

Past, Present and Future of a Mexican Self-access Center: The case of the SAC at UABJO ¹

**Ángeles Clemente, Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca,
angelesclemente@hotmail.com**

Joan Rubin, Freelance Consultant, j.rubin@erols.com

Abstract

This is a critical narrative dealing with the Self-access Center (SAC) at the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO). It is divided into two parts. In the first part, Angeles Clemente, a 'permanent' professor and researcher at UABJO, narrates the social and educational history and development of the SAC. In the second part, Joan Rubin, a 'visiting' professor and researcher at UABJO for a period of three months, describes the counseling training she gave to SAC counselors, since she considered this a critical area to work on in the SAC-UABJO.

In the last decade of the last century, the concept of self-direction in education was translated into simultaneous openings of SACs in most of the state universities in Mexico. We believe that there are approximately 80 operating in Mexico today. For many teachers in the public educational sector, this sudden profusion of SACs appeared to offer a way to achieve what obviously was not being accomplished in the six compulsory years of secondary school and high school: a good command of English for every Mexican undergraduate at public universities. These SACs became, for some teachers, an imagined community (Kanno & Norton, 2003). In other words, the teachers imagined self-access centers as spaces for learning communities, that is, students working together with counselors and adopting new and successful approaches to learning languages, particularly English. However, this type of thriving learning community did not become a reality for the SAC in the UABJO; the results have not been as they had been imagined. The purpose of this article, therefore, is an analysis of the past and present SAC-UABJO through the dual collaboration of Angeles Clemente and Joan Rubin and it offers suggestions for working towards the desired results.

¹ This is a refereed article.

The Self-access Center at the UABJO: An abbreviated history (Angeles Clemente)

The following is my subjective narrative of the SAC history in a public state university of Oaxaca, Mexico. I am able to tell this story due to my involvement in the SAC project as an implementer, counselor and researcher (Clemente 1996; Clemente, 1998; Clemente, 2000a; Clemente, 2000b; Clemente, 2001; Clemente, 2003; Clemente & Kissinger, 2007). For some readers it may appear a rather personal account and with a strong tone of disappointment. My involvement in the whole process makes me feel this way, but it also makes me share the responsibility for its failures. I do so in hopes that this account and our proposed new approach may shed some light and help other SACs which may find themselves in similar situations, that is, the imagined community and development of the skills of Learner Self-management (LSM) have not come to fruition.

This story starts sixteen years ago, in 1992. At that time, the *Centro de Idiomas* (CI) [now *Facultad de Idiomas*], which offered language courses to the Oaxacan community and Spanish courses to international students, opened a new program, a BA in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). In October 1992, the Mexican Ministry of Education invited us to participate in a nationwide program of Self-access Centers. In order to take advantage of this offer, I needed to convince my university administrators, teachers and students of the merits of the SAC project. Since at that time almost nobody in Oaxaca knew about self-access centers, I portrayed our proposed SAC as a specialized library or resource center that would serve all the university students and members of the Oaxacan community who wanted or needed to learn a language. Furthermore, I tried to convey the idea that self-direction was the solution to all our problems, above all the crowded classrooms and the heterogeneous groups. I explained to the CI teachers that, in a SAC, learners could work at their own pace and choose materials according to their own learning styles and individual needs (Clemente & Kissinger, 1994). I also hosted a "self-access day," converting the school patio and classroom spaces into exhibits in order to promote the idea of self-directed learning. The next step was to train the teachers. At that moment I realised that everybody (including myself) needed to learn about self-direction in language learning. We developed a training program for the teachers. This was at two phases: the formal training before the opening of the SAC, followed by informal training (on-the-job experience) when the SAC was in operation. The first phase (December 1992 and February 1993) of the formal training was achieved through a series of seminars and workshops given by scholars from England and France. The input was an introduction to a self-directed learning scheme in the context of

language learning and a practical orientation of organizing and processing materials. This clearly helped the teachers gain confidence and get involved in the project. Since most of the work was processing materials with content they were familiar with, the teachers felt that the workshop contributed positively to their expertise.

