship was to write a list of objectives. I decided to use these objectives as the link that would allow me to answer some of my questions during the internship. My list would also motivate me to experiment with ways to give my beliefs about the importance of independence in learning a practical outlet in the classroom. If I kept these objectives in mind as I taught, I felt they would help me both to clarify the teacher-student relationship in my classroom and to encourage the development of independent learning strategies in my students. While I didn't really expect that I would be able to realize all of these objectives to my own satisfaction, I viewed them then, as now, as an indispensable part of my growth as a teacher. They allowed me to keep on my chosen course as I was exploring the issue of learner independence in the midst of daily teaching responsibilities. They were a guide that reminded me of what I wanted to be observing and attempting. They sparked ideas

for activities when I was dry. They made me clarify what exactly is important to me in my teaching and gave me a gauge whereby to measure my progress.

I broke down the list into four categories under which I listed objectives that I felt dealt closely with the topic of learner independence. The categories are error correction, learning styles, student-generated and student-directed activities and course goals, and feedback. The list is as follows:

OBJECTIVES FOR SECOND INTERNSHIP AND INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

Error Correction

--To experiment with different methods of error correction and determine what methods will encourage the student to recognize the various resources available to her. For example, her own inner resources, peers, the teacher, the environment outside the classroom.
--To establish for myself and students a system of correction that I can consistently use and that will clearly tell students what I am asking of them.
--To become clearer in my own thought, and to communicate to students, what the goals and priorities of an activity are and to be more clear about how we will address errors. Which errors will we correct when and how?
--To help students and myself let go of a tendency to think that the teacher is the only or ultimate authority in the classroom and that it is always up to her to locate and correct errors. To find new ways to encourage students to locate and correct their own errors.
--To increase my ability to note how individual students are already identifying and correcting their own errors during different types of activities.
--To balance the need I see for encouraging students to take risks and experiment with the need to have students refine and perfect their use of the language.

Learning Styles

--To have students become more aware of themselves as natural, capable learners both inside and outside of the classroom.
--To have students identify their personal strategies for learning that they use in different situations.

--To become more skilled at identifying the individual learning styles within a group and at providing activities that will meet individual learning needs.
--To help students work with options, so they can learn how to choose activities or methods of going about an activity that will enhance their learning.
--To further explore the need to both challenge and accomodate individual learners. When do I want them to do what makes them feel comfortable/what they are accustomed to and when do I want them to push themselves/try something new?

Student-Generated and Student-Directed Activities and Course Goals

--To encourage students to verbalize what their own goals are for a course. What do they expect/want to learn? How are they going to learn it? How will they know when they have?
--To help students be aware of how they will use what they have learned when they leave the classroom, what they want to further explore, and how they will continue and evaluate their learning outside of the classroom.
--To become more clear, within a given teaching context, about what responsibility I as a teacher need to take for goal-setting--such as determining the syllabus and activities--and for evaluating progress and what responsibility students should take for same. This should be based on the students'/institution's expectations, my own beliefs about what enhances learning, and the cultural environment. What do the cultural norms say about a teacher's/student's role in the classroom?
--To become more clear about the difference between student-directed and student-generated activities, when each might be appropriate for a particular group of students, and how to encourage students to direct and generate.
--To be aware of what degree of control and initiative students or I have during any given point in a lesson.

Feedback
--To encourage both students and myself to become more aware of ourselves as learners and listeners, to develop the ability to evaluate and measure the learning that is taking place in the classroom, and to be responsive to each other's observations.
--To gain a clearer sense of how the need for learner security interacts with encouraging learner independence. In asking a student to take more responsibility for her own learning, how will I ensure that she realizes how she benefits/progresses in our student-teacher relationship and that she is clear about what is expected of her?

After I wrote my list of objectives, I felt a slight panic that I wouldn't have the self-discipline or creativity to really experiment with ways of encouraging independence during my internship. I could almost see myself being carried off by the newness of the environment and the immediacy of teaching classes every day and somehow losing the direction I had mapped out in the beginning. I knew that the objectives themselves were ideals that I could only reach if I supported them with practical classroom methods and activities. I decided to brainstorm some activity ideas that emerged from the objectives to help me keep my direction as I was teaching.

One example of an activity that was inspired by my objectives was an idea I had for the first day of classes. I thought about a practical way I might make students verbalize their purposes for learning English. I planned to have each group make a collective collage on a large strip of roll paper. The collage would display each student's past experience with English and some of her language goals for the future. Students could draw pictures or write in order to depict their own story. Then, each would have to explain her own story to the rest of the group. This project would also give me an idea of the different levels of ability and interests within a single class.

While I didn't use all of the activities I had planned during the summer, the process of moving from general objectives to specific activity ideas did help me prepare for

my internship on a very practical level. By having a number of activities to fall back on at any time, I also did not feel the pressure to find something new each day. This very useful exercise of moving from theory to practice continued work begun in the Assumptions courses at the School for International Training, carried through to my reading and preparation before the internship, and created a solid base from which I could work to keep learner independence a reality in my day-to-day classroom teaching.

II. WHAT OCCURRED DURING THE INTERNSHIP THAT RELATES TO LEARNER INDEPENDENCE?

Many of the ideas that I used to promote independence will not be new to most teachers, even beginners. However, the context within which they emerged might make them fresh even to those who have heard them before. I did little in the way of pulling activities or techniques out of a bag of tricks that I had mentally stored away. Although I would someday like to develop this bagful of ideas to use in unexpected situations, I had not yet developed to that point in Mexico. Consequently, nearly every activity or technique I tried was in direct response to a problem I was solving, a question I had, or an insight that dawned on me through the heat of experience. The important focus here for me, then, is on the process I went through in coming up with these ideas rather than on the product, or the ideas themselves.

In effect, I tried to design a method of exploring the topic of learner independence that was similar to the education I was proposing for my students. I was not out to find a recipe of techniques that was guaranteed to produce a classroom full of independent learners. Rather, I was trying to wade my way through both the comfortable and rough spots of each unique teaching experience and to be conscious of what I was doing, what I wanted to achieve, and where I was in this process of achievement. This was the learning strategy I discovered in Mexico, and the same strategy is still useful for me now. This is similar to the engaging quest and discovery that I believe true education involves. I want to

develop my own abilities to independently investigate, evaluate, initiate, and adapt. Then I will be more able to flexibly mold my teaching into an approach that, based on my beliefs about learning and language, is suited to each unique group of students.

A. AWARENESS AND INDEPENDENCE

1. Whose Responsibility Is It to Be Aware?

Wouldn't a student become more dependent on me, rather than less, if I was always aware of his needs and always ready to construct the environment and challenge to help him grow? This was the question I faced as I wondered if I would enhance or threaten a student's independence by sharpening my awareness of who he was and of how I might guide him.

I concluded that I did have a responsibility to make a definite connection between the activities and material in our class and the particular readiness and desires of students. I could make that connection only as I came to know my students better. In order to encourage learner independence, however, I would have to persuade the learner to begin pinpointing and addressing his own needs and goals. So, how would my increasing familiarity with students fit hand-in-hand with their increasing independence? If, through my own heightened awareness of students, I responded in unique ways to individual needs, I could eventually show students that there is a variety of strategies for tackling the subject matter. Students, in turn, could discover that by sharpening their own

awareness of themselves as unique learners, they could selectively choose among different learning strategies to find which ones suited them best.

In retrospect, I realize that at this point in my exploration of awareness and independence I was addressing only one level of awareness. This level had to do with knowing what one needed and desired to learn and knowing what strategies would best help. There are many other levels of awareness which we can cultivate in the learner that I will continue to explore; but for the time in Mexico, one aspect of awareness was enough for me to concentrate on.

2. Developing Our Awarenesses

In A Way and Ways, Stevick describes what he sees as the Silent Way's[7] demand on the teacher to be keenly aware of her students. He says:

> The teacher whose work is subordinated to the work of her students must be continually learning from them about where they are--must be constantly 'learning them,' so to speak, at the same time that the students are learning the subject matter.[8]

As I started the first day of class in Mexico, I wanted to master the task of learning my students in a more efficient way. I had seen from my winter internships how important initial assessment was to define the abilities of students at the beginning of a course. I was determined to do a better job of this in Mexico.

I decided that one way I could become more aware of individual strengths and weaknesses in the language was to get a reading on each individual after we covered a new portion of

material. In the Conversation Class, I made a grid with a list of language objectives that we were working on written across the top of the page and students' names down the left-hand column. This way I could mark with a ✓+, ✓-, ✓, or a blank space in the appropriate square to determine through homework assignments, quizzes, and class work who still needed help. Following is a sample of the grid where I included both grammar and functional objectives.

	Greetings & Intro's	Pres. Perf. with tags	Making Complaints	Conditional If Sents.	Giving Directions
Rodolfo	✓		✓+	✓-	✓+
Honorio	✓+	✓-		✓	✓

After a couple of weeks, I found that the grid itself wasn't all that effective. Because many students were absent off-and-on, I couldn't get enough readings on every individual to really determine whether they had mastered a certain objective.

What did help in this project was that in the process of making and filling out the grid, I began examining the capabilities of students much more closely. I trained myself to be more alert to individuals in the classroom on a day-by-day, activity-by-activity basis. As a result, I could more closely note down in my journal observations about personal learning styles. At other times, I made a mental note of what I saw and intuitively planned an activity revolving around a specific language hurdle that a group of students was confronting.

I experimented with different ways of presenting material and then observed individual responses to these differences. I also gave more choices to students about the type of activity they could do or the way they could carry it out. When I looked deeply into their questions and behavior, then certain insights unfolded which spoke to me of their individuality. I noticed over a period of sessions who generally liked to write and who preferred to converse spontaneously; who asked for explanations in Spanish and who insisted on hearing everything in English; who liked to experiment with what was still inconclusive for them at the risk of making many mistakes and who liked to have all their questions answered before they attempted to say or write anything; who liked to volunteer and who liked to observe; who asked for linguistic explanations and wanted a label for each speech element and who was impatient with such explanations and labels and wanted to get on with conversing; who liked specifically assigned tasks and who liked room for lots of choice that allowed them to design or adapt their own activity.

Of course, I couldn't always categorize an individual as one or the other type of learner. I just didn't become that familiar with some students. Others chose opposing alternatives in different situations. When they did this, I asked myself, "Why might they be acting differently today?" I then searched for clues in the environment of the classroom, the task, and my approach and attitude.

I wasn't with my classes long enough, nor had I sharpened my awareness skills enough, to feel I knew my students inside-out. However, I did get to know a few students well enough through class observation and through get-togethers in their homes or a nearby cafe, to be able to draw my own portraits of them as learners. Gradually, I could predict and plan for their reactions and learning habits. I wanted to be sure that I didn't feel I had these students so pegged that I wouldn't be capable of discovering them further. I still wanted to be open to the newness that they were daily showing forth. But it was exciting for me to think of reaching a degree of familiarity with a student so that I could figure how a particular activity might benefit him most.

