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advise on

LEARNER AGENCY MAXIMIZING LEARNER POTENTIAL

ELT EXPERT PANEL

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Learner agency refers to the feeling of ownership and sense of control that students have over their learning. Agentive learners are motivated not only to learn but also to take responsibility for managing the learning process.

Learner agency emerges, grows, and is expressed through meaningful interactions within a community of stakeholders which includes policymakers, school leaders, teacher educators, teachers, and parents. Collaboration and a sense of shared purpose help to provide the context for developing agency. This is the essential framework which will help learners to grow in confidence, meet with success, and become lifelong learners.

All learners have the potential to develop their agency further, and all teaching can be designed with learner agency in mind. Learning becomes more effective and efficient when teaching practices support learners to become active agents in their learning.

Beyond the classroom, learners can use their agency in positive ways to shape both their personal and their professional lives. As members of local and global communities, they will possess the skills to connect, adapt, and flourish in a dynamic and fast-changing world.

Our key messages in this paper are that:

- learners with a sense of their own agency are more likely to be engaged and invested in their language learning
- teachers play an essential role in facilitating the development of learner agency by providing opportunities for students to exercise and enhance their agency
- agency does not reside solely in the learner but is negotiated and supported by all stakeholders in an ecology
- students who develop agency are prepared not only for success as language learners but also for the challenges and opportunities in life beyond the classroom, in the present and the future.

THE EXPERTS CONSULTED FOR THIS PAPER



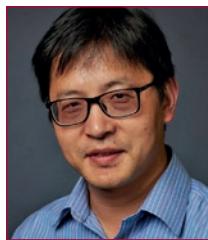
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CONTENTS

01	Introduction	5
02	Understanding learner agency	6
03	The ecology of learner agency	14
	Promoting learner agency: challenges and responses	21
	Conclusions	26
	Appendix 1: Reflecting on learner agency	27
	Appendix 2: Assessing learner agency	29
	Glossary	30
	Further reading and resources	31
	Endnotes	32
	References	33

INTRODUCTION

A central challenge for English language educators is to create and implement effective practices to support students in becoming lifelong learners who believe that they can learn another language and are able to assume responsibility for their learning. Such practices will help students to maximize their potential and give them the tools to adapt and flourish no matter what the future holds.

In this paper, we respond to this challenge by encouraging teachers to support learner agency—that is, the feeling of ownership and sense of control that students have over their learning. When students feel that they are agentive, they are more effective language learners who take delight in learning and who create learning opportunities for themselves. They can respond to shifting demands and unforeseen circumstances, and they are also better prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities that present themselves beyond the classroom.

The context in which teaching and learning take place is all-important, and we acknowledge, as Claire Kramsch expresses it, that ‘we are free to act but at the same time are not in control of the choices that are given to us’.¹ The choices available to teachers and students will be influenced by a variety of factors, including educational policy and the requirements of a national curriculum and of examinations. Nevertheless, we believe that there is always scope for teachers to actively involve students and to negotiate aspects of their educational experience with them.

This paper illustrates practices that language teachers can use to create enabling conditions for the development of learner agency. We also recognize that these practices may have to be adapted for the local context. A key focus of this paper is to show how teachers can use their authority to effectively and appropriately promote learner agency while working to eliminate some of the constraints on it.

In Section 1, we define learner agency, explain why it is important, and distinguish it from related but distinct concepts, such as learner autonomy. We show how learner agency can be implemented in the classroom by describing teaching practices that promote high levels of learner agency.

Section 2 discusses the ecology of learner agency. We recognize that teaching and learning take place at a particular time and place, within a dynamic and evolving ecology in which all stakeholders, as well as their beliefs and attitudes, and the teaching materials they use, have a role to play in promoting learner agency.

Section 3 considers some challenges to promoting learner agency relating to teachers, learners, resources, and the context for learning, and offers some possible solutions.

Appendix 1 is a self-assessment tool which allows teachers to reflect on the degree to which their teaching promotes learner agency. Appendix 2 is a checklist of factors teachers can consider in assessing the developing agency of their students. Key terms in **bold** are explained in the Glossary.

The paper concludes by affirming that language learners who are agents of their own learning feel empowered not only to direct their learning in the classroom but also to exercise their agency in continuing to learn beyond the classroom. In so doing, they gain the confidence and resilience to shape their learning and their lives in the present and the future.





01

UNDERSTANDING LEARNER AGENCY

Learner agency refers to the feeling of ownership and sense of control that learners have over their learning. Learners who are agentive have a **growth mindset**. They believe that they are in control of their learning, and that they have the ability to learn and improve. Agentive learners take initiative, seizing and even creating opportunities to learn. They take risks, confident that they can learn from their mistakes. They are also resilient; they have the ability to adapt and persevere in order to overcome setbacks.

Agency emerges and grows through meaningful interactions. It is not about teachers giving over control to learners—in fact, **teacher agency** is essential in promoting learner agency. Instead, it is about understanding that learning is more effective and efficient when teaching practices support learners as active agents in their learning.

WHY IS LEARNER AGENCY IMPORTANT?

Learner agency is important for learners' current language learning experiences as well as their future aspirations. With teacher support, learners can take responsibility for their learning, play an active role in the classroom, and become more confident in their potential. In addition, they can use their agency in positive ways to tackle problems that they may experience in their own lives and more broadly, as they act collectively and ethically as citizens in the world.² In short, learners who develop their agency are prepared not only for success as language learners but also for the challenges and opportunities that life affords beyond the classroom.

Language teachers who promote learner agency recognize that they do not only teach language, they also teach learners.

DIANE LARSEN-FREEMAN

HOW IS LEARNER AGENCY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CONCEPTS?

Some teachers may be familiar with the term 'learner autonomy'. They may also have come across 'self-directed learning', 'self-regulated learning', 'self-access', and 'self-learning', and may wonder how they differ from learner agency.

One answer is that agency lies at the root of them all.³ Being agentive is the fundamental conviction that one's behaviour can make a difference. In this way, it can be said that these other valuable concepts are all expressions of agency.⁴

Another answer comes from Namgung et al., who point out that while autonomy 'focuses primarily on an individual's independent and free decision for action ... agency entails multidimensional attributes that include intrapersonal and environmental factors'.⁵ Thus, agency is a more holistic concept. Agents are seen as embodied, thinking, feeling, social beings who have unique histories and identities as well as interests and goals that they pursue at particular times and places.⁶

Importantly, the prefix *self-* is key to distinguishing agency from these other concepts. Agency shifts the perspective from simply seeing a learner as an individual 'self' to viewing the same learner as socially connected.⁷ In other words, agency does not reside in the individual self as a fixed quality but is invited and nurtured in relations with others. While all learners have the potential to be agentive language learners, the extent to which they choose to enact their agency will depend on how important their goals are to them and on how their agency is supported by others.



HOW CAN LEARNER AGENCY BE SUPPORTED?

Context plays an important role in creating and shaping opportunities for learners to enact agency. For example, a set curriculum or prescribed coursebook could be constraining factors if they provide few opportunities for learners to own and influence what they study. It is, of course, necessary to provide structure to instruction, but in a classroom where learner agency is being fostered, students would be given more of a voice in what and how they learn.

Importantly, by supporting learner agency, teachers do not give up any of their other responsibilities. They still need to manage classroom interactions while engaging their students and maintaining their focus on relevant aspects of English. Being engaged does not mean that students are continually busy; that they are simply compliant; or that they are vocal at all times. It means that they are committed to and persevere with learning that is meaningful to them.

Learners need to believe that they can make a difference to their learning.

