SLA RESEARCH ON SELF-DIRECTION: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

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Ph D in Education

Institute of Education, University of London, 1998.

ABSTRACT

The objective of the thesis is to put forward a cognitive model of self-directed learning of a foreign language that sets the rationale for self-directed practice in Mexico.

The thesis is divided into three main parts. The first part (Chapters 2 and 3) sets the background of the research in two senses. First, it gives a description of the state of self-directed learning of foreign languages in Mexico. This part also includes a literature review that was necessary for the preparation stage of the Self-Access Centre Project in Mexico. Second, it narrates the experience of the author in self-direction and the different roles that she played in this project.

The second part of the thesis (Chapter 4) puts forward a cognitive model of self-direction. This includes the rationale for self direction in learning foreign languages, a comparison with a SLA cognitive model (which is identified here as other-directed model) and a discussion of the essential elements that make up the cognitive model of self-direction proposed in this chapter.

The third part (Chapters 5 to 8) has the objective of connecting theory with practice. It includes a methodology chapter which defines its ethnographic approach. This is followed by a description of the Oaxaca/97 Project, whose aim was to operationalize the cognitive model of self-direction. An important element of this part is the analysis and interpretation of the information gathered during the project and the discussion based on these. Finally, the last chapter (Chapter 8), gives a summary of the thesis and the conclusions of the empirical and theoretical research put forward in the thesis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present study began with the following question in mind: *How can language learners in Mexican self-access centres learn in a self-directed way?* However, as in any kind of research, it was impossible to answer this question if more basic issues were not resolved first. Thus, I soon found myself dealing with other questions: What is self-direction and how is it different from autonomy?, How does one learn in a self-directed way? How does the learning culture of the learners affect their self-directed learning? and what is my role, as a counsellor in a self-directed scheme?.

My attempts to answer these questions led me to engage in the research process which underlies this thesis. The content of it can be divided into three main blocks. The first block are Chapters 2 and 3, which contain a comprehensive account of the context and background for the study. These two chapters are a combination of different elements: the context of the Self-access Centre (SAC) in Mexico, the chronicle of the project, the literature review and my own role and experiences in the process of setting up and running a SAC in Mexico

In particular, Chapter 2, "First Contact", will provide an account of the history of a SAC in Mexico. However, the reader should not expect merely a descriptive and objective account, as I do not feel able to give one. Rather, I am offering the reader my own account, in the understanding that it is a subjective account. In this sense, this chapter is not only about the process and development of an innovation but also my own process and development and the way I experienced it.

.   Chapter 2 also deals with my first conceptualisations of autonomy, self-direction and learning to learn, among other concepts. It actually depicts the way I started to form my personal schema of self-direction from scratch. The reader will notice that the concepts put forward in this chapter are very different from the ones that I develop later in the thesis. One of the objectives of the thesis is just this: to show the reader the way I moved away from "borrowed" concepts to my own concepts. In other words, I will show the reader how my

working experience in a self-access centre, my change of roles and empirical research made me aware of the necessity of elaborating my own scheme of self-direction. The description of this process starts in Chapter 3, "From a different point of view".

The reader will also notice that the literature review for the present research is included in these two chapters. There are two main reasons for proceeding in this manner. First, the survey of the literature of the present research was not a single event I carried out when I started my PhD studies. It was an on-going process that began four years earlier. It took place along with the development of the innovation itself. Second, the review of the literature was a developmental process for me. I grew with it. I changed with it. Sometimes it influenced me and sometimes it made me react and go in the opposite direction. The most obvious example of this is the concept of autonomy. The reader will notice that there are three sections subtitled "Autonomy" (with a different number to differentiate each one). Dividing the discussion in such a manner, I am trying to depict the way I got into the research on autonomy and how the concept of autonomy got into me, that is to say, the way I developed my own definition of autonomy which responded to my own reality and why, at the end, I opted to use self-direction instead.

The second block of this thesis is Chapter 4. It is entitled "An Attempt to make sense" because it is exactly that, an endeavour to achieve coherence of all my knowledge and experience concerning the issue of self-direction of language learning. My most urgent need for coherence was triggered by the feeling that there was a huge gap in my schema of self-directed learning that stopped me from making connections with schemata I had already acquired as a language teacher. I basically wanted to establish a link between my knowledge of the process of language learning from SLA research and my concept of self-direction. The result of this reflection was a proposal for a cognitive model of self-direction in language learning (section 4.2). There were other needs related to this preoccupation with making sense. One of these was to read with a more critical approach the literature related to autonomy and self-direction (in section 4.1 I give an example of this). The other was to delve more into the concept of autonomy in order to have a coherent definition of autonomy, which also made me opt, as I have already said, for the term self-direction as a the key term in this study (section 4.3).

The third block of this thesis is made up by Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. Having dealt with

the theory of self-direction, I was concerned about two things. First, I felt that I needed to go back to Mexico and find out more about the learning culture I was dealing with. There were too many things that I had not noticed, or very likely, that I had taken for granted. Second, I needed to operationalise my theoretical model. I needed to put it into practice, that is, to make a link between theory and practice, either to exemplify my theory with actual data or to realise that my theory was not congruent with reality, or both. This was the purpose of the Oaxaca/97 Project that I carried out during summer of 1997. The results of the project are the main content of the third block of this thesis.

Chapter 5, "Revisiting the SAC", describes the project and explains the methodological approach for it. As the reader will see, I opted for an ethnographic approach, which I had, again, to define and conceive according to my own needs and perceptions.

Chapters 6 and 7, "Beliefs about a learning culture I" and "Beliefs about a learning culture II", are complementary and have a parallel structure. Both deal with the interpretation of the data from the Oaxaca/97 Project. The result of this interpretation was a series of beliefs related to self-direction. I decided to separate these beliefs according to the believer: Chapter 6 deals with the learners' beliefs while Chapter 7 describes my own beliefs, in my role of counsellor/researcher. In these two chapters it is possible to hear the voices from the different participants that take part in this research: the learners and the counsellor.

Chapter 8, "Creating a learning culture", is the final section of this thesis. In it I consider the possibility of a joint learning culture. Making reference to theoretical and empirical literature I analyse the elements of human beings-as-learners and the conditions for the creation of a learning culture and relate them to my own research in self-direction. My conclusion is that it is possible to talk about the creation of a learning culture in self-direction if the processes of mutual understanding and negotiation are an essential element of the rationale for self-directed schemes within the Mexican learning culture. Ultimately, I believe this will be one possible answer (but not the only one) to the question I posed when I started this study.

Before continuing, I should at this point explain certain stylistic decisions that I have taken. First, the reader will notice the use of the pronoun "I" throughout this work. I am aware that it is not an entirely common feature of academic genre as for many, the use of

impersonal statements seems to add to the scientific rigor of the positivistic tradition. I have detached from this tradition for two important reasons.

Firstly, the principles that underlie my research are not positivistic, above all because I do not believe that I am discovering *the* truth. Rather I am dealing with my beliefs and those of the learners who worked with me. Thus I am concerned about the definition of *their* truth and *my* truth. But above all I am in search for *our* truth, as I make clear in the final chapter of this thesis.

Secondly, as I said before, the present study follows the tradition of ethnographic research. As I take on this methodological alternative (see Chapter 5), my role becomes that of an *emic action researcher*. Inevitably my position in this type of ethnography calls for a committed stance in which the subjectivity of the researcher, and thus, the use of the pronoun "I", cannot be avoided.

Another stylistic decision that I have taken is the option of writing this thesis combining the academic style with a quasi-narrative style. This "genre-bending", as Block calls it (1998,6), has certainly allowed me to give coherence to my own experiences. I strongly believe that, as Carter states, "in creating stories, we are able...to impose order and coherence on the stream of experience and work out of the meaning of incidents and events in the real world" (1993,7).

Thus, when reading through this thesis, the reader will notice that the following pages are a patchwork of knowledge and experiences, events and processes, attitudes and beliefs that are intimately related. As a result, the reader will find out that throughout the thesis I am constantly referring to previous and further sections. The following diagram (Fig. 1.1) shows the way in which I consider the chapters of this thesis to be related.

In order to avoid the current argument about the use of pronouns, I have chosen to use "she" for all the cases in which I need to refer to a third person. The only reason I have to justify this decision is that it is the pronoun that corresponds to myself. However, my loyalty to "she" is not absolute, as I have also decided not to use the conventional "sic "for the references that use the article" he.

Finally, I am indebted to Dr. David Block for his contribution to my research in his role of supervisor and to Prof. Henry Widdowson and Dr. Rob Batstone for their helpful comments. I also want to thank the participants of the Oaxaca/97 Project, who

enthusiastically collaborated with my research.

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│  "borrowed" concepts,   │
│  history of SAC in Mexico)│
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┌─────────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
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│  developing own concepts)       │        │  my own voice)                  │
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Fig 1.1 Outline of contents and connections between chapters

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2. FIRST CONTACT

> Mexico is one such example where the universities are setting up self-access
> facilities for language learning. At the time of writing, thirty-four well-
> resourced centres are in operation, each one planned to meet the particular
> needs and flexible working hours of the thousands of students on its campus.
> Regional work groups and frequent conferences have established a network
> between the universities to exchange ideas and discuss problems.
> (Sturtridge; 1997,67-8)

The quotation above is a fairly objective account of the Self-access project in Mexico. However, I would say that it is an *outsider* account. I, and with me many teachers and students involved in the project, see it from a different perspective. In the following sections and in chapters 3 and 4, I will explain to the reader the way things appear very different when seen from a different angle.

The content of the present chapter consists in three main parts. The first is a brief account of the way I was introduced to the project to Self-access Centres in Mexico. In the second, I refer to the literature review I carried out in order to understand the concept of self-directed learning that underlies the project and the connection I made with the related concept of autonomy. The third part is a description of the Self-access centre in Oaxaca, according to the way we, in Oaxaca, interpreted the concept. I strongly believe that for the reader to understand the research I plan to do, and its underlying rationale, it is necessary to know the way self-directed language learning was originated and developed in Mexico.

2.1 THE INNOVATION

The first time I heard the term *self-access* related to language teaching was, in 1992, when two representatives of the Ministry of Education visited the University of Oaxaca (UABJO). At that time I was the director of the Language Centre of the university. They wanted to talk to me about this new project that the Ministry of Education was sponsoring.

From them I learned that the project started in 1990. The Ministry of Education was concerned about the low English level of Mexican university students. Apart from not being able to take advantages of scholarships to foreign universities, students did not have access to the latest publications in their own fields because most of these were written in English. To tackle these problems, the project "Ingles al alcance de los estudiantes universitarios" (Access to English for university students) was created. After two years of carrying out research, they arrived at the conclusion that self-access centres were the answer for all the Mexican students who needed English as one of the tools to improve their academic situation.

Furthermore, Mexican educational institutions had serious economic problems. They did not have enough money. Because of that, the current policy was against the increase of teaching hours in universities. Therefore, to open self-access centres that would cope with the large amounts of students without significantly increasing the paying roll was a very welcome idea.

I became immediately enthusiastic about the project. In Mexico, educational authorities do not often include language teaching departments in their projects. Besides, the University of Oaxaca resources are insufficient. As I saw it, the project represented the possibility to get resources for the Language Centre. As the director, I had witnessed the disappointment of hundreds and hundreds of students who applied for places on an English course but never got them. A self-access centre would be the solution for them, I confidently thought. I wanted to give the good news to the teachers. I was sure that they were going to be as happy as I was about it.

However, I was not very sure about the authorities. I did not know if they were going to be as enthusiastic as I was about the project. Therefore, I decided to do my best to

transmit my conviction and enthusiasm to everybody. I started reading about the subject and having meetings with the teachers and with the authorities, although the purpose when addressing these two parties was very different. In the former I wanted to share information with the teachers, that is, to tell them about the good news, whereas in the latter I wanted to convince the authorities. After several meetings with both parties, I achieved my goals. On the one hand the teachers were willing to start participating in training courses and working in the preparation of materials and, on the other hand, the university authorities decided to open a SAC in Oaxaca. They signed an agreement with the Ministry of Education. According to the agreement, the University was going to receive a specific amount of money to be administered and spent by the university on material resources, equipment and staff training. The university, in turn, was responsible for providing staff working hours and appropriate premises. As a part of the nation-wide scheme, the Ministry of Education was also responsible for in-training courses and the organisation of national and regional conferences and work groups.

I have to admit that it was not easy to explain the concept of a self-access centre. At the beginning, nobody seemed to understand it. However, the different training courses helped the teachers to have a better idea of what a self-access centre was. Nevertheless, there were several that stood fast in their belief that the SAC was going to be more a resource centre for the teachers than for the students. We attended four different courses before the centre was opened (see section 2.4.3.3, p 36). However, as the reader will see in a later chapter, it was not until we opened the SAC and experienced working with students that we (even I who was selling the idea) really realised the meaning of it.

For the University authorities, the situation was different. At the beginning my approach to them was to compare the SAC facilities with a library[1]. I thought that it was a good way to describe the layout and function of a SAC. However, I suddenly realised that they were not very happy with the comparison. If they were going to embark in such an expensive project it had to be much more sophisticated than a simple library. Obviously, they were interested in the public role (Sturtridge; 1997, 79) of the new project, something that was going to reflect well on them as university authorities. Finally, they decided to

embark on the project. I would say that what convinced them was the fact that the Ministry of Education was sponsoring and recommending the project.

Because of the documents of the project mainly referred to administrative policies, I had to construct my schema of self-direction by other means. Most of the knowledge I got at that time was basically gained by reading.

2.2 FIRST READINGS: THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL

The different courses and readings that I carried out at that time introduced me to the literature of what I shall call the *European School* of self-directed learning in foreign languages. The most representative researchers of it are Henri Holec (1979, 1980, 1987, 1988) and the group of researchers who work with him at C.R.A.P.E.L. (Philip Riley, 1988,1989,1990, M-J Gremmo, 1995, Richard Duda 1990, etc.) in Nancy, France as well as Leslie Dickinson (1987), David Little (1989), Gill Sturtridge (1992), Susan Sheerin (1989), and other authors in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Research in this field started more than two decades ago. The written work of this period can be classified into two very different types of literature. On the one hand we have the fundamental and basic documents on which the theory of self-directed language learning lies and, on the other, those practical and technical guides of the "how to" kind. I started reading the latter, for they were the most accessible and practical type of literature.

2.2.1 "How-to" guides

Although this type of literature tends to be very technical and usually focuses in physical and administrative issues, I have to admit that, at the earlier stages of the project the "how-to" guides such as Sturtridge (1992), Moore (1992), McCall (1992) were very useful (more recent examples of this are Caravalho (1993) and most of the articles in Esch (1994)) in setting up and starting running the SAC in Oaxaca. Nevertheless, as I see it, if the institutions, administrators or teachers limit themselves to this type of literature, there is the risk of paying too much attention to the hardware of the SAC in detriment to the more

pedagogical aspects of it. Up to a certain point, I believe that this was the tendency in several universities in Mexico. At that time I tended to think that the reason for this was that the project in Mexico was not mature enough to overcome that stage of technicality and practicality. However, this was not only a phenomenon of the early years of self-direction literature and practice. As late as 1994, some people still were referring to the same attitude, which is reflected in the first lines of Abrams' review of Wenden (1991):

In the light of recent writings on learner autonomy, some readers may
expect this book to focus on the establishment of physical structures in
the form of self-instruction centres. (Abrams; 1994, 280)

Thus, the main concern for many people involved in SAC projects seemed to be: what to buy, how to display, where to put, how to advertise, etc. More than one writer has compared self-access centres with supermarkets (Kenny: 1993, 434, Esch; 1994b, 63). It is not that I do not see their point; the physical layout of a centre is important. As Jones states

The intentions of a good self-access centre will be reflected, among
other things, in the choice and arrangement of furniture and the
disposition of materials (Jones; 1995, 231)

However, these "other things" Jones mentions, have to be taken into consideration before making decisions of the "what, where and how" sort. In addition to this, there is the strong belief that it is the technological development that determines the concept of self-access:

the many references to computer-based support systems indicate that without such
systems the modern notion of self-access is not feasible. This is reasonable.
(Hall; 1995)

I am afraid that it is still not reasonable for me, since I think, like Gremmo and Riley, that "hi-tech" facilities are not a priority in self-access centres, especially if we consider that sometimes these facilities are "accompanied by a retrograde and unreflecting pedagogy" (Gremmo and Riley; 1995, 153).

Actually, I do agree that the physical hardware is part of the definition of the concept of self-access. However, when opening a SAC, it is not enough to define it. It is necessary to go beyond this level and analyse what working in a self-access centre implies for both, teachers and students.

In the case of the Mexican project, most of the training courses were devoted to practical issues, however, we had also input on the theoretical aspect of self-directed learning. And this helped us, in the SAC of Oaxaca, to be aware that if the technical factors were necessary, the pedagogical foundation was even more important. Fortunately, from the very beginning we realised that we did not want that the former to draw all the attention to the detriment of the latter.

In the following section I shall take the reader on a tour through some of the most relevant literature and some comments about the way I perceived the theoretical rationale of self directed learning at that time. Basically, I will deal with the literature that makes up the cornerstone of self-directed language learning. Names such as Holec, Riley, Little and Dickinson, among others, have become essential in the literature of autonomy and self-direction. Their work has focused on the main areas of the field and has represented an inspiration for others to work in the same matter. The main areas that have been covered by these researchers are: the definition of key concepts such as autonomy, self-access, etc; learning to learn; learning strategies and learning styles, learner training and learning materials, among others.

2.2.2 Self-directed learning: a two stage scheme

According to most writers, self-directed learning of a foreign or second language is a matter of acquiring knowledge and skills by means of self-managing the different elements that make up the learning context. Thus, Holec (1980,9) mentions five levels of decisions: definition of objectives, definition of contents and progression, selection of methods and techniques, monitoring the acquisition procedure and evaluation of the learning process. There seems to be a logical order to these elements, according to the moment of the decision that each of them involves. Thus, setting the goals is considered the first step. It implies the analysis of needs in order to define long and short-term objectives. Once the objectives have been defined, the learner decides on the contents that each objective implies. This step also includes the selection of materials that include the desired contents and the progression that

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will give coherence to the whole programme. This step is usually identified as the elaboration of the study plan. The next step involves making decisions about the methods and techniques that appear to be the most appropriate to achieve the learning goals. For this step, it is necessary that the learner identify her learning style and the strategies that suit her best. For Holec, the fourth step, monitoring the acquisition procedures, consists of the decision on the most suitable time and place for the learning process to take place. The last level of decisions involves the evaluation of both, product, i.e. what has been learned in reference to personal thresholds and, process, in terms of the effectiveness of the decisions taken at the other four levels.

PREPARATION OF DECISION

Agent:
 the learner,
 with or without:
  -educator
  -adviser
  -teacher
  -materials
  -etc.

DECISION MAKING

Agent:

 the learner

LEARNING TO LEARN   *LEARNING*
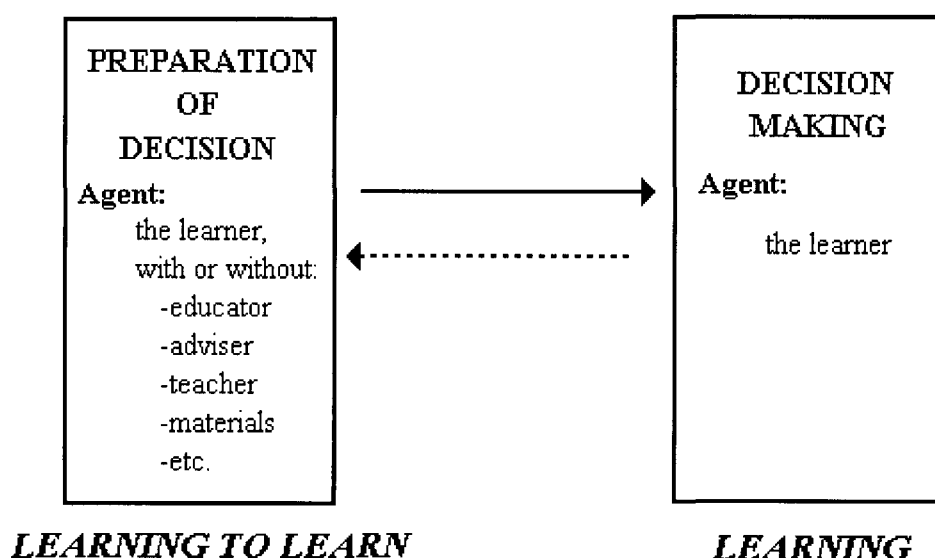
Fig. 2.1 Two stages in the self-directed learning scheme (Based on Holec;1996)

I found that the content and philosophy of the two courses that Holec prepared for the Mexican teachers in 1993 are very well synthesised in a paper published in 1996, where Holec summarises the basic principles of self direction in language learning. To start with, he states that in a self-directed learning scheme "all the decisions concerning the learning programme are the responsibility of the learner himself" (1996,89). However, he

acknowledges that there can exist the participation, in variable degree, of another agent (e.g. the teacher or the SAC counsellor) who intervenes in the preparation of these decisions.

This clearly implies two stages in the self-directed learning process: a stage for the preparation of the decision and one for the actual decision-making. In the first one the learner gets ready for the decisions and someone else may either assist her or directly participate in the preparation. In the second one, the learner, the only agent, has to make decisions on the five aspects of her learning programme. As I see it, the first stage refers to learning to learn and the second one to the learning itself (See Fig. 2.1).

The plain arrow in the scheme accounts for the chronological order of the two stages. The dotted arrow takes into account the possibility to go back to the first stage in order to think over before making a decision. In fact, there is the possibility to create a feedback effect where the more the preparation the more confidence in the decision making, which, in itself means to become better prepared.

2.2.2.1 The first stage: learning to learn

It seems that most researchers in the field agree on the relevant role that instruction has in self-directing learning. As Holec put it two decades ago:

> Preparation is an important concomitant of the operation of a SRC (Students
> Resource Centre). Without it, the SRC is like a rudderless vessel, or rather a vessel
> in the hands of a captain who has no navigational skills (1979,4)

Although most authors seem to agree about the importance of learning to learn, there is some disagreement as regards the definition of the concept. For some, the problem is that it has not been well-defined (Benson; 1995, 5 and Dickinson; 1988, 45). For others, the term covers such a wide range of areas and topics that it has become more problematic than helpful (Sheerin; 1991,151 and Dickinson; 1988, 47). A third problem lies in the fact that the term *learning to learn* has been used in two different educative situations: "learners aiming at autonomy and....those who intend to remain firmly within the context of conventional classroom" (Dickinson, ibid.).

Fortunately, there are areas of convergence within different research. Most literature dealing with the content of learner training courses agree on the five elements (see above) that Holec has identified (Little; 1989,55, Hill;1994,517, Barnett;1991,308, Sturtridge; 1992,15 or Sheerin;1989,50). Little, for instance, mentions six aspects (identify needs, define objectives, select appropriate materials, choose appropriate study techniques, organise themselves and evaluate and monitor their progress) which are more or less the same.

When Holec explains the first stage, learning to learn, he provides a detailed account of the objectives, contents and methodology. According to him, learning to learn, or being prepared for making decisions, implies the acquisition of certain *knowledge* and *skills*[2]. As regards knowledge, a programme for learning to learn needs to cover two areas: *language competence* and *language learning*. Skill-wise, the learning to learn programme should include the necessary skills that correspond to the application of the knowledge concerned. The purpose of the knowledge content is for the learner to be able to understand the information (sometimes new) about language and about learning and contrast it with her own preconceptions on these areas, either to correct or to complement them (ibid.). The purpose of the skill content is to get familiar habits of learning and acquire new ones on the basis of developing preconceptions (See Fig. 2.2).

In earlier work (1979,41) Holec describes these two areas of instruction in a way I found especially useful. He calls the first one *training at a psychological level*, where the aim is "gradual deconditioning". According to him, the learner has a series of attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences about language and learning that determine how she takes the task of learning the target language. So the objective of this area is to give the learner enough information in order for her to re-examine these preconceptions and change, adjust or reinforce them in relation to a self-directed learning approach. In other words this is a "critical reflection" step (Wenden; 1987a,11).

The second area is called *training at a technical level*. It deals with the developing of skills in order for the learner to "fulfil his/her role" in a self-directed learning approach. This level is directly related to Holec's five aspects mentioned above. Thus, the learner learns

how to define objectives, how to use the tools s/he has available, how to evaluate his/her progress, etc. (1980,42)

KNOWLEDGE   **SKILLS**

LANGUAGE COMPETENCE	{ -What is a language? -How is it used? -etc.		Apply the acquired language and learning knowledge for the definition of an actual learning programme.
LANGUAGE LEARNING	{ -What is the process of language aquisition? -What is learning behaviour? -etc.	OPERATIONALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE	

consciousness-raising activities ——————— VIA ——————— practice

language and learning activities ——————— GOAL ——————— self-direction experience

Fig. 2.2 Learning to learn scheme according to Holec (1996)

In a slightly different perspective, Dickinson (1988,46) identifies three areas of learner training.

1) training in processes, strategies, and activities

2) instruction designed to heighten awareness of the nature of the target language, and instruction in a descriptive metalanguage and

3) instruction in aspects of the theory of language learning and language acquisition (1988,48)

It is clear that, for Dickinson, the psychological level of learner education, which can be identified as a need of awareness-raising, is more important than the technical one, which is included only in the first area.

2.2.2.2 The Second Stage: learning

As was stated earlier, the stage of learning in a self-directed scheme equals a decision-making process in which the learner decides on objectives, resources, methods and techniques and the process and product of learning.

One good example of research on decision-making is Holec's article "The learner as Manager: Managing learning or managing to learn?" (1987) in which he proposes to "look more closely at what 'active involvement' in learning entails" (146). The author describes the way learners made decisions on the five aspects mentioned before (p. 19). However, apart from this, the research on the actual process of self-directed learning is scarce. Most of it has been devoted to the "learning to learn" stage.

I will deal with this aspect later (Chapters 4 and 7), however, I want to stress the fact that the lack of information in this area did not bother me at the time I first came in contact with the relevant literature on self-direction. I was so worried about technical and logistic issues that I took it for granted and I am not sure why. It was maybe that I thought that learning was that cognitive process that happens in the "black box", and I was contented with the idea that teachers can help learners to learn but we cannot learn for them, on line with the belief that

> we must always remember that teaching never causes learning but
> rather creates....the conditions in which learning can occur.
>
> (van Lier;1988,32)

Or maybe I assumed that self-directed learning was not different from other-directed learning, and thus, it was already, although not fully, explained by psycholinguists. Thus, I might have thought, most of the things that applied to second language acquisition applied

for self-directed second language learning. I will deal with this issue theoretical issue in Chapter 4 and its practical implications in Chapter 7.

2.3 AUTONOMY 1

When I first became involved in the SAC project I did not realise the connection between *self-directed learning* and *learner autonomy*. It was after several courses and readings when I understood that the opening of a SAC with students working by themselves implied a rationale based on the concept of autonomy. Actually, I had never come across the term used in such circumstances. It is not that autonomy was a new term for me. Actually, the word in the Mexican educational context is quite common (almost all the state universities have the word *autonomous* in their names) but it is used as an adjective for the institution and it means that the universities do not depend on the Ministry of Education to make their own decisions. It implies self-government. We also talk about *libertad de catedra* (freedom of teaching), but in this case it refers to the teacher's freedom to make her own decisions on the content and the methodology of teaching. But it was never applied to the student. In other words, being a university administrator and teacher, I knew about *teacher autonomy* and *institutional autonomy* but I did not know about *learner autonomy*.

So the question about learner autonomy, then, was to define a term completely new *for me*. The following paragraphs show the reader the way I understood autonomy with reference to the theoretical work I had read at that time and without any practical experience on autonomous learning.

Educators and philosophers have tried to solve the problem of the definition of this term and Holec has been one of the most interested. I will start with his definition, since most researchers and practitioners in the field have based their work on his concept of autonomy. It is obvious that, because of my training, my concept of autonomy was also based on his definition.

With the purpose of clarifying the definition of autonomy, in 1988, Holec states that there are three different ways to classify the ways people have conceptualised the term:

A) autonomy as independence of consumer

B) autonomy as the active exercise of learner responsibility and

C) autonomy as the ability to learn

(A) refers to a situation in which the learner is free to choose the learning materials and works with them in an independent way, i.e. without a teacher. According to Holec, this situation does not have anything to do with his own concept of autonomy. There is no teacher to teach, but the materials replace her physical presence. That is to say, the learner lets herself be directed by the materials in the same way a teacher would manage the learner's situation inside a classroom. In this case there is independent learning within a self-access environment but there is no autonomy. The learner plays the role of a consumer (remember the metaphor of the supermarket) and the materials play the role of the teacher.

(B) and (C) refer to true cases of autonomy, according to Holec. Both involve active learners who take the responsibility for their own learning processes. The difference between them lies on the approach to learning. While the (B) learner learns "indirectly, implicitly and even, intuitively", learner (C) "learns to learn openly, explicitly and cognitively" (ibid.). Basically, the main difference is a matter of *awareness*. Learner (C) is (or becomes) aware of her own learning processes and takes advantage of that knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that whereas learner (B) learns the language, learner (C) learns to learn as well.

Throughout all his writings, Holec has advocated the fostering of type (C) autonomy in second language learning. His own definition of autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning"(1980,3). He also believes that this type of ability is not inborn but learned "by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way" (ibid.). Thus, to learn this ability is to become aware, which in turn, enables learners to manage and control their learning processes. In fact, for Holec, the main role of an autonomous learner is to be the *manager* of her own learning processes (1987).

Our understanding of the concept 'autonomy' was reflected in the two ways in the SAC: the layout and the procedures. First, we considered that the learner needed to have physical access to all the materials and equipment available in the SAC. Thus, we designed a self-access centre for learners to have the possibility to use whatever they felt like using

without depending on someone else to guide them. All the materials were displayed in open shelves with signs and codes that indicate the language, area and level of each piece. Most of the books were processed and divided into units in order for them to be available to a larger number of students. There were written guides that explained the catalogue system and an options menu in which all the materials were classified according to their content and function. And, to our eyes, all this seemed to work. The catalogue system was very user-friendly, and with little practice SAC users managed it very well. We were really pleased to see students helping themselves, so to speak.

Secondly, from readings on the issue, we learned that in order for the learner to be autonomous the teacher had to change her role to be a guide and a helper and "resist becoming a language teacher" (Dickinson; 1987, 45). Moreover, as was stated earlier, in the second stage of making decisions the only agent is the learner, i.e. the learner was the only person involved in the *what, how, when, where* and *how well* of the learning process (see section 2.3.2). In other words, as we wrote it at that time, "the *counsellor* no longer makes the decisions on what the learners learn, how they learn and how well they learn" (Clemente and Kissinger;1994,19). We had understood and we were aware that we had to relinquish those responsibilities that we had as *teachers*. Therefore we decided that leaving the learners to work independently from the teacher, physically distancing from them, was the best way for them to be autonomous. Not being around was our best way of preventing our intrusions as teachers in their own learning processes. In fact, this assumption was not only taken by us in Oaxaca. In general, according to Little (1997a):

> Open and distance learning schemes are defined partly by the fact that, unlike
> classroom learning, they are not directly teacher-led, and from here it is a short
> step to a definition of learners as autonomous simply because they do much
> of their learning in the absence of the teacher (10).

2.4 THE SELF-ACCESS CENTRE IN OAXACA

Our understanding about autonomy and self-access was put into practice in the Self-Access Centre in the University of Oaxaca. In this respect I consider that it is relevant to

provide the reader with a written picture of the context in which the SAC in Oaxaca is immersed. Although there are certain aspects that respond to the specific situation of Oaxaca, many elements of this description can be generalised to most of the SACs opened by Mexican universities in recent times.

2.4.1 Foreign languages in the Mexican curriculum

In Mexico, English (or French) as a foreign language is taught as compulsory subject of the national curriculum at secondary and preparatory (high school) level (see Fig. 2.3). This means that all the students attend a Foreign Language class for four to five years after the elementary school. Although French is also considered in the national curriculum, English is the most commonly taught. French is only learned in few schools, where English also is an option.

The situation of the foreign language teaching in secondary schools is fairly similar around the country. As I said before, English is compulsory during the three years. This means three levels within the national curriculum. The national curriculum also establishes a national syllabus whose objective is the comprehension of written English texts. There is a tendency to use standardised textbooks written to follow the official syllabus. According to the statistics, the Foreign Language as a subject is difficult for secondary students, and as a result marks tend to be low. A study (Clemente,1989) on students', teachers' and parents' attitudes towards different subjects show that the Foreign Language subject is not considered as an important subject, in fact, it is one of the least important of the list of compulsory subjects in which the leaders are Mathematics, Physics and the Social Sciences. In other words, for most students (and parents) English is a non-important subject that has to be passed.

The teachers at the secondary level have, more or less, the same background: three years of general elementary teacher education and two years secondary teacher education with a focus on foreign language teaching. However, this pre-service training mainly focuses on pedagogical issues and is deficient in foreign language matters. In addition, the teachers' command of the FL is usually very low.

STATE EDUCATION			
ELEMENTARY age: 6-12	-----	------	------
SECONDARY age: 13-15	-English -compulsory -reading - 3 levels	-institutional syllabus -low status subject (-) -low grades (difficult) same textbook	-pre-service GTT -pre-service LTT -poor command of TL -NN teachers
PREPARATORY age: 16-18	-English/French -compulsory -reading -3 levels	-teacher/school syllabus -low status subject (-) -good grades (easy) -different textbook and teacher's materials	-no GTT -in-service LTT -poor to good command -N and NN teachers
UNIVERSITY (undergraduates and postgraduates) age: 19-	-English and others -no compulsory -ESP -self-instruction - all levels from elementary to proficiency	-school syllabus -high status subject -low-high grades -same textbook and supplementary materials	-no GTT -pre/in-service LTT -good command of TL -N and NN teachers

GTT= general teacher training, LTT= language teacher training, TL= target language
ESP= English for specific purposes, N= native, NN= non-native.

Fig. 2.3 Language teaching system in Mexico

The situation of preparatory schools is similar to the secondary school in some aspects but also different in others, and it is more or less the same in most parts of the country. English as a subject is compulsory in one or two of the three years. This is a third or less of the teaching hours in secondary school. There is not a national syllabus at this level; therefore each school, or in some cases each teacher, decides on the content and methodology of the course. The nature of the materials and textbooks is varied, as are the teachers' lessons and exams. Although the status of the subject remains the same, that is, English is still regarded as a non-important subject, it is not a difficult one at this level. The grades are high and it is fairly easy to be passed. The reason for the difference between

secondary and high school foreign language situation is that, at preparatory level, the foreign language is not a "new" subject for the students already experienced it at the secondary school. Besides, it has been noticed that the content of the specific programs, elaborated by the teachers and schools, is fairly similar, if not identical, to the one of the secondary school national curriculum.

The background of the preparatory teachers is very different. They do not usually have any pre-service general education. Their command of the target language ranges from good to poor because their competence in the foreign language was acquired in different circumstances. Some of the teachers are native speakers. There are in-service training courses run by the institutions that try to cope with the methodological aspect of teaching.

At the university level, the case is very different and changes from place to place since state universities are autonomous and make decisions on their own. In few universities, a foreign language is compulsory, either as a taught subject or as an exam that may be a requisite to graduate or to enrol into a postgraduate course. In most of these cases, the objective is the comprehension of written academic texts. In general, these courses and exams are run by universities' specific departments or centres generally known as *foreign language centres.*

For most university students, however, to study a language is not compulsory. Most of them enrol in language courses because they want to, their motivation is very high and, in this respect, the foreign language may have a better status than at lower levels. However, it cannot be said that students consider their foreign language studies as important as their university courses.

In most of the cases at this level, the syllabus and textbook are determined by the language centre. Each teacher has to follow the former and use the latter, however she has the possibility to use supplementary materials of her own choice.

It is difficult to generalise about teacher's backgrounds. It all depends on the regulations of the university and the characteristics of the state. However, it is at this level where most native-speakers teachers are. Although some of them do not have any language teaching background, there are some that have both language education and teaching experience in foreign languages. Apart from providing a background on foreign language teaching in the Mexican educational system, I consider that this information is relevant for

the reader to be able to understand the background of both, learners and teachers that work in the Self-Access Centre in Oaxaca.

2.4.2 Oaxaca and its university

As Mexico is a very large country, the situation of the North and the South is very different. Generally speaking, the Northern states are richer and more prosperous in many senses. In addition, their closeness to the USA results in a fairly different way of thinking and being of its inhabitants from people living in the Central and Southern regions. As regards the English language, it is clear that there is an easier access to it in the North than in the South.

Oaxaca (see map in Appendix 1), located in the Southern part of the country, is the poorest Mexican state. The only industrial development is tourism. Most of its inhabitants live in the countryside and struggle for living on agricultural production.

Oaxaca's capital city, also called Oaxaca[3], is 463 km. away from Mexico City and very far from the USA border. However, there are several ways in which Oaxaca and its inhabitants come in contact with English-speaking people. First, Oaxaca is one of the biggest tourist centres in Mexico. There are visitors from all over the world around the year, and most of them are from USA and Canada.

Second, there is a floating population of foreigners that live in Oaxaca, as tourists, for long periods of time. This phenomenon is reflected in different aspects of the Oaxacan life. The zocalo (the main square), the archaeological sites, the museums, the galleries, and most of the restaurants and hotels are regularly visited by English-speaking people. There are certain areas of the city and certain villages nearby that have become "foreignised". This means that most of the housing facilities are aimed at foreigner buyers and renters. Their style and prices are not affordable for most Oaxacans.

Third, there are many villages whose inhabitants are still Oaxacans, however they are in constant contact with English-speaking people. The reasons to visit these places are to buy

handicrafts (pottery, rugs and tapestry, wooden figures, etc) to enjoy resorts (beaches and forests) to visit archaeological sites or to attend some cultural events (weekly markets, religious festivals, etc). This is in part an explanation for the strong interest of Oaxacan people to learn English. Most of them need English for occupational purposes, however, it is also important to notice that the interaction between Oaxacans and foreigners at a social level is very common.

For linguistic research purposes, Garza (1986,18) classified Oaxaca's inhabitants into three sociocultural classes: high, middle and low, according to their educational level. Most Oaxacans belong to the low class. They live in the countryside and work in the fields. Due to the geographical features of the land, the lack of agricultural technology and the insufficient support of the government, they live on the breadline or just above it. It is not uncommon that one of the members of these families migrates to the USA in hope of a better life. Many young rural people's goal is to move to the USA. Here, students find another reason to be interested in learning English.

There are 9 universities and superior schools in Oaxaca. From these, the Technology of Oaxaca (ITO) and the Benito Juarez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO) are the only two that are public. This fact determines the features of the students that apply to study in them. Mainly, they are members of low, working and low-middle class families.

The university in Oaxaca has eight undergraduate schools with 4000 students, from which the most popular are Accountancy, Medicine, Law and Architecture. The university also runs 7 high schools and most of the students belong to that level (16000).

University teachers need to have a BA degree in order to teach at this level but, due to the low educational level of the state, there still are teachers that do not have one. The University carries out in-training courses and tries to encourage teachers to get their degrees.

2.4.2.1. The Language Centre of the UABJO

There are six private English schools in the city of Oaxaca, and it is very common for teenagers whose families can afford it, to learn English in private lessons or during exchange type trips to the USA or Canada. This access to English is, of course, available for a very low percentage of the population. The great majority has to apply for a place in one of the two public institutions (ITO or UABJO) or do without it.

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The Language Centre (LC) of UABJO runs semester courses on six different languages (English, French, Italian, Japanese, German and Spanish). and a B. A. in TEFL. It has around 1500 students and most of them are enrolled in English. The BA has around 150 full-time students.

The students at the Language Centre are young adults and adults from 18 years old upward. All of them have finished their preparatory school, some are studying an underdegree and others are working as professionals or doing a postdegree. There are not few that are just studying languages, this means that they are enrolled in more than one course at the same time.

The common English courses are 80 hours long. The sessions last 50 minutes and are held the five weekdays at the same time everyday. Class size varies from level to level. In the first levels there are around 40 students and in the upper levels no more than 25 students. More than 50% of the students drop out during the first levels. There are eight English levels, from elementary to upper-intermediate. Although the term upper-intermediate is often used and accepted in the literature, its use here is very relative, since there is no institutional procedure that assures that we are talking about the same degree of competence. At the end of the eighth semester the students are supposed to be able to pass the First Certificate Cambridge exam, however, since this exam is not compulsory it is difficult to generalise on the achievement of the whole population.

The teachers of the Language Centre have very different backgrounds. Some of them are foreigners and others are Mexican, although the former outnumbers the latter in ten to one. Being a foreign teacher in the LC does not mean being a native speaker language teacher since some of the English teachers are Swiss, French, Dutch and German. Education-wise, teachers are also very different. Some already have an MA (in TEFL and in other areas). Two have recently finished their Diploma in TESOL. Others hold a BA in different areas and there are still a few that have not got any degree. Of these, some are currently studying a BA in TESOL run by the British Council.

The LC was opened 20 years ago and seniority is a very important factor in the university. According to this, the teachers of the LC can be divided into three groups: "old-timers", teachers that have been working there for 15 years or more; "settled" teachers, who have less than 15 years experience but more than three and have already decided to stay in

Oaxaca and "tourist" teachers, who have less than three years experience and do not desire to stay in Oaxaca.

2.4.3 The Self-access Centre (SAC)

I will now give the reader a brief description of the outcome of the project, that is to say the actual self-access centre in Oaxaca and the way it is working. At the same time, I shall provide an account of the way we interpreted the theory on self-direction.

After eight months of setting up the self-access centre (SAC) it was opened in May of 1993. A pilot course was held in August and the SAC was opened to the university students in September. As of 1997, more than 1000 students have been registered. Enrolment is possible at any time of the year. The SAC is open 15 hours a day during weekdays (from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.), 11 hours on Saturdays (from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) and 5 hours on Sundays (from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). The SAC is only closed in Easter (two weeks), Summer (two weeks) and Christmas (two weeks) and official university non-working days (around ten days). In order to study a foreign language in the SAC, students need to fill in a form, show a high school certificate or some equivalent and attend an introductory course. There is a one-time fee of 200 pesos (less than 20 pounds) that entitles the student to use the facilities and materials in any language (English, French, Italian, Japanese and Spanish) she wishes for a period of six months.

The main goal of the SAC in Oaxaca was for university students to be able to study a foreign language in a flexible scheme. In an atmosphere where students did not have other possibilities to attend taught classes, the SAC was meant to be a *learning centre* (in opposition to a practice centre; see Sturtridge; 1992, for a classification of SACs). The SAC had to provide the students with all the necessary tools to learn a language in a self-directed way. Based on Holec's rationale, our aim was to create a learning centre with "all things to all learners" (1979). Not having to attend regular classes in regular hours with regular groups, the SAC would open a new possibility to cater for different needs, learning styles

and interests. Following the CRAPEL model, and convinced of their theoretical assumptions, we claimed that our objectives were:

> to create the necessary conditions for the SAC users to learn to learn,
> with this learning as a basis for learning a foreign language
> (Clemente and Kissinger,1994,16)

In order to meet these objectives we developed a working scheme of resources and procedures.

The resources we had access to were basically of three types: materials, equipment and counsellors. I shall now describe each of these types in turn.

2.4.3.1. Materials

The materials in the SAC can be divided into different categories. Our main classification was according to the materials' source and purposes. Thus, we had didactic, authentic and support materials. The didactic materials of English, for example, were catalogued according to level, and content. In order for these materials to be available in terms of physical and psychological access, we separated them into units. In this way, several learners would be able to work with the same book at the same time. In relation to goals, it was considered easier to set a short-term goal if the learner was working with a single unit as opposed to handling a whole book. We started with around 500 hundred different titles covering six different levels (elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced and proficiency) and the following categories: language courses (some with video or audiocassettes), skill-focused books, dictionaries, games, vocabulary books, exams and grammar-focused books.

Understanding that authentic materials were " the record of any communicative act in speech or writing that was originally performed in fulfilment of some personal or social function", as Little (1997b, 225) defines it, the authentic materials were classified according to their genre and/or content. Thus, we started collections of films, obituaries, reviews, video

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clips, recipes, health leaflets, tourist brochures, cartoons, etc. Most of them did not have exercises to work with, although counsellors have developed some for specific pieces. There also are what we called "standardised exercises". These are universal worksheets (Carvalho:1993, 31) that can be used with all the exemplars of a specific genre. For instance, a standardised exercise for reading recipes contains general questions that can be applied to any recipe.

The support materials were all the guides written with the purpose to give support to the learners working by themselves. We defined them as

> documents, written by experienced language teachers, in which they resume, in a clear and synthesised way, their advice to learners about different aspects and stages of the learning process (Clemente and Kissinger; 1994, 52)

In a way, we thought that this type of materials would play the role of the teacher, "replacing" her physical presence. In fact, at this stage our operationalisation of autonomy coincided with what Holec says about autonomy as independence of consumer (see section 2.3, p 25).

2.4.3.2 Equipment

The SAC in Oaxaca is located next to the Language Centre, in the centre of the city. It has 400 m2 and individual working booths for more than one hundred users, which can be doubled if the users work in pairs. It is surely one of the largest in Mexico. Equipment-wise, however, the SAC in Oaxaca cannot claim to be the best one. When making decisions about buying things, we realised that there were many things that were not affordable. Specifically, we had to decide not to buy some computing hardware (and software as well) that would have taken too much of the project money. Nevertheless, we managed to get enough to cope with the expected demands. There are fifty audiocassette recorders, twenty of which are interactive, twenty videotape players with TV sets attached to them, eight computers, two with CD-ROM drives, a satellite dish connected to a macro-screened TV, a laser disc reproducer, a photocopier and other small appliances for processing materials.

2.4.3.3 Counsellors

To be a counsellor in the Self-access Centre of Oaxaca it is necessary to be a teacher of the Language Centre. This means that all the counsellors are at the same teachers of the Language Centre, and their characteristics are the same (see section 2.4.2, p. 30). There are around 15 teachers that work in the SAC and as a group it is very heterogeneous and unstable. As I said before, the former feature is due to the fact that they come from different backgrounds: most of them are foreigners (Americans, Canadian, Scottish, French and Dutch) and their education as language teachers ranges from MA in TEFL to none. The latter trait, instability, is a result of the mobility of the teachers. Although some of them have decided to settle in Oaxaca, many are just there for a short period of time. The effect of this is reflected in several aspects, some of them being training, experience and commitment.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe the training process of the teachers to become SAC counsellors. The reader will notice that there is a difference between the actual content of the different courses, summarised in Fig. 2.4, and my personal recalling of it. This difference is due to the fact that most of the training input did not produce much intake. Later, I will analyse the problem in depth.

As I said before the training of the teachers consisted of four courses that started at the middle of 1992, a year before the SAC was opened. This has been called the *formal training* (Clemente and Kissinger, 1994, 18). A colleague and I attended this first course, which took place at the University of Yucatan. It was held by Susan Axbey, a free-lance English consultant. As I recall, its main focus was practical issues, in particular, processing and elaboration of SAC materials. However, looking through my notes there was some input on pedagogical issues such as the role of the teacher and the implications of self-learning (see Fig. 2.4 for an objective account of the content of the four courses from Clemente and Kissinger;1994,26). As I said before, I was exposed to the theoretical information but I did not process it.

The second course was carried out in Oaxaca at the beginning of 1993. That fact allowed me to invite all the teachers of the Language Centre to attend it. There were teachers

from six different universities. For the university authorities, and for myself, to be a host institution was a big event. It was again led by Dr. Axbey. As far as I can remember, the content was mainly administrative. Again, that does not mean this was the only content of the course. But this is what I recall the best, issues about features and functions of staff and other administrative procedures. However, my notes also show input on learner training and the concept of 'pathways'. Nevertheless, there is an event that did survive in my memory. Almost at the end of this course, one of the teachers from Oaxaca, openly, and somewhat aggressively, asked what a self-access centre was. I was perplexed. It was not the question itself but the moment and tone of it, which seemed to me completely out of place. It was not until much later when I fully understood the meaning and intention of that question. I shall address this point later (see section 3.3.4, p. 63).

CONTENT	First Course July '92 (2 weeks)	Second Course January '93 (2 weeks)	Third Course April '93 (2 weeks)	Fourth Course October '93 (1 month)
Role of counsellor		x		x
Role of the learner			x	x
Self-learning	x		x	
Authentic materials	x			x
Didactic materials	x			x
Organisation/administration		x		
Counselling sessions				x
Self-evaluation				x
Learner training			x	x
Procedures		x		
Learning to learn			x	x

Fig. 2. 4 Training courses for SAC staff in UABJO, Oaxaca.

The third course was held at the University of Chiapas in April, 1993. It was a very significant event as Henri Holec taught it. By that time I was already very aware of the importance of his work on self-direction in foreign language learning. He was the writer of a good part of the seminal work in the field. As I saw it, he knew all about autonomy and had all the experience I was lacking. Before going to Chiapas he visited the SAC in Oaxaca and

gave a talk to the teachers. The friendly and understanding attitude of Dr Holec made me feel more confident of the way we were developing the project. He was very positive about the way things were being done. We had been developing materials, mainly to support self-directed learning. However, I want to remind the reader, all our assumptions were rather hypothetical since the SAC had not been opened to students and it was not going to be opened to them until four months later.

Six teachers from Oaxaca attended the course in Chiapas and I knew that some of the ones that did not would have liked to have been there as well. That was a good sign; more and more teachers were becoming interested in the project. During this course, Dr Holec focused on pedagogical issues. I especially remember his remarks on the role and attitude of the learners and the emphasis he gave to the learner's psychological and methodological training. Dr Holec's presence and words made me even more assertive about the positive results of the project. It could not have been any other way. They, in CRAPEL, knew about autonomy and their outcome was successful. I did not see any reason why it would not work in Mexico.

The fourth course was held in Nancy, France in October, 1993. It was not possible for all the teachers involved in the project to go. Most of them would have liked to have visited CRAPEL and see the way things were done there, however, only four of us went. I was lucky that I had the opportunity to learn more about self-direction and see first hand the way an approach to autonomy was put into practice.

Although there were some lectures and seminar sessions, what I recall to be the most important event was the access to the library. Within the programme, there were scheduled some hours to "browse" through the materials of the resource centre. We were free to make decisions about the materials we wanted to work with. That was the best way to experience learner autonomy!

Another important turning point was when we realised that CRAPEL was very different from the SACs we were developing in Mexico. We were not discouraged though. On the contrary, we thought that that was a good sign. At that time I wrote:

This experience made us conclude that, while the concept of self-learning is universal, its realisation must originate as a product of the context to which it belongs (Clemente and Kissinger,1994,24)

At that time, however, I was not even half aware of the weight of that truth.