One activity that helped me more sharply focus in on individuals was a series of lessons that students themselves put together for the group. I decided to schedule time when volunteers could take over class and teach us on a topic of their choice. During these sessions, I explained that I would become another student and that it was up to the new teacher to guide the ten-minute activities and answer all questions. This project accomplished several objectives: It allowed students to make decisions about the topic and method of introducing and/or practicing the material. Hopefully this made them more conscious of the variety of alternatives available. It gave them the opportunity to take control of a lesson if they felt so inclined. It gave the class as a whole a chance to recognize the potential source of information and

authority within their peer group. It gave all of us a chance to witness the individual styles and preferences that emerged from a single teacher.

As I watched the different ways that the teachers worked with the material, controlled or didn't control their peers, handled corrections, and presented themselves in front of the class, I recognized reflections of their learner selves. For example, David presented a very self-assured, reserved, and organized image as a teacher--much like the learner I saw him to be.

Lili and Elizabeth chose to work together and were nearly on fire with excitement about getting up in front of the class. The two put together an innovative lesson that focused on determining if the students could use past participles with verbs relating to commerce. Watching them reminded me of their exuberance, creativity, and competitive attitude towards their peers. Their behavior also gave me clues about how they expected teachers and students in general to act. They wanted students to be alert enough to catch an incorrect sentence that they had planted in their chart. They were demanding with their peers, reprimanding them if they didn't listen. In fact, they often forgot to answer a question because they were so busy scolding a student. I realized that I wanted to present to them a different teacher image--one who expected order and attention but who also had patience and compassion and who considered students' questions of utmost importance.

Julian and Adriaan, two of the most hard-working students in the group, together made a presentation that helped me identify a problem that had caused both of them to do poorly on the last test. I saw more clearly that they both often overlooked small but important details in their work. That fact stood out in neon to me as I pondered their misspelled words on the board and their sentences with key articles missing. After I pinpointed the problem, I could more forcefully address it.

Miguel presented a very different type of lesson both in content and style. He first wrote up on the board various Spanish definitions of the English word <u>have</u> and then gave lengthy descriptions of the meaning filled with grammatical terms. He then gave us sample sentences in English showing the different uses of the word which he had copied out of a dictionary. I saw Miguel in class as a learner who liked very precise and complete explanations, who often referred to grammatical terms, and who was meticulously correct in his written work but very halting in his ability to speak. His teaching as well as his habits in learning reminded me that I wanted to emphasize creative day-to-day use of the language rather than mere knowledge about it.

The above activity was just one answer for me when I felt distracted by sheer numbers in the classroom so that my awareness was focused more on the outward commotion of the group rather than on the inner endeavors of each individual. Not only did I need to determine activities that would allow

me to ferret through the commotion to find what each student was uniquely seeking, but I also had to decide to what degree I could realistically address the variety of needs and learning styles in a group of 20 students. My larger goal was to have students themselves become aware of their own idiosyncracies and then determine how to make a particular activity work for them. In this way, we wouldn't have to sacrifice meaningful learning that grew out of attention to individual needs just because we were part of a large group.

3. Responding to Our Awarenesses

From the beginning, I wanted students to move beyond passively accepting what went on in class to actively questioning and taking part in the design of the course. I had concluded before the internship that the only way to truly address the students' goals and needs was to get them to offer their input for the course. I had to know something about their personal objectives for taking the course, and I needed their honest response to our activities. I reasoned that if students helped design some of the content and class activities, then they would have invested part of themselves in the course and would probably be more committed to making our lessons dynamic and useful. I had also concluded that a course which included student input would help prepare students for planning their continued exploration of the subject matter outside of the classroom.

I knew that a crucial prerequisite for student participation in the design of the course was my ability to genuinely listen and respond to their comments. If I wanted them to take seriously my request to evaluate our objectives and activities, I had to be open to their ideas. This didn't mean I had to necessarily heed all of their suggestions or agree with many of their observations. But I did have to try to see the class from their viewpoint. Then I would have to show them that their feelings and expectations made a difference in my lesson plans. I reasoned that if students saw that their input could make an impact on the class, then they would be more likely to constantly evaluate the quality of their learning. One project in particular helped me become both more aware of and responsive to students.

After about two weeks of classes, I designed a questionnaire and handed it out to all three of my groups. I had students complete it during class. I was hoping that the questionnaire would help me probe students' preferences and impressions in a more complete way than simply through observing the group as a whole for an hour each day. I decided to write the questions in Spanish because I didn't want the language to impede their ability to answer fully and honestly. I also knew I would get more information if they could write in their own language. A copy of the questionnaire follows on page 24 in its English translation.

In retrospect, the questionnaire looks like a rough draft to me. There are several changes I would make on it, such as the confusing format for answering Part B. But the overall outcome of the questionnaire project was very satisfying. I had a much better feel for students' personalities, as I hadn't talked to many of them in Spanish before. I could more clearly see their sense of humor or their earnestness, for example, as they wrote in their native tongue. I had a better perception of their personal interests, dreams, and demands on themselves. The responses in Part B gave me a better idea of the learning style trends within the group that I could address my teaching approach to, as well as the rarer preferences and tendencies of individual students.

Questionnaire

A. 1. What do you want to learn in this class?

2. What are you willing to do in order to learn this?

- ☐ attend all classes
- ☐ attend some of the classes
- ☐ fully participate in activities during class
- ☐ do homework
- ☐ practice English on my own (at home, with my friends, etc.)

B. 1. What helps you learn?
(First mark with a ☑ those that help you learn. Then, mark with an X ☑ those that help you learn the most.)

- ☐ - taking notes during class
- ☐ - not taking notes and just listening
- ☐ - listening to other students
- ☐ - listening to the teacher
- ☐ - doing written exercises during class
- ☐ - doing spoken exercises during class
- ☐ - freely conversing in English during class
- ☒ - practicing English after class with English-speaking people
- ☐ - practicing English after class with my friends
- ☐ - doing homework
- ☐ - doing homework alone
- ☐ - doing homework with my friends
- ☐ - working in a large group
- ☐ - working in small groups
- ☒ - getting explanations in Spanish from my friends if I don't understand
- ☒ - getting explanations in Spanish from the teacher if I don't understand
- ☒ - getting explanations in English from my friends if I don't understand
- ☒ - getting explanations in English from the teacher if I don't understand
- ☐ - when I am able to discuss something in class
- ☐ - when there is no discussion and I just receive information
- ☐ - when I am able to correct my own mistakes
- ☐ - when I am able to correct the mistakes of my peers
- ☐ - when my peers correct my mistakes
- ☐ - when the teacher corrects all mistakes
- ☐ - when the class is quiet
- ☐ - when the class isn't quiet
- ☐ - speaking only when I am sure I am correct

- [ ] experimenting with the language even though I make mistakes and trying again
- [x] thinking a lot before I speak
- [ ] thinking and speaking at the same time
- [ ] when I am in a large class
- [ ] when I am in a small class
- [ ] when I am in a medium-sized class
- [ ] using a book
- [ ] playing games
- [ ] using photographs
- [ ] using other objects
- [ ] writing
- [ ] listening
- [ ] speaking
- [ ] reading
- [ ] watching
- [ ] doing

2. What other activities or factors help you to learn?

3. Why did you choose to take an English class?

4. What things do you need to concentrate on most?

5. What is the most difficult thing in English for you to learn/use?

6. What is the easiest thing in English for you to learn/use?

7. What can you do to gain more fluency in the language?

8. How do you use English in your life right now?

9. How do you think you will use English in the future?

Increasing my own awareness and ability to respond was only half of the aim of the questionnaire project. I also hoped the questionnaire would shed new light for the student on his own goals and encourage him to aim for these goals in practical ways. I hoped he would become aware of the factors that either helped or hindered his learning, such as the classroom environment, my approach, his own learning habits and attitudes, and particular activities.

The questionnaire produced some definite results in the way of ideas for lesson planning. When I was void of new activity ideas for the Conversation Class, for example, I went through parts of the questionnaire answers for that group. Many mentioned building their vocabulary and learning how to use idioms. I then coordinated their responses with my perceptions of their needs. I designed an activity of group skits depicting particular situations for getting and giving information that I had briefly outlined on index cards. The skits then led us naturally into a discussion of expressions that natives use in circumstances similar to those on the cards.

The questionnaire also further sensitized me to the myriad of learning styles within the group. During many sessions, a student's verbal cues were not what revealed her particular style or need to me. Rather, the nonverbal hesitations, facial expressions, and other body language were what guided me. These were nonetheless tangible to me if I

was in tune with the wholeness of a student's message. Acting on my awareness often involved making a half-intuitive, half-educated guess about how to respond to students. Then I watched carefully for the following student feedback that would hint if I was on the right track.

I was aware, at times, when a task would present a real obstacle to some students because of their individual learning styles. Through this awareness, I was able to respond to a student's uneasiness in ways that made him know I realized my instructions would pose a challenge for him but I wanted him to try anyway. Stevick refers to the value of inspiring our students to stretch themselves in new directions when he says, "One of the marks of a fine teacher is [the] ability to see the gap between the far-possible and the near-comfortable, and to be the kind of person in whose company many learners reach the far side of that gap."[9]

A good opportunity for me to practice using previous knowledge of individual students was during an exercise towards the end of the Conversation Class. I tried to follow what each student was demanding of me and searching for in her use of the language. The class had chosen to give short narratives of a funny, scary, or embarrassing experience. I chose to stand behind students, sometimes with my hands on their shoulders, and give reformulations[10] of their narratives.

For Mary-Alejo, I didn't correct every mistake because there were so many and I didn't want to overwhelm her. When I did choose to address mistakes in her sentences, I broke down my reformulations into small chunks and spoke them very precisely into her ear because I knew she had lately been concentrating on pronunciation. For Renato, I offered new idioms and less formal phrases than he was using. I knew he was working on moving beyond grammatical correctness to speak in increasingly more native-like forms. For Rosario, I was careful to pick out even small grammatical errors because she was ready for more scrutiny. Often she corrected her own mistakes as I stopped her by placing my hand on her shoulder. For Rachel, I crouched down beside her chair at times because she liked to watch my lips while working on pronunciation.

It was at the Montezuma Brewery that I was perhaps most willing and ready to allow the students' ongoing feedback guide my moment-by-moment responses. I had learned the value of being in tune and flexible with my other classes, and since this group of students was smaller and more self-directed, I felt I could easily continue in this vein with them. For the first session, I wrote down some categories for identifying one's self and then gave a sample description of myself using a picture. When I saw uncomfortably strained looks on their faces, even after I had adapted the material to a very basic level and had tried different ways of making my meaning explicit, I decided to translate portions into Spanish. I saw immediate relief. Later I again saw questions in their faces,

but I had a sense that they could endure a few more moments of being confused and that they didn't want me to translate into Spanish. This feeling that I should go ahead in English was confirmed by an unstrained persistence on their part to get at the meaning of my words on their own.

