Educational policies and language learner autonomy in schools: a new direction in language education?

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Authentik books for language teachers

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Introduction

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The EuroPAL project gathered seven participants from seven different corners of Europe on the basis of one common interest, namely language learner autonomy. The seven countries are not only remote from each other geographically, with Cyprus in the south-east, Bulgaria in the east, Norway and Sweden in the north, England in the west, Portugal in the south-west and Spain in the south. They also differ substantially in socio-economic and historical-cultural respects. It is no surprise that these contextual differences colour the conceptual background of both the participants' understanding of learner autonomy and approaches to putting learner autonomy into practice. But this is also the strength of EuroPAL: having recruited participants who are motivated by a search for innovation in modern language teaching in Europe, building on transnational collaboration and common values.

In this book the project participants give accounts of how the governing national documents and overall educational aims in each country favour or obstruct the development of pedagogy for learner autonomy in schools (see also Lamb 2008). The participants express their personal points of view on the relationship between policies and language learner autonomy in practice. The first aim is to present the national educational backgrounds in order to contribute to the understanding of statements, definitions of concepts, suggestions, judgements and views that emerge from the EuroPAL products. It is important to acknowledge the context in which the participants' ideas are embedded. Secondly, the book aims to provide a cross-national comparison of educational policies and approaches to learner autonomy as a background to the different classroom examples of language learner autonomy provided by the EuroPAL material in order for the users to relate commonalities and differences of practices to learner and teacher development in their own contexts.

As will be seen from the various contributions, all these countries have been influenced by the Common European Framework of Refer-

ence for Languages (Council of Europe 2001). Therefore, their language education policies, especially national curricula, presuppose learner autonomy as a learning goal, either explicitly or implicitly. The chapters include accounts of the governing documents in the various countries, but also references to the organization of schools and classroom practice. Regarding assessment systems, the reader will find web sites that present examples of national tests given to the students either as final tests at the end of a course or as entrance tests to higher education. The contributions further describe the history and present state of the development of learner autonomy in the different countries. Constraining factors are explored, such as the need to use prescribed course books and a strict syllabus, or the lack of appropriate support for teacher development and school-based innovation. Facilitating factors are also pointed out, such as the existence of an open curriculum that gives opportunities for teachers to create their own agenda.

In some countries, school authorities structure the work in schools by regulating what is to be taught and learnt, whereas school authorities in other countries have given local schools and teachers a great amount of freedom and only state what goals should be met. They do not give directions as to what should be learnt or how. This is left up to the local authorities and teachers to decide. Still, education is a national responsibility in all countries. National authorities monitor closely what happens in schools through various types of follow- up, in some countries by carrying out inspections and by evaluating the work that is done.

We can see from the accounts that the development of learner autonomy in language education in secondary schools seems to be slow in many European contexts, even where it is advocated by educational policies. Teachers often tend to teach the way they were taught themselves, and find it difficult, and not always reassuring, to try out new ways of teaching. They want to work in a way that, in their opinion, is safe and secure and beneficial to the students. The teachers think that trying out new approaches may jeopardize students' possible success in school and make it difficult for them to gain entrance to higher education. However, teacher biographies and educational traditions play an important role in school change. They constitute the background to the individual teach-

er's endeavour to implement pedagogy for autonomy, and many of the teachers who promote learner autonomy in their classes have developed their ideas through reflective teaching practice. Still, initial and in-service teacher education can play a more decisive role in questioning beliefs, values and ways of teaching and learning.

In the countries involved in the project there are individual teachers, groups of teachers and schools that have introduced learner autonomy in their language classrooms, as presented in the EuroPAL materials. Nevertheless, in many cases the teachers find they have little support from colleagues and school leaders and find it hard to keep on working towards learner autonomy. Moreover, there is often a mismatch between the official educational discourse and a testing system that impedes innovative work. Some partners discuss the issue of consistency between new ways of thinking and working and the system of assessment and grading as a factor for innovation. But it will be seen that, even when assessment is aligned with educational goals, learner autonomy is not easily implemented.

Learner autonomy is a paradigm shift in language learning pedagogy. The 30 years' span since the seminal definition of language learner autonomy by Henri Holec in 1979 (Holec 1981) is a short period of time seen against the history of pedagogy. The field is still fragmented and strives for a common discourse. The EuroPAL project participates in the development of this discourse and, in doing so, also tries to make clear different points of view and various understandings within the project group itself. Many questions arise that resonate differently with different educational policies and practices. When this is accepted by the participants there is a considerable potential for innovation in transnational interaction. It stimulates creativity in the processes of change.

And, as shown in the accounts, even if our traditions and socio-economic and historical-cultural backgrounds differ, we face similar types of problems when trying to encourage learner autonomy.

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Language learner autonomy in a Bulgarian context

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1 State of the art

1.1 Overview

The public education system in Bulgaria encompasses kindergartens, schools, and service units. Education in state institutions is free. School starts at 7, is compulsory until the age of 16, and complies with the National Education Standards. The institutions are run and owned by the central authorities, local authorities or the private sector. In terms of level, education is primary (initial, grades 1–4; pre-secondary, grades 5–7) and secondary (first stage, grades 8–10; second stage, grades 11–12), and in terms of content, comprehensive or vocational (grades 7–13).

The Bulgarian educational system is regulated by several major legislative acts, viz. the Public Education Act (PEA), the related Rules and Regulations on the Application of the Public Education Act (RRAPEA), the Education Degrees, Education Standards, and National Curriculum Act (EDESNC) of 1999, the Vocational Training Act (VTA) of 1999 , as well as Ordinance No.2 of the Ministry of Education and Science on the Education Standards in the National Foreign Language Teaching Curriculum, Ordinance No.3 on Assessment and Evaluation, and Ordinance No.5 on Assessment and Approval of Textbooks and Teaching Aids.

The PEA states that "Each citizen shall exercise their right to education in a school and type of tuition of their choice according to their personal preferences and capacities."[1] Personal choice starts here. As an Education for All assessment report observed as long ago as 2000, "The

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1   Translations from Bulgarian are by the author.

new PEA […] affirms [...] the decentralization of [the education system] management and the expansion of autonomy in schools." An example of the administrative and managerial autonomy of public school principals is that their decisions can only be revoked by the Minister of Education and Science (or the Directors of the Education Inspectorates in the case of municipal schools).

School education aims to deliver "education and values to students in compliance with the needs of society and their individual capacities and expectations for a successful realization in civil society" (PEA, Art. 22). "There is considerable advance in the co-operation, dialogue and interaction of schools with the social environment, as well as in the participation and responsibility of the intellectual elite and the whole society in the outcomes of education and the autonomy of educational institutions" (The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Reports: Bulgaria).

The National Education Standards set out the levels of required general and vocational training and provide the "conditions for 1) building a free, ethical, and proactive personality, who as a Bulgarian citizen shall respect the laws, other people's rights, and their language, religion, and culture; 2) meeting individual interests and needs and acquiring wide general knowledge" (PEA, Art.15). General education secures the acquisition of the general education minimum and, when possible, specialized training according to the State Education Standards. The general education minimum standards underlie the provision of general education. They cover the knowledge and skills required for successful performance at the next stage of education. They are compulsory for all the different types of schools. Further to the general education minimum, however, vocational schools (60% of secondary schools) provide training, including language instruction, which is specific to their target professions. As regards foreign language teaching, these standards are diversified according to status (first or second foreign language), and are divided into three levels to be achieved before leaving school. These are I for secondary comprehensive schools, II for vocational schools with intensive instruction in foreign languages during the 8th grade, and III for profile-oriented schools (i.e. language schools) and classes with intensive instruction in foreign languages. The course load is 200–250 class periods (45 minutes)

per level. The first foreign language is introduced as early as kindergarten, while second foreign language tuition is offered in grade 7.

A school curriculum is elaborated on the basis of the National Curriculum taking into account the interests of the students and the capacity of the school. It is adopted by decision of the School Board of Teachers and is subject to approval by the Director of the Regional Inspectorate and the Minister of Education and Science. Syllabi set out the aims and objectives, content and expected outcomes of the course of training. They are approved by the Minister of Education and Science, except in the case of elective courses.

Textbooks and teaching aids comply with the national education standards as regards the content, design, and layout. They are subject to approval by the Minister of Education and Science after a transparent assessment procedure. The number of textbooks a teacher can choose from is three or less.

School subjects are either compulsory, compulsory-elective, or elective, and the ratio of these depends on the stage and level of education. Compulsory subjects account for 90% of primary, 80–90% of pre-secondary, and 45–80% of secondary schooling. This gives learner-autonomy-minded professionals another opportunity to offer further language training to students who are motivated to expand their language horizons. At language schools, subjects are taught in the target language provided that this is regulated by their curricula. Should that be the case, students have the opportunity to integrate language and content learning.

The aims and objectives of foreign language teaching in Bulgaria are "to prepare students to communicate with people belonging to other cultural and language communities, to situations beyond the boundaries of the native language environment; to teach them how to seek, retrieve, and comprehend information from target language sources, to boost their language awareness; to build skills for further independent learning and to improve their command of the target languages; […] to build and develop communicative competence, a capacity to understand spoken and written language and to generate spoken and written utterances." Learning-to-learn skills are explicitly interwoven into the aims and objectives, which is indicative of the appreciation for learner autonomy at

policy level.

National education standards are designed to be measurable, feasible, integral and interdisciplinary. The foreign language teaching standards comply with the Common European Framework of Reference, levels A1 through C1, while C2 is declared to lie outside the scope of Bulgarian secondary schools. Each level is assigned 200–150 contact hours. Schools are obliged to map the different forms of tuition to one of these five language levels.

The Ministry of Education and Science endorses the application of validated versions of the European Language Portfolio for different ages, levels, and purposes developed by different organizations and institutions, sometimes with ministry involvement. An ELP in five language versions has been validated for learners in vocational schools, as well as one for learners aged 6–10, out of the 80 ELPs validated by December 2006.

Nationwide competitions in good teaching practice are a policy of the ministry in order to encourage innovative approaches, e.g. by awarding prizes. They are not limited to formal classroom teaching, but also allow for extracurricular and informal teaching settings. This is another opportunity for exponents of learner autonomy to gain recognition and exhibit their (combination of) methods, approaches, and practices. Nationwide and regional student competitions, called Olympiads, motivate students to compare themselves with their peers, regardless of the degree of autonomy in their approaches, their educational settings, etc.

1.2   Background (1980s–2006)

The Bulgarian system of school education has always striven for a balance between tradition and improvement, having the student as its main focus. The underlying philosophy of equal opportunity and quality of education has aimed to encourage students to develop their abilities both in the course of instruction and in the process of developing their personality. Students have been taught to achieve their goals while acknowledging the rules, i.e. their particular contexts in terms of central/local/school regulations, etc. and while recognizing the right of their peers to do so too. The concept of students developing as versatile personalities, the interdisciplinary approach and the value of self-depend-

ence have been just some of the educational goals set over the years, which have been especially eagerly embraced by pilot schools throughout the country, blazing a trail to autonomy in learning. Entrance to the "elitist" schools, for instance, was based on candidates' average grade at the entrance examinations in one or two relevant subjects after grades 7 or 8. This performance-based approach allowed for different paths to be followed without discriminating against learning strategies, styles, etc. Gifted students have been allowed more flexible frameworks since early childhood. At the dawn of the new century, however, having recognized education as a national priority, the need is felt for a re-definition of goals.

2   New strategies

Education is proclaimed to be one of the national priorities in the Ruling Program of the Bulgarian government (2001–2005), and Lifelong Language Learning (LLL) is at the heart of its aims and objectives. An example of official encouragement is a recent government program called i-Bulgaria, which provides Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) equipment and solutions to all Bulgarian schools as a tool to achieve the targets in the policy documents, including those related to foreign language teaching. This is an outcome of the national strategy to introduce ICT to Bulgarian schools, adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament. "After accepting the LLL concept and the philosophy of the Lisbon strategy, and developing the Memorandum on LLL of the EU, Bulgaria has accepted entirely the basic formulations and ideas of the Memorandum, and has begun to implement them by developing all necessary legislative documents" (Ruling Programme 2001–2005). The Government's LLL Strategy "presupposes activities concerning investment in teachers' career growth, which shall guarantee their access to knowledge and improvement of their skills" (ibid.). The National Programme For Development of School Education and Pre-School Education and Training (2006–2015), henceforth "the Programme", envisages updates of content, curricula and syllabi in order to provide the prerequisites for encouraging learner autonomy. It takes a balanced approach based on three pillars: student, teacher, and policy. Students are able to increase their share in the ownership of the process, and the school is meant to be student territory, while

ritualization (school flags, ceremonies on various academic occasions, etc.) enhances students' awareness of their affiliation to their school and community. Extra-curricular and extra-school activities involve students and contribute to a well-rounded education and enhanced motivation. Teachers are viewed as a key factor in the development of the education system and their social status is being upgraded, as investments are made in their training and qualification, regular content knowledge updates, mastering new methods in teaching, ICT training, etc. A national register stores information on each teacher's qualifications and training. The career development model includes both a horizontal aspect (junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, head teacher and mentor), and a vertical dimension (headmaster, deputy-headmaster, expert and officer at regional inspectorates, administrative officer in the Ministry of Education and Science). Differentiated payment is introduced as a factor in their career development and reflects their students' performance based on external evaluation, initial and achievement levels. An award system is intended to honour the special contribution of certain teachers. All these incentives motivate teachers towards higher-quality performance. Policies include an efficient system for internal assessment using tests to be developed, including the state school-leaving examinations,[2] and a national standardized external assessment. The school network is being optimized; decentralization of the system is taking place, allowing for public control; legislation is being improved; and financing prioritizes school performance and development.

