

Views on self-access language learning

A talk with Leslie Dickinson, Lindsay Miller,
Gill Sturtridge and Radha Ravindran

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In May 1999, the first electronic colloquium was held in the AUTO-L, an Internet discussion forum on Language Learning Autonomy¹, the topic of which centered on the implementation of self-access language learning (SALL). Moderated by Anita Wenden and Leslie Dickinson, in this colloquium, four prominent scholars in the field shared their views and wide-ranging experience on the topic, by addressing some or all of the questions that had been previously specified by the moderators. The result of such an event, which extended over a period of four weeks, was a fruitful exchange of ideas not only among the four participants but also the members of the AUTO-L who joined the debate.

With permission granted by the participants and moderators, in this issue we would like to report the insights generated in the colloquium. Regrettably, the whole range of questions and responses elicited in the debate cannot be presented, due to space limitations. Instead, an edited version, which offers a great part of the responses given by the four scholars, is provided.

Q1: What are the main purposes of SALL: learner training or language training?

Leslie Dickinson: The reasons I have for using self-access language learning with students include both language learning and learner training, but these expressions conceal more than they reveal! I have believed for years that all language teachers should take on the responsibility - additional to language teaching - of helping students to learn how to learn. Providing self-access facilities and carefully helping students to learn how to use them is a good beginning. Of course, they then have to learn additional language learning tech-

1. For interested readers, contact < AUTO-L@ycvax.york.cuny.edu >. Also see the section on Internet resources in the annotated bibliography of this issue.

niques, i.e., learning strategies, and they have to practise those strategies as they engage in language learning. The ideal outcome of the process of learning how to learn is greater learning autonomy, and self-access learning is an excellent way of developing one's autonomy. The main purposes of self-access language learning, then, are firstly for the learner to develop greater learning autonomy and secondly to work on personal objectives in the target language.

What I have written so far raises several issues about the nature and use of self-access language learning. In essence, self-access facilities consist simply of a stock of relevant resources available to students. (When I stumbled into the idea of self-access in the 1970's, I was using a large cardboard box containing such resources as dictionaries, cassette recorders and cassettes, workbooks, an SRA Reading Lab and so on, which I humped from classroom to classroom. Later I visited the language learning centre at C.R.A.P.E.L. in the University of Nancy II set up by Phil Riley and colleagues and discovered what the possibilities were at the other end of the scale, given the money and accommodation. But the principle was the same!). My intention —and, of course, Phil Riley's intention— was to assist learners to develop their learning autonomy concurrently with working on relevant language learning objectives. But there is no necessary relationship between self-access language learning and learning autonomy. Self-access language learning can be highly teacher directed, it can be totally autonomous or it can be somewhere between those extremes; and of course, the level of autonomy can vary from time to time and from individual to individual depending on the particular objectives being tackled and the needs of the individual.

Nor, of course, does self-access necessarily imply that individuals are working by themselves isolated from other learners. Self-access merely means that the resources are immediately accessible by the learner(s) rather than being directly controlled by a teacher. Consequently, learning in a self-access facility may be individual, but it also may be in pairs or groups.

Lindsay Miller: I think that the obvious answer to this is that both learner training and language training should be accommodated within SALL. However, we can make a distinction between the product of language learning and the process of language learning. In this case, SALL focuses on the process, that is, how to go about learning, whereas language training may focus mainly on the product, that is, what can the learner do in the L2. By gaining access to better processes of language learning learners may become better users of the language.

Gill Sturtridge: The main purpose of a SALL provision is language learning, but it must give learners the means to learn languages without the teacher's constant presence and direction. Thus the purpose of any self-access centre is to provide a relaxed, materials-rich environment. Learners can only bene-

fit from that if they are given some learner support, either in the form of learning-to-learn materials and /or a support scheme from the facilitator. I see language training and language learning (or indeed, self-access history learning, for that matter) as an integrated approach in the SALL centre, whatever type of "centre" it may be.