4. Summary

In a classroom where one is trying to promote independent learning strategies, both the teacher and the students have a responsibility to be aware of and respond to the different needs and goals within the group. The question that naturally follows is: How do we go about becoming more aware and responsive?

The teacher's objective in this area is to gain a clearer understanding of each student's uniqueness, at least to the degree that her time and teaching environment allow this. As teachers, we have to find ways to observe and spend time with individuals, to take an interest in them, and to address their particular strengths and problems. We have to enthusiastically encourage their ideas and be willing to act on some, while we carefully weigh them alongside our own goals and opinions. We have to look for clues in a student's words and in his actions that tell us how to make our lessons most closely respond to his questions.

The teacher can't stop here, though, if she wants to truly encourage more learner independence or if she doesn't want to feel discouraged about being able to practically address the various demands within a large group. She has to

prod students themselves to become more aware of and responsive to their own language deficiencies and interests. If a teacher is genuinely asking for student feedback and is flexible with her plans, students should begin more actively evaluating the course and more openly making suggestions. As the teacher thinks up creative ways to respond to individuals, she should be able to suggest different possible learning strategies to students. Then, when students have more opportunities to make choices, they can determine themselves the alternatives that will best enhance their learning. As the teacher encourages students to verbally define their language goals--in clear, realistic terms--and to strategize ways to reach these goals, then students will be more likely to plan and conduct their learning both inside and outside of the classroom.

B. TEACHER AND STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND LEARNER INDEPENDENCE

1. Independent of Whom/What?

Two questions that repeatedly nudged at me during my teaching were, "What exactly do you mean by independence? Is it possible that the learner is always going to be dependent on someone or something that takes on a teaching role in order to discover and explore the unknown?" This inner dialog continued the exploration I had begun before my internship.

The most important points during my internship were:

--I was encouraging students to expand their search for their most effective and available resouces.

--I wanted students to demand more from themselves through a deeper awareness of their inherent knowledge, initiative, and creativity.

--I tried to help students break out of old habits which made them overly dependent on the teacher and which, in the process, tricked them into forfeiting their ability to direct their own learning.

In further examining the full meaning of independence as it relates to education, I defined for myself the bare essentials that allow learning to occur. These are: 1) exposure to the unfamiliar; 2) an environment that allows for the exploration and understanding of the unknown; 3) the motivation within the learner to encounter the unfamiliar, explore, and understand it. The classroom teacher enters as a person who may help arrange for the first two essential factors and guide the activity that takes place in each. Parents, students, and the administration generally expect that she will do both. However, students themselves can help take charge of these same factors. If students are in charge of them to some degree, they are freer than the student who depends on the teacher to both arrange for exposure to the unknown and construct the environment that will allow for exploration and understanding.

Factors 1) and 2) include many other, smaller, responsibilities such as: choosing what part of all that might be unfamiliar to the learner to expose her to; knowing where to look for the information that will aid understanding;

deciding which strategies to use to explore and understand the unfamiliar in the most efficient way and maintaining the environment that allows for this; and evaluating the learner's understanding of or ability to use the new information and skills. As I taught, I was considering the question: Which of these are the teacher's responsibilities and which are the student's? Thus emerged the theme of student/teacher responsibilities and what they have to do with independence. Under this theme, I was looking especially at who was responsible for error correction, directing class activities, planning, and evaluation.

2. The Role of Student and Teacher

In A Way and Ways, Stevick gives a chart description of the Silent Way's teaching and learning objectives[11] which illustrates the connection between learner and teacher roles and responsibilities. The chart follows on page 33.

Principle	Learner	Teacher
LEARNING IS WORK FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADJUSTING TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD	In meeting a new challenge,	The teacher provides challenges
INDEPENDENCE	I use resources from within myself	relative to the student's present resources,
RESPONSIBILITY	in order to decide for myself	but remains silent, noninterfering,
AUTONOMY	among the choices	while the student works to choose
INDEPENDENCE	offered by the resources within myself (for no other resources are available).	among the resources that we have guided him in developing.
REMEMBERING ("Learning"?)	The result of this work	This kind of teaching
RETENTION ("ACQUISITION"?)	may become a part of myself.	frees the student.

Stevick designs the chart so that the purpose and responsibilities of the teacher are alongside the development of independence, responsibility, and autonomy of the learner. Under the teacher column of the chart, one may identify certain tasks that spell out a definite place for the teacher in the learner's progression. The phrases "provides challenges" and "have guided him [the learner] in developing" highlight the teacher's responsibilities.

Stevick confirms here that the teacher must be aware of each individual's abilities. She can provide challenges

"relative to the student's present resources" only to the degree that she is in tune with what the learner has at hand to work with at any given moment. She also must have faith in the student's innate capacity. She can guide the student in developing his resources only to the degree that she trusts the potential within him and pushes him to uncover more.

These phrases show the active work of the teacher. However, there is also a restraining element in the teacher's responsibility that allows for the full activity of the learner: ". . . the teacher remains silent, noninterfering, while the student works . . . ."

In looking at the learner column, I was struck by the number of times "myself" is used to describe the learner's work. According to Stevick, the Silent Way learner's self is the singular true source of information, the agent who decides among available options how to meet a challenge, and the new product that evolves out of the encounter with the challenge.

Even though the chart puts a strong emphasis on the learner's self, which stresses the idea of independence, the teacher column still exists. One may wonder if the teacher has an indispensable role here. Can she eventually give the responsibilities outlined in the teacher column over to the student? I believe that as he progresses to fuller independence, it is possible that the student himself "provides challenges relative to [his own] present resources [or encounters and makes use of challenges in his daily experience] . . . while [he] works to choose among the

resources that [he has guided himself] in developing." While the teacher-controlled development outlined here "frees the student," the learner-guided development is a practiced acknowledgement of that freedom which enables the student to go forward in his learning, unencumbered with a dependency on a classroom situation or a classroom teacher. Or if he finds himself in a classroom that allows for his own guidance and control, he knows how to use the resources within the classroom to best advantage without relying so heavily on the teacher that he obscures his own potential.

Most students I meet in the classroom, however, are probably not at this stage of development. They are expecting that I, as a teacher, will have a significant role in their encounter with the subject matter. Even though I'm aware that this latter stage of development does exist as a possibility, I am more concerned now with the earlier stages of developing independence which make the latter stage possible.

3. <u>How to Clarify Teacher and Student Responsibilities and Encourage Learner Independence</u>

a. *Increased communication between student and teacher and ensured relevancy between the course and the student's/ teacher's goals*

One teacher responsibility that appeared clearer to me through the internship was to make the course content and my approach relevant to students' lives. I didn't want to design my courses by pulling ideas out of the sky. I wanted my choices about material to be connected with the students' interests. I wanted our activities to grow out of their

needs. I wanted my method of evaluating their progress to be carefully suited to each person's ability to understand and respond to that evaluation and then to progress even further.

During my time in Mexico, I also more clearly identified a responsibility for students that related to their independent learning skills. Not only did I have to observe and intuit student needs and interests, but I also had to hear in their words what and how they wanted to learn. As students learned better how to communicate their views to me, I would be better able to fulfill my responsibility of making the class relevant to them as individuals.

My job of ensuring relevance in the course didn't simply mean listening to students and then automatically following their leads. The full responsibility, I learned, involved combining students' opinions with my own beliefs about what was important for them to learn and what best enhances learning. Through this combination, I could design a syllabus and plan activities. My own beliefs about where and how to focus learning in the classroom were based on my own experience in teaching and learning languages, my knowledge of English, and my views of education. In taking on this full responsibility, I saw myself as someone who brought to the classroom ideas and opinions which, if offered in the right way, could guide students without inhibiting their own facility.

In my journal, I recorded my thoughts as I strove to make my courses relevant to students' lives. After my first day of

classes, my journal entry reads: "Can it help to be explicit to the group about why we're doing what we're doing? This requires that I be clear myself about a lesson's purpose. How does one activity relate to the next and that to the next and all the activities to our larger course goals? What connection does it all have with what I see that students require and desire? In explaining the 'why' to a student, I'm wanting to make sense of the class to him--to fit it into the NOW of his personal life."

I gradually found that it helped to list my specific goals before planning the lesson and then try to find activities that best promoted those goals. I resisted the temptation to do what was easiest without considering my purpose or to dream up interesting-sounding activities that would simply fill time with little connection to a larger purpose.

1. The Art Of Listening

Students who vocalized their feelings both inside and outside of the classroom helped me fit the course more closely with their uppermost concerns. One afternoon when I was having lunch with Miguel, a student from Class IV, he asked me why we didn't use the choral repetitions in the book more often. This was the book's method of presenting material that I often found unrealistic and boring. I also didn't feel that students absorbed the material that was presented this way as

I watched them during practice activities. Therefore, I had been presenting material in other ways. After I explained this briefly to Miguel, he said that the repetitions had helped him, in other courses, practice pronunciation and he missed hearing the teacher model these sample sentences. I decided, on Miguel's suggestion, to try a couple of choral repetitions in his class the next week, and students in general seemed to welcome the change. I also continued with other ways of presenting material. This piece of feedback from Miguel made me recognize a desire in the class as a whole to work more on pronunciation, which we later did.

There were other cases when I listened carefully to student comments and incorporated them into my knowledge of how individuals perceived the class and their learning, but I didn't heed the suggestions. During a feedback session in the Conversation Class, Laura suggested that I correct students whenever I heard mistakes in the large group. This feedback followed an activity where the stated focus was not on grammatical correctness. Instead, it was on freely saying as much as we could about Mexican vs. American views of women and on listening for new vocabulary. What ran through my mind as she made this suggestion was that there are times for error correction and there are other times when I want to create a freer atmosphere for experimentation. Constant error correction, I felt, would break the flow of conversation and possibly inhibit some students, aside from taking up lots of class time. I later tried to more clearly explain the focus

of large group activities and the purpose behind the focus. I continued to have some sessions where the emphasis was on grammatical correctness and other sessions where the emphasis was on experimentation and where not all errors were corrected.

2. The Art of Compromising or How to Work with a Textbook

Here is another question that was never too far away from me as I taught: "Won't the requirement to cover the material in the book and prepare for the standardized tests keep me from designing a course uniquely relevant to my students?" I concluded through the internship that required textbooks and exams do limit the extent to which a teacher can implement a syllabus designed by the group, one that is as unique as each new group of individuals.

