THE QUESTION OF AUTONOMY

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Autonomy may be thought of as an independence of freedom from external control with the question of control residing internally within the individual, state, or institution. For an individual to be autonomous means that he is self governing, receiving internally the impetus to make his own decisions. Such a learner theoretically would function independently, governing his own learning, or at least take a prominent role in that learning. This role would allow him to develop his own schema for learning and evaluate his success in learning.

The concept of the learner as basically self serving may appear incompatible when applied to the educational views of John Dewey. This view of autonomy appears to focus on separating the individual from the social scene, rather than focus on the social scene and experiences of the learner interacting with other learners. For that reason it might be viewed as one pole of a dichotomy with the Deweyan model at the other.

To arrive at an understanding of whether or not autonomy is incompatible with Dewey's educational theory, it is useful to consider the reality of each view and to attempt to reconstruct or transform the dichotomy. At the same time it is also useful to consider a learning situation to

which the concept may relate. Language learning presents a unique situation where the aspect of autonomy is of vital concern to the short and long term needs of the learner. It is also a situation where autonomy functions in a specialized sense as internal control interacts with external.

By looking at a specialized sense of autonomy is conceptualized or give more recognition to autonomy in the social scene.

I. Autonomy and Language Learning

Autonomy in language learning situations may be thought of as occurring in two ways. The first way is as a goal to be sought after in learning a language. This final state results in independence in handling language or a form of bilingualism. The second way is as a quality which is present as a person is involved in learning a language. This quality directs how aspects of learning are handled; that is, if the controlling factors receive direction internally from the learner or externally from society.

In the first way, the final goal of language learning, bilingualism, is achieved by having successful experiences with language in its social setting. These experiences are part of a process that requires that the learner take on a new persona with which to see the world as he is led to becoming a speaker of the language.

To arrive at this state, if it may be called one, the successful experiences the learner has had need to be examined in order to find out what produces the "good language learner". Certain qualities such as "living with uncertainty" and "risk taking" have been found to be present in this good learner (Rubin, 1975). They are part of the resources a learner calls upon to develop his linguistic competence, such as knowledge of forms, and his communicative competence, such as knowledge of how language functions in a social setting, in handling language. These two types of competence are essential for him to function successfully in transmitting messages and receiving them in the course of oral and written discourse. The teacher facilitates the acquisition of these competencies but they are owned by the student.

In the second way, the learner is caught up in the everyday dynamics of learning a new language, which means he has to have a purpose for communicating with others in a social setting or a need to communicate. This learner's purpose for learning a language is so that it will enable him to relate and interact with other people.

The importance of this interaction may be illustrated by the person who tries to acquire a language by himself, approaching it analytically. This person may decide to get a grammar textbook

of the new language and work his way through it, mastering the paradigmatic essentials of the language. With some finese he will probably learn the linguistic elements, but without interaction in a communicative situation he will not acquire the spoken language because he will be asserting individual autonomy in the sense of separateness, thereby, removing language from its social environment.

In both of these ways of viewing autonomy in language learning, autonomy has been seen as producing a kind of independence for the learner in allowing him to be able to handle the language as a bilingual or as a learner with a purpose or desire to communicate which relies upon his internal resources to be achieved.

When the question of where control comes from is raised, that is, if it comes mostly from the student, that is, can be thought of only in terms of the internal, a more concrete picture of the learner and a hypothetical program is needed. Dickinson (1987)'s diagram of degrees of autonomy for language learning shows how the shifts can occur between the internal and external in setting the pace of learning, where and when learning occurs, the materials used, the system of monitoring and the assessment (Appendix A).

When too much internal control is asserted, it may mask the need for improving linguistic

performance. For example, fossilization may occur when the message the learner wants to communicate is accepted by his interlocutors and he does not have sufficient reason or motivation to make this utterances more acceptable. Due to this lack of motivation, the learner stagnates or fossilizes in one of the stages he has created of his inter-language.