Part of our formal training was conducted by CRAPEL's (Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues) staff and particularly by its leader, Henri Holec, who came to Mexico twice: to Oaxaca and to Chiapas. Four teachers from Oaxaca attended the seminar in Chiapas, which was later taught by some of us to the rest of the team in Oaxaca. As a follow up to these on-site training seminars, in August 1993, a group of professors from six Mexican universities were invited to the CRAPEL center in France for a continuing developing of our training as SAC counselors. The month that we spent at Université Nancy 2 seeing the *Centre de Recherché (Research Center)* in operation, making copies of materials, and even developing our own SAC materials, were the most practical and important parts of our education in self-directed language learning ⁽¹⁾.

After coming back from CRAPEL in September of 1993, we opened the SAC to students. It was, at that time, the second SAC operating in Mexico (the first one was opened in Mérida, from the same national project) and the largest (400 square meters), with facilities to attend to more than one hundred students at a time ⁽²⁾ (Clemente & Kissinger, 1994).

We began operating our Self-access Center with the idea that the teachers' functions were to be counseling, writing reports, monitoring users, classifying, adapting and filing materials, developing support materials, updating the options menu and developing activities for authentic materials. In order to study at the SAC, users had to fill out a form with personal and academic information; this form was used to develop the users' profile as 'learners' as well as place the users within an introductory course. This was not a language course, but a workshop in which the user was introduced to the concept of self-direction; s/he also tried out independent work, defined his/her learning needs, objectives, and styles, reflected on key concepts (language and culture, learning and teaching), and learned how to self-evaluate and how to use the SAC equipment. When the course was finished, s/he had to carry out a series of orientation tasks for two weeks. At the conclusion of these tasks, the users would have their first counseling session with a SAC counselor in order to check their understanding of the SAC system and revise their study plans. From there they were expected to continue working by themselves with weekly counseling sessions to assist their learning. The SAC was open fifteen hours a day from Monday to Friday, eleven hours on Saturday and five hours on Sunday. For a fee of 200 pesos, users were

entitled to use the facilities and materials in any language available (English, French, Italian, Japanese and Spanish) for a period of six months (Clemente & Kissinger, 1994).

By 1995, approximately one thousand users had enrolled in the SAC. Most were from the CI, but many were also from other faculties of the university and a few were from the community. However, we noticed that most did not stay longer than four months. At the time, at least from a financial perspective, this was not seen as a problem because every day more people came to ask about the system and subsequently enrolled. After two months of working there, most users showed a strong sense of lack of direction and disappointment, and we became aware that we could not find a way to help them to self-direct their language studies. In short, things were developing differently from what we had imagined. So, in 1996 we decided to find out what was going on. First, we carried out telephone interviews with all the users who had dropped out to find out why they had not continued coming to the SAC. Their answers were consistent. Most of the people we contacted claimed to have something better to do ("I am busier now", "I am going to the gym now", "I am preparing for my exams", etc.). From their responses, we wondered if, after their experience in the SAC, they were no longer motivated to learn a language (in most cases English). So, the question was, if the structure and function of the SAC was (partially) responsible for not motivating them to continue studying.

Fortunately, by that time, from 1995 on, I was no longer head of the department, trying to implement what in fact was a top-down attempt at innovation (White, 1988). I say "fortunately" because, now as a language teacher and counselor, I could try things out myself. I was now in direct contact with students either in the classroom or at the SAC. Therefore, in my role as a counselor, I had the chance to share the same anxieties and fears that both the students and my colleagues had been experiencing. For the next four years (1995-1998), I carried out different studies (Clemente, 1996; Clemente, 1998; Clemente, 2000a; Clemente, 2000b; Clemente, 2001; Clemente, 2003) to analyze what was going on at the SAC. While these studies helped me be better informed about theoretical and practical issues of learner autonomy in other parts of the world (i.e. Clemente on learner awareness, 2000a; learners' beliefs, 2000b; teacher attitudes, 2001; counselor/learner discourse, 2003), they also allowed me to carry out empirical studies working with actual counselors and learners in the SAC-UABJO.