I also concluded, though, that in a situation where I had to use textbooks and exams, there was an even stronger urgency to make the course meaningful to students--amid the requirements. Otherwise, students were likely to blandly drift through semesters of textbooks and tests that would have little connection with their personal goals. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, this kind of education that incorporated no student input and that held little relevance for the students' lives outside of the classroom was exactly the kind I found useless. I had left for Mexico hoping to show myself and my students that we didn't have to submit to this kind of education.

In spite of my desire to change the situation, the limitations posed by the exam at the Instituto continued to baffle me. After reading over some questionnaire responses for Class IV, I wrote: "I want to do more of what students suggest, but I feel pressured by the exams to get through all of the book material quickly. Yet, every time I have students read the dry sentences out of the book, I feel I'm betraying something inside me that says, 'No!'" I had to come to terms with my own inner struggle of knowing I had to work with the book in two of my classes and of not wanting to do this.

The first thing I had to do in order to meet the institution's requirements while still enjoying some peace of mind was to determine what it was about the book and tests that was so inhibiting to carrying out my goals. Then I could try to come up with ways of overcoming or lessening that inhibiting effect. In my journal again, I attempted to pinpoint the reasoning behind my feelings about the book: "What if I didn't have to use the book? What would be different about the class, what/how students are learning, and my feelings about teaching? My first reaction is that the whole course would be more positive. But I wonder if there is some advantage in honing in on certain grammar points which the book helps us do. Could I concentrate well on particular points without a book? Probably so, but it might not be as easy. Also, the book saves time in deciding what exactly to concentrate on. What if I had the book to use, but no definite obligation to cover a certain amount of material in a

limited amount of time? I'd feel more free to let my own opinions and the needs and interests of the class guide me." My next step was to find ways to work with the book while still staying true to my goal of encouraging students to develop independent learning strategies. I had to overcome a bias against using the book, and in doing so, I found it was useful in some important ways.

I decided that homemade exercises weren't better just by virtue of being homemade. They became better when I could design into them some particular element that students needed to work on or when I could make them more realistic and lively. At times, ready-made exercises could give the needed presentation or practice so that I could spend more time one-on-one with students, addressing individual problems.

I found ways to intersperse the book's presentations with out-of-book ones that were more personalized. I had decided early on that one simple way to make our activities more relevant was to present material that we had to cover for the test using student names and interests. For example, for a presentation session in Class V, I wrote out the sentence, "Monserrat likes to go to the disco on Saturday nights," to introduce the grammar of <u>like</u> plus infinitive in a class where I knew something about Monserrat and her weekend escapades. This kept students much more attentive and reminded them of how they could use the English they were learning to talk about themselves and their peers.

I also tried first presenting new material without the book. For Class V one day, I wrote a short fictional passage about one of the student's career as a forest ranger to introduce the uses of until, still, anymore, and yet, which were covered in the book. The exercises in the book then reinforced and confirmed what I had presented and gave students practice in using the grammar points.

Later it became easier to scratch my original lesson plans when we ran out of time during a session and to jump to the heart of the purpose in each lesson. I often skipped over the book exercises I had earlier planned to use and went straight to the students' original work. Having them write their own sentences and stories, or converse with each other, was taking higher priority for me. These types of exercises were forcing students to actually use the new grammar to express their own original thoughts. Questions arose from these activities that reflected the language's complexity in real conversation. Consequently, the activities were closer to what students would later have to confront on their own.

I wanted my system of evaluating students to be relevant not only to their expectations for the class, but also to my own teaching goal of having students become more responsible learners. I recognized at the very beginning of Classes IV and V that students had lots of anxiety about the two upcoming exams. Their preoccupation with the tests made me feel as if they thought everything they did in class was geared towards passing those two exams. I wanted to be sensitive to their

worries, but I also wanted to bring the exams into balance with what I viewed as the other priorities for the course.

I decided on a number of strategies to bring about this balance. Before the test, we talked as a group about their anxieties and how we might diffuse them. I explained that an exam was only one way, among many others, to judge their learning progress. In grading the tests, rather than circling or correcting mistakes, I put small numbers beside each problem to indicate the number of points I took off for the student's answer to that particular problem. I later explained to the students what the numbers stood for. Then, as a group, we reviewed the answers and students had to listen carefully and ask questions in order to figure out how their answer differed from the correct answer. I hoped this would encourage students to pinpoint and correct their own mistakes. After I handed back the first set of tests, we talked about other methods of determining a person's strengths and weaknesses in the language. Then I asked students to rate themselves in specific mastery areas that I listed on the board. I also asked for written comments on areas they most needed to concentrate on within the next half of the course.

The following night I made a list of what was important to me in determining a student's grade, aside from the exams and other activities that showed mastery of material. The list consisted of: class attendance, effort the student made to catch up with material when she missed a class, participation in class, effort to do homework or ask questions

after class when the student didn't understand material covered in class, cooperation and respect for others in the group, and effort to do extra projects that interested the student or that helped her reach a personal goal. After introducing this list to my groups, I had students evaluate themselves in these areas in written form. Then I studied their feedback to see in what ways their perception of their work in class compared to my perceptions. I also began keeping better track of every student's degree of effort in each of these areas.

At the end of the course, I used this list to add or subtract points from the student's score that was determined by exams and other activities meant to judge mastery of material. I showed on the evaluation cards what the mastery scores were and how the other factors had affected these. By including these factors in the final evaluation, I was telling students that their commitment to the group and effort to take responsibility for their learning helped determine the quality of their education.

3. Summary

Listening is an art that teachers as well as students need to cultivate. Honest, persistent listening can engender a deeper understanding between student and teacher. This understanding can, in turn, pave the way for a closer connection between course work and a student's daily experience and future plans. As students discover that there can be a legitimate relationship between the subject at hand and their lives outside of the classroom, they will more

likely define just what it is they need or want to learn. Then they can help ensure that their courses are relevant to their goals by giving feedback on the content and process of their classes. By critically examining a course for any use it might offer them personally, students play a vital role in their own budding independence.

As teachers, we have to make students feel that their opinions are worth listening to. We have to prompt them to think through their ideas and then to present them clearly; to consider the reasoning behind another's opinions and actions. We also have to be willing to shape our teaching approach and lesson plans around what students are telling and showing us they need, when appropriate.

While we may be sure of what type of approach and what sorts of activities will be relevant to students' lives and will encourage learner independence, we might not always feel we have the power or opportunity to implement them. How do we work within the limitations of an institution which may have goals that don't coordinate with our own? How do we design a course that evolves from our students' unique needs and from our beliefs about education when we are required to use the institution's books and tests? At times, compromise is our sole hope.

If we give up completely on our own firmly held beliefs and goals, we could find ourselves in the midst of a frustrating experience where we feel like programmed robots or misplaced babysitters. We have to respect our own experience,

knowledge, and ideas. We have to value our right to experiment with those ideas that have as their ultimate motive to enhance a learner's growth. But we also have to face reality. The jobs available are not always ideal. While compromising some of our cherished goals may not always be desirable or possible, there may be times when a little give and take is our means of holding a needed job while still living up to a portion of our teaching objectives. Effective compromise often involves looking at a problem from a fresh perspective. We have to try to clearly define the obstacles that would hinder effective teaching. Then, we must be willing to persist with possible solutions instead of giving up on a problem as hopelessly unresolvable.

b. Ways to make the student's full range of resources more recognized and used

1. A Gold Mine Within

One simple way I found for students to realize their own power as a valuable source of authority was to have them, whenever possible, answer their own questions. In doing so, I realized that we often blurt out a question and expect someone to answer it immediately and precisely. We do this before stopping to wonder if, by thinking a little further, hypothesizing, and testing out our guesses, we might have the answer inside us all along. This manner of answering a question might not be as quick as having someone else answer it, but it may stay with us longer. I came to this conclusion as I thought back on experiences when, through seeking an

answer within myself, it stayed imprinted in my thought. In contrast, a quick answer that someone else offered often eluded me later on. Through probing for answers ourselves, we also find that the preciseness we are seeking may not exist. Our question may lead us to a gray mass rather than to a clean black or white line. If we come to a conclusion ourselves, then we are less likely to be as exasperated as we are by the gray answers that others give us when our questions can't bring us to a decisive end.

Throughout the internship it gradually became easier to hold back my snappy answers and to have students explore their own questions. One day before class, Guillermo came into the office to ask for some rules or a list that would tell him which verbs we had been working on in class could be used both with and without a preposition. Rather than give him a list of answers, I gave him a list of verbs that I asked him to experiment with. I figured that he could probably determine how to use many of the verbs by using his previous knowledge and what he had picked up from class. I asked him to write out sample sentences using the verbs either with or without prepositions. I told him we would talk later about the sentences and his conclusions. I explained that I thought he would understand better and remember longer about how to use these verbs if he tried to first figure them out on his own. He seemed receptive to this idea. We did talk about the verbs a couple of times later on. He decided to give me sentence samples orally instead of writing them out. I prompted him

with questions that I hoped later he would prompt himself with: "Why did you decide to put the preposition in? Are there rules you can memorize about the use of certain verbs with prepositions or do you just have to guess?"

In Class V one day, Gloria asked me how to use yet in a sentence. While earlier I probably would have quickly given her an example, this time I directed her back to the sample sentences we had examined as a group. After looking at these again, I asked her to give me an original sentence using yet. Her sentence was correct. This kind of situation occurred often, and the majority of times the questioner was able to come up with a grammatically correct sentence. If she couldn't or if she still had questions, then we would probe deeper with other explanations and samples from peers. But I would always try to end the discussion with the previously confused student giving the class an original sentence using the language element in question. This ensured that she did understand it and that she knew she could use it.

In his writings, Gattegno refers to the learner's educated ability to address his own mistakes. He says, ". . . every student can be granted the power of self-correction, of conscious correction." Further on he adds, "Self-correction assumes self-awareness, and it is awareness that is educable, i.e., can be brought to realization of what needs to be done."[12]

Often I would direct the class towards a mistake--without exactly pinpointing it--by repeating a whole sentence or

long phrase with the incorrect part as the speaker or writer had given it. Then I would ask the group if that sounded or looked right and volunteers could usually correct the mistakes. Later on, I made an increased effort to have the speaker or writer self-correct the mistake before I opened up the correction for the group to do.

One of the most vital points to remember when asking learners to probe and answer their own questions is that students still need to know that the teacher is guiding them. She has to assure them that they will eventually arrive at some kind of an answer, or else realize that they should ask a different kind of question. In other words, teachers have to ensure that a learner's security is not threatened as they demand more from him.