Personal and economic reasons made it impossible for all the teachers to travel and attend the courses. Therefore, the teachers who attended a course had the responsibility to reproduce it for their colleagues in Oaxaca. In this way, all the teachers taking part in the project had access to the information of the original courses. In general, this reproduction did not only consist of an account of the content of the course for it usually involved comments about the course and discussion on the feasibility of the content in the context of Oaxaca. This type of preparation was called *multiple training.* Another important element in the formation of SAC staff was the experience of working in the SAC, that is to say, the on-going learning that took place when the SAC was opened and the teachers were running it and working directly with SAC materials and students. This was the *informal training*, which may have been the most important factor for gaining confidence in doing the job.

2.4.3.4 Procedures

The main concern when setting up the SAC in Oaxaca was for students to be able to make their own decisions. However, not everything in SAC was free decision-making. There were some rules to observe and procedures to follow. At the beginning we were not sure if having rules and procedures went well with the atmosphere of autonomy we wanted to create. We did not like the idea of having certain constraints to limit learner autonomy, but little by little we accepted the idea that some rules (such as not taking away materials or equipment with them) would help us to give a better service to everybody. In the same way, we decide to establish a scheme of support elements the learner could take advantage of (see Fig. 2.5). Although most of the elements in the scheme were suggestions rather than compulsory steps, there were a few that needed to be followed. Those were the user's course and the first counselling session.
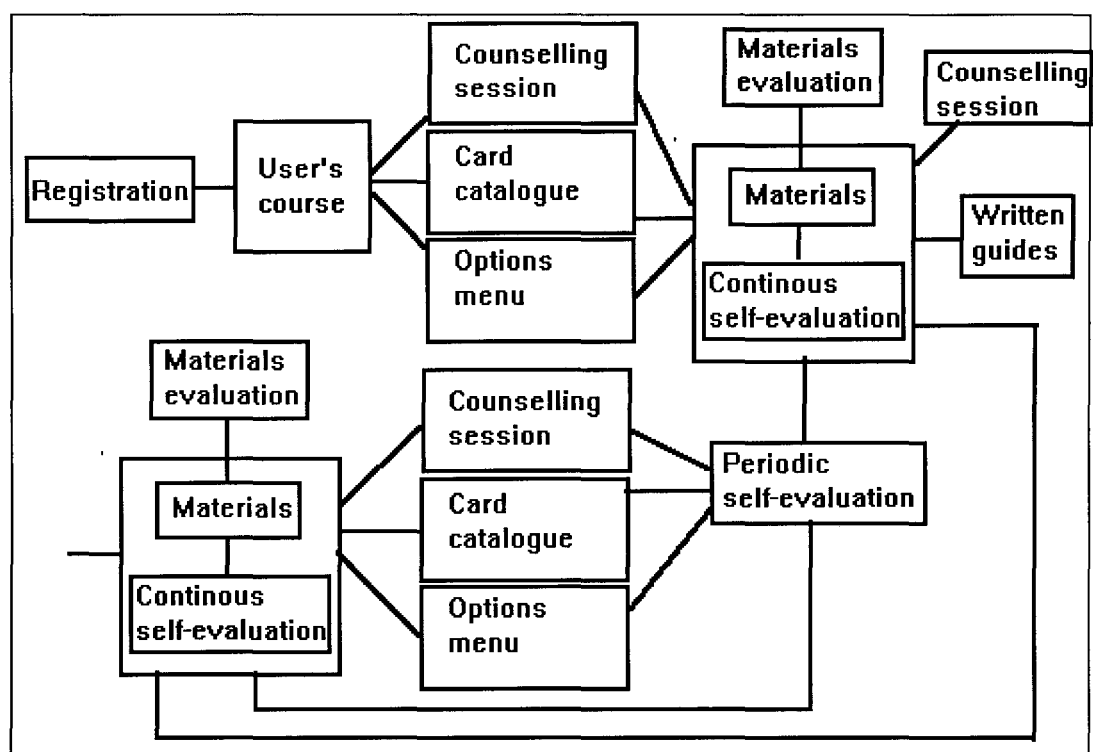
Fig. 2. 5 Scheme of support elements in SAC Oaxaca (from Clemente and Kissinger; 1994, 62)

As I see it, there was another reason for our procedure scheme. In spite of all the input about autonomy and self-direction, we, foreign language teachers, were not confident enough about "laissez-faire matters". We wanted some kind of structure, if not for the students, at least for us, to be more aware of what was going to happen when our first students tried things out. The scheme of support elements (Fig. 2.5) was the way we foresaw self-learning a foreign language.

2.4.3.4.1 The user's course

The user's course had the objective of introducing the learner to the SAC system and to the concept of self-direction in language learning. It lasted 20 hours and its contents were: information about organisation and resources of the centre, definition of needs and goals and objectives, identification of learning styles and strategies, discussion of key concepts such as language, culture, learning, counselling, and self-evaluation. All of this, we thought, had the purpose not only of informing but also of providing the students with the *methodological*

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and *psychological* aspects to undertake their own learning (see section 2.2.2.1, p. 20). After the course, the students worked for four weeks in the SAC trying out materials and equipment and developing their study plans. During this period they would require the help of a counsellor. They were free to ask for this help whenever they wanted. When this period was over they had to attend a counselling session. This CS was compulsory and its purpose was "to analyse the results of their first work in the SAC and the successes and failures ...(with) the system... or (with) them as learners" (Clemente & Kissinger; 1994,64). In later sections I will say more about the user's course and the counselling sessions.

To conclude, I hope to have provided the reader with a clear account of my first steps in the search of autonomy in language learning. As I have said before, this was not meant to be an objective account. I have been too involved in the project to be able to do that. What is more, I do not believe in objectivity in this sense for an attempt to be objective would necessary imply getting rid of all the attitudes and feelings (mine and others') that underlay the decisions we made.

I also hope that the reader has now the necessary information to understand the reasons why I started to see things in a different way, which is the topic of next chapter.

NOTES:
1) In fact, there are some centres that are called *mediatheques*, and *sonotheques*, which brings the idea of the function of a library or "bibliotheque" as in French.
2) Wenden (1987) says that learning to learn and learning a language are similar processes since both imply the acquisition of knowledge and skill, i.e. the proceduralization of knowledge.
3) The city of Oaxaca has a population of 213,985 inhabitants. Its area is 85 km2. In Oaxaca, we have 6 local papers, 3 local TV channels and several radio stations. We also have access to the most important national papers and TV channels. There are 198 primary schools, 72 secondary schools and 28 preparatory schools. Being one of the most important tourist locations in the country, the economy of this city is based on the tourist industry and commerce.

Linguistically speaking, most Oaxacan inhabitants speak Spanish, though there are 12 indigenous languages spoken in the state (Garza;1986,19) . The dialectal variety of Spanish that is spoken in the city of Oaxaca has been identified as antiplano oaxaqueño (Atlas:1988,167) which is very similar to the "Mexican Spanish", that is to say, the standard dialect of Mexico (Lope Blanch;1979, 125-6).

3. FROM A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

The content of the present chapter has been divided into four main parts. First, I will explain the change of roles that I underwent, and the effect of this in my views about the project. Second, I will describe the different practical aspects that stood out as contrasting with the theory we had learned. In other words, I realised that things were not happening as it was planned. Third, I will give a brief account of some research I carried out during this critical stage of transition. And four, as a conclusion, I will reflect on some issues related to the concept of autonomy.

In the last chapter I explained to the reader the way the Mexican SAC project was introduced and implemented in Oaxaca. I also told the reader about my function and involvement in the different stages of the innovation. It was clear what my position and interest were. As I said, my post was the Director of the Language Centre, which allowed me to make certain types of decisions. My specific role in relation to the project was that of an *agent implementing a top-down innovation* (see 3.3.4, p.63) "imposed" by the Ministry of Education. Fortunately, the post of director in the LC only lasts three years, so I went back to my position of full-time teacher. I said fortunately because, as the reader will see, the change of roles allowed me to see the project and its outcome in a very different way.

3.1 CHANGE OF ROLES

I was again a teacher, so my direct contact was now with students either within the classroom or at the SAC. I also became a SAC counsellor and shared the anxieties and fears

my colleagues experienced. Actually, for administrative reasons, I spent more time in the self-access centre than in the classroom, a fact that allowed me to concentrate fully on the SAC. By that time, I also started studying an MA in TESOL, which allowed me to carry out empirical research on the area of self-learning.

All these changes were very important not only because I was able to see things from a different perspective. They were also important because people saw me in a different way. I was not an authority any more. For the teachers, that meant that I no longer had the power to decide. With that in mind, they started being more open and even much more critical about the way the SAC was functioning, and what was more relevant to me, about the way the SAC had been implemented.

3.2 ON-THE-JOB EXPERIENCES: PRACTICE VS THEORY

As I said before, the on-the-job experience was the best way to gain confidence in the doing of the job. There were two reasons for this. First, when the formal training was carried out I did not have any practical experience, everything that was presented to me was too abstract. Second, the formal training was mainly other-directed, whereas, the informal training phase was inevitably self-directed. The result of this was that, when working in the SAC, with 'real' learners, I was in the position to understand and judge both, the specific elements of SAC and the project as a whole.

After some months of working in the SAC I realised that things were different from what I had expected. The following paragraphs describe some of the "unexpected".

First of all, I noticed that most of the students enrolled in SAC did not want to be there. They were there because they had not been accepted in the Language Centre. The SAC was their only possibility to study languages but not their best one. A few, I must admit, were there because they were too busy to attend a course in a fixed schedule. But, in any case, they would have preferred to work with a teacher.

Second, I became aware of the fact that learners were not learning much from the input we gave them during the users' course. After having taught the course to hundreds of

students, I had the strong feeling that I was only superficially giving information and training. That is to say, I was just telling them about definitions of old and new concepts (e.g. evaluation/self-evaluation, teacher/counsellor), informing them where the materials were and training them in the use of equipment. As I was not the only one with mixed feelings about this, on several occasions, we decided to change the course. Between changes, we held counsellors' meetings to discuss the 'new versions'. The last change of the user's course was due to both practical and pedagogical issues. The time was reduced to ten hours. We knew that for most of the students it was difficult to attend a course of 20 hours in a fixed schedule. The content was reduced to only practical aspects. Its objective was to know where the materials were and how to work with equipment. Although we still considered that the "theoretical" part of the course was fundamental, we realised that that type of information made no sense before working in the centre and experiencing self-learning. Because of their lack of experience, users were not ready to understand the methodological preparation, which also made the psychological preparation also meaningless. Before all this, we thought, the learners needed to have a better idea of what working by themselves implied. Therefore, we decided to deal with the psychological and methodological aspects (see 2.2.2.1, p. 20) in the form of monthly workshops. These were modular in nature and not compulsory but "highly recommended". In this sense, the students were free to make decisions on the content and order of their learning-to-learn development according to their own needs and interests. The content of these workshops was varied: elaboration of study plans, authentic materials, learning styles and strategies, language and culture, self-evaluation, counselling sessions, evaluation of materials, etc. Although the changes were well-founded, I still had the impression that something essential was missing.

A third unexpected development was the fact that the counselling sessions did not work as students were completely reluctant to ask for them. In the case of the first "compulsory" ones, they simply did not attend. At the beginning we thought that their learning style, rhythm or personality were the reasons for not using the counselling service. That would have meant that they were perhaps "naturally independent" and they did not need us as helpers. Other reasons for my worries (such as the fact that most students drop out) made me realise that such independence was a pure illusion. As an attempt to change

things, we made the decision of not forcing the students to attend a "first" counselling session and tried out ways to get in closer contact with students. We had individual interviews with them during the user's course whose objective was more psychological (being in touch, getting to know each other, etc.) than technical (e.g. revising the study plan). Another way to get closer was to be available, i.e. "on hand", while they were working.

In addition, I noticed that, in general, students prefer to work with certain types of materials. New SAC users especially like to work with video courses, such as *Ingles sin Barreras* and *Master English*. More advanced students generally spend most of their time watching movies, especially the most recent ones. They hardly ever use the standardised exercises with authentic materials and most of them absolutely love computer games, in particular *Hangman* and *Word Munchers*.

Fifth and finally, although many teachers wanted to work in the SAC, their main motivation was to have fewer classroom-hours. Working in the SAC is fairly relaxed and they are free to choose what to work on. From them, I learned that, in general, teachers do not like to give counselling sessions, but this does not represent a problem for them because students do not like them either.

In conclusion, as I see it, students were not interested in learning the language in a self-directed way and the learning support provided by the SAC was not effective, neither in the form of a user's course nor in the on-going counselling service. That implied a very distant relationship with the counsellors, highlighted by the fact that the counsellors were not very positive about some of these supports. In short, students' autonomy was reduced to the choosing of materials, very much the same situation of Holec's first definition of autonomy: autonomy as independence of consumer (see 2.3., p. 24). From the students' point of view, the only problem, but a big one, was that they were not learning the target language and that was their main reason for dropping out. So we had to face the fact that attrition was very high, and it was not that we were running out of students. On the contrary, every semester we had to run user's courses for more than one hundred of students. The problem was that they left after one or two months of being working in a self-directed way, or better, two months of "being working without a teacher", as most of them put it. Apparently, we had not

created the necessary conditions for the SAC students either to learn to learn or to learn the language (see above, section 2.3, p. 24).

When I became fully aware of the mismatch between the expectations of the project and the actual outcomes I felt completely inept, in particular in my role of counsellor. For the reader to understand my feeling at that time, I will draw a comparison, a strategy ethnographers commonly use to problematise the taken-for-granted events. Ethnographers usually draw parallels at different levels and look at one thing in terms of the other. For instance, it is very common to compare different professions. Teachers and gurus would be a good example (Riley, 1997). On several occasions, I compared myself, a SAC counsellor, with a physician. Although the comparison is not the best one (in no way do I consider students patients!), it is effective if I only focus on the functions of the physician and compare them with the ones of the SAC counsellor. Physicians need to reach a diagnosis. In the same way, counsellors need to identify the way a learner carries out learning processes to identify what is not working properly. Physicians also prescribe treatment or medicine to solve the problem. Counsellors, in turn, are expected to give some advice for the learner to find her way in self-direction. However, to reach a diagnosis, or to prescribe a medicine, you need to be completely assured about the things you are doing. In my case, I was not assertive at all, while nevertheless I was carrying out diagnoses and prescribing treatments. I had to wonder how many SAC learners I had killed! Perhaps the reader would see this as an exaggeration but it is not. At least, very deeply in my self I knew that I was just pretending. I certainly knew that I would not have liked to be in hands of a pretend-to-be doctor!

But apart from the possible correlation of our function as counsellors and the high attrition in SAC, there were other conceivable reasons for SAC students' failures. Some people say that, in general, learners need teachers in order to learn. Others strongly believe that it is the Mexican culture that cannot accept an educational system that lacks the figure of a teacher as the leader of the process. Some argue that the strategy involved in introducing and implementing this innovative system within the institution was the wrong one. And others would point out the SAC's procedures and logistics as the main problem. And *all* of them may be right.

In short, my new roles and experiences in the SAC gave me a completely different perspective of the project. The enthusiasm turned into serious concern and the assurances

were all doubts. Nevertheless, it also made me realised that I needed to read more and carry out some research on the subject.

3.3 MORE READING AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In this section I will try to summarise the second stage of my understanding of self-directed learning. It consisted of a combination of dealing with the literature and the carrying out empirical research. The first stage of reading, my introduction to the field (see 2.2, p.16), was very general and intended to give me an overall idea of what self-directed learning was. The second stage though, had different objectives. Above all, it responded to my own particular needs at that time. In that sense, it was more specific and intense. It was also more productive, for I was reading with my already-acquired own individual schema of self-learning, something I lacked in the first readings. It was also more open in the sense that I did not deal only with self-directed learning literature, but also with research and knowledge in others areas of applied linguistics and learning in general. I have to admit that for the second stage I needed to reread some of the literature. Obviously, I understood better some things but also, I was more critical and assertive. This allowed me to carry out empirical research and draw some conclusions about my own context. I did research on several areas. For the purposes of this study, I will only summarise the most important of the following: counselling, learner strategies, learner training and teacher education.

3.3.1 Counselling

Very little has been written about counselling in self-directed learning. Basically, researchers only have dealt with the functions of the counsellor. In his book *Self-instruction in Language Learning* (1987), Dickinson hardly mentions the role of the SAC counsellor. Although he states that "the teacher has a vital role to play in supporting learners in a self-instructional mode"(102), it seems to me that he understands this support more in the way of

setting up self-instructional systems and resources than in the way of direct contact with the learner. Other authors coincide that counselling consists of telling the reader that apart from "helping learners to..." (Sturtridge;1992,11), the teacher has to be prepared to carry out many of new roles such as librarian, manager, administrator, technician, etc. From Holec (1980), I learned that the content of a counselling session (CS) has to make

> reference to the learning process...(and) give the learner an
> opportunity to think about his learning... in order to develop the
> abilities he needs in order to be able to take over responsibility
> for his learning. (1980,31)

In addition to this, most of the writers seem to agree on the fact that the counsellor has to "resist becoming a language teacher" (Dickinson; 1987, 45). Little by little, I was building up and adding to my new schema of counselling session, nevertheless I found nothing about the way a counsellor counsels. In 1997, Riley is still saying that "we have no discourse in which to discuss or 'do' counselling" (115) and recommends that

> we need to frame a new discourse in which it is possible to
> 'counsel' learners without constant reference to other
> interactional genres, and other informational economies, in
> particular, teaching (ibid).

In 1995, I carried out a piece of research (Clemente 1995a) in which I analysed the discourse of the CS within the context of the SAC in Oaxaca. The data of this study was obtained through a questionnaire for SAC counsellors and learners, video-recorded CSs and the corresponding protocol analyses of those. From the questionnaire I learned that counsellors and learners have different concepts of counselling, mainly in terms of goals, content and roles (see Fig.3.1 for the most common answers). In general, it can be said that the counsellor's concept of counselling was more in agreement with the literature of self-directed learning than the learner's.

The analysis of the discourse of the CSs gave a description of the semantic characteristics constant in some of the CSs held in Oaxaca. From it I learned that the semantic attributes (Paltridge; 1994,292) of the CS we were carrying out were: *learners' experiences and goals, counsellor's information about the SAC system* and *suasion* in the form of suggestion or advice. Interestingly, it was found that in very few of the counselling

sessions they talked about learning processes, an attribute that must be present, according to Holec's description of it. From the counselling sessions studied in Oaxaca, it can be said that 'talking about learning processes' is a *marked* element, that is, it rarely occurs.

	USER	COUNSELLOR
GOAL	-help to learn faster, to find the easiest way -teaching, transmitting knowledge	-help to discover, to plan -give them confidence
CONTENT	-linguistic explanation	-need analysis/study plan
COUNSELLOR ROLE	- someone who has a lot of knowledge to teach the learners	-a person that needs to know the user in order to help her to find her own way
LEARNER ROLE	-someone who knows what she wants and the counselling session is one way to get it	-somebody who has a lot of questions and needs someone to answer them

Fig. 3.1 Divergence of counsellors and learners about counselling sessions.

The protocol analyses of the counselling sessions uncovered feelings and attitudes of both, learners and counsellors. From the SAC students, I learned that there were different degrees of dissatisfaction, a fact the counsellors were not aware of. The counsellors, in turn, dealt with the power factor either consciously avoiding it or consciously (and unconsciously) deploying it. The short interaction of the counselling session (10 to 20 minutes) was long enough to develop good or bad records, that is to say, good or bad opinions of the counsellors about the learners. When a good record was developed, the CS was smooth and pleasant but if a bad record evolved, the CS turned to be a difficult event for the learner as regards both interactional and illocutionary acts. At an interactional level the counsellor tended to control the discourse, holding the openings and changing the topic. The only possibility for the learners was to reply. At the illocutionary level a bad record session was notorious for its absence of praising in the form of overt and positive feedback. The following extract of a protocol analysis of a counselling session (translated from Spanish) shows the difference of views between counsellor and learner:

Counsellor:

"The girl wasn't prepared. That's the way I read it...She needs more
support, more help.... She hasn't talked to me. We certainly didn't establish
much of a relationship. I think she doesn't want CSs with me.... I overreacted,
I did make things difficult for her.... She is not independent. She will learn
English because she seems to have a genuine interest, but would need
more support.... I didn't like this CS, I don't know... I didn't do much. I felt I was
kind of useless".

Learner:
"CSs shouldn't be compulsory. CSs have to be requested not imposed....
This CS didn't help me. It didn't have an objective.... I didn't say what I really
thought because it would have sounded very strong, very impolite. It is not the
right thing to do.... I think that I had the opportunity to talk; if I didn't say
some things it was because I didn't want to say them or because I didn't have
the courage to say them... She overawes people. She seems very harsh (maybe she
is not when you talk to her, maybe she is more amicable), very big, very strong,
very severe. She frightens. She speaks with a very loud voice and makes one
feel very little. She is okay when you ask her a question. I go and ask her
when I don't understand something, but for a CS, no; she really frightens
me. Actually, I prefer to talk to someone who speaks Spanish. I don't feel
secure with foreigners.... She was polite, within her own personality....
I am not going to follow all the pieces of advice she gave me. I like when
people suggests things. Any suggestion is good, but I always decide
what is convenient for me".

In short, as the reader can see, the protocol analysis confirmed what the other
sources of data showed: there is a great divergence between the interlocutors of a
counselling session. It is understandable why both parties try to avoid participating in such
events.

3.3.2 Learning strategies

Parallel to the European School research dealing with the concepts of autonomy and
learning-to-learn, there was another trend of investigation that specifically focused on
learning strategies. According to Crabbe (1993), this trend started with the studies on the
good language learner (Naiman et al; 1978). The implications of this research were reflected
on an emphasis on learning strategies, and the promotion, within the language classroom, of
those that were identified as basic by the good language learners. Based on this approach,
some researchers have seen a clear relationship between learning strategies and autonomy
(Dickinson; 1993, Little and Singleton; 1990 and Wenden; 1987b, and 1991).

Learning strategies have been defined in several ways. For O'Malley and Chamot, who have carried out a series of investigations in this field, learning strategies are "special *thoughts or behaviours* that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (my italics)(1990,1). For Wenden (1987a,6), however, learning strategies are not thoughts or behaviours but *techniques* "actually used to manipulate the incoming information and, later, to retrieve what has been stored" (ibid). She completes her definition with 6 characteristics of learning strategies:

1) specific actions or techniques
2) observable
3) problem-oriented
4) contribute directly or indirectly to learning
5) consciously deployed (although some can become automatized)
6) amenable to change...they are part of our mental software (ibid,7)

In the same book, Rubin (1987) lists several assumptions on learning strategies. Three of them are relevant to the definition of the concept: "the learning process includes both explicit and implicit knowledge...consciousness raising is not incidental in learning ...(and) teachers can promote strategy use" (15). Calling them "study tactics", Cotterall also believes that learning strategies are "amenable to change"

Approach to studying is likely to vary between individuals. It will be influenced by a range of cognitive and affective variables and is less likely to be amenable to change than study tactics employed with specific learning tasks (1995,203)

To make things more complex, elsewhere Narcy differentiates between techniques and strategies, stating that strategies are *unconscious* factors the learners use in order to learn, while techniques are *conscious* ways to process and learn information (Narcy;1990,90). On the opposite side, Little (in Huttunen 1996,87) calls strategies "tools of intentional planning" and Little and Singleton (1990), in the same line, attribute a conscious element in strategies, which they generically identify as "(the) approach to the learning task":

It is essential to distinguish between the language learner's cognitive style, of which he may be largely unconscious and his approach to the learning task, which is at least internally conscious and may well be in conflict with the cognitive requirements of the learning task (11).

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I believe that all of these differences are basically valid although in some cases they contradict each other. The problem is that learning strategies are not a straightforward phenomenon that can be dealt with a concrete definition but a complex characteristic of learning which calls for a more flexible treatment. What I am thinking of is a definition that implies continuums and degrees, and depict all the angles of the matter.

First of all, learning strategies differentiate from other types of strategies in their objective, which is *learning*. Although learning strategies are basically the same across areas, Ellis has specified their role in second language learning, According to him, the objective of learning strategies includes both the "attempts to master new linguistic and sociolinguistic information about a target language" (Ellis;1994,530) and the "attempts to become skilled listeners, speakers, readers and writers" (ibid.). Therefore, learning strategies help to develop linguistic knowledge and linguistic skills and, hence, they "influence the rate of acquisition and the ultimate level of achievement" (ibid.).

Second, learning strategies show certain degree of consciousness, which calls for a declarative/procedural knowledge cline. An important characteristic of learning strategies is that they are "conscious or potentially conscious" so the attempts that they enhance are "deliberate" (ibid,37). This fact makes some authors believe that learning strategies occur in the cognitive stage, that is to say, in fields of declarative knowledge. However, for others, such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990,191), learning strategies exist in both declarative and procedural knowledge with different degrees of consciousness. As I see it, these two views rather than being opposite, are complementary, since the human mind is capable of going in both directions, from declarative to procedural knowledge and vice versa. Therefore, with a conscious effort, procedural knowledge can become explicit, that is to say, conscious, deliberate, declarative.

A third aspect of the definition of learning strategies is their potential learnability, a feature that has caused strong discussion. The characterisation of declarative knowledge as something conscious, deliberate and explicit gives a good foundation for the instruction of learning strategies, which can be taught and understood at this level and then "become proceduralized with practice", according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990,85). These researchers (1990,172 and ss) have focused on the instruction of learning strategies and their

conclusions are clear. For them, "strategies can be taught", and "academic language learning is more effective with learning strategies". Bialystok who also believes in the instruction of learning strategies states that the teaching of learning strategies is only possible if it gives the students the opportunity to "analyse and control their linguistic system" (1990,143), something that O'Malley and Chamot's studies accomplished. However, Little (1995) still thinks that "the extent to which learning strategies are teachable and learning styles are directly modifiable remains an open question" (177). With the intention to encourage a realistic but still positive view on this issue, Chamot and Rubin say that learning strategies are not a "magic formula" but they state that

> still the evidence...leads us to feel confident that such instruction, properly carried
> out, can positively assist language learners to become more actively engaged in
> their own learning processes, thus taking on greater responsibility for learning.
> (Chamot and Rubin, 1994, 774)

A very sensible comment is found in Horwitz (1987), who does not refer to the learning strategies but to the *use* of them: "productive use of learning strategies...is an *acquired skill*" (my italics) (120), a comment which stresses the importance of instruction.

Fourth, learning strategies involve cognitive work (they are thoughts), which sometimes can lead to overt behaviour. Hence, some of them have observable outcomes, which does not mean that the strategies themselves are visible. From the point of view of the researcher, this fact is very important for she has to develop methodological devices for the indirect study of learning strategies.

To sum up, research on the area states that 1) second language learning strategies can be defined as strategies that are carried out in order to learn knowledge and skills, 2) that their use, at the beginning is conscious but, eventually, they become procedural knowledge, which means that the user is not aware of using them, 3) that learning strategies can be learned (and, under the appropriate conditions, taught) and 4) that they involve cognitive processes, hence they cannot be equated with behaviour, which also means that they are not directly observable.

Now that I have defined learning strategies, I will say something about the way they have been classified. There are many ways to classify learning strategies but most of the studies on this issue agree on the existence of three main categories[1]: cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective (see Fig. 3.2).

Learning
Strategies

Metacognitive

Planning

Monitoring

Evaluating

Cognitive

Social/affective
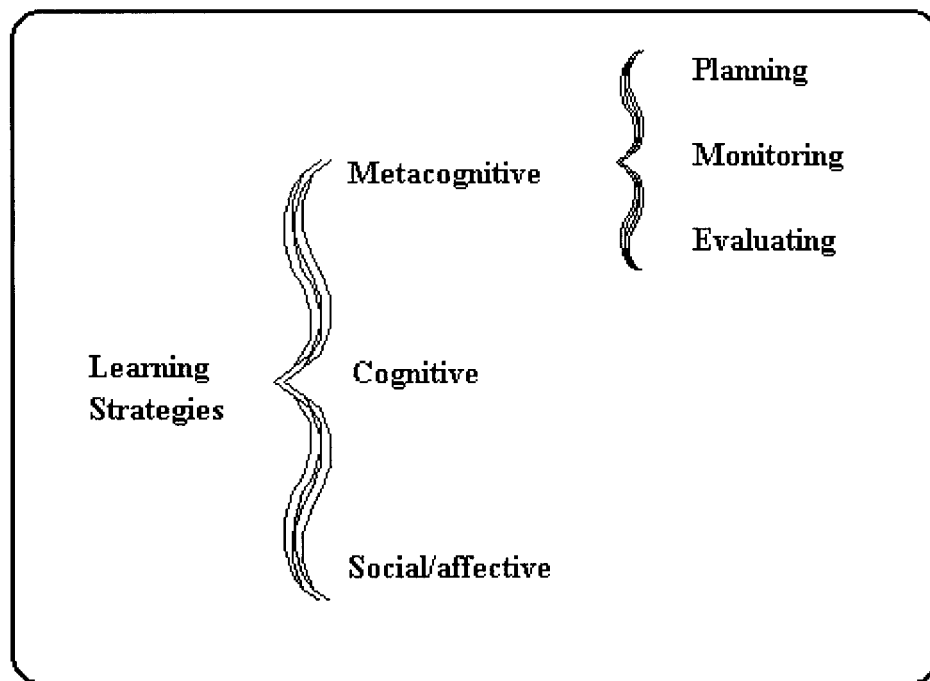
Fig. 3.2 Metacognitive strategies as learning strategies

While much research has been done on cognitive strategies, much less has been done about metacognitive strategies. In fact the few interested people within the field of applied linguistics are mostly those who are trying to find the connection between autonomy and learning strategies. The reason is their importance in the self-direction of learning:

> Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without
> direction and ability to review their progress, accomplishments, and future learning
> directions (O'Malley et al in Rubin; 1987,23).

However, metacognition is not a feature only found in self-direction. According to Little (1996c), there are certain metaprocesses, called "intersubjective" and "metalinguistic awareness" that

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are a prerequisite both of first language acquisition and of early
socialization and acculturation (208)

3.3.2.1 Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies have been identified in several ways. Wenden uses the term

self-management strategies and Holec refers to *skills of self-directed learning.* O'Malley and

Chamot defined metacognitive strategies as learning strategies that

> are higher order skills (and) may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the
> success of a learning activity (and) are applicable to a variety   of learning tasks.
> (1990,44)

Metacognitive strategies are higher order skills in the sense that they are processes that have

control over other cognitive processes (Crookes;1989,367), that is to say, they are strategies

to develop strategies. Skehan gives a very straightforward definition of them:

> They are *cognitive* because of the nature of the operations that they involve
> and *meta* since there can be a self-awareness built in their operation.
> (1995,93)

Metacognitive strategies, according to Chamot (1987,72) and Wenden (1991,25) are

not specific to particular tasks but they can "be applied to virtually all types of learning

tasks"(ibid). This is the main difference between these and cognitive tasks, which are task-

specific.

Metacognitive strategies have also been divided into three subgroups: *planning,*

monitoring and *evaluating strategies.* According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990,44), the

selection of the metacognitive strategy is related to the type of task that the learner is

carrying out. However, I explain the difference between the three types in terms of time. In a

natural way, it is possible to divide the process of carrying out a task into three phases:

before, during and *after.* These three phases correspond to planning, monitoring and

evaluation. In other words, planning means preparing oneself for a learning task, monitoring

is checking one's own performance while doing a learning task and evaluating consists of

checking performance once the task is over (ibid, 119). As I see it, Wenden's term "self-

regulation" (1991,106) is perfect to label the metacognitive process that implies the use of

the three types of strategies. However, Wenden believes that self-management strategies can be taught separately, something I do not agree with. She advises the reader: "Decide which of the self-management strategies you will first train them to use" (1991,114). First, I do not think that the teacher can decide on the order of metacognitive strategies because they are a framework of three elements that interrelate in a very complex way. Second, the learner is the one that needs to decide which strategy to use, according to her stage in the learning task.

3.3.2.2 Metacognitive knowledge

Some writers define metacognitive strategies as knowledge, regulation or control (Rubin;1987,23 and O'Malley & Chamot;1990,105). I prefer to separate out the 'knowledge' element in order to be able to relate the concept to other researcher's schemes. If we talk about metacognitive knowledge *and* metacognitive strategies it is clear then, that Holec and O'Malley & Chamot are identifying the same needs, though the latter use more specialised terms. The operationalization of knowledge of Holec (see p. 22), which is the process that develops skills from acquired knowledge, is confirmed by O'Malley and Chamot who state that "strategies began as declarative knowledge that become proceduralised with practice" (1990,85).

John Flavell defines metacognitive knowledge as

> that segment of your stored world knowledge that has to do with people as cognitive creatures, and with their diverse cognitive tasks, goals, actions and experiences (1979,906)

It is difficult, from this definition to decide what is and what is not metacognitive knowledge. And the problem is not the definition itself but the very nature of the process we are dealing with: *learning.* In fact, when one stops to think about it, everything can, in a given moment, affect, either positively or negatively, the process of learning. That is the reason why the definition of metacognitive knowledge needs to be so broad. In order to make things more manageable, some researchers have distinguished different types of metacognitive knowledge. Flavell (1979) divides it into three kinds: *person, task* and *strategy* knowledge. The first refers to cognitive and affective beliefs that are related the cognitive aspect of human beings. Within this category Flavell distinguishes three concepts:

intraindividual differences, interindividual differences and universals of cognition. Task, the second type of metacognitive knowledge consists of the nature of the information to be cognitively processed and of the task that this cognitive work involves. In the case of language learning, it involves the concept of language as a system and the task of learning the language. The third element, strategy, is related to the knowledge that we have, as cognitive beings, about the way we carry out the cognitive task, which in this case is learning a language. Basically, it refers to the learning strategies involved and the rationale for choosing them (Cotterall; 1995, 201).

According to Brown (1987,69), the difference between person, task and strategy is that the first two refer to beliefs about *knowledge of cognition* while the third implies beliefs about *regulation of cognition*. This difference allows us to make a link with the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge. In this way it can be said that person and task refer to metacognition about declarative knowledge while strategy implies metacognition about procedural knowledge.

Fig. 3.3 is a visual explanation of the way I see the interaction between cognitive strategies, metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies in relation to the learning task. The inner shadowed circle corresponds to the task. This is the only part of the diagram that represents *observable behaviour.* Everything else is in the learners' mind, hence *invisible* to the researcher. The next two circles symbolise the learning strategies, with the metacognitive strategies at a higher level. The outer, dark, irregular layer corresponds to all those elements that affect learning and that cluster together forming the metacognitive knowledge. The arrows show the way the outer circles affect and control the inner ones.

It is perhaps logical to find that the same discussion about the instruction of learning strategies should exist also for metacognitive strategies. While some people are completely against the instruction of strategies (Kellerman;1991,158), others strongly believe that metacognitive strategies can be taught. (Chamot and Rubin;1994, O'Malley and Chamot;1990). In Clemente (1996b), I carried out empirical research dealing with the acquisition of metacognitive strategies. I worked with 6 learners of a self-access centre and taught them metacognitive knowledge related to language and language acquisition (variability, interlanguage, fluency, accuracy, complexity, etc) and learning (metacognitive

strategies). After the instruction stage they practised planning, monitoring and evaluating. The results of the research showed that subjects were able to understand the information they received and start on their way to proceduralising it in order to develop metacognitive strategies (34). This led me to support O'Malley and Chamot's statement that learners are able to turn metacognitive knowledge into metacognitive strategies.
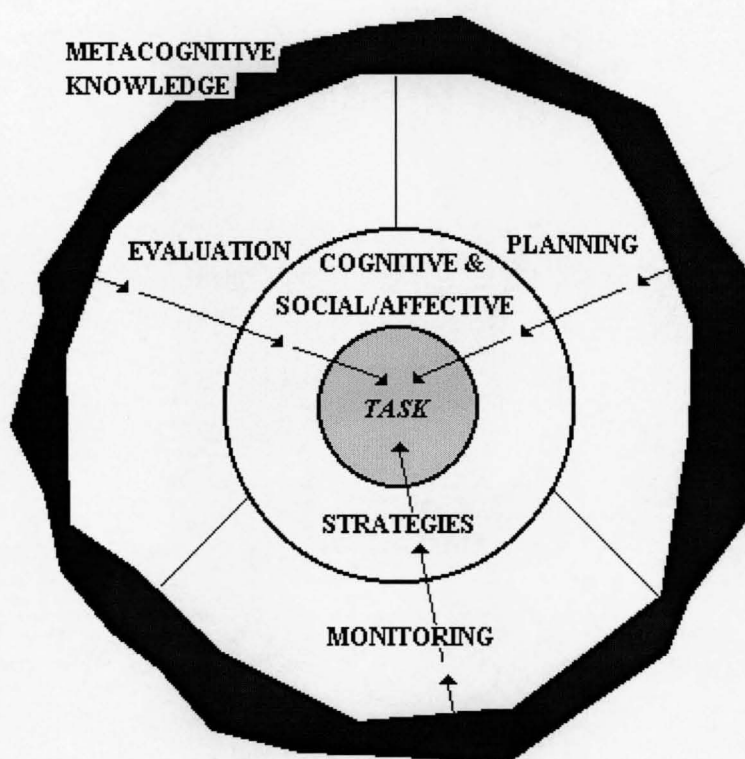
Fig. 3.3 Metacognitive knowledge and strategies scheme

3.3.2.3 Turning metacognitive knowledge into metacognitive strategies

However, the acquisition of metacognitive strategies is only possible under certain specific conditions. Brown (1983, quoted by Wenden;1987c,159) mentions four specific factors: *explicitness of purpose, content, evaluation and integration.*

Explicitness of purpose refers to the fact that instruction on metacognitive strategies should be informed. Students are "not only instructed in the use of the strategy but also in the need for it and its anticipated effects...together with the rationale to learn it" (Wenden, ibid,160). For O'Malley and Chamot (1990), this is *direct* instruction of strategies which

entails the actual explanation of the strategy to be taught and its goal. The purpose of this is to make the student aware of the strategy itself. Dickinson (1993) has been working on a framework to "invite the learners to pay attention to (metacognitive strategies) while experiencing a lesson" (334).

The *content* factor calls for the need of a specific content in the instruction of metacognitive strategies. This content is necessarily a corresponding cognitive strategy. According to Wenden, the isolated instruction of metacognitive strategies "will not lead to learning" (ibid).

Evaluation is a crucial element in the instruction of metacognitive strategies, which may be evaluated according to different factors. Wenden (1987c,159) mentions three: the improvement of the task involved, the maintenance of the behaviour that implies the use of the strategy and the transfer of the strategy to different contexts, or different tasks, which, according to O'Malley may be extremely sensitive (1987,143). Dickinson (1987), from a different perspective states three criteria for the evaluation of strategies, which for him, have to be carried out by learners themselves:

- Does the strategy work? Does it help the learner to meet his objective?
- What does the user feels about using the strategy? Is he happy, unhappy using it?
- How vital is the learning objective anyway? something that can be ignored? (204)

The *integration* factor refers to the fact that the instruction of strategies in a learning to learn programme is integrated into the language learning course. Wenden states that "the more integrated the learner training the more effective it should be" (ibid) and calls for the consideration of three factors: range and specificity of concepts and tasks, autonomy of application in or outside a classroom and learner needs in regards to language, time, objectives, etc. (1987c,166).

To these four elements I would add two more: the *willingness* of the learners and the *appropriacy* of the instruction. The former refers to the motivation of the learners to learn in a self-directed way. It is not enough that they are informed that they are going to learn metacognitive strategies; they have to be asked if they are willing to do so. Students enrolled in a language course may not be as willing as users of a self-access centre which in itself

"represents an excellent position to promote the learner centred philosophy" (Jones;1995,228)[2]. The latter calls for a type of instruction that goes along with the philosophy that strategy-learning implies: autonomy in learning. Learners need "discourse space and initiative" (Little and Singleton;1990,17), "support for cooperation and autonomy, and partnership behaviour" (Huttunen,1996,88). As regards metacognitive strategies, for instance, the instruction needs to be of a descriptive rather than a prescriptive nature, avoiding the "you should" type statements. In addition, the learners need to feel free to make their own decisions and try things out. On this topic, I have to say that I do not agree with one of O'Malley and Chamot's suggestions about teaching strategies (1990,200 and Chamot and O'Malley,1994,385). According to them

> after naming and describing the strategy to be taught, the
> teacher then models the strategy by actually performing a task and
> thinking aloud about the mental processes comprising the strategy.
>
> (1990,200)

To my mind, the "modelling" of strategies goes against my understanding that every student has to find his/her own way to deal with learning strategies. As I see it, modelling strategies turns instruction into a very prescriptive exercise.

Taking this point into consideration, it is understandable why there have been some researchers that report failure in teaching metacognitive strategies (O'Malley and Chamot; 1990, 161, Bialystok; 1990, 142, Ellis; 1994, 557, Chamot and Rubin; 1994, 778) For almost all of them the problem was that the learners were not interested in self-directed learning. They just wanted information about the target language. In some cases, the problem also was that the training was "blind" in the sense that it was not explicit for the learners the purpose of the instruction (Wenden;1987c,159). There has been no report on the mode of instruction with relation to the learning of metacognitive strategies, which, to me, shows more a lack on focus on this aspect rather than showing its unproblematic nature.

3.3.3 Learning to learn

In Chapter 2 (p. 20), I discussed the concept *learning to learn*. In the following paragraphs I will make a connection with that discussion by putting forward my own research and conclusions.

So far, I stated that there are two different stages that have been identified in the process of self-directed learning, *learning to learn,* or the preparation of decisions and the *learning* itself, or, as Holec says, the decision making. However, that knowledge was not enough to improve our learning-to-learn programme in the SAC Oaxaca. As I stated before, the results of it were not very successful. As I saw it, we needed to take into consideration the information I just mentioned in the last section, that is, the difference between metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies and their relationship to the process of learning. Hence, I worked in a framework for learner awareness that took into account both, metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies (Clemente, 1995b). It was a purely theoretical reflection of how I depicted this first stage in the form of a learning-to-learn framework. Afterwards, I carried out empirical research (Clemente, 1996b) and I changed some things, although the rationale for the framework remained essentially the same. Fig. 3.4 shows the way I depicted the two stages. The stage of learning is represented by the shaded area inside the triangle. The first stage, the learning to learn, consists of the six rectangles that form a coherent process of both, awareness (self-awareness or assisted-awareness) and practice. Metacognitive knowledge refers to the former and metacognitive activities refer to the latter. There is a difference between the rectangles with dotted lines and the ones jointed to the angles of the triangle. Although the 'knowledge' pieces of the process are consider to be essential for the development of the process, the 'activities' elements are the ones that act more directly upon the learning process. The main purpose of the knowledge aspect consisted on raising awareness of the rationale that underlies one's own particular way of learning in terms of person, task and strategic knowledge (see discussion on metacognitive knowledge above). In other words, this aspect of the learning-to-learn framework deals with all those values and beliefs about oneself as a language

learner, the beliefs about language and language learning and the beliefs about the procedures to carry out learning processes. The difference between the rectangles (1), (2) and (3) suggests a possible sequence of contents. Thus, the content of metacognitive knowledge (1) may refer to issues of person knowledge; the content of (2) may deal with task knowledge and finally, (3) can involve awareness on strategic knowledge. These awareness stages may require the inclusion of some information about language in general, language and culture, the target language, descriptive metalanguage, theory(ies) of language learning, and specifically information on metacognitive strategies.
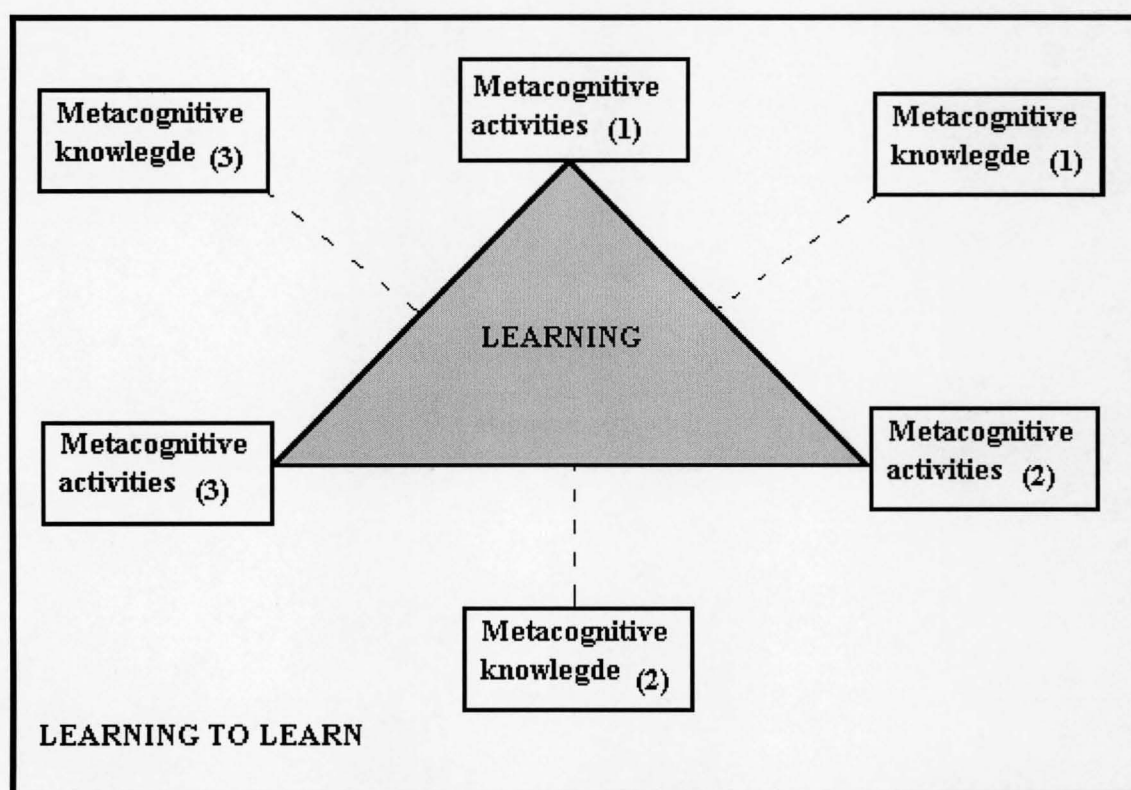
Fig. 3.4 Learning and learning to learn, an integrated approach

Metacognitive activities refer to learning activities. They basically consist of planning, monitoring and evaluation, but the numbers do not correspond to each one of them. Experience has taught me that they neither occur in this order nor can they be separated from the others. In fact, my purpose for including three moments of metacognitive activities is to be able to explain the strong interrelation between the two kinds of elements,

i.e. knowledge and activities, what Wenden has identified as "integrated instruction" (1987c,161).

3.3.4 Teacher education

Another area that I wanted to revise is that of teacher education for, at that time, one of my main concerns was that I did not feel competent to carry out my job. Being a language teacher was very different from being a counsellor and it implied different things, many of which I seemed not to be aware of. To study this specific area I gathered data through a long open-ended questionnaire to the teachers, and through meetings and personal conversations with most of them. I also took into consideration Freeman's scheme for teacher education (1989,30). According to him, teacher education should integrate four elements: knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness.

Although the national project included training schemes that provided us with information about different aspects of self-learning issues (see Fig. 2.4), it was not enough to be prepared to assist independent learners. As I see it, a SAC counsellor needs, among other things, to know the rationale of needs analysis, to have a deep knowledge of learning processes, styles and strategies and to be able to uncover and analyse them from two different perspectives: the learners and the materials. A counsellor also needs to develop metaskills that enable her to transmit some of her own teaching skills for the learners to turn themselves into their own teachers. I believe that, to a certain extent, the counsellor has to be able to educate the learner in the same way an educator educates the teacher in order to manage her own teaching. As the reader can see it is not enough to have a language teaching background and some information about the change of roles.

Apart from the knowledge and skills, there are the teachers' attitudes, which can be included into those

more complex aspects of teaching categories in which it is
much more difficult to train teachers but which are essential to
the theory of teaching (Richards; 1990,8)

The data I collected allowed me to describe the SAC counsellor's attitudes towards themselves as counsellors, towards the SAC learners and towards the SAC project. In

general, SAC counsellors think that it is better to teach in the ways they were taught. This underlies the idea that "if something worked for me, the same thing will work for my students". Actually this is not a feature unique to SAC counsellors. Most teachers, consciously or unconsciously, put into practice what they were exposed to when they were students. In fact, this is not a problem; on the contrary, it reaffirms the values of a specific learning culture. The problem in the SAC is that none of the teachers learnt in a self-directed way, so they do not believe in learning in that way. Self-direction is not part of their learning culture. In the same way, to change their behaviour would mean a form of denial of the validity they attribute to their past as teachers. It may seem to them that what they have been doing and improving in years of constant practice is not valid any more. What is more, they have been asked not only to change their ways of doing but also their ways of being: in the SAC, they were told that they were not going to be teachers any more. To cope with this clear mismatch between old and new perceptions, most SAC counsellors adopted the new perspective with the mere purpose of going with the trend (for social acceptance) but rejecting the rationale behind it.

Furthermore, most SAC counsellors think that their idea of a "good student" (self-motivated, risk-taker, organised, independent and assertive) does not correspond to the Mexican students. According to them (and they may be right), SAC learners want a teacher-centred approached class, where the teacher is in control and whose role is to be a passer on of knowledge and a provider of models to follow. In this sense, they think that the most appropriate learning situation for Mexican students is to study in a group and with a teacher. "We get the wrong students", as one counsellor put it.

As regards innovation, SAC counsellors think that the SAC project was an imposition because they were not consulted to make the decision. In this regard, what I thought a "desirable, effective and in line with the self-interest of the organisation concerned" (White;1988,128) (that is, the Language Centre) actually was a clear imposition of an outsider through a power-coercive strategy. In Chapter 2, the reader may remember certain details that I misunderstood (the willingness of teachers) or did not understand at all (the intention of that aggressive question from one of the teachers). Not having been taken into account reinforced their feeling that SAC rationale went against some of their principles. Moreover, some stages in the implementation of the SAC increased their work, and what is more important, created a sense of accountability. Innovation involves

evaluation and that means that, as White says, "there is some obligation on those involved to demonstrate that improvement has in fact occurred" (1988,115).

In short, SAC counsellors' position is difficult and intricate. In my role of counsellor, I can say that we do not know our subject matter, our counselling skills are scanty and our past as students and as experienced teachers usually acts against us and raise negative attitudes. Thus, we developed a disbelief in principles, a distrust of students, a rejection of innovation and a competence anxiety that makes our everyday work hard to deal with.