One of the first things I found out was that many people involved in the project blamed the learners: Mexican culture cannot accept an educational system that lacks the figure of the teacher as a leader of the process (see Clemente 1998; Clemente, 2007). However, that was a rather simplistic

view, and quite a broad generalization. I also noted that it was not the sense of learner-autonomy that gave the users a reason to go to the SAC; rather, the users were there for a more straight-forward reason: they were unable to enrol in a regular language class at the CI, due to space limitations. And, of course, most of these students would have preferred to work with a teacher, to be part of a group, and to remain in a 'conventional' classroom. As one of my counselees stated: 'And what is wrong about having a teacher?'

We also found that the users were reluctant to use the counseling sessions. Naively we thought that all these learners were 'naturally independent', but we soon realized that these 'naturally independent learners' were disappearing without having achieved their goals or even having made any progress towards them. In addition to this, SAC counselors expressed their preference for working with materials and equipment rather than having direct contact with users; in fact, some even refused to give counseling sessions. Furthermore, it seemed that both parties were unhappy with this situation. Neither the counselors nor the learners liked taking part in counseling sessions. The learners thus were basically working by themselves, with short or rare interactions with counselors. By 1996, the counseling sessions were reduced to dialogues initiated by the learners in order to ask for the location of specific material or to ask a particular language question.

From the study I carried out with the counselors (Clemente, 2003), I realized one problem was that, in spite of the SAC training that they had received, the counselors themselves did not believe in self-directed learning. Having been successful teachers and having learnt their languages in formal situations, they had not experienced, nor perceived, self-direction as part of their learning culture. They believed that to change their behavior would have meant a denial of the validity of their past history as teachers. It seemed to them that what they had been doing and improving on in constant years of practice was not valid any more. They felt that by working in the SAC they were being told that 'they were not going to be teachers anymore'. To cope with this self-perceived contradiction, most SAC counselors adopted the self-direction discourse only at a surface level while rejecting the rationale behind it. Moreover, instead of seeing the SAC as a welcome innovation, most counselors felt that the structure and purpose of the SAC was imposed upon them without being consulted about the decision. And, in fact, being assigned to work at the SAC had increased their work load. To make things worse, they also believed that the SAC users lacked all the attributes of good language learners: being self-motivated, organized, independent and assertive and taking risks (Clemente, 2001).

Thus, after several years of on-the-job experience, we were not even sure about the proper discourse for counselors to use in order to promote learner autonomy, but we were sure that our counseling sessions were a failure and that we were performing our roles contrary to what we had hoped for. Now we were distrustful of students, we rejected the idea of the SAC as an innovation, and we felt anxious about the competence of our everyday work at the SAC (Clemente, 2001). To attain some level of understanding of all these conflicting dynamics, I chose to carry out my PhD research on learner autonomy, focusing on the issues of self-direction in language learning. This research made me realize that a SAC counselor, in order to make sense of what users are saying and doing, needs to have his/her own theory of learning and needs to know how that theory can be operationalized in order to address the everyday concerns of the students. In a broad sense, my conclusion was that the creation of a learning culture in self-direction could be possible only when there is a process of mutual understanding and negotiation among all social actors involved in the endeavor (Clemente, 1998). Furthermore, in the case of Oaxaca, this 'understanding and negotiation' would also involve consideration of the complex social history of Oaxaca's multilingual and multicultural context. Oaxaca is one of the poorest states in Mexico in terms of economy but the richest in terms of indigenous cultures. It is also ranked as one of the lowest in educational level. Therefore, in the case of the SAC-UABJO, it means taking into account the background knowledge learners bring to the SAC and finding or inventing ways to help learners move towards self-direction. Counselors may need to determine the most effective ways to help learners acquire new knowledge, adapt their counseling to the learners so that they are able to promote self-direction, and help learners confront new academic demands.