Stevick speaks of how a teacher can ensure this security while still expecting the student to take full advantage of his own abilities. He says:

> Instead of giving a direct answer, [the teacher] may say something that directs the questioner's mind toward work which may enable him to find the answer for himself, within himself. In the same way, if a student expresses confusion or discomfort, the teacher may try to reply in a way that will give the student a hint at where or how to work within himself.[13]

This comment emphasizes two important ideas about the relationship between encouraging learner independence and ensuring learner security: a) Just because a learner is confused or uncomfortable does not necessarily mean that an effective solution is for teachers to hand out a fast answer

and to forgo the opportunity for the student to find his own way. It only means that we need to carefully continue guiding the student, never abandoning him. We might have to offer more specific feedback and suggestions that will inspire in the student the desire to "work within himself" until he finds an answer. b) There is a definite role for the teacher, even in an environment where the student is asked to rely more fully on his own knowledge and experience. A crucial aspect of the teacher's responsibility is in asking the right questions to the questioner that will prompt him to dig deep for the resources that lie within. Left alone and unchallenged by this prodding, the student is likely to conclude that he is stuck and then stop in his tracks.

Not only in the area of error correction, but also in presenting new material, I found ways of expanding students' notions of what they had to offer themselves. In Class IV, I had planned a presentation that involved the substitution of nouns with pronouns and the rearrangement of pronouns in a sentence. In a pocket chart, I put up separate word cards that made up the sentence: "Eric brought a rose to his girlfriend yesterday." I was hoping to eventually present several different adaptations of this sentence such as "Eric brought her a rose yesterday" and "Eric brought it to her yesterday." Instead of giving different versions of the original sentence myself, I asked students if they could rearrange or substitute any of the word cards in the chart to make a new sentence.

I was assuming that this new material was part of some students' previous knowledge or that they might be able to guess about ways to adapt the sentence which were similar to adaptations in their own language. Or if adaptations in their own language were made in completely different ways, then they would probably understand and remember these differences better if they experimented with the elements themselves. In asking students to essentially present the new material through their suggestions and experiments, we eventually got to all of the versions of the sentence I had planned to cover. Students were hopefully recognizing the potential both within themselves and their peers for exploring and coming to conclusions about new material.

As we ended structured practices using new material, I looked for ways to determine if students had actually digested the material so that they could use it on their own in new contexts. I believe these same activities that enabled me to identify who still needed help also enabled students to recognize their own inner resources which they could draw on independently.

2. Peer Support

In encouraging expanded use of another obvious resource in class--the student's peers--I had to learn to accept that these peers might not always give precisely correct feedback.

At Montezuma, Manuel questioned the wisdom of students relying on each other to improve their English. After our first session, the group mentioned ways they might help

themselves on the days that I wasn't holding class. One suggestion was to meet for ten minutes at break each day and practice what they had learned the day before. Manuel asked if it would do more harm than good to practice with someone who couldn't always correct him. Wouldn't he then learn the incorrect way? he wondered. I answered that I thought they could catch many of each other's errors and that practice would probably benefit them by showing what they remembered and could use as a group, even if some mistakes went uncorrected. I suggested that they note down questions or any part of their work that they thought might have mistakes in it, and we could talk about them in class. I hoped that when students got together without me, they would more closely evaluate both themselves and their peers.

I was able to answer Manuel the way I did because I had asked some similar questions myself after an activity in Class V. Instead of presenting new material and then leading the class through substitution drills which the book suggested, I decided to pair up students and give them loose elements of sentences containing the material and have them together construct their own sentences. For example, with "cost, $45, Larry" and "borrow, bike, her", they could come up with something like: "The stereo cost Larry $45" and "Cecil wants to borrow her bike." After each student constructed a sentence, his partner was supposed to check it.

In my journal following this lesson, I wrote, "I haven't verified everything the students have done, although they

often check with me on sentences they have questions about. The fact that their mistakes might go uncorrected makes me feel a little uneasy, but maybe there's also something positive in my withdrawal from them at certain times. This is weaning them of dependency on one authority and causing them to trust and demand more from their peers." Later, I found where Stevick speaks of the advantages of using peers as resources. He says, "The emphasis on students learning from listening to each other, rather than listening only to the teacher, shows the students . . . that their inner resources enable them to take in, refine, and profit from even inferior raw material."[14]

When I had students work in small groups, time would often run out just as they were more enthusiastically responding to each other. I started experimenting with different ways of cutting down presentation and large group practice time so we could expand the time spent using the material in small groups. One successful way of doing this was to give a very brief presentation to the class and then put up sample sentences or questions with the new material which students could refer to and discuss with each other. Then I was able to float from group to group as particular questions arose. If there appeared to be general confusion, I interrupted the groups temporarily so we could quickly discuss some point as a class. This way I saw more question asking, peer checking, and experimentation within the groups. Their questions to me usually focused on the meaning of vocabulary

or else a group would have me verify their work when they finished. When students asked me a question about the new material, I would first redirect it to the questioner's partner and often the partners would give all the feedback needed. In these instances, the peers were probably giving helpful feedback all along, but students wanted me to verify the reliability of their peers' answers.

Sometimes students naturally drew toward each other for support even when the activity had an individual focus. During one session in the Conversation Class, I asked students to individually write a description of a person that centered on feelings, likes, and dislikes using magazine pictures. I was grading papers as I observed the interaction between students during the hour. The only questions to me were about the assignment. Amidst the stretches of silence, there were snatches of shared passages from their descriptions, laughing, and questioning. Questions among students dealt with grammar, spelling, and meaning of vocabulary.

After this session, I came up with some possible reasons why there was this active interaction among students: I told them at the beginning of the activity that they would be helping each other in pairs the next day and they might have taken this as a hint to seek each other out early on. I was busy doing something else and didn't appear as available as usual. I encouraged peer help by not interfering. In other words, I didn't discourage the interaction as I made sure the occasional talk didn't appear to bother other students. I

also didn't intrude with my own unsolicited feedback. I was tempted to blurt out an answer when there were pauses after questions or when peers sounded a little confused in their answers, but I caught myself and kept working. I wanted to think, also, that a primary reason for students calling on each other instead of on me when they had a question was due to our emphasis on peer support throughout the course. This emphasis should have led students to recognize each other as valuable resources.

3. Summary

Every student has a significant source of information and authority that lies very close at hand, no matter where, when, or what he is learning. This source is the student himself. We all are probably able to answer more of our own questions than we recognize or are willing to admit. We all can begin to unlock the mysteries of untraveled subject matter through our own exploration and self-probing; through tapping on our reserve of knowledge and experience that can give us clues about the unfamiliar. The only obstacles that keep students from using more of their own inner resources are their ignorance that these resources exist and the debilitating dependence on teachers that our educational system has created.

Teachers who want to make the student's full range of resources more recognized and used have to devise strategies that don't threaten the student's security while they motivate him to examine and answer his own questions. These strategies

should include the teacher disciplining herself, at times, to hold back her fast and easy answers. In giving quick answers, a teacher might satisfy a student's immediate desire for an explanation. However, she might also make it ultimately more difficult for the student to understand and remember the truth or principle behind an answer.

While a simple, direct answer definitely has its place at times, some indirect guidance and prodding can be even more valuable for the student in other situations. As teachers, we can often direct students to material that will enable them to come to conclusions themselves. We can give clues and other specific feedback that will guide and encourage them to continue searching for an answer. We can ask the questioner questions that will show her she does have valuable information to offer herself. All the while we are using these strategies, we have to be careful not to exasperate the student by making her think we have abandoned her to confusion. Students themselves must understand that our methods are to help them become freer, more self-reliant learners.

Another valuable resource that is often too little recognized and used in the classroom is a students' peers. While we can't always guarantee that a peer will give one hundred percent reliable feedback, there are definite advantages in encouraging students to rely on each other. We heighten the sense of community within a group which can only enhance learning. We help to dethrone a harmful student

dependence on the teacher. We help students recognize and make use of the storehouse of information and experience that the group represents. One way that we can make room for peer support is to give students longer periods of meaningful small group activity. We can also more consistently hand over to students the responsibility for explaining language points to their peers, for checking each other's work, and for giving each other helpful feedback.

c. Ways of having students take on more of the initiative and control in the classroom

Through my experience in Mexico, I learned that two principle factors led to successfully handing over more initiative and control to my students: 1) I had to have a clear purpose for my lesson. 2) I had to understand what students expected from me. When I was sure about what I wanted a learner to accomplish, then I was better able to pinpoint who I wanted to be in control during given points in the lesson and how willing I was to adapt my original plans to unexpected student initiative. I also needed to be clear about what kinds of obligations my students believed teachers should have and what in my teaching approach made them comfortable or uncomfortable. Then, either I could accomodate students, based on their expectations, or I could gently introduce them to a new view of a teacher's role and a student's responsibilities. On the other hand, if I merely released my control without fully explaining to students--or understanding myself--why I was expecting them to do more of

the controlling and initiating, then I threatened both my students' and my own security.

1. How Much Choice?

In A Way and Ways, Stevick speaks of two types of control in the language classroom. One he calls the "'steering' or 'structuring' aspect of control" that determines the character and timing of classroom activities. The second type involves verifying how a student's behavior and speech compares to what a native would do or say.[15] He believes that both of these kinds of control can, at certain points, be shared with the student. It was knowing how and when to share them that became of primary interest to me.

I had to first determine how much choice and freedom to allow my students. At one point I believed that as often as I could let students come up with their own ideas about what they wanted to do and how they were going to accomplish it, the more they would benefit. I would be giving unconditional freedom that I thought would be refreshing for students who were accustomed to a teacher's constant directive. However, the couple of times I offered this unbridled freedom, I sensed that students weren't comfortable with it. I knew I wasn't. Students were at a loss to decide what it was they really did want to do and longed for someone to make the decision for them. I gradually learned that I was much more successful at encouraging student decision making when I provided some kind of a basic structure or framework within which students could guide themselves.

An example of a time like this was after a Community Language Learning-based[16] situation where students had generated a conversation about various sports-related pictures which I had taped up at the front of the room. After several activities where we used the generated material as a group, I asked students to break up into pairs. My purpose for the next activity was for them to practice and experiment with the same material from the generated sentences in a more individual manner. I had originally planned for them to do with the material whatever they thought would help them--to make up their own activity. After thinking further about it, though, I remembered a couple of past unsuccessful lessons when I gave students no lead or suggestions. I changed my plans. This time I outlined six possible ways of working with the material and gave examples of each to the group. I then asked students to choose among these possibilities. I saw the pairs get immediately involved with the material. One group came up with their own idea for working with the material, which I then encouraged.

