

LEARNER

3

AUTONOMY

From Theory to
Classroom Practice

Leni Dam

Open-Access Edition • Originally published in 1995

Learner autonomy

3: From theory to classroom practice

Leni Dam

Authentik

Books for language teachers

Learner Autonomy: From Theory to Classroom Practice

Leni Dam

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This open-access edition published in 2026 by
Candlin & Mynard ePublishing

Originally published in 1995 by Authentik, Ireland,
as *Learner Autonomy 3: From Theory to Classroom Practice*,
in the Learner Autonomy series edited by David Little.

Reprinted editions appeared in 1998, 2004, and 2014.

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The text of this edition is unchanged from the original publication,
apart from minor editorial and formatting adjustments made for
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Cover design: Candlin & Mynard ePublishing

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For my learners and teachers

Series editor: David Little

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Reprinted 1998, 2004, 2014

ISBN 978-87-89288-73-4

Askeladden
lars@filaoffset.dk
Hovedgaden 8,
DK-2690 Karlslunde
Denmark

Typeset in Helvetica and Palatino

Foreword

I suppose one could say that this book has been on its way for more than fifteen years. I began working with learners' involvement in their own learning process in the mid-1970s, but it was without doubt my meeting with Michael Breen and Chris Candlin — and their ideas — during a course on communicative language teaching and learning at Lancaster University in 1978 that marked the beginning of a more conscious and deliberate concern with the development of learner autonomy in my own classes as well as in workshops with other teachers. Thus began a long and fruitful collaboration with colleagues, teachers, teacher trainers and researchers in Denmark and further afield. It is largely through this work that my own awareness of learner autonomy has developed, and thus made this book possible.

My first and biggest thankyou therefore goes to the hundreds of pupils I have taught over the years, including my own daughters, who have willingly shared in the experiment, lent or given me their materials and data for use in workshops, filled in innumerable questionnaires, and patiently received countless visitors and answered all their questions.

I also want to thank my many “groups”, especially in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain and Spain, for their great commitment and for showing that “it is possible” — and not just for one teacher!

Next I want to thank the many individuals who have followed my work with interest, visited my classes, written about my work, supported me, believed in me, and invited me to give talks and run workshops, and have thus enabled me to share my work and ideas with others in Denmark and abroad. In this connection I owe a special debt of gratitude to Gerd Gabrielsen of The Royal Danish Institute of Further Education, with whom I have worked since 1972. Her initiatives, her persistence and

her support have been of enormous value to me.

The questions raised, the doubts encountered, the successes shared in my meetings with all these people have shaped the content of this book. However, if it had not been for David Little, the book would probably never have been published. I am extremely grateful to him for getting me started, for his patience with me while I was writing the book, and for his great help in bringing it to a conclusion. I am also very grateful to Lienhard Legenhausen, University of Münster, for his support while I was writing the book and his suggestions and comments as regards its content.

Copenhagen
February 1995

Leni Dam

Foreword to the fourth printing

2015 marks the twentieth anniversary of the first publication of this short book. Since 1995 we have seen dramatic developments in information technologies and social media, which have brought many changes to language classrooms. No doubt further changes are just around the corner, but the basic principles that govern the development of language learner autonomy described in the book remain unchanged. They include:

- involving learners in their own learning
- getting them to reflect on the learning process and thus raising their awareness
- subjecting everything that happens in the classroom to evaluation – by the learners as well as the teacher
- giving the learners genuine freedom of choice
- making use of the knowledge and skills they already possess
- ensuring that classroom interaction is authentic in the sense that it arises from and responds to the learners' needs and interests
- emphasizing the importance of collaboration.

Furthermore, the tools and methods of classroom management that I describe, like logbooks and posters, helpers and group work, remain foundational, and the experiences I report are no less valid now than they were in 1995. And although I am concerned with learners in the first half of their teens, the same tools and methods can be used, with appropriate adaptation, with learners of any age in any educational context.

The success of my approach was confirmed by the findings of the LAALÉ project (Language Acquisition in an Autonomous Learning Environment), carried out in the 1990s in the class of beginners described in Chapter 2: Beginning English – the first year. The learners in the autonomy class managed remarkably well, not only in their own terms but when compared with learners who used

a well-known communicative textbook. These research findings are reported in a number of articles which have been added to the list of references.

There is one minor change in the text: the word “diary” has been replaced by “logbook”. I made this change shortly after the publication of the book in 1995, because my learners, especially the girls, thought of a diary as an account of one’s learning for personal use only. By contrast, logbooks, as I began to call them, serve public as well as private purposes in the classroom – they are, for example, a useful basis for communication between learners; and, of course, learners are required to share them with the teacher (cf. Dam 2009).

I hope that this new edition of the book will continue to provide inspiration for educators at all levels as well as educators in spe.

Leni Dam
March 2014

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Chapter 1

Developing learner autonomy in a school context

- What do we do?
- Why do we do it?
- How do we do it?
- With what results?

“Learner independence“, “learning how to learn“, “co-operative teaching and learning“, “self-access learning“: these are just a few of the many terms used to denote learners’ active involvement in and responsibility for their own learning process, especially in the area of foreign language learning. Another such term, “learner autonomy“, is well on the way to becoming one of the buzz-words of the 1990s. These terms, and others like them, embrace a wide range of pedagogical and methodological ideas. Their usefulness, of course, depends on the extent to which the principles that underlie them are made plain to the reader. Thus I must begin this book by offering definitions of “learner autonomy” and “autonomous learner”:

Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one’s own learning in the service of one’s needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person. An auto-

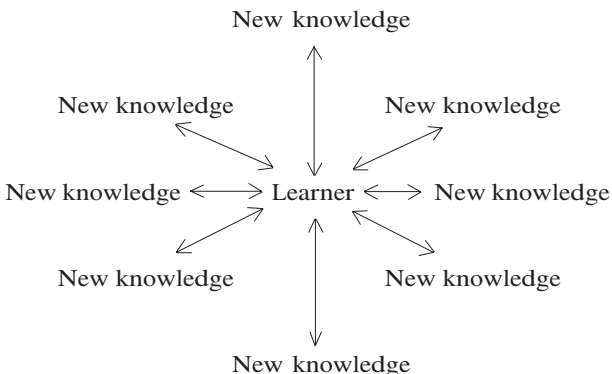
mous learner is an active participant in the social processes of learning, but also an active interpreter of new information in terms of what she/he already and uniquely knows. It is essential that an autonomous learner is stimulated to evolve an awareness of the aims and processes of learning and is capable of the critical reflection which syllabuses and curricula frequently require but traditional pedagogical measures rarely achieve. An autonomous learner knows how to learn and can use this knowledge in any learning situation she/he may encounter at any stage in her/his life. (Bergen 1990, p.102)

Why do we see the development of learner autonomy as desirable, important, even necessary? Here are three of the reasons why I have tried to develop learner autonomy in my own classes and, via initial and in-service teacher training, to persuade other teachers to work along the same lines.

In the mid 1970s I started for the first time to work with pupils of 14-16 years in unstreamed language classes. I was up against the tired-of-school attitude that this age group often displays, as well as a general lack of interest in English as a school subject. In order to survive I felt I had to change my usual teacher role. I tried to involve the pupils — or rather I forced them to be involved — in the decisions concerning, for example, the choice of classroom activities and learning materials. I soon realized that giving the learners a share of responsibility for planning and conducting teaching-learning activities caused them to be actively involved and led to better learning. It also increased their capacity to evaluate the learning process. In this way a virtuous circle was created: awareness of HOW to learn facilitates and influences WHAT is being learned and gives an improved insight into HOW to learn.

“To learn is to develop relationships between [what the learner knows already and the new system being

presented to him], and this can only be done by the learner himself' (Barnes 1976, p.81):



From this point of view communicative competence in a second — or third — language is continuous with the communicative competence that the learner already has in her or his first language. This continuity suggests that learners should be capable of taking responsibility for their own further communicative development, and should be given the opportunity to do so. Seen in a lifelong perspective, aims for language learning can and should only be decided by learners themselves.

No school, or even university, can provide its pupils with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their adult lives. Adult life, in its personal as well as its vocational aspects, is far too diverse and too subject to change for any educational curriculum to attempt to provide a detailed preparation. It is more important for a young person to have an understanding of himself or herself, an awareness of the environment and its workings, and to have learned how to think and how to learn. (Trim 1988, p.3)

By developing learner autonomy in the classroom I hope to strengthen my learners' "ability to make their own decisions about what to do rather than being influenced by others or told what to do" (Collins COBUILD 1987, p.85), outside school and later in life. I hope to prepare them for situations where they are given "the right of self-government or management of their own affairs" (Longman 1991, p.59).

But how can this goal be achieved? How can we create an environment in which the learners are both capable of taking charge of their own learning and willing to do so? What is the difference between a teacher-directed teaching/learning environment and a teacher/learner-directed learning environment? In my experience there are five main differences:

1. *A shift in focus from teaching to learning.* This shift entails, among other things, that "what to learn" and "how to learn" become central concerns for teacher and learners alike. It also entails the selection of learning activities and materials that are apt to involve learners in their own learning process, which includes the development of communicative competence in their target language.
2. *A change in the learner's role.* The learner's ideas about language learning and his or her competencies and insights are the essential point of departure in creating an autonomous learning environment. The learner is made aware of the various factors that contribute to the learning process — official as well as other aims, potentially useful materials and activities, social and affective influences, the teacher's role, etc. But more than this, the learner is required to define his or her own objectives, to choose relevant materials and activities, and to evaluate the outcome of learning.

-
3. *A change in the teacher's role.* Rather than direct a pre-determined and teacher-decided teaching sequence, the teacher will
- focus on learning rather than teaching;
 - be engaged in the learner's learning process;
 - be open to learners' ideas and suggestions;
 - support learners' initiatives;
 - initiate or encourage further activities;
 - observe and analyse learning behaviour for later evaluation with learners;
 - map out working methods and ways of evaluating progress in collaboration with the learners;
 - be a consultant as well as a participant and a co-learner in the learning process.
4. *The role of evaluation.* Evaluation is the pivot of the learning process. It depends on repeated attempts to answer questions like
- What am I/are you/are we doing?
 - Why am I/are you/are we doing it?
 - What was good? Why?
 - What was bad? Why?
 - What can it be used for?
5. *A view of the language classroom as a rich learning*

environment. The classroom is not regarded as an artificial environment. On the contrary, it is thought of in much the same way as a workshop or a laboratory, where

- things are being tried out or investigated;
- learners are teachers and teachers are learners;
- process and content are mutually dependent.

These changes cannot, of course, be achieved from one day to the next. Developing learner autonomy is a long, difficult and often painful process, not least for the teacher. It demands constant effort on the part of teacher and learners, not only as individuals but in collaboration with one another; for it is in the interactive process of collaboration that growth-points occur. Learner autonomy is not „something teachers do to their learners“ (Little 1991, p.3); rather, it is an experience-based learning process for teachers and learners alike. It cannot be taught, and there is no simple recipe for its implementation. Essentially, it is a matter of getting started, of taking the first small steps towards creating a learning environment where learners are encouraged to make decisions concerning their own learning, where the teacher dares to let go, where evaluation becomes an integral part of the course, where the learning process is made visible, where it is difficult to separate process from content.

This book does not lay down a set of rules to be followed; rather, it seeks to take the reader into my classrooms by describing my attempts to foster the development of learner autonomy over many years. In this way I hope that it will be possible for readers to relate the content of the book to their own teaching/learning experience and environment. I also hope that the examples of classroom processes and the reactions of teacher and learners will be useful for teacher trainers and teacher trainees.