Thus, the internal/external question is difficult to resolve and highly intricate. Nevertheless, one important aspect of this question is the fact that the learner is using resources he develops in the interplay of internal and external shifting.

It might be seen that the autonomous individual is a sterile concept for Dewey and incompatible with his holistic views. It might also seem to be incompatible with his view of the role of the learner in the social setting, and, as has been pointed out, produce a dichotomy.

A very important aspect of Dewey's philosophical position when dichotomies appear is to examine the conditions of the dichotomy and the forces which maintain the opposing poles as antagonists. He says "it is far easier to see the conditions in their separateness, insist upon one at the expense of the other, to make antagonists of them, than to discover a reality to which each belongs" (Child and the Curriculum, 1902, p.4)

Central to Dewey's argument for breaking down dichotomies is the idea of education as developing from within and formation from without. Dewey raises this issue of education and says that the problem in debates is that each has a reality and it needs to be discovered for a reconstruction of the two poles to occur. That is, each has a reality to which it belongs which needs to be discovered for a reconstruction of the opposing views to occur. Otherwise, the two poles of the dichotomy remain as they are viewed as complete and independent truths.

II. A Language Learning Dichotomy

To summarize, the autonomy concept has first been defined as an independence of the individual which cannot be removed from its social setting. Nevertheless, in this definition it means that the learner is developing internal control. This control is not one which is one hundred percent present at all times. It interplays with and shifts about with the external forces.

Dewey has argued for breaking down dichotomies such as the traditional vs. progressive education, the child vs. curriculum, and nature vs. social culture. The field of language learning has spawned controversy revolving about these issues as well. The traditional grammar-rule-based view of language learning has its roots in the humanist tradition the learner being controlled externally

in his learning. In this view language was either for reading or was the sign of an educated man. Hence, the route to learning a language for some time had been the mastery of rules governing syntactical forms, semantic relationships between words and vocabulary, as well as the manipulation of language forms. As a result language courses usually had a sequence of exercises and recitations designed to ensure that language forms were learned. The method was memorization and manipulation of formal grammar and syntactical rules.

In other words, in this view language learning meant "linguistic competence", a phrase of Chomsky's which contains the idea that knowledge of the grammatical patterning of the language together with vocabulary and literal meaning of both of these (semantics) was all the learner would need to communicate. It was like saying that the literal translation of a Spanish sentence into English would be an equivalent. It failed to take into account knowledge about the context of the discourse such as the intent of the originator of the sentence. The good translation would produce an equivalent of the Spanish sentence which would capture the intent of the writer and produce a translation which would function within its context.

Hymes (1966) saw the limitations of the traditional view of language and called attention to the social dimension of language when he challenged

the linguistic competence view. His concern was how language functioned in its social environment and its levels of appropriateness. He saw discourse, oral or written, as having chunks of units of discourse with rules of their own which governed the internal patterns and which connected with other chunks of discourse. These chunks of discourse he called "communicative events". The events were examined to see how the rules and restrictions realted to the beginning and ending of discourse, turn taking and the sequence of the discourse itself.

Thus, the adherents of the traditional view of language learning became ardent opponents of "communicative competence". The two camps produced opposing programs of instruction each of which excluded the component of the opposing viewpoint. That is, as grammar proponents had excluded the communicative aspect of language and its appropriateness, so the communicative proponents excluded, or de-emphasized the importance of grammar. Looking at what occurred from Dewey's standpoint, practice struggled with what appeared to be incompatible views and selected one.

In terms of control, when the external strongly controlled the learning situation a student was produced who could manipulate the rules of the language upon command but not handle communication in a "real" situation. On the other hand, allowing

a student to have extensive internal control about what he wanted to communicate often produced a student who could be relaxed in handling the communicative scene but whose message was interfered with or not received due to linguistic errors.

Attempts at resolving the traditional/ communicative dichotomy have resulted in an examination of the tenets and conditions of each position and a re-thinking of their relationship to each other. Language learning is now being seen as composed of levels of learning involving linguistics, sociolinguistics and culture (Appendix B). They are being viewed as part of a spiral and interacting at various points.