3.4 AUTONOMY 2

In Chapter 2, I dealt with the definition of the concept autonomy from a theoretical perspective. However, the practical experience on the matter made me consider the term from other perspectives.

According to some writers, autonomy as an educational approach, has turned into a cliché, and the term has been used so widely that it became "almost meaningless" (King; 1994, i), sometimes even used "as a synonym for 'directionless'" (ibid). Comments like this made me think that we, in the SAC Oaxaca, were not the only ones that were experiencing the "pseudo-autonomy" phenomenon.

In different ways, several writers dealt with the same problem. Some, for instance, talked about the taken-for-granted relationship between self-access and self-learning, and warned about this false impression of learner autonomy. According to Sheerin, "Self-access is by no means synonymous with 'learners autonomy' or 'learner independence' (1991,143). Benson also stated that self-access did not necessarily mean self-learning: "it does not necessarily follow, however, that by simply using a self-access centre on their own, students will be able to direct their own learning" (1995, 4).

Others stressed the role of the presence (or absence) of the teacher in self-direction. According to Holec, "the extent to which a teacher is physically present is not a good standard by which to judge the extent to which learning is self-directed" (1980,4).

As I said before, eventually I became aware of the fact that our work in the SAC was not resulting in any autonomous learning. After two months of working there, most students showed a great sense of directionless and disappointment. And we could not find the way to

help them. In few words, things were developing very differently from what we had expected. It seemed to me that I needed to know more about autonomy and in what conditions it was achieved.

In Chapter 2 (p. 24), it was stated that autonomy was the ability to take charge of one's own learning. In different words but along the same lines, many researchers have also defined autonomy emphasising the necessity of creating an appropriate internal state that allows the individual to take control of her own learning. Thus, Dickinson defines autonomy as "an attitude to language learning" (1993,330) and also states that there are five abilities (ability to identify contents, formulate objectives, implement strategies, monitor them and self-evaluate) which autonomous learners need to acquire. The *right attitude* Dickinson talks about plays the same role of Holec's awareness: the feasibility of self-directed learning. Elsewhere, Dickinson relates the two elements, attitude and ability, in one sentence and says that successful learning autonomy is "a combination of attitudes to learning and learning skills" (1994,39), where the attitude is "a favourable attitude towards independence in learning" and the ability is "learning skills". He also adds a third component: motivation. For other authors, this component is considered part of the right attitude towards learning in general, towards autonomous learning, towards language learning, and towards the target language. Cotterall, for instance, talks about "the ability to use a set of tactics for taking control" (1995,195) but refers to the right attitude when she adds that part of the reason for using these tactics in different degrees is the result of "differences in learner beliefs about language learners". In this sense, learner's beliefs account for the attitude that make possible the ability to self-learn. Wenden's comment on this topic is very clear:

> Without an internal change in consciousness to accompany expertise in the use of self-instructional techniques, true autonomy is not achieved. (1991,49)

In short, autonomy seems to be made up of two main elements. On the one hand, there are attitudes, beliefs, awareness, all of them playing an essential role in autonomous learning for they create this internal context that enables self-learning to take place. On the other hand researchers talk about abilities, skills, techniques, or tactics. To use Holec's terms, the former belongs to the *psychological* aspect of autonomy whereas the latter make up the *methodological* side of it (1980). In Little's terms

learner autonomy has both affective/motivational and metacognitive dimensions.
It presupposes a positive attitude to the purpose, content and process of learning
on the one hand and well-developed metacognitive skills on the other. (1996c, 204)

3.4.5.1 Autonomy and authority

The definition of autonomy implies a specific learner's role. In fact, I have already mentioned the way Holec sees the learner as a *manager*. But, what is the role of the teacher in a self-directed learning situation? For some people, the adoption of autonomy as a goal leads to disappearance of the teacher. In fact, the learner's autonomy and teacher's authority seem to be in clear opposition. The more learning elements the learners manages, the less the teacher has control over the learning situation. I myself think that this is a misconception and I will try to clarify it.

The concept *teacher* has been analysed under different perspectives. The roles that the profession implies are several (Wright, 1990,). Moreover, there is the status factor (Gremmo et al, 1985;39) that also adds subtle nuances to the profession, always responding to particular cultural contexts. However, no matter what the context is, the teacher's role is always related to the concept of authority.

According to Widdowson (1990,189) there are two kinds of authority the teacher can exercise. One is interactional and the other is transactional authority. The interactional element of the teacher's role focuses on the social relationship between her and her student. Interactional authority, hence, refers to the authority the teacher deploys when she is aware of the social role that the status of her profession confers to her and her *authoritarian* position in relation to her student. Her attitude is:

'I am the teacher. By the authority vested in me I have the right to ask you to behave
in a certain way, whether you like it or not. And you have the obligation to obey'
(ibid,188).

The best word for describing this asymmetrical relationship is *power*, a factor the teacher is very aware of.

Transactional authority, on the other hand, refers to the transaction of information that underlies any pedagogical situation. This type of authority is exercised by means of the expertise the teacher deploys when teaching, so the transactional authority that a teacher

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deploys depends on her professional qualifications. Her posture is

'Do this because I am the teacher and I know what's the best for you' (ibid)

The teacher/student dyad is still asymmetrical but the difference between teacher and student is based on the *knowledge* the teacher is willing to transmit to the student. In this way, the teacher is *authoritative* rather than authoritarian.

Thus, exercising authority can mean two different things: either being powerful or being knowledgeable. This distinction results in four different pedagogical situations (see Fig 3.5).
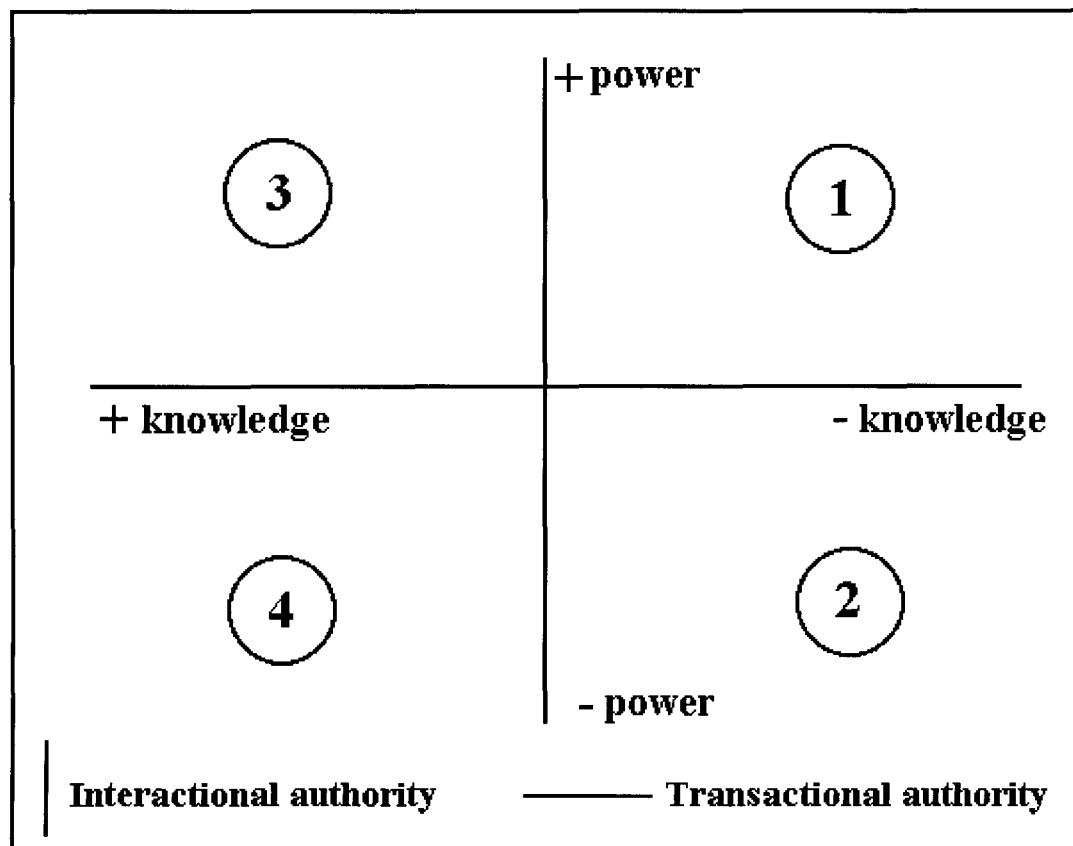
Fig. 3.5 Relationship between interactional and transactional authority

1) The upper right corner shows a completely authoritarian teacher leading the teacher/student relationship. The absence of knowledge refers to a teacher that shows no sense of learning processes or pedagogy and makes the power element the only driving force. The lack of respect for the learner results in the deployment of the teacher's powerful

status. Although it seems to be a very extreme case, in reality it happens very often, since it has been observed that when the teacher feels weak in her knowledge, she tries to compensate by adding more power to her relationship with students.

2) The lower right corner shows the extreme situation of lack of power and knowledge; the teacher has abdicated both, interactional and transactional authority. This situation results in the complete absence of control over the social and the pedagogical aspects of the teaching/learning situation.

It is obvious that the right side of the diagram has little if anything to do with education. By definition, the lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher makes her incapable of teaching. Let's consider now the left side of Fig. 3.5.

3) The upper left corner shows the presence of both knowledge and power. This means that the teacher deploys authority in both senses; she is authoritarian and authoritative at the same time. This situation can be described by a teacher-centred approach. Although nowadays this type of approach has been highly criticised, it results in positive outcomes for a certain type of learners.

4) The lower left corner represents a learning situation characterised by the presence of knowledge and the absence of power. It clearly refers to a learner-centred approach, where the teacher exercises her authority by creating the best conditions for learning. This also results in a mutual respect in which both participants acknowledge each other's transactional authority. Apparently, this seems to be the best situation for a SAC environment since self-directed learners are free to make decisions at different levels (Holec, 1980, and 1987) but are guided by the authoritative expertise of the SAC counsellor.

However, as I see it, *both* sections on the left side (upper and lower) show educative potential for self-direction. When discussing pedagogical issues, one should consider the interactional nature of the process. In this case, I strongly believe that pedagogical success depends on the degree of convergence of roles between participants. It is important to take into account that whenever students' expectations are different from those of their teachers about the degree of interactional authority deployed (if they want a less dominant teacher, if they would prefer a teacher-like counsellor in the SAC, and so on) a very serious

pedagogical problem arises.

This framework may serve as a basis to explain the causes underlying the high percentage of attrition in SAC Oaxaca. Many ex-students of SAC have expressed that, in spite of their high motivation when they started working in the SAC, they soon found themselves, consciously or unconsciously, lost. I wonder if this is not the same situation depicted in position 2 of Fig. 3.5 (the lower right corner). Part of the answer could be that the learners had neither the authoritarian figure of the teacher to oblige them to study (a situation to which they are very used) nor the authoritative figure of the counsellor to help them to manage their own study programmes. It is a fact that our experiences in SAC Oaxaca cannot be equated to the situation represented in number 4, where the learners are supposed to expect and find the expert and knowledgeable advice of the counsellor to help and guide them but do not expect the authoritarian figure of the teacher. Although some authors have suggested that learners do fine without the authoritarian figure of a teacher, for example in learner-centred approaches, (see Tudor:1996) it is still undeniable that the help of an authoritative person is cardinal for giving meaningful structure to the pedagogical situation. As Widdowson has stated,

> Language learners need some given conceptual framework within which to operate
> if their activities are to have any point. The central task of pedagogy is to find the
> framework which is most effective in learning...a framework of some kind, some
> sets of bearings to enable learners to find their way. (1990,194)

As the reader can see, two essential concepts in education have converged here: learner autonomy and teacher authority. As I have stated above, they are neither contrary nor mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the more the teacher exercises her transactional authority, the more the learner can achieve a state of complete autonomy. As I see it, the more the SAC student is helped, guided and taught by the counsellor on the two aspects mentioned earlier (learning to learn and learning the language) the more she can manage her processes and make decisions about her own way of learning. However, all of this depends, as I mentioned above, on two things: first, a convergence of roles, which refers to a convergence of beliefs and values, and second, the interaction between counsellor and learner. As I see it, it is obvious that these two issues have the further implication that autonomy is not independence, but *interdependence* (Voller;1997, 109) I will delve into this

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matter in later chapters.

The purpose of this chapter has been to give the reader a coherent and complete account of the knowledge and experience I have acquired during the four years I have worked with the concept of self-direction. I also wanted to explain the way my change of roles and my increasing awareness helped me to go through this transitional stage. I think that I achieved this purpose. However, there are still several aspects of self-direction I still have to deal with. I think that I need to delve a little more in the theory of self-directed learning in order to make sense. This is the purpose of the following chapter.

NOTES:

1) However, the following discussion is not going to cover all the types of learning strategies. For the purposes of this study, I am going to focus on metacognitive strategies (For a full account of strategies used by second language learners see O'Malley and Chamot (1990) Chapter 5)

2) This aspect is included by Wenden (1987,166) in the evaluation factor, but I think that its relevance calls for the addition of another category.

4. AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE SENSE

In the previous chapters, I have described the process of understanding I have been through since the project of Self-Access Centres in Mexico was started in 1992. The reader will have noticed the way I started seeing things in a different way when I gained some experience working in my role as a SAC counsellor and a researcher. As I see it, now, I feel more assertive and confident about certain things. I can positively affirm that I have found an answer (of all the possible answers) for some of several questions I had (I still have too many). However, at this moment I strongly feel that I need to make sense of the knowledge I have acquired. The purpose of the present chapter, then, is to try to make sense in three different ways. First, I will show the reader the way I do not agree with some aspects of the literature in this area. I will only deal with one specific book (Wenden's *Learner strategies for learner autonomy)* for the purpose of this study is not an exhaustive critical review of the literature. I only want to provide the reader with an example of some problems when writing about learning autonomy. Second, I will try to fill a gap in the theoretical foundation of self-directed language learning. There is the need of a cognitive model that help us to understand the way self-directed learners learn. Third, in the section "Autonomy 3", I will complete my definition of autonomy considering three different dimensions of it.

4.1 BEING CRITICAL

Teaching autonomy, if it is teachable, has become a very fashionable educative goal

(Macaro; 1997,167), and, as many people see it, a very justifiable one in many different ways (Tait & Knight;1996,1). However I would add that teaching autonomy is also a very demanding task. Above all because the teacher has to practice what she preaches.

So far I have been referring to all sort of research dealing with autonomy and self-directed learning in second or foreign language in order to give a broad overview of the discussions of the areas related to the goals of the present study. However there are some sources that fail to fully reflect the philosophy of autonomy they are trying to convey. A good example of this problem is the book *Learner strategies for learner autonomy* by Anita Wenden (1991)[1]. As an example of a general problem, I would like to look into its content and discuss it.

Before starting, let me stress the fact that I consider this book to be a very good contribution to the field. I have already referred to it and quoted from it several times in the two previous chapters. As I see it, this book is a good demonstration of how theory and practice can be combined. Specifically, I like the way Wenden analyses the theory about metacognitive knowledge and strategies and from that develops a framework to develop autonomy.

However, the book suffers from one major flaw: its inconsistency. Although the rationale of the book is autonomy there are several ways in which it goes against this concept. Let me mention what I consider the most problematic:

First, some of the activities proposed for the learner do not promote autonomy at all. Autonomy, as I understand it, means critical thinking. However, there are proposals of tasks and activities that are completely mechanical. A good example of this is the reading exercise which Wenden includes for the text about the good language learner. After having reading the text "A definition of a good language learner", the learner has to complete the comprehension guide. The following is the last paragraph of the text and the last exercise of the guide:

TEXT: .
...They learn to laugh at their mistakes; they know that it will take a long
time and that it can get very boring. They learn to work with their feelings.

The reader will have noticed that filling the gaps is just a matter of copying exactly from the text, which is reproduced almost intact. I doubt that this type of activity promotes critical reading in learners.

Second, the way Wenden draws on the research about the good language learner is, I think, inappropriate, at least for certain type of students. Let me explain myself. After providing the learner with the characteristics of the GLL (see Appendix 2) and the comprehension exercise I referred to in the last paragraph, she gives the following instructions:

Procedures
(a) Students compare themselves with the good language learner,
i.e. are they very different? To what extent are they autonomous? (122)

If I, as learner, were using this book and compared myself (and my situation) as a second language learner with the statements about the GLL, my assumptions would be that in order to be a successful language learner I need to travel abroad, have money to hire tutors, find the time to learn three or four languages, spend the whole day learning and practising the target language, etc, etc. And I would certainly be discouraged! In the context I teach, the vast majority of my students do not travel abroad, go to the university to learn a language because it is the cheapest place, and work and study at the same time. For them, then, being a good language learner is not a matter of cognitive or affective strategies but a matter of socio-economic opportunities.

The limitations of the GLL study have been often highlighted (MacIntyre and Noel; 1994, Little; 1995, 1997, Riley; 1990, Widdowson; 1983, 102, van Lier; 1988,31). It is necessary that researchers in the area of self-direction take these limitations into account since it has been a foundation for self-directed learning research. As Piper states, "the

origins of self-access learning approach lie in the tradition of investigating 'the good language learner'" (Piper; 1994,12)[2].

Third, there is no balance between instruction and decision making. I agree with Wenden about the need of instruction in learner training, particularly at the level of metacognitive strategies. The authoritative position (see 3.4.1, p. 67) of the teacher makes her play the role of instructor. However, I think that the teacher's instructor role should not nullify the role of decision-maker that the learner has acquired. In the action plan Wenden proposes (1991; 97 and ss.), for instance, the students are not the ones who choose the strategies to learn according to their preference and needs. Besides, the prescriptive nature of "inventories, resource files, planning guides, and process grids" (Abrams, 1994, 281) results in not enough room for the learner to exercise her will.

Fourth, the writer/reader relationship the book develops does not support a learner-centred approach. Although I see the point of including the so-called "analytic and application tasks" in order to encourage the analysis and evaluation of the content proposed by the text (Wenden; 1991,4), I do not think that the outcome is in that direction. First of all because the reader feels "continuously cajoled into action" (Abrams;1994, 281). To complete some tasks, according to Abrams, would take hours; according to me it would take days and weeks. A learner-centred text would not give this "cajoling" feeling to the reader. It is true that an assertive reader would choose which tasks she wants to do and to what extent. That is actually what some people have told me they do with books like this one. But, to my mind, an assertive reader, that is to say, an autonomous reader whose goal is her students' autonomy, does not need any suggestion, or imposition, of tasks at all. She is competent enough to ask her own questions and develop her own tasks whenever she feels like doing so. Otherwise, too much guidance makes the reader get the impression that the writer does not believe in the autonomy of the readers.

Another problem that lengthens the distance between reader and writer is the impression the writer wants to convey about the simplicity of things when developing autonomy. Too often, the reader finds the writer telling her that the task is easy, that the procedure is simple. This fact is very clear in three different aspects the book deals with: verbal reports, innovations and attitudes and beliefs.

For Wenden, carrying out verbal reports is "very simple" (1991,81), something I

strongly disagree with. I will not discuss the implications of verbal reports on verbal behaviour here, for I am leaving the issue for a later chapter; I rather want to state now that there are many people, and not just teachers but researchers as well, that agree with me. On an anecdotal level, fellow research students on occasion have made comments such as: "My informant seems like he does not understand what I am asking for!" I know that feeling of frustration because I myself have had the same experience. Elsewhere authors (Faerch and Kasper; 1987, Cohen; 1994) have highlighted the cognitive and social constrains of verbal reports. For a reader who has never tried out this technique it would be difficult to judge the degree of "simplicity" of the procedure. Nevertheless, when she tries them out and they do not work, she may think that either she did not carry out the procedure in the right way, because she did not read well -not because the procedure was difficult to carry out- or because she had the wrong students, which is even worse.

Another area in which it is important not to give an impression of simplicity is innovation, something that for Wenden seems to be a straightforward process (1991,131). At least, those who have undergone the innovation of setting up and running a self-access centre know the implications that this fact conveys. It is not just the organisational level which is affected. As I see it, it involves knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness of not only the learner but of the teacher as well (Clemente, 1995b), particularly if we take into consideration that for the teacher the self-access centre does not always mean an alternative but also an imposition (see 3.3.4, p. 63).

I agree with Wenden that the attitudes and beliefs of the learner are essential for their success, or failure, when trying to develop autonomy. Attitudes and beliefs are an important part of the learner's metacognitive knowledge. However, I do not think that her way of coping with the problem gets the results she expects. First, she thinks that attitudes are straightforward phenomena easy to handle. Let us remind ourselves that attitudes are not observable behaviour and that sometimes people of certain cultures do not openly talk about them (apart from the fact that people's talk does not necessarily reflect their attitudes). Second, she does not take into account cultural factors that underlie these attitudes. Attitudes about learning form part of a learning culture (see 4.3.5, p. 110), which, in turn, responds to specific contexts and situations. Finally, some of the techniques she uses to uncover and deal with these attitudes are not reliable. For example, she proposes to ask a student to give

"advice about how to go about learning English" (1991,120) in order for the teacher to know the student's beliefs about the best way to learn a language. However, I see that the student's answer may be of two different sorts: It may involve "how I have learned" statements, that is to say, what she has been able identify as good strategies that work for her, or it may deal with the "how I should learn" answers, which reveal the ideal situation in which this student believes but has not been able to carry out. As Ridley states,

> a belief system relates not only to the way things are but also to the way
> we think things might or should be (1997, 9)

In short, Wenden's task does not differentiate beliefs about "the way things are" (what the learner believes she does) from beliefs about "the way things should be" (what the learner believes she should do), which is crucial for a learner-centred approach such as this.

With this idea of simplicity in mind, the reader may get very frustrated when she discovers that the development of autonomy is not so easy, that, in her real situation the students, instead of giving transparent verbal reports, tend to talk about other things, that some of them react against the training, that they do not care about metacognitive knowledge, that they do not understand what in the book seemed so straightforward, and so many other responses I myself have experienced. I think that it is not fair to depict the developing of autonomy as an easy goal when in fact it is "a long, difficult and often painful process for the learner and not least for the teacher" (Dam;1995,6).

To sum up, I think that there is a need for consistency when dealing with autonomy; a kind of loop input (Woodward; 1988 and 1991) where the writer writes a reader-centred book about learner-centredness, where the writer believes in autonomy for the learner but also in autonomy for the reader, and where the writer's right attitude evolves in the teachers' best attitude. I believe that this, in turn, will bear fruits in relation to learners' attitudes towards autonomy.

Having dealt with some problematical issues when putting autonomy into practice, let me now focus on a more theoretical aspect: the cognitive element in learner autonomy.

4.2 FILLING A GAP: A COGNITIVE MODEL FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

4.2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 I introduced the self-directed learning scheme proposed by Holec (see 2.2.2, p. 18). He divides this scheme into two stages, learning to learn and learning. In that section I explained and summarised the main ideas that have arisen in the field of *learning to learn*. Later, in Chapter 3 (3.3.3, p. 61) I put forward my own ideas about a *learning to learn* scheme for developing self-direction. However, I have said almost nothing about the second stage, identified by Holec as *learning*.

In 1987, Wenden characterises some approaches of the European school as being technical in the sense that they "appear to be emphasising the importance of techniques" (1987a, 12). She calls this the "technical orientation". It is true that her approach is different because of her focus on learning strategies. In this sense it is more oriented to the cognitive side of self-learning. However, as I see it, Wenden's own approach stays in the learning to learn stage and does not provide an explanation of the learning stage in self-direction (neither in 1987 nor in 1991).

According to Benson (1996)

> Nobody has yet succeeded in developing a version of autonomy that specifically takes account of the nature of language and language learning. Little (1991) has taken us a long way in this respect, but we must nevertheless recognize that, so far, *we have no theory of autonomous language learning* (my italics, 27,28)

Or as Batstone puts it (personal communication)

> There is no dialogue between autonomy people and SLA research people

I have already suggested that the reason for this gap in the field of self-direction[3] may be due to the fact that, as everybody knows now, teachers can teach but, as Page says, "only the learners can learn, no-one can do the learning for her" (1992, 83). Taking this into

consideration, it might have been assumed that the cognitive process of self-directed learning is the same as in a teacher-led environment. In other words, self-directed learning is not different from other-directed learning. I partly agree with the idea that self-directed learning and other-directed learning have the same constituent elements. However, I have come to understand that these elements play different roles in these two kinds of learning processes. A theoretical model is needed in order to define the specific functions of the various elements that make the difference between self-direction and other-direction in learning. Thus, the purpose of this section is to work on a cognitive model in self-directed learning.

4.2.2 Some assumptions

To start with, the rationale underlying this model is based on two basic assumptions. First, it is understood that "to the extent that all human beings are endowed with the same cognitive equipment, some aspects of second language learning must be universal" (Little;1995, 177). Thus, the target of this section is a model that describes the cognitive and universal processes of self-directed learning. But it is important to say that, although its purpose is not the analysis of cultural and individual learning processes, it considers them as integral elements of the cognitive learning process of any individual.

The second assumption is related to the difference between mature and immature cognitive systems. Theoretical and empirical research, as well as everyday experience, have taught us that children learn a second language in a different way that adult learners do. According to Chomsky, this is due to the existence of a system called LAD (Language Acquisition Device) which, if we follow what most research on the critical period has to say, is not longer available after the puberty, or earlier (Long, 1990). That is to say, immature cognitive systems have a device mature cognitive systems lack. However, some researchers believe that this system does not disappear but develops in a different one (Larsen-Freeman and Long; 1991, 163). According to Widdowson, for instance, the LAD remains as an "active force for continuing creativity". This is his only way to explain the capability of human beings to understand and produce "innovative expressions which do not conform to established rules" (1983,26).

Another researcher who holds that mature cognition develops devices immature systems do not is Birdsong (1994). For him, the learning procedure specific for language (Chomsky's LAD) is replaced by a general problem-solving system. This system, along with the knowledge of the native language

> could approximately, but not perfectly, compensate for the loss in
> adults of the child's knowledge of Universal Grammar and a
> Learning Procedure design specifically to construct grammars
>   (Birdsong;1994,175)

A major difference between these two systems is that while the one used by children is a hundred percent reliable (everybody in natural conditions has learned a first language during her childhood), the adult one is not, i.e. "human problem solving is notoriously prone to failure" (ibid.). This difference would partly explain the difficulty adults undergo when learning a language and the differences between native and non-native performance. Within this scheme, Birdsong highlights the importance of decision-making as one of the factors of adult problem solving system.

It is precisely this element of mature problem-solving systems, *decision-making*, which makes the difference in autonomy. According to Holec, autonomy is the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" which in turn means that "the self-directed learner is himself capable of *making all (the) decisions* concerning the learning with which he is or wishes to be involved" (my italics,1980,3). With the purpose of describing the nature of decision making in self-direction, in his article titled "The learner as a manager" (1987), Holec analyses the different kinds of decisions the learner carries out. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the article, Holec reflects on different meanings of the word "learning" and makes clear that he is only focusing on the learner as a "studier". I want to make clear however, that the definition that underlies my own view is not restricted to the study side of learning. Thus, when talking about *learning* I am referring to the process of acquiring knowledge and skills by means of study, but also by other means such as instruction and experience[4].

Within this scheme, the decision-making process starts when an individual decides to learn a second language. This decision turns the process of learning into an *intentional* process, which according to Schmidt (1990,134), who calls it "conscious learning", is distinguished "at the basis of intention and effort".

Therefore, the definition of self-directed learning that underlies this study implies that when an adult learns a language in a self-directed way, she intentionally and effortfully acquires knowledge and skills through different means (study, instruction, experience). Being an adult, she uses different procedures of acquisition, some of them being part of a general cognitive problem-solving system. One of the most relevant elements of this system is the ability to make decisions. In this sense, my definition is closer to the one proposed by Esch who says that learning is "all the activities undertaken by individuals who have decided to acquire a foreign language" and adds that learning behaviour is

> the management of all the acts learners carry out with the
> objective of assimilating both linguistic knowledge and the
> know-how. (Esch;1994a,50)

4.2.3 Cognition in other-directed learning[5]

The process of learning a language is one of the most complex in human learning. It consists of acquisition of *knowledge* and *skills*, and, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990,20), it involves the acquisition of declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is the starting point that consists in controlled information processing. In order to acquire procedural knowledge, human beings need to go through a transitional process that ends in a stage of automatic information processing. In regard to language, the declarative stage consists of *knowing about the language* and the procedural stage means *using the language*. This model is not specific for language acquisition but accounts for skill acquisition in general (Sternberg; 1994,666).

Seeing this scheme from an autonomy perspective, learning a language would be *taking charge* of the two learning stages and *making all the decisions* on how to acquire declarative knowledge and how to develop efficient procedures to turn it into procedural knowledge. This statement seems to be clear but still it does not say anything about the cognitive aspect of self-directed learning. In order to do this, it is necessary to look at more specific theories of learning.

For our students in the SAC, to acquire declarative knowledge seems to be a straightforward issue. One just decides what to learn, chooses the materials whose content matches with one's own decision on objectives and learns it. However, in reality, this does

not quite happen. Many language teachers are now very aware of the difference between *input* and *intake*. Not all the language that a learner studies (or experiences or is instructed in, to use the terms mentioned in the definition above) results in intake. Language intake is language input that becomes part of the learning process and is an essential element to acquire declarative knowledge (and procedural knowledge, as well). According to Schmidt, the key for input to become intake is *noticing,* which (Schmidt 1990,131-139), is a private experience that entails a degree of consciousness. He places noticing between perceiving (a lower degree) and understanding (a higher degree). However, according to Tomlin and Villa (1994) the issue of consciousness is not so straightforward since the term itself has very varied meanings[6]. Hence, Tomlin and Villa do not talk about consciousness but instead, focus on *attention* and claim that "a finer grained look" is necessary in order to give a comprehensive account of *attention* in SLA that differentiates it from its attentional functions. According to them, attention is a generic term that includes elements or functions such as alertness, orientation, detection and awareness (see fig. 4.1). Attention is a cognitive system of limited capacity that carries out the process of selecting critical information for further processing (Tomlin and Villa;1994, 187). This process is related to control of information and action, which means that the processing is effortful and not automatic. The main element of attention is *detection,* which is "the process that selects, or engages, a particular and specific bit of information...Once information is detected, then further information is possible" (ibid.). According to them, detection is the element of attention that corresponds to noticing.

Tomlin and Villa also mention other elements, which, according to their explanation, are not *essential* for acquisition but they are *associated* to it. First, there is alertness which is defined as "an overall readiness to deal with incoming stimuli or data" (190). Mainly, alertness refers to the readiness of the learner. There are hundreds of aspects that may influence this readiness, for instance, the existence of previous schemata that help the learner to make sense of the new information. In other words, ready or alert, means to be able to make connections with previous knowledge. Another two good examples of aspects that make learners be ready are motivation and attitudes. Due to the importance of these in self-direction, I will deal with them in separate sections (4.2.6 and 4.2.7).
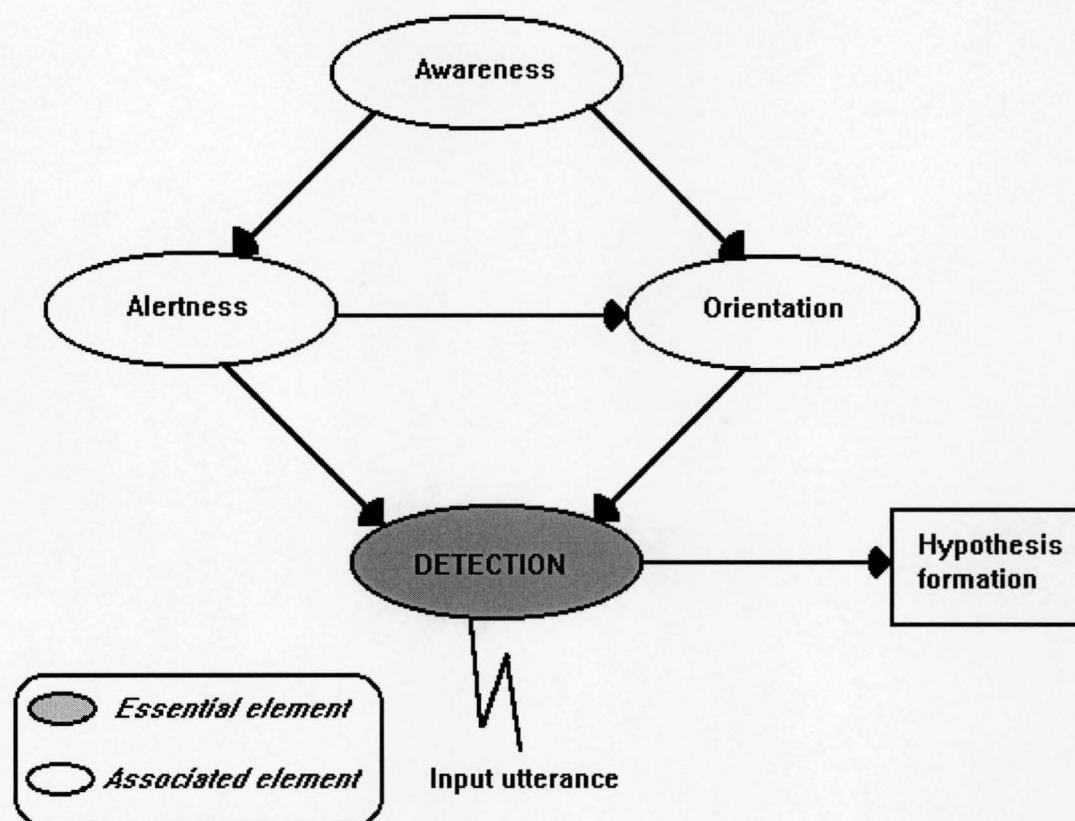
Fig. 4.1 Attentional elements in other-directed learning (adapted from Tomlin and Villa;1994,197)

In addition, Tomlin and Villa talk about orientation, "a heightened sensitivity to a specific feature of some incoming stimulus" (197) and add that it is "the specific alignment of attention" and it represents "the possibility of a significant difference of some sort" (1994,197). The oldest and most common way of "orienting" learners that human beings know is formal instruction. The function of it, that is, the function of teaching (van Lier, 1996;53), has been to make the learners focus on certain elements in order to increase the possibility for these elements to be *detected*.

Finally, Tomlin and Villa mention awareness, which they define as "a particular state of mind in which an individual has undergone a specific subjective experience of some cognitive content of external stimulus" (193). There are several instances of awareness and, again, formal instruction provides the best example. In order for teachers to be able to orient learners' attention, that is, in order to teach, they need to be aware of their own learning

processes. In other words, teachers need to make their implicit, procedural knowledge, explicit and declarative.

Another important field that has dealt with the state of awareness is learning research. Due to the fact that learning processes cannot be observed, researchers have developed verbal report techniques in order to analyse cognitive processes. The learners are trained to report, introspectively or retrospectively, their own intuitions and insights (see Chapter 5 for a discussion on this subject). It is not certain if verbal reports enhance awareness or if it is the other way around. What is true is that learners who give verbal reports of cognitive processes are aware of them.

As it is shown in Fig. 4.1, the only *essential* element that takes the learner to hypothesis formation, a further step in learning, is detection. Therefore, all the other elements are *associated*, that is, they can *help* to detect but are not crucial to the learning process. These authors are emphatic about the non-essential nature of these elements.

4.2.4 Cognition in self-directed learning

In contrast to Tomlin and Villa, as I see it, alertness, orientation and awareness are *extremely relevant* for the purposes of constructing a model of self-directed learning. What is more, what for other-directed learning appears to be associated, for self-direction has proven to be essential. In order to explain why I say this, let me reconsider these three elements, alertness, orientation and awareness, from the point of view of self-directed learning.

4.2.4.1 Orientation

Orientation is defined as the "specific alignment of attention". In the case of other-directed learning, it is common that the teacher helps the learner to focus, or orient, her attention to specific aspects of, in this case, the target language. However, in a self-directed situation, there is supposed to be no teacher; thus, it is the learner who has to help herself to focus their attention to something that she, and not the teacher, has decided to learn. Moreover, while in teacher-led situations it has been discovered that the students learn in spite of the teacher, in self-directed learning it is definitive that the learner cannot learn "in spite of herself", so to speak.

There is the case, of course, in non-intentional learning, that learning is a by-product of other types of experience. In this case, I agree with Tomlin and Villa that no orientation state is needed. However, a self-directed learner cannot afford the luxury of learning "by pure chance".

4.2.4.2 Alertness

As was stated before, alertness means "to be ready". In other-directed learning, being ready has traditionally been interpreted as having acquired the necessary previous knowledge which allows the learners to understand the new one (Krashen's 'i + 1' explains very well this notion). However, this "would appear to be a property of the language rather than the person exposed to the language" (van Lier;1996,46). Focusing on the person, that is, the learner, one runs into a series of aspects that make (or do not make) someone ready to learn. Actually, all those aspects have been clustered under the concept of metacognitive knowledge (see 3.3.2.2, p. 56). In self-direction, in order to focus, or orient, our attention to something, we need to be ready not only as regards the subject matter issues but also as regards all the elements that make up our metacognitive knowledge. The literature on this area, and my own experience when working with students struggling to become self-directed, have led me to the conclusion that two aspects of metacognitive knowledge are very important for self-direction. These are the learner's motivation and attitudes. I will specifically focus on the discussion of the role of motivation and attitudes in a separate section.

4.2.4.3 Awareness

According to Tomlin and Villa, awareness is not necessary for learning. However, from the point of view of other researchers, this is not the case. Van Lier (1996), for instance, following work by Vygostky and Csikszentmihalyi, states that awareness is a perceptual component of consciousness[7], without which "it is simply not possible to realise the conditions...that make progress towards proficiency possible"(74) and adds that

> it is clear that the bulk of human learning, being the complex and
> protracted activity that it is, can only be accomplished by a
> conscious person (ibid, 73)

In a very different way from Tomlin and Villa, van Lier simply defines awareness as the state of "know(ing) where you are going, what you are doing and why" (ibid,20). Analysing the concept of consciousness as the state involving awareness, van Lier highlights the importance of it and mentions some of its characteristics. For him, consciousness constitutes a high level of mental activity that includes intellectual and affective processes (from Vygotsky) and adds to it a self-directed element (taken from Csikszentmihalyi's definition). In this way, consciousness is not just a personal cognitive state. On the contrary, he discusses the term of consciousness, and the related concept of awareness,

> in a broader sense in which it allows for increasing self-regulation, for deeper processing, for more efficient learning actions, and for feelings of knowing, unknowing, and appropriate levels of confidence in one's own abilities. This is a more organic sense of consciousness which regards it as an interpersonal construct, which originates in interaction with the world and is closely tied to sociocultural development. Consiousness is thus a sociocultural construct as well as a cognitive one. (ibid,71)

The clear opposition between these two perspectives of awareness and its essential role in the learning process can be explained with regard to the approach of each of their authors. While Tomlin and Villa are interested in language learning in general, either in its formal or informal versions, van Lier is particularly committed in a framework of autonomy. In fact, part of his proposal for a language curriculum consists of students being "encouraged to develop their language awareness...to become autonomous" (ibid., 19).

Referring back to the model of Tomlin and Villa (Fig. 4.1), awareness is physically placed above alertness and detection, but it is just an associated element without which the process of learning can still occur. From a self-directed perspective, however, awareness is an essential element without which self-directed learning is impossible.

In fact, when referring to the process of self-direction it is necessary to state that one is talking about two simultaneous learning processes: the process of learning to learn and the process of learning something else, in this case a foreign language. Thus, it is a cognitive and a metacognitive process, in which both learning awareness and language awareness are involved. Although the content of these two types of awareness is different, they consist of the same elements. According to van Lier, consciousness means "the organising, controlling

and evaluating of experience"(73) and metacognition is achieved by the corresponding strategies of planning, monitoring and evaluation (see 3.3.2, p. 50)

It is also important to mention the relationships of alertness and orientation and awareness in self-direction. Alertness and orientation are particularly important within a self-directed learning approach. As can be seen in Fig. 4.3, both elements make possible the learning process by opening the learning process and keeping opened the awareness box. In fact, that would be the same function that researchers attribute to learning-to-learn schemes. It is not a coincidence that both elements are the core of the definition of the concept *learning to learn*. In the first chapter, I stated that learning to learn has been divided into two main areas: training at a psychological level and training at a methodological or technical level. In the former, the aim is for the learner to re-examine her own attitudes, beliefs, feelings, etc in order to change, readjust or reinforce them in relation to a self-directed learning approach. This aspect of the learning to learn programme makes her ready, i.e. *alert,* to detect new linguistic information. The latter aspect of the programme, the technical or methodological training, makes the learner focus on all those aspects of self-direction that are necessary for managing the learning process. Like a FL teacher, the SAC counsellor makes the learner *orient*, i.e. focus, her attention. With regard to self-directed learning, the expected result of the combination of these two types of training is *awareness*, that is, the fact that the learners realise the subjective experience of the different stages of their learning processes.

According to Tomlin and Villa (1994), awareness may be important in the process of detection because it may increase the level of alertness and orientation. They also suggest that awareness can be exploited to enhance them. This is certainly true for self-directed learning. However, this process effect also works in the opposite direction. In other words, the role of alertness and orientation in the form of learning to learn schemes enhances awareness, which in turn, can act directly upon learning. In a self-directed learning scheme, it is important to emphasise the interactive relationship of these two elements (see Fig. 4.2). Both, alertness and orientation are made up of external and internal factors. On the one side, the internal factors of alertness are the characteristics of the learner (motivation and some elements of metacognitive knowledge that generate it -attitudes, beliefs, etc.) that make her

ready to learn. The external factors are the characteristics of the context (sociocultural factors) that influence the internal factors. On the other side, the internal factor of orientation is the actual focusing of attention according to the learner decision of her goals. The external factor is the help that the counsellor provides for her to carry out the focusing process.
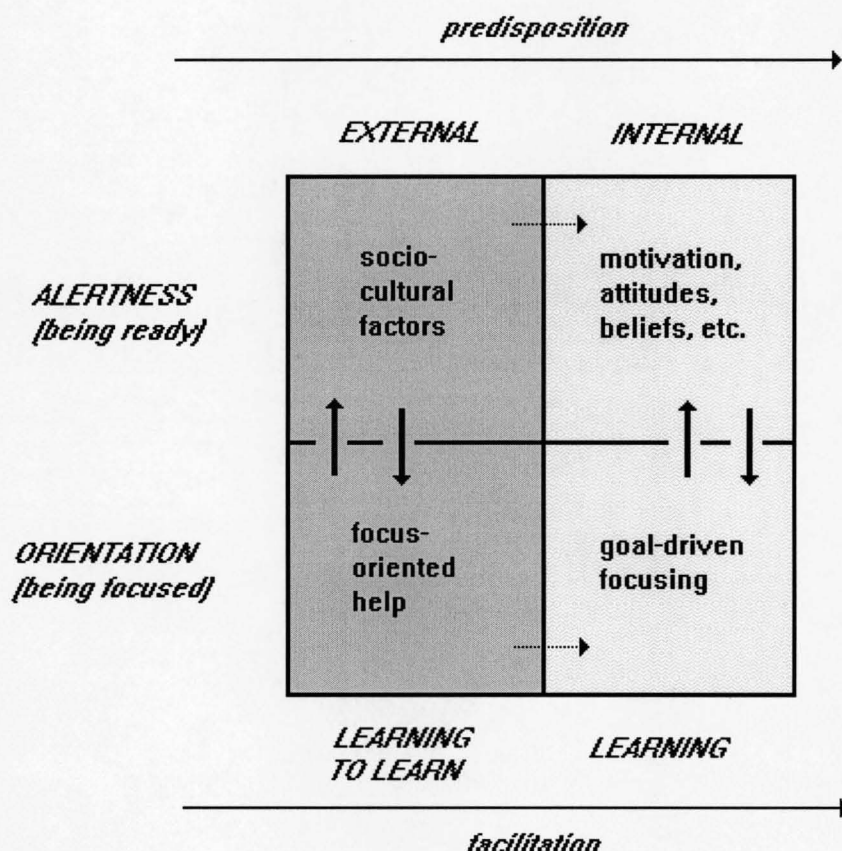
Fig. 4.2 Alertness and orientation elements in self-direction

As can be seen in Fig. 4.2, alertness and orientation may have a two-way interaction. This means that if something changes one of the elements, the other one varies as well. Any positive change in motivation, for instance, could potentially improve the learner's capacity to focus her attention in order to notice in a better way. In the same way, if her strategies to focus are not working properly, she may change her belief about the "good language learner" she is. In regard to external aspects, the characteristics of the contextual factors that make the learner ready can be influenced by her relationship with the counsellor. For example, she does not believe that the SAC is the best place to learn a language because her interaction

with a counsellor was negative. It can also happen that the focus-oriented help that the counsellor provides is dependent on sociocultural factors. The support provided to make her focus according to her own goals has been successful because the way the SAC is organised suits her very well.

In a horizontal perspective, the external factors of each element may also affect the internal ones. Thus, for instance, a nice, comfortable atmosphere (good social relationships in the SAC) will add to her motivation to learn. In regards to orientation, it is obvious that an effective help on the part of the counsellor results in better focusing.

But the most important aspect of these relationships is the fact that learning to learn is located in the external side of both elements. It does not matter how good and complete the learning-to-learn programme is, it only covers the left side of the diagram. This is important because it makes the counsellors realise their actual role and that of the learner. In this sense, it is impossible to say that a learning-to-learn programme *changes* the attitudes of the learners. A counsellor, or a learning-to-learn programme, cannot change internal factors of alertness and orientation. The only possible way to explain it is saying that the learning-to-learn programme *made the learner change* her attitudes, which is very different. Here, the actor is the learner and not the counsellor or the procedures. Two helpful words to label the process of getting ready and focused, either in the external or internal areas, are predisposition and facilitation.

So far, I have dealt with the first part of the learning process, in which, through the different attentional functions, input is detected (or noticed) and becomes intake. However, noticing does not mean that the learner has internalised the specific underlying rule. For this to take place, the learner needs to undergo another important process that is called structuring, which consists of "manipulat(ing) forms, changing them and recombining them in order to discover more about how grammar works (Batstone; 1994,51). Most researchers refer to the interaction of noticing and structuring as the generic term of understanding (van Lier, 1996, 41, Entwistle; 1996, 102). In most of the cases, the first structuring is not very successful. Therefore, the learner goes back and renotices something in order to restructure it

in a better way (Batstone; 1994, 41), repeating the chain as needed in order to enhance the knowledge of the target language. The importance of awareness is evident at this stage. Skehan gives a good summary of research on this issue (1996):

> Awareness enables more efficient solutions to the 'matching' problem (Klein 1986), i.e. noticing the gap between one's current language system and the language one encounters. Similary, Schmidt (1994) proposes that awareness may enable learners to appreciate better the instruction that they are receiving, especially the correction that is being given. Awareness may also (Karmilloff-Smith 1986) make it easier to transform and recombine material, to restructure, in other words, as the structure of material is more available, and other organizational possibilities become clear. Finally, awareness may help learners operate the sort of dual systems outlined above, where the learner/language user may need to combine rule-based systems and exemplar-based systems during ongoing performance (43)

All this is very relevant if one takes into account that the learner is the only one who makes decisions about when to continue (or stop) renoticing and restructuring a specific linguistic item.

This circle of noticing-structuring-renoticing-restructuring corresponds to what most research in learning has identified as hypothesis formation and testing. It takes the form of a structure made up of connected layers that take to proficiency (see Fig. 4.3). Bialystok (1994,158), who offers a coherent "cognitive account of how language proficiency develops", states that there are two aspects of cognition, *analysis* and *control,* whose function is to increase competence. Analysis underlies the noticing-structuring process of the first stages of language learning. Analysis is partly replaced by a control process, in which the learner/user controls her language in order to decide which elements of it do not need much attention, and become automatised, and which still need to be analysed. As was stated before, the attention resources of human beings are limited. With regards to language use, in order to become fluent, the learner has to control her attention and focus it on critical parts of the language.

This transitional stage whose aim is to turn declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge, that is, to use the language, and not only to know about it, is characterised by instability, or *variability* (Bialystok;1994,165). The language the learner produces, known as interlanguage, varies in both dimensions, synchronically and diachronically. Thus, sometimes, the learner uses a grammatical structure in a correct form, sometimes she uses it incorrectly. Sometimes she remembers a word, sometimes she forgets it. Sometimes she

appears to be very fluent and sometimes she appears to be struggling to form a complete sentence. However, these variations do not occur haphazardly. All of them respond to specific causes, although these can be different according to the learner and the interactional context. Again, metacognitive knowledge and the awareness of it seem to play an important role in this stage of the learning process. In Clemente (1996b), I studied the way self-directed learners can take advantage of metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies to analyse their production and make decisions in relation to the most appropriate psycholinguistic context for practising and monitoring their speech.
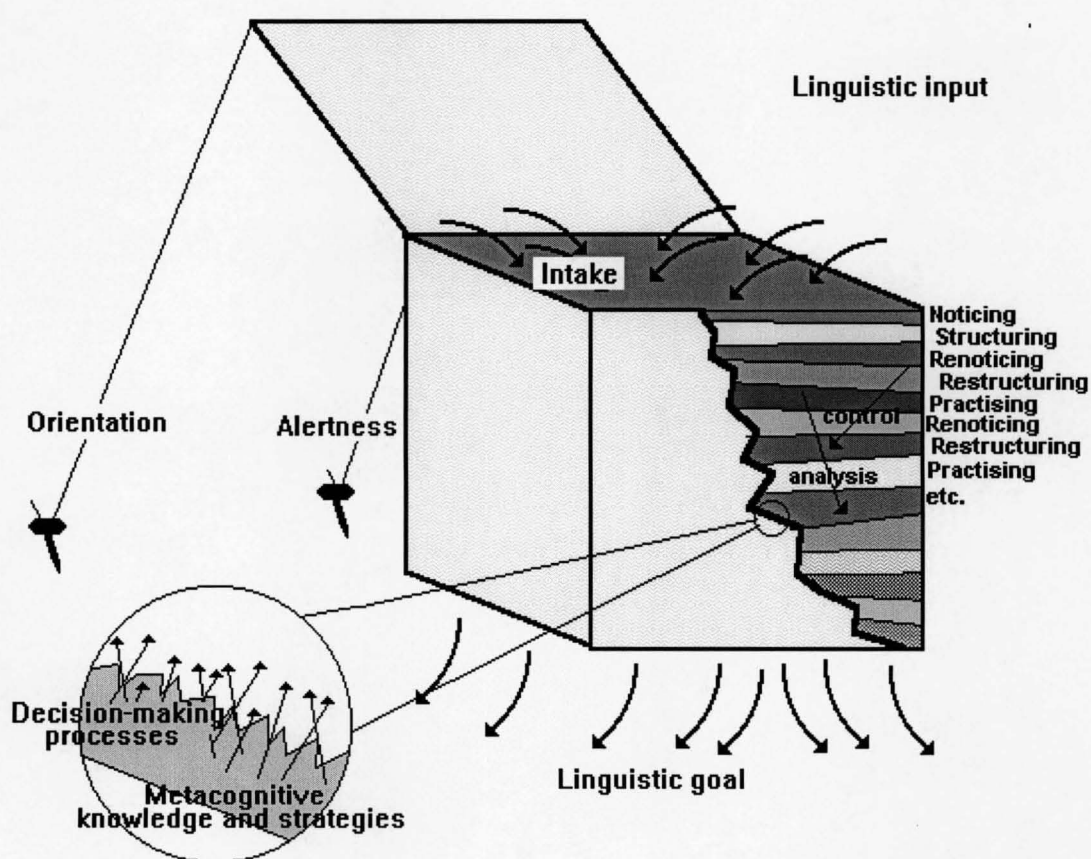
Fig. 4.3. The awareness box in self-directed language learning

As the reader can see, I am using the term awareness in its broadest sense, which implies the three different meanings in which it has been used in SLA research (Schmidt, 1993). Thus, awareness in self-directed learning refers to: *learning with intention* (opposed

to learning incidentally), *learning with attention* (which, for many researchers, is also a characteristic of other-directed learning) and *learning with awareness of understanding* (which refers to learning explicitly)(ibid). As I see it, awareness implies

> The ability to stand back occasionally from the learning process....and the ability
> to step back from actual tasks in order to plan, monitor and evaluate (the learners')
> own on-the-spot linguistic performance (Ridley;1997, 1)

As the reader can see, Ridley makes here a logical link with metacognitive strategies.