Radha Ravindran: Our Centre², set up in 1993 has focused on training learners to take responsibility for their own learning and what we have done is use language learning as a vehicle to deliver this agenda. All the projects we run are designed in such a way that it integrates learner training while learners work on their language learning needs. Every project is therefore task and learning focused.

Q2: How does SALL relate to traditional instruction?

Lindsay Miller: In many secondary school situations it is the 'product' which is important. Therefore, language learning is measured by test scores and in some countries like Hong Kong learners and their teachers are primarily focused on the techniques of learning how to pass the tests, rather than how to go about learning and using English. As such, it is quite difficult to establish SALL within a traditional teaching context. However, this does not mean that it can not be accommodated. Even when teachers and learners are following textbooks that have been written for examination practice, SALL can be implemented. This can be done in three ways: thinking about the process, doing the process, and reflecting on the process. For example, teachers can find ten to fifteen minutes of class time to talk with their learners about the learning process (this can be done in the L1 if necessary), and they can discuss different styles and strategies for learning. Teachers may also implement some form of SALL without disrupting the syllabus by means of, say, project work. This can be carried out mainly in the students' own time, with the finished product being presented as part of the oral assessment. To complete the process, students should also be asked to reflect on any SALL work. This can be done by once more talking about their project work as a learning experience, or perhaps as a written critique of what they did, why, what they learned from the process. In this way SALL needs not disrupt 'normal' teaching too much.

Gill Sturtridge: SALL can be an alternative to traditional instruction, but I believe it is more effective as a symbiotic system, allowing that individuality for each student that is not possible in a class. Learners use self-access mate-

2. The Centre for Individual Language Learning (CILL) was established in order to promote self-directed language learning at Temasek Polytechnic. Interested readers can address to the following website: <<http://www.tp.edu.sg/lcd.htm>>

rials to improve perceived weaknesses or follow interests. There is a danger that the more closely the work is related to class work, the more likely the Self-Access Centre (SAC) will become a practice centre rather than a learning centre. However, a close relationship between class teachers and the SAC is highly beneficial, particularly at the early stages, where the teacher can take on a counsellor role and guide the learner towards working independently.

Radha Ravindran: In our case, we run programmes in accordance with faculty needs. These are CILL Faculty joint projects which dovetail into the language and communication skills curriculum taught in these faculties, e.g., case reading skills for Diploma in Legal Studies students; job-hunting skills for engineering students, which is set as a problem based learning exercise, or independent learning skills for Design Faculty students. So while traditional instruction goes on in the classroom in these related areas, the projects run in CILL serve to add value by way of providing specialist language or learning skills, e.g., problem-based learning skills, critical reading skills, independent learning skills.

Leslie Dickinson: The intention of this question might be to ask about learning materials and methodologies or to ask about the relation between modes of learning, or both. So far as the relation between modes of learning is concerned, there are many possibilities, depending on the policy of the institution or the inclination of the teacher. There may be close integration between the two, organised by the teacher, or there may be no teacher directed integration. On the other hand, the students using the self-access facility independently may themselves relate the work they do in the SALL with the work in the classroom. A pattern I have seen in Thailand and Malaysia is one in which the teacher sets up a project in the classroom and the students use the self-access resources to work on the project. A variation is that the students design the project themselves, and then work on it using the self-access resources.

The teacher may suggest to students that they use the SAC to work on supplementary activities in the current course book. Alternatively, students themselves may be aware of areas that need extra work in their language learning, and use the SAC to work on them. On the other hand, students might use the SAC for extensive practice - by analogy with extensive reading. So, they might watch a movie on video or look at a TV programme (via satellite TV) or listen to a radio news broadcast, or read a daily paper. Another use of the SAC which is unrelated to classroom work is where a student wants to follow up a personal interest or work on specific objectives which are additional to those covered in the classroom. So far as methodology is concerned, I can see few methodological restrictions on self-access learning. Materials for self-access may use grammar translation methodology or communicative methodology or any other - with the possible exception of Total Physical Response!