SARAH MERCER

How teachers manage their students' developing agency will vary according to the characteristics of the students. Each student is unique, and so too is the amount and type of guidance that they will need to develop their agency. For instance, young learners or older learners with less knowledge of English may require more explicit guidance in developing their agency. Section 3 addresses in more detail the challenges of encouraging all learners to enact their agency, but for now we can acknowledge that most students value having choices—even a simple choice, such as being given different topics to choose from when completing a writing task.

Table 1 illustrates a range of teaching practices on a continuum from low agency to high agency, and offers some enabling conditions and example activities. Some of these examples will be well known; others may be less widely known. However, promoting learner agency is not just about choosing high-agency activities; it is also a question of how those activities are managed. The way an activity is managed is crucial in ensuring that it provides the enabling conditions for the development of learner agency—conditions such as encouraging students to believe they can improve. The continuum also recognizes that teachers may employ a blend of low- and high-agency practices at different times and for different purposes. By comparing low- and high-agency practices in this way, we hope to make clearer what is distinctive about high-agency practices.

Learner agency		Enabling conditions and examples of high learner agency practices
low	high	
Teachers specify goals for the course and lesson objectives.	Students are invited to set meaningful personal goals in partnership with their teachers.	<p>Students are encouraged to believe they can learn and improve. Students who set their own learning goals have more confidence in taking on challenging tasks and sustaining their learning.⁸</p> <p>Example: Teachers ask students to write down (in English or their L1) answers to questions such as: <i>What are you good at in English?</i> <i>How can you build on this strength?</i> <i>What do you want to improve?</i> <i>What would prevent you from improving, and what can you do about it?</i></p> <p>Students may not know what their goals should be at the beginning of the school year or how to state them in English, but they can discover their goals and revise them as the course progresses.</p>
Content is derived from the curriculum/coursebook.	Students generate their own content.	<p>While the curriculum and coursebook are important, content should also be determined by what students find relevant to their own lives.</p> <p>Example: Students bring to class English lyrics from a favourite music artist/group or share an activity that they enjoy, such as reading graphic novels.</p> <p>Example: Students use their mobile devices to create their own language learning content. If they have camera phones, they can take photos of places they regularly visit or family members and introduce them to the class.</p> <p>Example: Students record themselves telling a story. They can later watch/listen to, reflect on, transcribe, or make vocabulary lists from their recording.⁹</p>
Teaching is teaching-centred.	Teaching is learning-centred .	<p>Teachers teach in response to what students demonstrate they have not yet learned and are interested in learning.</p> <p>Example: Before each new unit, the teacher carries out an activity to find out what students know/know how to do in light of the goals of the unit. For example, if the unit is on question formation, the teacher can prompt students to ask questions by bringing in a 'mystery box' and asking them to guess its contents or by pretending to be a 'mystery guest' and asking students to guess their identity. Depending on how the students ask their questions, the teacher can focus instruction on where it is most needed.</p>
The teacher follows a fixed lesson plan.	The teacher responds to what is taking place in the lesson.	<p>A learning-centred teacher will have 'the ability to listen to, connect with, and be guided by what is going on at the moment'.¹⁰</p> <p>Example: A teacher at a university in Portugal noticed that his students were using vocabulary that he had not taught but they had learned from playing video games in English. He asked them to record themselves playing a game for five minutes and bring the language that they used to their next lesson for analysis. He felt this assignment helped to break down compartmentalized views of language learning and encourage a sense of lifelong learning.¹¹</p>
Students must only use English during lessons.	At times, students use a language other than English.	<p>Using other languages in the classroom demonstrates the value of all languages. It provides an opportunity for learners to express their cultural and individual identities as multilinguals.¹²</p> <p>Example: The teacher asks students to choose a song that is important to them and explain how the lyrics or melody are meaningful, using English or another shared language.</p> <p>Example: The teacher asks a student to share a story with the class about a cultural misunderstanding they have experienced when using English. The student tells the story using a combination of English and another shared language. The teacher or a classmate writes down what the student says. Then the class works together to describe the experience in English. This activity could lead to a discussion about the similarities and differences between the two languages and cultures involved in the story. The transcript can also provide a focus for future lessons.</p> <p>Example: Students keep a journal in a language they choose in order to comment on their English learning experience. If the teacher shares the language, they could collect the journals from time to time and comment on students' observations about their learning.</p>

Learner agency		Enabling conditions and examples of high learner agency practices
low	high	
Activities are closed.	Activities are more open-ended.	<p>Learners' opinions are invited and respected when discussing an issue. Tasks do not always have an obvious single solution, and they allow students to apply skills such as critical thinking.</p> <p>Example: The teacher or students occasionally introduce a topical issue and organize a debate around it, giving equal time to multiple perspectives.</p> <p>Example: Students work together in order to find one or more solutions to a problem. For example: 'You spend a lot of time on social media connecting with your friends. However, as a result, you have missed several homework assignments, and you have not prepared for a big test tomorrow. In your opinion, what should you do?'</p>
Students reproduce the language the teacher introduces.	Students develop the ability to adapt the language they learn in the classroom to the contexts or conditions in which they need to communicate.	<p>Successful adaptive behaviour entails the ability to perceive variation in language use and to respond to novel contexts and conditions.</p> <p>Example: Students read an article(s) and watch one or more online videos on the same topic. They contrast the different uses of language and summarize what they have learned, choosing to do so in writing and/or by using digital media.</p>
The teacher is seen as the sole source of assistance.	Students form a learning community where they are challenged and learn together.	<p>Mutual trust needs to be established among students and the teacher in the classroom so they can learn together. Students need to feel safe in order to be willing to engage and cooperate in a learning community. Making this willingness visible will help create trust.</p> <p>Example: It can be helpful to agree on some norms for interaction and jointly create a list to post in the classroom. Some norms might be: <i>I will be quiet when my classmate is speaking.</i> <i>I will listen carefully.</i> <i>I will never make fun of a classmate.</i> <i>I will try to help when I am asked.</i> <i>When I disagree, I will be respectful in saying so.</i> These could be translated into the students' L1. The sense of being a cooperative, interconnected team, and not simply a group of individuals, can play a key role in fostering collective agency within a class.</p> <p>Example: Use jigsaw listening or reading tasks. Put students into groups and give each student in the group a different paragraph from a text or section from a recording. Students exchange information in order to put them into a sequence that is cohesive and coherent. More than one sequence may be correct. The task should not be too easy because successfully completing challenging tasks can reinforce learners' agency.</p> <p>Example: After posting questions in various places in the classroom, ask students to form small groups and take a 'gallery walk' around the room. Each group starts in a different place, reading the question and writing their answer on a piece of paper next to it. The group then moves to the next place, adding to what is already on the piece of paper. The activity concludes with each group returning to their first question and reading and discussing what the other groups have added.</p>