In 1998, when I returned to Oaxaca after my doctoral studies, I sadly realized that, for administrative reasons (full-time professors needed to spend more hours teaching, and SAC hours were not considered teaching hours), I was not going to work in the SAC anymore. That was 10 years ago, and the rest of my story is from an outsider point of view, though still personal. The SAC has undergone several administrative changes, all of them with the objective of making it work better. The first one was a change in its function, which meant that the SAC was declared a practice center and no longer a learning center for all students taking language courses at the university. In accordance with this change, a strong attempt was made to create supporting materials for each level of the courses at the LC. In fact, several universities in Mexico have decided to make SAC work compulsory. An example is when language students are required to spend 40 hours of independent work at the SAC per term. What was decided in UABJO, instead, was that the teacher of each course was supposed to take his/her class to the SAC and tell them what to work

on, or orient them to SAC materials related to their respective language course. After trying this out for several terms, most teachers decided not to work at the SAC because it took away time they would rather use in the classroom.

In 2005 the *Facultad de Idiomas* moved into its new location on the main university campus, on the outskirts of the city limits. This meant that the students in the BA program were now physically distant from the SAC, which remained at the original downtown location. However, this was not the only reason for the SAC to be almost empty at this time. By now, it was common knowledge that the only faithful SAC users were students who spent hours watching new films that were downloaded from the satellite dish. However, this service stopped when the company went out-of-service and nothing was done to replace the signal. Moreover, the SAC had also been closed for long periods of time, during which the CI realized tasks such as building maintenance, classification of materials, and redesign of learning spaces.

In 2006, as part of an institutional evaluation project of the *Facultad de Idiomas*, (the CI had been re-designated as '*Facultad*' in December 2004 with the opening of our masters program in TEFL), the SAC was evaluated and the results were somewhat negative. Both language teachers and students consistently complained just about everything—the materials, the equipment, the counseling service, and even the reception desk. The only ones that did not seem to share this view were the SAC counselors and coordinator, who said that the SAC was working well.

Actually, these complaints, made in the evaluation of 2006, were foreshadowed in 1994. Back then, Henri Holec was happy with our SAC project. However, he warned: "A self-access center that is not taken care of and updated once it has been set up, is bound to be abandoned and die" (in Clemente & Kissinger, 1994: 8).

In an attempt to re-imagine a new learning community for the SAC, last year (2007) we invited Joan Rubin to the SAC for three months to give us her professional advice on how we could provide more effective training for the SAC counselors and begin to create a new community of teachers and learners.

The Training of SAC Counselors (Joan Rubin)

My point of view follows from the now accepted view that a SAC is much more than a place that has many different kinds of the latest equipment and books and programs that are well organized. Most SAC managers and researchers recognize that the great majority of learners are not able to begin to work on their own and to take advantage of these materials, without considerable training and support (Gardner et al., 1999; Holec,

1996; Kelly, 1996; Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans, 2001). Such training as Rubin (2007: 1) states: "...involves helping learners acquire the knowledge and skills to manage their own learning (see also Rubin, 2001; Rubin, 2005, for a description of Learner Self-management)".

Furthermore, in order to promote more independent learning, the counselor's focus needs to be on the facilitation of learning rather than on giving the "right" answers. To do this, the counselor also has to have the knowledge and skills to help the learner acquire the knowledge and skills to manage his/her own learning. Being a counselor requires a major change in orientation from one that focuses on teaching to one that focuses on learning and learner independence (Clemente, 2003; Pemberton et al., 2001). In order to become an effective counselor, most people require reorientation and extensive training.

Several SACs around the world have developed a range of Counselor Training Practices to provide sufficient level of expertise and to change the paradigm from one of "telling" to one of "suggesting" (Rubin, 2007: 2-3). These include: mock advisory sessions, peer feedback sessions, mentoring, action research to facilitate reflective counseling and learning, reading key books and articles on counseling, and techniques to build a professional community of counselors. The University of Hull now offers a professional certificate in language advising which is a recognition that there is a broad range of skills and knowledge required to become an effective counselor. After years of researching language learner strategies (see Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Griffiths, 2008, for reviews of this research), the importance of managing one's learning has become even more critical. One of the models used to suggest the relationship between knowledge and skills is Learner Self-management (Rubin, 2001; Rubin, 2005). This model includes planning, monitoring, evaluating and problem-solving; while knowledge and beliefs include task knowledge, self-knowledge, beliefs about learning and language learning, prior knowledge and strategy knowledge.