3   Initiatives for innovation towards learner autonomy

The national educational web portal (http://start.e-edu.bg), which allows simultaneous access by 1,000,000 users, is not only a knowledge network offering online courses, books, tests etc. but also serves as a means of communication between the teachers, students and parents. Interactivity, hypertext and test generation assist students in the imple-

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2   Examples of actual state school-leaving exam tests in English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish and their keys can be downloaded from the web Internet addresses given in the list of references.

mentation of their learning agenda. Students can also create interactive units, multimedia content or other education online resources, take part in discussion groups or task forces, and expand their knowledge of learning-to-learn strategies. The portal can be accessed even by students with special needs.

To increase students' awareness of the education process, days of student self-regulation are held on an annual basis, and student councils are set up on a permanent basis. Thus students develop social responsibility and critical awareness as active participants in the education process.

Drawing on the Bulgarian success story with language schools over many decades, the eighth grade has been dedicated to intensive study of foreign languages and ICT and/or vocational training. This is an important choice each student has to make in view of their preferences, interests and future plans The number of hours is sufficient for developing skills and enhancing the capacities of autonomous learners.

4   Pitfalls and critical issues

As outlined in the Programme, there is room for improvement in more aspects than one:

- The existing system tends to be oriented to memorizing and reproduction, rather than to stimulating thought, self-dependence and skills development. Positive changes are expected with the implementation of the new assessment policies.
- Bulgarian school education is still built around the model where the teacher is the knowledge provider and the person in charge, while the student is assigned a receptive and passive role.
- There is no system in place for nation-wide external assessment, and the internal assessment system uses traditional methods, which are not efficient enough. This prevents both students and teachers from adequately comparing students' performance to that of their peers from other schools or years.
- Teachers still have a low social and (especially) economic status, which leads to loss of self-esteem and motivation.
- The management of the system is over-centralized, as decisions are

made at levels which are distanced from those meant to implement them or those directly affected by them.

- The current system of financing does not provide incentives for teacher development.
- There are too many legislative issues sometimes contradicting each other, together with norms, which impede their enforcement.

Policies have been elaborated to overcome all these imperfections, which should significantly improve the environment for learner autonomy.

5   Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that a baseline study on learner autonomy in the Bulgarian education system has not been carried out so far and could be the subject of a further project. However, there is enough legislative evidence that school education policy does not discourage innovative approaches, and the role of teachers and learners, together with other stakeholders, is crucial to initiating, adopting, adapting, and disseminating learner autonomy practices. Bulgarian higher schools have a significant amount of autonomy compared with other EU and OECD member states and could exert a positive stimulating effect on secondary education in that respect. The teacher–students ratio is also higher than the EU average, which should be a favourable factor in this process. In a constant striving for improvement, the education community expects the implementation of the measures in the National Program for Development of School Education and Pre-School Education and Training, which will improve some aspects of the context for learner autonomy in Bulgaria.

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Language learner autonomy in a Cypriot context

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1   Introduction

In this brief overview, we will first refer to general education policies of the Republic of Cyprus, then concentrate on language policy with a focus on the English language programme, discussing how learner autonomy is addressed.

In foreign language education, some major innovations with implications for learner autonomy have been introduced in Cyprus over the last decade. The analysis of national language policies and practices related to learner autonomy in the Republic of Cyprus is based on the following legislative documents:

- *Country Report (Language Educatoin Policy Profile)* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004)
- *Language Education Policy Profile* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005)
- Primary, Gymnasium, and Lyceum language curricula, focusing mainly on the English language (Ministry of Education and Culture 1997, 2000, 2002)
- Ministry of Education documents describing Language Rooms, the European Language Portfolio, and teacher training (Ministry of Education and Culture 2005, 2006–2007)

2   School education

Public education in the Republic of Cyprus offers equal opportunities to all and aims at promoting tolerance, friendship and cooperation among the various communities in the Republic. Among its goals is "the

development of skills and abilities for further academic and technical studies, for employment and for lifelong learning." (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004: 6).

Pre-primary education lasts for two years and eight months, primary education covers six years (6–12-year-olds), lower secondary (Gymnasium) three years (13–15-year-olds), and upper secondary (Lyceum – Eniaio Lykeio or Comprehensive Lyceum since 2000) three years (16–18-year-olds). Education is compulsory from primary through to lower secondary school (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005).

3   Language policy

The aim of the Language Policy of the Republic of Cyprus is to promote individual plurilingualism. Based on the Council of Europe perspective, language education in Cyprus is seen holistically and includes:

a) Mother tongue/first language. According to Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, Standard Modern Greek and Turkish constitute the official languages of the Republic. According to Article 20, education is made available by the Greek and Turkish Communal Chambers (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005). Because of the events of 1974 and the continuing occupation of the Northern part of Cyprus by Turkey, this report only describes the current language policy of the Republic of Cyprus. This policy can be characterized as an implied policy because it has never been clearly articulated in an official declaration or decree, nor it is presented in one specific, official, government document. Nevertheless, it is widely known among educators that the language of instruction at all levels of education is the "Koini Neoelliniki" or Pan-Hellenic Demotic Greek (Standard Modern Greek). The Cypriot dialect of Greek exists alongside Standard Modern Greek, from which it is distinguished by phonetic and lexical features (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004).

b) Minority languages. Cyprus ratifies both the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Armenians, Maronites and Latins, Georgians, English, Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian and others enjoy the right to attend public or private educational institutions (Ministry of Education

and Culture 2003–2005).

c) Foreign languages. One of the five pillars of the educational system in Cyprus is foreign language teaching (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004).

4   School language programme

Cyprus is strongly committed to foreign languages. In the public sector, study of the English language is compulsory from the fourth year of primary school to the first year of Lyceum. English and French are compulsory for all three Gymnasium grades and in the first grade of Lyceum. In the second year of Lyceum, students choose two foreign languages out of seven (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Turkish) to be studied during the second and third year of Lyceum.

There is also a large private school sector where foreign languages are often prominent (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005). Tuition in languages is particularly sought after, not only for its own sake but as a factor in career success, not least in gaining entrance to universities in Cyprus or Greece, or to private colleges in Cyprus. Most private schools have flexibility in the allocation and distribution of time for languages (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004). They may offer, for example, a stronger emphasis on foreign languages, reflected in as many as six periods per week of English from the beginning of secondary education; integration of periods for modern and classical Greek to provide some curricular flexibility; and English as the language of instruction in one or more subjects (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005).

Supplementary private tuition outside school hours is also widespread. Most parents whose children attend public schools (estimated at over 80%) resort to seeking private classes (*frontistiria*) (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005).

Foreign languages are also offered at tertiary level by public and private institutions, mostly English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and Italian.

This report concentrates on the Public School Language Programme.

5   Curriculum, assessment and learner autonomy

Many developments in curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment have been facilitated by reference to the instruments and documents of the Council of Europe, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), together with the associated manual for relating language examinations to the CEFR, the European Language Portfolio, and the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005; for details of these Council of Europe publications, see http://www.coe.int/lang).

The Unified Nine-Year Education Programme, which aims at ensuring continuity and coherence between primary and lower secondary education, sets out common overall aims for the six years of primary education and the three years of Gymnasium (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004).

In primary school, foreign language teaching aims to enable pupils to communicate effectively in English in various situations and to develop a positive attitude towards the English language (Ministry of Education and Culture 1997). In addition, the syllabus respects the uniqueness of the individual child and responds to innate or acquired individual differences (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004). The national curriculum for elementary school makes no reference to learner autonomy.

The Gymnasium curriculum includes foreign languages. Amongst its main educational objectives, the Gymnasium aims to enable learners to develop critical thinking skills and to become aware of their potential in terms of skills, interests and talents (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004). No reference to learner autonomy is made in the current curriculum for language learning in the Gymnasium.

The Lyceum curriculum adopts a different approach to that of the Gymnasium curriculum. It emphasizes creativity and the importance of catering to students' needs, aptitudes, interests and communication skills. Since the introduction of the Eniaio Lykeio in September 2000, there have been radical changes in syllabuses and the introduction of innovation in state schools. The revised language learning approach (developed in 2000) includes autonomous learning as an explicit goal, with specific requirements to facilitate its development, and implicit references that

relate to autonomy or independence in general. Among the objectives of this curriculum is to prepare youngsters for lifelong education. It is also stated that the promotion of transversal aims should be realized through the following metacognitive objectives: "autonomous learning, communication skills (computer literacy), negotiating ability, analytical and synthetic abilities, critical judgement and initiative, project work" (Ministry of Education and Culture 2000: 280).

The Ministry of Education in Cyprus puts emphasis on the development of metacognitive skills. Teachers are advised to encourage learners to monitor and regulate their own learning. Students are provided with different opportunities to feel responsible for their own learning (for example, choosing the name of the group they belong to, peer correction, self-correction, encouraging learners to become leaders in the group, taking notes, monitoring their own learning while writing summaries or during reading comprehension-scanning and practicing skimming skills) (A. Prodromou,[1] personal communication, 19 June 2007).

The upper secondary curriculum also recommends that teaching should be learner-centered, encouraging autonomous learning and student initiative and focusing on learner development through the following:

• There are opportunities for students to get involved in the learning process through elicitation and discovery techniques and problem-solving activities. Also, students assume responsibility for their own learning and are given opportunities for autonomy through the use of information technology, grammar books and reference books.

• The teacher's role is minimized as he or she assumes the role of motivator, facilitator, adviser and guide, and students are offered opportunities to stimulate their creative abilities by undertaking individual projects, writing stories or poems, pair and group work (Ministry of Education and Culture 2000, 2002).

• Autonomy is also seen in the affective domain. Teachers create a classroom atmosphere where students are respected and can freely

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1   Inspector for English, Department of. Secondary Education, Ministry of Education and Culture.

express their views without feeling stress or anxiety.

As far as assessment and testing are concerned, reference is made to the use of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment in primary schools (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004). However, it is not clear how the outcomes of this are used to inform teachers at the Gymnasium about the experiences and progress of the children joining their classes from primary school (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005).

In secondary education there are separate syllabuses and examinations for each language. For example, the English curriculum for the Gymnasium is based on the acquisition of communicative competence and refers to *The Threshold Level*. The French curriculum, on the other hand, reproduces the contents of a textbook for French as a foreign language published in France but there is no clear theoretical basis for this programme. There is no generic core of aims and objectives to ensure consistency in expectations across languages (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005).

The Service of Examinations of the Directory of Tertiary Education organizes and supervises the annual Pancyprian examinations in foreign languages.[2] Their results lead to both the Higher School Certificate and acceptance into universities in Cyprus and Greece. Examinations are set by inspectors and teachers for each language. Candidates' scripts are marked by teachers from other schools.

6   Innovations promoting learner autonomy

In Cyprus, full ICT implementation has gained top priority in secondary education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004: 17). Language Rooms (LRs) are an example of ICT implementation in secondary schools. Considerable efforts have been made to promote autonomous learning through the introduction of Language Rooms and reforms in upper secondary education (Eniaio Lykeio).

LRs were first introduced during the school year 2000–2001 (a two-year pilot programme) for the teaching of Greek, English and French. At

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2 For examples of actual exams visit http://www.moec.gov.cy/daae/exams2006/26-5-2006-english.pdf

present there are two fully equipped LRs in the thirty-four Lyceums in Cyprus; they are used for all foreign languages (Greek, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Turkish). At Gymnasium level LRs are gradually being introduced and are used as resources to carry out learning tasks. As from 2004, a pilot programme has been implemented to include LRs in eleven Gymnasia (Ministry of Education 2005).

The establishment of LRs as a resource for language learning is a valuable and interesting innovation that provides opportunities for the implementation of the objectives of the language curriculum at secondary level (Gymnasium and Lyceum). The creation of LRs reflects a belief that language teaching and learning need dedicated space in which a wide range of media and activities can be deployed to meet the needs of learners and help them to develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well as other linguistic competences. LRs aim to encourage students to become autonomous language learners with the use of new technologies in mixed-ability classes. Learning/teaching in the LR becomes a process of supporting learners' personal development as independent language users in terms of the autonomous selection of thematic areas to investigate in a language other than their own (Ministry of Education 2005).

A LR is a user-friendly place that houses appropriate equipment and organized and easily accessible resources that satisfy learners' diverse needs and facilitate the teacher's work. A modern LR is a multi-functional classroom. It may contain equipment and facilities that help it to function as a conventional classroom, as a self-access centre, and as a language resource centre. The LR has a pleasant and motivating atmosphere, allows the creation of different classroom layouts required by different teaching techniques and preferences, and reinforces classroom dynamics (Ministry of Education and Culture 2005). Typically, a LR includes overhead projectors, computers linked to the Internet, audio-visual facilities (TV, video, DVDs, tape recorder and cassettes, CDs), enhanced display space, and flexible furniture layouts which can be configured to support a range of teaching styles, including collaborative group work. Immediate access to reference material, printers and photocopiers within the LRs enables students to work independently and also to take away the products of

their work for private study. The enhanced opportunities for teaching and learning encourage teachers to be innovative, to share ideas and to widen their range of strategies (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005).