The book is concerned with the five main changes that occur when we move from a teacher-directed teaching environment to a teacher/learner-centred learning environment. From my many years' work with teachers from all over Europe I know that these are the areas that cause most problems because they are "new"; they are also the areas that are of most interest. The data on which the book is based has been collected over the last fifteen years. In many ways this data has of course been extremely valuable; on the other hand, there is so much of it that it has often been difficult to decide exactly what to choose. In my selection I have, however, tried to cover the whole span of my involvement with learner autonomy, starting with my very first autonomous class in 1979 and coming right up to 1994.

The rest of the book is structured as follows. Chapter 2 takes the reader into a 1993 class of 11-year-old beginners, describing in detail their first three weeks of English. Chapter 3 then focuses on important elements and useful tools in the organization of classroom work developed over the years. Chapter 4 deals with evaluation, which I described above as the pivot of learner autonomy. It looks at evaluation in general, and gives detailed accounts of end-of-term evaluations carried out since 1980. In Chapter 5 we move on to a class of 15-year-old intermediate-level students in 1989 — a class where learner autonomy had been practised for four or five years. In particular we see how end-of-year evaluation is used at the beginning of the next school year, and we look at group work at this level. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes from the teacher's but also the learners' point of view successes as well as problems encountered in the teaching/learning process. It also summarizes what at the time of writing I consider to be the most important factors in the development of learner autonomy.

Chapter 2

Beginning English – the first year

The class is a fifth form of 11-year-old mixed-ability children. There are ten girls and eleven boys. At the beginning of the fifth form eight of the learners received remedial teaching in Danish, and two of them in maths. In other subjects they are used to a traditional teacher-centred learning environment. In their first two years at school they were placed in groups. This arrangement, however, caused too much noise, and their form master then placed them in pairs facing the blackboard. I changed this seating arrangement for my English lessons after the first week. We have four weekly lessons of 45 minutes, arranged as two double periods of 90 minutes twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Our aims for our learners at beginners' level are:

- awareness of why, what and how to learn English;
- awareness of possible activities supporting what and how to learn;
- awareness of their own role as well as the role of others in the learning process;
- readiness to co-operate;
- willingness to make choices and accept responsibility for them.

How to get started — an account of the first three weeks

- What are the first steps towards learner autonomy?
- How is it possible to get the learners involved in their own learning?
- What kind of planning is necessary from the teacher's point of view?

These are some of the many questions that teachers ask themselves when trying to set up a teaching/learning environment aimed at developing learner autonomy. This chapter will take the reader into a beginners' English class and will describe in some detail a number of lessons from the beginning of term and three weeks onwards. In this way I hope not only to give answers to the above questions, but also to give the reader an impression of how principles of autonomous language learning can be put into practice.

The description of the lessons includes

- how learners make use of their existing knowledge of language, in particular the target language;
- how learners make use of their knowledge of communication in their mother tongue;
- how group work is organized and developed;
- how the individual learner's responsibility for his or her own work as well as the work of others is developed;

- teacher responsibilities at this stage;
- shared experiences in class, including evaluation of the ongoing teaching/learning process.

The description is based on the following documentation from the three weeks in question:

Learners' diaries

I follow the same three learners during the lessons of the first three weeks and quote from their unedited diaries:

Learner A — a girl, who is clearly above “average”, intelligent, eager to learn and full of initiative.

Learner B — a boy who in all respects can be described as “average”: he does whatever he is told to do and works consistently, but seldom takes any initiative.

Learner C — a boy whose achievements in reading and writing are below average; he finds it difficult to concentrate and stick to one thing. When taking over the class I was told that I probably couldn't expect any homework from him.

The teacher's diary

In all my classes I keep a diary to document and evaluate the ongoing teaching/learning process. The diary contains provisional plans for the lessons — *WHAT* to do, based partly on the outcome of previous lessons, partly on the teacher's wish for a particular focus for the lesson in question. In the description of the first three weeks these considerations are included under *WHY*. The diary also includes remarks on the course of the lesson — things that were added or left out. Finally, it contains comments on the lesson as well as things to remember for the following lesson (see Figure 1).

Provisional plan	Comments
1. Day / Date	
2. New groups?	
– Who is working with whom?	2. A. Helene / Anders would like to work together. Were placed next to Emrah / Max. ⇒ Make a play?
– Who is doing what?	B. Lasse / Jacob move over to Jan / Michael! Jacob seems to feel better there.
– Group leaders?	C. Anja / Louise / Louise form a new group ⇒ word cards?
3. Share homework in new groups	
4. Work in groups	4. Till 9.20?
5. Homework for ...	No problems today?
6. "Together":	It was good with a new group.
– Evaluation (+ / -)	We did not work very hard!
– New games / ideas?	We worked well, it was fun!
– Books to be read aloud?	See poster!
– Song	Nanna's cartoon "Shut up".
	Karsten's book about football: Anne-Mette: "I did not understand it!"
	There wasn't time.

Figure 1 – Extract from teacher's diary

Posters

Decisions and evaluations by the whole class, groups of learners, or individuals are sometimes discussed and agreed orally, but in most cases they are written on posters on the wall of the classroom and/or in the teacher's and the learners' diaries.

Learners' products

Learner-produced materials such as word cards, dominoes, picture lotto and small books also give important insights into the teaching/learning process.

The description of each lesson starts with the teacher's provisional plans for the lesson as entered in her diary. This is followed by her account of the actual lesson, which includes extracts from the selected learner diaries. The teacher's comments on the lesson conclude each description.

A first meeting with the class

I did not know the class when I took them over, and they did not know me. I therefore asked for permission to pay them a short visit before the end of the previous term. My reasons for doing so were:

- To introduce myself and show that I was interested in them.
- To get a first impression of the learners and the degree of contact they had already had with English. For example, I asked them in English what their names were and what they could say in English. In other classes I have asked the learners to make drawings of themselves and their interests and write down any English words they happened to know.
- To give them their first "homework": "Please bring

some ‘English’ to the classroom when we meet after the holidays. It can be a T-shirt with an English word or phrase written on it. It can also be an English word you have seen somewhere, or an English book.“

My reason for giving them this “homework“ was to show them from the very beginning that the language is “out there“ — ready to be taken into the classroom and investigated, worked with, and used by all of us.

The first English lesson at the beginning of term — Wednesday 12 August

My plan for the lesson as entered in my diary was as follows:

- 1 What: Say welcome and repeat the learners’ names.
Why: It is vital that I get to know their names as quickly as possible — partly to show my respect for them as individuals, partly to establish the beginnings of a personal relationship.
- 2 What: Look at materials brought in by the learners.
Why: I have given them a task. It is my responsibility to follow it up. And if they have brought along anything they will probably be eager to show it to me and the rest of the class.
- 3 What: Give each learner *The Oxford English Picture Dictionary*¹.
Why: A real English book that can be used by weak as well as strong learners. A book that can be used by everybody, including eager parents.

1 There are many English picture dictionaries available on the market. I have chosen *The Oxford English Picture Dictionary*, E. C. Parnwell, Oxford University Press, because it is handy and because it contains a big and useful vocabulary for beginners of English (numbers, colours, names of days/ months/seasons, as well as hundreds of nouns grouped according to subject matter) .

- 4 What: Introduce “My English Diary” — an ordinary exercise book — to the learners and ask them to write about themselves in it in English.
Why: Partly to get to know the learners better. Partly to show the learners that with a little help they can communicate in English — their first real communicative task.
- 5 What: A song: “Have you seen the Muffin Man?”
Why: An enjoyable joint activity where you use the target language automatically; and yet, language is introduced for later use: “Have you seen?” “Yes, I have!” “No, I haven’t!”

The lesson

Not all, but many of the children had brought along some “English”. For instance:

- a cap bearing the words “I might be getting old, but I refuse to grow up”;
- tourist brochures about Denmark written in English as well as Danish;
- cuttings showing advertisements with English text, for example: “Johnny Walker, I want the best. How about you?”;
- *The South China Morning Post* of 27 June;
- a joke that one of the learners had made up:

Two horses stod on the field then The first said to The other: Take cover The Tractor has Broken.

The materials were shown to the class and read aloud either by the learners themselves or by me. After the presentation I asked the learners which materials we could keep in the classroom. It turned out that we could keep a lot, though not the cap. These materials were

placed in a box I had labelled “Our Own Materials“.

Then I distributed the *Picture Dictionary* to the learners. They all started leafing through the book and commenting to their neighbours on what they saw. Already they were involved in “English“. After a while I handed out the exercise books with the following comments:

This book is going to be your own diary. (*I showed them my diary*). A book where you can write down the things you do, the things you like or do not like, words you would like to remember. On the first page (*I showed them the first page*) I would like you to tell me something about yourself in English. Think about what you would like to tell me. If you don't know how to say it in English you can ask me — or perhaps you can find the word in your *Picture Dictionary* — or perhaps your partner knows how to say it.

Words and phrases needed by individual learners were:

*my name is — I live in — my birthday is on —
every day — I like — I have — my telephone number is —
about myself — bird — dog — boys' brigade —
girls' brigade — rabbit — fishing — swimming —
dancing — I / you / it / he / she — am / are / is — on — and
— playing football — hobby / hobbies — mother / father —
animal — a — comes — sailing — riding — they are —
sister / sisters — brother / brothers — twice / once*

As soon as a word or an expression was asked for I wrote it on a poster (a piece of A3 paper stuck to the blackboard with magnets) for everybody to see. The posters nearly filled the whole blackboard — a good start to building up a class vocabulary.

Here is what the three learners wrote about themselves:

Learner A

My name is Bitten Madsen. I live in Strandengen 26, 2340

Staden and my telephone number is 42152344. I have a cat and a rabbit. they are so kjuet. My rabbit its a old goy, he is 6.7 years old. My cat's name is Multe and my rabbit's name is Buller. My birthday is on 8th September. My hobbies is: girls' brigade / boys brigade, my cat and my rabbit, animals, clothes, music, swimming, gym. And more. My Mother work in a bank and my father is a sign painter. I have no sisters and brothers.

Learner B

My name is Esmon. I like playing football I have a brother and sister. I have two birds. I have two parents. I have a bike. I have been in Germany, Netherland, Switzerland, Belgium in my summer holiday, and my father drove the car, it was very fun.

Learner C

My name is Hans. I live in Krogen. My birthday is the 2. April 8.42. My telephone number is 42152134. I like birds. My hobby is birds. a I like gymnastics My brothers name is Martin My sisters name is Tina My mothers name is Lis. My fathers name is Bjarne.

When there were ten minutes of the lesson left I interrupted the activity and told them that they were welcome to write more at home — “if you can, and want to!”

Finally “The Muffin Man“ was distributed and glued into the diary on page 2. When we began to sing, the students quickly grasped the tune as well as the text.

Focus on the use of the picture dictionary — Monday 17 August

In my provisional plan for the day I had entered:

1. What: Look at brought-in materials. Learners present “About myself” to the class.

Why: Continued focus on the learners and their products.

2. What: Continued use of the *Picture Dictionary* by finding words of interest to the learners.

Why: Let the learners get personally involved in the dictionary and its possibilities.

The lesson

On this day even more materials had been brought along. They were shown to the class and if possible placed in the box labelled “Our Own Materials“. The learners were also very eager to show one another and me what they had produced “About myself“. When asked, six of them, including learners A, B and C, wanted to read their descriptions aloud to the class. The rest of the class listened with great interest.

I then asked the learners to open their *Picture Dictionary*:

Please find words that you find “funny” or “exciting” or “useful” — words you would like to remember. Write them down in your diaries and make drawings of your words. It might be easier to remember them then.