Several instances of allowing students the freedom to make some choices within a structure that the teacher had designed were workable for three main reasons. First, this gave students somewhere to begin. Sometimes too much freedom can be confusing, even frightening, because we can feel lost in a meaningless sea of choices. Second, these instances helped fulfill the expectation that students had of me as their teacher: that I would be primarily maintaining the

control and giving them some guidance each day as they came to class. They could just as well stay at home if they were going to totally plan and direct their learning anyway. The structure, which included my explanation of the activity, my instructions, and my control of the timing, gave students more reason to believe that our activities had order and purpose. Third, this allowed me to have students concentrate on an area that I/we had identified as needing more practice. We could focus the activity on a particular goal and keep our lessons on track within an overall plan.

Within this structure, I wanted students to assume more decision-making power. Often the simple opportunity to work in groups got students to try some original ways of exploring the material. I began to experiment, towards the end of the Conversation Class, with giving a little more freedom for group and individual choices. When I felt more comfortable with asking students to determine the method of working with the material and I knew students were already familiar with having to make choices, I set up an activity where the Conversation Class had to choose among three sets of cards to work with. Each set focused on a particular theme: two-word verbs, adjectives, or pronunciation. Students themselves chose where they wanted to concentrate.

For the verb and adjective group, I gave no special instructions except to work with the cards in some way that they all agreed on and to give a short class presentation the next day about something they had learned from the cards. I

gave the same instructions to the pronunciation group. I also suggested that they begin by matching the cards in columns according to the underlined sounds, because there was some confusion among students about how to work with the cards. All three of the groups had their own methods of approaching their material. The verb group had a set of two-word verbs that all had a more familiar single-word counterpart in another card set. The students shuffled the cards, matched up the pairs they knew, and then looked up the single-word verbs that remained. The adjective group had a set of adjective cards that were matched up with synonyms in another card set. They chose to look at the matched cards as I gave them, without mixing them up, and then they memorized them and used them in sentences. The pronunciation group matched up the sounds in columns, discussing differences of opinion and practicing sounds together. They then asked me to check their columns. I pointed out columns that had mistakes in them and waited for students to find the misplaced cards. They then asked if I would lead them in a human computer exercise[17] using the word columns, which was a follow up that I hadn't thought of. After I left this group, the students moved into reading a page of English comic strips on the wall beside them, paying special attention to pronunciation.

In looking back on these instances of combining my control of an activity with a students' choices, I saw I was constantly trying to find the optimum amount of learning space the students needed in order to successfully test out their

independent learning skills. Stevick explains the work of the teacher this way:

> In exercising "control," then, the teacher is giving some kind of order, or structure, to the learning space of the student. In encouraging him to take "initiative," she is allowing him to work, and to grow within that space. The trick, for the teacher, is not only to reserve this distinction; it is also to provide just the right amount of learning space. If there is too little, the student will be stifled. If there is too much, the student will feel that the teacher has abandoned him.[18]

2. Controlling Who Has Control

The above experiences are examples of when I made an effort to have students take on more of the control and initiative. There were other times when some individual student made the effort to define her learner space in freer terms. During these unexpected times, I had to carefully consider my reasons for wanting or not wanting to be flexible with my plans.

Some students in Class V easily took to turning an assignment into a more useful or interesting project. During one class when I asked them to write a description of a magazine picture, one student asked if he could write a dialog instead. Another asked if he could tell a story. As I was thinking of an answer, I had a quick dialog with myself that I thought further about after class. My questions included these: "What are my purposes for doing this activity? Why did I give the directions that I did? How do my purposes weigh against the advantages of having students take the initiative to choose what to do? Why are these students

choosing to deviate? Do they want to make the assignment easier/more enjoyable or are they choosing what they think will help them most?"

Deciding how to react to students who wanted to initiate or adapt an activity wasn't always a cut-and-dry experience for me. I was imagining before the internship that if students made the effort to adapt an activity in a way that showed they had thought about their individual preferences and needs, then I would encourage them. But sometimes questions such as the above arose for me, at the instant that a student chose to deviate from my plan, that made me debate the pro's and con's of allowing him to continue on his own path. After quickly thinking over some of the questions above, I told both students in Class V that they could go ahead with their ideas if they were sure to include descriptive words in their projects. I made this decision because my main objective for this exercise was to have students practice using adjectives and adverbs in creative ways, and I thought the two students would still be able to do this in their projects. Also, both of these students were particularly shy when they were in the large group, and I was looking for ways to encourage them to volunteer their ideas.

At the beginning of a session in the Conversation Class, I asked the group if they wanted to concentrate on pronunciation as a large group or continue their pair work of the day before. The concensus was pronunciation and we started with a human computer exercise. Individuals could

practice words of their choice under different sound columns I had written on a large sheet. After about five minutes of this, Laura broke away from the pronunciation work and created a sentence with the displayed words. I decided instinctively to play along with her, and I reformulated the sentence behind her. Then she chose a grammar point we had talked about earlier and began a game of her own. She called on a student and asked, "Will you lend me some money? I should be able to pay you back tomorrow." She questioned different people--threatening, diplomatically persuading, and begging them. They answered, argued, and joked with her.

As I was observing the activity, I was a little confused about my own feelings and the way I should react. In retrospect, I see that the real issue was whether I should have allowed one student to deviate from the group's concensus to work on pronunciation. At the time, however, I was focusing on the issue of student versus teacher control. I was glad that Laura had the courage to try out a new grammar point on the class. In one sense, I was also happy about the spontaneity of the whole event. Laura had quickly invented a game and the students were enjoying it and conversing naturally with each other. To develop the desire and ability to spontaneously converse was one of the goals of the Conversation Class, as I saw it. But in another sense, the fact that a student had suddenly deviated from my plan--albeit, without my objection--and was taking us in another direction made me feel a little awkward. My journal entry

after this session reads, "Was I in control? Were students and is that O.K.? Did we have direction? I was wondering at that moment, 'Where do we go next? Will the students hand the ball back to me soon, expecting me to go with it? Are all playing this game? If not, how do I involve everyone?'"

I realize now that my awkward feelings were not caused simply by a lack of control on my part. Rather, I probably felt disoriented because I hadn't purposely given away the control. I was wondering if some students also felt a loss of order and direction, despite the fact that they seemed to be enjoying the activity. Later I found where Stevick talks about the stability that the teacher's ultimate regulation of control brings to the classroom. He states, ". . . students need to feel that this sharing of 'control' is voluntary on the part of the teacher, and fits within her overall plan. (They also need to accept it.) Otherwise, they will feel that this corner of their world is not so stable afterall."[19]

This experience contrasts with several sessions at Montezuma where I accepted deviation when students initiated their own adaptations of an activity. However, in those instances, I kept the ultimate control of our session and felt there was clear direction in our lessons as a whole. During one part of our first session, students were reproducing a sample description that I had given earlier, using pictures. I was writing the students' reproduction on the board as they gave it. Just as we were almost finished, Carlos started changing the information to talk about himself. He used the

basic vocabulary and sentence structure but changed to first person and filled in his own details.

I followed his initiative and began writing some new sentences in first person on the board as he dictated to me. Then, without my asking for it, each student told about himself, using our framework for first person on the board. In addition, each student experimented with some new information of his own choice. Manuel added, for example, "My friend is older me." Fernando informed us, "My first daughter name is Beatriz." We then discussed other points--such as comparitives, possessives, and cardinal numbers in these examples--as questions came up. Then I had them change the sentences back to third person and start a list of verb conjugations on the board which they had had questions about.

My decision about when to let students get into more complicated language, or just simply more material, than I had planned or when to have them hold their questions and ideas while I led them back to my original outline, depended on a number of factors. These factors included how long the course was, what the students' purposes were for learning English, and the readiness and willingness of the group as a whole to approach the deviation and benefit from the spontaneity. My intention in working with the Montezuma students, for example, was to have the class address their most immediate concerns since I would only be with them for a couple of weeks. I was therefore trying to stay very in tune with their questions of the moment, and I encouraged them to deviate from our plan in

ways they felt were most helpful. I also recognized that they needed to become their own teachers quickly because the course would soon be over. I often found myself following their lead, but I still felt very much in control of the lesson as a whole.

3. Learners as Directors

There were also times when I allowed less opportunity for students to initiate or adapt an activity. I retained my own decision-making power over these aspects of the lesson in order to concentrate on a very specific language element or goal. However, even during these instances, I found ways to encourage some learner independence by allowing students to direct the activity. Earlier, I had been doing and saying more during a lesson than I later felt was necessary. Further on in the internship, I began to move myself into the background and allow students to become the actors who fully performed the activities, even while I maintained a high degree of control.

An example of this type of situation was in the Conversation Class when we concentrated on group stories which were written on large sheets of paper the day before. My purpose was to have students enjoy and get feedback from each other's stories by looking at them one at a time and correcting errors they found. First I asked one of the authors to read the story as a whole. Then we went around the room with each person reading one sentence again while students spotted errors or made suggestions. Then, a

volunteer came up to revise the story draft according to the group's suggestions. If they didn't spot something that sounded strange to me, I pointed to the part of the sentence where the error was located and students tried to find and correct it. If no one could make a correction, I would give my suggestions. However, students did spot and correct most of the errors. During this activity, I was doing and saying very little although I actually had full control over the details of the lesson.

At other times, an initial plan to simply have students direct more of an activity led to students actually taking on some initiative. As I was planning a lesson for Class V one day, I decided to find as many ways as possible to allow students to be the actors in presenting and practicing the material and in evaluating their understanding or use of it. We had been dealing with the use of present perfect versus past tenses with certain time tags such as ago, lately, and since. I had written a paragraph using several of these tags as a review.

After a volunteer presented the review by reading the paragraph, students themselves were responsible for asking appropriate questions with the tags that their peers would understand. If their peers did not understand, students would need to make their questions clearer. Then they had to check responses and guide their peers to a correct answer when they needed help. They were also responsible for trying to include everyone in the activity by choosing who to ask a question.

In other words, they were demanding more of themselves and recognizing more within themselves capable of meeting those demands. My role was to listen, pinpoint errors if students didn't, and guide in corrections if students were having trouble understanding or explaining some language point.

4. Including Students in the What and How

A prime concern of mine from the very beginning of this teaching internship was to help students clarify for themselves why they were studying English. I felt that any semblence of learning independence would have to include defining one's ideals and realistically planning what one could handle in a limited amount of time. This would also entail prioritizing one's goals and adapting plans as one progressed and became aware of unexpected constraints and possibilities.

The course at Montezuma was the best example of where I fully included students in the planning of the course from the outset. I came the first day prepared to introduce material that I felt was basic for a beginning class to learn, regardless of their particular goals. I also planned activities around this material that would allow me to get an idea of the various levels within the group. At the end of our first session, I explained in Spanish that we had only five sessions, each one lasting an hour and a half. I wanted to know what the students expected to learn in this amount of time. I asked them to together make a list of what was important for them to concentrate on. The list ended up being

suggestions for conversational settings plus a request to thoroughly learn and use some common verbs. While they were making the list, I talked with their supervisor about how they would probably be using their English in the future. I then built the course from the students' list and my knowledge of how their supervisors expected them to use their English in connection with their work. Our original plan was adapted since we had to skip one session and as other priorities arose.