4.2.5 Decision making and awareness

At the beginning of this section I highlighted the importance of decision-making in adult learning as well as in self-directed learning. Now I am going to relate it to the elements of attention that I have discussed.

I have stated that some researchers in SLA, such as Tomlin and Villa, have concluded that awareness is not necessary for learning. However, as I stated above, this is not the case in self-directed learning. The reason for this is that one of the main processes that is activated in self-direction is decision-making. It is precisely at this level where awareness plays a crucial role. In order to make a decision, self-directed learners need to be aware of the implications of those decisions. If the learners are not aware of the choices they have, the decision-making possibility becomes more a cognitive obstacle rather than a cognitive tool. In any case, uninformed choice means no choice. For a learner to be self-directed, she needs to be aware of the choices she has available in order to make sensible decisions about her learning processes. I have already mentioned van Lier's definition of awareness: "knowing where you are going, what you are doing and why". I would like to complete it with: *knowing where you are not going, what you are not doing and why.* Of course, due to cultural and psychological constraints, it is a fallacy to say that a learner can be aware of all the possibilities that exist. However, in spite of those constraints, there is still a broad range of possibilities the learner can choose from. In fact, as I see it, one of the educational goals in self-direction should be to prepare the learner to make informed choices, that is, to activate her decision-making ability.

In SLA research, there seems to be a particular preoccupation about the role awareness plays at the first stages of the learning process. There seems to be an assumption that automatisation replaces most of the awareness element. However, as I stated before, when talking about self-direction one is referring to two levels of awareness: learning and linguistic awareness. It may be true that linguistic practice takes to automatic, unconscious processes (Bialystok;1994,160), but it is also true that learning practice allows the learners to be more aware of her own learning processes and her power to make the right decisions. Awareness is an on-going state that is present during all the stages of self-directed learning process.

4.2.6 Motivation

The self-directed learning model that has been developed through this chapter identifies motivation and attitudes as both, relevant elements of the metacognitive knowledge that underlies awareness and internal factors that make the learner ready, or alert, to learn.

Several authors have analysed the relationship of autonomy and motivation (Wenden; 1987 and 1991, Dickinson;1995, Ushioda; 1996 and Macaro; 1997). In particular, some of them emphasise the role of awareness in motivation (Ushioda; 1996,54) and its connections to cognition and metacognition (Ushioda;1996, 12 and Wenden; 1991, 111).

Traditionally, motivation has been related to success. That is to say, motivation has been regarded as a variable responsible for the success of language learners (Ushioda;1996,1). In fact, most of the discussions are directed to answer a question of the chicken-and-egg sort: does success brings motivation or viceversa? (Macaro, 1997,181). However, as I see it, neither motivation is the only factor that accounts for success nor success in itself is enough to "create and/or enhance productive motivational attitudes (Dickinson;1995,172). Hence it is necessary to move on and analyse motivation from a different perspective.

Some paragraphs above I stated that motivation was an element of metacognitive knowledge and an internal factor of alertness. Then, Ushioda says that

the appropriate question no longer seems to be how can we motivate our
learners? but how can we help learners to motivate themselves? (1996,2)

The assumption is, thus, that motivation, as all the other internal factors that are involved in alertness, can only be managed by the individual. This capacity to manage one's own motivation is called self-motivation and has been defined as "taking charge of the affective dimension of (the) learning experiences" (ibid).

The internal nature of motivation implies a definition in terms of intrinsic forces. Intrinsically motivated learners are those who are doing an activity "for its own sake rather than because of external pressure" (Dickinson,1995,169). One of the intrinsic forces that can activate motivation are short-term goals set by the learner. In general, language students' motivation is based on the long-term goal of using the language. However, this goal is so far away that does not provide sound basis for self-motivation. But, according to Ushioda (1996,17), if learners focus on short-term goals, they find that they are also motivated by the process of learning. In this way there is a direct relationship between motivation and learning, which is one of the features of intrinsic motivation.

An important characteristic of intrinsic motivation is the type of rewards that it implies. Instead of being dependent on external feedback, the intrinsically motivated learner's rewards are subjective and take the form of enjoyment, satisfaction, feelings of success or competence, pride, etc. (Ushioda;1996,49). These are present during the whole process of learning since they are the product of short-term goals. It is interesting that Entwistle's subjects used the same type of terms to define their concept of understanding (feeling of satisfaction, a sense of wholeness, confidence, etc) (1996,104). There seems to be a correlation between noticing and structuring (and the subsequent stages) and self-motivation. Obviously, this is an area that deserves further research.

As was stated above, motivation is one of the internal factors of alertness. This also means that there are external factors that can affect the way a learner is motivated. Based on Ushioda's reflections on intrinsic motivation, I consider that there are several external factors that can play this role:

    a) the emphasis of the informational element of external reward in opposition to the controlling aspect of it,

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b) the development of "individual attainment of absolute performance criteria"

(evaluation based on personal standards and objectives),

c) focus on definition of short-term objectives,

d) appropriate learning-to-learn activities to help learners to modify

attributional processes in order to develop positive belief structures and,

e) learning atmosphere, tasks, materials whose role is to enhance the learner

predisposition to learn (to make her ready) and to facilitate learning (to make

her being focused)

It seems to me that all these external factors might be considered when developing the rationale and content of a learning-to-learn framework.

4.2.7 Attitudes and beliefs about self-direction

Some of the factors mentioned when I dealt with alertness were attitudes and beliefs. These seem to play a very important role in making the learners ready to learn. In this section I will define them and draw the connections with self-direction based on the results on research on this area.

Although different authors use several terms to refer to this type of phenomenon (representations, attributions, values, etc), for purposes of clarity I will only differentiate between two concepts: attitudes and beliefs. Beliefs, as Ridley states, are assumed " to underlie attitudes, especially core, or salient beliefs" (1997,9). Adapting Freeman's definition on attitude (who uses it to refer to teacher's attitudes, 1989,32) to this study, attitude is simply understood as the stance the learners adopt towards self-directed learning. With regard to beliefs, Riley defines them (based on Jodelet and Durkheim) as:

> part of a group's commonsense world of social reality, its shared or intersubjective meaning, established in and maintained through our daily life and conversation (1996b, 2)

and adds that we use our representations "both to interpret and to organise and manage the world around us" (ibid)

Categorising beliefs as part of one's own self-schemata and metacognition system Hager et al (1982, quoted in Wenden;1991,12), say that they

represent knowledge about one's own social and cognitive
features...concerning...capabilities and limitations,...degree of personal
control over academic achievement,... reasons for success and failure at
different tasks and...expectancies for the future (Wenden;1991,12)

In Chapter 2, when I firstly defined the concept of autonomy, it was stated that
autonomy consists of an *ability* (to take charge of one's own learning) and an *attitude* (to be
willing to do it). This "favourable attitude towards independence in learning" (Dickinson;
1994,39), as was mentioned in section 3.4, is mostly the result of learners' beliefs
(Cotterall,1995,195). Therefore, it can be said that learner's behaviour (Cotterall;1995,202),
such as the use of strategies (O'Malley and Chamot;1990,161), and motivation
(Riley;1996b,8) are the result of her attitude towards learning, which, in turn, is the result of
her beliefs towards learning (Wenden;1991,52).

Due to this strong link of beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, there have been several
authors who have focused their attention to the study of beliefs and their relationship to self-
directed learning (Little et al;1984, Wenden; 1987, 1991, Horwitz; 1987, Cotterall; 1995,
Riley; 1989, Broady;1996, Press; 1996 and Fernandez-Toro and Jones;1996). I have been
referring to attitudes and beliefs towards learning, but these expressions are not accurate
since learning is not the only factor that plays an important role in this issue. There are many
other related factors. Unfortunately, as Riley (1996b, 8) has pointed out, there does not exist
yet a complete taxonomy of beliefs (or representations) about self-directed learning, which
undoubtedly would be very useful for learning-to-learn frameworks.

However, the combination of the different elements that a number of studies have
mentioned help us to have a comprehensive idea of the beliefs that play a role in the attitude
towards self-directed learning. Fig. 4.4 summarises the findings of 6 different studies
(Wenden;1987b, Horwitz;1987, Riley;1989, Piper; 1993, Cotterall; 1995 and Broady;1996)[8].

In his article on the topic, Riley (1996b) synthesises the conclusions of self-directed
learning research on beliefs about language learning (BALLs) in a very straightforward way:

(these) research projects...show quite clearly that learners' beliefs vary and that
different beliefs give rise to different behaviours and attitudes to, amongst other
things, self-instruction in language learning (22).

AUTHOR	CONCEPT	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Wenden (1987)	beliefs	1w) learning using the language 2w) learning about the language 3w) social/affective aspects of FL learning	-learn the natural way -take a formal course -you have to be stimulated to learn
Horwitz (1987)	belief areas	1h) foreign language aptitude 2h) difficulty of language learning 3h) nature of language learning 4h) motivations 5h) strategies	-everyone can learn to speak a FL -you can't learn a language in one hour a day -it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country - I would like to have American friends -it is important to repeat and practice a lot
Riley (1989)	belief categories	1r) general beliefs 2r) about self 3r) norms and rules 4r) goals	-you have to start at the beginning -I sound childish when I speak French -The French get easily offended when you make mistakes -I just want to be able to make myself understood
Piper (1993)	beliefs and assumptions	1p) what you need to do to learn 2p) nature of language 3p) learning is product-oriented 4p) group-work is valuable 5p) motivation 6p) language learning is stressful	-you need to practise -vocabulary -summative assessment -provided opportunities for practice -desire to do well in formal assessment -being 'forced to speak'
Cotterall (1995)	factors	1c) the role of the teacher 2c) feedback 3c) learner independence 4c) learner confidence in study ability 5c) experience on language learning 6c) approach to studying	-I like the teacher to offer help to me -I find it helpful for the teacher to give me regular tests -I like trying new things out by myself -I know how to study languages well -I have been successful in language learning in the past -I study English in the same way I study other subjects
Broady (1996)	attitudes	1b) readiness for self-directed learning 2b) independent work in language learning 3b) importance of class/teacher 4b) teacher explanation and supervision 5b) language learning activities 6b) selection of content 7b) objectives and evaluation 8b) external assessment	-I learn a lot working by myself -language learning involves a lot of self-study -a teacher is necessary for learning a language -I like the teacher to explain everything to us - language classes should be used mainly for speaking practice - I would like to be able to use my own material for language classes -I feel I have a good idea of my language proficiency -all exercises should be marked by the teacher

Fig. 4.4 Summary of research on beliefs about self-directed language learning

This finding in itself is significant, above all, because it gives foundation to anecdotal evidence on the matter. However, for the particular purposes of this study, I would like to see it from a different perspective.

The six studies differ in many ways, such as the number of subjects or the method used to gather the data. Some of the researchers opted for quantitative instruments like questionnaires of the Likert scale type. Others chose a qualitative approach of the ethnographic type (interviews, self-reports and learner diaries). Their approach also determined the categories analysed. In some of the studies, the categories were predetermined before the collection of data, in others, the analysis of the data resulted in the categories the author mentions. Another point in which they are not alike is the fact that they refer to different levels and label their categories in different ways. However, as I see it, these studies are not incompatible. A closer look at them allows the reader to establish some links and highlight the constants that underlie all the categories mentioned in Fig. 4.4. To begin with, it is a fact that there are some categories some of the studies have in common. For instance, both Horwitz and Piper mention 'motivation' as one of the areas of beliefs. In the same way, Cotterall's role of the teacher and Broady's teacher explanation and supervision are very similar. Of course, there are other categories that are not so obvious. Riley's headings, as he says, have the advantage of being simple, and hence, easy to use although they are very general. Nevertheless, the examples that he provides clarify his four different concepts very well. According to me, all the different categories of the six studies can be synthesised as follows: there are three different major underlying concepts. These are: target language and culture (1), learning (2) and self (3) (see Fig. 4.5). The points where these three concepts intersect constitute specific fields that are also causes of beliefs. Thus, there are seven fields, four of them being the result of intersections between two or three of the main concepts: language and self (4), language and learning (5), and learning and self (6). The intersection of the three, that is, the relationship between language, learning and self, results in field (7).

Fig. 4.5 Fields of beliefs in self-directed language learning research

In order to define the seven different fields and their boundaries, it was necessary to take into account the explanations and examples provided by the authors. The reader will notice that some of the categories were placed in two or three different fields. I will try to explain this issue. Fig. 4.5 shows very clearly which fields (Field # 2, 12 categories, field # 7, 11 categories, and field # 5 with 9 categories) have received the most attention, either by researchers or by learners. The field that follows is # 6. This means that the four fields with more categories in them belong to the concept of learning. The reason for this may be that the main interest (or concern) in self-directed learning research is the belief system of learners towards learning, since this is self-directed. I agree with that. However, some of the readers will have noticed that the categories in the six studies are not mutually exclusive (my reason for repeating some of them in different fields). Actually, it can be said that my way of classifying the categories was very subjective. Other person might end up with a different classification. Well, this is exactly my point. How can we be sure, not just about the field,

but, much more important, about the source and rationale for the beliefs that learners express in relation to their learning? Let me exemplify this in order to make myself understood.

When a student expresses her beliefs in relation to her goals she may say something like: "I just want to make myself understood". This is a relatively clear statement, and for some teachers, very realistic, and even attainable, compared to others. However, wouldn't it be important to know why she wants to achieve that? That is to say, what is behind her statement? I can think of three different reasons. First, she may think that she *needs* just a certain level to cope with the short but necessary interactions she envisages in her next vacation to the United States. Second, she also may think that "being understood" is the only possible level of English she *can* achieve, taking into consideration all the courses that she has been through. She does not believe she is good enough for more than that. Third, she may also think that she *wants* to "be understood" because this fact, the mere fact of being understood, provides her with a feeling of satisfaction and achievement. It is obvious that the three possible sources (and I am sure that there are more) that may motivate this learner, place her belief about goals in different fields, and, what is more significant, defines her as a learner in a very different way.

What I am saying here is that there is still the need to delve deeper in regard to learners' beliefs. In other words, the research in this area, such as the six studies presented here has provided enough evidence to make a description of a belief system of first order (Riley; 1996b ,21, Marton; 1981, 178, and Freeman, 1996, 366). It is possible now, to uncover the reasons that underlie those beliefs, that is the beliefs of the beliefs, the systems of second order. I strongly believe that researchers on self-directed learning, but above all, teachers and learners, need to know more about second order beliefs. Actually, and not by coincidence, this is the way it has been defined autonomy by Dworkin (quoted by Riley;1996b,21):

> Autonomy is conceived of as a second-order capacity of persons to reflect
> critically upon their first-order preferences, desires and wishes...and the capacity
> to accept or change these in the light of higher-order preferences and values.

4.2.8 Summary

To sum up, in this section I have put forward my own concept of self-directed learning. I have done this by drawing some comparisons between other-directed learning models, taken from the second language acquisition research and my own concept of self-direction. Basically, the rationale of a self-directed learning model is based on the following assumptions:

> a) alertness, orientation and awareness are all essential elements,
> b) awareness does not only occur in the first stages of the learning process but embraces the whole learning process,
> c) alertness and orientation are not only enhanced by awareness but they, in turn, can enhance awareness in the form of learning-to-learn schemes,
> c) alertness and orientation are not only enhanced by awareness but they, in turn, can enhance awareness in the form of learning-to-learn schemes,
> d) a system of decision making underlies the whole process of self-direction
> e) both alertness and orientation contain external and internal elements.
> f) external aspects of alertness and orientation can make the learner change internal ones.
> g) motivation and attitudes are both internal elements of alertness and can only be changed by the individual,
> h) learning-to-learn schemes, as external factors of alertness, can have an effect on the enhancement of self-motivation and
> i)attitudes are caused by beliefs of different sorts, but these beliefs respond to beliefs of second-order that are part of the metacognition system of any human being.

4.3 AUTONOMY 3

4.3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 (2.3, p. 24), where I first dealt with the concept of autonomy, I defined it as "the ability to learn", which according to Holec, implies "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", that is, to make decisions at different levels of one's own learning process. In that section, I also described the way those of us working at the SAC Oaxaca interpreted the concept of autonomy and the mistakes caused by that interpretation. One of those mistakes was to think that the role of the teacher was to be as far as possible from the learner and her decisions.

In Chapter 3 (3.4, p. 65), I explained to the reader how my concept of autonomy had changed after having gained some experience working with students in SAC and carried out

some empirical research. To the definition of autonomy as an *ability,* I added the element of *attitude,* which is considered central, according to several authors, to the discussion of autonomy. It has to be clear that, ability and attitude only refer to the role of the learner, for she is the only agent who makes decisions. However, from my own point of view, it is also necessary to describe the role of the teacher in an autonomy approach. It is very tempting to think that, when defining autonomy, it is a contradiction to take into account the role of the teacher. In theory, this argument seems to be logical. In practice, it does not work. Let me remind the reader that I am not dealing with the concept of autonomy in a vacuum. I am considering it in relation to a context where the teacher has an important role in formal learning. Moreover, for the learners in SAC Oaxaca, the teacher still exists in the SAC, although with the new name of 'counsellor'.

Thus, I analysed the teacher's role in relation to the type of authority she can deploy. The reader will remember the discussion about the *authoritative* vs the *authoritarian* teacher and the four different situations that may potentially raise. It seemed to be logical that the best situation resulted when the SAC counsellor/learner interaction is characterised by the presence of *knowledge* and absence of *power* on the part of the counsellor. The reason is that, in theory, this results in a balanced situation where counsellor and learners are equals and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. However, as I see it, a positive interaction depends more on the convergence of roles (both participants get and give the expected) than on the absence of power. This discussion led me to the conclusion that *learner autonomy* and *teacher authority* were not mutually exclusive.

Within this scheme, I now want to discuss the concept of autonomy from a different perspective. This is the relationship between *autonomy* and *authenticity.* In other words, I will discuss how authentic it is to adopt autonomy as an educational goal. This section has two purposes, on the one hand, it will complete the definition of autonomy with the addition of the contextual factors that need to be taken into consideration, not just in self-directed learning but, in any learning situation. As I see it, a definition of autonomy is complete when it involves the learner's role (Autonomy 1) her interaction with the teacher (Autonomy 2) and the context in which they interact (Autonomy 3). On the other hand, this discussion will allow me to draw some connections with the definition of self-directed learning and the corresponding cognitive model presented some paragraphs above.

The concept of authenticity came into the field of second language teaching along with the communicative approach. The necessity of bearing in mind the communicative function of language called for the teaching of authentic linguistic data, something the native-speaker teacher was capable of doing. However, according to Widdowson, "authentic language is, in principle, incompatible with autonomous language learning" (1996,68) because the autonomous learner has as her priority the process of learning and not the goal of it. She is not interested in the appropriateness of language in contexts of use but in the process to make language appropriated in contexts of learning.

After a brief discussion of the matter Widdowson leaves a question for the readers to answer: "Are there ways, in practice, of reconciling these contraries?" (ibid). The answer to this question might be found in van Lier's book *Interaction in the Language curriculum* (1996), where he proposes a curriculum based on three basic concepts: awareness, autonomy and authenticity. According to him, with his proposal

> students are encouraged to develop their ....awareness to become autonomous (have
> choices and responsibilities and to develop their own sense of direction) to strive
> for authenticity in their learning experiences in general and in their language
> experiences in particular (van Lier; 1996,19)

However, the objective of this section is not to discuss this question, which I think is too difficult to answer now, mainly because neither autonomy nor authenticity can be defined with straightforward terms: both have generated strong disagreement in relation to the different interpretations to their meanings. Rather, what I plan to do is to take advantage of this dichotomy to explore in more detail the concept of autonomy.

4.3.2 Autonomy and authenticity

The term authenticity has mainly been used to describe the source of materials used in second language teaching. There exist all sorts of definitions (I already used one in 2.4.3.1, p. 34). The most common is to define authentic materials as those "which have not been produced for language-teaching or language-learning purposes"(Abe et al;1985,322) which for some is a rather negative definition. A more positive one, according to Abe et al, would be to called authentic materials to those "which have been produced (as messages) in a real communications situation"(ibid.). However, there are others, still not satisfied with this definition who prefer to called this type of materials *genuine* and reserve authentic for

the learning situation which involves a learner and her goals (see discussion about this issue in Widdowson, 1979,163-172, and van Lier; 1996, 125). In this sense, authenticity is created when materials' features match with learner's purposes and needs. In fact, it is this last definition that serves my purposes, for I am not dealing with the description of static physical things (such as materials) but with the analysis of the highly dynamic phenomenon of *learning,* that necessarily involves human beings and the context in which they interact. Thus, according to van Lier (1996), authenticity can be defined as

> a *process* of engagement in the learning situation, and as a
> *characteristic* of the persons engaged in the learning. As such,
> authenticity relates to who teachers and learners are and what they do as
> they interact with one another for the purposes of learning.
> (italics as in original, 125)

In order to give the reader a comprehensive account, I would like to discuss authenticity of autonomy as an approach to second language learning from three different levels: universal, cultural and individual[9]. In fact, this is the current concern of many researchers on autonomy, as it can be seen in Benson's and Voller's introduction of their book *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (1997), and which is reflected in several of its articles:

> One of key issues that is emerging in the field is how to reconcile
> psychological and political (and individual and social) perspectives in
> these concepts (autonomy and independence) (8)

When I put forward the cognitive model for self-directed learning (4.2, p. 78), I stated that it was under the assumption that all self-directed learners carry out the same cognitive process, with the same elements performing the same functions. In other words, it is considered universal in the sense that it applies for all the instances of self-directed learning, as it was defined. However, this does not mean that all learners are self-directed. With this argument in mind, let me now discuss the universality of the learning process from a different perspective.

4.3.3 The universal dimension of autonomy

When talking about autonomy, several researchers have made reference to the way people learn in natural settings, i.e. outside school. In fact, the description of how we learn to do hundreds of things, to carry out hundreds of processes, outside school, and without a

teacher or a textbook, is the best way to describe autonomous learning. As Dickinson, has stated, "the most autonomous learners that I am aware of are small children, who are obviously learning about themselves and about the world" (1993,331). We learn, during our childhood, how to do many things, to walk, to handle a spoon, to play with a toy, indirectly, implicitly, even intuitively, exactly in the same way Holec describes autonomy type (b) (see 2.3, p.25). We set goals, try out strategies, monitor our performance and assess the outcomes constantly and, most of the times, successfully. There is no need in teaching a child how to be an autonomous learner, she is an inborn autonomous learner already. With regards to first language acquisition, Little highlights two ways in which the child is autonomous:

> The first has to do with the (unconscious) agenda by which linguistic
> development proceeds; the second has to do with the social freedom that the
> child enjoys to interact with parents, siblings, relations, caregivers, and so on.
> (1991; 24)

Hence, in Little's words again:

> Autonomy is not only the intended outcome of developmental learning: it
> is also fundamental to its process....children cannot help but construct
> their own knowledge. (1996b,2)

Or, as Riley has expressed it:

> It may be culture...that provides the tools for organizing and
> understanding our worlds...but it is the individual child
> who must appropriate those tools and learn how to deploy
> them in the construction of his or her own meaning (1996b,21)

Furthermore, according to Little, it is the metacognitive capacity of human beings (Riley,1996b,21) (see 4.2.7, p.95) that allows them to be autonomous:

> In the normal course of development the human child learns to think but
> also to think about thinking; she develops beliefs, but also beliefs about
> beliefs....Our potential for autonomous behaviour derives from the fact that
> we are second-order as well as first-order intentional systems
> (Little,1996b,2).

With regards to autonomy within the classroom, Dick Allright has carried out interesting research. According to him, there is evidence of the existence of autonomy and individualisation in teacher-led classroom interaction (1988,35). There are two arguments that support his view. The first one lies on "the idiosyncrasy of classroom language learning". Learner autonomy is evident, he says, if we consider the fact that what is learned depends on the learner and not on the teacher.

> each lesson is different for each learner, and as teachers know very well
> already, different learners take away quite different things from the same
> lesson (36).

His second argument is about "the co-productive nature of classroom lessons". According to him, all the students' spontaneous interventions in a classroom can be considered autonomous moves since the learner

> seems to have made an individual and independent decision to intervene in
> the lesson, with a question that was hardly likely to be on the teacher's
> agenda (36,37)

And this is not only to the advantage (or disadvantage!) of the student who intervenes but also of any other student in the classroom "who bothers to take advantage of the learning opportunities so provided" (36).

This concept of autonomy clearly opposes to that one that sees autonomy (Crabbe,1993,443) as an "universal good thing" (Pennycook; 1997, 40) that the teachers have the moral obligation to hand over to their students. From a psychological point of view (Benson;1997,24) then, autonomy cannot be given to human beings for it is already an intrinsic feature of their cognitive system.

But still, there seems to be a contradiction between what has been said here and the rationale for the cognitive model of self-direction in section 4.2. First, I said some paragraphs above that not all learners are self-directed and now, Allright and Little (and I!) are saying that all learners are autonomous. In fact, there is not a contradiction, we are just referring to two different phenomena. On the one hand, I have referred to the natural, inborn capacity of human beings to learn, that is, developmental learning. On the other hand, I have described the intentional and effortful capacity of adults to acquire knowledge and skills through different means (section 4.2.2, p. 79). Let me refer to the first one as *autonomy* and reserve the term of *self-directed learning* for the second one. So far, I have been using them as synonyms, but from now on, this difference will be implied in my use of these terms [10]. The reader should take into account that when I make reference to other research, the authors may use the term 'autonomy' implying the two senses I have differentiated here.

There are obvious contextual differences between autonomy and self-direction, but the most important one in terms of cognition is awareness, which the reader will remember, is the essential factor that stands out in self-directed learning. As Little states:

autonomy in formal learning is a highly conscious phenomenon. By
contrast, autonomy as a feature of developmental learning begins as an
entirely implicit phenomenon, and the extent to which it becomes explicit
is infinitely variable (1996b,2)

Finally, following this argument, and taking into account the natural quality of autonomy, it seems to be naive to argue for or against the authenticity of autonomy. Autonomy is a given element of human beings' learning processes. Thus, the question may be better expressed in terms of self-direction. So, we had better ask to what extent it is authentic (i.e. appropriate) to consider formal learning within a self-directed learning approach. To answer this question, we need to consider the role of self-direction.

According to the previous discussion, human beings learn basic (which does not mean easy) knowledge, skills and beliefs in an autonomous way. Moreover, it is necessary to emphasise the fact that human beings *learn*, that is, they are not *taught*. However, there is a moment in most human beings, at least in most cultures, when they start to be taught. This does not mean that they cannot learn autonomously any more. It means that someone, an outsider, has decided that there are certain knowledge, and skills, and beliefs, which need to be acquired. Without the intrinsic motivation to learn (see 4.2.6, p. 93), thus, there is the need to be taught.

But what is the purpose of education? As I see it, the purpose of education, and the formal learning that it implies, is to enhance the natural autonomous process of learning when this becomes lengthy and inefficient. Let me illustrate this point.

Nobody would think to send a healthy baby to school to learn her first language. This is a process any healthy baby can cope with it. However, there are hundreds of other things (learning cybernetics, chemistry, learning how to drive, how to fly a plane, how to operate a computer, etc, etc) where we certainly consider the possibility of formal learning. Of course, there is always the alternative of self-instruction, in which case we are conscious of the risks that we run. Self-instruction can be very rewarding and rich, however, it can also be a lengthy and inefficient process, and even a highly dangerous one (if we think of instances like driving a car or flying a plane!).

The rationale for this thesis does not regard *self-direction* as opposed to *being taught*, i.e. the most popular of formal learning. Nor do I think that it is an either/or matter. As I see it, these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. In the second half of this thesis, I will

discuss the way these two concepts can co-exist and support each other. Meanwhile, let me go back to the discussion about the individual and cultural dimensions of autonomy and self-direction.

4.3.4 The individual dimension of self-direction

In the last section, I dealt with autonomy as a universal feature of human beings and I concluded that autonomy is a natural inborn capacity of human beings to learn. This discussion allowed me to establish the difference between autonomy and self-direction, defining the latter as the intentional acquisition of knowledge and skills. Let me analyse now self-direction from an individual perspective. In other words, in what terms is it authentic for a learner to learn within a self-directed learning framework? To answer this question it is necessary to take into account the definition of self-direction I have been working on. According to it, self-direction consists of certain ability and certain attitude. Ability and attitude are deeply interrelated. Actually both are equally responsible for successful learning outcomes (Littlewood;1997,82). As Brockett and Hiemstra state,

> within the context of learning, it is the ability and/or willingness of
> individuals to take control of their own learning that determines their
> potential for self-direction. (1991,26)

In regard to ability, the learner has to analyse herself and decide if her abilities, in terms of learning styles and strategies, match those required in a self-directed framework. Here, the role of learning to learn schemes becomes very relevant in terms of helping the learner to identify and analyse her learning. Actually, taking into consideration individual factors has been one of the most acknowledged advantages of self-directed learning frameworks. However, there remain several questions without answer. For instance, the definition of learning styles refers to innate ways of processing and storing information. Then, to what extent is it authentic to "train" people with different learning styles for self-directed learning? For example, is it valid to train field dependent learners to be more analytic and field independent learners to be more social sensitive? Or maybe I should put it the other way around: Is it valid for SAC counsellors to close the self-direction doors to those people who are field-dependent learners? The debatable teachability of learning strategies also raises a problem of authenticity: To whom are learning strategies teachable? In what conditions? Which strategies? For how long? etc, etc, etc. Unfortunately, research

on learning styles and strategies has not fully answered this type of questions, which opens a big area for further research[11].

Attitude-wise, the most important point is the learner's willingness to learn in a self-directed way. Being self-directed, as was stated above, means to be able to make decisions about managing learning. In these terms, we have to remind ourselves that decision number 1 is to decide whether to be self-directed or not (and deciding not to, as I see it, is a right any autonomous learner has). There have been many cases in which someone else (the institution, the teacher, the government educational policy) and not the learner decides in favour of self-direction. In fact, the field of learner autonomy is full of phrases such as: "the decision we make for our students" (in a MA lecture), "learners are given the opportunity" (in a book), "Is learner responsibility a good thing?" (as a topic to discuss during a symposium) etc. Such uses of pronouns and passive voice clearly resembles the fact that the person(s) that is making the decision for self-direction is not the learner[12]. In the extreme case, that is not very uncommon, the learner does not even know that she is taking part in an autonomous learning scheme, something which, in definition, seems impossible.

Some paragraphs above, I stated that, within a cognitive framework of self-directed learning the attitudinal factor has a very relevant role. It was also said that behind the learner's attitude towards self-direction, there lies a whole belief system that supports it. The problem is that there are many elements that make up this system of beliefs. Elements such as one's past learning experience, self-image, concept of the target language and culture, and future expectations, all seem to contribute to the development of attitudes. There are some authors who propose different procedures to change attitudes (Wenden, 1991, 118-135) However, as I see it, there are two important aspects to take into consideration. On the one hand, underlying any attitude, there is a system of beliefs that needs to be analysed. On the other hand, no teacher (or counsellor, researcher or support device) can change learners' attitudes. The only thing they can do is set the right conditions for the learners to change their own attitudes, if they decide to do so. Paradoxically, this resistance to change attitudes is another proof of the learner being autonomous. Again, it would be sensible to ask ourselves if the obstinate effort to change attitudes goes against the autonomy the teacher is working for.

With a different perspective on autonomy but still looking for the authentic side of it, some authors consider the issue of autonomy from another angle. They are not interested in the relationship of the individual and her inner cognitive processes (although they do not deny it)[13] but her relationship with the outside world (social vs psychological awareness) (Benson;1997,22). In other words, instead of focusing on the individual's abilities and attitudes to be able to self-direct her learning processes, they emphasise the rights that the individual has to express her own voice, to find her own means of articulation (Pennycook;1997,48). According to Littlewood, this means that autonomy provides the learner with the tools for the expression of her personal meanings and the own creation of her personal learning contexts. Here, the individual is defined not in psychological but in social and political terms.

> Autonomy is....the struggle to become the author of one's own world, to be
> able to create one's own meanings, to pursue cultural alternatives amid the
> cultural politics of everyday life (Pennycook;1997,39)

This critical view of autonomy implies developing a language of critique and a capacity to question our present reality and to consider different cultural alternatives (Pennycook;1997,46). However, this author faces the fact that "we can never step completely outside the cultural and ideological worlds around us" (ibid).

4.3.5 The cultural dimension of autonomy and self-direction

The point made by Pennycook and Benson is also important for realising that there is a third factor that mediates between the two extremes already discussed (universal and individual). This is the cultural dimension. On the one hand, we have seen how even the political views of autonomy acknowledge the restrictions and constraints of the social context. No matter how autonomous a learner is, the rules that she establishes for her, have to be in agreement with the rules established by the cultural context in which she interacts (If we are thinking about self-direction within a formal learning scheme, there are always rules set by the institution of the teacher). On the other hand, from a psychological point of view, learning, either self-directed or other-directed, is not related to individualism. On the contrary, according to Little,

> the psychological interaction that drives developmental and experimental
> learning typically proceeds within a framework of social interaction
> (1995,178)

And then he adds that "total independence is not autonomy but autism" (ibid.).

Therefore, considering that autonomy has to be considered within a given cultural context, the question is to ask to what extent the concept of autonomy is authentic (i.e, appropriate) in relation to that given culture.

First of all, it is necessary to define the concept of culture. According to Pennycook (based on Simon 1992), "culture determines how social reality is understood" (1997,47). In this sense, culture is understood as people's thoughts, beliefs and behaviours that respond to certain social reality. The notion of culture that underlies this study focus on the psychological and genetic features of culture, which imply the notions of "adjustment, problem solving learning and habits" (Berry et al;1992, 166) and understands that

> "culture arises as *adaptive* to the habitat of the group, out of *social*
> interaction, and out of a *creative* process that is characteristic of the
> human species" (ibid).

This definition also implies that a culture can be formed at different levels of organisations. Thus, it is possible to talk about a Mexican and an English culture or even a Western culture. It is evident that this level results in very general characteristics or, what is worse, false stereotypes. However, this type of definition also allows more specific reference. In this sense, we can talk about a learning culture and even "the culture of the EFL classroom". Along this line, Holliday talks about large and small cultures:

> By 'large' culture I mean ethnic, national or international; by 'small' I mean
> any cohesive social grouping. (1997b)

The reader will understand that within the framework of this study it will be necessary to focus on small culture, in the sense of Holliday.

In recent years, there has been a tendency to discuss the cultural issue of autonomy as a dichotomy between the culture in which the approach was created and the one which the learner belongs to. Based on the origins of the autonomy approach for language learning (what I have identified as the European school), it is common, to label it as the Western culture. On the other side, one finds people working for the adaptation and development of the autonomy approach in places such as Singapore or Mexico. There are many possible

terms to identify this dyad: source/target, first/second, start/end. They seem to convey part of the idea but they also carry connotations that I certainly want to avoid. For that reason, I have decided to use the terms *initiator* and *developer* to identify each of these cultures. 'Initiator', it seems to me, is a rather neutral term that clearly indicates the role of the European school in the approach to autonomy in SLA. In the same way, 'developer' conveys the idea of adapting and working with the concept, and avoids the sense of passiveness of words like 'recipient' or 'target'. In this way I am also avoiding the use of an antonymous dyad, for I truly believe that the two cultures involved are not in opposition at all.

Some authors have stated their concern about the relationship between the initiator and the developer culture in terms of autonomy as an approach to language learning. For example, Jones, who was responsible for setting up and running a SAC in Cambodia, talks very openly about the non-authenticity of autonomy in such a context:

> Concepts of autonomy and individual responsibility and freedom as they
> figure in social as well as educational context, come laden with Western
> values. (Jones, 1995,229)

And states that adopting autonomy as "an undiluted educational objective" in a society with different values is "to be at guilty at least of cultural insensitivity" (ibid.). In the same line, Sheerin states that independence "may not be valued as highly in all cultures as it is in the West" (1997,56), and proposes then, to consider it as a means to an end and not an end in itself. David Boud, who has become an acknowledged writer on autonomous educational issues, seems to share the same concern:

> In a static, unchanging society there maybe less need for an emphasis on
> autonomous approaches than there is in one which learners need to adapt
> to frequent change and need to learn new forms of knowledge and how
> to use that knowledge (Boud;1988,25)

I do not wish to discuss this argument in opposition to the autonomy Benson and Pennycook envisage for language education (see previous section). However, it is obvious that Boud is referring to the autonomy I prefer to call self-direction, as it was defined in the last section.

Considering this issue from a different perspective. I think that the cultural difference is an indisputable concept, nevertheless it is not an argument against autonomy and self-

direction, and there are several reasons that underlie this position. Some refer to the situation of the Western culture and some look into the non-western cultures' features.

On the one hand, one could argue that, if autonomy is a product born and conceived particularly in and for the Western culture, it should be more successful and welcomed in West than anywhere else. But this is not the case. According to Little,

learner autonomy is not notably easy to implement in Western systems
of schooling and, despite the aspirations of many national curricula, is
certainly not a widespread phenomenon in Western classrooms (1996b,1)

Macaro, who has recently carried out very interesting research on foreign language education in England, supports this view and, based on his findings, concludes that, in spite of the National Curriculum and its promotion of autonomy, "autonomy is...not at a very advanced stage"(1997,168-9).

Referring to a non-European, but still Western culture, Riley refers to the case of the USA:

interestingly enough the self-directed approach to language learning has
never really caught on in the USA, despite the fact that much of the
inspiration and justification in terms of educational philosophy,
psychology and second language learning has in fact come from the States.
(1996b,18)

On the other hand, the Western vs non-western argument implies that because autonomy is a construct of the Western culture, then it is very difficult to apply it in other cultures. Let me consider what other people have to say about the "Western construct" of autonomy. Pierson, writing from a Chinese context, has delved into traditional sources in order to discuss the suitability of self-directed language learning in that culture, It conclusion is that

There is an ancient Chinese pedagogical tradition congruent and consistent with
the best practice of autonomous learning (1996,55)

Riley, who has shown a particular interest on the cultural aspect of autonomy, argues against the cultural bias of the autonomy approach. Two of his arguments are relevant for this discussion. Considering autonomy from a diachronic perspective, he argues that it has been a constant in the history of civilisation.

the ability to think, act and study independently has been highly regarded by most,
perhaps all of the world's societies, even if such independence has usually been the
privilege of an elite, because of the power it generates and bestows (1996b,19).

From a synchronic perspective, looking at present cultures, he affirms that

> in different ways and mixtures, these factors (the ones that have contributed to the
> emergence of the ideas of autonomy) are to be found all over the world now,
> including South East Asia, so that many of the contingent pressures pushing
> language teaching provision towards autonomy and self-direction are just as present
> here and not certainly exclusive to Europe (ibid.).

And he gives the particular example of a remote culture in Venezuela, the Piora, who show a clear orientation to autonomy. One of their goals, he explains, is to acquire the knowledge "to take conscious responsibility" for the capacities that make up their cultural competence, which according to Western terms, could be called metacognitive awareness (Riley;1996b,20).

As I stated before, the argument of this discussion is not against cultural diversity. Cultures vary and their beliefs and values vary as well. And it is in this variation where we may find the reason for the inappropriateness of the self-directed learning approach in certain contexts. Before the reader thinks that I am contradicting myself, let me make reference to two of the discussions I have previously carried out in this study. First, the reader will remember the difference that Holec makes between two stages in the self-directed learning scheme (see fig. 2.1). These were identified as learning to learn and learning. It was stated that different agents may be involved in the learning to learn stage, whereas, in the learning stage the only agent was the learner, with not external intervention. Second, when dealing with the concepts of alertness and orientation (fig. 4.2) again the stages of learning to learn and learning were related to external and internal elements. With these discussions in mind, it seems very natural to relate the anthropological and ethnographic perspectives with the learning and learning to learn stages respectively (Fig. 4.6). As Riley states, on the one hand, working at an anthropological level, that is to say, seeing learners as human beings, autonomy is widespread and "it is so because it is an inevitable, universal part of human nature"(1996b,22). On the other hand, at an ethnographic level, considering the differences between cultures,

> learner's beliefs vary and different beliefs give rise to different behaviours
> and attitudes to, amongst other things, self-instruction in language
> learning (ibid).

However, this difference does not mean that self-direction is not an attainable educational goal, for we are not talking about the internal, or learning stage, but about the

external, learning to learn one. What it means is that in order to make self-directed learning an attainable goal we have to provide the learner with the necessary conditions for self-direction. It is evident, that these conditions will take into account the context, that is the culture the learner is member of. In other words, it is the learning to learn scheme which needs to be contextualised to match the learning environment.

Far from being culturally biased, autonomy as an educational aim is a social and cognitive imperative, a defining characteristic of the learning process. Its attainment may be either *facilitated or obstructed* by the arrangements for formal learning, which means that the forms of learner training appropriate to given cultural contexts will vary (my italics, Riley;1996b,22-23)
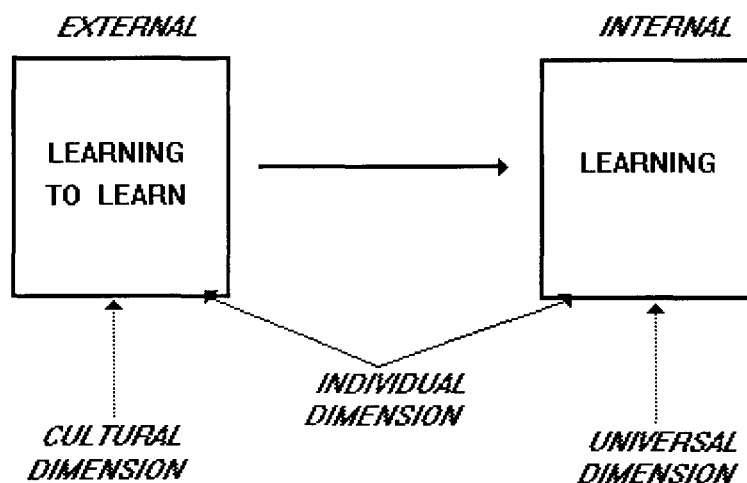
Fig. 4.6. Influence of different dimensions on a self-direction scheme.

As I see it, this is the best way to consider self-direction and autonomy within the domains of authenticity.

4.4 REFORMULATION

As the reader will have noticed, in my attempt to make sense I needed to be critical, productive and context-aware. In the first part of this chapter I re-read a key piece of the literature of self-directed research. The process undergone in this second reading was different from the first time I read it. The second time, I considered it from a critical point of view. I was certainly more aware of what I was reading. I did not take so many things for

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granted and I took into account my knowledge and experience in the field. Thus, I was able to realise that teaching how to be self-directed needs to stand on a very sound rationale that is coherent with the autonomous approach you are conveying.

But seeing things in a critical way is only part of the answer to make sense. It was also necessary to build up, to construct from the knowledge already acquired in order to organise and understand the different elements already gathered. Doing this was like providing a self-explanation for others' explanations. It was turning their knowledge into my knowledge. It was turning "borrowed" concepts into "my own" concepts. That was the underlying force that made me develop a theoretical model for explaining self-directed learning and the aspects that make it different from other-directed learning.

A third way of making sense was to complete the definition of the concept of autonomy and self-direction (once the difference was established) from different perspectives. This helped me to understand current points of view and arguments that added to my own understanding and experience. This was the purpose of Autonomy 3, in which I have analysed the concept of autonomy and self-direction (built up in the two previous sections on autonomy) in three different dimensions (universal, individual and cultural). Within the discussion of the cultural dimension, I referred to the current argument of autonomy as a Western value that tends to see the initiator and developer culture in opposition. This opposition has been regarded as the reason for the inappropriateness and failures of some projects that aimed to foster autonomy in a non-western environment. It was argued, however, that the negative results of these projects may be the results of a clash not due to the concept of autonomy (which seems to be a constant in most cultures) as a rejected value, but to the way the innovation was implemented. In other words, it was an ethnographic clash rather than an anthropological one.

This conclusion seems to direct our attention to the ethnographic level with the purpose to find the way an ethnographic clash can be prevented. According to Riley, whose words were quoted above, this depends on the appropriateness of the learner training scheme and the given cultural factors (1996b,22-23). In other words, he suggests to find convergence between the learning culture, which is a component of the initator and developer culture that come into contact. According to him, and on line with the definition of culture quoted above, a learning culture is

a set of representations, beliefs and values related to learning that directly influence
(the learner's) learning behaviour (Riley;1997,122)

In short, in order to create a new alternative of learning within a given learning culture, one needs to know the existing developer learning culture in which the innovation is going to transpire.

A retrospective analysis of my own development in self-direction makes me think that I have spent most of my time learning about the representations, beliefs and values underlying the philosophy of self-direction and autonomy in education (products of the initator culture) but I have hardly spent any time analysing the developer learning culture. I still do not know what its beliefs and values about learning are in general and about self-direction in particular. I think that I just took this knowledge for granted. We, in SAC Oaxaca, not only "skipped over the debate on what autonomy...mean(t) in our haste to move more rapidly on (its) implementation" (Benson;1997,2), but we also passed over the definition of the learning developer culture. Needless is to say that the adaptation we made was driven by forces (top-down innovation forces) different from the understanding of our students' learning culture.

Therefore, the purpose of the following chapters is to describe the elements of the learning culture of the students in Oaxaca that may be related to self-direction. Underlying this objective there is the assumption that there are first and second order belief systems and that it is necessary to explore both levels. I strongly believe that this knowledge can help us, SAC counsellors, as Cotterall says, "to construct a shared understanding of the language learning process and of the part (learner's beliefs) play in it" (Cotterall, 1995, 203). According to Cotterall, being aware, as a learner and as a teacher, of the learner's beliefs is "an essential foundation of learner autonomy" (ibid). Thus, it seems that awareness does not only play an important metacognitive role (see 4.2.4.3, p. 85), but it is also relevant at a level of interaction between teachers and students.

Making some connections to what I have said along these four chapters, my role as a SAC counsellor, requires me to know what the shadowed outer circle of fig. 3.3 is made of (p.58). In other words, I need to describe the beliefs, representations and values that make up the metacognitive knowledge of the learners I work with. This knowledge will allow me to identify our interaction in the appropriate point of the left side of fig. 3.5 (p. 68). That is to

say, I will be able to understand their stance and expectations towards a self-directed learning scheme and respond in a coherent and convergent way.

As the reader will have noticed, my idea of doing research on self-direction is supported by the understanding that SLA is about cognitive mechanisms that interrelate with different kinds of affective forces. Thus, in the following chapter, I will aim at getting to know the SAC learners within the context in which "a multitude of social factors influence their perceptions (of their learning)" (Block, 1995a).

NOTES:

1) I have chosen this book because, paradoxically, I consider it, as I said before, a good resource for teachers interested in autonomy. This critique does not mean that the book should not be read. On the contrary because it is worth reading it I am analysing it.

2) Little and Singleton (1990) wrote an interesting article where they analyse the styles of some second language learners and their results do not match with those of the GLL study.

3) Gremmo and Riley (1995) mention some gaps in this field but, for reasons that I ignore, never mention that the field lacks research on "learning processes", which is my actual concern.

4) This is one of the reasons that I do not equate "studier" with "learner". Our SAC has had many hardworking studiers that drop out very frustrated because they did not learn the language. Of course Holec is focusing on "good studiers", that is, the one that makes the right decisions.

5) I am using the term other-directed simply to differentiate any general view in SLA research with the specific one in self-direction I am dealing with in this study. I do not imply that all the theories and research I am referring to assumes that there is a teacher leading the learning process. The problem is that it is implied that SLA research refers to any kind of learning (formal or informal, other- or self-directed).
In short, other-directed means learning that it is not self-directed.

6) Terms like consciousness, awareness and attention represent different concepts according to different contexts and researchers. For Bialystok, consciousness has been replaced by awareness (1994). For van Lier (1996), consciousness includes awareness, which in turn, includes attention, alertness and noticing. For Tomlin and Villa (1994) all these elements need to be clearly separated and defined. Schmidt, in 1993, uses consciousness and awareness as synonyms and in 1994 states that there are four kinds of consciousness, and

each of them refer to intention, attention, awareness and control. For the purposes of this study, as the reader will see, I have decided to respect the different definitions of the references I am using but adding my own opinion and concept of them. This is specifically true for alertness, orientation and awareness, key concepts for the development of the model.

7) Although van Lier's main interest is the definition and analysis of awareness, sometimes he refers to awareness using the generic, or superordinate term of consciousness (this may be due to the work he is referring to).

8) Broady's study is related to attitudes and not to the beliefs underlying them. However, I decided to include it because of its relevance. Moreover, although different authors label their concepts with different terms sometimes they seem to be discussing the same phenomena (eg. Cotterall's and Broady's learner independence).
There are another two studies which I regard as very relevant to this issue. One is Little D, Singleton D and Silvious W (1984), *Second Languages in Ireland: Experiences, attitudes and needs*, and Press, M (1996), "Ethnicity and the autonomous language learner: different beliefs and learning strategies?". However, I did not include them in my analysis because they are not focusing on the belief categories the way the others do. To try to infer some categories would have meant too much interpretation (or misinterpretation) of their purposes. Nevertheless, their results are congruent with the ones of the studies presented here and the conclusions support what has been said here.

