

In Harding-Esch, E. (1977) Self-directed learning and autonomy. Proceedings of a seminar held at Cambridge University, 13-15 December, 1976.

Autonomy at work with adults

Caroline Stanchina

Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues, (C.R.A.P.E.L.)
Université de Nancy II, France.

The word "autonomy" is an umbrella term which covers several different experimental fields presently being explored by the C.R.A.P.E.L. and which, at the same time, represents the common denominator in all these endeavors.

Two of these experiments will be discussed today : the first will deal with adults who need to learn English but cannot, or refuse to attend any formal classes, and who therefore begin directly in an autonomous learning scheme; the second (which will be discussed by Philip Riley), with adults who attend classes for a certain period of time, during which they can be prepared for future autonomous work.

Before getting into the actual practice of autonomy, I feel it necessary to refer back to Les Dickinson's paper, taking up his argument that autonomy is a set of possibilities within self-directed learning.

Autonomy, in the C.R.A.P.E.L. sense of the word, is a philosophy of learning, a goal to be striven for, and therefore cannot be a pre-requisite for self-directed learning, and does not correspond to what Boud and Sidery regard as the underlying "assumption of what it means to be an educated person." To restate that quote, "the assumption is that an educated person is one who can identify his own needs, set his own goals, develop strategies for meeting his needs and be able to monitor his own action in this process. He can co-operate with others to obtain mutual support and assistance so that each may gain fulfillment." The development of the abilities cited above constitutes an essential part of the process of autonomization (which involves both learning a language and learning how to learn that language), rather than an a-priori condition to its implementation!

It is true that one may consciously choose to relinquish one's freedom

and responsibility for one's own acts. However, can this initial choice of other-direction, of, in effect, subjugation, really be taken as an example of self-directed learning??

The confusion in the distinction between self-directed learning and autonomy stems from the fact that we tend to see the problems as a black and white, clear-cut division - in stereotypical terms of either the "autodidact", who learns without ever asking anybody anything, or the "school addict", who depends very heavily on others' teachings. This is not unusual, considering that very little has been published on the possibilities of working at intermediate stages of learning, which would allow the "autodidact" to seek outside help and the school addict to begin developing his own learning techniques.

If courses could be conceived so that they were not at odds with the general aim of helping learners to become autonomous, then the choice of attending a course in symbolic logic or going along to the library to read up on it would not be one of relinquishing or maintaining one's autonomy, for autonomy would then be reinforced in both cases.

What must be questioned is the idea that a course in itself, limited in time and space, can be sufficient if it is merely a content-oriented, one-way exchange of information.

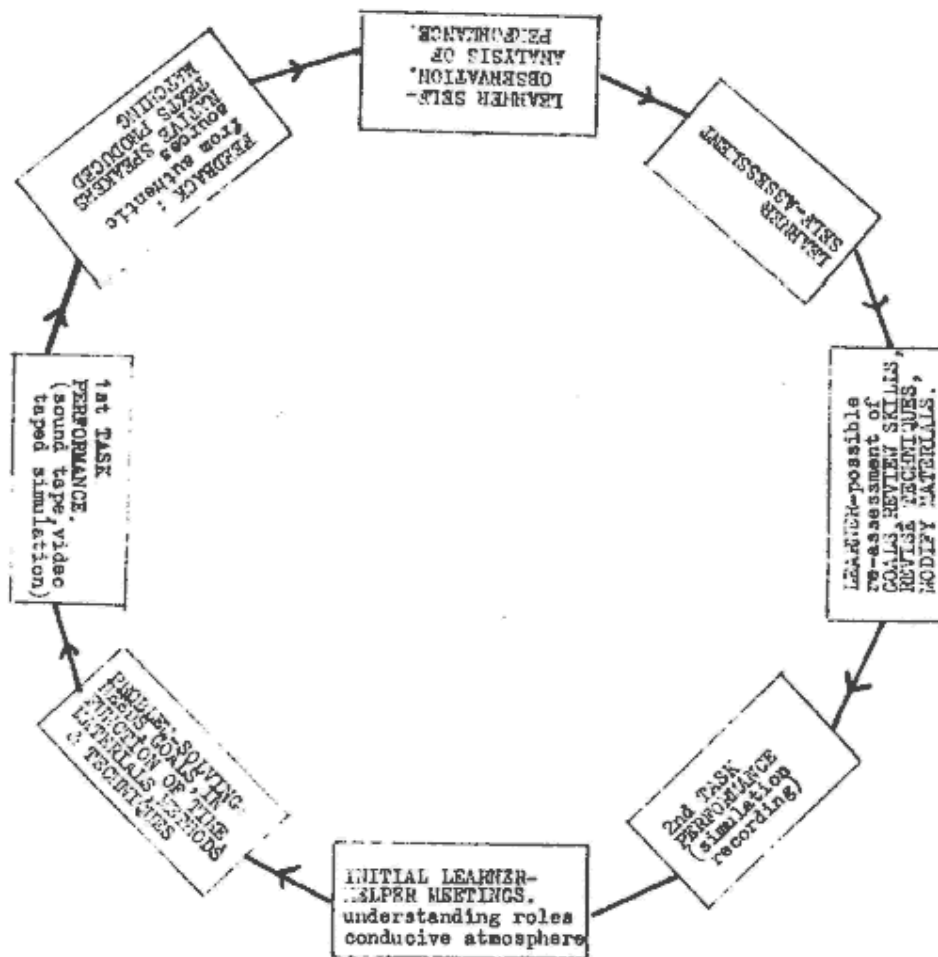
Ivan Illich, the mentor of "deschooling", who cannot be ignored or left out of any discussion on autonomous learning, inveighs against the educational machine, claiming that "school prepares for the alienating institutionalization of life by teaching the need to be taught" (p.67), and that, "schools themselves pervert the natural inclination to grow and learn into the demand for instruction." (p.87).

If schools took this into consideration and adjusted their structures and educational goals so that their learners were given the means and encouraged to be self-directing, then autonomy would seem a much more logical, attainable end.