Learner agency		Enabling conditions and examples of high learner agency practices
low	high	
The teacher asks all the questions.	Students are encouraged to ask questions of the teacher and each other.	<p>When students ask questions, they take personal responsibility for filling gaps in their knowledge.¹³ Student questions also open up an opportunity for the class to engage in a 'multilogue',¹⁴ where the pedagogical interaction expands beyond the teacher and individual student.¹⁵</p> <p>Example: Students are split into two groups, A and B. Each group is given a different text and creates a reading comprehension activity for the other group.</p> <p>Example: Students work in pairs to complete an activity, such as planning a trip. When students work in pairs, they often engage in 'language-related episodes'—where they ask each other questions and work out language problems together. In the following example,¹⁶ the students determined that the correct term is 'travel agency'.</p> <p>S2: Eh she was going to a ... S1: She went to a travel agency. S2: To eh this one, travel agency. Not trip agency but travel agency? Okay. S1: And why the remark? S2: Because I thought you wrote down trip agency, whatever. Okay, so she went to New York. S1: Travel agency and ...</p>
The teacher corrects students' errors.	Students are not penalized for making errors and are encouraged to self-correct when they do.	<p>Teachers encourage students to take risks by not penalizing them when they make a mistake. If they make a mistake, self-correction not only leads to deeper learning but also teaches learners how to figure things out for themselves and contributes to their feeling of confidence.</p> <p>Example: The teacher indicates a problem with something the student has said by repeating it with rising intonation and giving the student an opportunity to self-correct.</p>
The teacher answers all the students' questions.	The teacher and students seek answers together.	<p>Cultivating an attitude of inquiry¹⁷ is valuable for teaching students how to learn. Developing a range of learning strategies will be useful in guiding students to investigate puzzling aspects of English.</p> <p>Example: The teacher or a student brings to class an interesting or puzzling sample of language use. For example, a student has heard someone say that he 'had been wanting a new car for a long time'. She wonders why he used 'wanting' when she has learned that 'want' does not occur with -ing. The class explores this puzzle using the learning strategy of brainstorming other examples of sentences with -ing verbs. They use the strategy of inferring the meaning—that -ing refers to something 'in progress'. They then use the strategy of analogizing to figure out that because the man was talking about his desire continuing over a period of time in the past, it made sense to extend the use of -ing to 'want'.</p> <p>Guiding students to learn inductively in this way may initially take more time than simply providing the answer, but students develop valuable skills through figuring out answers for themselves.</p>
The teacher decides how to give feedback to students.	Students have more responsibility for directing the feedback they receive from the teacher.	<p>Students benefit from 'driving' their own feedback. Learner-driven feedback is given by the teacher, but students indicate how and on what they would like to receive feedback.</p> <p>Example: Where practical, students choose 'between various modes of feedback on their written work: in-text corrections, correction symbols, handwritten feedback, email, audio recording, or face-to-face consultation'.¹⁸</p>
The teacher teaches.	Students teach one another (and the teacher).	<p>Students deepen their learning and enact their agency through self-expression in relation to something of value to them.</p> <p>Example: Using English, students teach their classmates and the teacher something simple that they know how to do, such as how to fold an origami crane or cook a favourite dish.</p>

Learner agency		Enabling conditions and examples of high learner agency practices
low	high	
Lessons are focused exclusively on achieving linguistic goals.	At times, students play games or engage in drama in English.	<p>Making learning pleasurable is important for sustaining learning. Using games for language learning can motivate students to participate in a lesson and reinforce a positive attitude towards learning. Drama can give students an opportunity to be creative, try out new roles, and express themselves in ways that they might not do otherwise.</p> <p>Example: Board games and online games can be enjoyable and educational, especially those that involve iteration. An example is Quest Atlantis, in which students (aged 9–13) travel to multiple virtual lands, select educational activities, and talk with other users.¹⁹</p> <p>Example: Skits give students an opportunity to play with different identities and engage in make-believe. Adopting a different persona allows students to explore their agency and can contribute to self-discovery.</p>
Learning is assumed to take place only in the classroom.	Some learning takes place beyond the classroom. The teacher guides students to learn from these experiences.	<p>Students can create their own learning opportunities outside of class. They can then bring their questions and observations to class, where the teacher guides them to discuss what they have learned from these activities.</p> <p>Example: Learners can become pen pals with their peers in other parts of the world, using one of the many apps or websites available for this purpose, such as PenPal Schools and eTwinning.²⁰</p> <p>Example: Where appropriate, students can join online affinity groups with others who share their interests.</p> <p>Example: Students can use research, collaboration, and problem-solving to learn about a topic or complete a real-life project. For instance, one or more students might choose to plan a visit to another place or country. This could involve tasks such as researching facts about the place online, consulting a map, requesting brochures, making reservations, and creating a budget.</p>
Assessment involves comparing student work with the norms of Standard English.	Self-referential assessment is used.	<p>Self-referential assessment adopts an asset model of teaching, which highlights students' capabilities rather than their deficiencies. Assessing what students know or can do now that they did not know or could not do before encourages them to persevere. Self-referential assessment can be used instead of, or as a complement to, normative assessment, which compares performance to language norms and measures what a student does not know.</p> <p>Example: The teacher or student can carry out the assessment. If the student does it, it is helpful for them to complete a series of 'I can' statements in the L1 or English, such as:</p> <p><i>I can speak with less hesitation.</i> <i>I can read longer pieces of text before I need to consult a dictionary.</i> <i>I can use 10 new words.</i> <i>I can write a short paragraph.</i> <i>I can better understand what the teacher and my classmates say.</i></p> <p>Example: Students can create a language portfolio, where they collect their work during the course. From time to time, students can reflect on what they are learning, as the portfolio provides a personal history of their language learning experience.</p>
The teacher assesses students.	Students assess themselves.	<p>Self-assessment is particularly useful when students assess their incremental progress towards meeting their goals.</p> <p>Example: Students review their goals and report to what extent they think they have been achieved. They can ask themselves how what they are learning now connects with what they have learned in the past. They can then refine their goals or set new ones.</p>

low	Learner agency	high	Enabling conditions and examples of high learner agency practices
Teachers reflect on whether or not the lesson has been successful.	Students learn how to reflect on the lesson and share their reflections.		<p>Reflection during and after the lesson is essential for students to acquire knowledge about themselves and the learning process.²¹ Students also feel they have a voice when they are invited to share their reflections.</p> <p>Example: Students write an exit ticket or a 'one-minute essay' in response to one or more questions that the teacher asks at the end of class. The questions prompt students to reflect on the day's lesson and their answers provide the teacher with useful feedback. This activity also helps students discover their own meaning in relation to what they have been learning.</p> <p>Possible questions are:</p> <p><i>What have you learned today? What helped you learn? What was the most useful part of today's class? What is something that you could or should put into practice? What did you find most challenging in today's lesson? Was there anything that made learning difficult? What can you do about it?</i></p>

Learners are subjects who can act rather than objects who are acted upon.

XUESONG (ANDY) GAO

To support teachers in thinking about their own practice in relation to learner agency, Appendix 1 provides a reflection task which can be completed individually or in collaboration with colleagues. Appendix 2 provides a list of some of the characteristics of an agentive learner, which can be used to assess the developing agency of your students.



SUMMARY

Learner agency refers to the feeling of ownership and sense of control that learners have when they believe themselves to be active authors of their learning experience rather than passive recipients. Agency is not fixed; it is constituted in relationships with others. Thus, the enactment of learner agency may be facilitated or constrained depending on the conditions of the local context. Nevertheless, agentive learners believe they can learn and want to do so. This growth mindset aids them in learning English in the classroom and beyond. We offer a continuum between low-agency and high-agency teaching practices, based on the conviction that a teacher's actions can create enabling conditions for the enactment of high learner agency through intentional practice.

I teach in a higher education programme which prepares students for success at university. Learner agency is possibly the most important objective in our programme. My job is to help students equip themselves with the tools, skills, knowledge, and practices they need, both academically and socially. With a sense of agency and purpose, I believe that students can achieve greater success at university and have a much more rewarding experience in general.