9) Benson (1997) and Pennycook (1997), concerned about the limited, and sometimes narrow-minded, views of autonomy of some people, have made their own classification of different approaches to autonomy. I do not specifically identify with a particular one but prefer to take advantage of all of them in order to make sense of my own experience in Mexico.

10) The rationale underlying the difference between the terms of autonomy and self-direction is similar to the one underlying Holec's definitions of autonomy B) and C) (section 2.3) however, the reader will notice the different conceptualisation.

11) Little and Singleton (1990) have carried out interesting research in this area and suggested that cognitive style do not stop learners to take the most from different situations and warn us that "it is essential to distinguish between the language learner's cognitive style, of which he may be largely unconscious and his approach to the learning task, which is at least intermittently conscious and may well be in conflict with the cognitive requirements of the learning task".

12) The best example of this approach to autonomy may be the one reflected in the book titled *Deciding to individualize learning: a study of the process,* in which the three people who made the decision (and whose points of view are recorded in this book) were: a leading member of the Scottish Inspectorate ("perceived as the manager of the innovation"), the Principal of the Dundee College of Education and a lecturer in the Department of Psychology in the same college. One of them stated that "this powerful alliance (of the three

people involved) is a key factor in any understanding of the decision-making processes which resulted in this important innovation in Scottish education" (Mackenzie;1978,21).

13) Pennycook refers to Lindley (1986), who states that individual autonomy is a "form of self-mastery, both mastery over one's self (an internal, psychological mastery) and freedom from mastery exercised over oneself by others (an external, social and political freedom. (1997,36). In fact, Pennycook concern is that the "psychologized technologized and universalized" versions of autonomy have forgotten or minimised (perhaps intentionally) the political and critical force of autonomy, which he accused of "apolitical". According to Benson (1997,31), these technical and psychological versions make the students "assimilate themselves to established methodologies and ideologies of learning".

5. REVISITING THE SAC

The aim of this chapter is the description of an empirical study I carried out in Mexico. It is divided into two parts. The first one describes the project's plan and the way I developed it. It also introduces the participants, nine SAC users that took part in it. The second part explains the reasons I had for such a study. It develops into a discussion about methodology on self-directed learning research. This discussion links with the theoretical aspect of the present research.

5.1 WHAT I DID IN MEXICO: The Oaxaca/97 project

When I went to Mexico, after several months of working on the previous chapters of this thesis, my main goal was not only getting data for analysis and interpretation. I also wanted to see the way I behave as a counsellor, taking into account the changes I had experienced during the time of reflection I had undergone in England. Above all, I wanted to be in touch with SAC students, playing my usual role of counsellor and learn from that.

The first factor that I had to take into account was that I was going to Mexico with a double objective in mind: to work as a counsellor and to get data for my research. Although the two objectives were perfectly compatible, the research constraints of the situation called for some adjustments. The first problem I had to solve was related to time, a factor that I never consider when I work in normal conditions (as opposed to research conditions). I was going to be there for only three months (July, August and September, 1997), two months in Summer and one month at the beginning of the Autumn term. There was also the problem of finding enough participants for the study. The problem I encountered was that in spite of the fact that the SAC remains open during the Summer, there are considerably fewer users than in other times of the year. This

made me decide for an open invitation to SAC users for participating in the project. The invitation was open to any SAC user who had enough time to work with me during the months of August and September, since there was a two week period of vacation in summer. Because of this fact, during July I managed to announce the project, gathered some students, (18 responded to the invitation), and interacted with them in two different occasions. That left me with two complete months. Appendix 3 shows the calendar of the activities held during the whole project.

As the reader will notice from the calendar, the project's programme mainly consisted of three different types of activities, or sessions: individual/group sessions (I/GS), discussion sessions (DS) and input sessions (IS). The purpose of these sessions was very different from each other although it was seen that they were complementary in different ways.

In the input sessions, my objective was to give the participants the necessary information to understand the project's objective and content. These sessions were always led by me and they took the form of "normal" classroom sessions where "I taught them", as one participant put it. The content of the sessions is specified in Fig 5.1. Appendix 4 contains all the handouts that were given to the participants during these sessions.

===

A. INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP SESSIONS (I/GS)

Session	Date	Content
1	7-10 Jul	Who are you? Your history as a Foreign language learner (based on a written BIOGRAPHY)
2	14-17	How do you work? The way you work in SAC (based on a 30min free task) Self-access work
3	7 Aug	"Please, don't pay attention" Exploration of degrees of attention and the monitoring of it
4	11	Awareness 1 (Intention) What do you plan to learn? (based on a QUESTIONNAIRE)
5	12	Awareness 2 (Attention) What did you find?
6	13	Awareness 3 (of understanding) What did you understand?

7	18	Metacognitive strategies: analysis of a common task (groups of three)
8	19	Metacognitive awareness (self-observation of a common task -group)
9	20 of	Metacognitive strategies, playing "The Lynx" (self-evaluation and monitoring strategies, difference between cognitive and metacognitive strategies, self-observation)
10	21	Metacognitive strategies, Changing strategies (based on a task that had been worked before) (group)
11	25	Self-revelation (Introspection) Watching a film (15 min.)
12	28	Metacognitive knowledge.- the task, evaluation of a common task (group) Metacognitive knowledge.- the person, who you are (several questionnaires)
13	2 Sep	Metacognitive knowledge.- your profile (based on questionnaires)
14	3	Metacognitive strategies.- Planning a specific objective (past or third conditional)
15	4	Metacognitive strategies.- Evaluating and planning . Reporting monitoring of a specific task (past or third conditional)
16	8	Metacognitive strategies.- Evaluating and planning, Reporting monitoring. of a specific task (past or third conditional)
17	9	Metacognitive strategies.- Evaluating and planning, Reporting monitoring. of a specific task (past or third conditional)
18	10	Metacognitive strategies.- Evaluating and planning, Reporting monitoring. of a specific task (past or third conditional)
19	7	Metacognitive strategies.- Evaluating and planning, Reporting monitoring. of a specific task (past or third conditional)
20	18	Global self-evaluation (based on a questionnaire)

B. INPUT SESSIONS (IS)

1	4 Jul	Project introduction Explanation of objectives
2	6 Aug	Description of: Timetable, activities, SAC work and diaries (HANDOUT)
3	8	Self-learning process model, explanation of the six stages (HANDOUT)
4	14	Metacognitive Strategies, explanation of three strategies (HANDOUT)
5	19	Metacognitive Awareness, introduction of verbal reports (HANDOUT)
6	26	Metacognitive Knowledge, introduction to person, task and strategy (HANDOUT)
7	11 Sep	Metacognitive knowledge, person analysis (HANDOUT)

C. DISCUSSION SESSIONS (DS)

1	11 Jul	The National Educational System
2	18	Foreign languages in the National Curriculum
3	8 Aug	Autonomy, independence and self-access work
4	22	How do we learn foreign languages at school
5	29	What do you think of the Self-Access Centre
6	5 Sep	The counsellor, the counselling sessions and the SAC user
7	19	Project evaluation

Fig. 5.1 Type and content of sessions

The other two types of sessions, individual/group (I/GS) and discussion (DS) sessions, were mainly designed with the objective of getting to know the participants and working with them in a more individual basis. These sessions were also relevant for the amount of output I got from the participants. In the DS the main idea was to discuss several issues related to education and language learning. In general, my participation in these was very scarce. The I/GS were organised according to different formats. Sometimes I worked with the group divided into two (a noon and an evening session), others, I worked with twos or threes, and most of the time I worked on a one-to-one basis (see Appendix 3). With regards to content, the purpose of most of the I/GS was for the learners to talk retrospectively about their current learning of a FL and/or relate it to some aspects of the previous IS. Some I/GS were aimed at talking about the participants' histories as foreign language learners and some had the objective to make them reflect on specific aspects of their learning processes. On the whole, participants partook in eleven individual I/GS, two pair I/GS, seven group I/GS, seven DS and seven IS in a period of 8 weeks during July, August and September, 1997.

The kind of data I got from the project was gathered in different forms. All the sessions were tape-recorded and I also asked the participants to keep a diary and write a biography concerning their experiences as foreign language learners. Besides, I took some notes when I considered it to be pertinent. Basically these notes recorded the ongoing decisions I made during the project, some problems and unexpected situations I came across and my reaction to them and the new ideas that arose from the experience I was undergoing. Moreover, I asked the participants to answer some questionnaires

specifically related to the content of some sessions. I have also got other types of documents such as answers to language tasks and tapes recorded with the product of specific activities.

5.1.1 The participants

As I mentioned before, all the participants who took part in this project responded to an invitation that was posted two weeks before the project started. The only requirement was to be a SAC user. Because of this, all the participants shared an interest and motivation to learn a foreign language and were, or had been, undergraduate students. Nevertheless they were also very different in several respects.

	SEX	AGE	OCCUPATION	TARGET LANGUAGE	TIME AS A SAC USER	ENGLISH CLASSES
1 (T)	male	27	MA student Sociology	English	--	NO
2 (A)	male	40	Hydraulic engineer	English	2 years	NO
3 (E)	female	24	BA student TEFL (finished)	English	4 years *	PREVIOUS TERM
4 (F)**	male	22	BA student TEFL (3rd year)	English	3 years	YES
5 (Ga)**	female	20	BA student TEFL (2nd year)	English	3 years	YES
6 (Gl)	female	20	BA student TEFL (2nd year)	English	3 years *	YES
7 (J)	male	24	BA student Electronics	English	6 months	YES
8 (K)**	female	26	BA student TEFL (3rd year)	English	4 years	YES
9 (S)	male	35	Pub owner and manager	English	6 months	TEN YEARS AGO

Fig. 5.2. The participants

With regards to the table shown in Fig. 5.2, I have several comments to make. First of all, it only contains the participants who finished the project. In fact, I started

with 18 people who responded to the invitation but half of them left the project. As I see it, the reasons for their leaving were mainly three. It was obvious that some (four of them) were not interested enough and when they realised that the project required them to be at the SAC everyday for more than two months they left the project. They did this at a very early stage of it, mainly before the ISs started. The problem of others (another four) was actually the time. The attendance of two of them was impeded by health and administrative problems that were not expected. The other two were adults with family and job responsibilities that hindered their participation on the project. All of them were very apologetic and sorry about this. However their few participations were recorded and the reader may notice that some of the data come from these people. There was a unique case where the expectations of the participant did not match with the objectives of the project. From the very beginning this person stated that he wanted personal tuition on linguistic aspects. It was obvious that my explanation of the project was not convincing enough for he left after the first two meetings.

Nevertheless, there were nine people whose participation was constant throughout the project. These are the nine people included Fig. 5.2. On the one hand, as the reader can see, five of the participants (Participant E, F, Ga, Gl and K) share the same interest and field for they study the BA. in TEFL. This also means that, they have certain knowledge of English, are interested in teaching languages and have some basic knowledge of SLA research. However, there are certain aspects that make them quite different. Although all of them have compulsory English courses as part of the BA. curriculum, their English level is not the same. According to their English records, some can be considered advanced learners while others have been struggling and get grades below average or failing in their language courses. Their use of the SAC also varies. Some of them are regular users of the SAC whereas others hardly go to study there (with a (*) in Fig. 5.2). There is still another difference among these students. Three of them (with a (**) in Fig. 5.2) had already participated on a previous project I carried out during Summer of 1996. I found that this is important because they had certain expectations about this project. I also found that they made many connections between the two projects. I will comment on this in the next chapter.

On the other hand, participants T, A, J, and S come from different academic backgrounds and their only interest in a foreign language is to learn it. Their level of English was fairly low. All of them had taken the basic compulsory English courses at

secondary and preparatory school (see Fig. 2.3, p. 28). At the time that the project took place, two of them were, or had been, enrolled in English classes. For the other two (Participants T and A), the only possibility to study English was through the SAC. Moreover, Participant T had just enrolled at the SAC, when he joined the project. This fact becomes relevant in the information I gathered from him.

5.1.2 The setting

Except for the one-to-one sessions, the participants and I normally met in a SAC room that is generally used for the users' course. It is furnished with around thirty movable chairs and one or two tables. We usually worked around the tables, which were useful for recording and taking notes. During the IS, I sometimes used a portable whiteboard. Although having privacy was one of the great advantages of the room, its great disadvantage was the noise from outside. The SAC is situated in a busy downtown area next to the Oaxacan Red Cross. This means that on several occasions during the sessions, the person that is speaking has to wait until a noisy bus or deafening ambulance disappears in order to make his/her voice audible. For two weeks, however, because the SAC was closed for regular users at 17:00 we carried out the evening sessions in a more open and quiet area at the back of the centre.

For the one-to-one sessions we met in one of the cubicles that are supposed to be used for counselling sessions. These 2x2 meter rooms have a desk against one of the walls, two chairs and some shelves and file cabinets. There was always a tape recorder and some notes on the desk. We usually sat in a corner of it. Because of the heat and the size of the room the door was always opened. Although I liked this informal atmosphere, our conversations were sometimes interrupted by passers-by of different types.

5.2 WHY I DID WHAT I DID: THE METHODOLOGY

In short, what I did was to revisit the SAC and, for me, there is no doubt that I saw it from a very different point of view. I worked with nine students and recorded their stories about their personal experiences as FL learners. I also got their own versions of

the project (in the form of diaries). I got my own story of it and the experiences and reflections that it generated. I collected data of how the participants understood and viewed key aspects that underlie their self-directed learning. I interacted with the participants in their own learning context. I worked with individuals, with pairs and with groups in such a way that they were able to put into practice first and then into words their learning processes. In this regard, I might call my method of inquiry ethnographic research. In the following paragraphs, I will explain to the reader the reasons for this type of research and the specific features of my own ethnographic approach.

5.2.1 Ethnographic research

As I stated in the previous chapter, one of my aims is to describe the *learning culture* of the students in SAC Oaxaca, and for this reason I thought that an appropriate methodology for this research should understand the cultural factor as the core of research analysis and interpretation. Let me start with a quotation from Hammersley and Atkinson (1983,1), who have written extensively about ethnographic issues. According to them

> there is a disagreement as to whether ethnography's distinctive feature is the elicitation of *cultural* knowledge (Spradley 1980), the detailed investigation of patterns of *social interaction* (Gumpersz 1981), or holistic analysis of *societies* (Lutz 1981). (my italics, 1983,1)

Rather than focusing on the differences between the definitions, I want the reader to notice that *culture* is the common denominator of these three different approaches (for a definition of *culture* and *learning culture*, see p. 111 and p. 117). It is evident that, while ethnographers do not agree about different aspects of theoretical and practical matters (something I am going to deal with in the following paragraphs), all of them seem to agree about the relevance of focusing on culture. Regarding ethnography as a philosophical paradigm, Clifford defines it as "writing about, against and among cultures" (1986,3) To add to this, Byram (1989,88) states that, in general, the work of the social anthropologist is "to explain a foreign culture to those who have not experienced it". In this regard, from the beginning of this thesis my purpose has been to describe my own "foreign culture" to outsiders. Obviously, the connotation of *foreign* and *outsiders* is not that of nationalities but of people outside the group who make up this specific learning culture. In other words, doing ethnography has as its purpose the immersion of

the outsider in the context in order to understand what it feels like to participate in a particular culture.

In ethnographic research, it is also important to bear in mind the dynamic characteristics of cultures. As Clifford writes "'Cultures' do not hold still for their portraits". The dynamism of social phenomena calls for a different stance on the part of the ethnographic researcher. First of all, she is not looking for *the* truth, that objective reality that is outside there to be discovered. Rather,

> ethnographers believe that human behaviour cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perceptions and belief systems of those involved in the research, both as researchers and subjects (Nunan,1992)

Although ethnographic experiences can be "fragmentary and vicarious" (Atkinson (1990,82), they also provide us with a "poliphonal and collaborative text" (ibid.) which is an interaction of multiple perspectives and voices (ibid.) which contrasts with the "objective" third person point of view of positivist research.

Looking at the features of ethnography as a form of social research, Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), state that there are four elements that are usually present in ethnographic research. As Fig. 5.3 shows, they clearly contrast with positivist research procedures.

	ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH	POSITIVIST RESEARCH
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	exploration of the nature of particular social phenomena	setting out to test hypotheses particular social phenomena
DATA COLLECTION	unstructured data	a closed set of analytic categories to code data
DATA SOURCES	small number of cases (perhaps just one)	large number of cases (a representative sample)
DATA TREATMENT	explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions	quantification and statistical analysis

Fig. 5.3 Features of ethnographic research, adapted from Atkinson and Hammersley (1994)

Ethnography in applied linguistics has not been uncommon. In 1988, Watson-Gegeo wrote that ethnography had become "fashionable" in ESL research. The reason for this was the "promise for investigating issues difficult to address through

experimental research" (1988). She was also concerned by the fact that different people were understanding ethnography in very different ways and the result was "impressionistic and superficial" studies with the label of ethnographic research. She defines what she calls the essentials of ethnography and states that true ethnography can be very helpful for improving teaching and teacher training in ESL (ibid.). Watson-Gegeo is not alone in her hopes about ethnography in applied linguistics. In the following paragraphs I will deal with the approaches of van Lier, Holliday and Freeman, three researchers in language education who have subscribed to ethnographic research. As it will be evident, their approaches do not coincide. In fact, they diverge in what, for me, are key research elements. As I see it, the comparison of these approaches will be very relevant to my own research because it will allow me to put forward the specific characteristics of my project and the reasons for my decision-making with regards to methodology.

5.2.1.1 Van Lier

Leo van Lier, in a book on classroom research (1988,1) whose subtitle is *Ethnography and second-language classroom research,* considers ethnography as "the core of a humanistic approach to social science". According to him (1988,54), ethnography is based on two principles: the *emic* and the *holistic* principles. The former calls for an insider's (as opposed to an outsider or etic) description and explanation of the culture studied (see Watson-Gegeo;1988 for ESP research examples on this issue). This means that the researcher has to consider the culture from the inside, taking into account "just those features of the scene that are marked as significant by internal criteria" (Brend:1974, 3 quoted in van Lier,ibid,17). The latter principle is based in Heath's research (1983, cited in van Lier, ibid, 55). It argues for a contextualisation both in terms of relating the research to existing knowledge in the field and to the wider social context of the participants. Watson-Gegeo explains the holistic aspect in terms of "a series of concentric rings of increasingly larger contexts" (1988). Thus, the ethnographer has to bear in mind that the specific phenomena s/he is investigating belongs to a certain context which, in turn, belongs to a larger one. Related to this principle, van Lier puts special emphasis on what he calls the "contextually defined setting", which he defines as everything that "is relevant to the participants themselves" (1988,1).

Method-wise, van Lier says that there is a range of techniques that ethnographers use. The choice, he adds, always depends on the types of data the researcher considers

relevant. For him, *observation* is the method to be used. Considering it a "central aspect of classroom research"(ibid,39), he gives the possibility of different types of observation: participatory/non-participatory and overt/covert observation. With observation as the basis, then the researcher can describe and analyse the classroom phenomena, which is his focus. The recording and transcription of the observed data let the researcher work with it. In a very detailed and specific way, van Lier discusses some possibilities for the data to be described and analysed. He mainly focuses on discourse elements of classroom interaction, namely, turn taking, structure of participation and organisation of repair. van Lier is interested in language as data and not as means to get data. For this reason, he thinks that observation is better than interviewing as a research method. Based on Mehan's work on ethnography, he writes

> we must realize that the close, rigorous examination of interaction per se, as
> exemplified by Mehan....may reveal things about how learners and teachers get
> their lessons accomplished, which no amount of interviewing can reveal (ibid,62)

In his book van Lier clearly separates ethnography from other types of methodology (under the subheading of "Other approaches") such as classroom experiment and action research and concludes saying that "the debate between interpretative (or humanistic) versus experimental (or positivistic) science has existed for centuries and continues unabated" (ibid,69).

I clearly understand why van Lier relies on observation as his main method, followed by an intense description and analysis of the classroom data. However, I do not think that this is a suitable procedure for carrying out self-directed learning research. First of all, SAC contexts lack the everyday interaction of classrooms. Things in SACs happen in a more covert way. My own attempts to observe SAC activity have ended in boring descriptions of students going from the shelves to the working booths to the shelves again, with occasional questions to the counsellor on the floor about the location of material or the operation of a piece of equipment. There have been, of course, interesting studies that try to go further than that. Teremetz and Wright (1997) have observed the way two pairs of students work with interactive computer programs. They can objectively state where the students start and where they go. For instance, some students may start in the key source text and work only with the dictionary and the language notes translation. Others may work more interactively combining the task and the gap exercise with the text itself. In short, Teremetz and Wright were able to visualise the pathways that the students went through when working by themselves. Although this

is an interesting starting point for another type of SAC observation, it does not work for the present research, which calls for the collection of different kind of data and a deeper description and analysis of it.

I strongly believe that ethnography allows for more than observations of the world (be this participant or non-participant observation). Clifford has stated that "ethnographic experience and the participant-observation ideal are shown to be problematic" (1986,14). Moreover, he believes that the role of the ethnographer is no more that of the "experienced" observer and calls for a discursive rather than a visual paradigm. He says

> Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually -as objects, theaters, texts- it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. (1986,12)

Let me now consider another applied linguistics ethnographic approach and the way it contrasts with van Lier's.

5.2.1.2 Holliday

There are two points in which van Lier and Holliday do not coincide. These are the classification of methods and the discussion of emic/etic issues. Adrian Holliday (1994, 1996, 1997) has often carried out and written specifically about ethnography in language education research. According to him, ethnography is a branch of anthropology that "studies the behaviour of groups of people", and agrees that it is very suitable for the investigation of the teacher, the student and the classroom (1994,163). Being very concerned about cultural issues, he also calls for a methodology "which must by nature be culture-sensitive" (ibid,160). Holliday states that through ethnography, people who work within international English language education, can achieve what he calls a "sociological imagination...(which) is essential if (we) are to understand and negotiate the complexities of a cosmopolitan environment" (1996,250).

Unlike van Lier, Holliday does not draw a line between ethnography and action research. On the contrary, he calls for an *ethnographic action research*, which according to him takes the form of a spiral relationship between research and action:

> To be realistic, this spiral has to begin with teaching, during the process of teaching the teacher learns about the classroom, this learning gives rise to an adaptation of the teaching methodology; the learning process continues to evaluate the changes to the teaching methodology, which in turn requires

> learning about the changed classroom situation which it brings about and
> so on. (1994,163).

I believe in this kind of research, which deals with *intervention* of different types. After reading more about the project in the next chapter, the reader will note the resemblance of my research with the concept of Holliday's ethnographic action research.

However, Holliday thinks that ethnography in SLA research has been too emic, in the sense that it has focused on classroom language and forgotten the outside reality. In other words, the emic principle has blotted out the holistic one. This emic perspective, according to Holliday, has only focused on what is *said* and has generally ignored what is *done*. Although Holliday talks about interacting,

> we learn about a culture from the way in which it interacts with ourselves (1996,245),

his meaning of interaction is obviously wider than what van Lier's approach implies. Stating that ethnography "has often been restricted to oral aspects of classroom behaviour" (1996,234). The "emicism of verbal data", as he calls it, is too narrow and specific for understanding what happens in FL teaching/learning situations. Instead, he says, a "sociological imagination in the researcher will enable ...(him/her to) locate oneself and one's actions critically within a wider community or world scenario" (ibid.). In other words, he considers that research in this field has to analyse and interpret data taking into account "the multiplicity of relations between students, educators, the community, and also the people, material, and concepts which the profession transports along cultures"(ibid.).

It is evident that Holliday's concept of emic is different in meaning from van Lier's. However, Holliday is not talking about a different connotation of concepts but a different position as an ethnographic researcher. As I understand Holliday's argument, the development of this thesis goes very well with his approach since it has been carried out in such a way to analyse "the multiplicity of relations" between all the people, events and processes that have been involved in setting up and running the SAC in Oaxaca. However, if I needed to describe my own position as researcher I would say that it is an emic position. Let me elaborate on this.

First of all, I was born in the same country of the participants of the project. This does not only mean that we were able to communicate in the same language, which is in itself a better situation, but it also means that I am part of that culture that looks at English as a symbol of an outsider culture, but at the same time considers it as an

important personal goal. I have also been part of the same educational framework. Like the participants, I have studied English at Mexican schools, and I also know the classroom conditions in which English courses take place. I have learned English in a very similar situation, and I have also experienced the effectiveness of teacher-led methodology and a (for me, almost unconscious) scepticism about the idea of learning without a teacher. I, like them, also belong to the learning culture of the SAC in Oaxaca, which means much more than getting to know the same materials and the same people. In short, to paraphrase Delamont and Atkinson's words (1995,10), I am inevitably using my membership knowledge in order to recognise and interpret the SAC situation in Oaxaca.

Secondly, the nature of my research calls for a closer relationship with the learner. As I said some paragraphs above, it is impossible to just sit down and "observe" without getting involved. My purpose is to delve into learning processes that are not overt. For me, that means a need for intervention (see above) rather than observation. Moreover, it implies getting to know the learner and his/her learning processes. It also means getting involved in the learning processes rather than trying to capture them from the outside.

Finally, I have learned that only being involved in the learning processes you can understand them. This, in turn, has allowed me, as a researcher, to interpret them and make decisions inside the research process. From outside, I definitively would not be able to decide anything. As I see it, the ongoing understanding and decision-making were two essential elements of the project, something that would not have been experienced if I had been standing "outside" it.

As the reader can see, my position as researcher is nothing if not an emic position. Actually, I would say that I fall into the category of "indigenous ethnographer" (Clifford, 1986, 9):

> Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding (ibid)

Let me go now to a discussion of Freeman's position in comparison with the two ethnographic approaches already mentioned. This discussion is deeply related to my emic research stance and the way I carried out my study. In particular, I am interested in the specific focus of Freeman's ethnographic analysis and his point of view about the emic/etic dychotomy.

5.2.1.3 Freeman

In regard to the focus of ethnographic analysis, van Lier says that ethnography "studies human *behaviour* in its social context"(1988,48). Holliday also uses the word "behaviour" to define ethnography. However, the associations and research limitations are obvious. Using different terms, Byram writes that

> Ethnography ...answers a legitimate curiosity as to what it is like to belong to another culture...a curiosity which is not so much about facts as about the way these facts are subjectively experienced, and which calls for interpretation and description. (1989,88)

With this, Byram does two things. He prevents the association with some schools that have isolated and worked with behaviour in a vacuum and he broadens the possibilities of ethnographic research. With regard to the latter, Freeman has developed an interesting argument.

According to Freeman, descriptive research in the field of FL teaching and learning can be carried out in three different ways. First, there is product research, that is, when researchers are interested in finding out *what* is learned by students, i.e. the *outcome* of the teaching/learning process. Second, researchers may be interested in describing *how* something is learned. Thus, instead of looking at outcomes, they focus on learners' *behaviour*. Most of this type of research, called process research, has been carried out through observation. According to Freeman, Holliday's and van Lier's approaches support ethnographic process research. Finally, there is research that is focused neither on the "what" nor on the "how" but on the *why* of teaching/learning processes. In other words, research of this type is interested on finding the *reasons* why something was learned (the "what") in the way in was learned (the "how"). Therefore, according to Freeman, the object of research is a set of reasons (as opposed to behaviours and outcomes). He thinks that the fact that something was learned in a specific way is only important if we know the reasons of that teaching/learning process. Freeman calls this *hermeneutic or interpretative research*. For him, the hermeneutic paradigm

> (which) focuses on the perspectives of participants (often as contrasted with those of outsiders), offers a means to examine the purposes, meanings and interpretations of .....what people think and how they understand the world in which they live and act. (1996,360)

However, "purposes, meanings and interpretations" are not observable events open to the public domain. Looking for reasons means that we are dealing with "a

cognitive world that is unseen, unheard and only indirectly knowable"(ibid.). In order to be able to collect, analyse and interpret this type of data, Freeman opts for what he calls *second order research* whose aim is to "uncover and to document (people's) understandings (of phenomena) and not the phenomena themselves" (ibid., 365). In other words, research is not aimed at the world but at people's ideas about the world. This way of regarding research fits perfectly into my discussion on learner's beliefs about self-directed learning (see p.95 and the difference between first and second order systems p. 100) and my intention to delve into this especially important part of learners' metacognitive knowledge (see 4.4, 115).

This view also requires a well-defined position on the part of the researcher. Thus, Freeman calls for an involved researcher whose aim is to become an insider of the target culture, "who you are", he says, "shapes what you get" (1997). In this sense, I would say that interpretation is not complete without the participation of the researcher. This is one of the most important elements of ethnographic rationale, which is overtly opposed to the objective stance of the positivist researcher. "Ethnographic truths", says Clifford, "are...*partial* -committed and incomplete" (1986). In ethnographic research, one cannot claim to be objective or neutral, one can only be aware of, and admit, one's involvement and subjectivity and, I will also add, take advantage of it.

Along with his emic stance, Freeman argues for an emic approach to second language learning and teaching research, saying that the stories of the teachers are valuable and need to be taken into consideration (This is clearly opposed to Holliday's anti-emic position). He calls for a "presentational approach" (1996b) for studying and interpreting language data, arguing that the use of linguistic knowledge and its "nature, form, and social dimensions" (1996a,1) are perfect tools for the hermeneutic researcher. For him,

> language provides the pivotal link in the data collection between the unseen
> mental worlds of the participants and the public world of the research process
> (1996a,365)

As the reader can see, there are several points in Freeman's ethnographic approach that converge with my own research. However, I cannot say that I carried out my study in the way he carries out his. Apart from the fact that he is mainly working with teachers who work in classrooms and his focus is on teachers' thinking while mine is on learners', there is another aspect which does not meet the special requirements of my study. The main way in which he gathers data from his informants is through

interviews and, to my mind interviewing was not the best tool for me to carry out the present research. This point needs further elaboration (see following section).

Fig. 5.4 summarises the main points of these three different approaches:

Van Lier	Holliday	Freeman
- emic and holistic principles - contextually defined setting - observation as research tool - discourse analysis as interpretative tool	- culture-sensitive - sociological imagination - ethnographic action research - holistic above emic principle	- reasons above behaviours and outcomes (second order) - hermeneutic/interpretative research - emic stance of researcher

Fig. 5.4 Three different approaches of ethnographic research in language education

5.2.2 INSIDER TOOLS

At the planning stage of the study in question, I thought that my main tool for getting data was going to be interviewing. However, as soon as I started to put things in practice, I realised that I was not dealing with interviews. Actually, on several occasions, I found myself doing things opposed to what the literature recommends. Often, I had came across authors saying that interviewers should avoid giving their opinions, should minimise their influence and should look for distance and objectivity (Fontana and Frey;1994,367-9). And often I found myself doing quite the opposite. At that moment I felt the necessity to find a way to explain the way I was doing research and the reasons that underlay it.

First of all, I had to remind myself about my stance as an emic ethnographer carrying out action research. As I stated above, this involves being, part of the research context, that is, being an insider. With regard to this, I believe that when you are, or become, an insider, you need to work with the tools that the inner context provides you with. In the next paragraphs I will explain why I considered that some instruments, like verbal reports, were useful for my research while others, such as interviews (and observations, see above) were not.

Let me start with, what I see as a main issue: what are the insider tools a reseacher can work with? To answer this question, one has to reflect on her role in the context that is being researched and this allows her to see that the insider tools may vary from research to research and context to context. Thus, in order to answer this question for my own research I need to reflect on my job as a SAC counsellor, which is also my insider role. Taking into account the way I define self-directed learning, I consider that

my main task in a self-access centre is to interact with the learners and their learning processes. I understand this interaction in three different ways: *counselling, teaching* and *leading discussions*. Now, I have got an answer to the question posed at the beginning of this paragraph. These three modes of interaction with learners are my insider tools and through them I can collect the data I need for my further understanding of the learning phenomena I am studying. Fig 5.5 shows the place I give to the resources I used for my research. Because of the interconnection between roles, these resources were not exclusive to one single role but were used and referred to in the three of them. It also shows that there is a relationship between insider roles and resources and that the former are the only factors that determine the latter.
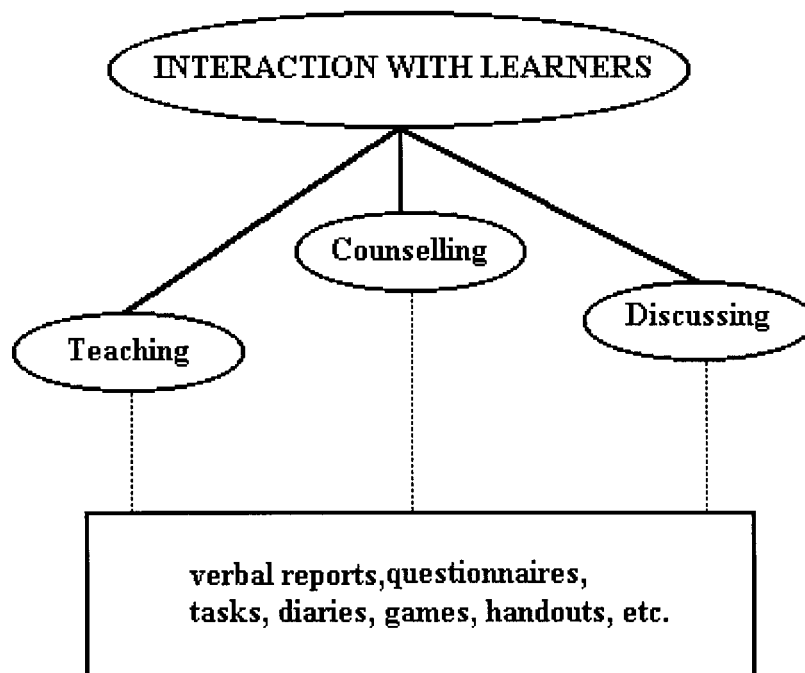
Fig. 5.5 Relationship of insider roles and research resources.

In the next chapter I will delve into the nature of counselling for self-directed learning. Considering, however, that there are a number of references that describe counselling as a type of interviewing, I think that I have to elaborate on this issue now. Above all, I want to be clear about two things. Firstly, for me, counselling and interviewing are two different things. Secondly, I am not against interviewing as a research technique. I have used it and I know how useful it can result in certain research situations. What I am saying here, then, is that I do not think that it is the appropriate tool for the present research.

As I see it, there are two problems inherent in the use of the concept. On the one hand, "interviewing" has turned into an umbrella term that covers almost any type of interaction between researcher and subjects. Almost everything is considered interviewing. Many texts even use interviewing as synonym of different modes of interacting such as discussion or verbal report. I strongly believe that one cannot use a term so loosely. On the other hand, the term is so widely used that it seems to carry certain universal default features. For instance, most people think that if the interviewee starts asking questions there is something wrong in the interview. Moreover, the fixation of interviewer/interviewee roles presupposes the control of discourse on the part of the interviewer. All this seems to be part of folk wisdom, However, this is an essential issue if we consider that I was going to use it with the participants of the project. Let me quote a simple straightforward definition of interview:

> the transaction that takes place between seeking information on the part of one
> and supplying information on the part of the other (Cohen and Manion; 1994,271)

Definitions like this make me avoid the term when working with in the project. I absolutely did not want them to think of an interviewing situation where it is the interviewer, and the audience, if there is one, who are interested in the answers of the questions and in which the interviewee, in most of cases, does not focus on the answers, either because she is already aware that she knows them or because she is more interested in discovering the hidden agenda of the interviewer. I wanted the participants to think in terms of a counselling event where, on the contrary, there is supposed to be a balanced interest in the answers of the counsellee, and of the counsellor as well and in which both parties have enough reasons to make questions and to give answers, and both parties are equally interested in what is being said for this is the basis for both, further interaction and study plans.

Cohen and Manion (1994), consider the therapeutic interview as an antecedent of non-directive interview. Actually, this type of interview is similar to the counselling session in self-directed learning because none of them occur as isolated research phenomena. Both are part of larger schemes, therapeutic and learning schemes, respectively. However there are still big differences between both genres. Among them, the most important for me are two. First, that the learner cannot be regarded as a "sick" person whose "motivation is to obtain relief from a particular symptom" (ibid., 288-9). Second, one of the main motivations of my own interactors, FL learners, is educational.

According to my experience, the learner seeks counselling in order to either learn to learn or learn about the target language. On the contrary, in a therapeutic context, "the counsellor", write Cohen and Manion, "is friendly and receptive but not didactic" (ibid., 288). As the reader will see, the three modes included in Fig. 5.5, teaching, counselling and leading discussions, continuously overlapped, which means that, on several occasions, when I was counselling I found myself teaching as well. Moreover, I want to remind the reader that I am dealing with action research. This means that I was not only interested in describing a situation, but also in changing it. Fig. 5.5 shows the subordination of the interview and its place with other types of research resources.

In general, researchers have had to face the fact that any kind of research method has its own limitations. Writers interested in interview research have explored some constraints about interviewing. According to Block (1995b), these are the following: the social construction of the interviewee, power imbalances, performing, and the nature of discurse processes. When carrying out CSs, I noticed that some of these constraints were reduced in certain aspects. For the most part, the participants did not seem to have the type of major problems which Block outlines with regards to their construction of their interactor, either me or another participant, or to the counselling event. (There still were constraints, but these were inherent to the mode of counselling as part of their self-directed learning scheme). Most of them were already familiar with counselling sessions and did not have the necessity to ask such questions as : "Who am I talking to?" "Why is Angeles talking to me?" "What is Angeles going to do with what I say?" (questions adapted from Littlejohn, 1988, quoted in Block, 1995b,46) There were, of course, other questions that might have been asked, such as "How am I required to express myself?"(ibid). In the next chapter I will aso analyse some of the constraints on counselling sessions for I think that this is a major issue when defining counselling as a mode of interaction with SAC users. Contrary to the interview situation, in which the interviewer hardly realises these elements (Block, ibid), I would say that counsellors need to deal with these problems in order to enhance the communication with learners. Fig. 5.6 summarizes the present methodology research in reference to the other three approaches mentioned in the paragraphs above.

COUNSELLING, TEACHING AND LEADING DISCUSSIONS

≠

-Intervention
-Interaction
counsellor/learner

- Verbal reports
- questionnaires
- tasks
- diaries
- games
- handouts
- etc.

=

Interpretative research
(emic position)

Holistic above emic
principle

Interaction interviewer/
interviewee

Contextually defined
setting

Observation of classroom
verbal behaviour

Ethnographic action
research

Analysis and interpretation of
verbal behaviour

Analysis and interpretation
of second order systems
(reasons)

van Lier's approach   Holliday's approach   Freeman's approach   a research approach for self-directed learning

Fig. 5.6 Comparison of ethnographic approaches

In the present project the main involvement with learners was through counselling. Along with counselling, I also taught and led discussions (see Fig. 5.1), both of which I considered insider tools for my research. I will discuss these three modes of interaction in the following chapter. As the reader will have noticed from Figs. 5.5 and 5.6, I utilised several types of resources, or research instruments, that, according to me, were in accordance with the three modes of interaction mentioned above. In the next section I would like to discuss the way I understand verbal reports, for these are one of the most recurrent elements of my research.

5.2.3 VERBAL REPORTS

In order to analyse cognitive processes, several authors (Cohen:1987, 1994, Faerch and Kasper; 1987, Dechert;1987, Haastrup; 1987 and others) have found that what they generally call verbal reports (VR) are a very good way to obtain "valid and

useful data" (Dechert;1987,97) on cognitive processes in language learning. VR can be simply defined as "learners reports of their own intuitions and insights" (Cohen;1987,92). In his article, "Using Verbal Reports in Research on Language Learning", Cohen gives a sensible account of this method and emphasises its potential value:

> As a field of Second Language Acquisition emerges, we will surely find more possible applications for verbal report data (ibid).

I believe that one of these "possible applications" is using VRs for self-directed learning research. So, what I want to put forward is a possible way to use VRs to help learners to develop awareness of their own learning processes and to be able to talk about this awareness.

According to Cohen's classification (ibid,94), VRs differ mainly in the *recency factor* (i.e. how recent), that is to say, the period of time between the cognitive process and the actual VR. VRs can be divided into three main categories:

a) *self- reports* that give accounts of learner's own general description
   of what they do and who they are as learners;

b) *self-observations* "in which learners inspect their specific language
   behaviour introspectively and retrospectively" (Cohen;1994,679) and

c) *self-revelations*, which are "a moment-by-moment description which
   an individual gives of his or her own thoughts and behaviours during
   the performance of a particular task" (Gerloff;1987,137).

According to research on the issue, different types of VRs give different outcomes, i.e., different kinds of information (see Fig.5.7). Applying Zimmermann's cline on this topic (1987,178) to Cohen's terminology, it is the most specific and immediate VR (self-revelation) which uncover actual strategies, while introspection and early retrospection (self-observation) uncovers preferred strategies. Self-reports, the most delayed of the three types of VRs, produce general metalinguistic statements about beliefs and concepts learners have about them.

VR TYPE	RECENCY	OUTCOME
Self-report	delayed or late	metalinguistic atrategies and generalisations about him/herself

Self-observation	immediate or early	preferred strategies
Self-revelation	simultaneous to the cognitive task	actual strategies

Fig. 5.7 Verbal report outcomes (adapted from Zimmerman; 1987,178)

It is clear that VRs do not reveal processes subjects are not aware of (Holscher;1987, 113), but "depending on the task, subjects may be successful at consulting their memory of cognitive processes and describing them" (Cohen;1987,89). In order to enhance the potential of VRs I combined them with metacognitive experiences which are "any conscious cognitive or affective experiences that accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise" (Flavell;1979,906). To my mind, metacognitive experiences give learners awareness of learning processes while VRs allow them to talk about these learning processes. The main difference with the way researchers use VRs is that the results of them were analysed and used by both learners and researcher. In other words, VRs are a learners' tool and not just a researcher's one.

As the reader will see in the next chapter, I combined VRs with different types of metacognitive experiences which were in turn derived from different tasks such as learning language activities, games, input sessions or discussion sessions. I also asked the participants to write about their learning experiences (again metacognitive experiences) in diaries and questionnaires. The latter were only a way to make them think about a specific learning issue before a VRs was carried out. They were usually a link between an input session and a VR individual session.

Again, it might be possible to classify VRs as a type of interview. However, I still resist doing it. I already stated my concern about the use of this term with the participants of the Oaxaca/97 project some paragraphs above. With regard to VRs, I would not call them interviews for they are framed in a counselling context. This means that, as I said above, VRs are a learner's tool (and not only a researcher's one), which learners carry out during interactive events in which they can discuss their content with a counsellor and, sometimes other learners.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I explained to the reader the way I carried out a research project on self-directed learning and why I did it. This led me to a long discussion of the specific

methodological details that made this research different from others. After explaining my arguments I stated that my research follows an ethnographic tradition with a openly emic position (as van Lier and Freeman define it) but with an action research agenda in mind (as in Holliday's). I made clear my concerns about certain ethnographic techniques recommended for second language learning and teaching research, namely observations and interviews, and called for the use of VRs and metacognitive experiences (through different tasks) as the appropriate tools within a counselling mode, which in turn is part of the interaction learner/counsellor I believe in. My interest in doing this was not to make a claim for methodological originality but to reflect on, and adapt my own investigation to the theoretical and contextual features that underlie the whole research situation. In short, I strongly believe that the way I carried out my research allowed me get involved in and to involve the participants in a self-awareness process about their own learning. As the reader can see, this also links the cognitive model for self-directed learning I put forward in Chapter 4 with the data that is going to be analysed and interpreted in the upcoming chapters.

What I propose to do is to give an account of the results I got from my work with participants in the Oaxaca/97 project. I also want to highlight the main aspects that became relevant. I plan to discuss, among other issues, the way I carried out counselling sessions, participants' belief systems (including my own belief system, as one of the participants) in relation to learning a language in a self-directed context, the learning processes of the participants and the way they managed them. These discussions entail a close analysis of the recorded data I have got. I am sure that during the process of listening to, transcribing and interpreting data, I will become aware of important matters I did not notice while working with the learners.

6. BELIEFS ABOUT A LEARNING CULTURE: FROM A LEARNERS' POINT OF VIEW

Beliefs about a learning culture is the topic of the following two chapters. In them I will analyse the data I gathered in Oaxaca/97 project carried out in Mexico. In Chapter 6 I will deal with the information students gave to me, what I learned from them and about them. Chapter 7 will be the counterpart of this one, that is to say, I will discuss what I gave to students. From a general point of view, I will analyse the project as a whole, and in a more specific perspective, the beliefs that underlie it. The content of the two chapters will be organised in three different areas: person, task, and strategy. The reader will remember that I mentioned this classification on page 56, when I introduced the concept of metacognitive knowledge. For the sake of clarity and coherence I will use the same terms to analyse the learners' beliefs, although I realise that not all the things that I am reporting are elements the learners are consciously aware of.

Even though both chapters deal with the interpretation of data, I physically separated this interpretation in two parts. I do not want this to seem a modular analysis of two isolated phenomena that occurred parallel and separated from each other. Actually, during the project things happened the other way around; events usually occurred in a chain reaction, where causes and consequences were profoundly linked. However, I decided that by writing two different chapters, I will make clear that there were things happening in two directions. In other words, I did not just receive information from learners, but I also gave information to them. That is to say, the project was ON learning about learning in a bi-directional way: they learned and I learned about learning.

In this chapter I particularly will deal with learners' belief systems and learning processes. It will be based on the recorded data from group and individual discussion sessions and written data in the form of diaries, biographies, and questionnaires.

In section 3.3.2.2 (p. 56), I introduced the concept of metacognitive knowledge, its relation to learning strategies, and its relevance to self-direction. Let me recall some aspects of it. Flavell defines person metacognitive knowledge as "the segment of your stored world knowledge that has to do with people as cognitive creatures and with their diverse cognitive tasks, goals, actions and experiences" (1979,906). He divides metacognitive knowledge into three categories: person, task and strategy. My main concern in this study is to look at the way students think about themselves, the task of learning a language and the strategies employed to carry out that task. In this first part, I will analyse the participants' beliefs about themselves as language learners in comparison to other types of learning and other learners. According to Flavell, one of the ways of acquiring metacognitive knowledge about *person* is to compare oneself to others (intra- and interindividual differences). For this reason, I will also include in this section the participants' beliefs about the teacher and learner's roles.

6.1 BELIEFS RELATED TO PERSON

The purpose of this analysis is not to give a general view of Mexican students working at SACs in Mexico. First of all because, I do not think that I have enough data to do that. Besides, I do not believe in stereotypes. Rather, my objective is to highlight certain descriptive features of the different learners I worked with. The reader should not expect a comprehensive account of SAC learners in Oaxaca. I am not going to say such things as "56% of the students are visual rather aural", or "Most students like to work with *Family Album*". I do not think that such information is relevant for this study. I am not saying that it is not important for the SAC counsellor to be aware of the learning styles and preferences of the students s/he is working with. What I am trying to say is that such descriptions do not really describe a learning culture. What I am putting forward in this section is a very subjective (subjective because it was I who decided what was relevant and what was not) account of the way students presented themselves as language learners.

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6.1.1 Beliefs about self

6.1.1.1 Written biographies and oral accounts

At the beginning of the project, the participants were asked to write a biography, in their mother tongue, concerning their history as language learners and the way they describe themselves. Although all of the accounts are very individual, there are some things that all of them share. First of all, it is salient the fact that the learners avoid, consciously or unconsciously, talking about themselves. In general, very few of the written biographies contain personal traits about the authors. Essentially, these traits are reduced to an adjective concerning their performance in relation to the learning process, "scared", "analytic", "motivated", "slow", or their way they relate to the target language: "I like English", "I love English", "I used to hate English". Fortunately, I also had the opportunity to talk to them and discuss their written biographies. This fact allowed me to make them elaborate on their statements. Although I did not ask them about things that were not included in their written accounts (I only asked them to elaborate on aspects that were included in the written biography), throughout the oral interaction the participants said more about themselves. For instance, one participant (Gl) who had not said anything about herself with the written version, directly told me in the oral interaction: "I am a dependent learner. I want the teacher to explain things to me". Another participant, whose written biography consisted of scarcely three paragraphs with no personal features, said in the oral interaction: "I feel like a ship without a captain", " I feel embarrassed learning with a group of youngsters", " I am at an age in which I cannot allow myself to waste time".

I find it very difficult to generalise about learners' personal accounts. The direction and range of comments were so varied that it is almost impossible to suggest any specific trend. There were only two people who coincided in describing their previous experience of learning a foreign language. Both of them used the word "difficult". However, from this, I cannot deduce that the others did not find it difficult, or that the others find it easy. As I see it, the only possible interpretation of this is that learners focus on different aspects of their learning (perhaps because something was more salient for them, perhaps because of their own nature and personalities).

However, I did find a very striking trend in all the written accounts. This was the reference to learners' former teachers. All of them commented on their teachers and their

teaching performance. The range of adjectives used to describe their teachers and their performance is extremely wide. There are unambiguous positive terms, such as "dynamic" and "patient". Such words were also unambiguous in the sense that they were written in a context where it was clear that what the writer meant was to describe a good teaching quality according to his/her own point of view.

Most of the learners seem to coincide that a good teacher is a dynamic teacher (the word was used by several learners), which does not mean that she has got "the knowledge". One participant said:

> Ga[1]: I only have had one good teacher, she was very dynamic, in her class I learned but she also made me aware of what I knew

Other participant put it this way:

> J: I did not learn anything...The teacher *did* know, but she was so boring, she should have been more dynamic.

It is interesting to note that two learners, Ga and Gl, who will be mentioned later as having two different concepts of the "bad teacher" referred to the same teacher as being a good teacher. When they were asked to give reasons, both used the word "dynamic" to describe her.

There were also some words and phrases whose meaning was not clear, for instance, the use of the word "good" to describe a teacher.

The phrase *bad teacher* appeared to have varied, and very subjective, meanings for different learners. For instance, for Ga, the bad teacher "teaches no grammar" but for Gl a bad teacher she had "was very traditional, he taught us just grammar". Another learner, J, reported that he did not learn because the "teacher only spoke in English", whereas, K mentions that "teachers that only speak in English" were one of her best learning experiences.

There were also other terms that were difficult to evaluate. For instance, one participant uses the word "vague" to describe her experience in relation to the teaching she was exposed to. When asked, she elaborated saying that "in class, she didn't understand" because "the teacher did not have enough teaching skills and experience". Among the "bad" experiences that learners reported were things such as " the teacher forced us to learn by heart 10 words every week, without bothering to teach the pronunciation", "they just taught us English for tourism", and "the teachers were so boring", among others.