If we look at the words chosen by learners A, B, and C, there are obvious differences both in the number of words chosen and their thematic content. It is worth noting that the “brightest” pupil did not come up with the most interesting words or the longest list, though the words she chose probably indicate her immediate needs and interests.

Learner A — *book, cat, rabbit, bike, house, dog, bird, horse*

Learner B — *door, sky, lightning, sun, key, book, cup, carpet, light, bath, tent, spade, hotel, cloud*

Learner C — *octopus, shark, whale, hedgehog, clown, bat, submarine, helicopter, oiltanker*

For homework the learners were told to find pictures of — or draw — at least five things for which they knew or would like to know the English word.

Focus on homework — Wednesday 19 August

From my provisional plan:

1. What: Show pictures/drawings to neighbours and say the words.
Why: In most cases it is of importance to a person to be able to share his or her “product” with someone. In our context it is equally important to indicate to the learners that this someone does not necessarily have to be the teacher — which is often the case in other subjects.
2. What: “Homework” to be further developed. Introduce my reasons for requiring homework. Collect learners’ ideas and suggestions for homework — “What can I do at home if I want to become better at English?”
Why: As a teacher I see homework (in the sense of being concerned with English outside the classroom) as useful because:
 - It shows the learners that learning English is not restricted to the classroom — quite the opposite.
 - It combines the classroom and the outside world. On the one hand language from “out there” can be taken into the classroom and investigated and worked with. What has been learned in the classroom can, on the other hand, be made use of outside the classroom.
 - Many parents as well as many learners believe strongly in the positive effects of homework, and it is a tradition in the Danish school system.

It is important, though, that the “homework” in question is something that the learner is involved or interested in, and

something that he / she can manage on his / her own;
parents might not be able to help.

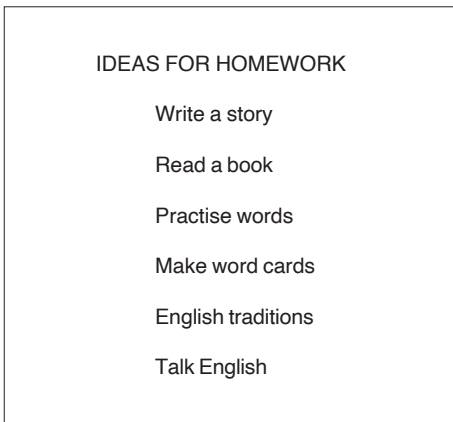
3. What: Watch a video: “Goldilocks and the three Bears”.
Why: Give the learners the experience of following an English film without subtitles.

The lesson

A lot of effort had been put into finding pictures or making drawings at home. I began the lesson by getting pupils to share homework with their neighbours, which gave me time to quickly review the various products and give individual help with some missing words, e.g., *guinea-pigs*, when walking around the classroom. When everyone seemed to have finished I took over:

It was me who decided what you should do at home for today. What else could one do at home in order to learn English? Please write down in your diary any ideas you might have under the heading “Ideas for homework”.

The ideas from the individual learners were also written on a poster:



(Nanna and her mother had tried making word cards with small pieces of paper, writing the Danish word on one side and the English word on the other. Anne Mette's mother had started telling her about English Christmas traditions.)

The learners were then asked to choose from the list and write their choice under the heading: "Homework for Monday". This is what our three learners wrote:

Learner A

talk English, write a story

Learner B

read a book

Learner C

laese-sake-oeve ("read-talk [wrongly spelt] practise")

Forming groups and continued focus on homework — Monday 24 August

From my provisional plan:

1. What: Forming groups for the first time.
Why: Up till now the learners have been placed in pairs facing the blackboard and the teacher's desk as in all their other lessons. Today, however, they are going to work with things that they themselves have decided to do — things they are responsible for. It is therefore important to shift the focus from me and the blackboard to the learners themselves.
2. What: Work with homework — share homework with partners; joint classroom talk about their work with homework.
Why: As mentioned before, it is satisfactory to be able to share one's efforts, one's work, one's product with someone else. In a learning-centred environment it is also important to show the learners that by sharing and discussing their

homework with somebody else they might gain even more insight into the work done; that it is not primarily a question of getting your product “corrected”, even though your partner might point out misspellings or wrong pronunciations or suggest alternatives. “Sharing homework” is part of the learning process. By sharing homework with peers the shift from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness is further stressed, apart from the fact that it makes it possible for the teacher to observe the learners or to share homework with individuals if a partner is missing.

Also, as my views on the functions and overall status of “homework” differ from more traditional views which the learners might meet in other subjects, a joint class talk about their experiences at home seems to be called for.

The lesson

After a few introductory remarks, such as “Good morning!“, “How are you today?“, “Day and date?“ I asked the learners to turn around and face the pair sitting behind them and share homework with other members in their group.

Everybody had been very busy at home. Many learners had taken up the idea of making word cards, and some had been to the school library to borrow English books. These books were far too difficult for them, but they had struggled with them, and they were eager to show the group which words they could understand.

After fifty minutes, when everybody had shared his/her homework with the group and I had had time to join all the groups, we placed ourselves in a kind of circle for our joint talk:

Who has done something exciting, funny, good, difficult, boring or impossible at home?

Oral accounts were given (in Danish). Products were shown and in some cases read aloud (e.g., small books

and stories). Experiences and new ideas resulted in a revision of the “Homework“ poster. “Read a book“ was, for example, changed to “read a text“; to “write a story“ was added “or write a letter“. From the diaries I could see that the new ideas were used for “Homework for Wednesday“:

Learner A

write a story, read a book, write a letter, talk english with my father and Mother, klippe et billede ud og s'tte det ind [“cut out a picture and stick it into my book“].

Learner B

read a book

Learner C

read, practise, write a letter

Learner A's homework for today was a story about her cat:

Multe.

Hello, my name is Multe and I a'm a cat. I a'm grey and I have 31cm tail. I love food and I beg and beg for more! At the neighbours live another cat, vi fight a little. My owner's name is Bitten and she loves me! Some times I sit in the window at the first floor, ther I can see everything! Sometimes I lay on my owners legs and sleep. In my garden I try to catch the blackbirds. One day a tog a mouse into the house. Birgitte wan't to tage me and her mother wan't to get me out with the mouse! I got out with the mouse, it ran away! in the morning befor Bitten go to shool I lay on my pillow and sleep. I love tuesday, because then Bitten first go to shool at 10 oclock! I a'm not so good at english so I finish nu.

Introducing a new activity — Wednesday 26 August

From my provisional plan:

1. What: Introduce a new activity — “Find a picture, write a story”.

Why: extend the activity “find / draw words” to include text and not just words; make use of the experience, the words and the expressions from the first day’s task: “About myself”; make use of the *Picture Dictionary*. This is an activity which can / might benefit from working in pairs / groups and from peer-tutoring.

How:

- Starting from a picture that I will bring along, a joint story will be built up and written on posters for everybody to see.

Why: Give the class an idea as to how it might be done — a kind of recipe.

- Individually, in pairs or in groups the learners will be asked to find their own picture (from the old magazines) and make up their own story.

Why: Make use of the joint experience and perhaps make use of some of the words and expressions included in the story.

- Together we will listen to some of the stories from those who would like to read them aloud.

Why: Show the learners how the stories differ in length and content, but at the same time stress that we have done something “together” and that each story has its own special value.

The lesson

It was Anja’s birthday, so we started by singing “Happy birthday to you”, and the learners wrote in their diaries: “It is Anja’s birthday today.”

It was then time to introduce the new activity — writing a story. For this purpose I had found a big picture of a dark-haired woman dressed in a bright yellow sweater. The picture was placed on the black-board with a magnet.

T: The very first day you wrote something about yourself in your diary. Today we are going to write a story about this girl — or lady — together. Have a look at your own stories. How can we begin our story?

L1: My name is ...

T: Yes? [*writes on a poster stuck to the blackboard*]

L2: Grethe.

All: No.

L3: She is too dark to be called that.

L4: Isabel.

L5: Yes, that's better.

T: [*writes "Isabel"*] Yes?

L6: I live in ...

T: [*writes*]

L7: Hvad hedder Spanien? ["What is Spain called in English?"]

T: Spain.

L7: I live in Spain. [*General approval of Spain*]

T: And?

In this way the story was built up. The woman's age caused a lot of discussion. In the final version one can see that nearly all the learners had projected their own interests onto Isabel. As regards her family life, the boys were sure that she had a boy friend. His name, Cherry, is not

totally arbitrary either. It was agreed that it had to be a foreign name. But which one? Then Nanna remembered that some Dutch people had visited them in the holidays and the man's name was something like "Cherry". Immediately "Cherry" was accepted by the class. The final story, written on three posters on the blackboard, went like this:

My name is Isabel. I live in Spain. I am 22 years old. I like elastics, and yellow, and to swim, football, and fashion shows, cycling, horses, shooting. I am not married, but I have a boy friend. His name is Cherry.

Before starting work on their own stories, the learners were asked to turn round and form groups as before in order to be able to help each other. As I had experienced before with similar activities, it took a long time to find the right picture — not every picture can be used. The reason, of course, is that the process of formulating the text already starts with the choice of picture. Not much help was needed from me during the work. A few questions were answered by referring to the posters. At the end of the lesson we had time to hear seven stories and sing "The Muffin Man".

These were the stories written by learners A, B and C:

Learner A

My name is Jeanette. I live in Denmark. I am 20 years old. I am a model. I have a sister, her name is Camilla. She is 15 years old. I like clothes, cats, to swim, to gym, and to surf, and my cat Bella, and horses. I don't have a boy friend because i travel so much.

Learner B

My name is Sara. I live in England. I am 21 years old, and I have a boyfriend. His name is Brandon. My hobbies is Horses, swimming, footbaal.

Learner C

My name is Leonardo. I live in USA I am 16, I like pissa and I do not like to fight. My brothers name is Donnatlo and Rafael and Mike. My teacher name is spillter.

Focus on “free activities” and helpers — Monday 31 August (the beginning of their third week)

From my provisional plan:

1. **What:** Make a list of activities together with the learners based on their own experience so far; a list from which they can make their own selection when working individually, in pairs or as a group.
Why: Taking into consideration the individual learner’s interests and needs by letting them choose for themselves; making it possible to pass over more responsibility to the learners.
2. **What:** Introduce “helpers”.
Why: I feel that the learners do not make sufficient use of each other — of peer-tutoring; too often they return to the traditional teacher-learner role and ask me for help. I have a feeling that I am helping everybody and nobody at the same time — some kind of octopus syndrome.

The lesson

The learners are now placed in their original groups from the beginning of the lesson. They have turned their tables slightly so that it is possible for all of them to see the blackboard.

- T: Today it is up to you to decide what to do when working with English. I would like, though, to make a list of things you find interesting, similar to the list of “homework” we have got already. Let me hear your ideas.

This is the result:

WHAT TO DO!

play our games / wordcards

share homework

find a picture / write a story

make small books

read small books

make dominoes and other games

write a letter

find new words in the *Picture Dictionary*

talk English

T: You can now choose what to do from this list. Within your group you can work individually or in pairs or as a whole group. Remember to enter into your diary what you are doing and new words you might come across when working with your activity. If there is time for more than one activity then give them numbers.

But there is a problem. I would like to sit down quietly with the groups without being disturbed, and at the moment I feel that too many of you want my help at the same time. Would any of you be willing to be “helpers” when I am working with somebody?

Eleven of the learners volunteered and their names were written on a poster. I am sure that many, myself

included, knew that probably only half of the pupils who had offered to be helpers would be a reasonable substitute for me. But none of them said anything, and neither did I. The fact that they had put their names on the list showed at least initiative, personal confidence, willingness to co-operate, and a social attitude to shared problems. I demanded that from now on the learners consult at least three names from the list before asking me for help.