Andi, Academic Manager, USA



02

THE ECOLOGY OF LEARNER AGENCY

While the enabling conditions of the teacher–learner and learner–learner relationships and actions described in Section 1 are central in promoting **learner agency**, what happens in the classroom does not occur in isolation. Teaching and learning take place within a complex **ecology**—in other words, within a context that consists of stakeholders, beliefs and attitudes, and teaching materials, all interconnected within a particular time and place. Each context contains **affordances**—that is, potential learning opportunities. The context is not only defined by background factors such as the cultural setting or the type of educational institution in which the teaching takes place. Indeed, contexts are not static. They are dynamic and evolving ecologies where agency emerges to varying degrees as people interact with each other and the external environment.

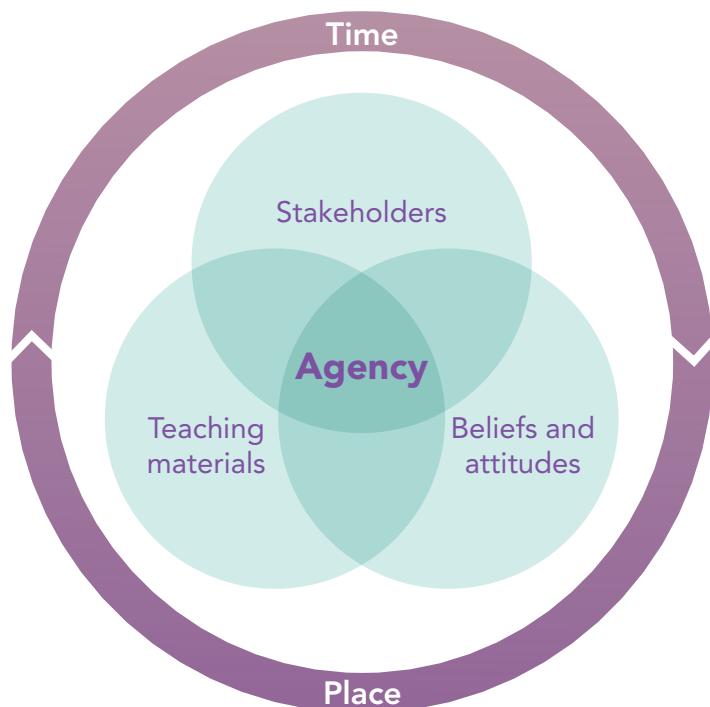


Figure 1. The ecology of learner agency

TEACHERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Promoting learner agency does not require individual teachers to operate on their own. To be truly effective, collaboration and a shared sense of purpose among all stakeholders are desirable. As Ingrid Schoon puts it, 'in the exercise of **collective agency** people pool their knowledge, skills and resources, acting together for a shared purpose to shape their joint future, to change social structures and bring about innovation'.²²

The stakeholders include, among others, teachers, policymakers, school leaders, teacher educators, parents, and students. While all these stakeholders have influence to varying degrees, it is teachers who are most directly involved in promoting learner agency. We consider next how **teacher agency** is important in enabling teachers to respond to and involve the various stakeholders.

Policymakers

First of all, teachers have to consider the policies and practices of their school or institution. Even when they do not have a voice in determining policy, teachers can negotiate and interpret language-related policies.²³ Of course, they are able to exercise even more agency when policymakers and school leaders involve them in decision-making and planning as partners. Teachers are supported in enacting their agency when they are given a say in how instruction is planned and undertaken and when their professional expertise is respected.

One example of this is a project in Uruguay where a preliminary national curriculum for English language teaching was drawn up by a small group of educators. In a subsequent stage, teachers from around the country were invited to contribute to the development of descriptors for learner achievement at primary, middle, and high school. This consultation process ensured that teachers participated in the policymaking process.²⁴

As Christine Hélot points out, 'even in a very centralized, hierarchical and monolingually biased education system, teachers can be key agents in the educational process from the beginning of their career'.²⁵ It is clear that willingness and readiness among teachers to engage in shaping policies (and the possibility for them to do so) play a crucial part in determining the degree to which learner agency is promoted.

Agency is dynamic and adaptable. It can be deliberately developed through intentional and focused interventions.

SARAH MERCER

School leaders

If teachers have responsibility for nurturing agency in their students, it is surely appropriate for teacher agency to be recognized and supported by school leaders. School leaders who are committed to the agency of their teachers and students can communicate their support through explicit school policies as well as by communicating values indirectly and showing respect for teachers and students, their opinions, and their decisions.

Where possible, school leaders can give teachers and students the opportunity to be actively involved in defining and creating school life. School leaders can communicate important messages about how teacher and student voices are valued, when, for example, they respond explicitly to the feedback and comments they receive from teachers and students regarding the teaching and learning environment. It would be particularly beneficial if teachers and students were also invited to give feedback on the effectiveness of policies and practices that respect and reinforce their agency.

School leaders can also encourage teachers to work collaboratively, for example by scheduling free time for them to focus on plans to support learner agency. Teachers often observe that a lack of time limits their ability to innovate, but if they have the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, it is much more likely that they will thrive within the ecology and achieve greater job satisfaction.



Teacher educators

Teacher education programmes and continuing professional development are important in fostering teacher agency. It is helpful for both pre-service and in-service teachers to have the experience of being recognized and valued as the agents they are. For example, pre-service language teachers can be given the opportunity to examine their own experience of learning another language. This kind of reflection helps to avoid the assumption that they are 'blank slates' to be written on by teacher educators and provides an explicit frame for considering their subsequent experiences. This does not mean, of course, that what pre-service teachers believe based on their previous experience cannot be challenged.²⁶ Nonetheless, such opportunities for self-reflection respect what pre-service teachers bring to their teacher education programmes and are an important way of reinforcing their agency.

Additionally, rather than schooling pre-service teachers exclusively in best practices at the level of technique, it might be helpful to introduce them to adaptable, high-leverage practices,²⁷ such as 'leading a discussion' or 'building respectful relationships'. This enables teachers to apply their agency by adapting such practices to different local contexts.

Opportunities for continuing professional development, which often take the form of in-service workshops, can address problems that teachers have identified themselves, instead of topics taken exclusively from an external agenda. A case-based approach can be used, in which teachers discuss specific problems drawn from their own experience and arrive at their own solutions.²⁸ Such activities help teachers to maximize their agency, which in turn enhances teacher wellbeing.²⁹

Parents

Parents can be key stakeholders in the ecology, and their voices can influence educational practices. Indeed, many teachers feel some pressure to teach in a way that meets the expectations of parents. However, teachers may often be able to alleviate parents' concerns by making it clear what they are doing and why. The teacher's position can also be supported by research that suggests children do better at school when teachers are not teaching to the test.³⁰ Parents tend to be impressed when their children are enthusiastic about participating in lessons, and teachers can often enlist parents' support for learner agency practices by highlighting how much more English their children are speaking as a result of them. For instance, in a recent project in China to encourage students to speak more often in their English class, teachers were advised to "Let go and let your students do it"; consequently, the teachers were amazed, the students' language changed, and they participated a great deal more.³¹

Students

Developing learner agency is beneficial at any age, and there have been calls to promote the agency of adult students in order to contribute to their feeling of empowerment. This may be especially important for migrants recreating their lives in a new country, for students preparing for academic study

in English, and for learners who need to acquire specialized workplace knowledge and skills. These varied goals for learning English can be better accomplished when learners are supported in enacting their agency.