Q3: What are the problems encountered in implementing self-access?

Gill Sturtridge: As I see it, the problems vary according to where self-access is being established and the reason why it was established, and the perceptions of it within the institution. However, some universal issues are a) the introduction to working in self-access, and b) adapting support to the changing or unchanging learner who works there on a regular basis. a) Most centres have introductory materials, to show learners around, but we still lack a range of good guidance materials for helping learners, who are still throwing off a life-time of directed schooling, to plan and work effectively by themselves. The presence of good facilitators or class teachers with a group can do much to combat this. b) There are clear indications that some learners change their working procedure. They might begin by doing practice work and then move to more exciting learning materials. Others remain working in the same way and are loath to change their study habits.

Have we really faced up to this question? Do some learners thrive better when they are directed and is self-access only for some? Perhaps I can add a further issue: teacher development to face the new role of *not* being a teacher and director, but a helper and seeker.

Leslie Dickinson: I reckon that there are three groups of problems in implementing (and establishing) self-access. There are problems concerned with administrative matters such as getting (and keeping) suitable accommodation; getting reasonable funding; getting agreement from the institution that teachers' work in a self-access centre is recognised teaching time (rather than administration, for example); and selecting and obtaining resources for the centre. There is a second group of problems concerned with the users - the learners. Some learners are unwilling to work without teacher supervision; and when SALL is used to encourage the development of autonomy, some learners are reluctant to undertake the extra tasks that accompany autonomous learning. Finally there is a group of problems relating to the reluctance of some teachers to undertake this innovative approach to learning. However, all of these issues are covered by groups of questions which come later in this Colloquium.

Lindsay Miller: This is a big question as it depends on what is meant by 'self-access'. If we mean allowing learners to choose how they will read a text, or asking students to collect some information from outside of the class as a homework assignment, then I cannot see many problems. On the other hand, if we are considering establishing a self-access centre and asking learners to use it, then there are potential problems. Some of these problems may be: a) learners do not know how to go about organizing their learning in an unstructured environment (especially if they are used to teacher-centred learning); b) the SAC is not clearly organized and so learners cannot find out

how to use it easily; c) the work learners do in the SAC has no links to their classroom-based learning and so appears to be a waste of time to the learners; and d) other teachers see self-access as a waste of resources, especially in schools where there is a lack of resources.

Q4: How should self-access be evaluated?

Lindsay Miller: So much effort has been put into establishing self-access that I think evaluation has been forgotten about. However, in many instances SACs take up space and funding, and the administrators who allocate these want to see the results of self-access. This is very difficult to quantify (unless you do it by simply counting how many learners use the facility, but what does that actually tell us?) as most of the benefits of using self-access may not be immediately apparent. In fact, it may not be until years after being introduced to self-access that the learner is able to appreciate the significance of what they have been doing. There are, though, two suggestions I have about evaluating self-access:

Firstly, the evaluation process needs to include an outsider. Administrators may not accept those who work in self-access and who have a vested interest in maintaining the facility saying "It's all wonderful, the students love it." Assessment criteria need to be decided on by those who are responsible for the SAC, or self-access corner, or whatever system is in place, *and* an outside reviewer. The evaluation must then be done in conjunction with the external reviewer to see if the criteria for evaluation has been met. He or she should be free to make comments and suggestions about the facility.

Secondly, we need to investigate ways of presenting qualitative reports to administrators about self-access. As we all know, stating that 400 students used a facility each month does not really tell us anything. We need to find ways to get students to talk about what they do in self-access and then report on these comments. If we really develop self-access for the students' benefits, then we have to give them a voice in reporting on its success or failure.

Radha Ravindran: A tough one - especially because we're looking at developmental skills. In fact CILL launched the first ever Certificate in Independent Language Learning³ (CERT) in August 1998. The CERT, of course, involves certification - we've worked out a system of grade profiles which we tried out with various faculty based projects and my colleagues have come back to me saying that it was extremely useful. We're continuing with our critical trialling of this method with current programme runs.