Training Counselors at UBAJO

I was invited to Oaxaca to provide training for the counselors at the UBAJO-SAC. The training consisted of two parts: 1) a twenty-hour workshop which presented the concepts of LSM, provided practice opportunities to assimilate the concepts and was—followed by the presentation of teaching strategies to promote aspects of LSM and 2) most importantly, practice sessions for counselors to work with students on their language problems with my modelling effective counseling and suggesting ways to apply LSM. The following observations were for the final report to the UABJO.

Two major results came from the workshop. The first was the counselor's recognition that LSM could be very useful and that for the first time, the counselors acquired some practical tools and knowledge they could use to help learners self-manage their learning. Furthermore, they understood how to implement the often-stated suggestion that the role of a counselor was not that of telling learners where to find materials or correcting their assignments but actually helping learners develop an understanding of what they could do to manage their learning. The second was that all the counselor-participants in the workshop felt that although they now had some initial understanding of the underlying knowledge required to become an effective counselor, all agreed they wanted more application opportunities to develop their skills as a counselor.

Another conclusion that came from the workshop was that the SAC could serve both the UABJO university community (mainly the BA TEFL students) and the general community if it focused on the professional language needs of these two communities. In the case of the university community, one emerging need is presented by a new university requirement that all TEFL students pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) with a score of 550 by their fourth year of their BA studies. This requirement requires learners to spend a lot of time on their own to reach this goal. For the general community, given the prominence of Oaxaca as a tourist destination, there is a continual demand for help from hotel personnel, tour guides, and cooking school teachers. They require targeted ESP (English for Specific Purposes) materials and training to continue learning on their own.

Practice Sessions

Each of the workshop participants had an opportunity to work as a counselor with one or more students. Below I report on two counseling encounters that illustrate how counseling can help learners define or redefine their goals, establish a realistic time-line, establish criteria to measure performance, and identify any problems. The description also illustrates my role as a coach for the counselors-in-training. For both descriptions I have used pseudonyms instead of the students' real names.

Student 1: Antonio

Antonio came in with concerns about passing the new TOEFL requirement. When asked what he specifically wanted help with, he mentioned listening and speaking. This was his goal, although it was not very specific. When questioned further, the two counselors-in-training realized that this student really did not have a clear idea of what the test consisted of, nor what his real weaknesses were. It was determined that the learner needed more information concerning his skill level and what the test required of him. The counselors decided to give the student a sample

TOEFL test. His results on the sample TOEFL test indicated that his language level was that of a beginner. Having these results increased his self-knowledge. The test also helped Antonio realize that unless he had 40 hours a week to spend for the next 4 months he would not be able to pass the test. It should be noticed that this helped Antonio recognize that his goal was not realistic given the time-frame.

Antonio then decided to work on the listening part of the TOEFL since he found it to be the hardest section of the exam. Antonio modified his goal based on the information that he obtained from the counseling session. I then suggested that the counselors-in-training consider discussing with Antonio the kinds of genres used in the TOEFL test (i.e. that they use task classification to narrow down the task) ⁽³⁾. The counselors-in-training said that the most recurrent genre types in the exam were *conversations* and *lectures*. I then asked the counselors-in-training to consider the structure of these genres and how this information might help the student listen in a more effective way. By doing this, it would narrow down Antonio's expectations of what might happen and perhaps lower his anxiety. I also discussed with the counselors-in-training what the usual topics covered in the TOEFL listening section were. This is also using task classification to help narrow down the task.

The counselors-in-training then called Antonio's attention to the structure of the test which consists of what form questions might be in (multiple choice, yes/no, fill in the blank). This refers to a form of task classification. Just recognizing this format improved Antonio's performance immensely. The first time Antonio took the TOEFL he got 10% but after doing a little task classification, the next time he took the test he got 48%. One can imagine how motivating that must have been for this student.