The other extreme of the cline is the notably bad teacher. Learners used rather

strong words. Some of them referred to their feeling towards their experience:

K: I was completely disillusioned when I discovered that my teachers weren't able to speak English

Ge: My experience was traumatic

J: I was so scared

In the last two instances the learners' experience was reported to be related to power issues:

Ge: That teacher was too demanding and strict

J: The teacher obliged me to learn by heart

Ge recalled that one of his teachers had the reputation of "scary".

Others describe the teaching experience in a more detached third person descriptive way:

E: My teachers were very bad

Ga: He was cynical
If you can call that a teacher

Most of the participants reported more "bad" than "good" experiences when referring to language teachers. I was tempted to think that when learners have a "bad" experience when learning something they tend to extrapolate this "bad" factor to the teaching side, not exactly blaming the teacher, but tending to see the global experience as a negative one. However, this is not consistent with the data that was gathered from learners, since two of the most successful and happy language learners reported very "bad" experiences and were the ones that notably used very strong words to describe their teachers. It was obvious that they felt very strongly about it.

Another trend that seem to be fairly consistent, more than half of the students, was to report a change in terms of the type of teachers they had had. Thus, they said that their six years of studying English (secondary and preparatory levels) were a bad experience. The teachers were bad and they didn't learn or remember anything. The experience is reported to be different when they started studying English at the Language Centre. Here the teachers were "good" in general terms, bearing in mind that the meaning of "good" has very different connotations (patient, native-speaker, dynamic, etc). An easy, straightforward conclusion of this could be that teachers are better in the

Language Centre. Apart from the fact that such a generalisation is not at all well supported, it does not say anything about the learners, which is the main priority in this section. As an attempt to give a different interpretation, I think that it is important to notice that this before/after classification of teachers coincides with the imposed/free nature of the learning/teaching of English. In other words, the "before-bad" stage of teaching refers to a period of studying in which students have to attend courses and pass subjects that were absolutely compulsory. On the contrary, the "after-good" stage of teaching suggests that the student voluntary decided to learn English, either as a foreign language or as the main area of their B A. One of the participants explained this saying that in high school she considered English as a "subject", very much like the study of Chemistry or History, "you have to learn facts, you have to take exams". Later, referring to the "after" stage, she uses the word "dream" to refer to her learning of English and adds that it is a "pleasure" to attend English classes nowadays. In short, my reading of this data is that the two stages refer to the time before and after the students were able to *make the free decision* to study the target language.

From the amount of time and language that they used in reference to teachers and their experiences with them, in proportion with what they said in their biographies, one thing is clear: teachers are very important for the learners I worked with. Taking this into account, it seems to be rather logical to refer to the teacher when learners were asked to consider their own learning experiences. Because the teacher is such an essential factor in their lives as language learners, it is easy to understand that they tend to consider the learners' performance by judging the performance of their own teachers. Considering this perspective, one can easily understand the concept one learner developed about language learning. She says:

Gl: At school, I had this teacher that only taught us grammar, no skills. At that time I thought that that was it: learning English is learning the grammar. I didn't know that there were skills

6.1.1.2 The "profile" task

At the end of the project, and after several group discussions, individual sessions and learning tasks, learners were aware and revealed more about themselves as language learners. In particular, I learned a lot from two specific tasks. The first one was a "profile" task in which they have to write they own learner profile. In order to do this

they were given several questionnaires that are kept in the SAC learning to learn section (see Appendix 5 for these questionnaires and their source). Some of the students gave a very detailed and specific account of themselves:

> Gl: - I like to study grammar, learn new vocabulary and practice new sounds and pronunciation.
> - I get angry when I can't pronounce a word
> - I can learn faster when I read a word than when I hear it
> - etc

This profile contains more than thirty statements of this sort. Of course, I realised that this account was literally copied from the questionnaires that she got from me. But, in spite of the fact that she is not being very original in her statements, one has to admit that she inevitably had to embark on the process of thinking and reflecting on her learning and make decisions to describe her own style. Finally, this is the purpose of such type of questionnaires, to help learners to describe their learning styles.

However, it was very interesting to find out that other participants did not restrict themselves to answering and copying the statements from the questionnaires. After they had answered them they reflected on their answers in order to apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate them. Most of the learners, for example, showed that it was very easy to apply certain questions to their own experience. F, for instance, said:

> F: I am visual. A word that I learned just from hearing it, "abroad" *(he mispronounces it)*, you know, to go to a foreign country, has given me a lot of problems because I haven't seen it written. First I visualised it as "to broad". Then I tried to use it in conversations and they always correct me. I know that until I see it written and I use it written, in a letter or something like that, I will learn it right.

A, another participant, also reflected on the questionnaires in order to elaborate his profile. After working on questions such as the following:

> (03)...I like to learn by games
>   no   a little   good   best
> (07)... I like to have my own textbook
>   no   a little   good   best
> (18) I like to study grammar
>   no   a little   good   best
> (27)...I like to learn by studying English books
>   no   a little   good   best
> (29) I like to learn by watching and listening to (native speakers)
>   no   a little   good   best
>
> (Willing, 1989, 13-14)

he gave the following account, which is just a small part of what he said:

> A: I don't like grammar, perhaps, I don't like the way grammar is taught. It is my experience, I don't know, I think that I don't like the way it is taught....I like to learn playing. I do not like to be sitting in a classroom, formal learning, you know. I like to learn by listening to native speakers and I would like to participate in their conversation even if I make mistakes. I like matching, multiple choice, ticking exercises. I don't like completion of full answer exercises. I don't like to write, I prefer to draw lines, to do crosswords. I don't like to hold the pencil for a long time. I would like to learn by going out for a picnic and chatting with other people.

Here, A is doing more than just answering a questionnaire. First, he is analysing the type of exercises he likes from textbooks. He is also elaborating on what he does not like and why ("I don't like to hold a pencil for a long time"). His statement " I don't like to be sitting in a classroom, formal learning, you know" is a good synthesis of all his answers to the questions about learning in class and with a teacher. This idea is reinforced by his last comment, which is an example provided by him and not by the questionnaires. The reference to grammar is a good instance of evaluation. Instead of just staying with the fact that he doesn't like grammar he goes further and makes a judgement about the teaching of grammar he has been exposed to.

For other students, working with the questionnaires gave them the opportunity to analyse their own learning behaviour and realise the changes that they have undergone. E, for instance, refers to the way she responded in a teaching situation and how this has changed:

> E: I am not self-directed at all, but, before I used to like to learn with a teacher because I felt that I didn't know anything. Now that I am not a beginner anymore, I don't like the teacher to tell me "Work with this. Do that". I don't like the teacher to tell me what to do. Before I liked it. Well, it was not exactly that I liked it, it was that I accepted it. But now, I like to choose a text and read it, if I get interested in it I learn new vocabulary.

Ga, who also reflected very critically after answering the questionnaires, referred to her awareness about her change as a language learner:

> Ga: (To answer the questionnaires) was very interesting for me because I had already worked with them before, some months after I started working in SAC. I became aware of the way I have changed. Before I was more dependent. Because I was not taking part in any formal course, I wanted to have a teacher. Now I am more independent, although I still need the teacher, for some specific grammar points, exact translations, you know. I am independent when it comes to choosing material, according to my needs. I evaluate myself. One can self-evaluate. Here I am wrong. You don't need someone to tell you. You can compare with your own notes. I know what I need for myself. The teacher may not know how I learn. He has so many students. He tends to generalise. I'd rather study by myself

6.1.1.3 The "self" task

Another activity in which the learners had the opportunity to reflect on their own person was the "self" task (adapted from Barrow;1986,304, see the handout corresponding to this task in Appendix 4). In it the learners had to think about themselves according to three different perspectives. First they analysed the way they see themselves as being, which is called *perceived self* (the circle on the left of the diagram in the handout), in comparison which the way they would like to be, i.e. their *ideal self* (the right circle). Then, they also had to determine which elements of the perceived self were also part of the ideal self, that is to say, the traits that are ideal for them but they already have got. In other words, the things about themselves they are happy with (this is the intersection of the two circles). The written outcome of this activity was three lists of personal features.

The content of their responses reflected the same phenomenon noticed in the written and oral accounts. For the perceived self, the answers were

T: I am a bit lazy

F: I don't work at the 100% of my capacity

Ga: Sometimes I do not understand oral language

K: I am forgetful

E: I am short

The ideal self was generally convergent with the perceived self. Notice, for instance, the way three participants correlate their beliefs:

Perceived self	Ideal self
T: I am a bit lazy	I have to commit myself
Ga: Sometimes I do not understand oral language	Don't get frustrated when I don't understand oral language
E: I am short	Accept myself the way I am

It was very interesting to talk to the learners in relation to this task. In this way I understood some of their reasons for their answers. For example, when I read that E perceived herself as a short person, I thought that she had not understood that this task was only related to their experiences about learning languages. When I talked to her I learned that I was wrong:

E: I feel very short, and when I am in a class, or interacting in a group of foreigners, I am very aware that everybody else is taller than me, so I feel "little" and I feel that taller people say more important things.

Through this task, it was also possible to know the learners in a different way. It was

noted that some learners put more emphasis on some of the three aspects of their selves than on others. Some even showed, or expressed, their problem about finding elements for one of the selves.

Five different tendencies were found among the participants of the study. The first one is represented by Ga. Her account of her selves is very even, the three lists were similar in length. Besides, she showed that she had a lot to say about herself. If we translate her three lists into a figure we visualise it as the following:

Fig. 6.1 Ga according to her selves

Although in itself, Fig. 6.1 does not say a lot, the reader will realise the difference when comparing it with the ones in the following paragraphs.

T, another participant, did not have problems when filling his self-lists. The difference is that his information tended to be more on the left side, that is, related to his perceived self. He was very aware of this. He commented:

> T: I am more aware of my shortcomings than of my ideal self

And the following represents his three selves:

- a bit lazy
- inconsistent
- scatty
- insecure
- I get bored easily
- I want to do everything
  at the same time
- impatient

- I understand easily
  when I want to
- If I like something, I
  I do it the right way
- If I like something I
  don't care about the time
- I am good at conveying
  my ideas and doubts

- consistent
- systematic
- attentive
- good memory

① ② ③

Fig. 6.2 T according to his selves

Learner F showed that he was also aware of his self, although he put more emphasis in the middle part, showing that he is very satisfied with his learning.

- I trust my way of learning
  so I don't make any
  extra effort

- I force myself to think
  in English most of the time
- I am able to understand any
  long authentic material
- I can deduce meaning out
  of context
- I don't have problems for
  remembering vocabulary

- I'd like to combine my
  studying style with a formal
  study program.

① ② ③
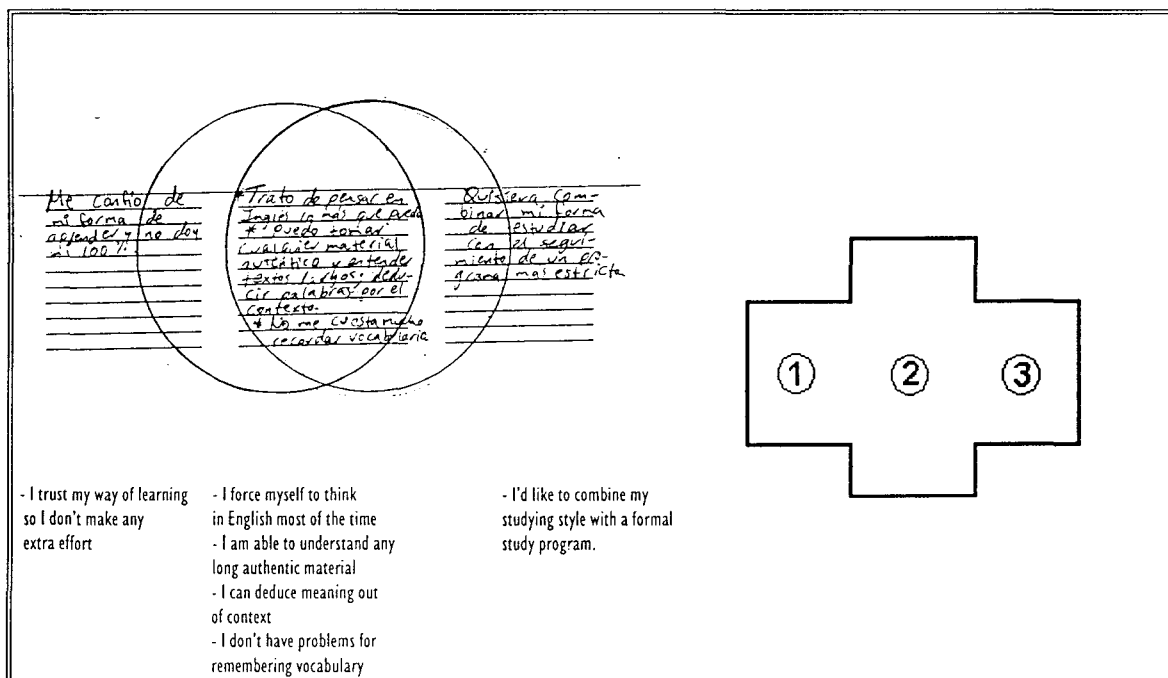
Fig. 6.3 F according to his selves

Learner K is also satisfied with herself to the extent that she did not find anything that belonged to the ideal self. This is the way her lists look:

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Fig. 6.4. K according to her selves

Learner E is also extreme but completely opposite to learner K. She was so over-critical about her performance and learning that she found it almost impossible to name one thing that could be placed in the convergence of perceived and ideal selves. In other words, she did not find anything she was happy with. The reader will notice the difference of her diagram in comparison with the other participants.

Fig. 6.5 E according to her selves

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For some of them, working with these issues added more to their metacognitive knowledge. Ga wrote:

> Ga: I became aware that I have to work more on my self-confidence and also that I already have some tools to work with, my extroverted nature, for instance.

Learner T said:

> T: I became aware that it doesn't seem to be very difficult to change my negative attributes of my perceived self. I have to work hard but they are not unreachable.

As I stated before, the results of this task were clearly in agreement with their performance as language learners. Successful language learners (K and F) showed their self-confidence in the way they completed the task while unsuccessful or inexperienced learners (E and T) produced diagrams that reflected their lack of confidence. The case of Ga is again interesting. Her balanced outcome is the result of her reflection on the process of becoming aware (from a non-aware, other-directed learner to a very assertive, self-directed one) she has been through. Nowadays, she tends to be a realistic learner although she still judges herself very hard.

I believe that metacognitive experiences like the self task can help learners (and their teachers) to become aware of their perceptions, which in turn, enhances their motivation. According to Ushioda:

> What learners believe about themselves is crucially important to their capacity for self-motivation (1996,55)

Or to put it in Ridley's words:

> In many cases, a lack of self-confidence is associated not only with lack of ability but also with negative self-perceptions, which give rise to poor motivation and low levels of effort. (1997, 15)

6.1.2 Beliefs about the teacher's role

In the last section, I referred to what the learners said about the teacher in order to know more about the learners, since they hardly referred to themselves in their biographies. In this section I will add to what was said before in order to get a general view of the way learners in SAC conceive of the role of the teacher. It has been already stated that the participants believe that a good teacher is a dynamic one while a bad teacher lacks this dynamism, turning her/his class into a boring event which makes the

students lose motivation. However, there are some nuances that have to be added to this good/bad polarity.

When discussing teachers and their roles, participants tend to balance their comments giving two kind of statements: 1) generalisations based on experiences and 2) prescriptions according to their own feelings and values, sort of "should" statements referring to ideal situations. In a way, there is a parallel with the way they worked with their selves (see last section) in the "self" task. In the same way that they see themselves as perceived and ideal, they also described the teacher and student's roles.

It is important to notice that it was easier for the participant (although they were not aware) to reflect on the perceived and ideal teacher than on themselves (as the last section showed). In a very natural way, most of the discussions, which always referred to "others" (in opposition to "self"), developed very rich accounts on the perceived and the ideal elements of a given topic. The self-revelation of subjective facts becomes very difficult for most of them. It seems that it is easier to evaluate and make judgements when the objects are third parties. The result of this is a perceived and an ideal concept underlying their discussions. Let me now analyse this.

Among the generalisations about teachers, that is to say, the perceived teacher, the concept of "authoritarianism" seem to be very relevant.

The authoritarian teacher is described in a asymmetrical power dyad in which the student has no right to interact, resulting in a one-way sort of communication:

> A: He is not open to discussion. He is just concerned with imparting information
> to the students. He does not set the right conditions, there is no communication,
> no interaction, boring classes....

Interestingly, the contrary of the authoritarian teacher is not the good teacher but a bad teacher with lack of control.

> X: the non-authoritarian teacher loses the control of the students. He depends on
> what the students do. "Maestro barco".

This metaphor, "maestro barco" (literally, a ship-teacher), is, in Mexico, a very common way to describe a permissive teacher whose expectations are too easy to satisfy. Being non-demanding and relaxed about attendance, participation, homework and grades, a "maestro barco" represents a good way for students to get good grades with little effort.

Thus, the polarity authoritarian/non-authoritarian results in a cline where the two extremes are bad. The balance, according to the participants, is the teacher who knows

when to be authoritarian and when to let the students go.

X: When there is no authority there is chaos

X: The good teacher needs to have authority, he is the flexible one that know when to say "yes" and when to say "no". He does not let things happen "freely"

It is interesting that none of these extreme cases, both negative, are related to lack of knowledge:

A: The authoritarian teacher may know a lot but she does not attract the students' attention.

X: The non-authoritarian teacher might know but s/he is not the authority.

Apart from being authoritarian, the perceived teacher, that is the bad teacher, also has other characteristics: she does not "know" but pretends that she knows, her teaching is boring, she does not learn from students, does not have any pedagogical education, and so on. As a conclusion, after having described the bad teaching situation, a participant, who plans to work as a language teacher, said:

X: When I am in front of that type of teacher, I repeat to myself: "*This*, what I am looking at, is what you are going to avoid. Look, pay attention, you are going to do other things except for *this*"

Although there was a tendency to focus on the description of the bad teacher, perhaps because their belief is that the percentage of bad teachers is very high, it is easy to build up an ideal teaching situation. Taking into account that the main elements of a good teacher are her dynamism and balanced authority (avoiding the extremes), then, a good teacher also has knowledge, is not boring, learns from students, has a pedagogical background, etc, etc.

A straightforward remedial solution for this problem would be to give the teachers the necessary on-going education to cope with these problems. However, for the students, this is not that easy, since they believe that in order to be a good teacher one needs to have the "vocation (dedication) for teaching", something that is not learned in the university:

K: Vocation is the important thing in teachers. It doesn't matter if she is qualified or not. Vocation is what counts. Empirical teachers. 'I do this because I love it'. The good teachers are so few...

6.1.3 Beliefs about the learner's role

The student's picture of the teacher seems to be rather dispiriting. However, this does not seem to be true if we consider their whole concept of the teacher/student relationship. At the beginning of their discussion, the students' opening statements seem to be very straightforward and blunt:

> A: There are several ways to learn, but we learn in a traditional way, and it works

> K: Generally, students are conformist. Few are enthusiastic and eager.
> Most remain silent.

This seems to be the stereotype of student that the participants had. However, when they had the opportunity to analyse and discuss this first stereotype, that is to say, when they start working in their second order systems, delving into the beliefs of their beliefs, different things arose.

First of all, they become aware that what they are first stating is not exactly their actual beliefs but the beliefs that they have about the beliefs of their teachers, that is, their teachers' expectations about the students beliefs on teachers. This was stated by E in a very direct way:

> E: The teacher wanted us to feel that he was the knower, and have mercy on the student who doesn't know!

Or in subtler ways, where the participant states a belief but adds something to make clear that the belief is not actually hers, that she doesn't believe in it:

> X: the teacher knows everything, he solves your doubts and you take what he is giving.
> *You don't have the right to give your own opinion*

where the last statement gives an element of incredulity and irony to the whole comment.

From this point, the participants start realising that they actually do not believe in everything that the teachers want them to believe. They expressed this in two ways, either emphasising the students' awareness:

> X: Students are not stupid. We realise when a teacher is a teacher. From the very first day. Sometimes the student pretends, because it is convenient for him. 'Great, I've got a *maestro barco'* But the teacher cannot deceive his students.

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or the lack of it:

> E: Sometimes we like the teacher because she says things in a nicer way, and
> sometimes she doesn't know what she is saying. And there we are, taking notes
> on everything!

which in itself is already a sign of awareness.

The reason for this awareness, according to the students, is due to a change, a change in roles and attitudes on the part of the students:

> A: The student has changed. Before we conformed. The mass media, the
> individual development. Now, s/he is more demanding, s/he doesn't conform,
> s/he is more eager to know and asks for more.

> Gl: "Before we were passive. Now: 'Mr. Smith, you are wrong'. Before we
> believed in everything, we accepted everything. 'I don't agree'. There is more
> discussion. The character of the student has changed

> X: "The new generations are more prepared. They are not the sheep they
> used to be"

Some participants referred to specific experiences that exemplify this change. In these cases there seems to be a power related issue in which, sometimes, the teacher wins:

> Ga: I expected more from the teacher, so I gave my own opinion in a written
> exam. He marked it and I failed it because what I wrote was different from
> what he had said in class. I was not in agreement, but my priority was the
> grade, I needed it to get the credit, so I gave up and did as the teacher said"

but sometimes she does not:

> K: Claudia (a former teacher) knew a lot. Her class was interesting. But
> She was very authoritarian and didn't respect the students. She didn't accept
> other's   opinions and she humiliated the students. At the beginning they
> ignored her. They didn't attend her classes. At the end, the group reacted and
> drove her out.

Within this context, the participants were able to depict the student in a different way, not only referring to roles and functions but also in terms of metacognitive processes:

> Ga: Now, we verify what we hear: 'What are you giving me?' Then I
> evaluate it: 'Do I agree with this?' The problem is that a lot of teachers

cannot cope with this. But now, we do not only receive, we verify. 'You say
this but I don't believe in it immediately. I doubt it'"

They also suggested that both parties are responsible and described the ideal
teacher/student relationship as an interrelated and committed one:

X: If the student demands better teachers s/he has to offer him/herself as a
better student. If one demands responsibility, one has to co-operate.
Reciprocity. I want you to teach me but I have to pay attention to you,
I have to express my doubts, I have to do my own search. This should be mutual.

Fig. 6.6 provides a visual synthesis of the learners' beliefs related to *person*.
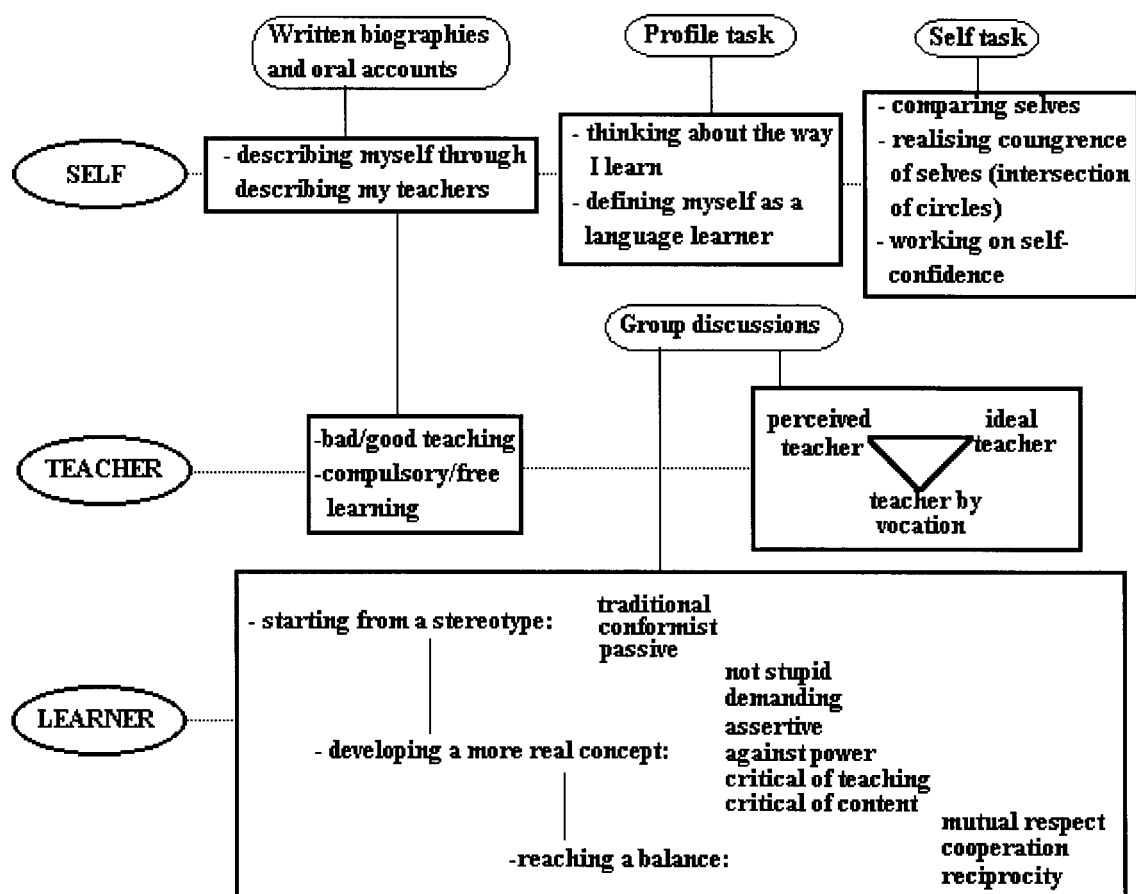
Fig. 6.6 Learners' beliefs related to person

6.2 BELIEFS RELATED TO TASK

Flavell defines metacognitive knowledge about task in the following way:

> The individual learns something about how the nature of the information
> encountered affects and constrains how one should deal with it (Flavell; 1987,23)

In this section I will mainly deal with what students think about learning, which is the cognitive task they are dealing with. As there are different elements related to this task, the analysis is going to be organised into different sections: learning, learning a language, learning a language in a classroom, learning a language in a self directed way and learning a language in a self-directed way in Mexico. The information for this section was mostly gathered through group discussions in which specific topics were discussed. My main objective here is to find the features that make up the culture of the specific group I am dealing with. Defining the group of participants as a *small culture* (see p. 111), I consider that one of its main features is the "homogeneity of the members" in relation to their "values, beliefs and norms" (Hargreaves, 1975, 90). According to a socio-psychological view, the five main characteristics of a group are the plurality (more than two people), the face-to-face relationship and awareness of membership, the commonality of goals, the agreement of rules and the internal structure (ibid. 88,89). Hargreaves acknowledges that there can be disagreement among the members, but "such disagreement will be in matters of detail about accepted values" since "members of a group tend to share the same or similar values and beliefs" (ibid. 91). The fact that the group of this project, with a minimum of nine members and the counsellor, met in a regular basis, was aware of the purpose of the project and agreed to take part in it, is a good reason to imply that the first four features are present. The subscription to a set of rules and the internal structure were two features that, though present, were very much determined by the roles the participants assigned to the different members. Some aspects of this fact will be analysed in detail in the following chapter. There will also be some examples of the way the members agreed about values and beliefs but negotiated specific nuances of them.

6.2.1 Beliefs about learning

From what has been said it seems obvious that the learners' beliefs about learning and learning a language has been made up and changed according to their personal experiences. The teaching situations that they referred to (see p. 157) plus the way they conceive themselves as learners, get mixed with the way they conceive the ideal situation. This melting pot underlies the beliefs that will be presented in this section.

When talking about learning, the participants expressed different views. For instance, one of them said that

X: Significant learning takes place when you can apply what you have learned.

while others defined learning according to the learner involved in it. Thus the passive learner gives the idea of being filled:

K: Most of the students are buckets that wait to be filled

But the active learner acts in different ways:

Ga: The learner brings knowledge with him and matches it with what the teacher is offering. He verifies, gets involved. Then the teacher gets interested, he likes this. She feeds the interaction.

X: the learners have to act as well, pay attention, ask questions, talk about their doubts. It is a mutual effort.

Among the participants' views, there is also the general belief that learning is something difficult, a process that human beings naturally oppose to:

Ge: the child opposes everything that requires some effort.
and learning requires work and sacrifice. This is why education is so difficult. You have to obey.
K: Everybody tends to go for the easy thing, the least effort. The easy things make us feel secure

This is the justification for making learning compulsory, as well as for the presence of different types of pressures that go from physical punishment:

A: It works. I learned that way. I studied only because I knew that there was the stick. A real fear to punishment. When there was no punishment, I didn't study"
Ge: But we learn, with punishment and 50 pages of repetition.

to "symbolic violence" as one participant put it:

> Gl: If the student hasn't got any interest in learning, then the teacher has to use symbolic violence such as attendance roll or right to exams.

Supporting this view, T commented that learning may be opposed to enjoyment

> T: During my school years I enjoyed myself a lot. However, I didn't learn very much. I am starting to believe that these elements do not correlate.

Gl, however, expressed her hopes about this:

> Gl: I think that we can learn and enjoy ourselves at the same time.
> That way, we wouldn't get so bored.

In the following sections, I will analyse the participants' beliefs about learning in relation to other elements.

6.2.2 Beliefs about learning a language

For most of the students it was clear that the process of learning a language suggests specific features. Their personal experience on this matter allowed them to identify some characteristics of their concept of learning a language. The following paragraphs deal with the most recurrent ones:

a) Language learning and the need of a base

With regards to learning a language, most of them expressed that to start learning a foreign language, a "good base" is very important. However, the way they use this term suggests different meanings. For some the base is provided by the presence of a teacher:

> Ga: a base is necessary, if not there is chaos. The teacher provides that base
> S: You need a guide to start with, to provide you with the essentials

For others this base is the book:

> Gl: it is good to have a textbook as a base

A basis is not only related to the resources but to the actual content of the teaching/learning situation. Thus, a base also means knowledge of grammar:

> S: Grammar is essential. If there was no grammar it would be impossible to communicate. It is the guide, the reference point that tells us the way to go. It is necessary to know the grammar categories.

For some a good base may be provided through the use of the mother tongue:

> Ga: the teacher only spoke English. We didn't even understand a
> "Pay attention". We knew neither what she was saying nor what we had

to do. Every month we got an "F". We didn't even have a dictionary. A
base is necessary.

As it can be seen, these "bases" are not mutually exclusive. The same student may have stated her inclination for more than one possibility, and in all the cases in which this happened, the combination of bases seems to be coherent. For instance, the same student agreed that a teacher and a textbook are the base for good learning, which means that the former needs to use the latter and not that one takes over the other. Other common combinations were teacher/Spanish, grammar/Spanish, textbook/grammar, etc.

b) Language learning and the dichotomy between grammar and practice

Two important factors that students take into account, when defining the process of learning a language, is grammar and practice. The learning of a language is seen as a process formed by two elements: grammar and practice. In this view it is implied that both are essential:

> Ga: For me, grammar is very important. My life goes around it....However, in
> spite of the success of the teaching system, if you don't apply it, you don't
> get it. Practice is important, it is part of the learning process.

However, Ga does not place grammar and practice at the same level, for her priority now is only grammar:

> Ga: Now, I only work on grammar. Grammar is my only interest.

Her reason is embedded in her own view of the function of grammar, which shows her focus on grammaticalisation in opposition to lexicalisation (Batstone; 1994, 57).

> Ga: Knowing the structure of the sentence you can accumulate vocabulary.
> If you know where to put the adjective. Then you don't have
> to memorise the whole sentence. Instead, knowing the structure you can
> play around with a lot of adjectives, or adverbs, for instance.

Ge, who agrees with Ga about the importance of grammar, mentions the predisposition of students for not learning it and the way to solve the problem with an inductive approach:

> Ge: Even grammar in Spanish is taught "by law". Then you hear
> about grammar and your first reaction is to reject it. They have to make
> it more digestible. It is possible. If you tell a child that you are going
> to give him a medicine, he is going to reject it, it doesn't matter how
> sweet the medicine is. It is going to be bitter for him. He doesn't like
> it just because he knows that it is a medicine. Then, if in the classroom
> the teacher says 'Let's pay attention to these actions, underline them, let's
> think about them, reflect on them, pay attention to the words. You

know what? the words that you underlined are verbs'. Teaching
grammar indirectly. But, no, they start with the same things: 'the verb
is the part of the speech that...' and the students reject it. They prefer to
be sick than to take the medicine.

Other students were concerned about the amount of grammar they are exposed to. The amount depends on the teacher:

Ge: Saturation, there is excess of grammar

But it should depend on the learner. S thinks that

S: They should take into account what the student wants. If she doesn't want to
become an expert but just to break the communication barrier, then she only
needs the basics of grammar

and adds, using a metaphor of exercising and going to the gym:

What if I don't want to participate in the Olympic Games? What if I just want
it as a hobby or as a means to keep me in shape? I don't need that pressure.

But all of them agreed that the presence of grammar, without any practice does not satisfy them:

Gl: Here in the Language Centre they stuff you with grammar, and
what happens, after four years? You still cannot speak.
E: I don't like a lesson just dealing with rules, it is boring and
complicated.

However, some students placed grammar and practice in opposition to each other, clearly stating that it is a matter of "either/or", in which practice plays a more important role:

E: Grammar is boring...Practice leads to success

This view is the result of two different situations. On the one hand, it is caused by teaching methods that favour grammar over practice:

Ge: there is an excess of grammar. Saturation. Teachers believe that if they
give us the grammar, you will take care of the rest. You come to the
classroom for your doses of grammar for you to go out and apply it.

On the other hand, some learners favour practice instead of grammar because they believe in a personal inclination to it. This is the way T explains it:

T: I learn when talking, I do not learn when I have to work with grammar rules.
Instead of widening my possibilities, for me, grammar is an obstacle to my learning.

> For instance, in Spanish I don't know how many verb tenses there are. I've never known
> that, but that doesn't stop me from being able to communicate. Once they tried to explain
> to me the irregular verbs in the past tense but I didn't understand it. It seems to me
> that my learning process is different. What I do is that first I get used to a specific
> sentence and then, after time, I am able to identify certain features of it. But the
> difference is that I am already using that sentence. I don't work the other way around.
> First the rule and then apply it, no way. My system works in the opposite direction.
> First I get used to it, I make it something mine, with not very logical terms,
> more like making a habit of it. That is the way I learned Spanish.

This belief in practice is related to the sort of experience participants reported from their previous learning experience. They said that their learning in secondary and preparatory school was very deficient because of its lack of continuity. Every term they had a different teacher that repeated the same content. At the same time, some of them also conceived their knowledge of the target language as something that has been learned and unlearned and relearned several times. Some of them reported that re-learning was easier that learning. Others think that relearning is more difficult because of the gap in time. The contradiction seems obvious. The fact that every term something is repeated would be a supportive and favourable condition for learn and relearn the language. However, one advanced student explained this situation with relation to practice:

> X: 'The verb to be' in secondary, 'the verb to be' in preparatory,
> 'the verb to be' at the Language Centre. I know the verb to be!" But
> that is not true, because the verb "to be" is something that has to be
> practised all the time. It is not enough "to learn" and repeat it.

This seems to be in agreement with what another student reported about her early experience:

> Gl: I didn't know that there were skills until I started in the Language Centre.
> The six years before were just grammar.

c) Learning a language is an individual process

In effect, language learners have very different views about learning. But what is more important is that they are aware of this fact. They showed this awareness in different ways. Some included this as a feature of the description of learning :

> S: There are infinite ways to learn a language, the key is to know which way is the
> best for me.

Some established the difference in operational terms, giving concrete examples:

F: I didn't like *Ingles sin Barreras*. It is like working in a group! I am not saying that it is a bad course. It may work for other students.

Others simply used phrases such as "for me", "as I see it", "it works for me", etc, to make clear their awareness about the individuality of a learning process. When comparing learning styles and strategies, for instance, they did not contradict each other. They just made clear that their personal experience was different, as the following interaction shows:

Ga: When you know the structure of the sentence........(and goes on talking in favour of the learning of grammar)
S: Grammar is essential (and talks about the function of grammar in communication)
T: But for me, grammar is an obstacle rather than help.

d) Learning a language is difficult

If learning in general is a difficult process, participants agreed that learning a language is especially difficult. In spite of the acceptance of the process of learning a language is individual, all the participants agreed with this idea. The causes of this belief may be attributed to two factors. One the one hand, there is the intrinsic complexity of the language. According to E

E: Grammar is something so complex but at the same time so logical. How do we expect to understand something perfectly if we do not know it in any way?

On the other hand there are the individual traits that do not favour the process of acquiring the language:

Ge: I am too analytical and perfectionist. That stops me from learning and acquiring the language
J: I don't like to make mistakes, that is why I don't speak
E: I am shy and too afraid to make mistakes
A: It is my age, young people are better language learners
Ge: Children learn easily. For us, it is not that easy

e) Learning a language as an emotional process

It was found that most of the learners related the process of language learning with certain emotions. Some students describe their learning experiences in emotional terms

Ga: When I realise that someone understands my English I get very happy. What a happiness!
J: In secondary school English was scary for me.

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Some referred to their involvement with the language itself

> K: I am in love with English
> X: English is a beautiful language either to think or to express the true
> feelings of the soul.

According to X, one can realise the nature of language learning when comparing it with other types of learning:

> X: Music implies human development, learning mathematics is mechanical.
> Learning a language is more like learning music. By learning a language
> I learn human values.

S and T did not refer to personal experiences but to the ideal attitude when learning a language:

> S: you need to get involved with the language. If you want to learn you need to
> have a motif. It is inside oneself. It is something "passionate"
> T: to make a habit of learning English, to make it part of your life

Although this view does not contradict what was stated above about the "difficult" nature of learning a language, it certainly contrasts with the generalisation that learning has to be compulsory. It seems to me that the participants, once again (see p. 150), are trying to correlate the imposed/free nature of language learning with the emotional selves. Thus, as it was seen from their comments, some find in it a pleasurable experience while others relate it with negative emotions.

The emotional side of learning a language seems to be the justification for avoiding compulsory learning of languages at school. According to most of them, the "formal-impositive stage of learning English", as S calls it, was a negative experience as language learners. Even F, a successful and positive learner, talked about his problem at this stage:

> F: I was shocked when I saw the content of my notes from the courses
> at the secondary school and realised that they already have taught
> me a lot of things, and I didn't remember anything!

And then, F finds a reason for this:

> F: The mistake is that they teach English in the same way they
> teach Chemistry: using formulae. It doesn't work because you learn the
> formula for the exam and then you forget about it.

f) Learning a language and the role of motivation

As I see it, in the last quotation from F, he is referring to the lack of motivation that he found when taking some of the school subjects. In fact, most of the participants found a correlation between motivation and success in learning a language. For some of them, this motivation is intrinsic to themselves. F, K and Ga provided good examples of high motivation and strong will:

> F: I have improved because I always wanted to speak E and now this is a reality.

> K: I was determined to learn English. That was my dream. I love it. Now, I am proud of what I know.

> Ga: Learning a language is a way to know places and to meet people. It broadens your view of the world. Learning English gives a special direction to my life. I want to teach what I know to others.

Other participants talked about how teaching styles are essential to be, or not to be, motivated. This extrinsic motivation, or lack of it, was expressed in different ways:

> T: I learned a lot at that time, and I liked it. I was really motivated. It was because of the games and the teaching materials.

> Ge: In order to learn it, you need stimulation from the teacher

> X: The teacher needs to transmit her knowledge in a motivating way. She needs to raise her students' interests.

In short, according to what the participants said, learning a language is a difficult task. In order to be successful, you need to be motivated, to start with a sound base and the right amount of grammar and practice. Furthermore, one has to take into account that learning a language is an individual process in which emotions are involved.

6.2.3 Beliefs about learning a language in a classroom

Because learning a language within a classroom is the mode that students in Oaxaca are most used to, they referred to it on several occasions. This topic also represents an interesting aspect of their system beliefs because it is contrasted with learning a language in the SAC.

Generally speaking, students are used to taking part in *large classes*, from 25 to 50 (or more) participants. This fact can be the justification of *poor learning*. The teacher, according to Ge, finds many problems when facing a large group:

> Ge: It is difficult to get to know a group with 50 people. It is difficult to monitor, to understand each individual...then, the only possibility is to "apply" the syllabus and leave. If the students learn, OK, if they don't, OK. That's it.

A problem that students highlighted in large classes is its *heterogeneity*, that is to say, the mixture of students with different levels:

> Ge: When the teacher asks if everybody understood, a few students answer "yes", and then you, who didn't understand, become shy and afraid to talk. You feel inhibited and remain silent.

Another feature of the group that the participants depicted is its competitiveness. According to them, the members of the group, more than being collaborative, tend to compete among them:

> F: We don't support each other

In fact, according to the participants, teachers use and encourage this competitiveness to motivate their students. Unfortunately, according to some, this situation can lead to very negative attitudes,

> K: You don't learn and you don't participate when the teacher ridicules you in front of the group, Better stay silent . The group starts bulling you. A big mass of people against you.

> X: ...and I wish the earth would swallow me

or a radical change of strategies:

> F: When I learn a new word, I want to hear myself using it, then, I usually use it when talking with a native speaker. I don't care if the person realises that I make mistakes. But when I am in a classroom, I have to think twice what I am going to say, because I know that if I make a mistake they will talk about it and finish me off. In the classroom one has to be perfect.

However, there are also some advantages when being part of a group, and in front of a teacher. When analysing the role of a counsellor, participants found themselves describing the position of a teacher within the class and her relationship with the students:

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A: I felt that there was a barrier between the counsellor and me. A feeling
of isolation. With the teacher is different. There is an everyday contact. That
makes him closer to you.

X: Maybe the teacher doesn't talk to you as an individual but he is always talking
to you as a group. He is not a stranger. You two belong to the same group and that
gives you the confidence to go to him and ask him.

Certainly, most of the participants have not found that closeness with any of the
counsellors in the SAC.

A: Here, the counsellors are cold, indifferent. The facts have proved this

According to the participants, learning a language in a classroom basically means
two things. On the one hand, it means coping with large classes, heterogeneity and
competitiveness. On the other hand, it can be a positive experience because it favours a
close contact with the teacher, which means the possibility for communication.

6.2.4 Beliefs about learning a language in a self-directed way

For the participants, learning in a self-directed way includes the features
mentioned in the last section. Therefore, because most students think that the learning
process should start with a good foundation, they believe that within a scheme of self-
direction such a base should be present as well. In fact, for them, self-directed learning is
not opposed to the presence of a teacher, either in the classroom or as a counsellor in the
self-access centre:

S: In SAC you need to have a guide, to provide you with the basics.
That way self-learning is more beneficial because with that basis
you have the option to choose what you want.
E: I think that the self-access centre has to be complementary to the
classroom. A support to what is learned in the class
K: At the classroom the teacher is a guide for learning X, which can be
elaborated in the SAC. The two things go together

As the reader may recall, this is the base learners talked about when dealing with
their concept of learning a language.

However, for some of the students, it is important to notice that in a self-directed
scheme you need another element as a base to start a good self-directed process. This
base is an awareness of your need.

Ga: The clue is to know where to start, what to look for. That is why
most of the SAC users drop out. They felt lost.

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In fact, as Ga states, most of the students that have experienced working in the SAC expressed their problem of "being lost". They said that most of SAC learners do not know where to start:

F: They get lost and dizzy among this massive amount of materials.

However, most of them did not express the need to be aware of their specific problems, as Ga advises. Underlying this fact, may be the belief that the fact that they have a teacher (or a counsellor), or a textbook as a base to start, will take care of their specific needs and problems.

However, once more, their views about the SAC teacher, or counsellor, were not in agreement. Some of them were very reluctant to have a counsellor to help them in their learning process. K, for instance, who expressed that the teacher is a guide in the classroom (see above), stated that in her way of working in SAC she does not need that guide:

K: I want to make my own decisions. The counsellor isn't able to guess what I want.

T expressed the same attitude, however, his reasons underlying it were very different:

T: Many teachers have been a barrier in my learning processes

Taking this into account, it was clear to see that the participants depicted three different situations when working in a self-directed way: independent learning, guided learning and assisted learning, i.e., three different self-directed learning styles.

Independent learning consists in isolated work. K provides a good example of this concept of self-direction. Independent learning gives the learner the opportunity to make her own decisions. Using K's own words:

K: In all my school years I have had a teacher. That has been my life as student, until the SAC was opened, a system in which I can learn in my own way, which gives me the opportunity to be independent. One needs to be self-sufficient

In this mode of learning, counsellors are not needed. According to K, the user's course at the beginning is the only guide required for "finding your way in SAC". According to T, another student in favour of independent learning,

T: The idea of a counsellor makes my life complicated. What is needed is an organisational structure to be able to find material. I don't like people telling me what to do. I hate asking people. As I said, a structure that describes the materials, telling about advantages and disadvantages. Criteria to make choices.

Ga, on the contrary, is aware that she is not independent:

Ga: I am not completely independent because, to solve some problems that are difficult, I seek the suggestion of a teacher or a native speaker.

Most of the students, however, went for the idea of *guided learning*. The most important feature of this mode of self-direction is the presence of a guide.

Gl: In the SAC there are some many things that I really do not know what to choose, where to start. I need a guide. The user's course is not enough. I need someone to tell me which one is the best according to my own knowledge.

According to them, a guide needs to have knowledge of the organisation and materials of the SAC:

Gl: They should know what is available here, for us to know where to look for. They should guide.

For S, the guide should present different options:

S: He should show the learners all the different ways, the different methodological options. If they don't show me what is available, I can't choose. I stay in the same place. I don't improve myself.

For F, the guides should also have knowledge about the learners:

F: They should be interested in the learners' learning needs and styles.

A good explanation of this mode of self-learning was provided by F, who made a comparison of the SAC with a gym:

F: When someone first goes to the gym, he asks the trainer about a program for one or two weeks. After those two weeks, they decide on another program, and then another. One does the exercises by himself. If he has doubts, he asks. In order to decide on a program, the trainer takes into account the interests and needs of that specific person, if he wants to learn or to practice. They look for the appropriate materials, decide on the times and he keeps an eye on the learner.

The third mode, *assisted learning*, also involves the figure of another person, apart from the learners, that may be involved in the learning process. The most salient feature of this mode of learning is the fact that the counsellor is not a guide but an assistant. " I don't want a teacher following all my movements", as A stated. According to Ge,

> Ge: You counsellors do not guide me. You counsel me. I read that and
> I didn't understand this particular point. I know what I didn't understand.
> So, I ask you. You don't tell where my problem is. I already discovered it.
> I didn't understand and you solved my doubt. Still, I am my own guide.

Different from the guide, that seems to be necessary for some learners, the counsellor is not essential in every moment:

> A: A counsellor doesn't offer a compulsory service. He helps on an optional
> basis. As a learner, you know that there is someone there to help you, if you
> want you can ask him, but if you don't want that is OK....But it is important
> that I know that he is there for me, ready for the moment I need him.

The function of a counsellor is to answer the learners' questions, to solve their doubts, to work out their problems. The learner uses her to verify her knowledge, to test her hypotheses, to save time:

> Ga: Unconditional, as the responsible teacher should be, with the
> obligation to respond to you. I know that he is there and he knows
> that I am here. If I don't look for him, no problem. I decide, I,
> I make the decision, but he should be there.

The counsellor becomes an assistant subordinated to the needs and requirements of the learner, who is the main figure of the learning process.

It must be noticed that, in regards to this topic, the participants made several complaints about their experience when interacting with SAC counsellors. They particularly stressed the counsellors' lack of commitment and ability to cope with their problems. This may be the reason for their belief that, in a guided and counselled self-directed learning, the interaction between the counsellor/guide and the learner is essential for the success of the program:

> A: The self-access project is a failure. The counsellors need to be here
> more time. Get involved....They seem to be ghosts. They are here
> but in fact they are not....They need to be conscious of what their role is.
> They need to define it.

Most of the participants agreed that their relationship with counsellors, if there is one, is very distant and impersonal. They have not met their expectations, either as guides or as counsellors. The consequence is that they do not discuss their learning problems at all:

> A: It is difficult to tell someone very distant and cold with me that I am not learning. I do not want to expose myself to someone I do not know if I can trust.

Under these conditions, most of the learners prefer to leave without saying a word.

In short, the participants believe that in self-directed learning a base is still needed. However this base is different from the ones mentioned in other-directed learning. In this case, the base was expressed in three terms: participating in a class, in which case SAC work is complementary; an awareness of own needs (in order not to feel lost in SAC) and the counsellor. The third element, the counsellor, was depicted by participants in three different ways according to their own learning styles: independent learning (in which case the is no need of a counsellor); guided learning (in which the counsellor is a guide) and assisted learning (where the counsellor plays the role of an assistance for learning).

6.2.5 Beliefs about language learning in a self-directed way within the Mexican culture.

Basically, everything that has been said in this chapter talks about Mexican people working in a self-directed scheme and their beliefs. In this section I will put forward some participants' comments about this issue. According to the participants, learning in a self-directed way means, in the Mexican culture, a break of habits, that is, a change in the way they are use to learn. There is an agreement that a sudden change is impossible

> A: We have the same capacity as people from other cultures, but the change has to be gradual.... Yes, we can change, but we need guidance, direction, advice.

The change, for F, has to mediate with our usual learning scheme

> F: Mexico is not ready for autonomy. It would be a failure. We do not have that culture. Actually I do not know if it exists in another country.

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We have the habits of classical teaching. Although we are changing we still
need to get ready for it. The teacher cannot be replaced, but her function
can be changed. Instead of teaching, she can be a facilitator.

Most of them agreed with F in the fact that this change has already started. This
was made clear in their beliefs about learners (see section 6.1.3, p. 160). Others, like Gl,
think that they are ready for the change:

Gl: It may go against the Mexican culture but there are always changes
within a culture. It would be good if the student by herself wanted
to search, read, think, comment, argue. We are breaking something
in our culture. We have to change. If the teacher says something I do it.
Am I always going to depend on the teacher? Am I not a human being
capable of thinking, capable of making her own decisions without anybody else
telling me what to do? There comes the moment that you are fed up. and then
you do not wait for orders any more, you take the initiative.

However, for one of the participants, J, the self-direction that the SAC offers is
not very different to the way he has been studying since he started school:

J: I don't notice any difference. Since elementary school, I feel that I
have to study by myself. Most of the teachers in Mexico only say: "Study
this, I will see you the day of the exam"

In the next chapter, these views will be related to my own beliefs about task and
the way I put them into practice.

6.3 BELIEFS RELATED TO STRATEGY

This section refers to metacognitive knowledge about strategies, the third element
of Flavell's classification. As it was stated before, this category, according to Flavell
refers to

knowledge that could be acquired concerning what strategies are likely to be
effective in achieving what subgoals and goals in what sorts of cognitive
undertakings (Flavell; 1979,907)

In particular, for Flavell, strategies are "procedures for getting from here to there in order
to achieve various goals" (Flavell;1987,23). Therefore, this section deals with the beliefs
the participants reported about the way they learn a language. It is mainly based on the
content of individual sessions that were carried throughout the Oaxaca/97 project. The
main goal of these sessions was to reflect on the learners' learning processes.