3. A write-up of this is available on CILL-Matters, at the following website:
<<http://www.tp.edu.sg/cillmatters.htm>>

Q5: How can administrators be convinced that self-access centres are worth the money they cost?

Leslie Dickinson: First, let me say how administrators should *not* be convinced, and that is to argue that self-access saves money in staffing. This argument should *not* be used, first because it is usually not true and second because it is disloyal to teachers. If a self-access centre is to be properly stocked, properly managed and properly run then the teachers are going to be busy doing those things, so it is not true that self-access saves on staffing. Secondly, it should not be used because it is disloyal to the teachers. The teachers are the SAC's greatest resource and everything possible should be done to support them in their work in the self-access centre. Suggesting to the boss that the centre is likely to make (some) teachers redundant is not a good strategy.

How, then, can administrators be convinced? One way that has been successfully used is to argue that a SAC is likely to be more effective in language learning than a computer lab or a language laboratory (if language labs are still around). In the old days when language laboratories were novel and educators believed that they were worth the money, administrators could sometimes be convinced to put up the cost of a language laboratory for use in establishing a self-access centre. The more thoughtful administrators could be convinced that a lot of the functions of a language lab could be carried out by much cheaper cassette recorders (listening practice) and that a few dual channel machines used in turn by class members would cope with the other functions. I suspect that similar arguments can be put forward about computer labs.

However, ultimately, administrators are only going to be convinced by arguments about the effectiveness in terms of language learning of the self-access centre. Get someone from a nearby institution with an effective self-access centre to come and talk about it; maybe get some students to come along too. Also, propose beginning in a small way and be prepared with a well-worked out programme for training the teachers and the learners to use it.

Lindsay Miller: I agree with everything that Leslie said about convincing administrators to part with money for establishing a SAC. But I also want to re-emphasize the point that not all SACs cost a lot of money. If a teacher decides to begin SALL work in the classroom then very little extra resources are required. Inviting administrators along to observe class work and then begin to ask for small amounts of funding for some special resources may result in the money being granted.

Administrators are often teachers themselves, and so we may not need to convince them too much of the benefits of a dedicated SAC. The problem may be asking for too much too quickly. I have seen a very expensive SAC, set up with the good will of teachers and administrators, collapse as a result

that things went too quickly. The wrong materials were purchased, the 'wrong' group of students was targeted to begin using the SAC, the wrong manager was put in place to oversee things. The result was that the administrators lost all confidence in the SAC and withdrew funding and space allocation, and the losers were the dedicated teachers who had spent much of their time trying to establish the centre and the students who lost a potentially useful resource. So, my two points are: begin with manageable facilities, and keep the administrators in mind when planning what you are going to establish. Don't over-reach yourself.

Gill Sturtridge: I go along with the points Leslie and Lindsay have already made with regard to winning minds and influencing people, particularly in starting small. Also ask for a low but regular budget. If you are at the planning stage, it does help enormously to take the administrators to see a successful SAC in action if there is one near you; seeing learners working has a big impact. Often administrators don't really understand what a SAC is. If there is nowhere to show them, get a film or select from the literature or simply write one A4 page yourself on SACs. Make it short (they're busy) and clear and in line with their concerns. More importantly identify their exact concern. Is it money, space, rival institutions, publicity or a desire for more effective learning? Work accordingly. It is difficult to provide evidence that SACs produce better language learners. Not least because in most cases, the regular users are self-selected and, as has been suggested earlier, may be the most motivated. Your positive argument would have to be that SACs provide opportunities for extra exposure to the FL: a virtue in itself.

Q6: What management skills are needed for running a self-access centre, and how necessary are they?