Thus lessons in the LR always vary according to the objective of the lesson, the number of sources to be utilized, the approach and class management used, and the type of presentation/feedback chosen. Overall, the LR provides an integrated multimedia environment that facilitates pupils' self-expression, reflection and self-assessment in a variety of modes (visual, graphic, kinaesthetic, etc.), thereby enriching their lifelong linguistic potential (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004: 19–20).

It has been a challenge for both teachers and learners to adopt and adapt to new methods of learning, which emphasize learner. When the LRs were first introduced teachers and students were uncomfortable. It was difficult to persuade students that they were being given the authority to control their learning. Before the introduction of LRs, the teacher had the authority to control the learning process. Now student and teacher attitudes have gradually started to change. Research that has been conducted in secondary schools during the five-year implementation of this innovation has shown that students are now enjoying using the LRs. They are actively involved in the learning process, choosing which resources to use, carrying out research and presenting their work. Teachers are supporting their learning by guiding them rather than transmitting knowledge (A. Prodromou, personal communication, 19 June 2007).

Many projects that have been conducted at secondary schools as part of the European Language Label competition also show that "students can do miracles when working in the Language Room" (Ministry of Education 2000, 2005). For example, four projects that were awarded the Label in 2003 were about language lessons taught, as examples of good practice, in the LR. The examples of good practice in order to promote and encourage the implementation of this innovation concerned the teaching of foreign languages. The methodology used sought to include the following:

- extension of classroom learning to satisfy a need for remedial work;
- flexibility of class management, especially when dealing with mixed ability classes;
- access to a wide range of resources and equipment;

- promotion of cooperation and team spirit both for learners and teachers;
- training learners to be aware of their needs and take responsibility for their own learning;
- catering for individual learners' needs regarding choice of resources and pace of learning;
- training of learners to acquire the ability to evaluate themselves and their work

The outcome of these projects was the creation of a LR portfolio that would present the activities and work done in the LR (http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm?fuseaction=ProjDetail&ID=2961&lang=EN).

The European Language Portfolio (http://www.coe.int/portfolio) was developed by the Council of Europe as an instrument in which language learners at any age and at all levels can record their language competences as well as their learning and intercultural experiences. It promotes coherence and transparency in an individual's learning path, at both the national and European level, and facilitates education and vocational mobility. In Cyprus, an ELP has been developed in three languages, Greek, English and French. Pupils, however, have the opportunity to assess themselves in any other language they speak. A pilot project was conducted in eleven Gymnasiums, both in the towns and in the country. After being evaluated by both students and teachers, amendments were made and the ELP was sent to the Council of Europe for accreditation (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004: 37–38). The ELP was introduced in September 2007 and is to be provided free for all Gymnasiums.

7   Teacher training

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute offers pre-service and in-service teacher training courses for languages, as well as for other subjects, thus providing assistance and guidance to newly-appointed language teachers in preparation for their induction into the state school system. These courses have as their objective the training of educators in the use and application of contemporary strategies, techniques and approaches in their teaching. The latest teaching and learning theories are introduced and

discussed and a practical assessment is required for the successful completion of the course. Use of the LR and the ELP are among the core topics included in the pre-service course, and autonomous learning is among the methods discussed (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004).

The Ministry of Education and Culture also provides opportunities for in-service training. For example, in collaboration with the British Council, a four-day training programme was organized for LR managers in state secondary schools. The main objective of the training was to raise awareness among secondary school LR managers of the relevant issues. It was delivered by an expert from Bell International, London, and focused on an overview of self-access and independent learning theory with particular emphasis on learning styles and how these relate to the use of LRs. Other issues such as sourcing, evaluating and creating materials for use in LRs were also looked at (Ministry of Education, 2005).

8   Conclusion

In this brief overview, we first referred to general education policies of the Republic of Cyprus, then concentrated on language policy with a focus on the English language programme, with special reference to the inclusion of learner autonomy. Our study indicates that recently there are many activities in Cyprus that lead to more autonomous learning in general and language learning in particular. This is reflected in changes in the Lyceum curriculum and the introduction of Language Rooms and the European Language Portfolio. The Language Education Policy Profile of Cyprus (Ministry of Education and Culture 2003–2005) makes many suggestions for more improvement in many areas, including that of promoting learner autonomy through teacher in-service training.

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Language learner autonomy in an English context

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1   Introduction

This brief chapter will offer some reflections on the relationship between secondary education policy in England and the promotion of learner autonomy. It will identify some milestones in curriculum policy since the inception of the National Curriculum through the Education Reform Act of 1988. These milestones will relate to both generic and languages-specific curriculum policy and innovation, given that they both represent a need perceived by government to ensure that educational standards are raised generally in the curriculum as a whole and particularly in areas perceived to be problematic (such as literacy, numeracy and languages).

Given the significance of context in education policy (Jiménez Raya, Lamb and Vieira 2007), the intention of this account is not to define learner autonomy in a highly specific way and then consider whether or not education policy is supportive of it. It has been suggested that the contextual nature of autonomy means that "it can be construed in many different ways, and that we must follow the scent rather than look for the specific" (Lamb 2005: 83). In this chapter, then, I shall be examining key policies in order to identify any aspects which appear to encourage learners to take greater responsibility for or control over their learning. As the focus of the EuroPAL project is on teacher development towards a pedagogy for autonomy, the chapter will also include some comments on the changing status of the teacher as an autonomous professional, as illustrated by general education policy.

My approach to this chapter is largely reflective and highly influenced by my own professional engagement over the past 30 years. Thus,

although it includes a level of documentary analysis, this is not carried out methodically, but rather from my own awareness and positionality. This positionality is characterized by the following key aspects:

- as a teacher of French and German, and a head of languages, over a sixteen year period from 1978, which encompassed the introduction of the National Curriculum;
- as a teacher educator in two universities since the mid-1990s, during which time frameworks for teacher development have changed several times;
- as former President of the Association for Language Learning and a governor of CILT, the National Centre for Languages, both roles which afford engagement with policy making at the highest level of government.

It should also be stated that this chapter refers exclusively to England. Although there are some commonalities with Wales, there are also significant differences, and Scotland and Northern Ireland each have not only their own curriculum policy but also their own education systems.

2   The Education Reform Act 1988: a paradigm shift

Until the late 1980s, England (and the rest of the UK) had one of the most flexible approaches to curriculum design in the world. Schools were free to teach whichever subjects they wished, and to choose to what extent and how those subjects would be taught. The main constraint was the existence of 'O' (Ordinary) level and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examinations (which became General Certificate of Secondary Education [GCSE] examinations in the 1980s) taken usually at the age of sixteen, and 'A' (Advanced) level examinations taken usually at the age of eighteen, for which most schools prepared their learners, though even here there was a plethora of different examination boards offering a range of syllabi from which schools were at liberty to choose. In many cases, schools chose examination boards which allowed them to devise and assess their own examinations for sixteen-year-olds, the role of the board being to approve the syllabus and to moderate the assessment.[1]

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1   For further information on assessment and examinations in England, see the website of the QCA.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the reasons for the introduction of education reform by the then Conservative government in the late 1980s, though it clearly paralleled other aspects of political reform in line with government thinking on free markets, competition and choice. Suffice it to say that this heralded a paradigm shift in education policy, which made a great difference to teachers' lives and work. The three key aspects of the Education Reform Act 1988 were the introduction of a National Curriculum, the devolution of finances away from local authorities to individual schools, and parental choice of school (at least on a theoretical level) which would be informed partly by the publishing of performance data in the form of 'league tables'. The overall effect of these developments was to increase government control over schools directly through the curriculum and indirectly through reduction of the power of the local authority and through the introduction of the concept of competition between schools. As a result of this, the incentive to focus mainly on matters which related to performance data, such as extra support for borderline learners often at the expense of learners who were expected to pass their examinations anyway (or indeed those who were not expected to pass even with additional help; Parsons 1999, Gillborn and Mirza 2000), and to spend increasing amounts of time on examination preparation often at the expense of innovation and motivation, proved irresistible to most schools. This was exacerbated by the Education (Schools) Act 1992, which introduced the OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) inspection regime with powers to close schools should they not conform to expected levels of quality as defined by the National Curriculum.

The reason for this introduction to the exploration of education policy in terms of its relationship to learner autonomy is that it explains why, over the past 20 years, there has been an increase in control over and accountability amongst teachers, whose work has become more publicly visible through OFSTED reports and league tables focused on compliance with national curriculum demands, narrowly defined attainment, and examination results. For a while this encouraged a conservative approach to teaching and learning; the lack of opportunities to collaborate with teachers from other schools and the general focus on examination results were not conducive to innovation. Indeed, much previous innovation,

both in terms of curriculum structures and content as well as teaching methodology, was lost. An example is the loss in the 1990s of two major developments which had characterized my own professional work in the 1980s: the development of language awareness (e.g. Donmall 1985) and more flexible forms of classroom arrangement to encourage flexible, learner-centred learning (e.g. Gathercole 1990; Page 1992).

What is interesting is that nothing in the curriculum forbade the further development of these pedagogic practices. Indeed, the first version of the National Curriculum for Modern Languages referred explicitly to the development of children's ability to work both independently and in groups, and also required the teacher to cater for individual learners' needs through the planning and ongoing monitoring of learning. Teaching heterogeneous classes, I believed that the only way of managing this was through the increased enhancement of opportunities for learners to work independently, and I spent many conferences presenting this to other teachers (e.g. Lamb 1996, 1998). However, the new focus on evidencing their learners' learning through the collection of pieces of work, and the fear that they may not be doing this correctly, combined with the pressure to get children through their examinations, ironically led to a distraction away from such learner-centred ideas, leaving teachers with a belief that they had to conform to practices which they perceived to be expected of them.

Subsequent versions of the National Curriculum have maintained this commitment to the development of learners' independence. The current version (Department for Education and Employment 1999: 16) includes, for example, a section on developing language-learning skills as part of its Programme of Study, requiring learners to be taught:

a) techniques for memorizing words, phrases and short extracts;
b) how to use context and other clues to interpret meaning;
c) to use their knowledge of English or another language when learning the target language;
d) how to use dictionaries and other reference materials appropriately and effectively;
e) how to develop their independence in learning and using the target language.

However, the overall vision of learner autonomy is not expressed clearly anywhere, which means that the above can be interpreted in a limited way as the teaching of learning strategies and explicit grammar teaching. This is reinforced by another piece of strategy reform, the Key Stage 3 Framework, which will be explained later in the chapter.

3   National Strategies: increasing learner autonomy, decreasing teacher autonomy?

In the 1990s, further government anxieties about the state of the nation's educational achievement in the face of increasing globalization led to the introduction of a new, enhanced focus on literacy. This began with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in the mid-1990s, which was initially focused on school entrants at primary level, and was gradually extended throughout the primary years. Part of this strategy involved a prescribed 'literacy hour', specifically broken down into a number of stages, which teachers were encouraged to organize each day. A further aspect was the development of literacy across the whole curriculum, and not just in English lessons. The full significance of this became clear when the Strategy reached beyond primary into secondary schools, as it led the way towards a comprehensive strategy for all subjects, broadening out to encompass not only literacy development, but a whole-school approach to teaching and learning.

It is important to understand that the National Strategies are less focused on what is taught than how it is taught. As such, they introduce a new orthodoxy in methodology which cuts right across the curriculum. It is also of note that they are not meant to be compulsory, though in fact they have been adopted by schools as a whole-school focus, and may be perceived as compulsory for teachers under such circumstances, especially when this is reinforced by OFSTED inspections.

The Key Stage 3 (KS3) Strategy[2] was first introduced (after a pilot year) in 2001. It consists of five main strands: English, mathematics, science, ICT and foundation subjects (citizenship, design and technology,

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2   Key Stage 3 represents the first three years of secondary education for children aged 11 to 14.

geography, history, modern foreign languages,[3] music and physical education). It also has a whole-school dimension which includes a focus on, for example, behaviour and attendance. The purpose of the KS3 Strategy was to build on work in primary schools, and to emphasize inclusion and differentiation, in order to enhance standards of attainment.

In the training materials provided to all schools, it is expressly stated that "a key feature of the Foundation subjects strand is the emphasis it gives to the teaching of thinking skills and to assessment for learning. These help pupils to reach higher levels of attainment and become independent learners" (Department for Education and Skills 2002a: 4).The fourteen training modules include modules on assessment for learning in everyday lessons (which will be discussed later in the chapter), principles for teaching thinking (with the aim of developing the skills of independent thinking), thinking together (through talk), reflection (including the development of a language to talk about learning and the promotion of metacognition through, for example, the use of learning logs), and big concepts and skills (designed to help "to provide pupils with the ability to see patterns in new learning situations, tasks and problems; to provide a foundation for assisting pupils in transferring their learning", and to help "pupils to become more independent and motivated learners"; Department for Education and Skills 2002a: 343).