If there is an impression of an "all or nothing" philosophy emanating from the C.R.L.P.E.L. papers, it is perhaps because we do firmly believe in the intrinsic merit of autonomous learning strategies, and attempt to encourage

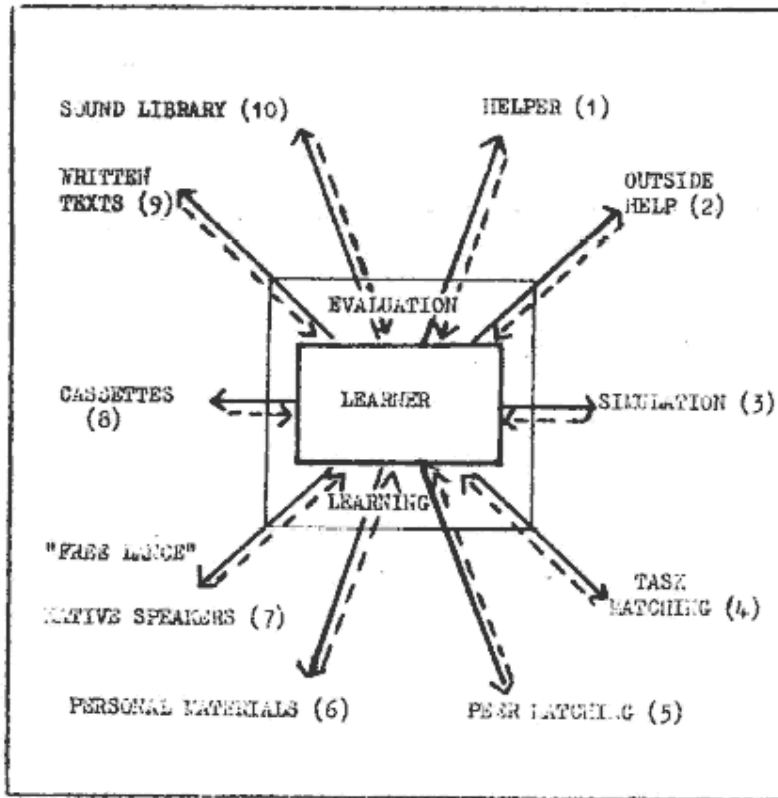
their development in all situations. It is, however, essential to bear in mind that autonomy is the final stage of a process, so that there will necessarily be different degrees of autonomy at different moments of that process. Thus, autonomy is not of the rigid, all-encompassing, 'be autonomous-or-else' nature that was implied earlier.

The description I'm going to give aims to depict this particular autonomous learning strategy not as a linear progression which would inhibit backward movement and abruptly withdraw all support from the learners, but rather as a scheme which, in its final stage, takes the shape of a repeatable loop; a scheme where, with the help and support necessary to adapt to this new



learning situation (the limits to this support being the line that separates autonomous learning from private tutoring), the learners select from among the numerous learning experiences available to them, those which they feel are most beneficial in view of their language needs and objectives, and their own assessment of the learning needs and capabilities. Learners are responsible for the organization and management of these experiences.

The diagram you have before you represents the elements composing the autonomous learning scheme. These elements can be combined in various ways by the learners to form total learning experiences which meet their different needs;



LEGEND : ———> represents choice of learning experience in function of needs, goals; etc.
LEARNER <--- indicates feedback on learner's performance in a given situation.

Although the tasks of coordinating their learning experiences, defining their goals, selecting materials, determining the pace at which they work, diagnosing learning difficulties, developing adequate learning techniques and evaluating their own performance do rest with the learners, the helper may intervene at any of these levels to ensure the necessary psychological, methodological and technical preparations which must be carried out while the learners are already functioning in this strategy.

One of the main fears of people starting out in autonomy - the fear of not being able to sustain their commitment, was allayed by the performance contract. The reasoning behind this contract was that it would continue to motivate learners to live up to their expectations of themselves by artificially imposing an external deadline. Thus, short-term renewable contracts were drawn up by the learners, specifying a date by which a given chunk of work was to be completed. The learners were able to determine their levels of aspiration; that is, approximately how much time they needed to cover a certain amount of ground, by judging from their previous work in autonomy. These levels of aspiration could always be readjusted in future contracts if they proved unrealistic in terms of the ratio time/quantity of work completed.

Disgivings about studying in isolation also had to be dealt with. Some adults had previously tried to work with methods such as "Assimil" but their interest had waned partly because of the lack of human contact. The presence of the helper, then, can relieve the apprehension of learners who are not yet ready to be left solely to their own resources, for they know they can have recourse to the helper in person or by telephone whenever they run into an obstacle. This also reduces the frustration that may build up when accumulated problems remain unsolved.

The peer-match, an Illich-inspired system, was set up at the request of the learners, to provide an opportunity for those working individually to meet each other. Two learners who are approximately at the same proficiency levels (and who, in the helper's opinion are likely to have something in common professionally or personality-wise) are introduced to each other, and they discuss, most often in English, aspects of autonomous learning. They compare

their learning techniques, discuss their perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses, while each one takes advantage of the occasion to measure his or her language performance against the other's.

The peer-match, then, is the third means of reassuring, supporting and encouraging those learners who might be skeptical as to the feasibility of autonomous learning.

In order to best demonstrate the way the autonomous learning strategy operates, and to illustrate the nature of the roles assumed by the learner and helper within the total learning experience, I have chosen 4 case studies:

I. Professor A.

The first encounter with Dr. A., a professor of cardiology in Nancy, took place in March, 1976. At that time, he explained that he was going to be attending an international conference on cardiology (held in Holland) in late June, where he would not only be giving a slide lecture but would also be acting as chairman for one of the round table discussions. This meant that within about three months he had to bring his competence in the aural/oral skills up to a sufficient level to ensure him accurate understanding of the conference business and enable him both to fulfill his functions as chairman and deliver his own slide presentation, as well as to participate freely and confidently in the extra-curricular activities organized around the conference.