Gill Sturtridge: The self-access centre director/supervisor/facilitator is the key to success or failure. The supervisor sets the atmosphere and if that is wrong the learners won't come. I recommend reading: "Establish self-access" by David Gardner and Lindsay Miller (1999), as it covers the range of management skills. I would add here that a SAC supervisor/manager must have a good knowledge of language learning and teaching and counselling. SAC personnel need to know when and how to intervene and support and the supervisor is often a link (or indeed teacher developer) with the teachers from different departments within the institution. You need librarian skills, but be wary of librarians! Though modern librarians are friendly and welcoming and might seem the obvious choice, they know too much of their science of catalogues; in SACs, unorthodox catalogue systems and approaches are often what learners need.

Leslie Dickinson: I suppose that the management skills needed depend on the size and complexity of the centre. As I wrote in my response to the first set of questions, my first experience with a self-access 'centre' was a box of materials. Very few management skills were needed for that. But if the centre is large, with a lot of materials and equipment, then a range of management skills will be needed. For me, the main skills needed are teacher skills needed for selecting appropriate materials and presenting them in an attractive way as well as librarian skills, in order to establish an effective system for handling the materials (cataloguing them, arranging them on the shelves and so on), and for actually handling them on a day to day basis (getting them back on the shelves in the right places, keeping the catalogue up-to-date and so on). However, the most important skill of all is that of working with other people, both staff and students, and helping these other people to develop a feeling of ownership of the self-access centre so that they feel confident in going there and using it, and so that they feel responsible for it. The most effective example of the development of ownership that I know of comes from a teachers' college in Malaysia where students and staff worked together to convert a disused and neglected room into a self-access centre. The conversion involved tasks as mundane as cleaning out the room and painting it, and as profound as selecting materials, preparing worksheets and deciding on the arrangement of the materials in the room.

Lindsay Miller: I agree with Leslie's comments, but I'd like to go further. Management of dedicated SACs has been something which has been ignored in the past. Basically, the administrators have had the view that 'if teachers want to work in a SAC then make management part of their responsibilities'. Although there are some courses organized by organizations like The British Council, very few people involved in the management of SACs have had any kind of formal training in management. In a recent publication I wrote with David Gardner⁴, we call for a lot more attention to be given to management training for those in charge of SACs. For example we suggest that managers need training in the following areas:

- management systems (e.g. job descriptions, dealing with roles of committees)
- institutional procedures (e.g. hierarchy, committee structures)
- personnel (e.g. hiring and firing, disciplining)
- financial (e.g. budgets, tenders)
- appraisal (establishing a system of appraisal)
- counselling (teaching staff to counsel students)
- evaluation of materials, people, systems

4. Gardner, D. & Miller, L. (1999). *Establishing self-access: from theory to practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- staff development (e.g. running training programs)
- negotiation skills (to negotiate with staff, teachers, higher level managers)
- planning (short and long term planning skills)
- public relations (dealing with visitors, making presentations about the SAC).

We make these suggestions on the basis of a dedicated SAC. Most managers of small scale SACs will have to get their training on-the-job and by visiting other SACs. But, if we want administrators to take self-access seriously, and fund SACs at an appropriate level, then we must address the issue of training people to manage the facilities.

Q7: How should learners be prepared for self-access language learning and ultimately for independent learning?

Lindsay Miller: This question brings me back to something I said earlier about SALL beginning in the classroom. With the amount of work that has now been done into learner styles and strategies, we have a better understanding of how differently learners approach their language learning. We now need to use this knowledge to sensitize our learners to the process of becoming an independent learner. This can happen by simply talking with the learners (perhaps in their L1) about what they know and think about their own abilities as learners. Often, when I do this with my own students I meet a barrage of negative comments about their abilities - it then takes some time to help them realize that they all have attributes which help them become better language users/learners. Using tools such as Oxford's (1990)⁵ strategies lists and Willing's (1989)⁶ tasks also helps to sensitize the learners.