It is clear then that the KS3 Strategy offers schools support in developing learners' autonomy. It has since been extended throughout the compulsory years of schooling, including Key Stage 4 (ages 14–16), and is now called the Secondary Strategy. However, early evaluations of the Strategy suggested that although it was having a positive effect on aspects of teaching and learning (mainly in terms of being explicit about learning objectives, greater variety of and purpose to activities, and more pupils

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3 Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) is the term introduced by the National Curriculum to refer to modern languages. In fact, this term has been much criticized, and it is now official practice to refer to Languages, a more inclusive term which reflects that not all languages taught are 'foreign' but spoken by British learners in their homes and elsewhere. However, in KS3, the term MFL continues to be used as it is enshrined by law in the National Curriculum and would thus require an Act of Parliament to change.

being involved in their learning), few schools are seeing the 'big picture', and there is little evidence of coherence across the strands (Kitson 2004). This is partly related to the encouragement to focus on one or two strands as a way of making use of the Strategy manageable, and a reluctance on the part of the Government in recent years to introduce statutory changes, brought about by severe criticism that schools are unable to cope with such high volume of change. Lack of opportunity to consider the big picture means, for example, that most teachers are now sharing objectives at the beginning of the lesson, and organizing a plenary at the end, but often in a tokenistic and repetitive way rather than as a way of encouraging learners to understand the point of the lesson and the way in which it builds on their prior learning.

4   Assessment for learning

One strand of the National Strategy which is very much in evidence in schools is assessment for learning, defined as follows by Black and Jones (2006: 4):

> Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning […].

> An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs.

Key characteristics of assessment for learning are described in support materials for secondary teachers (Department for Education and Skills 2004: 3–4) as follows:
• Sharing learning objectives with pupils.
• Helping pupils to know and recognize the standards they are aiming for.

- Involving pupils in peer and self-assessment.
- Providing feedback that leads pupils to recognizing their next steps and how to take them.
- Promoting confidence that every pupil can improve.
- Involving both teacher and pupil in reviewing and reflecting on assessment information.

The implication is that teachers need to support pupils in the development of skills and knowledge to enable them to become more aware of themselves as learners and to understand that they have a responsibility for their own learning (Black and Wiliam 2005: 232–233). However, there is evidence to suggest that such pupil awareness is not always apparent (e.g. Lee et al. 1998; Williams et al. 2002), and that greater teacher awareness once again of the 'big picture' would enable this potentially powerful innovation to have greater impact. It is also clear that any attempt at assessment for learning will be limited without the development of the capacity for self-management and self-regulation. The implication is that teachers need to focus explicitly on the development of learner autonomy, through 'assessment for autonomy', i.e. through focusing the above key characteristics not only on learning but also on learner autonomy (Lamb forthcoming).

5   Key Stage 3 Framework for teaching MFL

In addition to the above generic strategies, it was decided that a specific "improvement programme" (Department for Education and Skills 2003: 11) needed to be developed for modern foreign languages in KS3. Therefore, in 2003, the KS3 Framework for MFL (Department for Education and Skills 2003) was introduced, deliberately mirroring the design of the National Literacy Strategy in its focus on developing language at word, sentence and text levels. The Framework is also intended to promote pupils' independence as language learners (albeit only in year nine):

> the MFL Framework and its associated training programme are designed not merely to inform the teaching of languages but also to create language learners. Pupils working to Framework objectives should develop an understanding of what it means to learn

a foreign language and of the skills and conventions of language learning. They should thus be well placed to learn other languages later. (Department for Education and Skills 2003: 13)

However, as in the National Curriculum (and indeed in the Strategy as a whole), the concept of independence as an overall vision is not defined in the Framework, and can therefore be interpreted in different ways. This is compounded by the design of the Framework, which consists of lists of 103 individual objectives which pupils should be taught (35 for year seven, and 34 for each of years eight and nine), divided into the five categories of words, sentences, texts (reading and writing), listening and speaking, and cultural knowledge and contact. These objectives vary in their scope, but there is again a strong focus on the development of learning strategies and the development of grammatical awareness. For example, in year seven at sentence level, we find the following:
Pupils should be taught:

7S1	How to recognize and apply typical word order in short phrases and sentences
7S2	How to work out the gist of a sentence by picking out the main words and seeing how the sentence is constructed compared with English
7S3	How to adapt a simple sentence to change its meaning or communicate personal information
7S4	How to formulate a basic question
7S5	How to formulate a basic negative statement
7S6	How to formulate compound sentences by linking two main clauses with a simple connective
7S7	To look for time expressions and verb tense in simple sentences referring to present, past or close future events
7S8	Punctuation and orthographic features specific to phrases and sentences in the target language
7S9	How to understand and produce simple sentences containing familiar language for routine classroom or social communication

Reading this, it is not difficult to understand why teachers may construe the concept of 'independence' as the ability to manipulate the grammar

of the language, with some element of learning strategies development. The inclusion in the Framework of complex grids which cross reference the objectives with the National Curriculum may also tempt teachers to adopt a 'tick-box' mentality to ensure that they are 'covering' the objectives. It could be argued that such teaching of discrete objectives is unlikely to lead to an autonomous learner, aware of and taking responsibility for the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of language learning.

6   Key Stage 2 Framework for teaching MFL

In 2001, the National Languages Strategy was launched after a year of deliberations by the National Languages Steering Group chaired by Baroness Ashton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Early Years and School Standards and consisting of representatives of key organizations and government departments (including myself as representative of the Association for Language Learning). The purpose of this strategy was to "transform our nation's capability in languages" (Department for Education and Skills 2002b: 4) through the encouragement of lifelong language learning both within and beyond educational establishments. Alongside a focus on out-of-class opportunities to learn languages, and the further development of e-learning (both of which have implications for learner autonomy) a key objective was to develop language learning in primary schools in order to "harness children's learning potential and enthusiasm" (ibid.).

However, unlike in most other countries where it is assumed that the first foreign language to be learnt is English, in England there is no clear case for introducing all learners to one language rather than another. This inevitably led to discussions about how to ensure continuity of learning when children move from primary school, where they may have been learning one language, to secondary school, where they may be learning another. During the development phase of the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages[4] (Department for Education and Skills 2005), the idea of learners learning transferable skills and knowledge in relation to language

4   Key Stage 2 refers to primary learners between the ages of seven and eleven, and constitutes the phase of schooling prior to secondary education.

learning emerged, with a view to them being able to learn more effectively no matter which language they were learning in secondary school. As a result, the Framework objectives are comprised of oracy, literacy and intercultural understanding as progressive core strands of teaching and learning, and knowledge about language (KAL) and language learning strategies (LLS) as cross-cutting strands, intended to be "important tools for learning, providing a basis for children's future development as language learners" (Department for Education and Skills 2005: 6).

Given the non-statutory nature of this Framework, and the problem of enhancing the capability of primary schools to teach any language, it is difficult to evaluate the effect that this Framework will have on language learning. In terms of learner autonomy, needless to say this concept is not articulated in the Framework despite it having provided a rationale for some of its key features. There is a passing reference to independence in a section entitled "Assessment and Evaluation" which includes discussion of the use of portfolios:

> Many schools have also used a portfolio approach to recognizing achievement in languages – as an aid to self-awareness and to continuity into the secondary sector. Use of a portfolio helps to give children a commitment to and ownership of their learning. By discussing and negotiating the aims, content and processes of their work at regular intervals, they gradually learn to take more responsibility for their own progress. The portfolio encourages children to develop a reflective approach to language learning and supports them in developing language learning strategies, which help them to learn more independently. (Department for Education and Skills 2005: 12)

7   Conclusion

This chapter has examined both general and languages-specific curriculum policy with a view to unearthing any references which may resonate with the broad concept of learner autonomy. It has found that there are indeed elements which can be interpreted as leading to a more autonomous learner, and that this concept, broadly interpreted, underpins

some of the thinking behind the vision of what the nature of an effective (language) learner may be.

However, the chapter also reveals some constraints on the development of learner autonomy. Firstly, teachers themselves have become less autonomous over the past 20 years, and the imposition of policies which are perceived to control and monitor the teacher and which encourage a narrow focus on examination results have exacerbated this. This has interestingly also led to some teachers becoming increasingly self-limiting, not daring to innovate and interpreting policies in narrow, conservative ways, even when the strategies themselves are suggesting something else. Secondly, the policies themselves appear only to hint at some spurious notion of the independent learner, and fail to articulate any vision of or rationale for learner autonomy. The result is a focus on grammatical awareness (leading to a revival of traditional grammar teaching in some schools) and strategy training, which can be interpreted as the explicit teaching of strategies. Possibly the recent innovation with the most potential to encourage learners to be more engaged in and reflective about their learning is the development of assessment for learning. However, teachers would do well to extend their encouragement of learner reflection on what they have learnt to include reflection on how they learned it, and how they may learn better in the future. This will require a far clearer articulation of the 'big picture' of learner autonomy, so that teachers can over time support their learners in personalizing[5] their learning according to their own learning needs.

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5 This chapter has avoided discussion of the recently introduced concept of 'personalized learning', which is now appearing in government statements on a regular basis. This is because there is as yet no clear definition of this, though it appears to suggest that learning should be appropriate to the learning needs of the individual, and that this requires increasing curriculum flexibility to facilitate learner choice about what they learn and, in some cases, where they learn. As such it is at the heart of new curriculum reforms for the 14-19 age range which are attempting to engage more learners in education beyond the age of compulsion through the inclusion of new vocational qualifications and through the enhancement of workplace-based learning.

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Language learner autonomy in a Norwegian context

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1 Introduction

Norway has seen a number of educational reforms since the comprehensive school system was introduced at primary and lower secondary levels in 1974 and the former highly selective school system was abolished. In 1976 upper secondary post-compulsory level was reorganized as a follow up to the 1974 reform. The overall aim was to sustain the continuing development of democracy and provide equal access to education – education being viewed as a means of overcoming social inequality. Thus, individual differences in ways of learning were taken into account and the pupils' right to receive teaching adapted to individual needs was explicitly stated. Learner-centredness and teaching differentiation were perceived as a need, but without altering the classic pedagogical view of teaching as transmission of knowledge, even though the idea of learner autonomy had already emerged. Some changes regarding the learner's role, such as learner participation in decisions related to school matters, can be traced back to this period, but learner autonomy and self-directed learning as a way of teaching and learning did not gain influence in curriculum legislature until the reform that took place in 1997, which is called L97.

This brief chapter is divided into two parts; firstly I shall identify the explicit and implicit position of language learner autonomy in national education legislation, and secondly I shall consider the impact of the curriculum on learner autonomy practices in the foreign language classroom.

2 Language learner autonomy in national education legislation

Three of the documents date back to the 1990s. These are the School Act (KUF 1996: 10–12), the National Common Core Curriculum (KUF 1996: 9–53) and the National Guidelines – Principles, Organization and Structure (KUF 1996: 53–87). These are all part of the L97 reform and have not been altered by the 2006 reform, which affected only subject curricula. The fourth document is the most recent subject curriculum for foreign languages (LK06 2006). I shall also refer to the second foreign language curriculum, *Tilvalgsspråk* (Additional Language), in L97 (KUF 1996: 277-297) as this has strongly influenced the curriculum for foreign languages in LK06 and is the document in which learner autonomy is referred to most explicitly.[1]

2.1 The School Act

The School Act dates back to 1994 and sets up the overall national goals of education. Below are keywords that might be considered as philosophical and pedagogical aspects of prominent educational ideals:

- Democracy
- Responsibility
- International co-responsibility
- A sense of values
- Intellectual freedom and tolerance
- Human equality and equal rights
- Personal development
- Scientific thought and method
- Basis for further education
- Independent action at work and in society
- Cooperation between teachers and pupils

(KUF 1996: 10–12)

The goals place an emphasis on both attitudinal and operational aspects of how to orient education. On the whole, the School Act forms

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1   All translations from the original documents are made by the Ministry of Education.

a solid basis on which a pedagogy for language learner autonomy may be founded. We may conclude that taking control of one's own language learning is consistent with national educational ideals.

2.2   National Common Core Curriculum

The National Common Core Curriculum for primary and secondary education constitutes a binding foundation for the development of separate curricula and subject curricula at the different levels of education. This document expands on the goals in the School Act. The selection of extracts below is representative of the educational philosophy of the general guidelines and may also be interpreted as supportive for learner autonomy. The first extract deals with the learner as an active learner:

> Education shall provide learners with the capability to take charge of themselves and their lives, as well as with the vigour and will to stand by others. [Education] must teach the young to look ahead and train their ability to make sound choices, allow each individual to learn by observing the practical consequences of his or her choices, and foster means and manners, which facilitate the achievement of the results they aim at. The young must gradually shoulder more responsibility for the planning and achievement of their own education – and they must take responsibility for their own conduct and behaviour. (KUF 1996: 9–53).