There are numerous ways for students to direct their own learning in the classroom. As we saw in Section 1, they can ask questions, thereby identifying a gap in their understanding and inviting clarification from the teacher or their classmates. They can use the internet to find answers to their questions, with guidance in identifying trustworthy sources if necessary. Another way that students can employ their agency is by comparing English with another language (or other languages) they know. Indeed, research has shown that language learners who are linguistically aware can better discern the similarities and differences among the languages they know and the language(s) they are learning. Awareness of the similarities can, in turn, facilitate learning a new language.³²

Learner agency can be compared to chess. While a chessboard provides a novice chess player exactly the same physical opportunities as it does a grandmaster, a novice will not initially perceive many of the possible game moves. However, over time, the novice's awareness of possible moves will gradually improve.

PAUL DRIVER



BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Teachers' beliefs

Some beliefs and attitudes can be supportive in promoting language learner agency; others can undermine it. For example, the belief that language learners are mere processors of input is an unsatisfactory computer metaphor for a very human activity.³³ A higher regard for learner agency can be achieved by foregrounding the social and emotional dimensions of language learning. Teachers have a profound influence on their students' attitudes and **growth mindset**. It is crucial, therefore, that they convey the belief that all learners have the ability to learn and succeed.³⁴ Promoting learner agency requires the cultivation of a mutually respectful relationship and the encouragement of agency among students. For example, instead of saying 'I want you to ...', teachers could ask 'What is your goal?'. A teacher's words can be more powerful in influencing a learner's attitude than the orientation that students bring from their previous experiences.³⁵ For instance, if a student is convinced that they are not good at learning languages, rather than suggesting that they might be good at other subjects, the teacher can encourage the student to keep working at learning a language. With the teacher's support, students can become co-creators of their own learning opportunities.

Societal beliefs and attitudes

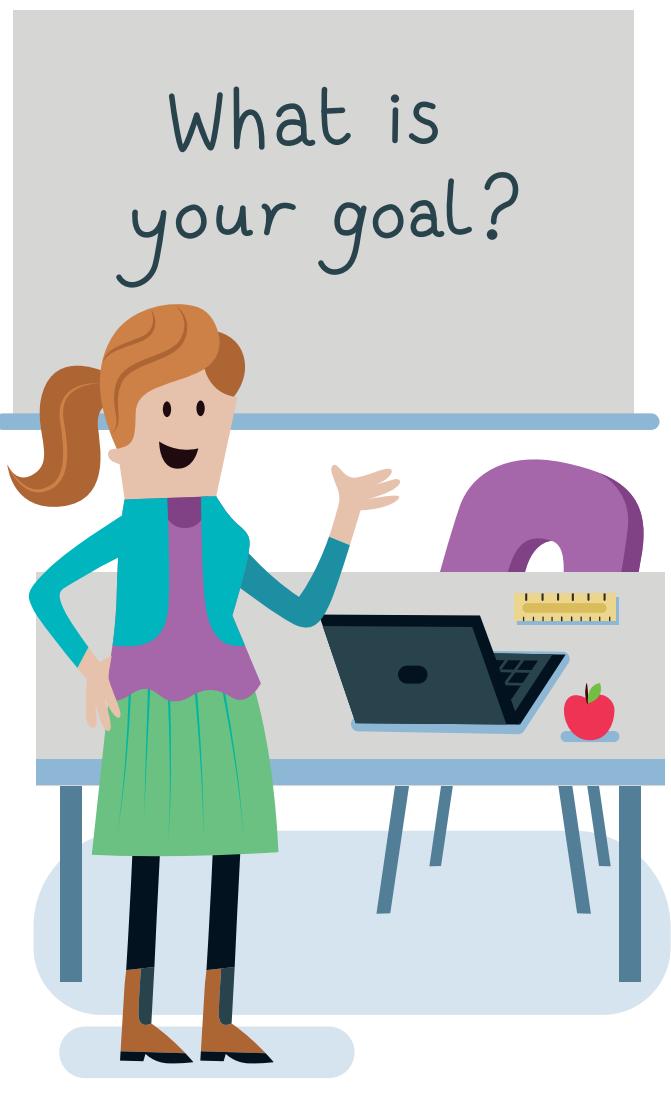
It is also important to address societal beliefs and attitudes which undermine the collective agency of teachers and learners. One example is the belief that to truly learn another language, learners must be instructed by a native speaker of the language; another is that some languages are superior to others. Such beliefs are not only false, they also constrain learners' agency by limiting their choices when it comes to what and how they choose to learn. Countering these false beliefs can contribute to positive collective agency.

Positive collective agency

Positive collective agency can be built by negotiating and agreeing a statement of common principles based on well-established beliefs about teaching and learning among stakeholders. Examples of such statements might be:

- Studying English is worthwhile for all participants.
- All languages have equal value.
- Other languages that our students know are respected and not forgotten.
- Our goals are multilingualism and intelligible communication, not necessarily conformity to the norms of Standard English.
- We value the learning of another language for the intercultural understanding and empathy it can create.

By involving teachers and other stakeholders in endorsing statements of common principles, it is possible to chart a shared direction for promoting teacher and learner agency.



Agency is not an attribute of a person. It is a relationship between the learner and what their context affords.

DIANE LARSEN-FREEMAN

I teach English to beginner-level teenage boys. I use a coursebook for my lessons and we also switched all their social media and apps from their first language to English. Together we discovered how learning doesn't have to take place only in the classroom.

Learner agency is the most important thing of all in my classes. We need to promote it any way we can because it can give learners a sense of control over their learning.

Roula, Teacher, GREECE



TEACHING MATERIALS

Coursebooks

Coursebooks provide a valuable foundation for instruction, but teachers play an important role in acting as mediators between the materials and the students. This entails helping students to cultivate a relationship with the materials whereby opportunities for them to exercise their agency in learning English are created. For example, before a coursebook unit is used in class, students could be invited to look at it and identify sections they would like to pay special attention to or elaborate on. Students could also be asked to express their preference for reordering the activities in a unit, if doing so does not disrupt its coherence. Even simple steps such as giving students several options for completing a coursebook activity—by writing a narrative, drawing a series of pictures, or creating a multimedia presentation—can reinforce their agency.

Materials developers

Materials developers can assist learner agency by including activities that invite curiosity and allow for multiple paths of exploration. Where appropriate, leaving 'gaps' in materials where not everything is spelled out can encourage interpretation, experimentation, and personal ownership. It might be helpful to think of the contrasting analogies of completing a jigsaw puzzle, where there is one solution, and constructing an object (whether specified or freely chosen) out of building blocks. The second option allows more possibilities for learner agency. Activities created in this way can also be adapted for learners with different levels of English, by adjusting the amount or type of guidance given.

Multiple modalities and digital artefacts

Audio, video, and online materials for language learning are widely available and often included with coursebook packages. This variety helps learners apply their agency to different modalities. For example, they can create, curate, or appropriate digital media. With nothing more than a basic smartphone, students can plan, script, record, and edit different genres of video or repurpose clips they have found. Technical activities that were once complex to perform, such as removing audio and adding a voice-over, are now easy to do in most contexts.

Indeed, the increasing interest in learner agency could be attributed in part to greater opportunities for learners to create digital artefacts. Each evolution of the web—from the static, read-only web 1.0 of the 1990s towards the participative social web, and now the increased interactivity of web 4.0—has brought new opportunities for learner agency. This is no truer than with computer programs such as Minecraft's 'Diving for Dialogue'.³⁶ Blending old and new media, the game takes students through an immersive, interactive journey in which they engage in problem-solving and research before creating multimodal outputs that bring together multiple skills, including speaking and digital literacy.