The activities chosen by our three learners were:

Learner A

1. Play my game
2. Anja's wordcards — swan
3. Make small books

Learner B

Wordcards with Max

Learner C

Make play: Domino

Focus on evaluation — Wednesday 9 September

From my provisional plan:

What: Jointly shared, written evaluation at the end of the lesson.

Why: So far evaluations of the lessons — “comments on today's work” — had been done orally at the end of the lesson when sitting in our “circle”. They hadn't taken up much time, but had simply been general questions like: Good things / bad things today? Why? Some learners had been able to or had tried to answer in English, others had answered in Danish. A poster with written comments would support written, individual comments in the future.

The lesson

Evaluation came at the end of the lesson. As often

before, the learners were asked to think of good or bad things from the day's work; the difference was that this time I would write down their comments on a poster — in English.

<p style="text-align: center;">GOOD THINGS</p> <p>worked on our own</p> <p>we decided ourselves what to do</p> <p>had a good time</p> <p>worked well together</p> <p>helped each other</p> <p>worked together AND individually</p> <p>good with a new group</p> <p>learned many new words</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BAD THINGS</p> <p>nothing</p> <p>didn't work well together</p> <p>want to work on my own</p>

We talked about what could be done about the “bad things“. They turned out to be easy to deal with because

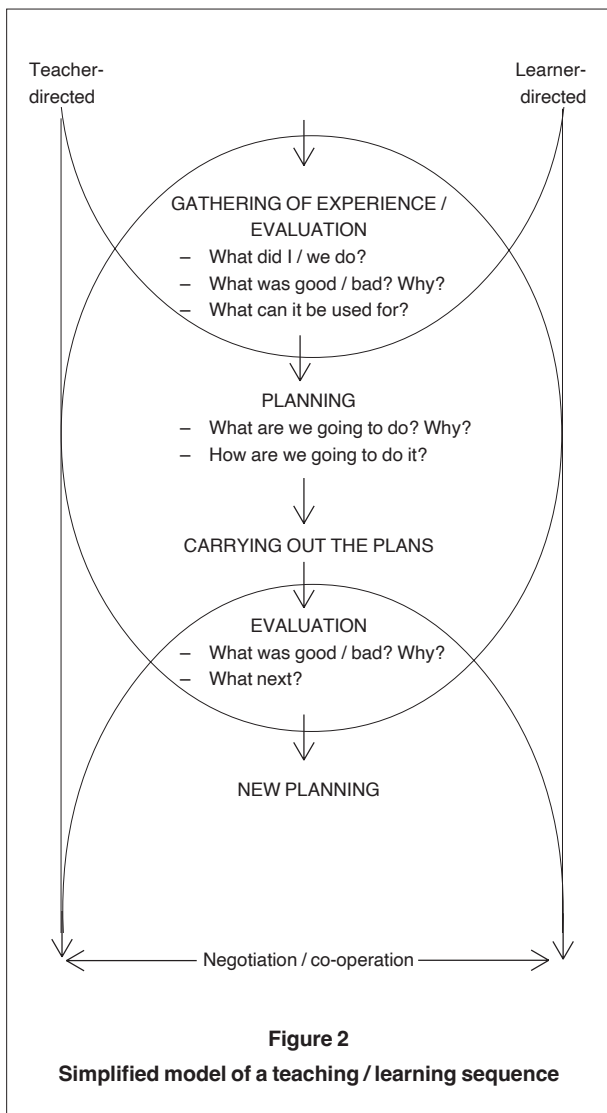
they had all come from the same group. It was decided that the pupil who wanted to work on her own could do so as soon as she had shared homework with one of the group members. The rest of the class pointed out that it was good to be in a group, however, because then you could get help from the others. The three other group members claimed that they could easily agree on what to do.

After three weeks of English

By now the learners are expected to be responsible for choice of partners, activity and homework. In many cases the choices will, of course, be made in negotiation with fellow learners and the teacher. However, the learners are capable of taking some of the decisions concerning their own learning process.

In terms of the simplified model of a teaching/learning sequence shown in Figure 2, the first move from left to right — from teacher-centred teaching to learner-centred learning — has begun. During the following months a number of new issues concerning the learning process and the learners' awareness of learning will be taken up in class in the same way as the issues described in the first three weeks, e.g.:

- Why and how do you learn English?
- How to tackle an unknown text?
- What is it to “learn“ a word?
- What is a good talk?
- What is a good teacher?
- What is a good learner?



Chapter 3

Important elements in the organization of classroom work

The general course of an English lesson

After three weeks of English — 12 lessons — a general framework for an English period had developed:

- “Input” from the teacher
- “Fixed procedures”
- “Free activities”
- Homework for the following lesson(s)
- “Together” — a whole class session, including evaluation.

“Input“ from the teacher can take many different forms. For example, it might entail distributing a new song; or introducing ideas for new activities; or supporting the organization of new groups; or making sure that everybody feels comfortable about partners, plans, equipment, etc.; or checking whether the groups are ready to present their work at the end of the lesson; or informing the learners about curricular guidelines or other “musts“.

“Fixed procedures“ are activities which in a teacher-centred environment are directed and/or controlled by the teacher, but in an autonomous learning environment are passed over to the learners to manage themselves. “Fixed procedures“ include sharing homework in pairs

or groups and “Two Minutes’ Talk“, also in pairs or groups. “Two Minutes’ Talk“ is a short informal conversation between two learners, where the content is decided by the learners themselves — a kind of small talk. “Fixed procedures“ have several advantages: they require the learners to be active rather than the teacher; they pass over responsibility to the learners; they leave time and space for the teacher to observe and reflect on the ongoing classroom process rather than controlling it. The activities placed under “fixed procedures“ will of course vary from teacher to teacher and from class to class. They will also vary according to the official demands and constraints put upon teachers and learners and the specific needs of teacher and class when organizing classroom work.

“Free activities“ are based on previous experience and previous planning, whether in groups or individually. They are chosen either by the learners themselves or by the learners in co-operation with the teacher within the overall aims determined by:

- curricular guidelines
- the teacher
- the learners
- the teacher and learners together

Homework for the following lesson is decided by the learners and — very occasionally — by the teacher. In order to support the learners in deciding what to do at home, lists of ideas for homework put forward by the learners and/or the teacher (cf. Chapter 2, pp.18ff. above) have gradually been compiled. The actual choice of homework will depend partly on overall aims, partly on individual needs and interests. It will also take into account the following criteria for choice of homework set up by

the learners themselves:

CRITERIA FOR CHOICE OF HOMEWORK

- Learn English
- Not too easy and not too difficult because then it gets boring
- Something you are really interested in and want to do
- Something you can manage on your own — parents might not be able to help

At beginners' level homework could be:

- Find a picture, write a text.
- Make a small book.
- Read in my book called ... from page
- Find ten new words in my dictionary and make sentences with them.

At intermediate level it could be:

- Read two chapters in our book and come up with at least two discussion points for each chapter to be discussed in our group.
- Prepare and write down "Two Minutes' Talk" on a topic to be presented to the class.
- Write an article for our newspaper.

Tuesday 5th October

1. October page / words.
2. Share homework + 2 minutes' talk.
3. Focus on diaries!
Why diaries?
(Individually / class)
(See poster)
4. "Together"
 - see a play
 - comments on the play!

Diaries — Why?

- Learn days of the week + the months.
- Learn a lot of new words to use later on.
- Like a calendar – you can see what you have done.
- All the things in one place – no loose papers.
- You become better at writing.
- Good for remembering things (homework).
- Keep track of what you are doing.
- The teacher can see what we have worked with.
- "My own, private English book."

Figure 3

Lesson posters

“Together“, a whole class session, including evaluation, is of the utmost importance in the autonomous classroom, because this is where experiences, learning outcomes, feelings, etc. are shared. For example:

- Results from the work in groups: show a play, read aloud a story, present a newspaper.
- “Something nice“ — a game, a song, a story, a poem or part of a film.
- Evaluations of and/or comments on the work undertaken (day, week, longer period of time).

This general framework of an English lesson is of course an open agenda in the sense that activities are normally allowed whatever time they take. For this reason it can happen that some activities or parts of activities are postponed to the following lesson due to lack of time. It can also happen that at certain stages — whether at beginners’ or at intermediate level — there is a need to dwell on just one or two of the activities and leave out the others for the time being. The framework might also cover not just a lesson, but a week’s work. Examples of posters that respectively summarize a lesson and expand on one aspect are given in Figure 3.

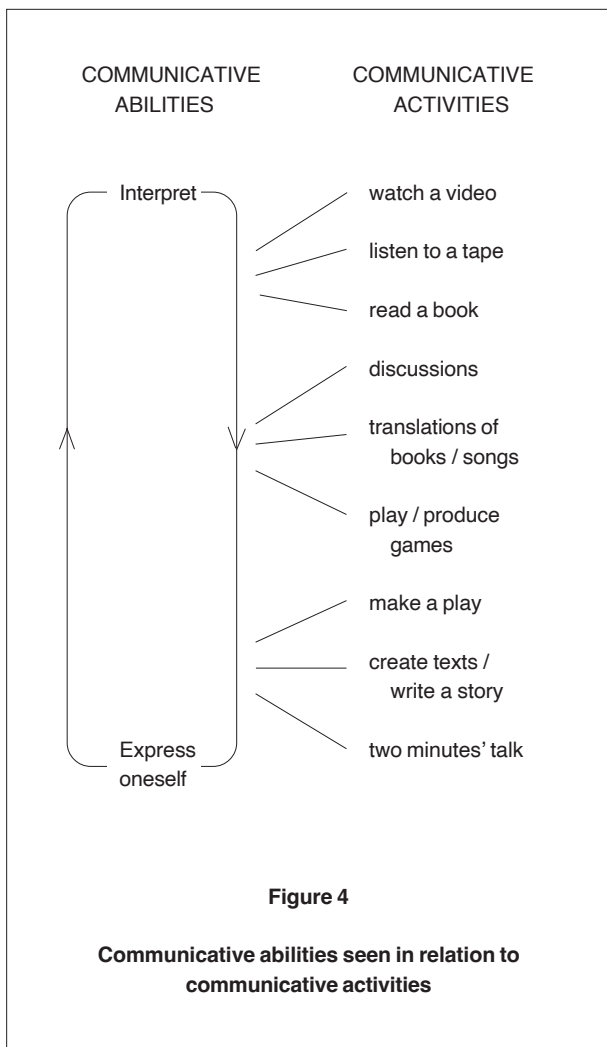
Activities in an autonomous classroom

In an autonomous classroom most of the learners are active and engaged for most of the time — in a lot of different things. If you have a closer look at what is actually going on, it becomes clear, however, that the activities are less varied than they seem to be at first glance. Consider, for example, the activities taking place in a sixth form with 12-year-old learners working individually or in groups/pairs:

- plan and produce a talk show
- produce small books/stories
- make a cartoon
- produce a music magazine
- produce a play
- play games produced by other students

If we place these activities in a simplified model of communication and language learning it can be seen that most of the activities could be categorized as “expressing oneself“. The point is that activities undertaken when learning a language can in most cases be categorized either as interpretation or as expression. Sometimes it is necessary to place an activity in between the two if the two communicative abilities are equally involved. The impression that there are many different activities derives from the fact that the contents or the topic as well as the level and type of language used within the various activities will vary from student to student and from group to group, according to the students’ needs and interests and the curricular guidelines they are following.