The picture of the active learner entails certain implicit characteristics such as taking charge of learning, making choices, taking control and learning how to learn, all of which resonate with learner autonomy. These characteristics are linked to a socio-constructivist view of learning as presented in the extract below:

> The point of departure for schooling is the personal aptitude, social background, and local origin of the pupils themselves. Learning occurs when new information is interpreted from the known – the concepts one already comprehends determine what one can fathom and grasp. Knowledge, skills and attitudes develop in the interplay

between old notions and new impressions. Education must therefore be tied to the pupil's own observations and experiences. Pupils build up their knowledge, generate their skills and evolve their attitudes largely by themselves. The ability to take action, to seek new experiences and to interpret them, must depart from the conceptual world with which pupils enter school. (ibid.)

A constructivist learning theory entails learner initiatives, making choices, self-construction of knowledge and assuming responsibility, all of which are referred to explicitly in this document. It is from this view of learning that the idea of learner autonomy has emerged. The next extract deals with didactic implications of this view:

Teaching and learning are not one and the same thing. Learning is what occurs within the pupil. Teaching is something done by another. [The learning] process can be stimulated and spurred or curbed and blocked, by others. […] Good teaching will give pupils evidence of succeeding in their work, faith in their own abilities, and the heart to take responsibility for their own learning and their own lives. Greater equality of results can be achieved by differences in the efforts directed towards each individual learner. Education should view individuals as moral beings, accountable for their decisions and responsible for their actions. (ibid.)

Teaching and learning are seen as different processes, and the fact that teaching can also hinder learning is recognized and related to differences in learners' cultural baggage. This argument points at implications for the understanding of teaching that are not observed in this document, namely that the teacher cannot possibly know on behalf of every single pupil what is the best approach and that the learners, when informed about learning, are the ones who are in the best position to know. The document advocates different aspects of the teacher role such as "initiator, guide, interlocutor and director", but still prevailing is the idea of adapted and differentiated transmission of knowledge (Trebbi in press).

2.3   National Curriculum Guidelines: Principles, Organization and Structure

The National Curriculum Guidelines (KUF 1996: 53–87) point to different implications for a new organization and structure of schools and teaching and recommend the development of a new pedagogical platform at local and school level, which is coherent with the core guidelines and the subject curricula. The pedagogical platform encompasses views of the learner as an active agent of learning, of teacher and learner roles and the role of school in society. Each school has to discuss the role of textbooks, how to use the space and resources at its disposal, how to create the 'learner-active school', how to put exploratory learning methods into action, and how to enable learners to take responsibility for their own learning. It is also emphasized that the traditional timetable and grouping of pupils in classes should be replaced by more flexible systems. Variation in learning activities is strongly recommended, such as play activities, practical and project work, creative activities, independent and exploratory work. The difference between teaching and learning should be discussed and clarified and more emphasis should be put on counselling and guidance. Learner initiative, participation and self-evaluation should be strengthened. Overall, the document is coherent with learner autonomy and opens the door to educational innovation.

2.4   Subject Curriculum for the Second Foreign Language in L97

Before we look at the most recent curriculum for foreign languages, LK06, we shall examine the curriculum for French as a second foreign language, one of the options among the compulsory additional subjects (*tilvalgsfag*) in L97 (KUF 1996: 285–291). The curriculum is common for all the second foreign languages and quite similar to that of the compulsory language, English. French is here taken as an example.

The two expert groups who made the proposal for English and the second foreign language curricula at lower secondary level were well informed about the theory of learner autonomy and interpreted the Common Core Curriculum, which was mandatory for their work, along these lines. The Curriculum for the Second Foreign Language at upper

secondary level was designed later and to a large extent followed the same direction. Two extracts from the French curriculum for lower secondary level which are linked to learner autonomy follow:

> The approaches to the study of French are designed to make the subject accessible to all pupils. […] Pupils may acquire elements of language in different sequences, and what they learn of the language may also differ. In cooperation with teachers and fellow pupils, they will gain experience of shaping their own language learning.

> The learning task will enable pupils to discover and explore the language, to use it right from the start, and through their own use of it gradually systematize their discoveries and try out their knowledge of the language. The pupils' evaluation of their own texts, and of the actual work process, helps them gain insight into their own language learning. […] Information technology can make it possible for pupils to participate in real language communities. Such direct contact with the language is also an invitation to independent learning. (ibid.: 285)

The extract points to aspects of language learner autonomy that coincide with theories of language learning as individual, social, experience-based and subject to hypothesis testing.

One of three general aims for the subject is "to promote the pupils' insight into what it is to learn French and their capacity to take charge of their own learning" (ibid.: 288). The study area linked to this general aim is "Knowledge of French language and culture, and of one's own learning" and the objectives related to the latter are the following:

Pupils shall

- help to create good learning situations and working methods, make their own choices, discuss their efforts to learn the language and discuss how to provide the whole group with the best possible conditions for French language learning (grade 8; ibid.: 289);

- define their own learning needs, set up learning targets, and assess their own efforts and progress (grade 9; ibid.: 289);
- learn to use a broad range of aids to solve the problems they encounter in their study of the language, and increase their insight into how useful information can be stored, organized and made available manually or electronically in the classroom and the library (grade 10; ibid.: 290);
- talk about and evaluate learning material and approaches in relation to the aims of the language course, and make choices that will benefit their own learning of French (grade 10; ibid.: 290).

We may conclude that language learner autonomy is explicitly included in the syllabus for French in L97. We shall now have a look at the most recent reform, LK06, which covers the whole educational system from the age of six to nineteen.

2.5   Curriculum for Foreign Languages in LK 06

This curriculum comprises all foreign languages except English and establishes competence aims that are organized into three main subject areas at two levels. The subject areas are language learning, communication and language, culture and society. The language learning area is the area that follows L97 most closely regarding learner autonomy. The description says that the area "covers insight into one's own language learning and language usage" (LK06 2006). This implies the learning-to-learn component of learner autonomy. The text goes on to say that "developing the ability to use appropriate learning strategies, such as defining one's own learning needs, formulating goals, selecting work methods, using aids and assessing work processes and goal attainment individually and in cooperation with others, could increase the learning of the subject" (ibid.).

At level I the competence aims of the study area "Language learning" are that the pupil should be able to

- exploit his or her own experience of language learning in learning the new language;

- examine similarities and differences between the native language and the new language and exploit this in his or her language learning;
- use digital tools and other aids;
- describe and assess his or her own work in learning the new language.

At level II the pupil should be able to

- exploit his or her experiences of language learning to develop his or her multilingualism;
- exploit various sources of authentic texts in his or her own language learning;
- use digital tools and other aids critically and independently;
- describe and assess his or her own progress in learning the new language. (ibid.).

We see that the competence aims are less concrete regarding the operationalization of learner autonomy and self-directed language learning than in the L97 reform. This means that the school and the teachers have considerable freedom to choose approaches and methods as well as content and material. The examination has been changed to bring it into line with this possible teaching plurality.[2]

3   From official discourse to classroom practice

We have seen that the policy documents open up opportunities for learner autonomy. We recognize principles like democratic ideals, responsibility, independence, intellectual freedom and tolerance, human equality and equal rights, learning for personal development, the importance of scientific thought and method, emphasis on equal access to knowledge, insight and skills, and learning methods for further education. We have also seen that the curricula for foreign languages both in 1997 and 2006

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2   For examples of actual exams visit http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/ templates/udir/TM_Artikkel.aspx?id=3001

take this a step further and incorporate learner autonomy more explicitly. On the other hand, when looking into the foreign language classroom there is evidence that innovation towards learner autonomy has not taken place on a general basis. Furthermore, there seems to be a growing dissatisfaction and de-motivation in foreign language education. This is confirmed by the Council of Europe *Experts' Report* on language education policy in Norway (Council of Europe 2003). Among the issues for discussion particularly noted by the Expert Group and also raised independently by those whom the group met during their visit, we notice that

- in compulsory education, a substantial number of teachers of English are not formally qualified (ibid.: 12);
- there is a similar lack of specialist knowledge and skill among some teachers of other languages (ibid.);
- many German and French teachers do not consider their subject suitable for all pupils, and approximately one quarter of pupils who begin a second foreign language at 8th grade quit before the end of 10th Grade, leaving only 55% of all students who have completed three years of a second foreign language by the end of compulsory schooling (ibid.: 9);
- even if the methodology of language teaching has been recently influenced, renewed and made increasingly complex by currents of international reflection and experimentation (language and cultural awareness, inter-comprehension, bilingual teaching/CLIL, etc.), language teaching is still often analysed and reduced to simplified dichotomies such as active/communicative approaches vs. grammatical/formal approaches (ibid.: 28);
- teachers who feel insecure about their skills rely on older approaches to pedagogy and textbooks (ibid.: 14), and orient their teaching towards the study of grammar, translation and, sometimes, 'learning by heart', making their subject 'difficult', 'theoretical', 'academic', with little or any communicative approach and with little 'appeal' for the students (ibid.: 24).

This situation demands explanations and these are, of course, highly complex. One explanation put forward is the lack of linguistic and didactic competence of many Norwegian language teachers, which creates insecurity and a need for established, in other words traditional, teaching behaviour. Innovation seems to be too challenging. Teachers who are facing diversity and the individual learning processes of the learners most often turn to teaching differentiation instead of creating flexible and open learning spaces to support different ways of learning. As a teacher educator with regular contact with classrooms during our students' practice periods, I observe that this is also true for teachers who have an excellent ability in the target language. They still stick to conventional and traditional approaches and do not respond to new insights in language learning that are taken into account in recent policy documents. We therefore have to search for additional explanations.

The National Common Core Curriculum presents us with several contradictions among which the following is one example. On the one hand the Common Core says that "Pupils build up their knowledge, generate their skills and evolve their attitudes largely by themselves", and on the other hand it says that "the course of study must identify what the learners should be familiar with, in what order and at which level". Interestingly, the text tries to combine transmission of knowledge and learner self-direction: "Education shall not only transmit learning; it shall also provide learners with the ability to acquire and attain new knowledge themselves." Moreover, the learners are supposed to take responsibility for their learning regardless of whether the learning activities are self-directed or teacher-directed. This 'double-binding' strategy is probably not viable for promoting innovation towards learner autonomy because it does not highlight what it is all about.

Nevertheless, changes are taking place in the foreign language classroom. Many schools are experimenting with new group formations, flexible timetables, new subject content, periods of independent study time for the students, learning-to-learn schemes, portfolio-based evaluation, and more emphasis on counselling and guiding. Also, the use of information technology, which is strongly promoted by the ministry with significant financial support, seems to have a promising impact on classroom prac-

tice, which is in line with the approach of self-directed learning. Lastly, examinations have become more coherent with the reform. The Council of Europe's Expert Group was impressed by the character and formats of current national examinations and hoped to see these maintained (Council of Europe 2003: 35).

There is a risk however, that these indicators of innovation remain purely instrumental for superficial changes if the teachers do not realize the potential for personal development inherent in these alternative ways of organizing their teaching. Increasing the time spent on independent learning and reducing classroom hours prove to be of little benefit as long as support is not provided for consciousness raising about language learning, the nature of languages, communication and culture, all of which help to underpin the development of learner autonomy.

Nevertheless, there are some good examples. These are teachers who are self-confident and dissatisfied with a situation of learner failure. They are able to detach themselves from conventional attitudes and the mental burden of tradition. They find it unacceptable that many learners are bored stiff and demotivated. They realize the need to change teacher and learner roles and dare to experiment with alternative practices. Some of these teachers participate in the Nordic Conference on Learner Autonomy in the Foreign Language Classroom together with teacher educators and researchers from a wide range of countries (Gabrielsen 1987, Trebbi 1990). Such networks are invaluable in sustaining innovation towards learner autonomy (Gjørven 2008).

4   Final remarks

To conclude, learner autonomy is a realistic goal within the framework of current legislation. However, the ambiguity of official discourse does not promote learner autonomy in a straightforward way. On the other hand, we know from earlier reforms that changes in curriculum do not necessarilyi have the intended impact on classroom practice. Teachers' internal constraints, i.e. attitudes and beliefs, prove to be greater obstacles to innovation than current external constraints (Trebbi in press). Innovation must emerge from the teachers themselves.

Learner autonomy implies a paradigm shift in didactics, not least

because learner control replaces centuries of teacher control over learning in schools. As long as this is not understood as empowering students without reducing the importance of teachers, new insights in language learning processes and socio-constructivist views on language learning will probably continue to translate into contradictory concepts that align themselves with the traditional representations of both language teachers and policy makers.

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3   On 15 June 2004 the Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education (Utdanningsdirektoratet) was established as a new organization under the Ministry of Education and Research. The Directorate is responsible for the national quality assessment system and has the overall responsibility for supervising the quality of education in Norway. Local school owners – the municipalities, counties and independent schools – are the ones responsible for the quality of education and through the agency of the County Governors the Government will ensure that this quality meets the required national standards.

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5

Language learner autonomy in a Portuguese context

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In this brief reflective account I will consider two issues:

- Do national policies encourage the promotion of learner autonomy in schools?
- What contradictions or tensions affect the implementation of learner–centredness?

On the whole, we can say that though educational policies in Portugal open up opportunities for (language) learner autonomy to be developed in schools, they also limit those opportunities in important ways, especially by not supporting innovation and not taking into account the way local circumstances and cultures may foster or inhibit change. I will not refer exclusively to language education policies, since some national policies affect the whole curriculum.