We went through a similar process of planning at the very end of this same course in order to prepare for when the group would have to progress on its own. We were thinking both about the interim before the students could get another teacher and then about their tentative plans with a new teacher, depending on the teacher's willingness to work with their ideas. During this second planning session, I sat back and listened to the students' ideas and occasionally made a suggestion. Students decided to identify possible resources for further study within the community. These resources included their own children who were taking English courses in secondary schools, their children's text and reference books, one man's wife who taught English and could help them with pronunciation, two fellow workers who had lived in the United States, our class notes containing conversations we had generated and checked together, and each other.

I also organized a planning session in the Conversation Class three weeks before the end of the course. I had asked

for planning input and feedback on activities from the beginning of the course but wasn't very successful in getting either from everyone. One day I broke the activity of the day before into each of its components. Then I had students rate each part of the activity according to how it had/had not helped them learn. The components were rated high, and I am not sure if this was because the activity was genuinely helpful or if they thought I wanted them to give high ratings. But asking them, "Why did you give this a 7?" for example, helped me feel there was reasoning behind their numbers. I was satisfied with the rating activity because it generated some discussion and I felt us giving the How of our learning more attention.

I then explained why we had spent so much time evaluating the activity: I could more effectively guide our lessons if I knew what students preferred or what helped them most. By discussing what types of activities helped us, we could together plan how to use our last three weeks. We were saying, in effect, "This is what we've got to work with. Now, what are the possibilities and what are our preferences?" The students listed many activity suggestions on the board. We then voted on one for the next session.

At the Instituto, my initial enthusiasm for making course planning a joint venture was dampened quite a bit when I found out I would have to follow the outline of a textbook and prepare students for two standardized tests in two of my classes. However, I did find a few ways to include even

Classes IV and V in planning activities. For example, I asked everyone in these two classes to write down one personal goal that they were going to concentrate on for the following week and how they were going to work on it. I gave examples and we discussed the meaning and purpose of a goal. Most of the students' goals were more general than I had wanted. Graciela wrote, "I'm going to learn more words. I'm going to be alert in class every day." But there were other more specific ones. David said he was going to practice his pronunciation by reading a newspaper or magazine out loud to himself every other afternoon. We later discussed the difference between a general and specific goal and gave examples of each from the class. I also asked students to write down any classroom activity ideas that might help them accomplish their goals.

I didn't feel quite as successful in including students in planning the method of evaluation for the course, although I made the attempt. In the Conversation Class, I decided to spend the first part of one session discussing on what basis I would figure grades. The concensus was that, aside from my evaluation of previous work throughout the course, there should be one final activity that would test the student's abilities. As students offered specific activity ideas, I listed them on the board. Then students voted on them and chose to give five-minute talks on a subject of their choice. After hearing their ideas on criteria I could use to judge the talks, we agreed on such things as continuity, correct grammar, and pronunciation. I later broke each criterion down

so that under correct grammar, for example, I was looking for subject-verb agreement, appropriate verb tense, etc.

I chose another culminating activity that involved a written assignment. I handed out a detailed list of all the functional areas of concentration and all the activities that had made up our course. I asked students to think about: 1) which activities they liked/disliked and why; 2) which activities helped them learn/didn't help them learn and why. For the writing assignment, I asked them to give brief reactions to any of the listed activities they wanted to mention. Then I had them write a description of themselves as learners. I gave an example of what a description might include, and I listed questions they might answer in writing their description such as, "What kind of a learner am I? What helps me learn best? What bothers or hinders me the most?"

There were several purposes behind this assignment. I wanted to give students an idea of what we had covered through the course in a form that they could refer back to. I wanted them to think more carefully about their own learning styles and strategies. I wanted more feedback on our activities. Finally, I wanted to get a clearer view of individual strengths and needs that might show up in this final piece of writing. The students ended up giving more reactions to the activities than descriptions of themselves as learners. But the assignment did, to some degree, accomplish the above purposes.

Students in the Conversation Class had other opportunities to make decisions about evaluation when I had them choose my method for giving feedback. For example, after students had prepared some talks that they were going to give in front of the class, I gave them two choices for receiving feedback, both of which they were familiar with. One choice was to have me reformulate their words behind them to native form while they were speaking. I touched their shoulders when I wanted them to pause for a reformulation. The other choice was to have me take notes during the talk and then help them pinpoint sentences or phrases with errors in them at the end.

6. Summary

One clear way to have students practice their independent learning skills is to have them make more choices. These choices can include what material to concentrate on, which kinds of activities to do, and what methods of feedback and evaluation to use. The degree of choice and freedom we offer students should depend on our purpose for a lesson and the student's willingness and readiness to take over. As we allow for more student decision making within a basic structure that we control, we can offer the needed focus and stability to students while still pushing them to exercise more healthy initiative over what and how they learn.

Even if we decide at times not to give students the freedom to design their own activities, we can always allow ourselves to recede into the background while students direct classroom activities that we have planned. Students

themselves can become the presenters, the question askers, the information suppliers, and the judges.

Beyond their ability to simply direct activities, students also have the potential to help teachers with course planning and evaluation. The key to getting them involved is unlocking their desire by showing that we value and will consider their input. Not all students are anxious to freely expose their opinions because of cultural or personal reasons. Teachers often have to provide, in the beginning, carefully structured opportunities for students to present their suggestions. For example, a teacher can ask everyone to write down three language goals or activity ideas, or she can have everyone rate specific parts of past activities. Later, students should be more receptive to open feedback sessions where volunteers contribute their opinions and ideas to the group. We can also hold very productive planning sessions with students at the end of a course. It is then that students should be thinking about how they will independently use and continue their learning after they leave the classroom.

4. Definitions of Teacher and Student Responsibilities at the End of the Internship

Following are two lists which show how I envisioned teacher and student responsibilities at the end of my internship in Mexico. After reflecting on my teaching experience in Orizaba, I concluded that if students and teachers understood and made an effort to assume these responsibilities, then together they could create a classroom

environment which would help encourage students to become more independent learners. I also conceded that defining these goals was relatively easy, while finding creative ways for teachers and students to realize them was much more challenging. I continue to hold to the vision of a learning environment where students and teacher have shared responsibilities for planning, implementing, and evaluating in the course and where students gain the tools and desire they need to continue their exploration of the subject matter after the course is over. I am beginning to see, however, that the following lists are not static but dynamic. The particular way I define student and teacher responsibilities continues to evolve as I gain more experience in the classroom and as I persist in probing my own questions about learning and independence.

The responsibilities on the student's list which are followed by a letter connect to related responsibilities on the teacher's list.

Student Responsibilities

--to bring to the class interest and a willingness to learn

--to clarify in one's own mind what one wants and needs to learn (a)

--to verbalize realistic goals for one's self in the course and for learning the subject matter in general (a)

--to offer suggestions for course content, for particular activities, and for the method of evaluation when the teacher is willing to listen to these suggestions (b)

--to respect others within the group (c)

--to be aware of one's self as a unique learner who has individual needs, strengths, preferences, and goals (d)

--to identify learning strategies and attitudes that enhance one's learning (e)

--to identify elements in the classroom environment and in the teacher's approach that help or hinder learning (f)

--to give ongoing feedback on class activities, course content, and the teacher's approach (g)

--to actively engage in classroom activities

--to evaluate one's progress and identify new needs during the course (h)

--to search for and make wider use of available resources for learning the subject matter (i)

--to probe one's own questions and seek answers for one's self at times (j)

--to learn to make choices and decisions that enhance one's growth (k)

--to begin identifying and correcting one's own errors and the errors of one's peers (l)

--to help clarify, with the teacher, what the student's and teacher's responsibilities are in the classroom (m)

Teacher Responsibilities

--to have sound knowledge of the subject matter and a clear understanding of one's present beliefs about learning, language, and teaching

--to try to define what students want to learn (a)

--to assess students' abilities in the subject matter at the beginning of the course (a)

--to decide to what extent one can realistically address the variety of needs and goals within a group (a)

--to encourage student suggestions for determining course content, activities, and method of evaluation by allowing opportunities for students' input and incorporating their ideas when appropriate (b)

--to respect and use one's own intuition, knowledge, experience, and ideas in planning, implementing, and evaluating a course (b)

--to facilitate cooperation and respect among students in the group (c)

--to be aware of the students as individuals with their own needs, strengths, learning styles, and goals (d)

--to plan different activities that will accomodate a variety of learning styles (e)

--to identify a student's learning strategies or attitudes that one believes are hindering the student's learning and to guide him in developing different strategies and attitudes that will enhance learning (e)

--to be alert to elements in one's teaching approach and in the classroom environment that might be hindering a student's learning and to make positive changes when possible (f)

--to consistently ask for student feedback on class activities, course content, and the teacher's approach (g)

--to be flexible with the course syllabus as one becomes aware of directions that fit more closely with students' needs and desires (g)

--to be aware, throughout the course, of who has mastered particular objectives and who still needs help (h)

--to help students become more aware of their weaknesses, progress, and potential throughout the course (h)

--to identify and introduce students to the full range of resources available to them (i)

--to encourage students to probe and answer some of their own questions (j)

--to give students meaningful opportunities to make choices and decisions (k)

--to prod students to identify and correct their own and their peers' errors (l)

--to communicate to students the purpose of activities, of each day's lesson, and of the course as a whole

--to attempt a balance between respecting the institution's/ parents'/students' goals and staying true to one's own goals and convictions about learning

--to continue adapting one's approach and experimenting with techniques in order to better enhance students' learning

--to identify for one's self what the student's and the teacher's responsibilities are and to make one's view of these responsibilities clear to students (m)

III. CONCLUSION

The subject of this paper has been learner independence: what it means, where it exists, how it can be encouraged. However, in thinking about this topic, I was led to consider the role and responsibility of the teacher and the ways in which the learner might need the teacher and the classroom environment in order to progress in his learning. I found I couldn't exclude an exploration of the relationship and exchanges between student and teacher if I was to fully understand learning that was increasingly self-directed and self-evaluated.

At times I was disappointed with the small extent to which I could actually encourage learners to become more self-reliant. I wondered if the idea of independence was merely a far-fetched dream that ignored the need for a stonger teacher directive than I wanted to admit. Was the desire to have students take more responsibility for their learning a goal that sounded appealing but that was too hard to realize because students didn't share this goal? I guessed that many students were more comfortable with dependency because it appeared easier. To design and control one's learning takes conscious thought and involves asking questions, making choices and often mistakes, experimenting, and back-tracking. All of this likely stacks up to much work in the learner's eyes. Following what the teacher plans and depending always on her judgement is quicker and more secure. If learning

doesn't occur, one can blame the teacher or the system instead of evaluating one's choices and trying again. Should this goal of independence be for just a few unusual, self-motivated students? Does it create conflicts and do more harm than good by frightening or confusing students who aren't self-motivated? I also questioned if I, as a teacher, secretly feared this goal of having students become more independent because it called for a well-thought-out teaching approach and innovative skills that were very different from what I saw teachers using in most classrooms.

