INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is moving slowly but steadily to the centre of the stage. Not everywhere, not with every teacher, but certainly within a growing circle of pioneering pedagogical practitioners and researchers. Little (1999:17)[1] reminds us that, even if the theoretical construct has been in existence for only twenty years, we are already facing growth problems inherent to the present model. He contemplates the next stage in the process and formulates a triple necessity: a) the 'need to broaden the scope of the research focussed on strategies, counselling and cultural difference'; b) the 'need to explore and refine our understanding of learner autonomy by fleshing out and further developing the anthropological argument'; c) the 'need to establish a firm bi-directional relation between theory and practice, research and pedagogy' (p. 30).

In her quest for the 'anthropological argument', Mann compares the values inherent to the current model of autonomy with those of postmodernist theory and finds that 'Postmodernist ideas challenge the modernist project with its roots in ideas of individual freedom, rationality, progress and benevolent change. Postmodernism thus critiques the idea of the self-motivating, self-directing rational subject capable of individual agency' (35-36).

Taking up Mann's perspectives on the postmodern condition, Breen sees the transition from modernism to postmodernism as a series of five closely-related shifts —'reactions against the modern'— that 'may have an impact upon classroom pedagogy' (52). Using two-pole labels, he describes these five moves as shifts 'from values to performity, from grand theory to multivocality, from membership of stable organisations to multiple "identities", from reality to simulated "realities", and from theory and thinking to play and feeling' (ibid.). The resulting multiple postmodern perspective on education reveals 'its essentially oppressive nature in terms of the social control it exercises upon the individual and the subsequent life chances it determines. Such control serves the values and interests of the rich and powerful [...] even if the discourse of education is framed as if it was emancipatory' (51). And, in this social frame, the learning product is 'seen as far more important than the felt experience of the process' (49).

Dam looks back to those who 'have left this very summer' (1997) —some of them learners described in her book From theory to classroom practice— and analyses her findings since the development of the basic workshop model (as described in Breen, Candlin Gabrielsen and Dam 1989)[2] She stresses the power

of the workshop inputs and the responsibility of the teacher, and concludes that 'it is more important than ever to ask ourselves the good old questions: What? Why? How? With what result? – when deciding for input at our courses' (77-78).

Trying to 'broaden the scope of the research focussed on strategies, counselling and cultural difference' (Little *op.cit.*) Ribé (p. 81*ff*) suggests that, even if the theoretical construct has been center-stage for only two decades in the presently dominant culture, the concept of learner autonomy has been with us for a very long time, even sometimes explicitly —if not systematically— formulated, in cultures which, having endured political and educational oppression, developed multicultural pedagogical perspectives and became a fertile ground for alternative thinking.[3] He makes use of local quotes to underline the universality and timelessness of this quest for freedom and development towards autonomy. Through self-narratives of experiences and theory-building processes, he develops a conceptual framework of 'spaces' and 'tramas', as a practical implementation of autonomy. The resulting construct links together practice, process description, contextual learner training and teacher development into a single framework.

Alcón presents the results of research into 'learner training towards autonomy in the Spanish university context', a context where transmissive views are traditionally prevalent over transformative views. 'Our intention has been to present and evaluate a methodological approach based on the assumption that reflective learning and teaching is an alternative way of fostering autonomy in formal settings' (109).

Breton outlines the design, process and evaluation of an experiment in introducing innovation in FL learning through project-work and counselling in an Engineering School in France, a context 'where attainment of a reasonable level of English is a requirement rather than an option', and concludes that these two elements 'seem to be sending the right signals about constructing one's own knowledge and about being a driver rather than a passenger' (127).

For Fenner, Trebi and Aase, generalised learning has meant for FL a dramatic change, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. 'Language in use includes both cultural exposure and cultural expression. This means that language competence is a social and cultural competence' (134). Much of this is process and this is usually social. How much of it can be carried out in the mother tongue?