1   National policies and learner autonomy

Since 1986, when our first democratic Law of Education was set up, national goals for school education[1] have put a lot of emphasis on democratic citizenship and lifelong education, advocating the development of autonomy-related competences: responsibility, freedom, solidarity, co-operation, social and cultural awareness, intellectual curiosity, criticality,

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1   School education in Portugal is organized into 4 stages: compulsory education ("Ensino Básico"- levels 1-9, starting at the age of 6) comprises a 1st four-year cycle ("1º ciclo do Ensino Básico"), a 2nd two-year cycle ("2º ciclo do Ensino Básico"), and a 3rd three-year cycle ("3º ciclo do Ensino Básico"), which are followed by an upper secondary three-year cycle ("Ensino Secundário" - levels 10-12).

self-organization, creativity, and innovation. The idea of learner-centred-ness, which is aligned with current humanist and constructivist views of education in all fields, has become a key cross-curriculum trend, though it is not necessarily translated into explicit proposals for learner training, self-direction or learning how to learn in national syllabi or textbooks.[2] Historical and structural reasons, particularly the existence of national exams, encourage a concern for content knowledge acquisition, especially in upper secondary education where exams are highly selective.[3] Never-theless, there have been recent changes in the way exams are constructed. In the case of language exams, there has been an effort to integrate the notion of task-orientedness in the way the different language activities are sequenced; that is, activities are designed so as to contribute to a final outcome that always involves the communicative use of the language.

Especially during the past 10 years, national policies have been implemented to promote a focus on competences rather than content knowledge, on learning processes rather than products, and on learning how to learn. This can be seen in legislation emphasizing the central role of (self-)regulation processes in school assessment, in the formulation of competence-based syllabi, and in the implementation, since 2001, of a cross-disciplinary subject for students up to level 9 – Estudo Acompan-hado/Supported Study – whose goal is to promote their ability to learn how to learn with a focus on non-subject-specific learning strategies, so as to increase their academic success in the different subjects.

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2   We have national syllabi for every school subject, though schools have some degree of autonomy to manage (prioritize, sequence, organize) learning contents locally. There are no prescribed methods for teaching and assessment. Textbooks are compulsory for all subjects and are chosen at school level, for a period of 6 years (since recently), according to a set of national criteria for textbook appraisal. Most textbooks are written by Portuguese authors and try to operationalize official guidelines.

3   Final national exams (level 12) account for about 30% of final average marks and play a decisive role for students wishing to take undergraduate studies. There have also been national exams for Portuguese and Mathematics at the end of compulsory education (level 9), which account for 25% of the final mark on these subjects (for examples of national exams go to http:// www. gave.min-edu.pt).

In foreign language education[4] some major innovations with implications for learner autonomy have been introduced in national syllabi in the last decade:

- an increasing focus on sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences within a view of language form as subordinate to language use, as well as on intercultural awareness and communication associated with the idea of European citizenship and co-operation, but also with attitudes of openness to others and acceptance of diversity in one's communities;
- an increasing integration of communication and learning competences, through describing sets of learning processes and self-regulation strategies that can be associated with the planning, use and evaluation of receptive and productive language skills;
- an increasing orientation towards learning-centred approaches that promote pedagogical negotiation and differentiation, integrated skills learning, and self-/co-regulation procedures (especially task-based learning and project work);
- an increasing openness to alternative methods of assessment that can best promote and document learning processes and progress, with a recent focus on the (optional) use of the portfolio as a learning and assessment tool (though not necessarily following the European Language Portfolio model);

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4 Compulsory foreign language education starts at the age of 10 (level 5) and students must study at least two foreign languages during compulsory education (mostly English, followed by French, Spanish, and German). They may go on studying them or not in upper secondary levels, depending on the study area they choose. Although there is no mandatory foreign language, English is chosen by most students. According to data presented by Eurydice (2005, p.49) referring to the year 2001/2002, the percentage of students who learnt the 4 languages was: English (77.8), French (54.4), Spanish (1.6), and German (0.5). The last two languages are not offered in most schools for compulsory education, which limits the students' choices. Spanish was introduced more recently, and the fact that Portuguese speakers do not have much difficulty with Spanish may influence its choice. English has been introduced recently in primary education within a national programme that will make it compulsory in future years.

- an increasing appeal to methodological flexibility within a view of teaching as reflective practice and a view of teachers as (co-)managers of pedagogical choices.

Syllabi integrate (though not always explicitly) current developments in language didactics, especially the work of the Council of Europe, including the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001). The autonomy concept appears in the official guidelines at the levels of rationale, learning goals, and pedagogical proposals. Because textbooks are compulsory and usually designed with reference to syllabi (see note 2 above), they have slowly integrated learner-centred proposals, which is reinforced by some of the national criteria for textbook appraisal and selection at schools. Nevertheless, a close look at published textbooks reveals that learner development is often reduced to occasional opportunities for self-evaluation of learning processes (e.g. through checklists about study habits, reading strategies, etc.), rather than constituting a systematic approach promoting students' competence to develop as self-determined and socially responsible participants in language education environments. Moreover, even though schools are free to choose their textbooks, there has been a tendency to increase the number of years that the selected textbooks should be used by each school, which decreases the possibility of innovation and may make teaching materials outdated, for example in terms of their socio-cultural content.

Since there has not been an interdisciplinary approach to syllabus design, options and discourses across syllabi and textbooks for the different languages have not been consistent. Policies have always been more progressive in the case of English, which raises the issue of the hegemonic power of English and its impact on investment put into research and theoretical developments, with implications for curriculum and materials design. Talking about "foreign language teaching" is thus misleading, as differences of status among languages necessarily affect policies and practices.

The focus on learning how to learn has been especially notorious in resource books for the new cross-disciplinary area referred to above (Supported Study), for which there is no syllabus or specialized teachers. These books usually present units of practical advice and activities centred

around general areas of potential learning difficulty (e.g. how to prepare for tests, how to write a summary, how to take notes, how to organize study time, etc.), thus emphasizing the non-disciplinary dimension of learning and leaving to subject teachers the integration between content knowledge and strategy learning (Vieira et al. 2004).

Going back to the first question – whether national policies encourage the promotion of learner autonomy– we have to say that they do open up possibilities. In the particular case of foreign language education, there has been a significant investment in guidelines that favour a focus on learning competences. However, there are contradictions and tensions within the system which seem to affect schooling in general, with a negative impact upon the development of learner autonomy.

2   Contradictions and tensions

Pedagogy for autonomy is a highly flexible and context-sensitive approach that requires teachers willing and able to reflect critically upon educational goals and means so as to make informed choices about their practice, and who have the opportunity to do so in their working contexts. Questions may be raised here as regards the role played by educational policies in creating conditions that a) enable an inquiry-oriented, learner-centred approach to teaching, b) encourage teachers to reshape the curriculum according to learning needs and interests, c) promote the development and dissemination of local innovative practices, and d) enable teachers to play a decisive role in the production of relevant pedagogical knowledge.

When considering these issues, we have to think about policies that affect not only the curriculum but also teacher education and the role of teachers in educational research. On the other hand, we also have to take into account the extent to which policies collide with the cultural environments in which they are to be implemented.

2.1   Curriculum reforms

Curriculum reform policies in Portugal have traditionally followed a top-down applicationist pattern that does not include the establishment of support systems (extensive training programmes, local

advisory boards, resource centres, etc.) to assist educators in planning, monitoring and evaluating policies in practice. Moreover, learner-centred guidelines have been introduced without making significant changes in the organizational structure of schooling, for example, decreasing the number of students per class and the number of classes and working hours per teacher, allowing more time in teacher timetables for collaborative work, reorganizing learning spaces and creating new resources, reshaping subject curricula, and decreasing the weight of national exams.

The lack of supportive policies and structural changes reduces the scope for innovation and the impact of de-centralization measures to promote autonomy. A good example can be found in the implementation of Supported Study (SSt), the new "learning how to learn" area which calls for high levels of learner-centredness, teacher decision-making, peer collaboration and inter-disciplinary coordination. Since no significant measures were taken to facilitate the required changes, SSt has gradually been "disciplinarized", thus losing its potential for cross-curricular integration of learning competences. Most teachers work in isolation and on an ad hoc basis, either reproducing discipline-based approaches or relying (sometimes mechanically) on resource books that have rapidly proliferated in the market. Therefore, the political intention to promote competences that help students improve academic success may have been completely subverted (see, however, Vieira et al. 2008). It is interesting to note that if SSt were successful, with all students learning how to learn and all subject teachers integrating learning strategies into their own disciplines, it would become redundant, since subject teaching would then be more learner-centred itself. The paradox is not surprising, since SSt was intentionally created to supplement deficiencies in the system, namely its inability to promote students' academic success due to an over-fragmented, over-disciplinarized curriculum. To some extent then, SSt is still necessary because it has not been successful, though it will probably be extinguished without fulfilling its goals.

2.2   Teacher education and participation in educational research

Initial teacher education takes place at univeristy and inte-

grates educational training.[5] The discourse of reflection and school-based inquiry is present in some national laws and regulations, but programmes in general have failed to prepare teachers for pedagogical innovation as they are still largely transmissive and application-oriented, with no systematic integration of school/classroom-based inquiry into their curriculum. Even the practicum is often wasted as an opportunity to enhance pedagogical innovation, and the socialization of young teachers often leads to the reproduction rather than the transformation of existing discourses and practices.

Why this happens is not easy to explain, but part of the reason may lie in the undervaluing of professionalization issues in academic settings as compared with disciplinary research, and the resulting divorce between higher education institutions and schools. Progressive teacher education policies often contradict the priorities of the professoriate in higher education, whose civic mandates have been clearly de-emphasized. Recent European policies deriving from the Bologna Declaration will tend to reinforce this situation by enlarging the gap between specialist knowledge training (1st cycle of studies) and educational training (2nd cycle of studies). As professionalization becomes postgraduate, the amount of time student teachers stay in schools will also be reduced, and training at this stage may become even more academic than it is nowadays. Moreover, our government has recently proposed a new mechanism of access to the profession: a national exam for candidate teachers. When this measure is implemented, it will surely have a backwash effect upon teacher education practices and may reduce its innovative potential, since the exam will tend to become a means of ensuring that prospective teachers conform to existing norms and regulations (e.g., knowledge of prescribed syllabi).

Policies regarding in-service teacher education have advocated

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5   Until now, initial teacher education programmes have taken 4 or 5 years and always include practical training in school. This can be done for short periods of time during the programme or condensed in one final year. The practicum is supervised by school and college teachers. Current reforms, however, will reduce the practicum and separate specialist subject training (1st cycle of undergraduate studies – 3 years) from educational training (2nd cycle of post-graduate studies, 2 years).

the implementation of school-based programmes that take the form of "workshops", "circles of studies" and "projects", whereby teachers can develop an inquiry-based approach to teaching and improve the quality of student learning. Programmes can be offered by higher education institutions or school-based centres, and must be accredited so that teachers can get credits which are required for career promotions, with a direct impact on salaries.

The fact that in-service teacher development is directly associated with accreditation for promotion has fostered in-service development, but it has also raised some problems regarding teacher choices. Preferentially, teachers have enrolled in intensive courses (of 15 to 30 hours) that do not involve classroom-based inquiry, if and when they need the credits, which has also influenced the kind of courses offered. Therefore, the political intention to favour a practice-based approach to in-service teacher development, which might in turn enhance the promotion of learner-centredness, has not always been fulfilled, because it collides with a credit-based system for career promotion that does not necessarily take into account the quality of teaching practices and teachers' commitment to innovate.

The participation of universities in in-service teacher education has been constrained by issues related to academic priorities and prestige, but also by internal policies regarding institutional control over partnerships with schools. This might be counteracted if post-graduate studies explored possibilities for university-school co-operation and school-based inquiry, but teacher dissertations sometimes follow academic standards and their impact upon schools has been low. Research agendas often reproduce academic supervisors' interests and paradigmatic orientations, and it is not clear that postgraduate courses always produce better professionals who will commit themselves to school innovation. This is what happens in the field of language didactics, where Canha's study (2001) showed that most MA and PhD theses (among a sample of 26 completed between 1983 and 1998) do not involve teachers directly in school-based work, and their authors are not very optimistic about the social impact of their research. A more recent study carried out by Alarcão et al. (2004), where a more extensive review of research in the field is undertaken, covering

246 publications from 37 researchers in the period 1993–2002, also shows that the involvement of teachers in academic inquiry is extremely low.

The fact that teachers (in pre-service, in-service and postgraduate education) have been largely "kept backstage" as regards the construction of pedagogical knowledge certainly hampers their ability to innovate, as well as the social relevance of academic research itself. As far as learner-centredness is concerned, it is impossible to envisage how it can be implemented without promoting school-based inquiry and inter-institutional co-operation.

3   Final remark

Innovative policies will eventually fail if the only priority is to set the rules for action and not also to create conditions that make such rules workable, and to support action taken. However, success and failure are never absolute, as educational environments are living organisms that evolve continuously. Innovative experiences do exist and deserve more attention from authorities than is usually the case. Policy makers should be looking closer at how professionals understand and implement progressive policies in local contexts, and how local cultures enhance or constrain change. This kind of analysis should also be a priority of teacher educators and educational researchers, who might assume a more critical position towards the relation between policy and practice, and contribute more actively to reshape both.