This section, along with the previous two, is about the participants' beliefs, in this case, their beliefs about the strategies they use when dealing with the task, learning the language. It is not reporting the actual cognitive behaviour of the participants but the way they think they behave when learning the language. I am not saying that what they say is not true. What I want to make clear, though, is the way I gathered this information. It was reported to me by the participants. It is the way they think things happen. This information will be compared with section 7.1 and 7.2, where I will put forward the way I see things were happening. That will be my belief.

A main difference between this section and the ones dealing with person and task is that, as was mentioned before, the latter refer to beliefs about knowledge while the former implies beliefs about regulation of cognition (Brown; 1987,69), which basically refers to the deployment of a skill, that is, procedural rather than declarative knowledge. For this reason, the information that is included in this section was mainly gathered from retrospection about cognitive processes, which in themselves involved the participants in metacognitive experiences.

As in the previous sections, I have organised the information in a certain way. In this case, I will deal with the already well known classification of learning strategies with a specific focus on metacognitive strategies, which are highly relevant to the development of an ability for self-direction. With regard to this, I want to remind the reader of the potential problem of classifying metacognitive strategies (see section 3.3.2.1). However, I am positive that the data that I have identified as beliefs on metacognitive strategies refers to actual metacognition, especially in the case when students needed to reflect on and give an opinion of their own performance.

6.3.1 Beliefs about cognitive strategies

There were several moments when the learners and I talked about their learning processes (individual and group sessions 5, 6, 10 and from 14 to 19, and 2 input sessions, 4 and 6, see page 124). From these sessions there was one specifically dealing with cognitive strategies. In I/G session 10, I gave the participants a list of cognitive strategies (taken from O'Malley and Chamot; 1990, 119,120), and asked them to choose the ones that they use most. The following day, they told me that it was difficult to decide which strategies they were used to working with. Most of the strategies were familiar to them.

Almost all of them agreed that they had used most of the strategies. However, they did not say much and their comments were very scarce and poor. Apparently, it was difficult for them to discriminate their use of strategies by analysing them so abstractly. Another possible explanation may be that they were not aware that they were aware of them! (as when looking a familiar image upside down and not recognising it). During the counselling sessions, the image appeared in the right way, that is, they became aware of their strategies. With a bottom-up approach, they talked about their strategies whenever they considered it relevant for the learning process analysis they were carrying out. When listening to the information from the other sessions, I discovered that these same learners were referring to strategies in a very interesting way, in particular, when they were asked to talk about specific tasks, either recalling or planning them. Let me give some examples.

1) Ineffectiveness of strategies. E showed awareness about some of the strategies that do not work for her. On the one hand, she mentioned strategies that she does not use anymore because she has realised they are useless for her:

> E: And, can I use different strategies to learn these words?...Because...I
> have used some and...I know that rote learning works for a while but then
> you tend to forget

On the other hand, E also mentioned strategies that she currently uses even though she is aware of their ineffectiveness:

> E: When I am speaking in English, I think it is like Spanish and I see
> everything as cognates, but there are a lot of things that are not cognates!

2) Difference between strategies involving L1. E also sees the difference between two different strategies that involve her knowledge of her mother tongue:

> E: I've been working with the difference (of the third conditional) in
> English and in Spanish and I think that I have no doubts anymore....
> This comparison was very useful, because I think now that there is not
> much difference (between the use of the third conditional in both
> languages). However, this doesn't always work, well, the thing is that I
> mainly translate from Spanish to English and sometimes it doesn't work,
> but in this case I compared it and that is different.

E seems to be aware that what she always does, translating from L1 to L2 in order to produce the language, is very different from comparing both languages, which involves the use of already acquired knowledge, in this case linguistic knowledge from L1. In

O'Malley et al's terms, E is referring to *translation* and *world elaboration*, two cognitive strategies to manipulate the linguistic material (O'Malley et al, quoted in O'Malley and Chamot; 1990, 138).

3) Use of different strategies in different contextual situations. Ge makes uses of repetition when he does not have time to work it in a different way:

> Sometimes I have to learn things by repetition because I don't have time.
> Ring, rang, rung, ring, rang, rung, OK, the next one. Pure memorisation.

Another example is the case of F. I already referred to his need to change his usual risk-taking strategy, a kind social strategy in which F tries out new language and waits for the reaction of the interactor:

> F: When I learn a new word, I want to hear myself using it, then, I usually
> use it when talking with a native speaker. I don't care if the person realises
> that I make mistakes.

as opposed to what he does when he is in taking part of a class:

> F: When I am in a classroom I have to think twice what I am going to say

For him, the classroom pressure calls for the use of a less risk-taking approach. More than learning strategies, he seems to be talking about *face-saving strategies*.

4) The discriminatory use of strategies for specific cases. During the project, Ga agreed with most of the participants about the idea that memorising things was not very useful. She usually referred to her interest to learn grammar and the value of it for working on vocabulary:

> Ga: By knowing the structure of the sentence you can accumulate vocabulary

However she also realised that:

> Ga: There are things that are not related to grammar. You have to
> memorise them because you have to memorise them.

5) The combination of two strategies. F reported the use of translation as a cognitive strategy, combined with creative elaboration (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, 138) to be able to recall the difference between two linguistic items:

> F: I learned REcord and reCORD. I think that now I will be able to remember the difference. I thought about Spanish. I related it, record, *disco*, the stress in the first syllable (both in English and in Spanish) and record, *grabar*, the stress in the second syllable (in both languages) It is clear now, I won't forget it anymore.

6.3.2. Beliefs about metacognitive strategies

It was found that the participants were very eager to reflect on their learning process. In fact, the information quoted in the last section is very good proof of that. With regards to metacognitive strategies the learners referred to different aspects of their learning process. I have identified instances of the three different main areas of metacognitive strategies: planning, monitoring and evaluating.

O'Malley et al (quoted in O'Malley and Chamot; 1990, 137), classified metacognitive strategies into seven categories: planning, directed and selective attention, self-management, self-monitoring (with eight subcategories), problem identification and self-evaluation. Let me analyse some of them throughout the information I got from the participants.

a) Planning

According to O'Malley et al, *planning* consists of either the advance organisation of a task, or the organisational planning of a task. In both cases, the task is already given for the learner to work on it. However, in the Oaxaca/97 project, I found that planning also refers to the strategy to plan actual tasks, that is to say, to elaborate tasks from scratch, or re-elaborate given tasks, in order to meet the learner's needs. F explained how he would deal with the third conditional:

> F: (to practise the third conditional) I will have conversations dealing with hypothetical matters, inventing things in order to use the structure...a group of students answering questions like: What would you do in such a situation? And then each participant had time to think about the answer, working individually, and then....analyse what the other people said. Express yourself for the others to know what you think and be able to compare....(*after the counsellor's suggestion of writing the sentences instead of working in a group*) I feel that this activity would be better if worked in pairs or groups...because most times, when you think about the first part of the sentence (subordinate clause) unconsciously you are thinking

about the second part (the main clause). It is like when you are playing a game and you already know the content of the card you are about to choose.

Here, F is not just working in a task-as-plan (Breen; 1987), but he is also taking into consideration his metacognitive knowledge of language task in order to foresee the effectiveness of the task if worked in different circumstances. His experience of task-as-process allows him to plan his task in the most appropriate way.

b) Selective attention

There were also instances of selective attention to specific elements of the language:

F: Right now I am interested in chunks, idioms, you know, to learn them by heart. If in a book I come across introductory phrases I can use in my writing I work on them.

K: When watching the film, I paid attention to tag questions and the way they used them in context.

Ga: I wanted to see the different pronunciation of *wood* and *good* and practice it.

However, it was noticed that only the students that followed an *inner guide* (see section 7.2.1, p. 209, for a discussion of this concept) were using this strategy.

c) Self-management

Another relevant metacognitive strategy for planning that was present in the participants' reports was self-management strategy. According to O'Malley et al, this strategy consists of two types of procedures. Let me label these as a) and b):

a) Understanding the conditions that help one successfully accomplish language tasks and arranging for the presence of those conditions;
b)controlling one's language performance to maximize use of what is already known
(quoted in O'Malley and Chamot; 1990, 137)

Type b) was only noticed in one participant:

F: I have improved a lot since the last project[1]. I think that one of my problems was that I tended to think very fast. You need to think in English and organise your ideas. I felt that I had a lot of knowledge and I wanted to use it all at once.

Currently, F is very aware, for example, that he needs very detailed monitoring in order to organise his ideas when dealing with the third conditional. He explains:

> F: Something happens to me with this structure, well, actually, there are two
> structures in one, two sentences in one, then, most of the times I already thought
> about the second sentence (would clause), that is, what I want to say last, then, I
> have to think how I am going to start to build the first part. Or, I am starting but
> then I ask myself: and then what, what's next? That's what happens to me. I need
> to be able to make a connection while I am speaking, an ongoing connection.

He is also aware that he needs such a close monitoring when he is speaking. For writing,
F says:

> F: Sometimes, when writing it doesn't matter. I do not have to work so hard.
> Maybe I don't notice it because when writing I can stop myself and nobody is
> waiting for me to say something.

With regards to the type a), Ga and K provided evidence of their beliefs:

> K: I know that I have to work more when I watch films with close captions. There
> are three things to do: see the body language, listen to what they are saying and
> pay attention to the grammar, because it is there, it is written. While without
> close captions, I only concentrate in the image and the sound.

> Ga: (One of my principles is) to practise what I learn as soon as possible. If you
> don't use the new words, they just stay in the short-term memory. I have to say
> it in order for it to stay. It gets fixed, and from that practice I learn other forms
> of use. That enriches you, and I learn and I build something bigger and bigger.
> The knowledge grows.

Unlike most learners, K prefers to do without the written language because that distracts
her from her priority, oral language.

In both cases, it is clear that they "understand the conditions that help (them) to
successfully" learn the language. On several occasions, Ga also talked about the way of
"arranging for the presence of those conditions":

> Ga: I make my tandem partner use the language I am learning at that moment...
> I ask: "By the way, how do you use this...?" I try to maximise my opportunities...
> I think that for having a conversation with someone you need to plan specific
> topics to talk about. I make decisions according to my priorities. I take notes.
> Otherwise it would be a mess. This is important for me to feel that I took
> advantage of that opportunity. ...Sometimes my interlocutor asks questions,
> and sometimes those questions are related to my doubts. But, if they are not, then,
> "I am sorry, I am going to interrupt you because I need you to explain me this...",
> "And see, I have this doubt...", "And tell me this in Spanish...", "And now, how
> do you say this in English..."

For the rest of the group, the use of strategy type a) was limited to the
understanding of the conditions. A, for instance, makes reference to what it was said in
one of the input sessions to make this clear:

> A: From what I have learned, we pretend to learn only by activating the short

> term memory, and we don't practice. Well, we already tested our hypotheses, but, now, what? To practise and use. We are only half the way and that's why we forget.

However, he did not give any evidence of the arranging of those conditions, in this case, finding proper situations to practise.

d) Self-monitoring

For O'Malley et al, monitoring is "checking, verifying, or correcting one's comprehension or performance on the course of a language task" (quoted in O'Malley and Chamot; 1990, 137). In the data collected, there were several instances of monitoring. For example:

> Ge: I feel that I make my sentence in Spanish first and then I say it
>
> E: When I am speaking in English I think it is like Spanish and I see everything as cognates, but there are a lot of things that aren't cognates
>
> F: I like hearing myself saying a word

However most of the participants seem to be only referring to checking and verifying (like Ge and E) but expressed that they were not able to correct the problem.

> A: I don't know what to do, how to cope with my problem

e) Self-evaluation

For O'Malley et al, the metacognitive strategy of self-evaluation is

> Checking the outcomes of one's own language performance against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy; checking one's own repertoire, strategy use, or ability to perform the task at hand (quoted in O'Malley and Chamot; 1990,137)

Most of the participants were able to give an overall evaluation of their language competence. Some expressed this in general terms:

> T: I know my needs, my problems and achievements
> A: I have been here for a lot time and I don't progress

And some were specific about it:

> E: It is difficult for me to speak and understand oral English
> J: I know enough to write a sentence

Most of the participants showed an extended use of self-evaluation of their overall process of learning and they seemed to be very eager to talk about it.

f) Self-evaluation and learning beliefs

As I stated before, A's evaluation of the two years working on English was stated in a single straightforward statement:

A: I have been here for a lot of time and I don't progress

He is also able to identify his problems:

A: I don't have a good memory....I get tired when I see the same thing again

And, as stated before, he knows the way he likes to learn:

A: I like to learn by playing. I don't like to be sitting in a classroom, formal learning, you know. I like to learn by listening to native speakers....I would like to learn by going out for a picnic and chatting with other people.

However, A's beliefs about learning being systematic and difficult are stronger than his beliefs about himself as a learner. This opposition between beliefs and the superiority of one over the other was uncovered when A was discussing his work with me. A was aware that he got very bored with a specific material but he felt (and he did) that he had to finish it because he believes that

A: In order to learn you need to be disciplined, and I haven't been. I am always changing methods (course textbooks). But, if I chose one I have to finish it.
C: Even if you don't like it?
A: Even if I don't like it!
C: Even if you don't feel you are making any progress?
A: Even if I don't feel I am making any progress!

A was not the only case in which beliefs of different kinds overlapped. In fact, I strongly believe that this overlapping is a constant in all the learners. A good way to realise this is analysing the way the participants, when discussing language learning, tend to identify themselves in their concept of language learning. Discussion about language learning is not just a matter of knowing how to do it but of also of placing oneself within that scheme. This self-definition represents a good way to self-evaluate. For example, F knew how and was sure that it is a successful approach:

F: I have improved because I always wanted to learn a language and now this has

become a reality

Ga was very aware of the wrong and the right approaches because she has tried both and she knows now

> Ga: Before I didn't try out difficult tasks. But now, I force myself. It is not possible to go on with my simple sentences. I have to make the effort. Little things don't satisfy me anymore.

S knows that there are different approaches but he is still looking for the one that is most suitable for him

> S: There are infinite ways to learn a language, the key is to know which is the best for me

E knows what would work for her but she has not tried it yet

> E: I am aware of what I need but I haven't tried to cope with it yet

A knows what does not work for him but at the same time, he does not know what will work for him.

> A: Some materials make me bored because they just repeat what I already know. I waste my energy repeating the same things...My objectives are very general.... I know my problems but I don't know how to cope with them....I need guidance.

g) Self-evaluation and the identification of barriers

In the case of Ge, he defined his problem using a metaphor:

> Ge: "I don't know" means I don't know how to use what I know. I know the recipe for the cake but I haven't made it.

And then he elaborates on it:

> Ge: I feel that I learn, vocabulary and other things, but I can't express myself. When I am on my own, I think in English, I speak in English, but with someone, I can't. My mind goes blank

His explanation also includes his awareness about the cause of his problems:

> Ge: I can't speak. It isn't easy. Sometimes I believe that I can but at the very moment I want to speak I get stuck. My own worries make me get stuck.

In fact, some of the learners that were dealing with the practice of oral production, coincided with Ge about the feeling of being stuck. S expressed it in terms of dissatisfaction:

> S: Sometimes I learn words by heart, but this doesn't satisfy me because I don't
> use these words.

E, being aware of this barrier, tends to use different strategies to cope with it:

> E: I just listened to a cassette. I thought about the way they used the words
> and I imagined the way I would use them.

A and J simply stated that they cannot produce the language so they avoid situations where they have to produce it.

h) Self-evaluation and being aware of the process

It was very interesting to notice that two of the successful learners that are now in an advanced stage of their learning process have realised that they did not start working in the same way at the beginning of their studies. F sees his first stage as different in nature from the present stage of learning

> F: I learned English in a very peculiar way. The first stage, at school, I learned it by
> reading and writing…that is the written form. So, that's why I don't need to
> write anymore. In Family Album, I don't do the exercises, I don't need them
> anymore. They are elementary……I am studying German now, and I am in the stage
> that I need to write a lot, answer all the exercises. But in English I don't need
> that anymore.

Ga, apart from realising the changes she has undergone, she evaluates them and emphasises the role of awareness in the whole process:

> Ga: I am aware now…I have realised that before I didn't force myself to make
> a real effort to learn. But now I am not satisfied with accomplishing little, short
> aims. My goal now is complex things. I haven't valued the knowledge I can
> acquire. Before, I use to write down everything. I didn't waste my time, but I don't
> use my notes anymore. Now, I don't write things on the paper but in my mind. I want
> to make the effort.

In short, the participants found it difficult to talk about strategies when they were asked about them directly. However, when describing their learning they referred to the way they use strategies very often. With regards to cognitive strategies they talked about the inefficacy when using them and the possibility to differentiate, discriminate or combine them according to specific cases or contexts. In terms of metacognitive strategies, they appeared to be willing to reflect on their learning processes. They

mentioned specific instances of planning, focusing attention, self-management, self-monitoring and self-evaluation of learning processes, beliefs, identification of barriers and awareness. Although I am very much aware that what the participants articulated may not correspond to reality (Ridley;1997,18), with regards to the way I gathered this information (through individual and group counselling sessions and group discussions), I believe that, as Ridley states:

> Learners gain in self-awareness by talking; talking generates self-knowledge;
> therefore group discussions can be helpful to the individuals concerned (ibid)

NOTES
1) All the data included in Chapters 6 and 7 was gathered in Spanish for it is evident that it is easier for the learners to communicate in their mother tongue.

In order for the reader to identify the participants of the Oaxaca/97 project, I have used their first initial (see p. 125). The initial X refers to some participants that left the project before it was finished. C stands for myself in the role of counsellor.

2) As it can be noticed, F is referring to a former project in which he also participated. I will talk about this in section 7.2

7. BELIEFS ABOUT A LEARNING CULTURE: FROM A RESEARCHER/COUNSELLOR'S POINT OF VIEW

This chapter is the counterpart of the previous one, where I dealt with the learners' metacognitive knowledge. It is my turn now to look at myself and analyse the beliefs that underlie my research. As I see it, although I have not fully discussed the concept of counsellor and his/her role in a self-directed scheme, I have established the rationale for defining the profile of the SAC counsellor in Chapter 4. Basically, in this section I will focus in three areas of my metacognitive knowledge. First, I will comment on my own way of looking at the Oaxaca/97 project (7.1). Second, I will deal with my own conceptualisation of the learning processes of the participants of the project (7.2). Third, I will analyse my beliefs related to the learners and the counsellor (7.3). As the reader can notice, these three areas closely correspond to the three metacognitive categories, strategy, task and person, discussed in the previous chapter. I have reversed the order of the three categories. I decided that it would make more sense if I gave the reader my own perception of the whole project (as strategy metacognitive knowledge) before I put forward my beliefs about the participants' learning processes (task metacognitive knowledge) and the way I, as their counsellor, thought of them as learners and of myself as a counsellor (person metacognitive knowledge).

In the following sections, I will deal with the same sources of information I worked with in Chapter 6. These were basically the input, group discussion and individual/group sessions I carried out for the Oaxaca/1997 project. I will not only take into consideration my participation in the project (which is going to be the main focus)

but also the input from the participants, for it certainly influenced my own beliefs. The difference from the previous chapter will be that, in the present one, I will analyse the data from my own point of view, taking as a framework the theory that I put forward in the first half of this thesis. In this regard, this chapter will give me the opportunity to carry out other two important things: first, to exemplify my own theory with actual data, that is to say, to connect theory with practice, and second, to examine if my practice is congruent with my thinking, and in a more general sense if theory is congruent with reality.

7.1 BELIEFS RELATED TO STRATEGY: THE WAY I SEE THE PROJECT

The purpose of this section is to describe my own beliefs that underlie the metacognitive strategies concerning the Oaxaca/97 project, that is to say, the procedures I took for achieving my goals. As I stated above (Section 5.1, p. 125), in this project I work with nine participants in order for them to be able to put into practice first, and then into words, their learning processes concerning a foreign language. In other words, this section deals with what I think I did when I worked with learners. It is my own version of the project and the experiences and reflections that it generated.

As the reader may remember, the project consisted in the interaction with nine participants during two months, working in a daily basis. This interaction took the form of three different types of sessions: input sessions (IS), in which I basically gave the learners information on learning processes; individual/group sessions (I/GS) in which the participants and I analysed their own learning processes and group discussion session (DS) in which general topics related to language learning were openly discussed.

These three types of sessions were distributed along a two month program that started with a preliminary stage of individual sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to get to know the participants on an individual basis (I have already discussed the content of their written biographies and the corresponding protocol analysis in section 6.1.1.1, p. 147). After these sessions, I carried out the main stage of the project, in which the three types of sessions were combined to support each other. I ended the project with

a second round of individual sessions. In this case, the objective was to evaluate processes and plan future strategies. The very last session consisted of a group discussion to evaluate the project. In the following paragraphs will deal with the most relevant elements of the project.

7.1.1 The preliminary stage

I consider that the preliminary stage was essential to get to know the participants of the project. It certainly gave me a good idea of the kinds of learner I was going to work with. Moreover, it opened the channels of communication. In general, the interactions were very interesting and developed in an easy-going, friendly atmosphere.

The preliminary stage consisted in two sessions. The first one was the protocol analysis in which each one of the participants and I discussed the content of their written biographies (see section 6.1.1.1, p. 147, for the data I got from this interactions). I can say that I learned a lot from these interactions about each individual, although, at that moment, according to my field notes, I had the feeling that I was not getting anything new in terms of other types of research I had read.

In the second session, I asked the participants to work in the SAC for 30 minutes and come back to tell me what they had done. The purpose of this task was to get to know the learners through their work. Basically, I wanted to know the way they worked in SAC and how they made use of the resources there.

Although the information was far from being an exhaustive account of their styles of self-directed learning, it made me realise the way they approach their learning tasks (see section 7.2.1, p. 208, on orientation).

I must also say that, even though I was worried about the number of participants (18), and I had realised that I was not going to have enough time to work with them on a daily basis, I felt that I was in control of the situation; as I saw it, everything was going according to the plan. Moreover, I was happy to be there, feeling at home, working with students again and realising that some of them were looking forward to working with me.

7.1.2 Input sessions

There were seven input sessions that dealt with the content described in Fig. 7.1:

INPUT SESSIONS (IS)		
1	4 Jul	Project introduction Explanation of objectives
2	6 Aug	Description of: timetable, activities, SAC work and diaries (Handout 1)
3	8	Model of self-directed learning process Explanation of six stages (Handout 2)
4	14	Metacognitive strategies, explanation of planning, monitoring and evaluation (Handout 3)
5	19	Metacognitive awareness, Introduction of verbal reports (Handout 4)
6	26	Metacognitive knowledge, introduction to person, task and strategy (Handout 5)
7	11 Sep	Metacognitive knowledge, person analysis (Handout 6)

Fig. 7.1 Input sessions in Oaxaca/97 project

The first two ISs had the objective *to inform the participants* while the other five were aimed *to teach the learners*. The following two sections will deal with each of these.

7.1.2.1 Informing the participants

The first two sessions were aimed to give the participants all the information I believed they needed to participate in the project. Basically I thought that they needed to understand the purpose of the project, its background, the things that I was going to ask from them and the possible outcomes of the process.

My way of understanding ethnographic research is to look for informed participation, in which the participant should be informed about everything within the research situation. Therefore, I told the participants that there were two different general goals underlying the project. First, one of my goals was for them to fully understand the way we (SAC learners and counsellors) were doing things at SAC Oaxaca. I also told them that I was worried about the high attrition rate among SAC users. I remember very well that I was very concerned about the way I was going to convey this information to the participants. As I did not want to influence them with my own view, I presented it as a mere fact, consciously avoiding my opinion about it. The reader will notice that this was not the case in further interactions.

The other goal, I told the participants, was the very personal aim of getting my

Ph.D. Because I did this with the only purpose of not concealing any kind of information to them, the response was somehow unexpected. They actually showed interest in my research and were happy with the idea that they were going to help me to get my degree.

Dealing with the specific objectives of the project, I explained to them that I wanted to work with them to uncover their learning processes in order to know the way they learned, their beliefs about learning, the way they made decisions. In a way, I said, "all of this is aimed to know ourselves better as language learners".

With regards to the background of the project I explained to them that I already had carried several pieces of research in the SAC Oaxaca during the previous two years, and I briefly mentioned some of the topics and the way I worked with learners. As three of the participants had already taken part of that research, they were able to comment on it.

As part of the background I placed the project within the whole process of my investigation in England. I explained that the main purpose was to get data to make a connection with the first theoretical part of the thesis. One of the participants asked why I was getting the data in Mexico and not in England, where they were supposed to know more about SACs. My answer was that my interest was in Mexico. "I work here and I wanted to put into practice the things I believe in with the people I worked with".

I also wanted them to be clear about the things I was asking from them. First of all, I explained that I needed their time. Apart from the time for the daily session (when there was an individual session half an hour and when there was a group discussion or an input session it was an hour), they were required to work in the SAC for at least one hour every day, either before or after the session. I explained that for most of the individual sessions they were going to be asked to talk about their work in the SAC, and sometimes they would need to carry out specific tasks. I put special emphasis on the written data I needed from them, in particular, their written biographies and diaries.

With regards to the outcome of the project, I told them that my expectations were in terms of enhancing their learning processes and thus, being able to improve their target language competence.

7.1.2.2 Teaching the learners

As was stated before (fig. 7.1), ISs 3 to 7 were aimed to teach the learners about some basic knowledge related to foreign language learning processes and self-direction. Session 3 dealt with two issues, definition of self-direction and analysis of the learning

process involved. Session 4 was about metacognitive strategies. Session 5 dealt with metacognitive awareness and verbal reports. Session 6 introduced the concept of metacognitive knowledge and session 7 specifically analysed *person*, a category of metacognitive knowledge (see handouts of these sessions in appendix 4).

7.1.2.2.1 About a model of self-directed learning process

As it was the first session of this sort, I started with my own definition of self-direction and the difference I saw between this concept and autonomy (see discussion of this issue in 4.3.3, p. 104). I explained to the participants that this definition implied two essential elements, ability and attitude, that were intimately related and fed into each other. I also introduced the concepts of metacognitive knowledge and strategies as the be-aware and make-decisions processes that make up the core of self-direction. The following diagram explains this (it was included in the handout for this session):
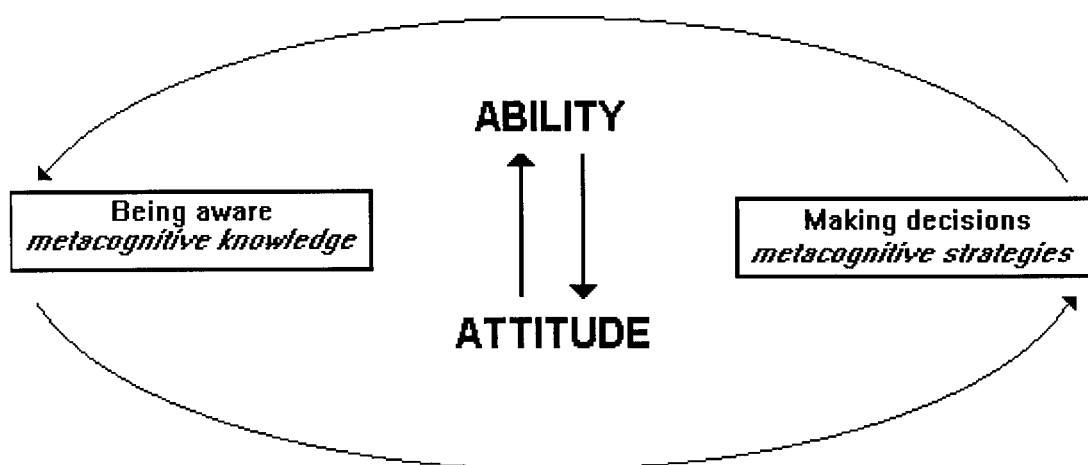
Fig. 7.2 Definition of the process of self-directed learning

In this session I also introduced a model of self-directed learning process. The following is an extract of the handout I gave to the participants (translated from Spanish):

1	2	3	4	5	6
>	>	>	>	>	→
be ready	notice	structure (make hypothesis)	renotice & restructure (test hypothesis)	practise	use

Fig. 7.3. The six stages of self-directed learning

The rationale for the way I explained the learners the process of self-directed learning can be found in the cognitive model of self-direction I put forward in Chapter 4. The reader will remember the awareness box, Figure 4.3 (p. 91), and the way alertness and orientation are the elements that keep the box open. These two elements correspond to stage 1 in Fig. 7.3. Step 2 to 5 are the different layers inside the box. These layers represent the different cognitive steps the learner has to carry out in order to learn anything of the target language. Stage 6, use, corresponds to the production of the language, which is the achievement of the learning goal. As the reader will notice, Figure 7.4 is based on Fig. 4.3 (p. 91). In this figure, I have included the six stages I divided the process in, in order to make it manageable for the learners.
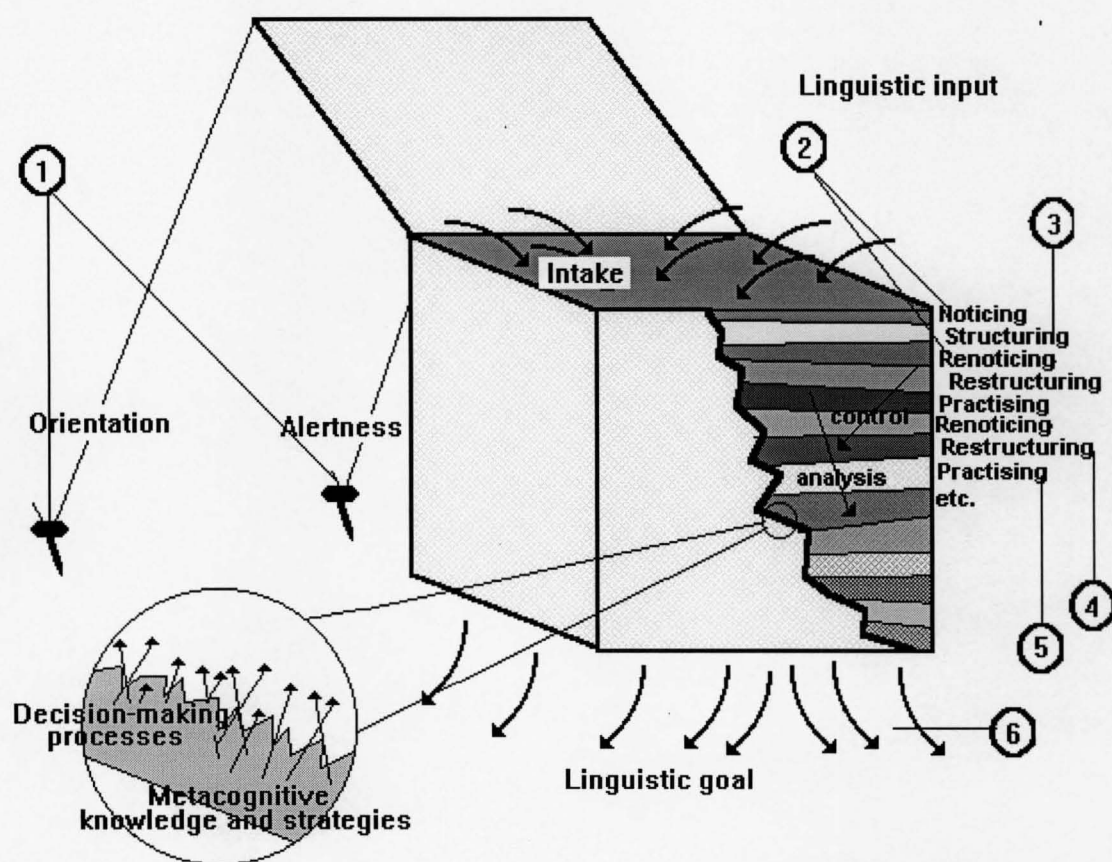
Fig. 7.4 Cognitive model of self-directed learning and the six stages of operationalisation

As I see it, the content of this session was very important because it served two purposes. On the one hand, it gave the learners a model for analysing their processes and,

on the other hand, it set the framework to work with in the whole project. In fact, it was a way to operationalise the theoretical model that I put forward earlier. I will specifically develop each element of the model in section 7.2.

7.1.2.2.2 About metacognitive strategies

The six stages of the self-directed learning process allowed me to make a link with the concepts of metacognitive knowledge/strategies and the corresponding being aware/making decisions processes. The following diagram is the way I presented it to the learners:

1	2	3	4	5	6
>	>	>	>	>	→
be ready	notice	structure (make hypothesis)	renotice & restructure (test hypothesis)	practise	use
intention	attention	attention & awareness of understanding	attention & awareness of understanding	less attention & awareness of understanding	
are you ready?	are you focused?	did you understand?	are you sure?	are you able to produce it?	

Fig. 7.5 The six stages of learning and the type of awareness involved

As the reader can see, the explanation of the metacognitive element introduces the three elements of awareness that I included in the definition of awareness (see section 4.2.4.3, p. 85) and the way it develops throughout the whole learning process. As was stated above, the model of self-direction calls for the presence of awareness as a constant state in the learner metacognition. The third element of the diagram refers to metacognitive strategies. As an operational scheme, this was presented in terms of questions the learner has to ask herself in order to make the right decisions about her learning processes. The second part of the session dealt with the definition of three terms (cognition, cognitive strategy and metacognitive strategy) and the classification of metacognitive strategies. As a conclusion I referred to the conditions of metacognition, according to Flavell (see section 3.3.2.2, p. 56), and the statement that the only living organisms that possess these conditions are human beings.

7.1.2.2.3 About metacognitive awareness

On the belief that metacognitive awareness is one of the essential elements of self-direction, which, above all, needs to be constant along the whole process of learning, I dedicated a session to the definition of metacognitive awareness and the way the learners might be able to enhance their awareness through verbal reports. As I stated above (5.2.3, p. 141), the combination of metacognitive experiences and verbal reports results in the possibility to analyse and to understand learning processes. While the former allows the learner to trigger cognitive and affective experiences related to cognitive processes (in this case, learning a language), the latter, verbal reports, allow the learner to share her experience with the counsellor and/or other learners. Furthermore, I also believe that through the use of verbal reports (5.2.3, p. 141) to communicate cognitive and metacognitive experiences, the learner facilitates development of her own awareness of these experiences. I believe that in the same way that giving a presentation or writing an article forces one to be clear about one's ideas and organise them in a way they can be conveyed, verbal reports force the learner to think about processes that were taken for granted or completely ignored. In this session, after I explained to the participants the three different types of verbal reports, the participants carried out a language task and self-reported the process retrospectively to the group.

7.1.2.2.4 About metacognitive knowledge

The sixth session dealt with metacognitive knowledge (see handout on appendix 4). Referring again to Flavell's work, I restated the model of self-directed learning (see fig 7.5) focusing on the awareness element. So far, we had discussed the importance of being aware when self-directing one's studies, but we actually had not discussed the content of that awareness. Under the subject of " Being aware of...what?" we analysed the definition of metacognitive knowledge and the classification of it into the three already mentioned categories of person, task and knowledge. I exemplified the different possibilities according to Flavell's scheme. As the third category refers to strategies I gave the learners a copy of O'Malley and Chamot's classification of learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective strategies), for them to think about the strategies they generally carry out (I already referred to this point in Section 6.3, p. 178).

7.1.2.2.5 About person, a category of metacognitive knowledge

The last IS was focused on person, as a category of metacognitive knowledge. The purpose of it was to analyse the way we perceive ourselves as cognitive beings. Using Barrow's scheme for developing self-confidence, I introduced the four aspects of self. According to Barrow (1986), these aspects are: physical self, social adequacy, intellectual competence and emotional functioning. These four aspects are present in the two different types of selves that Barrow identifies as the perceived and the *ideal self*. In his book, he suggests a task for students to analyse their selves. Taking this task as a basis and relating it to the concepts of interindividual and intraindividual differences and universals of cognition, the participants carried out an activity in order to enhance their self-confidence (see section 6.1.1.3, p. 153, for results of the task).

To sum up, I gave the students an overall account of the most important elements that make up in a self-directed scheme according to the model that I presented in Chapter 4. The obvious question here would be to ask why I taught the learners about this knowledge. There are several reasons that I shall now outline.

First of all, I believe that self-directed learners need to know some basic elements of psycholinguistic knowledge. Taking into account that self-directed learners have to be aware of their learning processes and make decisions about them, it is extremely important that they are provided with some tools to understand and manage their own processes. In previous research (Clemente, 1996b) I carried out with the same type of learners, I found that self-directed learners are able to take advantage of psycholinguistic knowledge in order to improve their learning strategies. With this experience in mind, I decided to introduced the participants to the concepts I already described above.

This fact, providing the learner with psycholinguistic knowledge, is related to other two important aspects of the rationale underlying the input sessions of the Oaxaca/97 project. The first one is the role of the counsellor and the second one the interaction between counsellor and learner.

I strongly believe that the SAC counsellor has, among her most important roles, the function of a teacher. As I stated in the second chapter of this thesis, the literature on self-access and autonomy describe the role of the counsellor as very versatile and complex, but they especially stress the fact that the counsellor is not a teacher, and nonetheless a language teacher. However, for all its versatility and complexity I think that the main reason that a learner has to seek the communication of a counsellor is that the latter has something to teach to the former. That is why I held the input sessions, in

which I openly taught them. I am aware that the teaching content of this project was planned to be mainly psycholinguistic and methodological (as it was described in Clemente 1996b). However, I cannot see any reason why I should have had to restrict myself to learning to learn matters as some authors suggest (Mozzon-McPherson; 1997, for instance) and leave the linguistic material for the language teacher. Actually, on more than one occasion I found that I had to deal with linguistic matters in order to get into learning processes. The interaction on with K included in Appendix 6 is a good example of this. I cannot see myself just telling her: "I'll tell you something. Go to your 'language advisor' and clarify your doubts about the third conditional and come back to deal with your learning doubts, ok?". If an important aspect of the rationale for learning to learn schemes is that it should be based on specific content ('learning' used as a verb needs a subject) (see section 3.3.2, p. 59), it is impossible to separate the roles of counsellor and teacher in self-direction.

The other reason for teaching them psycholinguistic terms is the belief that the more learners and counsellors share the same knowledge, the better their communication becomes. Counsellor/learner interaction has proven to be difficult in most of the cases (Clemente; 1995a). One of the ways of enhancing it would be through the sharing of technical language. I am not saying that the learner has to become a psycholinguist. I am just proposing that she needs to manage the basic terminology which, in this case, would serve as a metalanguage to discuss learning matters.

7.1.3 Individual and group sessions (I/GS)

The individual and group sessions had the purpose of working in a one-to-one or group interaction in order to make the link with the content of the input sessions. The individual sessions either make the learner look backwards (in a retrospective mode) to reflect on their learning processes or look forward in order to plan further strategies to manage their learning.

The group sessions were of two types: workshops in which the participants put into practice specific aspects dealt with in a previous input session or retrospective sessions in which the learners share with the group their learning experiences.

With this in mind, I would like to give a brief account of the I/GS and the way they linked with the ISs.

The first session, "Please, don't pay attention", was aimed to make the participants aware of their attention and the way they could control it. Throughout different activities, the participants regulated their attention according to the instructions of the leader of the group. After these three sessions, I had the feeling that I did not get relevant information from the learners. At that time, their answers were too vague for me to make sense to them. However, as the reader will notice in the following section (7.2), at the end of the project, the data as a whole was more coherent than what it appeared at this early stage.

After the activities, they discussed their experiences and reactions. Skill-wise, I believed that it made the learners realise the possibilities of working at a level of metacognitive skills (although they have not been introduced to the concept). Theoretically, it dealt with the concept of attention, which was going to be introduced in the following IS.

After the first IS (on self-direction and learning process), we had a series of three individual sessions which I called Awareness 1, 2 and 3 for the aim was to discuss their awareness according to the three first elements of the learning process. The following figure shows the connection:

1) BEING READY	2) NOTICING	3) STRUCTURING
a) Awareness 1	Awareness 2	Awareness 3
b) Intention	Attention	Awareness of understanding
c) Are you ready?	Are you focused?	Did you understand?
d)Tell me what you plan to do	Tell me what you found	Tell me what you understood

Fig. 7.6 Three Input sessions on awareness

The purpose of these sessions was to make them realise their degree of intention, attention and awareness of understanding when learning the target language. These sessions were supported by open questionnaires (see appendix 7) which they had to answer before attending the session. In that way, they were not taken by surprise when answering my main question (point d) in Fig 7.6) but already prepared to talk about it. During the session, I also made reference to the previous IS in which I introduced the concepts of being ready, noticing and structuring.

These three sessions were followed by the IS on metacognitive strategies, that is to say, we focused on the theory underlying point c) of Fig 7.6. In the following I/GS in groups of threes we discussed a task (the same for all) in order to evaluate it (which was putting into practice the one of the metacognitive strategies). By analysing and sharing their individual procedures with the two other members of the group, they were able to compare their cognitive strategies and be aware of the different styles in which they approach a task. All of this, of course, implied a metacognitive experience.

The following IS dealt with metacognitive awareness and verbal reports. After it, there were two I/GS dealing with metacognitive strategies. In the first one, the participants (in groups of three) played a board game called "The Lynx" (see appendix 8). The purpose of this game is to locate the drawings that the player has in her cards (usually she gets 3 cards) on a board that contains all of them (176 drawings in total). After they learned about the rules of the game, they played several times with me changing the conditions of the game each time. The first time, I gave them three cards and after the game was over I asked them to explain to me the way they look for their cards (retrospective self-observation and awareness of individual style). The second time, I gave six cards and asked them to think, while playing the game, in the way they were solving their problem. After the game, they explained their strategies (some continued using the same strategy; some reported having tried a different one) and compared them with the outcome (if it took longer or if they were not able to find the drawing). The third time, I gave them nine cards and asked for the same thing. They reported back. The fourth time, I gave them 6 cards and asked them to change their strategies (look for colours instead of figures, for instance) and they reported back evaluating their outcome. The last time, I asked them to look at their cards (without seeing the board) and plan their strategy according to the cards they had got (metacognitive strategy, planning). Then they played the game and reported their evaluation of both the outcome and the way they played the game in relation to the way they had planned their strategy. At the end of the session we had a discussion of the way they were able to become aware of their strategies and manage them. Making reference to the strategies they had reported, I was able to make the difference between cognitive and metacognitive strategies and give several examples of both.

The second of these sessions had the purpose of working with metacognitive strategies in a language task. Previous to the session, they had to think on different strategies to work with a task they already had done. The purpose was to become aware

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of the strategies they already used in that task and be able to use different strategies and evaluate the difference. In general, this session dealt more with types of exercises than with types of strategies. The suggestions of the learners were on variations of the exercises that the task presented. I am aware that a different exercise may imply a different strategy, and some learners were also aware of this, but I am not sure about all the participants. Anyway, what was clear is that they talked in terms of exercises for the obvious reason that this is the tool that they have been trained to work with when learning a language.

In the following individual session, dealing with verbal reports, the participants experienced introspection. They were told to watch a video in the target language for 15 minutes, with a tape recorder on, in order to think aloud and record all the thoughts they had while watching the film. From the tapes I found out that the participants did very different things under the name introspection (or instead of, because they did not have any previous schema for this concept). For instance, S verbalised what he was watching (what the characters were doing) and A filled his 15 minute tape with the reading aloud of the verbs that he identified from reading the close captions.

F and Ga were very good at reflecting on their understanding of the points they had chosen as objectives, however, in both cases, because they decided to stop the video to record their voices, we can say that it was more a retrospective rather than an introspective experience.

For J, the cognitive task he chose was too demanding (pronunciation work with a movie without close captions). Therefore, the first part of the tape only contains phrases such as "I don't understand", "They talk too fast", "I am listening and watching but...", etc. In the second part, he tends to talk more about what he is watching, that is, the actions of the characters (like S). His attention seemed to go more for the visual input when he faced the fact that he couldn't cope with the linguistic input.

T and E decided to work with other types of materials, a poetry book and a magazine respectively (because they said that they felt too self-conscious about recording themselves in the presence of other students), and generally, their comments are in terms of their understanding and reaction to the exercises and content.

Ga's data was rich in the sense that she reflects more on the understanding of the linguistic input. This may be due to the fact that it was not the first time that she tried out introspection as a way to analyse her learning processes.

Except for Ga, all the participants expressed their uneasiness when carrying out

the task. Most of them were not sure that what they were doing was "true introspection":

> A: I don't think that this is introspection

Or that they were making any sense:

> F: I hope I was concise and clear
> T: I feel awkward...this is an attempt to do introspection.

In short, the introspection activity was not effective in terms of adding information to the project or helping the learners to be aware of their learning processes. I strongly believe that much more needed to be done in terms of protocol analyses and backing up matches (matching verbal reports with actual behaviour, for instance) (Ridley, 1997, 9) in order to reflect on the outcome of introspection. From the participants I learned that they wanted some kind of feedback, and I certainly needed a lot of clarification from them. It is also evident that for this type of verbal report the participants need more time for training. Further research needs to be done in order to find out the potential of introspection in a self-directed learning scheme.

The following IS introduced them to the concept of metacognitive knowledge and the three categories (person, task and knowledge). Then, in the following I/GS they work with some questionnaires (see appendix 5) that have been developed in order to help the learner to know herself better. Although I do believe that this type of instruments have several disadvantages (Ridley;1997,8) (close questions mainly restrict the responder[1]). I thought that I could take advantage of them in a different way. Based on my experience with the written biographies (they didn't write much about themselves) and taking into account that the questionnaires covered the three categories of metacognitive knowledge (they ask about person, task and strategy), I told the participants to answer them and to evaluate their answers. With the answers as a basis, they had to write a profile of themselves as learners. I told them that I was not interested in the answers but in the actual profile, which was going to be the outcome of the task. After analysing their profiles (see results of the "profile task" in section 6.1.1.2) and the session in which we discussed them, I can conclude that the way I worked with the questionnaires was very productive.

At this stage of the project, I realised that I only had left 8 I/GSs with them. I had

the feeling that I still had not got in touch with their learning processes. They had talked about them but not to the extent I wanted. I was not happy with what I had done. I was anxious. I felt that I had not had a "proper" counselling session. In other words, because we had been so busy in doing other things (input sessions and group discussions), the learners had not got the chance to learn something on the target language. Hence, I had not got the chance to learn more about them in this aspect. In short, I felt like we had been talking *about* language learning most of the time but we had not actually *learned anything.*

Moreover, the plans that I had for those sessions were a follow-up of the three awareness sessions we had at the beginning of the project. However. I found that I was not going to be able to do much because I had not got any solid clear outcome from the awareness round.

Therefore, I decided to change the plans for the remaining individual sessions.

As I felt that the awareness round of sessions was somehow a failure because the participants were not focused enough on something specific, I decided to assign a specific content for them to learn. That, I thought, was going to give me results in terms of a controlled research situation.

As we had worked within different approaches (tasks based on genres, e.g., messages, vocabulary, e.g. compound nouns, authentic materials with open tasks, e.g. introspection watching a movie), I decided to work on a different perspective: grammatical points (past tense and third conditional). The participants were free to choose one of these points. My instructions were to choose the one that represents a "challenge for them to learn and/or master", as I put it. The more advanced learners went for the third conditional while the others chose the past tense. Afterwards I learned it was indeed a challenge for all of them since they felt that the chosen point represented a problem in their learning.

The task of learning a grammatical point was aimed to trigger metacognitive strategies. Throughout several steps, the learners were able to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning activities and communicate them (during CSs).

First, they had to plan how to learn (or relearn) the chosen grammatical point according to their own perspectives. The instructions were the following:

> Imagine that you have all the possible resources you need in order to learn
> the third conditional (or the past tense). Which one (s) would you choose
> in order to learn it?

Because in the first step they were not able to look at any materials, they had to make up their own strategy. The planning ideas were quite varied and this variation clearly matched with the way they described their learning preferences and experiences in language learning tasks. In the following CSs they talked about their plans. The second step was to look for the materials that would help them to carry out their plans and start working on the specific content they have chosen. From that moment on, we had four CSs for discussing their experiences and evaluating their outcomes.

In general, this set of CSs was very fruitful. They allowed me to get more in touch with their learning processes. They made me realise the way I conceptualise their learning according to my own schemata. They made me experience a different way of counselling. They made me realise the possibilities of using my own expertise (authoritative knowledge) according to their learning needs.

After the IS on *person*, we carried out a one hour individual session in which the participants, based on an open questionnaire, to record the steps they took to learn the specific grammar point (see appendix 6). This time we revised their learning strategies, evaluated them and started planning a long-term program for their future studies in the SAC.

As I see it, this final CS was very important. Apart from giving coherence to the whole project (the questionnaire made links with the theoretical aspects from the ISs), it allowed the participants to realise the way they wanted, or did not want, to work to learn the target language. The feeling that they had worked with something concrete (and at the same time with something "difficult" for most of them), gave them confidence to cope with similar situations. In the next part of this chapter, dealing with task, I will present a discussion mainly based on the data from this part of the project.

7.1.4 Group discussion sessions (DS)

The group discussions dealt, as it was stated above (p. 125), with the following topics:

DISCUSSION SESSIONS (DS)		
1	11 Jul	The National Educational System
2	18	Foreign languages in the National Curriculum

3	8 Aug	Autonomy, independence and self-access work
4	22	How do we learn foreign languages at school?
5	29	What do you think of the Self-Access Centre?
6	5 Sep	The counsellor, the counselling sessions and the SAC user
7	19	Project evaluation

Fig. 7.7 The discussion sessions (DS)

There were two purposes underlying these sessions. First, I expected to get an overall idea of the belief systems of the participants in relation to the concepts that are related to self-direction. The data from their sessions constituted the main source to develop the discussion of the previous chapter.

Second, I believe that open discussions enhance awareness of one's own beliefs and attitudes. Although I did not research this area, I think that it deserves further attention. This is mainly because I discovered that the group discussions add cohesiveness to a working group, which results in better activities and individual motivation.

The results from the discussion groups have already been discussed in Chapter 6. Here, I would like just to add a reflection about my role in them. When I had to describe the way I worked in the group discussions, I saw my role as one of observer who was only taking notes and whose participation was limited to elicit information from the participants. However, when I listened to the recorded tapes, I discovered that, although my intention was that, I did not limit myself to that role. I certainly participated in the discussions at two different levels. At a surface level, I led the argument and I gave my opinion. When leading the argument, I started the discussion with a opening general and third person point of view, I invited them to participate, I posed questions to specific people, I paraphrased and synthesised their comments, I confronted contrary views, I summarised and gave an end to the session. Surprisingly, I realised that I also gave my own personal opinion. At a deeper level I had a hidden agenda. I wanted them to say certain things, I wanted them to realise other things, and I wanted them to consider my own point of view. In section 7.3, I will specifically analyse an extract from my participation in the discussion group sessions and the beliefs that are behind it.