My approach in working with the counselors was to suggest how they could use aspects of the LSM model to orient this particular learner with specific concerns and to educate him about what he might focus on. In a sense, I was helping them use LSM to understand practical student problems. In the future, the counselors themselves would ask their own students the same questions concerning genre, format, and other possible topics in order to help the students develop the skills to learn on their own.

Student 2: Maria

This was a Mexican student with a clear goal. Maria wanted to apply for a job with an American factory in Mexico. The student had worked before for a similar kind of factory and now wanted to do so again. She said she needed to learn how to behave in a job interview. After discussion, Maria decided her first goal was to identify what questions an interviewer might

ask her. The learner was asked to do what may be called *task classification*. She also decided that the best place to carry out the task was by using the Internet. This represents an example of *task demands* or *strategy*. After establishing the questions that might be asked of her in an interview, Maria began to work on the answers. The counselor-in-training and I worked with Maria to settle on several criteria that would indicate if she had adequate interview answers. Her criteria included: good grammar and spelling, appropriate vocabulary, logic, and a good attitude (honesty, confidence and interest in the business, understanding of the culture of the business, etc.). To help Maria identify whether she met some of these criteria, we suggested that she use an English language spell-check and grammar. Since Maria would need to be able to do this on the job, this would also provide her with tools she could use on her own.

Once Maria brought in her written answers to the questions she thought would be asked in a job interview and checked them using her own criteria, it became apparent that she had no clear way to notice appropriate vocabulary or collocation issues. When we looked at how she was selecting vocabulary, Maria showed us her very basic dictionary that only gave glosses. In order to get a better handle on collocation, we strongly suggested that she buy a larger dictionary that would give her a more complete understanding of word usage. Since this learner often did not have the knowledge to recognize "appropriate vocabulary", the acquisition of a better dictionary would at least begin to allow her to select vocabulary more effectively.

Another problem we worked on was finding appropriate responses that would reflect well on her (for example, why she left her last factory job). The way in which we worked on this was by asking her questions about how she could show continuity of employment. This clearly was not a criterion she had thought of, but once she understood the concept she was able to identify a rationale and include it in her response.

This seemed to be a highly motivated learner with a clear goal. The counselor-in-training was very impressed with how much the learner was able to improve her answers through coaching and how much she would be able to accomplish on her own in the future.

In conclusion, all three counselors-in-training (two with Antonio and one with Maria) found my coaching helpful because they could see how one could apply LSM to individual cases and promote more learner independence. Although the counselors-in-training had been exposed to knowledge of the LSM framework and some of the counseling functions and discourse, spending time actually developing it with students was a very important part of their learning process.

Next Steps (Angeles Clemente and Joan Rubin)

As we stated at the beginning of this article, the SAC has failed in its purpose. It is definitively not working the way we, the UABJO faculty, had imagined almost two decades ago. One of the most salient problems, and the one that Joan Rubin decided to address was the training of counselors. As stated earlier, the counselors that were initially trained and had gotten experience in the SAC are not there anymore. Based on an administrative decision, SAC hours are no longer considered part of fulltime teachers' obligations. And even if this faculty had continued working at UABJO, they probably would not have received the ongoing necessary training to become successful counselors. The language teachers currently working at the SAC are not skilled in language learning counseling. Hence, it does not matter how long they have been working there; their role has essentially been reduced to either answering language questions or attempting to help to solve equipment problems.

For us, it is clear that Joan Rubin's approach was the appropriate one. Making use of recent research, she introduced the basics of the LSM model and, most importantly, helped the counselors-in-training put them into practice, working with actual language learners to define and solve concrete language learning problems. The questions are now: How can we assure that all the counselors keep working in the same way? How will we extend this experience to the hundreds of students at UABJO and the Oaxacan community that use the SAC to learn English? How can the hundreds of users that have experienced nothing but frustration at the SAC have some expectation that things will now be better there?