AFFORDANCES FOR DEVELOPING LEARNER AGENCY

Although the ecology abounds with opportunities—or affordances—that learners perceive for the development of their agency, this does not mean that they will all be taken advantage of. Different students will perceive and act on different opportunities and possibilities for exercising their agency within a particular ecology, and they will learn to enact their agency as language learners at different rates. A feature of the ecology only becomes a learning opportunity when it is seen as having significance for learners in terms of their goals or purpose, as determined by their history, previous experience, and future aspirations.³⁷ Students who find personal relevance in what they are learning are more likely to perceive and act on affordances for the development of their agency in their learning contexts.³⁸ The potential for agency is also enhanced if the learning experience inspires in students pleasant feelings and enjoyment, curiosity and challenge, or self-discovery.

Teachers can demonstrate that they value the language learning opportunities their students create for themselves outside school, such as through their use of mobile technologies. Establishing links between formal learning in school and informal learning outside school can help learners perceive affordances for learning. However, in order for outside learning experiences to have positive impact on formal learning, students may need to be guided in how to reflect on and learn from them. Having a learning experience and learning from experience are entirely different activities. It is the latter that supports learner agency.

SUMMARY

Language learning and teaching do not take place in isolation. Learner agency is constrained and enabled in an ecology which consists of stakeholders, their beliefs and attitudes, and the materials with which they work. The enactment of learner agency will always emerge from the interplay of these factors at a particular time and place. Teachers are better able to support learner agency when their own agency is encouraged. Agentive learners are not only motivated to learn but also take responsibility for managing the learning process. Students and teachers work with other stakeholders to construct a unique ecology characterized by their interconnectedness. An interconnected ecology affords the potential for greater agency when it is well informed, the effort is collective, and teachers and students are respected for who they are and what they bring to language learning.



I teach adults who are migrants to my country. They have only three hours of English a week, sometimes less. Learner agency is vital if they are going to progress and achieve their goals. Even with beginner and low-level students, we encourage them to engage with the language in real life as much as possible – listening to the radio and TV, talking to neighbours, reading the local newspaper, trying to understand signs on the street and in shops. We also encourage the use of internet resources, apps, anything that can help them learn English. We find that those who take responsibility for their own learning advance in leaps and bounds, attain their career and life goals, and generally participate in society more successfully than those who don't.

Sara, Teacher, IRELAND



03

PROMOTING LEARNER AGENCY: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Any attempt to innovate will present challenges: an innovation may contradict customary practices; teachers may lack confidence in their skills to implement an innovation; learners may be uncertain about what they are being asked to do; or the existing conditions in a school may not support the change. Promoting **learner agency** is no exception. It can present unique challenges with regard to cultural and social expectations, teacher development, learner differences, and the conditions of and resources for learning. This section acknowledges these challenges and offers some possible solutions, based on research and classroom experience. There may be other challenges not addressed here, and there are doubtless other solutions beyond those we have mentioned. All in all, these challenges can be met, provided there is a commitment to promoting learner agency and collective support for doing so.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

The potential for enacting learner agency is universal, but there may be challenges in some settings if there are different cultural or social expectations surrounding teacher–student roles and relationships. For instance, there may be a predominant belief that learning is best accomplished when knowledge is transmitted by the teacher, or when English is the only language permitted to be used in the classroom. In such situations, learner agency might be seen as a threat to teacher authority and a challenge to expected norms of language use. Thus, before teachers can effectively introduce high-agency teaching practices, some explicit work addressing beliefs may first need to be done with learners, colleagues, and possibly parents.

Teachers can address such beliefs through explicit discussions with stakeholders. Students can be encouraged to engage in research of their own, exploring alternative approaches to teacher–learner roles, reflecting on them, and reporting back on their findings. Gradually, steps can be taken for teachers to work with students more as partners. An instant transformation is unlikely to take place: applying their agency to language learning is not an all-or-nothing proposition for students, and developing it will take time and patience.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

It goes without saying that teachers play an essential role in facilitating learner agency by providing opportunities for students to exercise and develop their agency. However, it is sometimes difficult for instructional innovations to take root. Teachers can be helped in changing their practice (provided they want or need to) by reviewing their own language learning histories, examining how they themselves have or have not been agentive, and experiencing for themselves the conditions that enable their agency.

Teacher-led inquiry groups can provide opportunities for teachers to discuss challenges relating to learner agency that they face in their classrooms. Teachers can also engage in **action research**³⁹ in which they investigate problems they experience in attempting to bring about change, or in **exploratory practice**⁴⁰ in which they seek not to solve problems but rather to better understand classroom life.

Teachers are at different stages in developing their teaching practice. Novice teachers are often understandably preoccupied with the demands of establishing routines and relationships. Their ability to develop students' agency will progress as they themselves become more experienced. Given time and with support from school leaders, both experienced and novice teachers will learn to teach in ways that are more supportive of learner agency.

LEARNER FACTORS

Age, experience, and knowledge of English

How agency is realized in the classroom will depend upon the students' age, experience, and knowledge of English. Agency can be promoted even in young children, when approached in

a developmentally appropriate manner. For example, allowing children to select their own partners for an activity can promote agency, provided that no students are excluded. An activity for slightly older children is 'correcting the teacher'. The teacher writes the date and learning objectives for the day on the board and invites the students to find the 'mistakes' that the teacher has deliberately made. The mistakes are based on what the teacher has observed the students have problems with. The complexity of the mistakes can be adjusted for the students' language level and they can be of different types—sentence-level grammar issues, word choices, the sequence of sentences, the wrong objectives for the day, etc. Children enjoy this activity and feel agentive when they can 'correct' the teacher.

It may be that young learners enact more agency than teenage or adult learners, who may be more inhibited. Nonetheless, if students are not experienced language learning agents or their knowledge of English is at a beginning level, more explicit guidance may be necessary. For example, students who know only a little English could be given a list of statements and questions in their own language, or helped to generate such a list, which they can use to manage their own learning. Typical statements might be:

- I don't understand.
- I understand.
- Could you repeat that?
- Could you speak more slowly?
- Could I get some help?
- Could you give me a hint?
- Could you tell me what you think of this?
- Could you call on someone else?
- Could I try now?
- How do you say ____ in English?



Another way to support the agency of students with limited English is to use a **translingual pedagogy**, which recognizes that the students' first language can have a facilitating rather than an interfering effect in the learning of English.⁴¹ In a translingual approach, students use the first language to scaffold their writing in the second language. In this way, learners can make meaning that is important to them without being held back by their knowledge of English.

Efforts to promote learner agency always require a balancing act. Teachers never give up control entirely, and especially in classes of young or inexperienced learners, they always have to be ready to provide the necessary support, structure, and guidance.

Reluctant learners

The language learning process is different for all students and so is the extent to which students value and enact their agency. While most students want some degree of choice and appreciate being able to exercise their agency, some may prefer teacher-directed pedagogy, especially if that is what they are used to.

Most teachers are familiar with the signs of a reluctant learner: lack of reflective engagement with the learning process, apparent lack of interest in developing skills for thinking about and managing learning, and not being proactive in seeking out learning opportunities. Some learners may decide not to take action or to resist the teacher in the learning process. Of course, even such learners can be said to be practising their agency, although it may not be helpful with regards to their language learning.

The following are possible options for dealing with reluctant learners:

- Make students aware of the purpose of what they are doing. Greater transparency from the teacher will help students understand what is expected of them and why.
- Give students an opportunity to redesign an activity in a way that allows them to participate more authentically. One study of secondary English classrooms in Sweden offers the example of a student who did not want to participate in writing a group blog.⁴² Rather than allowing others in the group to do the work of writing the blog while he did nothing, he wrote an authentic reflection on his lack of enthusiasm for blogging.
- Encourage students to reflect on their own learning. Try to find out what they really want to achieve in the learning process and the reasons for their reluctance. What do they think would make them more willing to be more agentive? It is possible to learn a great deal from students' answers to these questions.