Stevick speaks of the challenges facing a teacher who believes in encouraging students to become more responsible and independent. He says:

> What of the teacher who, instead of offering (or claiming to offer) to the student exactly what he needs, offers instead to try to help him become able to get for himself five times as much? That teacher may be seen as undependable. What of the teacher who refuses to use the coercive kind of authority, who instead learns from her students what they can teach her, even as she invites them to learn what she knows but they do not? Such a teacher may provoke a feeling of uneasiness, for she is unlike the picture we have learned of what a teacher is. And what of the teacher who insists on telling her students that they have powers far beyond what they have dreamed about themselves? She will be punished for disturbing that safe dream, and for destabilizing a picture that had been learned at the cost of so much pain.[20]

Even though he emphasizes the value in offering "more and deeper 'life' to [our] students" through supporting learning that is capable of self-directed growth, he warns us:

> There remains . . . a residue of resistance and resentment against being given opportunities instead

> of rules and vocabulary lists--against being invited to explore one's own potential and to grow, rather than being immediately led to accrue some very specific communicative skills and repertoires for which one foresees a practical need.[21]

I feel the arguments that both teachers and students have against learner independence stem from the fear of an unknown possibility--a fear that would try to defeat us before we try to understand the obligations and benefits of such a new possibility. It may sound logical to argue that a teacher should be solely responsible for deciding the content of a course, for pinpointing and addressing errors, and for evaluating student progress. Most people have such expectations for teachers. However, these arguments would keep us from bucking the status quo with an attempt to work toward the ideal of independence that sounds so appealing. The appeal of this ideal is valid for it would give students the freedom to pursue an education that is more relevant to their individual lives. It would help them build confidence in themselves as capable, determined learners. Finally, it would give them the tools and the practice they need to continue their learning outside of the classroom.

Our own internal arguments as well as those coming from others can prove useful if we change them from fears to cautions. The message that Stevick gives to the teacher in the above passages is cautionary in its import: The value in helping the student realize more independence in her learning is definite, but be aware of the challenges and risks that you are likely to face in working toward your ideals. During my

internship, I realized the difficulty of coordinating my goals with the expectations and goals of my students and the institution. As I gradually learned to listen to others more and to compromise, the degree of independence I had envisioned for students wasn't realized. But it was hinted at. I did implement, in small ways, more room for students to direct and evaluate their own growth in the classroom even as I was working within the limitations that would try to make my goals appear inappropriate or unrealistic.

I realized that before I could successfully hand over to students more control over their learning, they would have to understand why I was handing it over to them and they would need to have a desire for it. Even a limited degree of freedom can spell a feeling of helplessness for the student who is suddenly expected to make more of her own decisions. Before I could begin, I had to answer the question: Shouldn't everyone have the desire to become more independent if our ability to be self-reliant is something we have naturally used from infant stages and something that enables us to learn in a freer and more meaningful way? Deep down, I believe we all do have that desire. We all have demonstrated some form of personalization and control in our education as we learned our language and the ways of our families, communities, and national culture. But for too long our schools have not given us practice in using the same independence and control we have demonstrated outside the classroom inside the classroom. As teachers, we need to show students how natural and revitalizing

classroom learning can be when it is infused with the same curiosity, drive, and self-reliance that we embody as we explore and cope with the world around us. We also have to help students break out of old habits which make them overly dependent on the teacher. If they rely totally on others to design their education, then they are less likely to set learning goals that are personally meaningful to them. Instead they strive merely to pass through the class and the system.

There were three basic ways that I tried to encourage self-directed exploration of the English language during my internship. I had students more clearly communicate to me their personal goals and expectations for the course. I found methods of making students recognize and use the full range of resources available to them. Lastly, I found ways of prodding students to take on more of the initiative and control in the classroom.

We all reaped many benefits when students began to plan and direct their own process of learning. As I gave more decision-making power to individuals or to groups, students began spontaneously to shoulder more responsibility in ways I hadn't envisioned. When I stood outside of groups, observing and listening, and entered as an additional resource only when students requested, they were more responsive to each other's questions and needs. When students directed activities, they often became the ones who shushed and demanded attention from their peers instead of me shushing and demanding for them. As

I made it clear during certain activities that students were to pinpoint and correct their own and their peers' mistakes, they became keener listeners, better guessers, and sharper critics.

I also saw more active engagement with the material. Often students who had initiated their own activity would forget the clock and stay past the hour. They were also very animated--laughing, teasing, and experimenting with English slang while they worked. As I asked students to make simple choices about how to attack a particular assignment or which part of suggested homework to do, I hopefully prodded them to recognize their own preferences and needs. I was also allowing myself to shed the unappealing role of a coercive dictator and the single authority and decision maker in the classroom.

Of course there were many objectives I didn't fully accomplish in the area of encouraging independence during my internship. In my lesson plans, I would often arrange for students to take on a strong leadership role. However, once I was in the classroom, I tended to play more of a mediator/ corrector/choice maker than I had planned or wanted. Because our lessons were only an hour long, I didn't always take the time for students to find and correct their own mistakes, to give me full feedback on a lesson, or to help plan the next week's activities.

Also, I suspected that if I asked students to do more of the designing and directing in the course, they might think I

was shrugging off responsibility that was legitimately mine as a teacher. As I continue to teach, I want to have both students and myself broaden our definition of teacher to include anyone or anything that instructs or guides. This will allow other elements in our lives, aside from the classroom teacher, to assume a teaching role. These other elements might include a certain environment or a particular situation, either of which might be made up of a conglomeration of guiding influences. Other sorts of teachers might include written material and the human guides we interact with daily such as ourselves, peers, parents, neighbors, and strangers.

I want to find more effective ways to have students use the evaluative parts of themselves instead of relying totally on the judgement of the teacher. In this way, I can continue to introduce students to themselves as powerful sources of authority and information. I also want to become more sensitive to the times when my input as a classroom teacher is vital. I believe that we all, as learners, don't always recognize and use the potential that lies within us. But I also believe there are times when the learner feels that a more reliable and clear source of information exists outside of himself. There are times when the learner doesn't know if he is right or what in fact is right. Here is where other resources beyond the student's self come in and where a teacher's input may bring crucial light to a learner's darkness. The challenge for me is in knowing when to jump in

with my guidance. Should I interfere when there is confusion or indecision among students? Or is there always value in allowing students to grapple with some perplexity and indecision and to feel their way through their questions to their own answers?

At times during the internship, I also felt myself scrimping on quality for the sake of quantity. I felt obligated to get students through a large amount of book material, and I didn't always allow time for concentrating on what students themselves suggested. My choice to cover more book material was not strictly due to the institution's demands. I also suspected that parents and students themselves valued the number of visible accomplishments we had made such as subjects we had covered and projects and tests we had completed. I suspected they wouldn't be as impressed with the more intangible accomplishments that I valued such as: the material the students had actually internalized and were ready to use on their own in the real world; the creative abilities they had developed that would allow them to determine for themselves what and how they would learn; the confidence in themselves they had built as self-reliant learners.

I conceded during the internship that allowing students to plan and evaluate and flounder a little took up valuable time. I also knew it would have been infinitely easier and quicker for students to depend on a teacher who was accustomed to saying, "This is who you always need to listen to, that is

what you need to know, here is how you mememorize it, and there is how you apply it. Now learn it!" Yet I have also concluded that it is more effective for students to choose and learn to independently use a small amount of material than for them to skim the surface of a great volume of information. In addition, if I had allowed students to plan and evaluate their growth in more ways, they would have learned something invaluable about themselves as independent learners that would have served them as priceless gifts later on. I am continuing to search for ways of respecting others' expectations for a course while not giving up my own convictions about how to best enhance learning.

A little discouragement can creep into the thought of a teacher who reasons that effectively redirecting a student's learning goals also means having to change our society's beliefs about what true education should include. If our society primarily demands from education only acceptable grades and degrees, then no matter what a student believes is most important in his learning, he is coerced into conforming to our society's priorities. Then he begins to work for, above all, grades and degrees in order to gain acceptance from his family, to continue his education, and to find employment. Attempting to change a whole society's priorities looms as an overwhelming task for teachers. But we can have some influence on those larger, more influential beliefs by having a positive, lasting impact on our students. While recognizing that the demand for good scores and degrees does

prevail in our society and therefore in our schools, we can all begin promoting a type of education that we have thoughtfully explored and that we thoroughly believe in. We can all set objectives for ourselves and our courses that are based on our personal view of learning. We can begin shaping the teaching approach and honing the skills that support this view and that make our objectives realistic. The self-questioning, careful designing, and experimentation that such work involves are bound to foster self-confidence and on-going growth for ourselves as well as for our students.

Notes

[1] I intentionally use both feminine and masculine pronouns throughout the paper when I am referring to the generic learner or student. However, I have chosen to consistently use female pronouns when I am referring to the teacher.

[2] Caleb Gattegno, The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages (New York: Educational Solutions, 1976), p. 45.

[3] Ibid., pp. 45, 46.

[4] Ibid., p. 46.

[5] Earl W. Stevick, A Way and Ways (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 287.

[6] Throughout the paper I refer to both "learner" and "student." I see these terms as basically interchangeable. However, "student" refers more specifically to the learner in the classroom setting while "learner" can refer to one's role outside of the classroom as he is exploring and adapting to the world around him.

[7] The Silent Way is a language teaching/learning approach founded by Caleb Gattegno.

[8] Stevick, p. 45.

[9] Ibid., p. 293.

[10] When I gave a "reformulation," I restated the student's idea or message in words I thought Americans would more likely use. This often involved correcting the student's grammatical mistakes and making different word choices.

[11] Stevick, p. 51.

[12] Gattegno, pp. 7, 8.

[13] Stevick, p. 50.

[14] Ibid., p. 46.

[15] Ibid., pp. 17, 18.

[16] Community Language Learning or Counseling Learning is a language teaching/learning approach initiated by Charles A. Curran.

[17] This is an activity taken from the Community Language Learning approach. The exercise involves students volunteering to practice their pronunciation by choosing a word or group of words out of material displayed in front of the class. The student says the material he wants to practice and the teacher repeats it into his ear behind him. The student can continue practicing the same material while the teacher continues to repeat after him. The student himself determines when to stop the practice.

[18] Stevick, p. 20.

[19] Ibid., p. 18.

[20] Ibid., p. 289.

[21] Ibid., p. 289.

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