My main thing, these days, however, is not just to talk about styles and strategies, but implement them as part of my lesson planning. When planning any lesson now I not only think about the language objectives, but also about the learning skill objectives. I also try to explain to the students why we are doing a certain activity in a certain way, and ask them to comment, from time to time, about the way they are learning. I teach high level university students, but I still think that they need time to change to become independent learners and that I should help them try to achieve this. It is now part of my classroom management skills. I think that by setting the stage in the classroom for students to become more independent in their learning, the task of using a SAC becomes more acceptable and manageable.

5. Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

6. Willing, K. (1989). *Teaching how to learn*. Sydney: NCELT, Macquarie University.

Leslie Dickinson: Learner preparation might be concerned with at least four things: a) Preparation in using the self access centre (i.e., in how to use it, how to use the catalogue, how to select materials and so on). b) Preparation for general language learning, now often referred to as learner training (i.e., how to become more effective in their language learning whether they are learning in a classroom, a self access centre or independently, or of course, in some combination of these modes). c) Preparation for independent learning. Some learners in some circumstances wish or need to undertake language learning independently of a course, a teacher and a class. Such learners may need rather specific preparation in such things as designing a learning programme, specifying objectives, selecting materials and so on. And d) preparation for autonomy. Autonomy, for me, is an attitude to learning that the learner develops, in which the learner is willing and able to make the significant decisions about her learning, including the decision *not* to make some of the decisions - that is, a deliberate decision to go along with what the teacher is doing in class.

Preparation, then, involves giving people opportunities to reflect on their attitude to learning and to think about and extend learning techniques. I have found Henri Holec's (1981) terms⁷ useful to cover these two categories: Psychological preparation, concerned with attitude to learning, and Methodological preparation, concerned with techniques.

Autonomous learners are willing and able to do the things listed below; their willingness to do them is a matter of psychological preparation. Their ability to do them is a matter of methodological preparation.

- a) Identify what is being taught. That is, they are aware of the objectives in the materials, or stated by the teacher;
- b) State and follow-up their own purposes in addition to the objectives in the materials, or stated by the teacher;
- c) Select and implement appropriate learning strategies;
- d) Monitor their own learning and
- e) Monitor and evaluate their own use of learning strategies.

How can we help students to develop these attitudes and abilities? I think that there are five ways teachers can help. They can help *a*) by legitimising autonomy in learning through demonstrating that we, as teachers approve and encourage learners to be more autonomous; *b*) by convincing the learner that she is capable of greater autonomy in learning, probably most effectively by giving her successful experiences of independent learning; *c*) by giving the learner increasing opportunities to exercise her independence; *d*) by helping the learner to develop learning techniques (learning strategies) so that she can exercise her independence; *e*) by sharing with the learner aspects of knowl-

7. Holec, H. (1980). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Council of Europe, Pergamon.

edge of language learning so that she has a greater awareness of what to expect in her task of language learning, and how to react to barriers to learning and problems. The first two are clearly concerned with Psychological preparation; the fourth is clearly concerned with Methodological preparation and the others are concerned with both.

Q8: What are the responsibilities of the learning counsellor in SALL?

Leslie Dickinson: The following is an excerpt from my book, Dickinson⁸ (1987: 122-124). This accounts for the rather formal style.

“Tough⁹ (1979:181) lists the salient characteristics of the ideal learning counsellor based on research done in the late 1960s. He uses the term 'helper'...

The ideal helper is warm and loving. He accepts and cares about the learner and about his problems, and takes them seriously. He is willing to spend time helping. He is approving, supportive, encouraging friendly; and he regards the learner as an equal. As a result of these characteristics, the learner feels free to approach him and can talk freely and easily with him in a warm and relaxed atmosphere. A second group of characteristics concerns the helper's perception of the learner's capacity to plan and undertake his own learning. The ideal helper has confidence in the learner's ability to make appropriate plans and arrangements for his learning. He has a high regard for the learner's skill in planning his own work, and does not want to take away from him control of the decision making. As a result of this perception, the helper views his interaction with the learner as a dialogue; his help will be tailored to the needs, goals and requests of the learner, and the helper listens, understands, accepts and responds as well as helps. This is in contrast to those helpers who want to control, command, manipulate, persuade, influence and change the learner. Such a helper views the learner as an object, and expects to do something to that object.