III. Experience Continuum and Language Learning

Turning now to how aspects of autonomy may relate to Dewey's views of learning, which would involve a consideration of the importance of experience in learning and the forces which produce growth or movement along that time line. Again, the issues of internal and external control appear. How does internal control over learning function in a model in which social involvement of the learner with others is important, and in which the teacher with knowledge of the student's interests and capacities arranges the elements in the educational scene,

Dewey applies the concept of reconstruction

to the student's learning as well. Starting with education, he defines it as that "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which directs the course of subsequent experience" (Democracy and Education, p.76)

Experiences then are part of the continuum. Movement along the time line of the continuum occurs as the student grows intellectually, gaining knowledge from his present experiences which will provide fuel for future ones. The quality of his experiences may be represented as a second line intersecting the time line with educative ones leading to further growth and miseducative one not. The elements of interest, impulse, attention, and meaningfulness interact to promote this intellectual growth. This process as a whole means that learning becomes an intellectual activity in which the individual is constantly interacting with his experiences and actively thinking and reflecting. As he derives meaning from the experience, his willingness to learn drives his learning even further. At the same time there is a continuity between the experience of the past, present and the future.

It would seem then that in terms only of his continuum model the student is driven forward in his learning by developing his "intelligence" or participating in "intellectual activity".

Translated into the internal/external issue, it would seem the internal is very active. However, as soon as the teacher's role is considered, this view of autonomy would appear threatened, because the teacher's role is that of setting up and arranging the elements of the experiment based on knowledge of the student's capacities, needs and interests. The teacher, Dewey says, is to select the kind of experiences that "live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experience (Education and Experience, 1938, p. 28). As has been pointed out this assumes a tremendous capacity on the part of the teacher to arrange things externally, that is, to arrange the conditions which provide the subject matter and content of the experiences. Thus, the external involvement of the teacher can initially be seen to control the situation to some extent. However, the teacher does not control in what direction the learning might proceed but is instrumental in the meaningfulness of the student's experiences.

IV. Meaningfulness

Assumed in this educational process has been the meaningfulness of the experience. Meaningfulness seems to reside in the teacher knowing the capabilities, needs and interests of the student and externally setting up what will occur and be meaningful for the student, and in the learner perceiving what is meaningful to him. Meaningfulness drives the internal control of the

situation.

Dewey finds that meaningfulness of an activity has great power in transforming the learner when knowledge is no longer viewed as an immobile solid to be acquired.

The question of how control functions might be seen in an example from a language learning situation. The technique called Community Language Learning (CLL) is one example of a technique based on meaningfulness of a language experience (1). It wants to provide a situation in which the student can say what he has wanted to try out in a very informal, relaxed language situation.

It is also a technique which gives the learner an opportunity to be autonomous in creating the discourse and in using authentic language in a "real" situation.

CLL is also arranged by the teacher, involving a small group of learners, a "community of learners", and a tape recorder. The plan is that they, as they sit facing each other in a group, may want to strike up a conversation. The teacher stands behind them as a resource for reference when they can't say what they want in the new language. The teacher translates it for them. With each turn taking, or at appropriate junctures, the language is recorded, repeated by the speaker, and the conversation continues. Each of the responses are on tape and when played back produce a flowing conversation.

The conversation, although not the replica of a real conversation, has an authenticity to it—it is what the speakers want to say when they talk with each other and when they have a bilingual person or native informant to rely on.

Also, this experience is meaningful because the student has control over the content of the discourse. As well, the student is bringing his desire of what he wants to say or ask others in a group about themselves, or to discuss as he interacts with their ideas and grows with the conversation.