They consider different national syllabi for FL and their effects on school learning and teacher training. 'Students maybe inexperienced as regards grammar and language systems, whereas they are quite experienced as readers and writers' (141). On the basis of this, mother tongue and foreign language learning should be dealt with as a continuum of complementary and cross- referential learning experiences. (*ibid.*)

As pointed out by Little (*op.cit.*), the movement for autonomous learning has started to gather momentum and a few more forward-looking curricula have already started adopting its values within their listed objectives. When this happens, we seem to be facing a contradictory situation. Gjørven analyses teachers' representations and their reactions to a curriculum embodying these values. In spite of findings apparently showing total teacher disagreement —'They miss a defined programme that prescribes for the learners when and how to learn and for the teachers what to teach (148) —, she finds that 'teachers are not negative and hostile': 'They may feel apprehensive and insecure facing changes, fearing failures and difficult working situations as a result of a change in practice and in the teacher/ learner role. Nevertheless, I think most teachers want to change practice towards a learner centered classroom. [...] Developing learner and teacher awareness demands respect, confidence and patience from all participants in the development process'(152).

Lai examines 'resistance to learning how to learn' in her precisely written research paper ("Self-directed learning readiness and self-direction in second language learning"). She suggests the co-occurrence of a variety of factors which are operating at the same time as the general readiness, language-proficiency level being not necessarily one of them. She believes that 'The constructs of the *self* or the *agent* of learning in a *specific* context, such as second language learning as opposed to general learning situation, should be explored and documented' (164). And she concludes that 'What we know about learner training in self-directed language learning is indeed relatively piecemeal and unsubstantiated by empirical research. To further facilitate and maximize the process of learner training, a more deliberate effort in cracking the code thus becomes paramount' (*ibid.*).

While developing an account of a local macro action-research project, Marques describes a continuum (a 'developmental chain', p. 176) of training action in which information, experience, feedback and assistance flow into and from the different agencies co-operating in the project —trainers in an in-service program, school experiences of learner autonomy, and pre-service training. In this kind of loop system 'The promotion of autonomy [...] whether we think of

learners, teachers or teacher trainers seems to be justified not only because of its educational value but also due to the contribution each individual is enabled to give to the society of which he/she is a member in full right' (*ibid.*).

A different kind of circular-feedback training system is described by Miccoli in her report on a research project where six undergraduate EFL learners revisit their own process of language learning while observing themselves on video and reflect about classroom events over the course of one academic term. She sees 'experience' (after Boud *et al.*) as 'the total response of a person to a situation or event: what he or she thinks, feels, does, and concludes at the time and immediately thereafter' (199). It is the underlying rationale of the project 'that by conducting research which fostered reflection not only would learners develop their autonomy but also their descriptions of their Classroom Experiences would lead to a better understanding of classroom L2 learning' (*ibid.*).

Miliander describes a third kind of integration ('give the trainees opportunities to develop awareness of themselves as teacher [...], as learner [...], as professionals [...]') managed through a portfolio project in initial teacher education which, besides the expected portfolio outcomes, included peer assessment and teacher assessment. Portfolios are not only an incredibly effective instrument for developing these three levels of awareness, but also a tool with which 'the students have a set of material linked with theories on learning and teaching, a material they can bring into their own future teaching' (210).

Teacher awareness of autonomous learning processes can also be developed through cooperative group production of materials for training purposes. Rodríguez describes a project in which teachers co-write task-based EFL units, film teaching episodes and produce sketches on video demonstrating teaching approaches. Among the results, she lists achievement motivation in teachers, involvement, development attitudes towards self-direction and experiential-learning approaches in education, willingness to reproduce the production-training experience. 'Teachers who experienced self-directed training are likely to reproduce this attitude and these skills in their classrooms' (219).

Vieira formally proposes an integrative model for the in-service development of FL teachers towards a pedagogy for autonomy which 'articulates teacher and learner development within the same framework, by exploring the relationship between reflective teacher education and a pedagogy for autonomy' (221). This framework, which is inquiry-oriented and classroom-based, and is organized

around five leading questions, integrates bottom-up and top-down approaches, experience and reflection, teaching and research, aims and processes, universities and schools (230). Education is seen as a 'process of empowerment where the goal of personal growth is combined with the aim of social reconstruction', and teacher education as contextual teacher reflection 'producing liberatory discourses of education'.

NOTES

[1] All the references in the introduction are to articles in this volume.

[2] Breen, Michael, Christopher Candlin, Leni Dam, and Gerd Gabrielsen (1989), *"The evolution of a teacher training programme"*. In Robert Keith Johnson (ed.): *The Second Language Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 111-135.

[3] S. his quotes of Ors, p.82-83 and 92.