As Dr. A. had previously followed an intensive course given by the C.R.A.P.E.L., his starting level was judged to be intermediate, (this saved him the trouble of taking the placement test initially given to other non-beginners), and since there was no time to waste, he was immediately given a selection of cassettes to sample for level and interest: the cassettes ranged from intermediate through advanced course material - (C.I.A.B., C.A.C.D., and Colloquial English) to authentic recordings of radio discussions on medical subjects. (Unfortunately we did not at that time have any recordings dealing with "unstable angina" to offer Dr. A.).

Furnishing these cassettes was the first and only possible step to take on such short notice. (Visits to the sound library ("vidéo-thèque") were

suggested, but Prof. A. simply hadn't the time. He was also invited to attend a class in Medical English being given at the Faculté de Médecine for professors, doctors, interns (by the C.R.A.P.E.L.) but declined the invitation because his previous experience had taught him that he didn't work well in groups.

However, a plan was established whereby:

- the helper would try to gather as many examples of conference chairing as could be extracted from materials available at the C.R.A.P.E.L.;

- Dr. A. using his past experience of conferences, his acquaintance with all the round-table participants, and the abstracts he had received for each of their papers, would prepare his introductory speech, contemplate his potential interventions, and begin drawing up a list of his functions as chairman, and send these to the helper as soon as possible. He would also write out the commentary for his own slide presentation, so that any necessary modifications could be made in the text.

- The dates for all future helper-learner sessions were arranged in advance, with tasks being fixed for each meeting by Prof. A., so that he would be able to fit the meetings into his heavy schedule of teaching, consulting and travelling for professional reasons.

The interval between the first and second meetings allowed the helper enough time to analyse tapes of international conferences (e.g. IIIe Colloque International sur la Biologie Prospective, which had been held in Pont-à-Kousson in October 1975, and the International APLIST Conference of 1976) and to cull from them a certain number of functions common to chairpersons. These elements were classified in light of the communicative acts that were being performed in each case, as is indicated by the excerpts provided below:-

CHAIRING A CONFERENCE:

MAKING OPENING REMARKS:

- We'll just wait till these people have settled down...
- What we have this afternoon is ...
- This afternoon we'll be dealing with ...

- The subject of today's discussion is ...
- Today we shall be talking about ...
- Perhaps you've already heard something about ...
- I expect you already know something about ...
- I think what we might do is ...
- Let us start by ...
- Let's look first of all at ...
- The first thing we have to consider is ...
- Perhaps we should first look at ...
- Could I suggest that ...
- I'm sure I'm speaking for all of us when I say ... (how grateful I am...)
- Right, can we begin then, do you think? ...
- Can you all hear me at the back? ...
- If I may, I'd just like to ...
- Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. May I have your attention please (thank you).
- I think it's time we set/got the ball rolling ...
- It's already 10.30 and so I think we should start ...
- It's time for us to start ...
- I have pleasure in opening the section on ...
- I declare the meeting open ...
- Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you to the round table on

GIVING INSTRUCTIONS TO SPEAKERS AND TO THE FLOOR

- I would like to ask you to address your remarks through the chair.
- Before throwing the discussion open to the floor ...
- Would speakers from the floor please ...
 - ... use the microphone
 - ... come to the rostrum
 - ... keep their remarks as brief as possible
 - ... give their names

- I would be grateful if all speakers would kindly identify themselves before they speak ...
- Would speakers from the floor try to keep their remarks to the point please ...
 - .. so that as many people as possible have the chance to contribute to the discussion ...
- I think the gentleman at the back wanted to say something
- I think it is that gentleman's turn to speak now

INTRODUCING SPEAKERS

- It gives me great pleasure / to introduce [our / the] next speaker, [Mr. X... / Mrs. X...]
- I now have pleasure in calling on Mrs. X.
- I now call on Mr. X ...
- I now hand over (the floor to) ...
- Our next speaker is Mr. X. [and I have great pleasure in calling on him to speak ... [and he is going to speak to us about ...]

Introductory description:

- Mr. X is Professor of Cardiology at ...
 - (work)
 - (where he studied)

HANDLING QUESTIONS:

- Now, I think what I'd like to do is to sort of sit back and say, 'Are there any questions?' and hope that questions from the floor will in fact get us into a spirited discussion ..
- So can I ask, 'are there any questions?' ...
- Mr. X, perhaps you'd like to answer that question ...
- Mr. X, would you like to answer that question ...
- Perhaps Mr. Y could explain what he meant by ...
- If there are any questions you'd like to ask ...
- Now, are there any questions? ...

- Has anybody got any points he'd like to raise? ...
- I don't think we've considered yet ...
- What we have to discuss is whether ...
- Well, I think that's just about all the time we have ...
- Do you feel that your question has been answered? ...
- All right then, perhaps we can move on to the next question ...
- There's a question from the back ...
- Fine, then let's get on to the next question ...

BRINGING BACK TO THE POINT:

- We're getting a bit off the subject here ...
- What I'm driving at is ...
- If you'll forgive my saying so, that's not the point ...
- The crux of the matter is ...
- We're sidetracking a bit here ...
- We're getting a bit bogged down with details here ...
- Can we leave that for a while and get back to ...
- Perhaps we'd better not spend any more time on this ...
- We're not getting anywhere, are we? ...
- We've been over all this before ...
- The point is that ...
- There is one thing we shouldn't lose sight of ...

TAKING UP A POINT:

- I'd like to revert back to ... (your point)
(the point Mr. X was making ...)
- I really thought perhaps someone would say something about that ...
- Could I take up the point you made about ...
- The statement you made earlier sort of frightens me ...
- I think you've isolated one particular aspect of ...
- Yes, that was the point I was hoping you would bring up ...

- That was my point (the point I was talking about ...)
- To come back to Mr. X's

{	paper	}	on ...
{	talk	}	
{	comment	}	
- Yes, I see your point, but ...
- I'd like to take up this point in a question to Mr. X. ...
- Can I take up this point about ...