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6

Language learner autonomy in a Spanish context

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1   Introduction

From the mid 19th century, the Spanish educational system has been highly centralized, so much so that all important decisions about curriculum, staff needs, budget and school equipment were centralized. The LOGSE (1990) introduced the notion of autonomy as an educational aim. The concept of autonomy has since become one of the key terms of the frequent reforms of the Spanish Educational system (Three education acts in 16 years!). The LOCE (2002) extended the notion of autonomy to schools but did not actually allow them much autonomy. The LOE (2006) continues to incorporate the idea and extends it to schools. All of these three Education Reform Acts had as a goal to improve the quality of education in Spain. Since 1990 the Spanish educational system for secondary education has been divided into two stages: Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (compulsory secondary education) ranging from the age of 12 to 16 and Bachillerato (post-compulsory secondary education or Baccalaureate) from the age of 16 to 18. At least in theory the different acts have advocated the notion of autonomy as one of the fundamental principles of the system. However, Spanish administrative and political structures still remain highly centralized.

2   Learner autonomy in the Spanish education system

In order to carry out the analysis of the concept of learner autonomy in the Spanish context, we will refer to four levels at which, from our perspective, the impact is more evident, namely, educational philosophy, impact on teaching, school autonomy, and teacher autonomy.

2.1   Educational philosophy

The LOGSE (1990) advocated a constructivist view of education. Constructivism in education is rooted in notions from cognitive and social constructivism. Cognitivism is basically grounded in the work of Piaget (1955, 1970; Piaget & Inhelder 1971), which emphasizes cognitive development and the active construction of knowledge by the individual. Social constructivism lays emphasis on the social construction of knowledge. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky 1978). One of the basic tenets of the constructivist paradigm is the encouragement and acceptance of student autonomy and initiative. From the constructivist perspective, learning is not a stimulus-response phenomenon. It requires self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction. From this perspective, education is, according to von Glasersfeld (1995), essentially a political enterprise with two main purposes: to empower learners to think for themselves, and to perpetuate in the next generation ways of acting and thinking that are judged the best by the present generation.

The advocacy of constructivism in the LOGSE should have had important pedagogical implications. A constructivist view of pedagogical intervention places the learner's individual development at the focus of teaching and learning. It also acknowledges the crucial role played by internal and external factors in the learning process. The basic tenet of constructivism is that students learn by doing rather than observing. Students bring prior knowledge into a learning situation in which they must critique and re-evaluate their understanding of it. This process of interpretation, articulation, and re-evaluation is repeated until they can demonstrate their comprehension of the subject-matter. Learning is thus regarded as a creative process that enables learners to elaborate levels of internal representation of the new language system in a creative way. This kind of learning advocated by constructivism cannot be done through traditional teaching methods; more creative, more learner-centred approaches become necessary.

The LOCE (2002) and the LOE (2006) abandoned the advocacy of the constructivist paradigm in favour of more general education principles,

leaving, in the case of the LOE, the adherence to a philosophical paradigm to the school. However, learner autonomy continues to be a prominent organizing principle. Both Acts incorporate the lifelong learning principle as one of the main tenets.

2.2   Impact on teaching

The impact of the LOGSE and the LOE is more evident at the level of curriculum.

In line with the constructivist approach, there should be no standardized curriculum. This is because curricula need to be customized to students' prior knowledge and prior learning experience. At the level of curriculum, the LOGSE has given rise to the development of open, flexible national curricula for the different educational stages (primary, secondary, and post-compulsory). An open and flexible curriculum assumes that each school is a unique pedagogical institution. It was assumed that the consequences of this deregulation would bring about a significant transformation in teaching. Both the national curriculum for compulsory education and the one for post-compulsory secondary education (16–18) take the form of general guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages and leave the responsibility of the final specification of the curriculum (goals, contents, methodology and evaluation) to the school and the teacher. Teachers are regarded as 'autonomous professionals', 'reflective' and 'cooperative' and competent to specify an open, flexible curriculum. Schools and teachers, therefore, have the possibility of creating their own curriculum according to the guidelines provided by the national curriculum, their views of teaching and learning, and the needs of the learners. At both levels there is a very reasonable degree of autonomy. There are therefore 3 levels of curriculum specification in the Spanish context:

Level I	National curricula for secondary education	Educational authorities
Level II	School project and school curriculum	School departments
Level III	Classroom teaching materials	Teachers

In addition to the adherence to the constructivist paradigm, already strongly related to learner autonomy and active agency, the LOGSE and the LOE advocate learner autonomy explicitly on a number of occasions. Among the goals set for the educational system, those directly related to the notion of learner autonomy are those that refer to:

- the acquisition of learning techniques and intellectual habits;
- the development of learners' capacity to learn on their own and in cooperation with others.

In addition, in the case of post-compulsory education (age 16–18) four blocks of contents are mentioned:

- oral and written communication;
- language awareness;
- socio-cultural aspects;
- self-regulation of learning.

The first three are centred on language and are the same as those for compulsory secondary education. However, the fourth is more associated with the notion of learner autonomy. It represents one of the psychological conceptions of autonomy in education. Self-regulation refers to the use of processes that activate and sustain thoughts, behaviours, and affects in order to attain goals (Zimmerman & Schunk 1989). The view of self-regulation adopted in the curriculum is basically centred on the development of learning strategies and metacognition.

As regards methodological principles for secondary education, the curriculum for foreign language teaching advocates the use of a teaching methodology that encourages the learner's capacity to learn on their own, and in cooperation with others. Learner autonomy is also evident in the advocacy of an active teaching methodology which should guarantee learner participation in the teaching-learning process. Learner-centredness is the underlying principle advocated.

Furthermore, learner autonomy is also an explicit evaluation criterion in the curriculum for modern languages. According to the curriculum for foreign language teaching, this criterion aims at assessing learners' capacity for self-management of learning. This criterion is supposed to evaluate the setting of learning goals, and the selection and transfer of learning strategies that allow learners to progress in their command of

the foreign language. According to the curriculum for foreign language teaching it is also relevant to observe and assess the autonomous use of the resources, information and tasks done in the classroom and outside.

2.3   School autonomy

School autonomy is an ambiguous concept that requires some degree of analysis and questioning rather than mere adherence to the dominant theoretical paradigm. To analyse the notion of school autonomy, we can use Habermas' (1989) distinction between full autonomy (those concerned enjoy the power), partial autonomy (it is possible to exert an influence on the decisions), and pseudo-autonomy (those aspects about which it is possible to make decisions have already been decided upon).

Certainly, Spanish schools enjoy the lowest degree of autonomy in Europe, despite the fact that since 1985 all education acts (LODE (1985), LOGSE (1990), LOCE (2002) have referred to school autonomy (pseudo-autonomy) explicitly. The LOPEG (1995) took as a principle the notion of quality in education, at the time occupying a central role in international debates. It tried to promote and grant greater levels of school autonomy, in particular in pedagogical aspects, by determining that each school would have its own school project, curriculum, and its internal rules. It also opened the possibility of schools administering their own budget (art. 7.2). For some, a greater degree of autonomy must be offset by greater levels of accountability. Autonomy and accountability are regarded as two sides of the same coin. Accountability was to be carried out through the evaluation of the school (art. 29), the evaluation of the system itself (art. 27), and the evaluation of teachers. In the case of the latter, teacher promotion was to be dependent on the results of the evaluation (arts. 30 and 31). In addition, there was an attempt to professionalize school management. However, due to a change in government, the LOPEG was not enacted but many ideas and principles were incorporated into the new Act, the LOCE. This Act introduced a moderate component of neoliberal autonomy. It acknowledged parents' right to choose their children's school and also introduced school specialization.

So far schools have enjoyed little autonomy in Spain. The system has

always been highly centralized in line with political and administrative structures/bodies. The system under the LOGSE (1990) and the LOCE (2002) was still centralized and there was little room for decision-making at the school level. Autonomy was understood as freedom to further specify and implement the curriculum determined by the central government. From this we can infer that autonomy is not an end in itself but a means to an end, that is, a way of improving academic results.

However, the LOE has made school autonomy one of its basic principles. The possibility to adapt and provide teaching that meets the needs of learners requires a certain degree of autonomy, that is to say, of the necessary freedom of a school to organize itself in flexible ways to cater to learners' needs. There are three areas in which schools are granted autonomy under the new education Act:

• *Pedagogy*. Schools can adapt the general pedagogical guidelines to their own purposes when they develop their school project and curriculum. Schools can emphasize certain areas of the curriculum by assigning a greater weight in timetables. Other activities are also possible. The school will have the freedom to specify the curriculum.

• *Organization*. Schools can agree on a certain organizational model because a school must develop from within. Only then can it mobilize its genuine resources. Schools are entitled to experiment, to organize themselves according to their students' needs and even to modify their timetable to cater for their learners' needs.

• *Economic*. Schools will manage their own budgets. The use of their funds and investments will be determined by them. Previously all these decisions were centralized. The system was (still is) very rigid.

To be independent, it might be said, is to enjoy the power and the permission to act according to one's own choices in the determination of means but it also means that the school is accountable to society in general, and to educational authorities, parents and students in particular.

2.4   Teacher autonomy

School autonomy does seem to be feasible without teacher autonomy. The right of teachers to function autonomously in their class-

rooms has generally been accepted by generations of teachers, administrators, and students alike. We also know that teacher autonomy is a direct result of the manner in which schools and school systems are organized (Bidwell 1965). From his perspective,

> Teacher autonomy is reflected in the structure of school systems, resulting in what might be called their structural looseness. The teacher works alone within the classroom, relatively hidden from colleagues and superiors, so that he has a broad discretionary jurisdiction within the boundaries of the classroom. (p. 976)

This idea has been taken up by other researchers such as Lortie (1975). He also documented the loosely coupled nature of school systems to describe the "structural looseness" mentioned by Bidwell. The relationship of "structural looseness" to teacher autonomy tends to transcend national boundaries. On the basis of their results, Leon et al. (1982) concluded that

> teaching everywhere is an activity which enjoys a fair amount of autonomy. It should not be surprising, for teaching everywhere is performed under similar structural conditions: the formal structure of most schools leads teachers to work in isolation in self-contained classrooms. (p. 20)

Not only do teachers work in self-contained classrooms, but they have little professional contact with other teachers, rarely sharing common planning periods. Minimum contact, lack of agreement, and inconsistencies are all indications of a "loosely coupled" organization.

However, many would argue that this is not what they refer to when they talk about teacher autonomy. Teachers as principal agents of teaching need to be part of the process of building environments in which teams of teachers, administrators, and education experts work collegially to improve the school, redesign the curriculum, and increase the power of teaching (Jiménez Raya 2007).

A constructivist view of education has important implications

regarding both school and teacher autonomy. In contrast to a closed and predetermined curriculum, an open curriculum is regarded as an opportunity for professional development and pedagogical innovation. This is so because at a theoretical level schools and teachers become decision-makers rather than mere implementers of decisions taken by others. The freedom to determine the curriculum implies a reasonable degree of school and teacher responsibility and autonomy, as they have collectively to define those matters that before were decided by experts. An open curriculum is a political option that emphasizes the recognition and promotion of differences within the educational system, the possibility to offer different options, the importance of adaptations to cultural and individual characteristics. The literature suggests that this offers a good opportunity for teacher development and pedagogical innovation. Limits to the innovative capacity of schools and teachers are theoretically disappearing.

However, in practice, before we actually talk about the theoretical advantages of empowering teachers legally to make the decisions concerning the what and how of teaching and evaluation, it would be necessary to study the constraints and problems inherent in an open and flexible curriculum. In my contact with teachers, I have observed that many do not really want the responsibility of planning the curriculum. In the Spanish context, the majority of teachers do not see the advantages of designing the curriculum and feel that their responsibility should be at the level of the selection of a textbook that is in line with their view of modern language teaching and learning. It is generally agreed that autonomous teachers learn to make more adequate teaching decisions by doing their own thinking about educational issues. Teachers who are not autonomous depend on others to tell them what to do. This makes them susceptible to educational fashions that come and go. Autonomy, the ability to make intellectual and moral decisions by considering various perspectives and deciding based on what is in the best interest of all, enables teachers to act as professionals. Why do teachers not want the freedom and responsibility to specify the curriculum? From my perspective, the most obvious reason we can mention is teacher education policy and programmes in Spain. Some even ask themselves if this is not a concealed way of shift-

ing responsibility for the quality of results of the reforms to schools and teachers, without having previously provided the necessary means for change and development. One thing is clear: teacher education policy and practice has taken for granted the education of teachers towards teacher and learner autonomy.

3   Assessment and exams

In Spain, there are no national exams as such. Teachers in school have complete responsibility for the exams the students take at the end of each academic year. However, students have to take a university entrance exam. Universities are responsible for this university entrance exam, which is the same for all students in the region. The exam[1] typically consists of a short reading text (200–250 words) plus a number of language exercises based on the text. Students have to complete a number of questions/items on: a) comprehension, b) use of English, c) production. The reading comprehension section normally includes three questions on the content of the text. The section on use of English includes a number of items on grammar and vocabulary. Finally the production section offers students two topics. Students choose one and write a composition of about 100 words.