The learners are introduced to a simple model of communicative abilities seen in relation to communicative activities (Figure 4) as soon as they have experienced a variety of activities either in the foreign language or in their mother tongue. In discussions between teacher and learners the activities previously used or experienced are placed in the model. When new activities are introduced into the classroom either by the teacher or by the learners it is important that both abilities — interpreting as well as expressing oneself — are equally represented. Once introduced, the new activities will be added to the



model. This of course gives scope for many fruitful discussions. Where, for instance, should “translating a text” be placed? What about “reading aloud”? When the learners choose an activity they are supposed to divide their time between expressing and interpreting. This process of relating learning activities to the model increases their awareness of which activities to choose and why.

A general feature of the activities preferred by the learners is an immediate transparency. The activities can be seen to be related to a straightforward, recognizable purpose or objective: writing stories or making books to be read by others, improving spelling, coping with irregular verbs, developing fluency, learning something about a topic, reading a book or poem of interest. Non-transparent activities, or activities with no clearly expressed purpose, as often found in foreign language course books, are rejected: “They’re boring!”, “We don’t know what to do!”

Typical criteria used by the learners for choosing activities at beginners’ level are:

- What do I feel like doing?
- What is of interest to me?

At a later stage the following criteria are added:

- What do I want to be better at doing?
- What do I want to know more about?
- What do I need to learn?

Further criteria, mainly introduced by the teacher, are:

- Does the activity in question activate the learners’ existing knowledge as well as provide opportunities for expanding this knowledge?

- Does the activity allow the teacher and learners to focus on the process as well as on the product?
- Does the activity give scope for differentiated processes and for differentiated products?
- Does the activity involve/draw upon experience beyond the classroom?
- Does the activity encourage learner co-operation/peer tutoring?

The use of diaries

In order to keep track of the work undertaken the learner has a personal diary or logbook. This is a book where activities undertaken during a lesson are recorded and new words or expressions used during the activities are written down. It is also where learners make a note of homework, decided by themselves or by the teacher, and where they write individual, group or whole-class comments on the day's work.

Most learners are positive towards keeping a diary: "It is good to be able to see what you have done", "It makes it easy to remember things — homework, contracts, etc..", "I can remember words this way", "You become better at writing".

Apart from being very useful for the learners, the diaries are also useful for the teacher. They give the teacher a chance to follow the work of the individual learners, their interests and their needs, and they make direct contact and communication with the learners possible. Furthermore, the diaries form a good basis for talks between learners, parents and teachers at parents' meetings.

In order to make a success of using diaries it is important for the teacher to consider the following questions in advance:

- Why do I — the teacher — find the diary important/necessary?
- How is the diary going to be kept? Will I negotiate the format as well as the content with my learners? Will I have certain demands as to format and contents?

Posters

Posters are another important tool in the development of learner autonomy. On our “English Board“ there will be different types of posters (sheets of paper in A3-format) showing:

- The progress and content of the English lessons.
- Plans for work undertaken in the groups (WHO, WHAT, WHY).
- Ideas for activities, homework, etc., introduced and developed in co-operation between learners and teacher, for example, “Ideas for homework“, “Things we can do in order to become better at talking!“ or “Ways of making use of our materials!“
- Demands or contracts for group work or the various elements in the daily work. These might be requirements for entries in the diaries or a group’s plan for their work, including WHAT, WHY, HOW, and EXPECTED OUTCOME.
- A list of “helpers“, learners who have volunteered to help others when the teacher is busy working with another group and does not want to be disturbed.
- Words/expressions needed by the learners when working with a certain task or when communicating in class.

- Grammatical rules to remember, extracted from the work of the learners, in most cases by the learners themselves.

The content of the posters in many cases derives from the work undertaken by individual learners or by groups of learners. Sometimes they arise from joint classroom discussions. As English cannot take up all the wall space in the classroom, the posters are hung on nails in clusters. One group with “ideas“, one with “plans“, one with “contracts“, and so on. In this way, apart from being a rich source of language, the posters help to make the teaching/learning process visible and to stress the respect for and importance of what is being said by the learners as well as by the teacher. In due course the posters come to provide a process syllabus for each class.

Group work

When moving from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred teaching/learning situation it has proved not just useful but necessary to underline this change in roles by changing the physical focus from the teacher and the blackboard to the learners themselves. This is done by seating the learners in groups rather than individually, in pairs or in a horseshoe to face the teacher and the blackboard. Experience shows that the physical shift of focus facilitates the passing over of responsibility to the learners (cf. the classroom setting reproduced on p. 73).

Learning to organize group work and getting used to working in groups is, however, a long process, for teachers as well as learners, especially if they are not used to it. But when it works the advantages are numerous. We are aiming at a situation where

- the learners are capable of forming their own groups, realistic and relevant to their needs and interests;
- the learners are capable of conducting their own group

work and making use of the potential that exists in a group, e.g., for peer tutoring.

In order to reach that point, learners and teacher together must go through a process of forming different groups with different tasks, followed by an evaluation of the group work. In this phase the teacher suggests the criteria for the formation of groups, but not *who* is going to work together. The criteria might include:

- Choose partners you like.
- Choose partners you work well together with.
- Choose partners you think you can learn from.
- Choose somebody you have seldom or never worked with before.
- Find partners who would like to work with the same materials or the same activity as you.
- You will need a secretary in your group, so at least one of you must be able to write.
- You must be able and willing to help each other.

While the group is working with a given or chosen activity, the main concern for teacher as well as learners will be: "How does the group function?" Teacher and learners will make notes of their observations in their respective diaries for later use.

When the group has finished its task, the group members will compare notes: What was good? Why? Did we have any problems? Why? Ideas for improvement? Other things? These group discussions will be followed by a joint class evaluation, where the experiences from the various groups together with the teacher's observations

will be shared. The outcome is partly a personal experience for the individual learner: How do I work in a group? Which persons do I work well with? Which persons can I learn from? It is also a source of information for the teacher about the learners, their learning strategies, and their ability to work with others. The outcome of these discussions is a shared and negotiated knowledge in the class about group formation and group work. This is vital, especially when it comes to finding the right group for the “problem children“ in the class. They, too, have of course got their preferences regarding who they work with.

After some time, when different group formations have been tried out, three main starting points for setting up groups seem to emerge. All three are equally acceptable:

1. What do I want to be better at? Why?
2. What do I want to do? Why?
3. Who would I like to work with? Why?

When groups have been established, a poster is filled out and put on our “English Board“. It is a rule that groups are not closed until everybody has found his/her place.

Forming groups in this way nearly always results in successful group work, either because the learners have chosen peers they work well with or because they have chosen an activity — e.g., “making a newspaper“ — where they feel they have something to contribute.

The poster reproduced in Figure 5 is an example from the sixth form (12-year-olds). At beginners' level only WHO and WHAT are entered in the plan. At this level the agreed overall aim is to become better at English. Later on, when the learners might have more specific aims, WHY can be included.

	WHO?	WHAT?
<p>Wednesday 5th Sept '93</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share homework 2. 2 minutes' talk 3. Free activities (see poster) 4. Homework 5. Michael's and Lasse's book 	Birgitte	Write a letter
	Susan, Anne Mette	Make a small book
	Anja, Louise	Make a small book
	Marten, Karsten, Jan	Make a newspaper
	Emrah, Helene, Lars	Make a newspaper
	Lasse, Michelle, Jacob, Louise	Make a play

Figure 5
Poster with WHO / WHAT

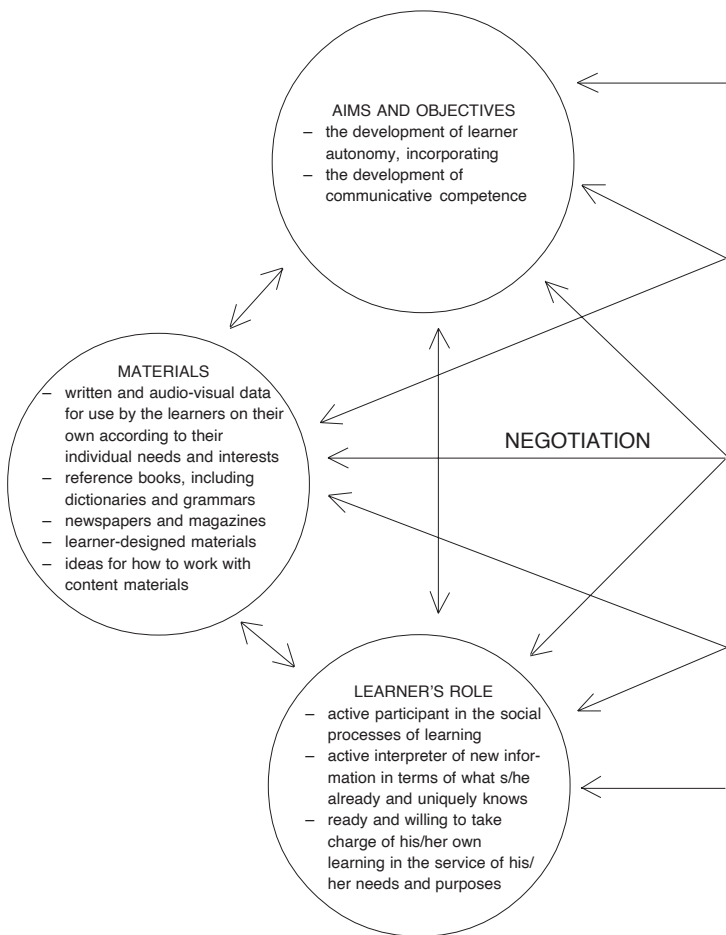
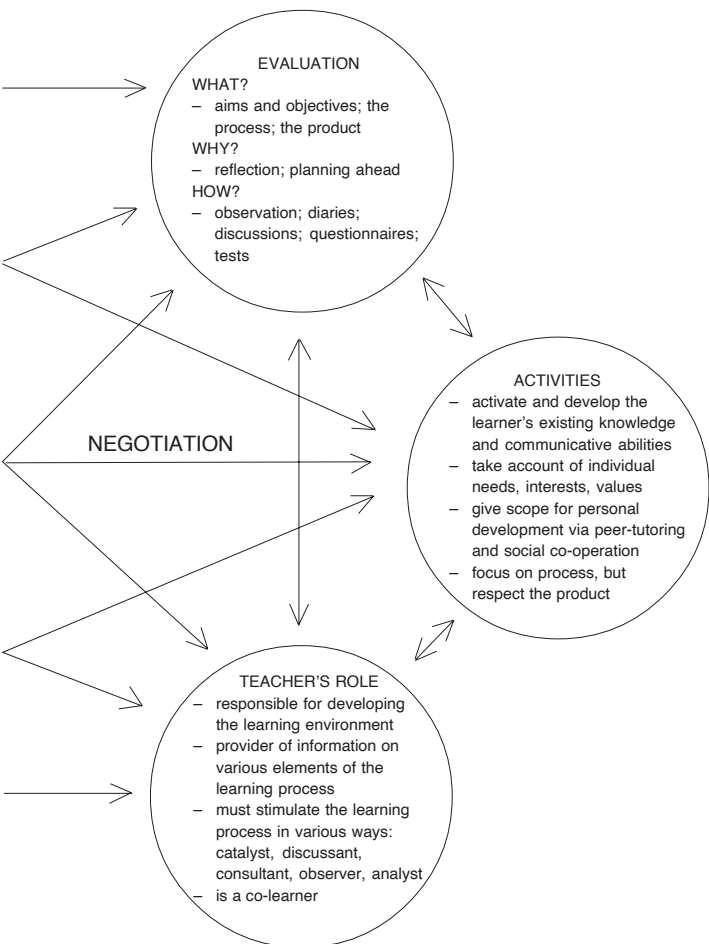


Figure 6



“The Flower”

“The Flower” — a planning model

The various elements in a teaching/learning situation can be arranged in the shape of a flower. The idea is to show that they are separated like petals in a flower, but at the same time form a unity — they are interrelated and influence one another.