MAKING CLOSING REMARKS:

- I think that makes a very nice concluding contribution ...
- I think we ought to thank our contributors ...
- As Chairman, I think I must thank you all for keeping the questions and the discussions flowing ...
- ... and now there's nothing left for me to do but say, 'thank you very much!' ...
- I declare the meeting closed (thanks the speaker and all contributors).
- I'm afraid time has run out ...
- If there are no other questions it only remains for me to thank ----- once again. ...
- Well, thank you Dr. X for a most interesting/fascinating/valuable paper.

whereas normally, copies of the actual tapes of these conferences would have been given to the learner along with transcripts, in this case, the poor quality of the recordings would have made this choice unwise, for the strain involved in simply understanding the tapes would have been inappropriate and uncondusive to the learner's attainment of his goal in oral expression. Therefore, the scripts resulting from analysis of authentic conference tapes, and enriched with examples taken from the helper's personal experience of conferences, were recorded (by a male English voice) onto cassettes, where gaps had been left to allow for repetition.

In addition, the following list of expressions received by mail from Prof. A. was translated and expanded by the helper:

- "Vous pouvez discuter de cela tout à l'heure à table".

- "Il est temps de alore la discussion";
- "Encore une seule question.... oui.... Prof. X.."
- "Si je comprends bien...."
- "Je n'ai pas bien compris votre (position/opinion)..."
- "Nous pouvons maintenant ouvrir la discussion, et je vais demander au Prof.-- de dire quelques mots d'introduction..."
- "Nous devons respecter strictement l'horaire..."
- "Excusez-moi, Prof.---, encore 30 secondes, s'il vous plait."
- "La parole est au Prof.---, qui va vous exposer ..."
- "Comme le disait (tout à l'heure/justement) le Prof. X..."
- "Pensez-vous vraiment que..."
- "quelqu'un veut-il encore poser des questions?..."
- "Peut-être que Monsieur S. voudrait en dire quelques mots..."

giving these results: (which were also recorded onto cassettes):

- Perhaps you could take up this discussion a little later on at lunch ...
- I'll have to ask you to wait until the lunch break to continue this discussion ...
- I trust you will take advantage of the lunch break to discuss this further ...
- *****
- One more question ...
- We have time for just one more question ...
- I'm sorry but it looks as though we only have time for one more question ...
- Only 30 seconds left now ...
- We'll have to limit ourselves to just one more question ...
- *****
- I take it then that ...
- If I've understood you correctly ...
- I'm not quite sure exactly where you stand on this issue ...
- I don't think I understand what you're getting at ...
- I'm not quite clear as to what your position is on this matter ...
- *****

- The discussion is now open ...
- We may now proceed to the discussion ...
- I think we can now begin the discussion ...
- It seems reasonable to begin the discussion now ...
- *****
- I'd like to call upon Prof. X, if I may, to say a few words about ...
- We shall now give the floor over to Prof. Y, who will (discuss) ...
(speak about) ...
(present) ...
- I suspect that Prof. Short would like to say a few words concerning ...
- Perhaps Mr. Z would like to comment on this ...
- *****
- As Prof. X was saying only a minute ago ...
- Do you really think that ...
- *****
- In view of the number of speakers present, we will have to ask you to please respect the time limits which have been set ...
- I warn you, we will have to pay strict attention to the time limits imposed ...
- May I ask you to please co-operate by respecting the time limits that have been set ...
- It looks as though we're running out of time, so ...
- Time is running out ...
- We're running a bit late ...
- I'll have to sum up rather quickly the results of the teams who responded ...
- Post-operative mortality - low (from 1.6-4.7%)
Non-fatal infarction - high (11-17%)
follow-up - very good (low mortality
few infarctions
excellent comfort level).

Translations, however, is not, and should not be a service offered by the helper. It must, on the contrary, be recognized as a deterrent to the desired process of autonomization. Its use here stemmed from the learner's expressed lack of confidence in his ability to perform this task himself, a fine lesson in how modesty can preclude objectivity, for future exercises of

this type proved that the learner was, in fact, perfectly capable of expressing his ideas directly in English, and composing them with only minor errors. Translation, then, ceased to be a part of this scheme, replaced by the re-working together of his own written props, destined to modify a statement such as:

"Slide 1 shows us the name of the teams which have answered, which have not answered and recalls us the surgical statistics which have already been given,"
(spelling matters little, as this is merely an aid for an oral presentation)

in order to obtain a more concise, clear, less gallicised rendering:

"Slide 1 gives the names of the teams that answered, those that did not, and recapitulates the surgical statistics already provided."

All subsequent work of this type was carried out in the same way; Prof. A. writing a preliminary version, the helper-learner session being devoted to exploring ways of improving it, whether through the use of already published articles in the field of cardiology (in English) as models, the use of a dictionary, of the helper, or of any other means suitable to the learner.

But a strictly linguistic examination of Prof. A's work proved insufficient (this is not, of course, a problem peculiar to autonomy), giving way to discussions on verbal interaction within a particular communication situation and in function of the relationship of the speakers involved.

These discussions were prompted by a particular comment aimed at one member of the round table whose ideas about the indications and usefulness of surgical treatment were diametrically opposed to Prof. A.'s.

His proposed intervention went as follows:

- "Thank you, thank you so much Dr. C... for a very interesting paper. It makes me wonder if we shouldn't do away with the entire surgical part of this session ... One can hardly say that you're especially fond of emergency coronary surgery, isn't that so, Dr. C?" ...

This utterance, while still only in its preparatory stage, was nevertheless marked by all the prosodic, parapsodic (voice quality, speed of delivery) and extralinguistic (gesture, facial expression) phenomena that could have made the conveyed irony catastrophic within the context of this conference. Who was Dr. C. and what was his position in the international cardiologists'

community in relation to Dr. A's? what were their professional and personal relationships like? So many questions, and more, had to be asked by the helper, who tried to probe the relationship of these two "colleagues" in an attempt to determine the force of this utterance. Was this meant as playful jest, or biting sarcasm, and would the hearer's interpretation concord with the speaker's intentions? Dr. A. resolved to talk this over with his co-chairman, who, being Scottish, and knowing the context of the conference, was far better equipped than the helper to judge the potential effect of this utterance.