There is abundant evidence that enacting their agency is empowering for students, and that feeling agentive is likely to boost their motivation and engagement, which will subsequently enhance learning. However, change of any kind takes time and needs to be introduced in small steps that take into consideration what students are willing and able to manage.

One useful piece of advice comes from the language teaching methodologist Caleb Gattegno, who often stated that it is the learners' job to work on the language and the teacher's job to work on the learner. Both jobs take time.



Learner diversity

Students bring different histories, different identities, different cultural experiences, and their own talents to the act of learning. For teachers, the usual solution to challenges of inclusion is to use culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction, in which lessons are adapted to learner sensibilities and differences. This can be very helpful but, on its own, it places all the responsibility on the teacher.

Personalized learning can be used in tandem with more teacher-led approaches to differentiation to foster learner agency. With personalized learning, the focus is on students' agency in designing their own learning paths, based on their identities, their interests, and the way they learn best.⁴³ Both approaches to managing learner differences can be useful tools in helping learners develop their own agency and contribute to greater inclusivity.

I teach my students face to face and remotely. I explain to them that they will learn more effectively if they can shape their own learning journey. For example, if they reflect on the things they can and cannot do after a grammar lesson, they can plan the next steps—how much they need to practise or how long they should prepare for the next unit. I also encourage them to do dictionary work on their own and prepare for exams by coming up with their own revision strategies.

Mehtap, English Language Instructor,
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

CONDITIONS OF LEARNING

Physical conditions and resources

Classroom conditions can present a challenge to promoting learner agency. Creating the necessary conditions may require changing the setup of the physical classroom space where possible in order to promote social interaction and provide spaces in which relationships can grow. For example, it is helpful to have seating that is not bolted to the floor but can be moved into different configurations so that students can more easily ask and answer questions in language-related episodes. Class size can also be an issue. Students may have fewer opportunities to enact their agency as the size of the class grows. One solution to this challenge is to divide large classes into small groups where each member of the group has a role in completing a task.

Digital technologies can help to overcome the challenges created by physical space and class size by giving students alternative ways of enacting their agency. Students who rarely participate in classroom interaction may be more willing to contribute their ideas on an online learning platform. Of course, in some contexts, access to technology is limited. Where students do not have laptops or tablets and access to the internet, mobile phones can offer a solution. Many students around the world use their phones to access information and connect with others through popular apps. So even where broadband internet access and laptop computers are not available, mobile phones may provide opportunities for learners to enact their agency when they are used to research topics that interest them and share their findings with others.



Standardized high-stakes tests

It is not uncommon for formal study to conclude with the administration of a high-stakes test. Both teachers and students understand the consequences of student performance on standardized tests: successful performance may be required for promotion from one level of instruction to the next, for access to higher education, or for desirable employment. Teachers know, too, that their efforts will sometimes be judged by their students' test scores and they may feel pressure to teach to the test. Yet it should be reassuring to know that students whose agency has been supported perform better on standardized tests,⁴⁴ which still only measure a fraction of what has been learned by agentive learners who seize the **affordances** in the **ecology**. Therefore, the time that teachers invest in promoting learner agency need not detract from their obligation to meet curricular objectives.

Related to learner agency and standardized testing is an approach that involves students in the development of standardized tests. Students participate in the final stages of test design: their opinions are systematically gathered and used to inform the design of a new test. In a study of learner identity, learner agency, and language assessment, Little and Erickson point out that such an approach 'can easily be justified in terms of validity in a wide sense that embraces democratic principles, ethics, and potential pedagogical impact'.⁴⁵



Opportunities for learner agency can be intentionally embedded into learning resources and into physical or digital environments to encourage or discourage particular types of learner behaviour.

PAUL DRIVER

SUMMARY

With any innovation come challenges. In the case of promoting learner agency, the challenges may stem from cultural and social norms, teacher readiness, learner differences such as age, experience, and level of English, and the classroom conditions found in any given context. A careful and thoughtful response is required from all participants in the teaching–learning ecology to address them. With support from other stakeholders in the ecology and commitment to promoting learner agency, none of these challenges are insurmountable.

CONCLUSIONS

Promoting learner agency—the feeling of ownership and sense of control that a learner has concerning their learning—is an important undertaking in education. It can encourage students to invest in their own learning in the present and for the future. It can help them shape the instruction that they want and need. It can inspire their confidence to fully participate in lifelong processes of inquiry and to engage in the world around them. The potential for learner agency is present in all students. It emerges, is nurtured, and is expressed in interaction with others in relationships which centre around respect, trust, and inclusion. It cannot be prescribed but is rather invited.

In the case of classroom language learning, this invitation is made evident in the primary relationship between the teacher and students. All teaching can be designed with learner agency in mind. It means that teachers are intentional in attempting to understand what their students are thinking, feeling, and able to control about the language and the enabling conditions of the activities they are being asked to take part in. The development of learner agency is facilitated by teachers who pause and ask themselves: how can I make the lesson more conducive to promoting learner agency? Seeing students as co-designers of their learning opportunities is one way to develop their agency and to contribute to an effective teaching approach. In short, promoting learner agency means not doing for students what they can do for themselves.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of **learning-centred teaching** is that it requires a shift away from expecting things to happen in a particular way and towards embracing a degree of uncertainty.⁴⁶ When responsibility for learning is shared, outcomes can be especially uncertain. One way that the demands of encouraging learner agency can be managed and sustained is by establishing a supportive community in which enhanced learner agency is an explicit common purpose shared by all key stakeholders. When everyone is pulling the oars of a boat in the same direction, it is more likely to reach its destination.

Although there may be challenges to developing learner agency, they can be met if there is a willingness to do so. When teachers gather feedback from students, ask for suggestions, and make adjustments to their practice and the curriculum to promote learner agency, remarkable changes can take place. The reward for doing this work is having students understand and appreciate that they are valued as capable, independent learners. In return, teachers gain the privilege of watching their students grow in confidence and ability and become lifelong learners.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Learners with a sense of their own agency are more likely to be engaged and invested in their language learning.** Students who are engaged and invested in their learning will become more confident and effective learners. Evidence suggests that enacting their agency is empowering for students and is likely to boost their motivation.
- **Teachers play an essential role in facilitating the development of learner agency by providing opportunities for students to exercise and enhance their agency.** Learner agency may appear to be something new or different. However, many teachers will already be familiar with it. Building on their existing skills and expertise, teachers can create the opportunities that will enable students to develop high levels of learner agency and improve learning outcomes.
- **Agency does not reside solely in the learner but is negotiated and supported by all stakeholders in an ecology.** Agency shifts the perspective from seeing learners as individuals to viewing them as interconnected within a dynamic and evolving community. Through shared principles and a common purpose, learners can make the most of the learning opportunities they perceive are available to them and receive the support they need to make a difference in their own lives and in the world.
- **Students who develop agency are prepared not only for success as language learners but also for the challenges and opportunities in life beyond the classroom, in the present and the future.** When students take an active role in their learning and believe that they can take action for themselves to be successful, they are more likely to maximize their potential. In this way, they will develop the capacity to grow, adapt, and flourish.

APPENDIX 1: REFLECTING ON LEARNER AGENCY

The following exercise allows you to reflect on the degree to which you believe you are putting into practice a teaching approach which will promote learner agency.