The nature of the exam produces, from my perspective and that of many colleagues and teachers, a negative washback effect. The fact that the focus is exclusively on the written language, and almost exclusively on formal aspects, makes many teachers focus their teaching on formal aspects of the language entirely. Accordingly, teaching methodology tends to become teacher-centred.

4   Conclusion

As we have seen, policy in Spain explicitly advocates the development of autonomy at the levels of school, teacher, and learner. However,

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1   For examples of actual exams visit one of the following sites. For Madrid universities: http://www.emes.es/AccesoUniversidad/Selectividad/ModelosdeExamenes/tabid/344/Default.aspx For Catalonia: http://www10.gencat.net/dursi/ca/un/pau_examens.htm. For samples from various regions: http://pre.universia.es/selectividad/modelos-examenes/index.htm

this policy has not had the impact on classroom teaching practice one would expect. Some reasons for this have been hinted at above. From my perspective, the most obvious one is teacher education policy, which has not really assumed teacher development for learner and teacher autonomy as a goal. The inclusion of learner autonomy as an educational goal requires the design of a coherent and extensive teacher education strategy for learner autonomy, as well as the creation of the conditions that support the change. Teacher education policy has advocated the introduction of school-based programmes and has institutionalized them by demanding that schools plan the following year's teacher education programme on the basis of a needs analysis.

However, school-based teacher development demands adequate support structures which have not been developed. Substantive changes in teacher professionalism are never brought about by changes in the discourse but by changes in working conditions. The fact that this has not occurred leaves school-based teacher education policies as mere words on paper. As a consequence, learner autonomy in Spain is still very theoretical. In practice, things continue mostly as they always have done.

There is a clear discrepancy between declarations and practice. Reasons for this are mainly attributable to a culture of double talk or pedagogical hypocrisy. Educationalists and politicians responsible for educational policy seem to feel obliged to speak in terminology which is not backed by reality. Furthermore, teacher education practice is still basically transmissive in nature. Teachers who have been trained to teach a foreign language using traditional, teacher-centred methodologies cannot be expected to change their classroom practice because a new law or a new curriculum says so. Top-down-induced change and innovation in teaching practice requires coherent and supportive teacher education practices that help teachers uncover their own views of foreign language teaching and learning and support them in their efforts to adapt their teaching to current methodological developments. Curriculum reform policy must be accompanied by the necessary changes at a structural level too. To conclude, I would like to quote McClintock (1992):

Educators propound reforms, but schools remain the same. With-

out material agency, new methods fail. A scheme captures the educational imagination – spokespeople think it out, the daring try it, researchers document its effects, and the committed demand its adoption. Thus, the idea diffuses from various centers –– but then, sporadically, resistance builds, enthusiasm falters, influence weakens; ineluctably, distinctive practices gravitate back to the norm. Pedagogical weathering soon makes the new shingles indistinguishable from the old.

The introduction of an educational philosophy without creating the necessary conditions to enable teachers to implement it is doomed to failure. Any major innovation in the curriculum is a complex process that requires meticulous planning and sustained effort. It is impossible to mandate what matters to effective practice; the real challenge for educational change lies in understanding how policy can enable and facilitate it. A fundamental lesson learned in this period of school reform efforts is that much more time is necessary for professional development than is now available. It is obvious that teachers need more time to cooperate with colleagues, to critically examine new pedagogical proposals, and to revise curricula. They need opportunities to develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with learners.

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7

Language learner autonomy in a Swedish context

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1   Educational policy documents for Swedish schools

Three official documents govern activities in Swedish schools. We have the School Act (1985) including current changes (2007), which is the overall document. We have a National Curriculum which gives general outlines that all personnel in school are to meet, and finally we have syllabuses for each subject, which include goals to strive for and attainment goals. The current documents were introduced in 1994 and 1995. A revision of the documents took place in 2000.

1.2   The School Act

In the School Act we find the overall aims and directions for school years 0 to12. The School Act contains demands on the municipalities and emphasizes co-operation between school and home in order to promote the students' development as responsible human beings and citizens. It gives directions as to how the education of young people should be carried out and stresses above all attitudinal goals. According to the School Act, education in the official educational system should be equal wherever it is carried out and provide equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, social and economic status, and geographical location.

The attitudinal goals concern fundamental democratic values and respect for all human beings. Staff and students must refrain from any actions, such as mobbing and racism, that may be perceived as violating others' rights. Furthermore, all personnel should help students to develop respect for the environment.

The School Act stipulates in several places that students should actively participate in the planning of their education and the way it is

carried out. The extent of the students' influence should depend on their age and maturity.

1.3   The National Curriculum

The general part of the Curriculum reinforces the directions given in the School Act regarding the development of democracy, respect for common, fundamental values and mutual respect and consideration. Acquisition of knowledge is a vital part of work in school. The curriculum formulates two kinds of goals regarding subject knowledge: goals to strive for and goals to be attained at different levels in the students' education. Among other things the school should aim for every student to

- develop curiosity and a wish to learn;
- develop his/her own ways of learning;
- develop self-confidence and self-esteem;
- acquire good knowledge in the subjects taught at school in order to educate him/herself and prepare for life.

1.4   The syllabus for languages

The current syllabus for languages was introduced at the same time as the new curriculum for Swedish schools. It was inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001). The syllabus is divided into three sections which address the aims of the subject and its role in education, the structure and nature of the subject, and its assessment. The aims are identical for all foreign languages and the syllabus gives the reasons for language study and formulates the overall goals to aim for. No directions are given concerning methods or material to be used. Regarding English, the syllabus says:

> English should no more than other languages be divided up into separate parts to be learnt in a pre-determined sequence. Both younger and older pupils relate, describe, discuss and reason, even though this takes place in different ways at different language levels and within different subject areas. The different competencies involved in all-round communicative skills have their counterparts in the structure of the subject. Amongst these are the ability to master

a language's form, i.e. its vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar. Competence is also developed in forming linguistically coherent utterances, which in terms of contents and form are progressively adapted to the situation and audience. When their own language ability is not sufficient, pupils need to compensate for this by using strategies, such as reformulating, or using synonyms, questions and body language. The ability to reflect over similarities and differences between their own cultural experiences and cultures in English-speaking countries is developed continuously, and leads to an understanding of different cultures and intercultural competence. An additional competence is an awareness of the process involved in learning a language. (Skolverket 2000: 65–66)

The syllabus describes the goals to be attained at each of seven levels, which, to a certain degree, correspond to the levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. According to the syllabus, language teachers are at liberty to choose, together with their students, any way of teaching and any kind of material as long as the goals are met. The use of textbooks is not prescribed. The syllabus describes receptive and productive competences, and cultural awareness is emphasized as one of the goals to be attained. Among other things, learner training, learner influence and learner responsibility are essential for the attainment goals. The revised syllabus of 2000 states:

Pupils should
[…]
be able to reflect over and draw conclusions about their way of learning English;
be able to choose and use aids when reading texts, writing and in other language activities;
be able on their own and together with others, to plan and carry out work tasks, as well as draw conclusions from their work.
                                    (Skolverket, Languages Gy 2000: 67)

1.5   Grades and assessment

A new grading system was introduced at the same time as the new syllabus. For each level in the syllabus the goals to be attained are: pass, pass with distinction and pass with special distinction. The grades, which are important for admission to further studies at all levels, are awarded by the teacher, not by external examiners. There are, however, national tests.

A new national program for the assessment of English (and other languages) was launched in the mid 1990s. The tests, which are given at the end of compulsory schooling when students are 16 years old, mirror the intentions of the syllabus and are to be regarded as support for teachers in their grading of students' competences. Individual results on tests are not automatically given as students' final grade but are part of the overall assessment made by each teacher. Tests of listening, speaking, reading and writing give students an opportunity to show what they can do with the language. Designed in such a way that they constitute not only a testing occasion but a learning opportunity, the tests are widely appreciated by teachers and have contributed to changes in pedagogy. Test-taker feedback is collected systematically in the pre-testing phase, and test results are presented in profiles that help students and teachers to plan ahead (Erickson 2007).

The grades given by teachers in school constitute the basis for admission to secondary school and to higher education. It is possible for students to take a general test for admission to universities (the Swedish Scholastic Assessment Test)[1] but usually it is the grades from secondary education that determine whether a student can go on to further education or not.

2   Changes in school

At the same time as the new curriculum was launched, a great many changes were taking place in schools. After having been previously governed by the state, school education became the concern of each mu-

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1   For examples of actual tests visit http://www.umu.se/edmeas/hprov/
   index_eng.html

nicipality: local authorities were now responsible for schools. Moreover, teachers were assigned new working hours of which a certain number, outside teaching, had to be spent in school. New ways of working such as team-based work were introduced and compulsory attendance at meetings became obligatory.

At the same time there was a change in the way teachers' salaries were determined: they were not to be decided by the local head teachers on an individual basis. Previously, teachers' salaries had been regulated by the state and pay increases occurred at certain intervals, mostly determined by age. The changes created much dissatisfaction among teachers. A lot of the development work that had started in the 1990s lost its impetus. Today, ten years after the changes, teachers have partly adjusted to the changed conditions and new development is underway. Some teachers, of course, adapted to the changes at an early stage and continued to work in a way they believed in, which meant that some continued to develop learner autonomy in their classes.

2.1   Changes in English

English is one of the core curriculum subjects together with Mathematics and Swedish. Students need to achieve certain goals in order to secure a place in higher education. A European assessment of pupils' skills in English in eight European countries in 2002 (Bonnet 2004) and a national evaluation which was carried out in 2003 (Skolverket 2004) showed that students in the final year of compulsory school are motivated to learn English (85%). They regard English as an important subject which they will need later in life for further studies and personal fulfilment (87%). Moreover, they consider English an easy subject. The present study was identical to a study carried out in 1992 and a comparison between the results from the two years shows that students today are much more self-confident, which is good, but on the other hand, their results in the accompanying language tests show that their performance today is not quite up to what it was 11 years ago (Skolverket 2004: 71–80).

According to the same study (Skolverket 2004), students' influence on school work increased over the ten years from 1992 to 2003; 48% of students said they work individually on every, or almost every, lesson.

However, we cannot know what is meant by individual work. It can nevertheless be assumed that individual work is not always synonymous with autonomous work.

As mentioned earlier, students in Swedish schools are motivated to learn English. On the other hand, it seems as if they are not always motivated by the English that is taught in school. Many teachers find their students unmotivated and unwilling to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers try to find new ways of teaching where they can engage, motivate and involve the students in the learning process. To some teachers, learner autonomy is the only way to solve the problem of large heterogeneous classes. Others think that large, heterogeneous classes are an obstacle that stops teachers from trying new and different ways of teaching.

3 Promotion of learner autonomy in Sweden

The notion of learner autonomy was first introduced in Sweden at the end of the 1980s. It was the result of a commission from the Swedish Agency of Education to investigate the outcomes of individualization in the language classroom (Eriksson & Lindblad 1987). At the end of the 1980s, Swedish teacher educators, researchers and classroom teachers participated in European workshops on learner autonomy and were supported in this by the Swedish Board of Education. The aim of the workshops was to disseminate ideas which would promote learner autonomy in schools. The movement was to a large extent bottom-up and the ideas concerning learner autonomy spread quickly during the first years of the 1990s. Development work was carried out (Thavenius 1990, Eriksson & Miliander 1991, Rebenius 1998, Rebenius 2007) and a few handbooks appeared (Tholin 1992, Hanish & Risholm 1994, Eriksson & Tholin 1997, Rebenius 1998). A doctoral study on the effects of in-service teacher education was carried out by Rigmor Eriksson (1993). Swedish researchers, teacher educators and teachers have been active in the Nordic workshops on learner autonomy which started in 1986 in Köge, Denmark. The workshop series gives people interested in learner autonomy an opportunity to meet, share experiences and exchange ideas. Work on portfolios (Miliander 2001) was the result of attempts to introduce learner

autonomy also into initial teacher education.

Although some networks were initiated at that time, few of them survived the 1990s. There still seems to be quite a lot of work on learner autonomy going on, not on a large-scale but rather in small groups of teachers and students. At a national level, the Swedish Board of Education (Skolverket) carried out large scale in-service teacher education directed at primary and secondary teachers in 2001 and in 2003. The aim was not specifically to introduce learner autonomy but to educate 'pilots' who would, in their turn, run in-service education for their colleagues and create informal networks. The courses focused on the new curriculum and syllabus, but learner autonomy was also part of the program. An unusually extensive in-service teacher training project to promote learner autonomy was initiated by classroom teachers in the municipality of Gotland in 2003 and 2004. The local authorities supported the in-service training financially. Preliminary results show that many teachers have made considerable progress in instituting learner independence in their classrooms.

As has been shown above, the Swedish curriculum and syllabus do not set restrictions on the development of learner autonomy. On the contrary, much of what is said in national policy documents supports the development of learner autonomy in schools. The national tests in Sweden do not constitute an obstacle to autonomous learning; rather, they support learner awareness and learner independence. The way the tests are designed gives a variety of opportunities for teachers to develop learner autonomy together with their students. Even though one might say that learner autonomy to a great extent has been a bottom-up movement, there is still only a fairly small number of teachers who have embraced the idea. English has a high status in Sweden and in the policy documents learner autonomy is well provided for.

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