Tough's list of the personal qualities and attitudes of the ideal helper must be extended in terms of professional knowledge and skills required of a helper of language learners. The following list is adapted from Carver (1982a: 33)¹⁰ and McCafferty (ND: 22)¹¹. The ideal helper requires knowledge and skills in:

8. Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Tough, A. (1971,1979). *The adults' learning projects: a fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning*. (2nd Edition). The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
10. Carver, D. J. (1982a). Introduction to 'The selection and training of helpers'. In Cousin, W.D. (ed.). *Report of the workshops in the role and training of helpers for self-access language learning systems*. Moray House. Mimeo.
11. McCafferty, J. B. (ND). *A consideration of a self-access approach to the learning of English*. The British Council (unpublished mimeo: 22).

- the learners' mother tongues in order to be able to communicate with the learners without difficulty and with a minimum risk of misunderstandings;
- the target language in order to help the learner with all or most of the items below;
- needs analysis, to help the learner to identify and describe his needs in language learning;
- setting objectives in order to help the learner to break down these needs into achievable objectives;
- linguistic analysis in order to identify for the learner (and later to help the learner identify for himself) the key learning points in authentic texts in subject areas relevant to learners with specific language requirements;
- materials in order to help the learner to find appropriate materials from the resources in the institution, but this would also include knowledge of published materials in order to help build up the resource;
- materials preparation in order to prepare appropriate materials from authentic texts, and in order to adapt published and in-house materials for self-instruction;
- assessment procedures in order to help learners to assess their proficiency and to develop self-assessment techniques;
- learning strategies in order to advise learners about the best ways for them to go about their learning, and in order to be able to recommend alternatives to learners who are not succeeding;
- management and administration in order to maintain lists of native speakers of the target language(s), find other learners of the target language(s) and arrange meetings among learners, arrange learning exchanges, monitor learners and keep records of them;
- librarianship in order to establish, maintain and run the self-access resources centre; this may include skills in cataloguing, devising and operating ways of keeping track of resources and being responsible for ordering new materials.

It would be very optimistic to expect to find an individual who possessed all of these qualities and skills; nevertheless all are desirable among the staff of an institution offering supported self-instructional learning. A programme of preparation for tutors should be concerned first to identify people with various of these skills and qualities, and secondly with helping tutors to acquire as many of them as is feasible."

Lindsay Miller: A counsellor's role has to be defined. Otherwise everyone ends up doing their own thing and this is very confusing for the learners. It is the responsibility of the manager of the SAC or head teacher, where SALL takes place in classrooms, to define what the differences should be between teacher and counsellor. It may be more useful, though, for me to state what the counsellor should *not* do. The counsellor should *not*:

- proof read and correct everything the learner shows him/her;
- try to solve complex emotional problems (use other professional services for this);
- be a technician (change a plug, yes; open up the computer, no);
- be a cleaner of the centre of classroom (give this responsibility to a cleaner of the learners);
- take on the manager's roles (these are very different from the counsellor's and involve dealing with staff, ordering materials, talking to senior management).

I am sure that you can add to this list. But it is useful to know what jobs/roles are out with the counsellor's responsibilities.

Q9: What training do learning counsellors need?

Lindsay Miller: Quite a lot, and the training should be co-ordinated so that everyone involved in SALL knows what is going on. We don't usually allow learners to opt out of the learner training programmes, so why should teachers be allowed to opt out?

Professional workshops and discussion sessions have to be held when SALL is being implemented and while it is being used. This will allow all staff to feel involved and will allow the manager/head teacher to know the feelings of the staff about SALL. These training sessions can involve outsiders (librarians, psychologists, managers) and should be seen as professional development, not something extra to do. Once the roles of the counsellor for the specific contexts have been established then you will realize what type of outside help to involve.