There are various versions of “The Flower”. One summarizes the overall content of a language learning course as shown in Figure 6, whereas others illustrate particular teaching/learning sequences — a “Flower” for beginners, a “Flower” for intermediate level, a “Flower” for a limited number of lessons or weeks, and so on.

Normally I begin with aims and fill out the other petals from there: Which activities will support these aims? What are the prerequisites required from the learners in this connection? What kind of evaluation will be relevant? What can be expected from the teacher? And so on.

The advantage is, though, that “The Flower“ can be entered at any other point — materials, activities, teacher’s role, etc. If, for instance, you have a good film or a good poem, the name of the film or poem will be placed under “materials“. The questions leading on from there could be: What are my objectives for showing this film? How can these objectives be evaluated? And so on. When used in this way “The Flower“ also becomes a good check-list when planning a teaching/learning sequence.

Chapter 4

Evaluation – the pivot of learner autonomy

Evaluation in general

Evaluation plays a pivotal role in the development of learner autonomy. The function of evaluation is on the one hand to ensure that work undertaken is discussed and revised, and on the other to establish a basis of experience and awareness that can be used in planning further learning. It is a recurrent activity between the teacher and individual learners, groups of learners, or the whole class. It can also be undertaken by the learners themselves.

Questions used in evaluation are:

- What am I/are we doing?
- Why am I/are we doing it?
- How am I/are we doing it?
- Good experiences?
- Bad experiences?
- Ideas for changes?
- What can it be used for?
- What next?

Evaluation is usually related to specific and/or general aims underlying the learning activity in question. It typically focuses on one or more of the following issues: aims/objectives, materials, activities, learner contributions, social aspects, administration of and participation in classroom interaction, strategies used, teacher/learner roles, and evaluation itself.

The format of the evaluation and/or the exact questions asked will vary to suit the double purpose of evaluation — reflection and planning — as well as the linguistic abilities of the learners in question. Since the evaluation takes place in English — to the degree the learners can manage it — it constitutes genuine communication in its own right.

Prerequisites for a good and useful evaluation are

TIME — REFLECTION — HONESTY

Evaluation that can be relied upon will probably only take place in an atmosphere of trust and respect.

Very often end-of-lesson evaluations are done orally because they ask for an immediate reaction, perhaps some kind of change in classroom management. In many cases they are based on short, written indications entered in our diaries, such as key words under GOOD THINGS/BAD THINGS, or a mark out of ten, or a number of smiling/sad faces. As end-of-term evaluations normally affect long term planning for the teacher as well as the learners, a more complex, written evaluation seems to be the most sensible thing at this point. The following section gives an account of end-of-term evaluations used with my first group of autonomous learners in 1980, from beginners' level through to intermediate level.

End-of-term evaluations — some examples

After their first year of English, the end-of-term evaluation was limited to a single broad question:

What do you feel you have learned this year?

As one might expect, the answers were accordingly broad. Here are two examples (unedited):

I think I have learn much words and sentences

- and count from zero to tousind
- and we have played Bingo 1 and 2
- we played play to they other children
- we have a good teacher

I have learn

- of understanding composing
- when I not has English can I just lighten [= “easy”] words
- reading English
- write English
- and speak English
- I have too learn strong [= “difficult”] words of play “Meet the Family” f.eks. office, heavy, parcel, clothe, yourself
- and I can reading all them books we have in the class
- I can now outspoke [= “pronounce”] English words much better

Other answers — written in Danish — were:

- I have learned to act.
- Sometimes I talk to my friend in English.
- I have learned to understand English but not enough.
- I have learned to answer questions.
- I have learned to form questions.

After their second year of English I was concerned with the learners’ view of the process of learning going on in the classroom. In our end-of-term evaluation I

therefore hoped to get them to focus on *how* they had learned rather than *what* they had learned by asking them the following question:

What was good/what was bad about the way we have worked this year?

Typical answers were that it was good

- to be able to choose materials/activities yourself;
- to work with many books and possible activities;
- to create our own plays;
- to work together;
- to listen to tapes/read books;
- to read books and report the contents to somebody else.

Most learners had nothing under “bad things“ — a tendency also in the end-of-day or end-of-week evaluations. Five boys, however, pointed out that it was not good when the teacher was away. One boy would have liked to be told what to do. One learner felt guilty that he didn’t get anything done at home. Some learners found that *This Way*, a course book chosen by themselves, was boring in the long run — but as one of them put it, “you can’t expect everything to be exciting“.

At the end of their third year of English I felt the need for a more detailed evaluation in order to provide a basis for planning the following term’s work. At the same time I felt that the learners were ready for this as well — a feeling derived from our daily evaluations in class, where the areas touched upon had accumulated to include nearly every aspect in the teaching/learning situa-

tion, including the teacher's role, contributions and behaviour.

As a result of this development the learners were each given a questionnaire containing the elements in "The Flower" (cf. pp.46f. above) and were asked to submit ideas for the coming term:

EVALUATION AT THE END OF TERM

Objectives / plans

What were your objectives / plans for this term?

Outcomes

What did you achieve? If possible state why.

Learner's role

What do you feel you have been responsible for this year?

Did you live up to this responsibility? Why / Why not?

Materials / activities

Write down good activities or good materials you have worked with this year. State if possible why you liked them.

Evaluation

Which type of evaluation have you made use of? (diaries, whole- class talks, talks with teacher, talks with friends)

How do you judge the usefulness of the various types? (Good? Bad? In between? Don't know?)
Why?

Teacher's role

Positive things?
Negative things?

Ideas for next term?

Some learners had answered in Danish, some in English, in which case the dictionary had been used frequently. Here are some representative answers from the questionnaires, written in English (unedited):

OBJECTIVES / PLANS

What were your objectives / plans for this term?

- That I could talk something more and have a somewhat greater vocabulary than now.
- I had decided that I would get through some more reading and write a little more.
- Gain self-confidence when talking and writing English. Become better at English.

OUTCOMES

What did you achieve? If possible state why.

- I do not think I have achieved all that I thought to do.
- I have done: I have listened to tapes, I read books, I wrote resumes of books, etc. I have done this because I heard from others that it is good doing that.

LEARNER'S ROLE

What do you feel you have been responsible for this year?

- I think that I have tried to do as much as possible, but I only did that when I did something I liked. But when I find something difficult I start playing the fool, but I can't help doing that.
- Almost all the time I have found out myself what I wanted to do. Only a few times have I not been able to do this.
- To do my homework, to concentrate (especially in the lessons), get started by myself.

DID YOU LIVE UP TO THIS RESPONSIBILITY?

WHY / WHY NOT?

- I do not really know, but I think I have been satisfactory.
- I think it was satisfactory almost all the time because I think that working with English is fun and when there is

- something I think is interesting I can pull myself together.
- Sometimes I forgot to do it or I didn't feel like doing it, but nearly all the time I have done why I decided to do.

ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS

Write down good activities or good materials you have worked with this year. State if possible why you liked them.

- I have played drama. Learn new words.
- Worked with the book "Come Along for the 7th form". Something new to work with.
- Heard "Alice in Wonderland" and "The Bottle Imp". Exciting to listen to real English.
- Made small books. Because I learned new words.
- Read "The Wind in the Willows". Many good new words.
- Play lottery. Learned new words and describe things in English.
- Present our story to the rest of the class. Show the others how you have spent your time. See yourself how much you have done. Get appraisal for what you have done

EVALUATION

Type? Good? Bad? In between? Don't know? Why?

- Diaries: Good. It has been a help both because I learned some new words and because you can look back at what you have been doing.
- Class talks: In between. It is good to hear the comments of others.
- Talks with the teacher: Good. It is good if the teacher is talking English in the talk then you can hear some English language.
- Talks with one or a few other learners: In between. Of course you hear some English if you talk with some friends but I think it is better with the teacher. I suppose because they have a greater vocabulary.

THE TEACHER**Positive things about your teacher?**

- Good that she is talking English all the time and not Danish.
- Good that we are allowed to work freely.
- If the teacher gets mad if you have not finished your home-work.
- The teacher finds time to help all people who need help.
- That the teacher is good-tempered.
- Lets us see different films.

Negative things about the teacher?

- Is bad-tempered.
- Sometimes you expect too much.
- I think you ought to control if we have made anything at home, but not always just in between when we have not made it.
- You ought to let us write e.g. an essay at school.

In general the learners seem to be very honest when answering the questions. They are especially very open in their statements concerning their own active part in the learning process — “worked hard“, “been too lazy“, “fooled around“, “satisfactory“, “could have been better“. It is interesting to notice that their reasons for taking part — or not taking part — are reasons that I as a teacher would have pointed out as well:

- I work best when something is of interest to me.
- When it functioned it was just great.
- I got irritated when something was difficult to understand.

But there are also reasons that I would not have thought of immediately:

- I have been too relaxed the last half year, I always feel more like working after the Summer holidays.

- When I find things difficult then I start fooling around, but I can't help it.

Everybody, however, felt that to a greater or lesser extent they had become better at what they had intended to become better at, which of course was a very positive starting point for our continuing work.

Concerning the teacher, here too the learners were very straightforward in their statements. It was regarded as positive that

- you can work freely with what you want to work with;
- there are many materials/ideas for the use of materials;
- the teacher is willing to help;
- the teacher speaks English;
- the teacher is in a good mood.

It was regarded as negative that

- the teacher was sometimes in a bad mood;
- the teacher demanded too much of the learners.

The overall impression from reading the questionnaires was a generally positive attitude towards the teaching/learning situation as such. In my view the important thing is that the learners share with me their interpretation of the situation. This shared knowledge provides a basis for further co-operation and makes it easier for me to support them in their future work.

Looking at the end-of-term evaluations, I can see that the account shows at least two things. First of all, it

reflects the well-known fact that answers are determined by the questions asked. Secondly, I think it shows that evaluation is a collaborative, ongoing process for the teacher and her learners — the questions asked arise partly from the answers given, partly from the teacher's own personal development. This development in turn is based partly on her work with her learners, partly on influences from society, including a general awareness of factors that shape learning. Constant changes in the teaching/learning process give rise to new objectives and vice versa. Evaluation must be seen in this dynamic perspective.

Chapter 5

Intermediate English

Fourth year of English — the class

The class consists of 21 learners — 12 boys and 9 girls. They are 14-15 years old, and it is a mixed-ability group. It is their fourth year of English, which means that they have by now had approximately 450 English lessons. This year they have three lessons of 45 minutes per week: a single period on Tuesdays and a double period on Wednesdays. Apart from two newcomers this year, the class has been with me since the fifth form, when they were beginners.

Beginning of term — getting started

The learners were asked to express their general expectations and plans for the year. They had to come up with individual plans, but were also encouraged to discuss things with their classmates. To support them they were given:

- a complete set of the end-of-term evaluations from the previous year, including their own ideas for this year (cf. Chapter 4) — in other words, every student got every other student's evaluations and ideas;
- a copy of the aims and requirements for this level and age group as set out in the official curricular guidelines;
- my expectations and plans for the year — a version of “The Flower“.

The learners agreed that it was a good idea to get not only their own evaluation, but also those of their friends. It was important to familiarize them with the official curriculum because the fourth year marks the beginning of a new phase of English teaching and learning in Denmark. There are specific curricular guidelines for this phase leading up to the final state exams after five and/or six years of English. Based on the end-of-term evaluation, the official aims, my own experience from previous years with this age group, my expectations, and my general aims for developing learner autonomy (cf. Chapter 3), I had filled out a version of “The Flower“ for the fourth year of English as follows:

Aims / Objectives

- The curricular guidelines.
- Continuous development of learner autonomy; i.e. the learners should gain further insight into and knowledge about planning their own learning sequences (aims, the work undertaken, evaluation).