(As it turned out, Dr. A. did not pronounce these words, for Dr. O's speech demonstrated that he had, in fact, softened his stand on cardiac surgery.)

Having thus helped Prof. A. prepare for his role as chairman, the next logical step was to attempt a simulation. Needless to say, this simulation would allow him to carry out only the more general functions of a chairman (making opening and closing remarks, giving instructions to speakers, to the floor, handling questions ...) excluding, of course, his planned interventions on the content of the speeches themselves. The helper, therefore, tried to set up a "Task-matching" session, in which Dr. A. would act as chairman for a slide lecture to be given by Prof. C. (see "Methodological Preparation") and followed by a discussion among the members of his laboratory. Unfortunately the timing was wrong - Prof. C's speech was not ready early enough for this task-match to be realized. However, Prof. A. was still able to simulate, using his notes (as he expected to do during the conference) and recording himself: his acts as chairman, his comments between speakers and his own slide lecture, several times, both alone and in the presence of the helper.

Tending to his other needs, that is, being able to indulge freely in casual relationships with people at social functions during the conference, the helper introduced Dr. A. to an English student who happened to be in Nancy at the time. And over the three-month period, this student visited Prof. A. regularly for "conversation".

Conceived at different levels, Prof. A's preparation for the role he

was to assume, and for the continuation of learning thanks to the techniques and the awareness of learning possibilities he had acquired, proved effective.

The autonomous learning strategy allowed him, by selecting from the learning resources put at his disposal by the C.R.A.P.E.L., to organize his own, most productive learning experiences. He reports that the conference went rather well and is satisfied with his performance. He also took our suggestion and recorded the conference, so as to have his own authentic documents to work on in the future, a further step in reducing his dependence on the C.R.A.P.E.L. (These recordings will also be copied, thanks to Prof. A., for the C.R.A.P.E.L. tape archives, and will therefore be available for future use by other learners.)

II. Mr. C.

A professor of organic chemistry, Mr. C., had been invited by an American professor to give a keynote speech at a conference to be held in July. He needed practice in understanding American English and in speaking. Moreover, he had already decided that he would not stand up before his audience and read a prepared paper. He preferred to be able to deliver a more spontaneous talk, (as he would do in French), using slides to illustrate his comments. Although he did intend to write out a full text of one possible version of his speech in English, this would certainly not represent a final polished version of his actual presentation. This situation, then, militated against the type of work that concentrates on the perfection of a finished product. What this learner needed was not to know how to read his paper without flaws, but rather to learn to approximate a natural style of delivery that would satisfy him, and be understandable to his audience. He organized his learning experience accordingly.

He began writing up his paper, and in the interim worked with cassettes at home. Within a month, he had gone through the entire intermediate course (Cours Intensif d'Anglais Oral), and had started on two higher level courses (Colloquial English and extracts from the Cours Avancé de Compréhension Orale presenting a variety of American accents) as well as on authentic recordings

(Crosstalks series) provided by the U.S. Information Service (Voice of America tapes). He was granted the use of these tapes throughout the summer. He was also introduced to an American living in Nancy, with whom he was able to spend several hours in natural conversation.

Once his paper was written, an entire session was devoted to reworking those parts the helper felt would be unclear to an American audience. The paper was then recorded by the helper, again less as a model to imitate than as an indication of one possible presentation. The most useful aspect of this exercise was the emphasis on certain semantic combinations such as: "to perform", "to carry out a reaction" (the learner decided that he would continue to search for these combinations while reading specialized texts in English), and one the pronunciation of technical terms such as "tetrahydrofuranne", "teramyloxyde", "dihalogenocyclopropane", "spectroscopy", "benzene", and even more common terms like "indulgence", "substitution", "activating agent", and others, where gallicized vowels or misplaced stress could hinder the comprehension of an American audience, or in any case, render their listening more taxing. Using this tape as a guide, Mr. C. practised recording himself several times at home. Finally, when he felt sufficiently prepared, a simulation of his speech was carried out, slide projector and all, and his presentation was tape-recorded. It was originally planned that Mr. C. would present his speech and slides before a competent audience - that is, members of his own research laboratory - likely to ask questions, make comments and stimulate the kind of interaction he would later be involved in. This, unfortunately, was not possible in the short time available.

The resulting tape was then analyzed by the learner - who took notes on everything he felt needed improvement - in the presence of the helper. In this way, he gained confidence in his ability to evaluate his own performance, at the same time recognizing this as a tool which would allow him to go on practising his presentation in July (in the absence of the helper), becoming more comfortable with it.

One activity that Mr. C. was also anxious to try was a "task match".

The helper, therefore, tried to set up a task-matching session between Mr. C., who was to simulate his slide lecture before a competent audience, and Prof. A., a doctor preparing to act as chairman at an international cardiology conference. Needless to say, there was no connection whatsoever between the two fields of speciality: organic chemistry and cardiology. This simulation could nevertheless have allowed each learner to play his respective role - Mr. C. delivering his speech, answering questions from the floor, and Prof. A. carrying out the more general functions of a chairman: making opening and closing remarks, giving instructions to speakers and to the floor, handling questions. The more specific functions Prof. A. had to practice (bringing back to the point, taking up a point) were so closely linked to the subject matter of his own conference that it would have been impossible to work on them out of context.

This task-match never actually took place, for the simple reason that the two learners were unable to make their time schedules coincide. The idea of the task-match for learners with highly specific needs remains, as well as the hope that the occasion will arise to co-ordinate other task-matching sessions.

III. Mr. R.

For Mr. R., a learner with no very specific needs other than the desire to improve his aural comprehension and oral expression in English, the learning experience consisted of elements 1-2-5-7-8.