Since we have raised the level of awareness among the counselors, we can now suggest several further steps to move the SAC-UABJO toward being a more effective academic center. Below we list a number of broad areas of development. First and foremost, the counselors-in-training will need more practical experience to understand how to apply their knowledge. It is clear from the literature and our experience that the process of becoming an effective counselor requires extensive practice, coaching, and a *community of counselors*.

Then, it would be very helpful to develop a set of forms/tools to encourage the following learner skills: assessment, awareness, and LSM. Assessment would include assessment of emotions, language skills, beliefs, learning styles, and self-efficacy. Awareness would involve reading excerpts about learning and learning strategies, thinking aloud, journaling, and focus groups. LSM (or learning to learn) would require forms to promote the ability to do the following: set goals with a time-frame, establish criteria, set task purposes, do task classification and task

demands, determine action plans , and do monitoring, evaluating, problem-identification and problem-solving.

There is also a need to establish a *community of counselors*. This community would be a learning community (for more detail on how to establish and maintain such a community see Karlsson et al., 2007) that would provide more hands-on experience as well as sharing, reading and discussing important books and articles on the topic, peer coaching, sharing successes and addressing solutions for problems and developing a set of tools to self-evaluate their own counseling. Further, we suggest that the hands-on experience be supplemented by a trained coach who could provide additional information and experience.

There has to be a realization of the importance of developing a *community of learners* as well. Just because learners are more independent and know how to manage their own learning does not mean that they have to work in isolation. Many learners find it extremely helpful to share problems and solutions and discuss task analysis and goal clarification. Counselors will need to brainstorm ways to create this community. Some that are used in other SACs include: learner workshops on specific topics (i.e. setting goals, task analysis, improving listening comprehension) and conversation groups.

This exercise in counseling has opened the door for more effective use of the SAC-UABJO. Right now, the counselors who took part in this workshop are willing to offer counseling sessions and are enthusiastic to create this new type of community. Furthermore, we need to make sure: 1) that all the SAC counselors have a strong commitment to the SAC and the principles of learner independence, 2) that they are trained in SAC counseling and 3) that they have many opportunities to improve their skills through constant reflection of their practice. In order to build a strong community of counselors, we need ongoing planning and evaluation of counselor formation and training programs, and continuous evaluation of the process and results of counseling. It is essential that the institution realize the importance of the SAC and assign it more resources, both financial and human, and specifically, allowing full-timers to work in the SAC with appropriate compensation.

Last, but not least, there is the issue of material resources. We need to provide the counselors and the learners with adequate tools to attain their counseling and learning goals. In the SAC-UABJO they have hardly been adequately updated. Although different administrations have added/repared/replaced resources, the effort has not been sufficient. In the times we are living, equipment is soon outdated. We have sadly realized that the electronic and computing devices that we were very proud of when we opened the SAC are now useless. The word processors,

for instance, were useless within the first two years, since regular computers were far more complex. Again, institutional authorities have to realize that a functional SAC has to have an annual budget to update material resources. We think that by working on these areas we will move towards the learning culture in self-direction that we imagine for Oaxaca: a community of counselors and learners working together to address the linguistic needs of Oaxaca. Finally, the authors of this article believe that the value of this experience lies in the constant communication that we had in order to understand each other's perspective and to make the most of this encounter.

NOTES:

- a. This training was continued with the help of the British Council, which was commissioned by the Mexican Ministry of Education to take over the openings of most of the SAC in public universities all over the country. The British Council also donated many materials to the English section of the SACs.
- b. SAC-UABJO was equipped with 50 tape recorders, 20 of which were interactive, 20 VHS players with their respective TV monitors, 8 computers (of which three had CD-ROM units), a mega-screen TV connected to a satellite dish, a laser CD player and a video recorder. For reproducing materials, we had a sound system for CDs, cassettes and long-play records, computers for word processing, a multi-system video converter, a photocopier, a double-deck video recorder, and a regular video recorder, with close caption feature, connected to the satellite dish.
- c. See Rubin and McCoy, 2008 for an example of Task Analysis Instruction.

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