

# **four seasons in one day –**

**literacies in changing climates**

Adult Literacy Conference ■ Melbourne ■ September 10-11, 2004



## **Satisfaction for All?**

**Jocelyn Hooper, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE  
and  
Julie Simmons, AMES**

## Background

In order for learner autonomy to develop fully, we need to create a classroom context that allows the teacher and learner to take the learning journey together, through all its seasons of change. The teacher has to move from being the more traditional, controlling, information giver to the facilitator of the learning process, whereby the learner will be "maintained in a learning environment, in which learners can be autonomous in order to become more autonomous," (Little 2003)

Assessment driven learning programs, together with outcome-driven funding bodies, have perhaps pushed teachers into adopting a more controlling role in formal large classrooms, than they would otherwise choose. We can perhaps take time to consider the strengths of community provision, with their more informal learning contexts and merge the strengths of both delivery models to provide a richer more effective learning process. Primary and secondary curricula are currently undergoing significant changes to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new curricula will require a more negotiated approach with learners. Part of the new curriculum will "encourage students to learn in new ways that suit them and encourage them to be explicit about how they learn". (The Age 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2004)

The adult learners who we have in our classrooms, come from disparate backgrounds, but they probably have a common experience of their own learner expectation (if they have experienced formal education at all), which will be divergent to such trends.

The adult language teacher needs to spend considerable time exploring the learning environment both in terms of the processes and goals.

This transition has to be made in incremental steps, as adult learners will have firmly established habits and attitudes. They will also generally have strong feelings about the learning situation, so the process used to meet their learning objectives needs to be very clear.

Through our current practice we have found that formal classroom delivery does not adequately address the needs of all our learners. Our classes are large and culturally and educationally diverse. While the needs of most of the learners were being met most of the time, we had concerns about the lack of engagement of some of the learners.

We had to adhere to the constraints of the here and now.

- student preference
- student identification (Centrelink)
- funding source
- financial viability (the Provider)

Requirements of delivery model

- limited hours available
- student needs
- ongoing entry

but we wanted to explore the parameters of diverse ways of practice.

Whilst we noticed that students were motivated to come to class, we also observed that for some, effective engagement and thus learner autonomy was not evident.

## Aims

- explore an alternative to large formal classroom delivery, within the constraints of the here and now.
- use small group model

*Action Research Questions:*

- Is the process of learning intensified and customised in the small group and so made more explicit for the learner?
- Is there a preferred small group model? (Which way is best?)

- Is it financially viable for teachers to facilitate the small groups?

## Methodology

Small groups of learners (maximum 3 in a group) were identified and set up as models.

### **Model 1**

Low level learners, from different cultural backgrounds were identified, who had attained minimal gains within their 510 hours. The group was set up as precursor to a more formal classroom program.

### **Model 2**

Low level learners, from the same ethnic background were identified, who had attained minimal gains within their 510 hours. The group was set up as precursor to a more formal classroom program. In this model there were only women.

### **Model 3**

Low level learners, from the same ethnic background were identified, who had attained minimal gains within their 510 hours. These learners attended the small group concurrently with larger formal classroom delivery.

### **Model 4**

Higher level learners, with an identified need for further support in oral communication. The group was mixed I gender. These learners attended the small group concurrently with larger formal classroom delivery.

## Results

Findings so far.....

Discussion of different models and scenarios

Evidence collected and considered so far.

Evaluation of evidence in addressing original action research questions.

## Commentary

Where to from here?

Exploration of preferred strategies.

Recommendations

We think we know what learner autonomy is, but do we? When will we know when a learner is autonomous? What are the triggers to assist us to identify the autonomous learner?

What strategies together with motivation support the learner to gain autonomy?

## References:

*Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*, Phil Benson, Pearson Education 2001

*Learner Autonomy 7 Challenges to Research and Practice*, Phil Benson and Sarah Toogood, Authentik 2002

*Learning Strategies in Foreign and Second Language classrooms*, Ernesto Macaro, Continuum 2001

*Learner Autonomy A guide to developing learner responsibility*, Agota Scharle and Anita Szabo, Cambridge University Press 2000

*Learning Strategies: the secret algorithms of learning* Irena Moran-Williams ACAL Conference 2000

<http://ec.hku.hk/autonomy/what.html>

<http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/goodpractice.aspx?resourceid=1409>

<http://www.eltnewsletter.com/back/September2000/art322000.htm>

<http://www.arch.usyd.edu.au/kcdc/books/VR99/Tversky.html>

<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/entre36/appf.html>

[http://education.qld.gov.au/pub;ic\\_media/reports/curriculum-framework/productive - pedagogies/htm/manual.html](http://education.qld.gov.au/pub;ic_media/reports/curriculum-framework/productive-pedagogies/htm/manual.html)