Statements 1–12 are about your own classroom practice. Statements 14–23 are about the students in your classes. Think of a specific class as you answer each question and repeat the task for each class you teach. Statements 13 and 24 are blank for you to add your own ideas, if you wish.

		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
My classroom practice	1 I see myself as a partner with my students in the teaching–learning ecology.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2 I seek to cultivate an attitude of inquiry among my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3 I am conscious of who participates in the class, who does not, and why.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	4 I teach my students to adapt the language they use to the situation in which they are communicating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	5 I have a somewhat flexible approach to managing lessons.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	6 I make use of technology (where it is available) to enable students to generate their own content and direct their learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	7 I see it as part of my role to prepare my students for challenges and opportunities in life beyond the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	8 I provide opportunities for my students to self-assess.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	9 I make use of feedback, including learner-driven feedback, as appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	10 I am open to learning with and from my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	11 I teach what students show me that they have not yet learned and are interested in learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	12 I am comfortable with not being certain about the outcome of an activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	14 Students choose topics, texts, and activities that match their interests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	15 Students feel that their opinions are welcome.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	16 Students feel that it is safe to make mistakes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	17 Students set personal goals and learn how to work towards meeting them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	18 Students work with me to design certain aspects of their course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	19 Students reflect on what they have learned, what has gone well, what they have found difficult, and how they can move their learning forward.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	20 Students bring items of interest from their lives outside school and share them in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	21 Students believe that they can be successful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	22 My students and I have a mutually respectful relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	23 Students' curiosity is encouraged.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	24	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

REFLECTING ON THE RESULTS OF YOUR RATINGS

When you have finished the reflection task, try one or more of the following activities. For an even richer experience, do these activities with a trusted colleague or group of colleagues. You could then consider ways of working together to develop practices that promote learner agency.

- 1 Pick one thing that you do 'often' and evaluate how successful it is. Why do you think it is successful? Are there any changes you could make to improve it, use it in another context, or expand it in another way?
- 2 Pick one thing that you do 'sometimes'. What stops you from doing this more often? Is it something that you can or want to change? How might you develop it to allow you to do it more often?
- 3 Pick one thing that you do 'rarely' and think about why. Is there a way that you could add it to your repertoire? Why or why not?
- 4 Try out one new way to encourage learner agency in your class. Think about:
 - the context of your school/classes
 - what is achievable
 - any challenges
 - what is likely to be most successful and have the most impact on teaching and learning.

Try it out in class and evaluate its success. Think about any changes you could make to improve the outcomes next time.

- 5 Identify three of the main challenges to promoting learner agency within your context. How might you overcome one of them?

APPENDIX 2: ASSESSING LEARNER AGENCY

It is impossible to be prescriptive about the development of learner agency due to the many factors that interact in any ecology. However, the following characteristics of an agentive learner may help you assess the developing agency of your students.

SOCIAL AND OTHER BEHAVIOURS

- Asks questions when unsure or takes the initiative to find out answers
- Finds opportunities to use English outside class
- Brings language from outside life into the classroom
- Can adapt the way they use language as the context changes
- Sets goals and monitors progress towards meeting them

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

- Believes that knowing English is worthwhile
- Believes that learning English is possible
- Is curious about English and its speakers
- Feels confident in their ability to learn
- Is willing to make mistakes
- Is willing to take ownership and responsibility for their learning

EMOTIONAL FACTORS

- Wants to be present
- Can recognize and understand their own emotions
- Is not anxious about learning or using English
- Is cooperative and empathic
- Is resilient, not easily discouraged, and perseveres

COGNITIVE FACTORS

- Has knowledge of and ability to use learning strategies
- Is able to use strategies to investigate language
- Can compare a language they know with English and learn from their similarities and differences
- Understands and can learn from teacher feedback

AWARENESS

- Has a developing awareness of how they learn best
- Recognizes when they have made a mistake
- Can accurately self-assess and track their own progress
- Recognizes learning opportunities when they occur

GLOSSARY

action research

Research carried out by teachers, often in their own classrooms or in collaboration with other teachers. The research goals and questions are local and specific to their own teaching environment.

affinity group

A group of individuals who share a common interest or purpose and can learn informally from each other, often in an online environment.

affordance

A learning opportunity recognized by the learner.

asset model of teaching

A model of teaching in which learners are valued for what they can already do rather than being characterized by what they lack.

attitude of inquiry

Being inquisitive and committed to investigation.

collective agency

A feeling held by individuals that they have the capacity to act together with a shared purpose.

ecology

The interconnected relationships among stakeholders within a context and between the stakeholders and the environment that emerges at a particular time and place.

exploratory practice

A form of practitioner research in which teachers and learners investigate their own teaching and learning practices in order to better understand them.

growth mindset

An individual's belief that they are in control of their own ability and can learn and improve.

learner agency

The feeling of ownership and sense of control that students have over their learning.

learner-driven feedback

An approach to feedback in which learners choose what kind of feedback they receive and how they wish to receive it.

learning-centred teaching

Teaching that manages the process of learning with a focus on what students have yet to learn and are interested in learning.

personalized learning

An approach in which students design or adapt learning activities in accordance with their interests and preferred ways of learning.

self-correction

When learners correct their own errors, with or without prompting from the teacher.

self-referential assessment

A type of assessment that focuses on what learners can do now that they could not do earlier. This contrasts with approaches that assess learner performance in terms of language norms.

teacher agency

A feeling held by teachers when they have a voice in determining the nature of instruction and their professional lives.

translingual pedagogy

A set of practices which aim to make use of learners' full linguistic repertoires to help them express the meaning they intend. Also sometimes known as translanguaging.

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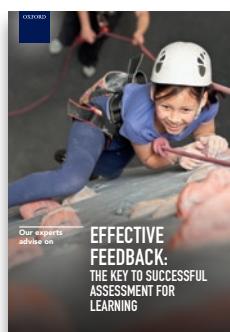
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ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Kramsch (2012), p. 15

01 UNDERSTANDING LEARNER AGENCY

2 Ushioda (2020)

3 Benson (2007)

4 van Lier (2010)

5 Namgung, Moate, & Ruohotie-Lyhty (2020), p. 5; see also Larsen-Freeman (2019)

6 Ushioda (2009); Mercer (2012)

7 Lantolf & Pavlenko (2001); Toohey & Norton (2003); Lipponen & Kumpulainen (2011); Crabbe, Elgort, & Gu (2013); Duff & Doherty (2015)

8 Ushioda (2019)

9 Jones (2018)

10 Underhill (2014), p. 63

11 Paul Driver (4 December, personal communication)

12 Oliver et al. (2020)

13 van Lier (2008); Waring (2011)

14 Schwab (2011)

15 Thoms (2014)

16 Mayo & Zeitler (2017), p. 71

17 Larsen-Freeman (2000)

18 Maas (2017), p. 129

19 Zheng et al. (2009)

20 www.penpalschools.com; www.etwinning.net

21 Gao (2013)

02 THE ECOLOGY OF LEARNER AGENCY

22 Schoon (2018), p. 9

23 Menken & García (2010)

24 Enever (2020)

25 Hélot, in Menken & García (2010), p. 65

26 Kayi-Aydar (2015)

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03 PROMOTING LEARNER AGENCY: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

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42 Henry & Thorsen (2020)

43 Shak (2018)

44 Zeiser, Scholz, & Cirkus (2018). In this case, the standardized test was not a language test. For another similar study, which also underscores the importance of learner agency over reliance on standardized test scores alone, see Ferguson with Phillips, Rowley, & Friedlander (2015).

45 Little & Erickson (2015), p. 134

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