Given the Cours Intensif d'Anglais Oral, a course composed of spoken texts and structural exercises, Mr. R. insisted upon writing out translations of all the sentences, first into French, to make sure he really understood them, and then translating them back into English, to see if he still remembered the given structures. Devoting approximately 3 hours a week to his task, he naturally had little time left to use the recorded material provided him to practice aural comprehension and oral expression. When this was brought out to him, he explained that this was the only way he felt he could learn and retain anything. Discussion revealed that he judged his memory to be very poor,

and what, in fact, he was unconsciously striving for, was to memorize the course book. The helper suggested trying to elaborate a system of "fiches" or index cards that could eventually serve as a reference guide to the structures and vocabulary he had studied, while relieving his memory of those elements inherent to the course material and perhaps less likely to come up in real situations. Having thought this idea over, Mr. R. did decide to abandon most of his translating (except for some vocabulary) and began making index cards instead. However, when he had produced the first few and showed them to the helper, two flaws were discovered. First, the cards were not cards, but little pieces of torn paper that could never have lasted long enough to serve as a reference document. Second, index cards such as those shown below:

to deserve : meriter
by the way ' au fait
to be off = to take off

I can't help thinking
To give back
to dare
scarce

What have you come for? :
Que venez-vous faire?
Do they work overtime?
A teaspoon is to stir your tea with.
... for stirring your tea.

would certainly have been very difficult to exploit, would have been ineffective as a study guide mainly because various elements were all grouped together in order of appearance in the course, and there was no way of knowing where to look for anything, and no guarantee that he could ever find what he was looking for. By making this observation and showing Mr. R. the following examples of index cards being elaborated by another learner in autonomy (1), the helper led him to develop a much more usable system of fiches, samples of which are also provided here (2).

1. models extracted from another learner's set of index cards and shown to Kr. R.

Emploi de GOT :

même chose que avoir dans le
sens de posséder, avoir

(HAVE GOT
HAVE

I have got = I have
have you got = have you
I haven't got = I haven't

Present perfect
continue:

to be + verbe-ING +
for/since

(present perfect)
indique une action qui
a commencé dans le
passé et qui n'est pas
terminée.

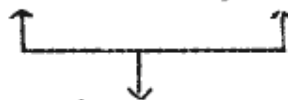
- FOR : indique la
durée, le temps
écoulé depuis que
l'action a commencé.
- SINCE : indique le
moment, la date de
début de l'action.

Venir de...

Sujet + avoir + just + verbe

présent

part. passé



Prétérit simple :

exprime une action
définitivement passée.

2. Examples of Kr. R.'s second, usable version of index cards, classified in alphabetical order by structural heading on card: or by first letter of verb or vocabulary word studied, and placed in a small filing box for future references:

Gérondif

- My father is talking to my mother.
- That is one of the most interesting and serious questions that you could ask.
- Plenty of brushing improves your hair.
- A teaspoon is for stirring tea.
- I'm very fond of fishing.
- The church choir is practising.
- I was just setting off when it started raining.
- She's wearing an expression of happy anticipation.

As

- I don't feel so hungry as I did 10 minutes ago.
- His excitement grows and grows as they get closer.

This satisfied Mr. R. as a remedy for a failing memory and a substitute for translation, and allowed him more time to concentrate on the oral and aural skills he was, in fact, trying to improve.

However, this attitude exhibited by Mr. R., that a language is a "savoir" that is, a combined set of grammar rules and vocabulary to be ingurgitated before that language can actually be put to use, led him to initially postpone or reject the meetings with native speakers that were offered and encouraged by the C.R.A.P.E.L. He wanted, first, to store up all the structures presented in the course materials, then move into an application phase (conversations with native speakers), and then come back to another storage and perfection phase. He could not conceive of combining those phases of storage and application, because he did not recognize language as a "savoir-faire", a communicative tool that may be used at all levels of proficiency.

This problem was handled in 3 stages. Since his readiness to test his communicative competence in an authentic situation did not come naturally because he was too self-conscious, afraid of ridiculing himself by making mistakes, and nervous about the contact with a stranger, Mr. R. preferred to meet with the helper, a native speaker of English, for conversation. The second intermediate stage which was useful in building the learner's confidence in his own performance was the "peer-match". Mr. R. was introduced to another learner who was at approximately the same proficiency level (and who, in the helper's opinion, was likely to have something in common professionally or personality-wise, with Mr. R.). Their discussion dealt with their respective jobs, general topics of current interest, and especially with aspects of autonomous learning.

Since in many cases, autonomy has become synonymous with a certain dose of solitude, this peer-matching system provides an excellent opportunity for learners to commiserate with each other one might say. Thus, they compared study habits, discussed their perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses, while each one took advantage of the situation to measure his performance against the other's. The helper was present at this session, acting as an

objective observer, and recording the conversation to enable the two learners to re-examine their own performances.

The final stage of this progression is generally, of course, the actual meeting with a native speaker. It is here that learners can test their general interactional competence - how well they understand what is said to them, as well as how sensitive they are to non-verbal signals coming from their interlocutors, and how effectively they respond.

Mr. R. went through the first two stages being so obsessed with grammatical correction, that his part of the conversation would resemble a sort of stream of voiced hypotheses on each particular sentence. Obviously, this absorption led him to become totally insensitive to signals from his interlocutor indicating that he had already made himself understood, and was therefore, rather inconducive to spontaneous interaction, to say the least. At the end of the second stage, this was brought out to him by the helper. A discussion of the minimum adequate level of competence at which he was beginning, and of the differences between grammaticality and acceptability, ensued. This enabled him to work towards freeing himself from his self-imposed constraints, and to engage in more natural interactions with native speakers.

He later hired (with the aid of the C.R.A.P.E.L. acting as a placement agency) an English speaking assistant for his office, thereby multiplying his opportunities to speak English in authentic communication situations.

In Mr. R's case, as in countless others, the helper did not merely transmit a fixed body of linguistic knowledge to the learners, but discussed the efficacy of certain techniques in view of their priorities and objectives.