Apart from bringing specialists into talk with staff, those involved in SALL should also conduct workshops/seminars. These can be trouble shooting sessions where everyone moans together and perhaps thinks of solutions, or if a member of staff has a particular skill (e.g. knowledge about easy readers) then ask him/her to offer a seminar to other members of staff. The training of counsellors should be a creative process and also it should fill the gap of skills/knowledge that staff really want. So, do a needs analysis on your staff first.

One problem I have seen many times is a counsellor on 'duty' in a SAC and no learner going near him/her. By talking with the learners I have found out that they have a variety of reasons for not using the counsellor: don't know what a counsellor is supposed to do; don't know the counsellor and don't want to speak with a stranger; the counsellor looks busy (usually doing some marking) so don't want to disturb him/her; have asked the counsellor a question before and s/he couldn't give me a good answer; don't know who the counsellor is (usually in large SACs with several workers).

So, I think that once the role of the counsellor has been worked out it is then up to the centre or counsellors to go out and sell themselves. This can be done in many different ways: posters, learner training, badges on the counsellor, wandering around talking with learners, etc.

Leslie Dickinson: (From Dickinson, 1987: 124-125) "Teachers, like learners, may need both psychological and methodological preparation. Those who are new to self-instruction, those who lack confidence in themselves to help learners in this mode, and those who are doubtful or sceptical about self-instruction may benefit from a programme of workshops, enabling them to consider and reflect on this instructional mode, and the arguments and evidence in support of it. The major objectives of such preparation would include giving participants an opportunity to discover the full breadth of possible meanings of the concept of self-instruction; to reflect on their own attitudes to this instructional mode; and to consider the necessary changes of role and task required of the teacher who is helping learners working in a self-instructional mode. Suitable methodological preparation is mainly a matter of learning about the methodological preparation required by the learners in order that teachers can help to prepare groups of learners. Teachers can then apply the teaching skills they already possess to the new content.

It is likely that, in spite of preparatory workshops, some teachers will remain unconvinced and feel unhappy in working in this way. It goes without saying that it would be wrong to force change upon them, as it would be wrong to force learners into self-instruction. There is unlikely to be any shortage of need for conventional class teachers, even where self-instruction has an important role".

Q 10: What Instruments should be used to help learners to manage their learning progress in SALL?

Leslie Dickinson: The instruments that I have used in the past are: Needs Analysis Questionnaire, Learner Contract and Record of work. I have described various versions of these instruments in my book "Self-instruction in language learning" (Dickinson, 1987).

The Needs Analysis is only required by students who wish to design an individual course for themselves (or have one designed for them). It is concerned with getting the student (with or without help from a tutor) to think through such questions as her aims in learning the target language; the uses to which the language will be put; specific aspects of the language that the learner feels are important for her and so on.

The function of the Learner Contract is to help the learner make decisions on what work he will do over the next period of time. One version of a contract asks the learner to say what his objectives are for the next time

period, what materials and activities he will use to achieve his aims and when he reckons to be finished. Once again, the contract might be completed by the learner himself, or by the learner with help from a tutor. They are quite difficult to complete (because of the decisions that have to be made and the research that has to be done to find appropriate materials). Contracts avoid students wasting time wandering about in the self-access centre 'grazing' the materials - that is trying a little bit of this and a little of that.

The Record of Work is simply that: a form in which the learner records what she has done, when, and maybe how well. Ideally, the purpose of the record of work is to assist the student herself, but often they are used by the teacher as a way of maintaining some control over the students' work - a necessary safeguard with many groups of students.

A note about the participants

Leslie Dickinson is now retired. Until 1993 he was Senior Lecturer and course leader of the MA in TESOL at the Scottish Centre for Education Overseas, Moray House Institute, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. He has published mainly in the area of autonomy in language learning.

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Radha Ravindran is Manager of the Language and Communication Division, Temasek Polytechnic. She was instrumental in developing the Certificate in Independent Language Learning offered by the Centre for Independent Language Learning at the Polytechnic.

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