Still it must be pointed out that even with meaningful situations, the teacher's role has been external in organizing the scene. The scene has been set in the small language group with CLL. Perhaps Dewey would have liked more to have the students involved in an activity. That also could be set as a scene. Nevertheless, in the strict sense of what is meaningful to the learner the question of control has been externally set or arranged to allow for internal control to take place, a control which may be directed by the desire to speak one's own ideas in another language or in the subject matter of the experiences.

It is interesting that Dewey talks about meaningfulness in what could be seen as a second language learning situation. He says:

When language is used simply for the repetition

of lessons, it is not surprising that one of the difficulties of school work has come to be instruction in the mother tongue. Since the language taught is unnatural, not growing out of the real desire to communicate vital impressions and convictions, the freedom of children in its use gradually disappear untilfinally the high school teacher has to invent all kinds of devices to assist in getting any spontaneous and full use of speech. (The School and Society 1915, p.56).

The meaningfulness of the experience which Dewey is concerned about for the native language is true also for the language learner when the language he is learning is "unnatural" as Dewey says. Spontaneity disappears, leaving a passive student. Instead, when meaningfulness is of utmost concern in learning, the student, it might be said, is cutting, cleaning, refining, and weaving his own wool for a future garment.

V. Learning and Communicative Strategies

The language student's continuum involves an added task that the native speaker would not have, since language serves for him as a mode of communication no matter what activity he is involved in. This is not to say that the continuum is one only for the native speaker and his education. The continuum of experience should include learning content and learning content through language. Nevertheless, the experiences should lead to an

independence which will prepare the learner to handle any situation he might confront, not as a spectator (as he might appear in the traditional program conjugating verbs and manipulating language) but as an agent or participant involved in what is going on and in its outcome.

The concept of independence enters into both ways of viewing autonomy in language learning, as part of the bilingual student and as part of the internally and externally directed experiences a learner has over time. To become bilingual or a competent speaker of the language means that the characteristic of a "good language learner" (Rubin, 1975) are probably present. That is, the student is able to "live with uncertainty", "take risks" and "initiate learning situations". These are characteristics which are promoted by strategies. The primary strategies can be divided into those for learning and those for communicating.

Bialystok (1978, p. 71) defines learning strategies as "Optional potentially conscious methods for exploiting available information to increase the efficiency of second language learning." She defines communicative strategies as being the same kind of method but with the aim of "attaining a particular communicative objective or to overcome a problem in its attainment".

The essence of these two types of strategies are found in Democracy and Education when he says:

> To say that one knows what he is about, or can intend certain consequences, is to say, of course, that he can better anticipate what is going to happen; that is, that he can, therefore, get ready or prepare in advance so as to secure beneficial consequences and avert undesireble ones. (Democracy and Education, p. 77)

Communicative strategies such as "guessing" and "predicting" produce a student with a power or resource he can use in coversation. It means that he can now live with uncertainty of the unknown or unintelligible, and successfully produce positive results.

When the student is not a participant, however, and he has just tuned the radio to an English speaking station, he is being exposed to authentic language, but he is a non participant. He has to rely on his listening skills solely. If what he is listening to involves speakers talking about a subject, tremendous redundancy will occur. The learner who is aware of such redundance can listen for unknown key words or concepts, and when they reapper in different contexts confirm or disprove his hypothesis about the meaning of the key word. In this situation he is removed from the conversation himself and does not have the possibility of framing questions to serve as hypotheses, questions such as "Do you mean...? or more

directly, "What do you mean about X?" or more inderectly by bravely asking using the term in the conversation, taking the risk that the meaning he has may be wrong. If it is he will soon know.

VII. Thinking

Looking solely at the internal investment of the learner brings into view the importance Dewey places on thinking. Thinking, as well as reflection, are part of making experiences meaningful. This importance of thinking also relates to the discussion of the student and his continuum of educative experiences.