IV. Mrs. B.

The problem-solving nature of autonomous learning is brought out very clearly in the case of Mrs. B. An executive secretary; Mrs. B. was moving to La Réunion with her family. She had applied for a job there, and been accepted on the condition that by the time she assumed her functions in the company (that is, within an interval of four months, say through August) she would be capable of carrying on commercial correspondence in English. At the

beginning of May, when Mrs. B. first came to the C.A.A.P.E.L., she was as absolute a beginner as one can be.

In an attempt to get to the crux of the problem as quickly as possible, it was suggested that Mrs. B. write to the company asking for copies of previous letters sent out by the secretary (apparently English) she was to replace. Although she did this immediately, communications proved to be rather poor with la Réunion, and as Mrs. B. had but two months to work with the helper, another starting point was needed. She tried, therefore, using the vague information she had about this "hardware supply" company, to determine with the helper the kinds of letters she could conceivably be called upon to write.

Three types were distinguished: enquiries (catalogues, information, or orders), offers; complaints: either making or replying to these.

Either one of two conflicting approaches could have been adopted here. As Mrs. B. was a pure beginner, she obviously had to pass through a written comprehension phase before she could begin experimenting with written expression. This comprehension phase could have had as its base the C.A.A.P.E.L. beginners' course in written comprehension, which would have given her a basic knowledge of the morphosyntax of "journalistic" or newspaper and magazine English. She would then have had to transfer that knowledge to another communication situation: that of the business letter.

The other possibility was to realize that preliminary comprehension stage by using only business letters from the start.

Confronted with this choice, Mrs. B. opted for the latter, in view of the short time available, and an impatience to get right down to business, as it were! This decision implied that there would be no pre-established linguistic progression, as in a course, but rather that grammatical structures would be dealt with according to their order of appearance in the letters chosen.

She was given a certain number of reference documents at the outset: general descriptive extracts from the beginner's course in written comprehension,

dealing with "pronoms", "déterminants", "prépositions", and a table on tenses and "conjugaison des verbes", as well as a model showing the layout of a business letter, lists of useful abbreviations and fixed phrases for opening and closing letters. (see Appendix). She also began collecting reference documents from other sources: her daughter's school textbook, the Larousse dictionary, books friends had lent her on the English business letter, etc., filing them for future use in a looseleaf notebook.

With this and with her background: her experience as an executive secretary, giving her extensive knowledge of what constitutes a business letter, her knowledge of German and ability to exploit all the similarities between German and English, and French and English (although this can also lead to erroneous interpretations), she was able to plunge directly into the deciphering of letters taken, for lack of a more authentic source, from Commercial Correspondence in English, by M.D. Spooner and J.S. McKellen. (Nelson, 1975).

Working then from a semantic base, Mrs. B. used her interpretation as a crutch to learn to identify the elements composing the structural base: noun-phrase, verb, complements. At the beginning, Mrs. B. relied heavily on translation as a means of achieving comprehension, although the helper had suggested that she try to avoid this. However, in the ultimate stages of her analyses, Mrs. B. herself realized the drawbacks of translation, for in translating she inevitably came up with rather poor versions of French letters. As these were unacceptable to her discerning eye, she tended to spend far too much time trying to polish up her French version of the letter, rather than concentrating on the English one. Translation, then, was put into perspective, and viewed as a device for discovering word meaning, and a technique that could aid comprehension, although by far not the only one worthwhile developing.

As she acquired more and more knowledge of the morpho-syntax of English, by picking out the formal markers and using her reference material, dictionaries, etc., she depended less and less on the complete translation of the letter.

APPENDIX

- Faire référence à une lettre que vous avez reçue, une publicité que vous avez vue, un événement qui vous a incité à écrire:

- Thank you for your letter of June 3rd. ...
- In your letter of May 22, you inquire about ...
- It was a great pleasure to receive your letter ...
- I am very sorry to learn from your letter of June 3, that ...
- In reply to your letter of October 21, I regret that ...
inquiry
- I read your advertisement in last Monday's issue of ...
- You may remember that I visited you last year ...
- I was surprised to learn that ...
- I recently called on your agent in this country to ask about -----

but he was unable to help me ...

REPONDRE A UNE DEMANDE :

- Thank you for your letter inquiring about ...
- Thank you for your inquiry of Feb. 25 ...
- With reference to your letter of ...
- I have received your letter dated Feb. 25, and I am extremely happy that..
sorry
- In reply to your letter of ...
- You will find enclosed ...
- I enclose ...
- I am enclosing ...

CLORE LA LETTRE :

- I shall look forward to hearing from you ...
- I am looking forward to hearing from you soon ...
- We look forward to hearing from you and would be very pleased to give
you any further information you need ...
- Please do not hesitate to write again if you need any further
information ...

For two weeks, Mrs. B. met with the helper twice a week for an hour each time, so that she could verify her hypotheses, have her questions answered, review large chunks of grammatical structures, and clear up any confusion that might have resulted for instance, from a misunderstanding of a dictionary definition, or even typographical differences between English and French, that could lead to misinterpretation.

(A case in point being the way figures are written:

French	: 1.450,000	} (for one thousand four hundred and fifty and no cents!):
English	: 1,450.000	

Within this short span of time, Mrs. B. was already reading fluently and confidently enough to request that the written expression phase get under way. In line with what had been studied during the comprehension phase, the following tasks were established by the helper and learner together:

Two of Mrs. B.'s letters are given as example of what she was able to produce at this early stage:

1. - Vous avez vu un représentant de la société RANK XEROX. Il vous a montré le catalogue des photocopieurs et vous désirez en louer un dont le numéro de référence est ... Quels sont les termes du contrat de location ?

YB

RANK XEROX

27th May 1976.

Dear Sir,

I saw your representative recently and he showed us a catalogue of your photostats.

I would be interested for the hiring of the reference no. ... machine and I should be very grateful if you would let me know your terms of the hiring contract.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

YB

2. - REPOINDRE à :

- la demande d'une femme qui a assisté à une exposition de maillots de bain et qui désire le catalogue avec prix et possibilités de réduction pour commandes importantes.