Activities

- Must cater for interpretation as well as expressing oneself.

Materials

- Written texts and data as well as visual / oral data that can be used by the learners on their own: examples of foreign language coursebooks, extra readers, collections of poetry, facts about Britain and other English-speaking countries, newspapers, taped materials, videos / films, written / taped / videoed learner-produced materials such as magazines, newspapers, booklets, plays.
- Reference books to facilitate the work with the texts / data and / or to be used on their own: dictionaries and grammar books.

Evaluation

- Will continuously be part of the work undertaken.
- Exchange of written notes (teacher / learner) concerning the giving of marks 3 times a year.
- Talks (teacher / learner(s)).
- Class discussions.
- Final evaluation at the end of term.

Learner role

- Active participant in the learning process.
- Being responsible for achieving own aims.
- Feeling responsibility for achieving the official aims.
- Showing respect for co-learners and their work.

Teacher role

- Support learners in setting up aims.
- Support learners in achieving these aims.
- Inspire.
- Evaluate progress.
- Support co-operation.
- Try to be in a good mood.
- To the extent it is possible, provide useful materials.
- Be a co-learner.

This version of “The Flower“ was also presented at the first parents’ meeting of the year.

Some pupils’ answers (unedited) were:

- I want to speak a better language and I want to write a better language. I can learn more words by reading a book and write some words down. I can make a summary of the book, describe a picture, make plays of given words, get some pictures and then write a story. I would also like the teacher to give me a subject so I can write about the given subject and the teacher can give some comments. I also want to talk with my teacher about how I can improve my language.
- I would like to learn to speak more correct English. I should

like to sit and read aloud together with another one who wants to learn better English herself / himself. I would like to listen to a tape recorded by an Englishman so I could hear real English.

- I would like to learn some more about grammar, and be good at spelling. Have you got any spelling exercises that I could use?
- I am not quite satisfied with our extra readers. They are either too easy or too difficult.
- I haven't really set up any aims for this year. But you can of course always be better at reading and writing.

The learners were then asked to enter into their diaries specific wishes/plans for the beginning of term based on one or more of the following questions:

- What would you like to become better at?
- What would you like to do? Why?
- Who would you like to work with? Why?

From their individual answers groups were formed, a poster with WHO, WHAT, WHY was filled out, and work could begin — following the general course for our English lessons (cf. Chapter 3).

At work — working with projects

Wednesday 7 March — a double period

The teacher enters the classroom. The learners, are already sitting in groups with their diaries, their grammar notebooks and their dictionaries in front of them. On one part of the wall a board is filled with posters

under different headings: PLANS, CONTRACTS, THINGS TO REMEMBER, USEFUL EXPRESSIONS, GRAMMAR. After greeting the class with “Good morning, everybody“, to which some of the learners respond with “Good morning, Leni“, the teacher places an empty poster on the blackboard with a magnet and writes at the top: “Wednesday, 7th March”. Those learners who have not already done so write the day and date in their diaries.

T: Today we are going to form new groups for the next period. You were asked as homework for today to consider who you would like to work with and what you would like to work with.

She writes on the poster:

1. Who? What?

The learners look at each other. Questions and answers are sent to and fro across the classroom. After a few minutes hands start coming up.

L1: Me and Dennis would like to work together. We would like to make a book about Hitler’s childhood.

L2: Helle, Maria, Rikke and me would like to make a radio play. We don’t know about what.

L3: I would like to work on my own and I would like to make a story about a family in East Berlin.

L4: ...

While the learners have been talking the teacher has placed a new poster on the blackboard next to the first one. She writes:

Who?	What?
Dennis, Anders	Hitler's childhood
Helle, Maria, Rikke, Camilla	A radio play
Thomas	A story
Malene, Anders, Klaus, Jesper	Human rights
Soren, Betina, Niklas	Poems
Rikke, Louise	Horoscopes
Rasmus, Sandra, Martin, Morten	Introduction book to Dungeons and Dragons

T: Fine. What I should like you to do now in your groups is to plan what to do. And I should like you to make a poster for each group including:

- Who?
- What?
- Plan?
- Objectives?
- Activities?
- Materials?
- Outcome?
- Timetable? (maximum 1 month)

The learners get up and find their new partners and new seats and soon group discussions have begun. The teacher moves around, joining in their discussions, questioning some of their decisions, coming up with ideas for

WHO	Malene, Anders, Jesper and Klaus
WHAT	Human rights
OBJECTIVES	Spelling, learning new words, translating, and obtaining more knowledge about Human Rights
ACTIVITIES	We will work in 2 groups, with the common goal of a book based on Human Rights and the rights of animals, Amnesty International, refugees, South Africa and about prisoners of conscience
MATERIALS	Materials from Amnesty International and Danish books
OUTCOME	A book
TIMETABLE	A month

Figure 7

Example of a contract

Tuesday, 30th November

1. Share homework with Flemming.
Flemming had read in Detective Stories, and found 5 new words. He had practise very well.
2. I'm getting interviewed by Camilla H.
3. Read a poem.

New words:
blight = plantesygdom
drifts = dyng
petals = kronblade
flight = flugt
patience = tålmodighed
ripe = moden

4. Blossom Poem!
Blossoms are beautiful
Blossoms are sweet
Blossoms are there when people meet.
5. Reflections!
I think it was a good lesson, and we learned a lot of new words.
6. Homework: read in push me pull me.

Figure 8
Example of a learner's diary entry

activities or materials, and so on. Towards the end of the lesson all the groups have produced a poster which is shown to the rest of the class. The posters are then fixed to the wall under the heading **CONTRACTS** (for an example, see Figure 7). It is now diary-writing time — time for the learners to write down “Homework“, “Plan for Tuesday“, and “Comments on today’s work“. The last of these is no longer compulsory. It used to be, but the learners argued against it on the ground that they wrote down the same things again and again, so it was agreed that, for a period at least, they could decide themselves whether they wanted to make any comments or not. For an example, see Figure 8.

While the learners are writing in their diaries, the teacher makes notes in hers:

- Forming groups went well. (Niklas joined a group.)
- Problems with “objectives” vs. “outcomes”
- Remember for Tuesday: Examples of horoscopes — Authentik? Articles on East Europe / East Berlin — Authentik! Print-out of “Mary — the cow” for radio-play group. Materials about Hitler?

Tuesday 13 March — a single period

There is no break before this lesson, so when the teacher arrives some groups have already started work while others haven’t. The teacher passes her materials over to the different groups. For the “Hitler“ group she hasn’t been able to find anything. They themselves, however, have been to the local library and have brought along some Danish books on the topic. The teacher reminds the class that today they will only have half an hour for their group work because of the presentation of the radio play “Little Red Riding Hood“ which had been announced by one of the groups in the previous lesson.

Soon all the groups are at work, and there is time for the teacher to move around and observe what is going

on. Have they got started? Are they following their plans? Have they managed to find materials? Are there any problems? Do they need help? There is also time to discuss why they chose the topic they did, for example, Hitler's childhood:

Oh, yes! There must be something about a man's childhood that makes him such a big Jew hater that he can kill 6 millions Jews without feelings. We want to know how he grew up and why he became the evil man "Der Fuehrer"!

The following is an extract from Maria's diary:

Tuesday, 13th March

- 1) go on with our radioplay
- 2) Homework: read in "The woman who disappeared." chapter 3 and 4.
- 3) presentation of "Little red riding hood" by Rasmus, Martin, Louise and Sandra.
Agenda for their presentation:
 - a. tell about how we decided to work
 - b. read a part from our roles
 - c. listen to the tape
 - d. comments: I think it was good, because they spoke in a funny way.
 - they spoke clerly
 - it was funny

Notes from the teacher's diary

- Remember to support positive and "constructive" comments from the class when presenting projects.
- Think of ideas for "being better at reading and talking" for

the radio-play group.

- Bring along some English poems.
- Sandra has improved her intonation.

The work in the class continues like this for the next few weeks. Once a week there is a presentation of previous group projects. Apart from this the groups continue undisturbed with their projects and with individual work, and they plan their time themselves. The teacher sees to it that she gets around to all the groups at least once a week.

Wednesday 21 March — a double period

We are now half way through the project period and the learners are asked to consult the posters bearing their original plans and to make a plan for the last part of their work. They are asked to do this partly to support them in their work — “Where are we now?“, “What is left to do?“, “Who will do what?“ —, partly to give the teacher a clear idea of where they are. As it is, the learners working with “Human Rights“ discover that they will not manage to complete their project according to the agreed timetable. This leads of course to a discussion with the group. What can be done about it? They claim that they have worked really hard with the topic. They have met at home in the afternoons and worked, and they feel that they have worked hard also in the lessons. They admit that the task they have set themselves — translating the “Declaration of Human Rights“ from Danish into English — has been more difficult than they had expected it to be. They decide to continue working and at the end of the month they will describe to the class how far they have got with their task.

Wednesday 4 April

It is nearly time for the end of the project work, and the teacher presents the following poster on the black-board at the beginning of the lesson:

Wednesday, 4th April

1. Finish work with projects.
2. Evaluation of work — written on posters.
3. Prepare presentations of work — plan on posters.
4. Plan for presentations and continuing work after the Easter holidays.

The teacher comments on the different items as follows:

Please look at your first posters with your plans — objectives, activities, materials, outcome. Especially your objectives, i.e. what you wanted to become better at. Discuss in your group what you feel that you have learned, how you have worked, whether the materials you used were useful or not, good things / bad things in general. Write down your conclusions on a poster and put it on the wall.

As for your presentation of your work. Please make a poster showing what you wanted to include in your presentations. Decide in your group who is going to do what when presenting. Find out what you might need from me as regards, for example, tape-recorders, video, etc. Please pass these posters over to me when finished so that I can get an overview of the different presentations.

If you get time please consider when you would like to present your work. Also consider what to do next.

From Maria's diary — unedited

- 1) Share home: read aloud "On Sunday afternoons"
 - answer the questions
 - talk about the new words

New words:

sammenligner = compare

personlighed = personality

- 2) go in the computerroom and write our story "Mary — the cow".
- 3) Homework: read the story "Green Green grass of Home." find 5 new words and learned them. Answer the questions. Read in "the woman who disappeared" chapter 8.
- 4) comments: I think it have been a good day because we worked well. and we talked a lot of english.
- 5) Plan for presentation:
 - how we worked
 - new words
 - listen to the tape
 - comment

From the teacher's diary

None of the groups had finished their work. Reasons given were:

- Difficult in groups to stick to a timetable because individuals have been away during the period. (I agree!)
- "Human Rights": Problems with the computers, difficult task, Klaus dropping out, Jesper not doing much. In general: Task bigger than foreseen. Solution: No time-limit next period!?

Discussing what to do next:

- Many expressed a wish to continue with projects.
- First day after Easter: Time needed for "final touch" including plan for presentations.
- "Streets of London" as a joint event. Remember text and tape.

After Easter the various groups eventually presented their work. At the same time new groups were formed and new projects were started. Three people from the "Human Rights" group insisted on continuing translating the articles on "Human Rights". They said they felt it was a challenge. The pupil who had worked on his own

said he would like to join a group. The “Poems“ group had worked so well that they agreed on a new topic together — “London“ — which was opened to new participants. As a result of the problems concerning timing, the groups were free to take as much time as they needed. Their obligation was to set up a plan for what they wanted to do, to keep me informed, orally or via their diaries, about how work was progressing, and to end up with some kind of product to be presented to the class.