Dewey says tha there are five ways in which thinking is involved in the educative experience. They are:

> First, that the pupil have a genuine situation of experience—that there be a continuous activity in which he is interested for its own sake: second, that a genuine problem develop within this situation as a stimulus to thought; third, that he possess the information and make the observations needed to deal with it; fourth, that suggested solutions occur to him which he shall be responsible for developing an orderly way: fifth, that he have opportunity and occasion to test his

> ideas by application, to make thier meaning clear and to disvover for himself their validity. (Democracy and Education. p. 163)

These ways might be applied to a communicative language learning situation to see how the specific connections are made between what learner does and the consequences which result. The situation might be a "genuine situation" of prejudices and stereotypes people have about other cultural groups. The "genuine problem" which might emerge from the learner's interest is the role culture and cultural contact play. The ingredients which produce prejudice, both positive and negative, might be examined; that is, TV, movies, jokes, textbooks, and casual conversation. The information could be that of the learners' own experiences. The solutions to the problem might involve how to overcome prejudice through testing out ideas about prejudices the group has and through the experience of examination of how these attitudes are formed, change them.

At the same time as this experience with thinking about prejudice is going on the student is also using the new language. He is making links with the past, trying out hunches, correcting, refining hypotheses, reformulating and linking up experience with reality. He has to test his concepts about how language works and monitor his own language and that of others. Otherwise, he remains locked in a stage of interlanguage.

In summary, the student has had internal control through the fact that he is the possessor or owner of his own thinking. At the same time his thinking has evolved through experiences with a community of thinkers as well. He has reconstructed experience as a member of a group, made connections and considered the consequences. The experience has required that he have the language to participate in working with prejudice.

VIII. Conclusion

The concept of autonomy has been addressed in this discussion. It has been viewed as involving two elements, namely, an independence which could be interpreted as a separateness and a quality of self-governing whose control and direction is derived internally. Independence as a complete separateness from society in any sense has been excluded from the discussion in order to consider the concept of autonomy in its social setting and see how it might function when the educational philosophy of Dewey is considered. In terms of the language learner the concept of individual strength has been dealt with as a power receiving its strength from the internal and external shifting. This movement between the internal and external has been seen as part of Dewey's philosophy and part of the tradition of language learning.

Considering the importance of social interaction to Dewey's philosophy and its essentialness to language, this discussion has tried to produce a reconstruction out of what might have been the creation of a Dewey vs. autonomy dichotomy. The value of breaking down a dichotomy such as this and reconstructing it has been in the re-thinking which has occurred to move autonomy away from what has been viewed as a polarity.

The reconstruction has meant that other dichotomies have been drawn in to the discussion, all of which take positions with respect to the internally directed and the externally formed. It has been pointed out that the external may set the scene for learning as the teacher sets up the experiences for the learner based on knowledge of his capacities, interests and needs. The learner may use this settings to grow "intellectually". The learner driven only by his natural desires has not been an issue addressed in this discussion. (Language programs do exist which are organized in such a way.) Instead, an attempt has been made to see how a concept of autonomy might be put into Dewey's equation.

As a result, aspects of the resources a learner has and develops have become an important part in disvovering if its internalness is as separate or individualistic as it might first appear. It has been argued that the resources of

a learner can be developed only through the interactions between the internal and external forces as degrees of autonomy are present in the carrying out of the language experience.

The example of language learning has exposed aspects of autonomy which lead one to recognize that learning a language is an additional task a learner has, but this discussion has not seen it as a task separate from learning in a Deweyan sense. The learner has a need to communicate his ideas and react to others and what they say. The subject matter of experiences are essentially the same. English may serve the purpose for achieving academic purposes or the academic purpose is driving the learning. In either case degrees of autonomy are present.

Appendix B:

LINGUISTIC	Phonology Graphology Grammar Lexis
SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL	Organization of discourse, rules of speaking, turn-taking; Sequence stages and functions; Realization of functions; Choice of words.
STRATEGIC	Strategies of learning; Strategies of communication

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Footnotes:

1. "Community Language Learning" is a technique for foreign language teaching which is part of C. Curran's Counseling Learning (1972, Counseling Learning: A Whole-person Approach. New York: Grune and Stratton).