YB

FANFRELUJCHE

27th May 1976

Dear Madam,

Thank you for your letter enquiring about our range of the swim-suits which you saw at the Exhibition recently.

We inclose our catalogue and price list. We allow a ~~10~~ discount for bulk orders of up to -- items.

We shall look forward to hearing from you; please do not hesitate to write again if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

YB

By this time, Mrs. B. had been able to squeeze some more information out of her employer-to-be (although the letters requested had not yet arrived). She was told that because of its geographical location (on la Réunion) and the delays caused by a slow, somewhat inefficient postal system, the company conducted a great deal of business by telegram, and by telephone.

While it was totally feasible to move on to writing telegrams at this point, expecting to be able to handle a telephone call would have been unrealistic, in view of the fact that Mrs. B. had voluntarily set aside the aural/oral skills not essential to the attainment of her initial goal.

The order of priority was, then, to continue writing letters, and telegrams, and to postpone the telephone conversations until some later date. In anticipation of this, xx was given the beginners' course in oral English on cassettes, along with the correction sheets and explanatory accompanying documents, She was also given several recordings of both authentic and contrived telephone conversations with their transcripts. In addition, xx, something seemingly unorthodox was done, that, the letters she had worked on were recorded, Aware that this did not correspond to a truly oral form of communication, Mrs. B, nevertheless felt it would be useful as a comprehension exercise, her memory of the letters serving as an aid to comprehension.

Though her intention was not to begin doing any aural/oral work at this xx briefly experiment with the tapes out of curiosity, and was, in fact, able to practically transcribe some of the letters after listening to the tape several times, The material was at her disposal, and having glimpsed at it and seen how it could be used, she was satisfied to defer this aspect of her work until the summer vacation.

This being the case, the letters that had been studied previously were taken on once again, this time for the sake of turning them into telegrams, sending the same message in as concise and unambiguous a way as possible, xx subjects, determiners, auxiliaries, etc., without misrepresenting the actual meaning, as seen below.

TELEGRAMME (XX)

XX

Our order No. x97 – Not received 1962 Schloss Holstein Hock.

If not received within next week, cancel order –

Thanks

STYLE TELEGRAPHIQUE -

I - DEMANDE

Visit of Mr. HATH - Send catalogue Christmas toys, business terms, prices
JOB DOVER, delivery dates

Thanks

(Signature)

II - REPONSE

Enquiry Christmas toys - Sending catalogue, export price list
Will send

Letter on payment terms follows - all items available - Interested
in other samples? Are you interested?

(Signature)

STYLE TELEGRAPHIQUE -

I - DEMANDE

Saw Paris Trade Ladies' Sandals - Send catalogue, export price list,
quotation 500 Sentinel shoes GIN Naples, terms business, delivery
date - if terms satisfactory, place regular orders.

Signé

II - REPONSE

Enquiry 25th february - Sending catalogue, export price list, samples.
Delivery date 2-3 weeks except "Jaydes" which takes 5-7 weeks
Sentinel shoes GIN Naples 2,125 (for) 500 pairs, transport insurance
covered - 2,50. discount cash settlement within four weeks.

Signé

TELEGRAMME

our order 1st june

100 swim-suits arrived discoloured - sell with large discount
or else return? Thanks

With these tricks up her sleeve, Mrs. B. was fairly well prepared for applying her know-how to the samples of company letters which finally arrived at the end of June (along with the confirmation that an English-speaking secretary would be at her disposal at least temporarily, so that she would not have to assume full responsibility for this correspondence immediately.)

1. RECAPITULATIVE CHART

LEARNER

Understands role : maintain motivation; takes on responsibility for :
defining needs, goals, priorities
selecting materials, organizing learning
experiences (program developer)
determining pace, time devoted to study
diagnosing learning difficulties
developing adequate learning techniques
self-monitoring: guiding and planning
the learning process

self-assessment :

furnishing materials, when possible

devising descriptions of English

determining level of perfection sought in
function of personality

manifesting a certain willingness to accept
change (both cognitive and affective (atti-
tudinal) changes) if confronted with attitudes
or techniques that are recognized as more
beneficial.

determining frequency of sessions with helper

HELPER

Understands role : not a private tutor, may
assist learners at any stage of the learning
process, acting as an objective observer,
open to discussion, to sharing ideas, giving
advice when asked, assuring methodological
preparation, by helping learners develop
techniques and use them as tools for analy-
zing their documents, evaluating their own
performances, and using media and people
as learning resources. Being available.
Assuring technical preparation.
provide learners with opportunities to
receive feedback in authentic situations.

furnishing materials when possible

helping to set up those descriptions in
function of learner's degree of linguistic
sophistication.

manifesting a sincere caring for learners,
adopting an attitude and creating an atmos-
phere that are conducive to an supportive
to autonomous learning. Assuring psycholo-
gical preparation, providing an environment
that will encourage attitudinal changes when
these are advantageous for learners.
intermediary between learners :

INSTRUCTION

flexible structure, making such
experimentation possible, providing
a special place for helper-learner
sessions.
making the rapid reproduction of
materials possible - fast cassette
copier : xerox photocopier.

furnishing materials - tape archives
collection of dossiers, newspapers, magazines.

leading equipment - cassette players
cassettes.

making simulations in studio possible.
facilitating contacts with native
speakers residing in Nancy -
establishing a network of free-lance
native speakers of English.

dealing with material problems:
paying helper, establishing
registration fees, paying for a
certain number of "conversation"
hours, which represents a socially
embarrassing situation to learners.

LEARNER

HELPER

INSTRUCTION

Coordination: peer-matching, task-matching, preparation of material (cassettes, other documents, simulations).
Keeping detailed notes on each learner.
Knowing what assistance they have, which experiences they've chosen, which resources they've used, where they are as far as the development of learning techniques is concerned, how they've fared in authentic communication situations - thru contact with native speakers who have met them for "conversation".
Awareness of research being carried out in the field of language learning - further research into the acquisition of each of the language skills.
Ultimate production of learning materials for learners with less specific goals.