In their end-of-year evaluation, which this year with this group was narrowed down to “Think back over the year — good things/bad things“, many learners expressed their views on working with projects:

- **Australia:** It was a good project, and I learned a lot from it. I think it worked well with Rikke P., Rikke S. and Betina.
- **Dungeons and Dragons:** I think I worked well with that project, but it was difficult because Rasmus, Martin and I first had to teach Sandra how to play.
- **Lithuania:** I think we worked well. We talked much and made some writing too. I learned a lot.
- **Good things:** We have begun to make bigger projects, and I especially liked the project poems. The only project that became boring was human rights. I wish the way we have worked this year will continue in the 9. form. I like presentation of project each time.
I believe we have worked well with both our projects even though we could not make the deadline. Even though the result might seem like unfinished business I think we have learned a lot from it, and that we’ve worked hard to finish our projects.
Good: working with Trivial Pursuit, working with Human Rights, reading “The color Purple”, watching the film “That was then, This is now”.
Not so good: that some of the things we had written

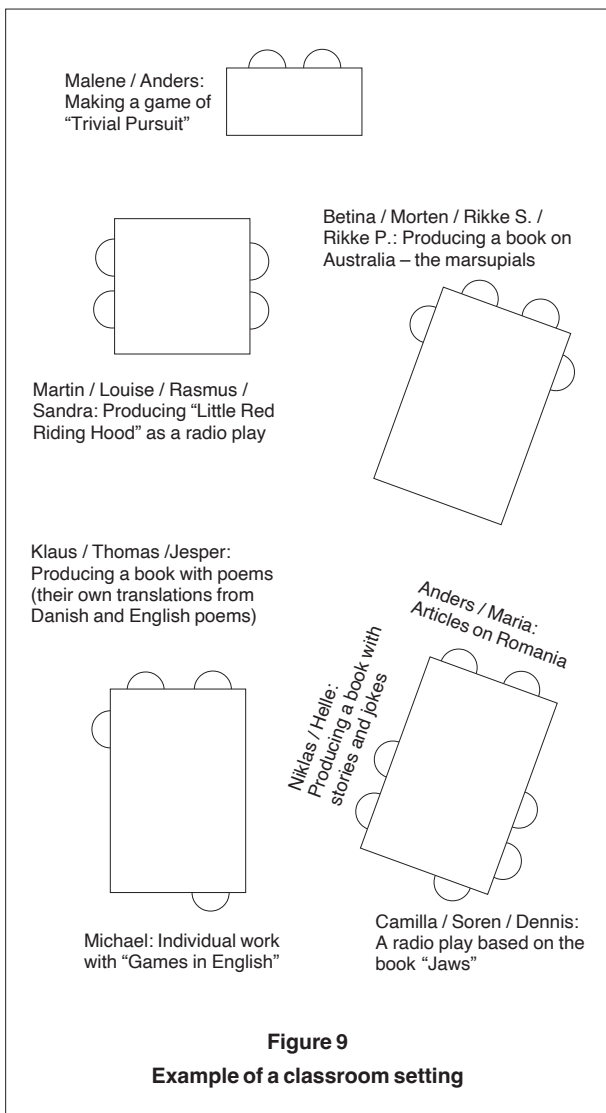


Figure 9

Example of a classroom setting

working with both projects was erased from the disk because we had saved them the wrong way, Klaus leaving our group not having finished his part of the project.

- **Rumania:** I liked working with this topic. I learned a lot from this project. And I was satisfied with the outcomes.
- **Hitler:** I think that this project was our best work and that's also my partner's opinion.
Lithuania: We used too much time just to find some articles about the topic. The newspapers didn't wrote much about it.
Good: The group working was good. I have learned a lot from the projects.
Bad: I did not read enough but I will do that next year. Next year I am keen on working with these projects.
- **Good:** It was good that we could work in small groups. I think we learned much when we worked in groups.
Bad: I think that you should make the groups for us. Sometime I also think that we should work all together with books.

Figure 9 shows a classroom setting, originally drawn by the learners themselves.

Chapter 6

Developing learner autonomy in a school context – with what results?

In Chapter 1 I argued that the development of learner autonomy is a long, hard and often painful process for teachers and learners alike. But I also mentioned that the collaborative effort to establish a learning environment where teachers and learners share responsibility for the outcome contained a number of growth-points. The following lists of successes and problems are not just based on my own teaching experience. They also derive from what teachers have told me, in workshops or in-service teacher training, in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, Spain and Poland. It is my general experience that in our work the growth-points and successes far outweigh the frustrations and problems. It therefore seems reasonable to mention them first.

Successes experienced by teachers when developing learner autonomy

- Interested, motivated, happy, engaged, satisfied learners.
- Personal involvement and motivation for teachers and learners alike.
- A feeling of confidence, security, acceptance and respect.

- Co-operation and joint participation, negotiations, and discussions.
- Shared responsibility.
- A changed teacher role (“I have become a human being!”)

Quite apart from the issue of learner autonomy, these statements summarize the conditions for successful learning, including language learning. It is therefore important to stress that the successes are not limited to Denmark or other countries where English is virtually a second language. They are also valid for teachers in Spain and Poland, where English is much less a part of everyday life. The development of learner autonomy seems to depend primarily on getting learners to become personally involved in the learning process; it certainly does not depend on any particular target language, or on the relation that obtains between the target language and the linguistic culture in which learning takes place.

Problems encountered by teachers

The problems experienced are also many. However, even though the following issues started out as problems — or to be more precise, as frustrations — they were soon turned into challenges, and in most cases they ended up becoming growth-points.

First, we have come to realize how difficult it is to bring learners to make decisions and to accept responsibility for these decisions. We have learned that it is not at all easy to find a single best way of supporting learners in their choice of learning programme or to facilitate group work among pupils who have never worked in groups before, or to cope with the octopus syndrome (the

feeling of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time). We have struggled with our traditional, “efficient” teacher role, in which the teacher is the one who “knows best”. We have tried hard to become better at listening to learners and respecting their right to make “wrong” decisions.

Learners’ views on their English lessons

Here are some statements from learners in their fifth year of English when asked about problems and successes:

- I like very much the independent way of working. That you, yourself, decide which books you are going to use and who you are going to work with. What you are going to do. I like that very much. But it also makes you insecure sometimes.
- I think that working in this way, the students have to make an effort themselves. If they don’t want to they don’t achieve anything. You learn more when you have to deal with things yourself, have to find out what to do yourself.
- I like to work the way we do because we work in groups and I think we learn much from helping each other.
- I think the biggest problem is to know if you are good enough. Sometimes you get very insecure in what you are doing and then you think about: Do you learn enough? Do you work hard enough? Well, that’s the biggest problem, I think.

And here are some of their answers when asked what they had learned:

- I think that I have grown better at planning my own time. I know more about what I need to do and how to go about it.
- I have learned English, planning my own work,

co-operation. Know more about people in other parts of the world. Have had and used an independent responsibility (it makes one want to do, learn something for oneself).

- I know, that I'm able to work together with other people. In the 5th form I learned words / expressions very quickly. I'm sure it's the way I was taught English, which helped. I know why it's important to learn English, and to be responsible for what I'm doing.

Concluding remarks

At the beginning of this book I argued that the development of learner autonomy entails

1. A shift in focus from teaching to learning.
2. A change in the learner's role.
3. A change in the teacher's role.
4. Evaluation as an integral part of the learning process, including teacher/learner and learner/learner interactions.
5. A view of the language classroom as a rich learning environment.

I also suggested that the development of learner autonomy is a long and difficult process — especially for the teacher. “Letting go“ and trusting in the learners' ability to “take hold“ (see Page 1992) seems to be the biggest problem. In our work it is therefore important to remember that not only the learners but we, the teachers, bring to the classroom knowledge about what and how to learn, and that whatever we do starts out from this knowledge. It is important to remember that

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- To let go doesn't mean to stop caring,
it means I can't do it for someone else.
- To let go is not to cut myself off,
it's the realization that I can't control another.
- To let go is not to enable
but to allow learning from natural
consequences.
- To let go is to admit powerlessness,
which means the outcome is not in my hands.
- To let go is not to try to change or blame another,
I can only change myself.
- To let go is not to care for,
but to care about.
- To let go is not to fix,
but to be supportive.
- To let go is not to judge,
but to allow another to be a human being.
- To let go is not to be in the middle of arranging
all the outcomes,
but to allow others to effect their
own outcomes.
- To let go is not to be protective,
it is to permit another to face reality.
- To let go is not to deny,
but to accept.¹

It is important that we do not lose ourselves in the process. A prerequisite for developing learner autonomy is a feeling of confidence, trust, acceptance and respect on the part of teachers and learners alike. On the other hand, the many growth-points show that it is worthwhile!

As for the learners, it is our general experience that strong and weak learners alike benefit from the teaching/learning procedures we have developed, not least

1 I have been unable to trace the source of this text.

in the growth of their linguistic proficiency (see, e.g., Little 1991, pp. 27–32.). The complexity of areas that the learners consider when evaluating their last years at school indicates to me an all-round awareness of the different elements involved in the language learning process as well as an awareness of personal possibilities and responsibilities within these processes — an awareness which they can use when planning and making use of opportunities for further learning. This awareness will doubtless benefit them in later life as well, not only in the context of foreign language learning, but possibly also in other contexts.

In conclusion, I would claim that the most important aspect of developing learner autonomy is probably a growing awareness of social as well as learning processes, for teachers as well as learners. It is my hope that this book will support the growth of this awareness in those who read it.

Suggestions for further reading

Barnes (1976) shows how learners can be in charge of their own learning and how they can learn from each other. He makes an important distinction between “school knowledge” and “action knowledge”, and looks closely at the role of the teacher.

Little (1991) is a “must” for anyone entering the field of learner autonomy, offering an indispensable theoretical background to classroom work.

Breen (1983) discusses the principles by which we might characterize locally developed communicative classroom practices, including the development of learner autonomy.

Holec (1988) reports on experiments in autonomous learning in twelve different countries and educational settings.

Page (1992) suggests ways in which teachers and learners can move, in quite small steps, towards more autonomous learning. This book brings together the ideas, experiences and techniques of many teachers, illustrating a wide variety of approaches and different degrees of independence for learners.

Dam (1988 and 1994) provides further consideration of the development of learner autonomy as well as classroom observations additional to those included in this book.

Dam, Legenhausen and Wolff (1990) give a detailed account of text production in pairs and small groups, including groups from Dam’s classes. The article is particularly concerned to describe how writing skills develop when learners are allowed to work on their own.

Legenhausen (1994) reports the first results of a research project on language acquisition in an autonomous language learning environment carried out in co-operation with myself. The article focuses on vocabulary

acquisition by beginners in the first few weeks of learning English — the data was provided by the beginners' class described in this book.

The video produced by Thomsen and Gabrielsen (1991) shows a double-period in a class of beginners following a fixed plan: sharing homework, presentation of a play, group work, comments on today's work, and finally a song and a story. The accompanying mimeo reports the teacher's reflections on starting to work with this class.

Ways of helping teachers to develop learner autonomy in their classes are described by Breen, Candlin, Dam and Gabrielsen (1989), Eriksson (1993), and Taylor (1990).

Finally, Mißler and Wolff (1994) have compiled an extensive bibliography on learner autonomy in general and in foreign language teaching and learning. This can be found in an issue of *Die Neueren Sprachen* devoted to learner autonomy, published in October 1994 and available from the publishers: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, Wächterbacher Str. 89, D-60386 Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

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