As a way of a summary, Fig. 7.8 gives a synthesis of the type of sessions that were carried in the Oaxaca /97 project and their corresponding objectives.

```
┌─────────────┐          ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ PRELIMINARY │──────────│ Open the channel for     │
│ STAGE       │          │ communication            │
└─────────────┘          │                          │
                         │ Getting to know the      │
                         │ participants             │
                         └──────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────┐          ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ INPUT       │──────────│ Informing the participants        │
│ SESSIONS    │          │ Teaching the learners about:      │
└─────────────┘          │   a model of self-directed learning│
                         │   metacognitive strategies        │
                         │   metacognitive awareness         │
                         │   metacognitive knowledge         │
                         │   person (metacognitive knowledge)│
                         └──────────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────┐          ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│ INDIVIDUAL/ │──────────│ Connecting theory and practice    │
│ GROUP       │          │ (linking with Input sessions):    │
│ SESSIONS    │          │   backwards, reflecting on        │
└─────────────┘          │   learning processes (evaluation) │
                         │   forwards, planning further      │
                         │   strategies to manage learning   │
                         └──────────────────────────────────┘

                         ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                         │ Overall idea of belief systems    │
                         │ Enhance awareness of own beliefs  │
┌─────────────┐          └──────────────────────────────────┘
│ GROUP       │──────────┘
│ DISCUSSION  │───────────────────────────────────┐
│ SESSIONS    │                         ┌──────────────────────┐
└─────────────┘                         │ Evaluation of project│
                                        └──────────────────────┘
```

Fig. 7.8 Overall view of sessions and their objectives in the Oaxaca/97 project

7.2 BELIEFS RELATED TO TASK

In section 4.2, p.78, I put forward a cognitive model of self-directed learning. My intention in this section is to relate the learners' beliefs that underlie their reports on their learning process with the model that was presented in that section. As the reader will remember, the model deals with *alertness* and *orientation* as essential elements of the initial part of the cognitive process. *Noticing*, or detection, *structuring*, *renoticing* and *restructuring*, and *practice* were identified as the main stages of the cognitive process of learning a language (see p. 91 and discussion in section 4.2.4, p. 84) In the following sections I will deal with each one of these elements. Finally, *awareness*, as the

box where everything goes through, was highlighted as an essential element that is present during all the different stages. Awareness, in other words, is conceived not as a stage to go through but as a constant feature of the self-directed learning process that is present in different degrees at different stages. This is the reason why I will not discuss awareness in a specific section. Rather, I will deal with it as it occurs in each of the different stages of the learning process mentioned above.

One final introductory note. When dealing with learning, one has to be aware that it is a difficult aspect to research. I am sure that in the Oaxaca/97 project there were several things that I did not notice. As I see it, there may be three causes for this. The first one is pointed out by Ridley (1997) and I have already referred to it some paragraphs above. This is "the potential mismatch between what learners believe they do and what they actually do" (20). Second, there is the possibility that certain element was present in the actual learning process, but the learner did not report it because she was not aware of it. Finally, the learners and I did not share the same model of learning, or the same terms to talk about it (especially at the beginning of the project). Let me now analyse alertness and orientation with reference to the data I collected in the Oaxaca/97 project.

7.2.1 Alertness and orientation

In section 4.3, a difference was established between the factors that relate to alertness and orientation. It was said that there are internal as well as external factors that affect them (see Fig. 4.2). According to that scheme, the internal factors of alertness are the characteristics of the learner that make her ready to learn, whereas, the external factors are the contextual aspects which are involved in the learning process. From the perspective of metacognitive knowledge, I already dealt with both of them, in the form of beliefs about person, task and strategy[2]

In the awareness round of individual sessions (see section 7.1.3), the participants were directly asked about their readiness to learn English (see questionnaire appendix 7). All the participants answered that they were ready to learn the language. Their comments on this answer reveal that this belief lies in their awareness about their high motivation, which is the most important element for them to be ready. This sort of reasoning is something like "I really want to learn English, so here I am, ready to learn it". With regards to orientation, there are also two types of factors, an internal and an external one,

that correlate to allow the learner to focus her attention according to her goals. It is evident that, within a classroom context, the teacher is instrumental in helping the learner to focus. In the absence of such a help, I became interested in the mechanisms that the learners deploy to orient their attention in a SAC situation.

In regards to this specific group of learners, it was noticed that there are two factors that are involved when learners focus their attention to something specific: the source of the guidance and the degree of selectivity.

7.2.1.1 Source of guidance

The first of these is the source of the guidance the learners follow in order to orient their attention. According to the participants, there are two main sources for this guidance: the one provided by external factors, and the one found in internal forces. On the one hand, in the case of the external guide, the learner working in the SAC finds that the materials provide the guidance she needs to focus her attention:

> Gl: It is good to have a textbook as a basis

In particular, this guidance is determined by the way they work with the material and follow instructions:

> K: Before starting using something I read the instructions, to see the way it
> should be used.

On the other hand, there are other learners that believe in following a kind of inner guide that tells them what to do. In the case of T, this inner guide was mainly driven by previous experiences:

> T: I think that I know what I want. I still remember some of my English
> courses. How to order hamburgers and how to take the bus. They were
> pathetic. I was not interested, and I am not interested now. It implies
> investing time in something I am not interested in.

For Ga, the inner guide was based on her awareness of her own problems, i.e., language gaps, mistakes, doubts, etc. This is what she reported after working for 30 minutes in the SAC:

> Ga: I had very specific ideas about what to work on, but I didn't
> find the materials. Then I try to think about my mistakes and I look for
> grammar books to solve them. I didn't find anything so I thought about
> another of my problems, pronunciation. Actually , I was looking for the
> difference between *would* and *wood* but this attracted my attention

Ga's inner guide seems to be very strong. As she explains, she does not follow instructions:

> Ga: How did I work? I usually listen to the words, I repeat them according
> to the cassette. I don't read the instructions, they all say the same. They tell
> you to repeat but sometimes I don't do it. It is useless, and sometimes
> they say "Repeat once" and I repeat twice. Sometimes I do not
> read the transcription but only listen to the cassette, to see if I am able
> to repeat that way.

And she seems to be very aware of her priorities

> Ga: If I don't take notes of my doubts, I forget about them, wherever I
> am, then I come to the SAC and look for them. But sometimes I just want
> to work with something at the very moment I notice it. I don't even take
> notes, because it is a priority and I know that I won't forget it.

If we think of these two cases as the extremes of a cline, it is easy to place at the middle of it the cases of learners that partially accept the guide of the materials. For instance, F, whose strong inner guide was evident, still accepts the guidance of a textbook:

> F: In this material, I don't do the exercises, they are not necessary
> for me anymore, but I do the pre-reading activities in order to know
> the context of the conversation and the language it is going to be studied.
> That's why I like this material. They contextualise the lesson. They prepare
> you to be aware of the things that you are going to study...This is what I
> like about studying by myself. If I was using this material with a teacher,
> he might give more emphasis to the exercises than to the listening of the
> language. I would be forced to do the exercises. By myself I know what
> I do and what I don't do.

J is another case of what happens when one is somewhere in between the extremes of the guide continuum. Incidentally, he was using the same material F referred to, but, differently from F, he was only interested in the transcriptions of the textbook:

> J: I am only interested in the transcriptions, not in the exercises. I listen
> to the cassette several times with the transcriptions. I listen to it and
> repeat, reading from the transcription. At the end I copy the transcription
> in my notebook. I don't do the exercises, I don't know why.

Another different case were the people who claimed to be "lost" in the SAC due to the lack of guidance. This was the situation of A and E. However, even though they were aware of this lack, they still knew the source of it. For E, the reason for her lack of focus was this:

> E: I didn't know how to start. Nothing came to my mind. I was not prepared to think

about something specific, then I came across this, which seemed to be interesting.

which makes obvious that she is the one that has to decide on where to orient her attention. For, A, on the contrary, the guidance has to be external:

> A: I know that now, I have a problem that I have faced before: too general objectives. But I do not know how to cope with the problem... I feel that I need to stay with the same material until I finish it, even I think that I do not progress. The reason is that I don't know the materials. They tell you "choose what you want". But we need some kind of orientation about a specific piece of material, what it does, what its advantages are. I feel that will help to know where to start, to realise the difference, to know my level.

7.2.1.2 Degree of selectivity

The second element involved in orientation is the degree of selectivity on the part of the learners in relationship to the target language. Here I mainly found two different situations: the learners who were selective about their way to focus their attention and those who think that everything is important for them. The first group is very well represented by Ga, who openly stated her belief about these matters:

> Ga: the key for succeeding in the SAC is to know where to start, if not you are lost.

On the other hand, we can find K who thinks that everything is useful to learn the language:

> K: I don't look for anything in particular. Everything is useful for me. I want to learn everything.

Most people are placed somewhere in the middle of the cline, but their particular situations are very different. For instance, although F agrees with K that everything is useful, he is now more interested in language, particularly in learning formulaic expressions, while K's main interest is culture. Gl and J expressed that everything is important but stated their worries about listening and speaking. In the case of A and E, their sense of "being lost" makes them avoid the extremes. To opt for everything would make their problem worse. They seem to be waiting for a guide to be able to be selective. Fig. 7.9 shows the two aspects of orientation in a two axis diagram, and the place of some of the participants according to their information.

As the reader can notice from Fig. 7.9, Ga and F are mentioned twice and placed in two different positions. According to their view, both of them were aware that as

elementary learners they let themselves be other-directed. But they had experienced a change in their way of learning. For Ga, the change became evident when she compared the way she used to work when she started coming to the SAC. She used to ask for guidance about materials and follow course textbooks until finishing them. A year after that, she reported, she started a change to a self-directed way in which it was her need that made her decide what to work with and how.
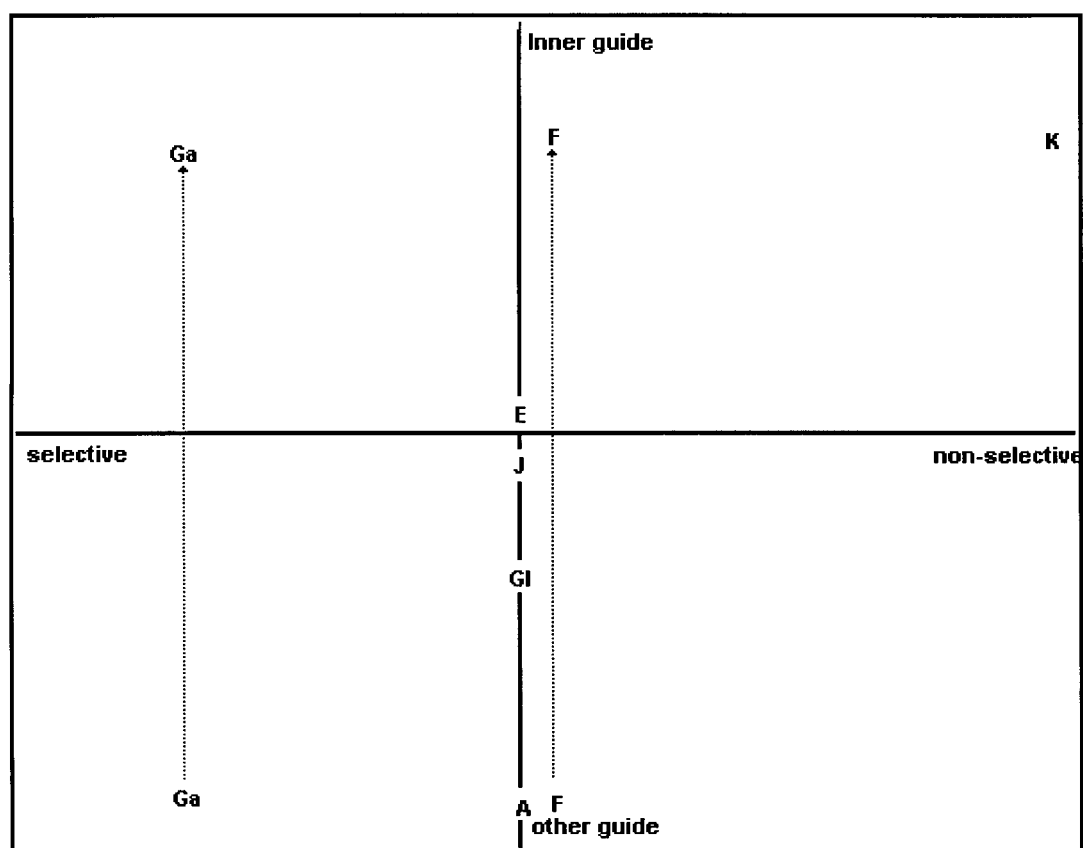
Fig. 7.9 Orienting according to source of guidance and degree of selectivity.

The change in F's style was reported in a different way. For him, it was easy to notice the difference because at that moment he was studying two languages at two different levels, advanced English and elementary German. With the latter, he says, he follows all the directions of the materials and carries out any task they recommend. For English, on the contrary, he is very selective about what task to do and in which way.

7.2.2 Noticing and restructuring: Declarativisation

In the previous chapter I talked about a major change I made at the final stage of

the Oaxaca/97 project. As it was stated there, this change in the program consisted in giving the participants specific grammar points to work with.

Underlying this decision there was a belief that making the learners focus on something consciously would give me better results (in terms of research data) than a top-down approach (Batstone; 1994,30) freely chosen by the learners, i.e., I wanted them to pay more attention to specific linguistic forms. I am aware of the fact that, as a language teacher, I believe that a DECPRO approach (going from declarative to procedural knowledge, Johnson;1996), the way Johnson explains it (based on conclusions of studies such as Schmidt and Frota's (1986) and Ellis' (1990), among others), results in better learning. I find a clear link between Johnson's statement:

> Declarative knowledge need not to be conscious knowledge...But if we wish to convey declarative information to students, one of the most obvious ways of doing so is by means of conscious knowledge (104)

and my belief on awareness (intention, attention and awareness of understanding) as an essential element in self-direction.

By assigning the students a specific grammar point to study I ran the risk of being accused of exercising "imposition", that is to say, of making decisions on behalf of the learners. Imposition is, of course, something that should be openly avoided in learner-centred approaches, particularly if one is promoting self-directed learning. Being aware of this risk, I made the decision for several reasons. The following is what I wrote in my field notes:

> Today I started individual counselling dealing with plans to work with the past tense and the third conditional. I think that this is going to work better than what I did before, because in the past attempts:
> 1) When I told them to work in the SAC and describe the way they work, the problem was that they weren't really focused on something (and then they didn't notice anything), although everybody said that they were ready.
> 2) When I asked them to think of a different strategy to work with a specific material, they only thought of a different type of exercise (which in it was very difficult). It was also difficult for them to give suggestions to their peers....
> 3) Because they don't start thinking in terms of contents (what aspect of the language they want to study) but in terms of materials (what materials they are going to use) the materials become so influential that they cannot think about other possible strategies.
>
> I told them to work on a specific grammatical form because:
> a) I wanted an homogeneous activity (to be able to generalise and compare)
> b) I wanted to be sure that it was something new and/or interesting and something complex and/or challenging.
> c) I think that some of them do not know what to choose to learn because they don't know it yet! (theoretically, a learner cannot write a study plan if she doesn't know what is the content of what she is going to learn!)

Reflecting on the reasons I had at the moment of the decision-making, I can see that (a) was mainly a response to my concern about getting some accountable results out of the project. Points (b) and (c), however, seem to be more guided by pedagogical reasons. To make the learners work with something new, interesting, complex and/or challenging was important for two reasons. On the one hand I believe that a learning situation that meets these features is good for enhancing learners' motivation. On the other hand, I feel that any of these characteristics need to be present in order for the learners to notice something in specific. In particular, I thought that this last point would make a difference in the learners that found it difficult to manage their attention. This problem of attention, as Ridley says, is not exclusive of self-directed study:

> It is a common enough classroom phenomenon that some learners –whatever their age, or the type of language course they are following- do not pay sufficient attention to what they are doing when they are performing learning tasks. (1997, 2-3)

However, Ridley is referring to a metacognitive level ("what they are doing when they are performing learning tasks") within a classroom situation. She does not refer to attention at a linguistic level because in a classroom situation it is assumed that the role of the teacher is to help the learner to focus her attention to that level. In a self-directed scheme, as I see it, one cannot take for granted that all learners will focus their attention on linguistic forms whenever it is necessary.

For this reason, I consider that point (c) is particularly relevant for those students who need more guidance with self-directed learning. The ones that work better in a "guided learning" framework (see section 6.2.4) are the ones that expect this type of help from a counsellor[3]. I must add here that for all the participants the focusing on the specific assigned grammatical forms was a matter of renoticing for this was not the first time they have studied them.

In the following discussion about the participants' process of noticing I will refer to two frameworks dealing with noticing. These are Johnson's chapters about declarativisation *in Language teaching and skill learning* (1996) and Batstone's chapters on product grammar in *Grammar* (1994).

Johnson states that declarative knowledge has two main roles. One is the "initial point for a process of proceduralisation" and the other is a "data base" of knowledge

central to general language use. At this moment of the discussion, I will focus on the first of these roles and later I will refer to the second one.

As part of the initial stages of language learning, declarativisation can be defined as the development of declarative representations of linguistic knowledge. Declarativisation in Johnson corresponds to what in other frameworks, as the one presented in this study, is called noticing and structuring.

7.2.2.1 Noticing and renoticing

In his definition of declarativisation, Johnson, following Schmidt and Frota (1986), describes noticing as a process to convert input into intake. For the purposes of this study, I will add that, as Batstone states (1994, 137), noticing is a conscious process. Thus, noticing is the conscious process by which input is turned into intake. Batstone uses the terms bottom-up and top-down processing to the focus of grammar/lexis and schematic knowledge respectively when understanding language. By extension, I think that these terms can also be applied to processing language for learning purposes. Thus, a bottom-up learning process is a common strategy in the DEC approach while top-down learning processing is mainly present in PRO approaches to language learning.

Focusing in a teaching perspective, declarativisation takes the form of *product teaching*, to use Batstone's terms (ibid.), which he defines as "focusing learner's attention to pre-specified forms and their meaning" (137), In other words, product teaching is primarily based on the manipulation of forms (51). Within this discussion, for obvious reasons, I will refer to this declarativisation as product self-teaching or simply *product learning*, which mainly implies bottom-up processing. As I see it, the main difference, although not the only one, of course, between product teaching and product learning is the awareness element that is necessary in the latter but not in the former[4].

According to Johnson, declarativisation corresponds to the first P (presentation) of the traditional PPP approach (presentation, practice, and production). He mentions six common classic ways in which presentation is usually carried out: *explanation, key sentences, dialogues, passage and teacher action*. These "conventional techniques" do not seem to be recommended by Johnson, who uses terms such as the following to qualify them: "difficult metalanguage", "small number", "traditional...result(ing) in highly inauthentic interaction"(1996, 107).

Interestingly, all the learners taking part in the Oaxaca 97/project opted to use

one of the presentation techniques cited by Johnson. At this point, let me remind the reader that the only instruction that they had was to learn either the past tense or the third conditional. I did not give any indication in terms of how to learn it, although I said that we were going to work with this for two weeks on a daily basis. Thus, the first step for most of them was to look for reference books (grammar books, in this case) to fulfil their needs of presentation (the first of the three PPPs), in spite of the fact that they had a huge range of possibilities among the materials and equipment in the SAC. Moreover, the specific presentation technique they chose seemed to be in agreement with their own learning styles and needs and, as it was reported during the counselling sessions, they felt satisfied with them. What is relevant for me is that when they had a particular linguistic target in focus, all of them felt more free to manage the first steps on their learning process (noticing, structuring, renoticing, restructuring), whereas when they did not have a particular topic to deal with most of them let themselves to be other-directed, as when they just follow a course textbook from beginning to end.

Explanation was the first step that some of the participants took to learn the grammar point in question. Although we are not talking here about teacher explanation, I consider that the grammar books in the SAC played a similar role.

However, the nature of *product teaching explanation* may considerably differ from *product learning explanation*, basically because in product teaching, the explanation depends on the style of the teacher, who may not be aware of why and how each of her students needs explanation.

In regards to *product learning explanation*, most of the participants in the project used grammar books in order to get that explanation, but none of them used them in the same way. Gl, for instance, used three different English grammar books to get explanations for the third conditional, while E looked for explanations of the third conditional not only in English but also in Spanish grammar books. Her focus was on the different way they use the third conditional in her L1 in comparison to her target language. One can see that her strategy is based on her awareness of using the form in Spanish but avoiding it in English (C stands for myself in the role of counsellor):

C: Was the comparison useful?
E: Yes, it was. I feel that there is not much difference (between the third conditional in English and Spanish)...
C: And the use, is it the same?
E: The case is that I never use it in English but I think it is the same
C: ...Are you conscious that you don't use it in English?
E: ?
C: What would you use it for, in English?

E: I don't know exactly...only...to practise it.

C: You have never come across a situation you needed to use it? Or is it that you don't remember?

E: I don't remember...well, I have always had doubts about it, that's why I avoid it...I am conscious that I avoid it. I prefer not to use it

C: You prefer not to use it

E: I prefer not to use it

....

E: I think that (*studying the 3rd conditional again*) was very interesting because in Spanish I use the 3rd conditional even though I never analyse what is this part and what is that part, but I know that I use it... I use it to give excuses. "I didn't come yesterday, I would have come..what happened was that such and such"

Ga's report shows that she works in a very different way from Gl or E. She stated that more than two books were not good for her and mentioned that she was interested in finding examples, which is what Johnson identifies as *key sentences*:

Ga: I worked with two books, there were more but I didn't like them. I thought that it was better to work with these two, the others confused me, but not these ones, although two is not enough...

C: That means, in a way, that more books is not always more information. On the contrary, a lot of books could be a problem because they don't explain the way you understand.

Ga: Or maybe they contradict each other, I don't know, hmm...I guided myself with the example in the first book. The other was kind of complementary.

C: Aha. The interesting thing is that you didn't focus on the explanation, it was more focusing on the examples.

Ga: Yes, and I read more in the other books but they had other type of information

C: Too much information and/

Ga: And, no, well, it was related because all were conditionals but, other types, like future and present. I didn't find anything here, perhaps later on...

C: *(looking at the examples in the book she chose)* But, in a way the fact that they put the three types together, in a comparative way/

Ga: Aha!

C: The three together...the perfect tenses

Ga: Hmm, the fact that I already knew about auxiliaries and the suffix for the main verb helped me a lot, right? It wasn't difficult

As I see it, the most relevant issue in Ga's account is a selectivity skill, that is, to be able to make inter and intra selection of sources (between books and inside books) in order to understand the grammar form. It is evident that Ga's decision is based on: 1) her awareness of her current knowledge of the target language in general ("the fact that I already knew about auxiliaries..."); 2) her target language knowledge related to the focused form ("it is related because all were conditionals..."); 3) her own learning style and preferences ("I thought that it was better to work with these two, the others confused me..."); and 4) her learning strategies ("I guided myself with the example in...."). All of these elements form Ga's *inner guide* that helps her to regulate the type of presentation that she needs.

Another learner who mentioned an interest on examples, not to replace explanations, but to support them, was K. For her, the *dialogues* and *passages* were essential to give her the context to place the new knowledge.

> K: Yesterday, I solved my doubt.
> C: Aha (laughter)
> K: Definitively
> C: And now you have a good hypothesis about/
> K: Yes
> C: how to form the 3rd conditional
> K: Yes, now
> C: Hmm
> K: I had a doubt...because I had, I mean, at the very moment that you
> mentioned "conditional" I thought about *if clauses*, so I said, it's got to be
> the *if clauses*. But the structure, I had doubts about that.
> C: You were mixing the past, the *have*
> K: Yes
> A: with the modal
> K: Yes
> A: and what happens is that they belong to two different parts
> K: Exactly, that was my doubt. And then, so, now I know how, I put my ideas
> in order
> C: Hmm
> K: And then. And now it is only a matter of looking for examples and it is not a problem
> of focusing on the grammar, the structure
> C: That is already
> K: Now, to look for examples and to reinforce, to begin to master the structure, but what
> is causing me problems is the use...

Again, an inner guide seems to be present in the way K works. In this case, this inner guide is based on several aspects: 1) her current state of general linguistic knowledge of the target language, Here she is aware of the presence of a schema for the conditional that she calls "if clauses" which was triggered in the moment I mentioned the third conditional ("at the very moment that you mentioned..."); 2) and the actual state of that schema ("but the structure, I had doubts about that"); 3) her learning style when dealing with form ("it is only a matter of looking for examples...") and 4) her weaknesses ("but what is causing me problems...").

The role of exemplification in context plays a very important role in K's learning strategies. Her first attempt to work with phrasal verbs was:

> K: I think that I'd rather have to look for the same verbs with a minimum of five
> or eight examples, to give me an idea of how they are used....Yes, because if
> I just wait until I come across them in a movie or a video. Sounds like it is not
> Likely to happen.

But a week later she reported:

> K: Finally, I made up my mind about how to work with phrasal verbs. Actually
> I have already started. You know, I listen to my teachers' lectures (on
> Phonetics, Discourse Analysis, Psycholinguistics, etc). I tried to understand
> what they say (actually that's what I am there for), but at the same time I concentrate
> on their use of phrasal verbs. I've noticed that they basically use the same verbs.
> This way, I have everything, the examples used in different contexts! I write them
> down and then try to use them in my tandem conversations.

Apparently, at that time, she was very pleased with her strategy although it was too soon to expect results from it. If we analyse this strategy, we will find some interesting elements. First, although the grammatical form has been chosen by her, the actual phrasal verbs she is going to learn depend on the teacher's speech, a sort of shared control, in which she controls the focus on phrasal verbs (her own choice) but the teacher (unconsciously) controls other factors (when, how, what). Second, her strategy consists of monitoring and imitating native speaker speech but with her in a conscious and on-going state of focusing and noticing. As I see it, K's strategy is a very good example of an attempt for declarativisation through a double approach: a top-down approach to understand content and a bottom-up processing to learn the form.

For obvious reasons, *teacher action* as a presentation technique was not present in the data. However the role of another person (or persons) was salient in some of the participants activities at this stage. Gl and E reported having asked or discussed a grammar point with their peers. In both cases it was noted that they looked for this help in order to compare the peers' explanations to their own schemas:

> E: (reporting on her inquires about 3rd conditional) It was as I thought but
> the other person wasn't wrong either because....

> Gl: I asked my peers but I am not sure they are right

Instead of teacher action we could talk here about *comparison of peer explanation.*

To sum up, when learners are focused on specific grammar forms, they showed that they are able to self-regulate the initial stages of learning. In particular they showed an inclination to work with presentation techniques, being able to select the sources of linguistic information they wanted to work with and adjusting the explanation provided by these sources. This conclusion makes me consider some related issues.

First, even though noticing cannot be forced, I believe that one of the ways that a

SAC counsellor can help most learners is to assign contents to study (according to their own needs) in order for them to be focused. I believe that this is one of the areas in which the counsellor needs to deploy her authoritative knowledge.

Second, to a greater or lesser degree, the learners showed the use of inner guides that let them decide what to pay attention to in order to notice the grammatical form. It seems to me that following an inner guide in self-learning prevents the problems learners necessarily confront when teachers' initial presentation "cannot resemble the learner's internal one" (Johnson 1996,111, based on Prabhu, 1985). As one of the learners put it:

> Ga: the teacher may not know the way I learn. He has so many
> students. He tends to generalise. I'd rather study by myself

This inner guide allows the learners to make decisions along a continuum of noticing. The extremes of this cline are noticing *for* the learner, where formulated information is overt and explicit and noticing *by* the learner where most things are implicit and have to be worked out by the learner (Batstone; 1994,72). After all, these are the types of decisions a self-directed learner is able to make.

Finally, in all the cases of the Oaxaca/97 project analysed in this section, we have entered into the realms of metalanguage, in the three different kinds that Widdowson (1997) has identified: metalinguistic description, exemplification and analysis. According to Widdowson,

> The purpose of language pedagogy (is) to establish a metalanguage of
> description, exemplification and analysis to offset the disadvantages of
> authentic language data (1894)

I believe that making the learners consciously work on metalinguistic awareness is a good way to "offset the disadvantages" of the common top-down approach to authentic materials they usually work with[5]

Metalanguage in a classroom context, to follow Widdowson's argument, is teacher controlled. By contrast, in the present study, metalanguage was controlled by three different agents: first, I, as a counsellor, took control of the metalanguage by "imposing" them a grammatical form to work with; second, the authors of the books controlled the metalinguistic input by making decisions of what to include, and what to leave out, in their metalanguage presentations. However, in the case of self-direction, there was a third agent, the learner, who also controlled the input she wanted to pay attention to.

In terms of the use of metalanguage, my argument is in line with Widdowson:

> We cannot reject the contrived metalanguage of the classroom on the grounds
> that it induces students to learn things they must subsequent unlearn since
> learning depends on recurrent learning....such metalanguage can be seen as the
> teacher version of learner interlanguage in that it presents interim linguistic
> expressions. These are not authentic in reference to what has ultimately acquired
> by the way of competence, but they are auxiliary to the learning process (1997)

Much has been said against inauthentic metalanguage and the way it works against proceduralisation. However, I believe that, first, the use of metalanguage is very appropriate for noticing and structuring (and renoticing and restructuring), and second, it is not the use of metalanguage but the lack of strategies that promote proceduralisation (the lack of the other two PP's, see Johnson,1996,120) which prevents the learner from going beyond a declarative stage. As one of the participants put it:

> Ge: Teachers believe that if they give us grammar, we will take care of
> the rest. You come to your classroom for your doses of grammar for you to
> go out and apply it

7.2.2.2 Structuring

Structuring is the learning stage that follows noticing in the scheme of this study. It is a moment of insight, or "penny dropping" (Ridley;1997,56). Batstone defines the process of structuration as "the progressive sorting out by learners of their knowledge into hypotheses about its structure" (1994,137). Although Johnson does not use the same term in his language learning framework, he describes the declarative stage in more or less the same terms:

> Learners store knowledge they are given in long-term memory as a data
> base...The learners' encoding is ...declarative, and consists of two
> separate components associated with declarative models: (a) a data base
> and (b) a set of general procedures (1996,93)

Johnson attributes two roles to declarative knowledge, one clearly located in the declarative stage and one placed after proceduralisation. In this scheme, structuring corresponds to the former, that is, it is the foundation for proceduralisation, which according to Johnson, "needs to be simple, uncluttered, concrete, and easily convertible into a 'plan for action'" (104).

Basically, then, structuring is the process that follows noticing and consists of the formulation of hypotheses that become stored as declarative knowledge in order to

construct one's own model of language.

One of the differences between structuring and restructuring is, as the prefix implies, a matter of sequence. Structuring is formulating a hypothesis for the first time while restructuring is formulating successive hypotheses (Batstone:1994,41)

In the present project, the participants did not report any case of structuring because it was not the first time that they dealt with the assigned grammatical forms (as it was stated above, in the last section we were merely talking about renoticing). For this reason, the discussion about the data gathered in Oaxaca/97 will be carried out in the section for restructuration (see further section 7.2.3).

7.2.3 Practising: Restructuring and Proceduralising

As the reader must have noticed, in the operational model that I presented to the learners (Fig. 7.3) restructuring is followed by practice and practice is followed by use, as if it was a sequence of steps. The purpose of describing it this way was purely analytic. Basically, I wanted the learners to be aware of the existence and importance of these elements. In fact, in reality, there are two facts to take into account. First, language practice and use cannot be separated from each other because both

> employ the same psycholinguistic mechanisms, they are essentially
> inseparable and often indistinguishable...(and because)...analytic and
> reflective activities designed to facilitate second language learning
> inevitably involve language use, however deficient (Little; 1997b, 227)

Second, practice is a learning stage that encompasses two important psycholinguistic processes: restructuring and proceduralising. Let me say more about the latter issue.

There are some differences between the way I conceive these learning processes and the frameworks that I have been making reference to. In Batstone's scheme (1994), restructurating is a process that happens after structuring, through the formulation that successive hypotheses that replace previous ones. According to him, restructuration is a grammar issue that he places, therefore, in what he calls, the *product perspective* of language learning. On the contrary, proceduralisation as

a process

> that requires sustained practice in using grammar when the reins have been loosened,
> and when learners are negotiating their own meanings (1994,73)

Is related to practice and placed within a *process perspective*.

Within the scheme of the present study, the essential role of practice for restructuration makes me conceptualise these processes together.

In Johnson's, proceduralisation refers to the process of declarative knowledge being turned into procedural knowledge (1996, 96)[6]. However, as I see it, proceduralisation is not the only process present in the PRO stage of language learning. For me, this stage consists of two main processes: restructuration and proceduralisation. In terms of learners' goals, restructuration leads to accuracy while proceduralisation aims to fluency. Any of them, or, in most cases, the combination of both also trigger complexity.

7.2.3.1 The issue of practising

The issue of practising is very salient in the learners' view. As it was seen in section 6.2 (p. 163), one of the learners' beliefs about language learning is conceiving language learning as grammar + practice. There were even some learners who gave more weight to practice (than to grammar) as a key element to master a language. However, they also showed evidence of having problems when dealing with practising.

After having studied and understood a grammar rule, the participants responded that they needed practice in order to manage the form. Their responses denote different issues. S, for instance, mentioned practice as the factor that he needed to improve his language; however, he was never able to give a concrete situation for practising. A, in contrast, shows that he is aware of his problem:

A: I know now that what I need is practise but how?

This uncertainty of how to handle the practice factor of learning a language was very evident when they were working with the assigned forms. They did not have any problems for planning the first stages but they were very insecure, unhappy, reluctant and unrealistic when planning their practice of the grammatical form. Here are some examples of this. S talks about his 'unhappiness' about his lack of practice:

S: I am not happy because I don't use the words I learned

E also feels the need to practice but she replaces it with imagination. That is, instead of actually producing the language in order to practice it, E imagines linguistic

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situations:

> E: I was skimming the dialogue and just imagining the way I will use it.

This "practice in her head" is congruent with her expectations, expressed in hypothetical statements about her future linguistic performance.

> E: I don't know right now, but I *might* know in the moment I will be
> speaking in English, I *might* have an idea, I don't have it right now....
> I am sure that time is the answer. Time will give me the expertise that I need.

In fact, most of the learners who had problems with practice referred to a kind of barrier that prevents them from producing the language. This barrier does not only affect their production but also the practice that is necessary for this production to be enhanced. Ge provides a good example of this problem. He talks about a fear:

> Ge: I don't know how to get rid of this fear. I feel that I learn but I cannot
> express myself in English.

And explains how he can practise in private:

> Ge: When I am alone, I think in English, speak in English, but with someone,
> I can't. The tape seems to be deleted.

He refers to a psychological barrier and his fighting against it:

> Ge: I am aware that learning English worries me a lot. But I don't want to
> give it too much attention. I want to think that it is just another subject.
> I am able to learn English in the same way I learned psycholinguistics.
> I am thinking about not creating a barrier.

At the moment of working with the learners and having to face their problem of practice I thought that the main obstacle was the lack of content. It was certainly something recurrent in learners. They knew how to say something in the target language but they did not know what to say

> Ga: I don't know which verb to put!...I know the structure but I don't
> know what to say

> F: But I don't have an example right now....at this moment I can't think
> about an example.

My own comment reflects that concern:

> C: Well, now I know the grammar but what do I have to say? Some of the
> times when we don't say anything it is not because we don't know how to say
> it but because we don't have anything to say. This was what happened to you.
> You didn't have anything to say because you were not communicating anything

However, I think that my way to solve the problem was very narrow-minded. I only gave them ideas for how to provide their own content. After having reflected on it I think that it is necessary to have a deeper reflection on practice, its nature and function. The following paragraphs are the product of that reflection.

From my experience in FL teaching I know that the psychological barrier that most students refer to, this fear of producing the language is an unmarked feature in the culture I work with. In this context, FL teachers really struggle in order to achieve production by means of appropriate practice situations. This is one of the major obstacles that the learner has to get rid of. However, I strongly believe that in a self-directed context the learner has to face another problem: methodology. Certainly they do not know how to practise and what for. In fact, as I see it, one of the most effective ways to cope with this 'psychological barrier' is methodology on FL practice. It is the assumption of this study that if the learners knew how to manage practice, how to build up practising contexts, they would be more willing to attempt practice and get more results with it. The following sections will delve into some issues related to this area.

7.2.3.2 Restructuring

When dealing with restructuring, there is the temptation to explain this process as 'structuring again'. However this is not the case. The process of restructuring is far more complex than structuring since it is related to knowledge changing and going forward (Ridley;1997,57). As it was stated above, structuring is the first formulation of hypotheses while restructuring is the formulation of

> Successive hypotheses, with one gradually giving way to another as (the learner) notices and incorporates more about the target language. Each hypothesis will be (the learner's) best bet so far, and, with luck, each successive hypothesis will be an improvement on its predecessor
> (Batstone, 1994,41).

There are mainly two issues to consider when dealing with restructuration. First, it has been implied that in a way, restructuration and complexity are synonyms (Skehan, 1996). Although I do not agree (for me restructuration is a learning stage while complexity is a learner's goal), I can see the connection. When restructuration takes place, there is a potential for interlanguage to become more complex, that is, the learner feels as if she can take some risks. This, in a way leads to a new chain of noticing-structuring-renoticing-restructuring. All this, of course, must occur in a context of

practice.

The case of A will illustrate this. A reported that he had been working in the SAC for two years without much progress. Although he knows some structures, formulaic expressions and basic vocabulary, he is far from being able to produce the target language. After some input sessions, he put it this way

> A: (Comparing the model of language learning with his own way of learning)
> As we can see, we only learn using our short-term memory. We do not practise.
> "Well, I tested my hypothesis and now what? PRACTICE and USE." Therefore,
> we only go half the way and that is why we forget everything we learn, and that
> fact prevents you from being able to use the language outside, in the real world.

Now he is aware that he needs practise. He considers that he is stuck in restructuring. However, I do not consider that he has gone as far as restructuring. Because practice is considered essential for restructuring and he has not got any practice (and with that, he has not got any opportunity to get feedback or monitor/evaluate his performance, (see further discussion on this), he has not restructured his knowledge yet. As I see it he is stuck in a vicious circle of noticing and structuring the same grammatical forms. This repetitive noticing-structuring of the same forms just makes him aware that he "already knows the rule", but does not allow for the formulation of hypotheses and the reaccomodation of new elements into his cognitive language network. What is even more important, however, is the negative attitude, a kind of "Oh no! The same thing again!", that arises from this circle and weakens his motivation to learn the language.

Second, as it was stated earlier, restructuring and practising in language learning occur at the same time. However, restructuration is not a process that appears automatically after structurating and with practice. Although the practice element is essential for restructuration, there are two factors that one has to take into account, one is the nature of flawed performance that signals the need for restructuration and the other is the kind of forces that generate restructuration.

7.2.3.2.1 Correcting errors

Firstly, it is necessary to reflect on the nature of the flawed performance that is being spotted as problematic. Basically, we are talking here about the classic difference that Corder (1981) pointed out between errors and mistakes. *Errors* are caused by a faulty or incomplete knowledge of the target language while *mistakes*, on the contrary are due to the pressure that supposes real operating conditions (ROCs for Johnson, 1996,122). To use the terms of the present discussion, errors are the cause of a lack of

declarative knowledge while mistakes are due to lack of procedural knowledge (ibid.)[7]. Because of the different nature of knowledge that each of these imply, the processes to correct them are very different.

When restructuring for correcting errors the procedure is the following: the learner goes back a few stages and renotices the grammatical form in question so that she can be aware of her problem. Then she restructures this form in order to make a new hypothesis and store it, getting rid of the old one. Finally, she incorporates it to her working language network. It is supposed that the correction of errors through restructuration results in accuracy.

During the individual sessions in the Oaxaca/97 project, there were some instances of participants working on restructuration in order to enhance their linguistic knowledge. Here is the way K worked it out:

C: ...now you have a good hypothesis of /
K: Aha
C: how to form the 3rd conditional
K: Yes, now
C: Hmm.
K: With the present perfect, isn't it?
C: Hmm
K: and the past, and the modal would.... to form the grammatical structure
(here she goes on explaining the doubts that she had before and she suggest
how to go on working)
C: Could you give me an example
K: *if I...*
C: But from here (*pointing the notes*) It is not necessary that you know it by heart.
K: But that's the point! I want to see if I understood....
C: Do you want to write it down, or not? (giving her a piece of paper)
K: (writing) *If I had....If I had....drive slow....I wouldn't I wouldn't
have an accident....*It isn't *drive*
C: (a little laughter)
K: It is...well...(*here she tries to remember the past participle of drive
and shows that she has problems with the pronunciation*)....Aha,
driven (a little laughter).. If I had driven slow...I wouldn't ...
C: Let's see, now check it with an example you have in your notes
K: *If I had* aha, *if I* ...aha
C: Are you right here?
K: Yes
C: (reading from the notes*) If he had tried to leave the country... he would
have been stopped at the frontier.*
K: *I would have...I would have...*No*! I would have...*NO. I am wrong
C: Aha, what happened?
K: Here. I am wrong here.
C: Hmm, let's see. Let's see another example... *If we had found him earlier
we could have saved his life.* Ok, if *we had found him earlier we could have
saved his life.* Ok, *could* instead of *would*...Why are you wrong here?
K: Why? Because I don't have the present perfect here.
C: Ah...Ok, then, that was what was missing.
K: **Then I haven't understood it yet. I mean, not very well, not as I supposed
I had.** It is not the same as...
C: What is missing here?
K: a verb in participle

C: Of course, like what verb?
K: Some *have*....(looking at me) Help me!
C: What happens is that here you have to use the same verb. *I wouldn't have had an accident.* This isn't the main verb. The verb is this. This is "haber".
He wouldn't have had an accident. Haven't you used it?
K: No
C: (Realising her expression) Is it weird?
K: It is funny
C: Is it? (here there is some interaction to clarify the two meanings
of *"have"*).....Then we are here (pointing at her example). What do you use
this structure for?
K: What for? For a hypothesis, something unreal, in this case *if I had draiven...*

K's example shows the way she had to renotice the third conditional once more in order to be aware of her problem. After that, she had to work out a new hypothesis of how to form it, incorporating factors that make up a more complete schema (the difference between *have* and *have*, for instance). From this data, it is not possible to affirm that K has incorporated the new hypothesis to her working interlanguage network. Only a longitudinal study would give some results on this point. However, I believe that she at least has started a restructuring process. K can be described as a reflective learner who, to use Ridley's words:

> step(s) back and reflect on the process of learning and also on the
> content of their learning...(she) continually shift(s) and upgrade(s)
> (her) interlanguage knowledge...(her) mind being ....switched on. (1997,57)

7.2.3.2.2 Triggering restructuration

In this respect, it is necessary to consider that restructuration needs to be triggered by external and/or internal forces. In the case of external forces, these are mainly present in the context of formal language teaching. It is common for the teacher to give *feedback* to learners in relation their interlanguage. In fact, monitoring and correcting learners' production are considered to be some of the main roles of language teachers. However, there are also internal forces that play a role in restructuration. These are mainly monitoring and evaluating processes that the learner puts into practice in order to correct herself. As the reader can see, we are now again entering the realms of *metacognition.*

As we observed, in K's example of restructuring the 3rd conditional, the main force that triggered her restructuring process was external. It was I, making her notice her written example and compare it to her notes, who made her realise her problem. I believe that in a self-directed scheme, there is a cline of restructuring triggering forces that goes from the external/feedback in one extreme, to the internal/self-evaluation in the other. I do not think that self-directed schemes are, or must be, deprived of external

feedback for triggering restructuration. As I see it, the amount and type of triggering the learners need depends on two factors: their experience in self-direction and their linguistic competence. On the one hand, the more they are used to working by themselves, the more they can realise their flaws by comparing their performance with other's performance. On the other hand, I believe that their experience as target language speakers counts a lot. The more competent they are the more self-confidence they have and the more self-evaluation they can carry out[8]. However, this does not mean that advanced students need to be left to their own devices. Although they need the assistance of a SAC counsellor less, they can still take advantage of it. Even though K has proven to be one of the most successful self-directed learners in SAC Oaxaca, she still can make use of individual work with a counsellor.

7.2.3.2.3 The case of writing

I believe that the fact that K wrote her example down made a difference in her renoticing her 3rd conditional hypothesis. As I see it, writing plays an important role in raising awareness, which helps to the process of restructuring. Within an autonomous scheme, Little (1997c) states that apart from providing "support for the development of speaking skills", writing

> also focuses on linguistic form in a way that is apt to foster the growth
> of metalinguistic awareness (126)

To add evidence to his view, Little refers to Leni Dam and Hanne Thomsen's experience of the use of writing for developing autonomy in language learning. Highlighting the fact that Dam and Thomsen's pupils are able to communicate from very early learning stages, he describes the way these learners work with their writing:

> The writing that their pupils engage in is not derived from a textbook: on the contrary, it
> comes from within themselves, is prompted by their evolving sense
> of their learning needs, is always personally relevant, determined by their interest
> and preoccupations (ibid,120).

According to Little, this emphasis on writing in order to exploit collaborative modes of interaction can be related to the Vygotskian model of developmental learning:

> In the special case of the foreign language classroom...the linguistic/discursive
> support that the teacher must provide to her learners, especially in the early
> stages, is closely similar in its structure and effects to the support of parents,
> siblings and caregivers provide for young children learning their mother tongue
> (Little,1997c,123)

I strongly believe that when Dam's learners write, they get the chance of restructuring (and renoticing) the forms that they, or Dam, have been using in an oral context. By restructuring in this way, learners incorporate their hypotheses to their working framework of the target language. Moreover, it also has an effect in learners' self-esteem for they become confident (or more confident) about their linguistic competence.

There is still one factor that has not been mentioned. This is the importance that Dam (personal communication) gives to feedback, which I think, is essential in this process. To my own view, Dam's learners make use of their teacher's feedback as an opportunity to organise their internal linguistic framework. As I see it, this is a good example of how an external force can trigger restructuration and build on the learner's self-esteem.

Unfortunately, in the case of the Oaxaca/97 project, it was found that in most of the cases, the absence of writing played a detrimental role in the stage practice. They do not write, either because they are afraid or because they are not used to writing (not even in their mother tongue). Whatever their reasons for avoiding writing are, one thing is true: they do not give it the attention that it deserves.

Being aware of this problem, I caught myself several times trying to make them realise the importance of writing. In the case of K I explicitly remarked the role of writing for her renoticing the 3rd conditional.

> C: .... You need to practice now with speaking, in order for you to be able
> to produce the form without thinking about it too much, without needing to
> write it in order to realise your mistakes. If you noticed, when you were
> speaking you didn't notice your mistake. It was until you wrote it down
> K: Yes
> C: Until you wrote it you said: "Aha, I haven't understood it well"
> K: Ha.........Listen! Yes! No!
> C: (laughs)
> K: (laughs) That's right! Then I have to write first
> C: Then, it is a good idea. You first write it down, and doing so you become,
> you realise that you are right or that you aren't
> K: Hmm
> C: I think that in several cases you need to check something up with your
> theory, with your hypothesis and then make decisions: "Aha, this goes here
> and this goes there." "A modal is missing here. This is missing there." "No, here
> it should be the tense form and there I should use the past." "No, it has to be the
> other way around, first past and then present" That way you can play around
> and make several changes...

7.2.3.3 Proceduralising

So far, I have dealt with the practice stage of language learning for

restructuration. However, as I stated earlier, practice also serves another important process in language learning. This process is proceduralisation. According to Johnson (102), within a DECPRO scheme, proceduralising refers to the conversion of declarative knowledge (once this has been developed) into procedural knowledge. He also uses the term *automization* as a synonym of proceduralisation.

For Batstone (1994), proceduralisation is "the process of forming and mentally storing language routines through experience in language use" (137). It is language users being able to make sense *of* language and *with* language and not just *about* language, as in the declarative knowledge stage. For him, procedural knowledge is ready-to-use language.

In relation to this, Batstone talks about process teaching which "emphasises the use of language by the learner". As it was done earlier with product teaching, in this study I will refer to process learning as the self-directed process aimed at developing proceduralisation by means of practice. Therefore, the learner has to be able to manage all the variables that depend on the construction of the appropriate context to practise the language, which is aimed to make the learners able to "express themselves more efficiently as discourse participants" (ibid., 74). In the following sections, I will hardly make reference to data from the Oaxaca/97 project. The reason for this has already been stated above: practise was notoriously absent. However, this fact made me realise the necessity to reflect on this problem. Thus, I will analyse some issues related to this matter and make some suggestions for learners to become more apt to manage their own proceduralisation processes.

7.2.3.3.1 Getting rid of mistakes

In section 7.2.3.2.1 (p. 226) I discussed the possibility to correct errors within a restructuring process. In the same way, I will discuss now the issue of mistakes within a proceduralisation stage.

As it was said before, mistakes are due to a lack of procedural knowledge. Developing procedural knowledge through intense practice in order to get rid of mistakes sounds a sensible answer to solve the problem. However, the operationalisation of it is nonetheless an easy matter. First of all, as it was shown earlier, students find it very difficult to handle their own practice of the target language. Using the scheme introduced in the input session, A refers to his learning process in this way:

A: (*Comparing the model of language learning with his own way of learning*)

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> As we can see, we only learn using our short-term memory. We do not practise.
> "Well, I tested my hypothesis and now what? PRACTICE and USE." Therefore,
> we only go half the way and that is why we forget everything we learn, and that
> fact prevents you from being able to use the language outside, in the real world.

Before the input sessions, A did not consider practice as a necessary stage for his learning process. Now, he has realised that it is important but he does not know how to deal with it. This was basically the case for all the participants at early learning stages. There were some advanced learners, like Gl and E, that talked about practising and realised its importance but who, being unable to cope with it, referred to it more in terms of wishful thinking ("I would use....", "I imagine myself using it", etc) than actual behaviour. In short, most participants showed problems when trying to put their declarative knowledge into practice.

Dealing with automization, Johnson (1996) highlights the fact that learners need to be aware of the nature of their mistakes. He mentions several aspects of what he calls realisation of flawed performance. As I see it, the most important factor is to consider that one cannot assume that learners are aware of their mistakes. Therefore, he says

> Positive action needs to be taken to make learners aware, and the likelihood
> is that it will need to come from outside (i.e. be extrinsic) (126)

Considering this point in terms of self-direction, we are again dealing with the role of external forces, in this case, to trigger proceduralisation, and the function of the SAC resources to provide this force.

However, as it is the case in self-direction, external triggering is not enough for managing proceduralisation. According to Johnson,

> Learners seem to need to see for themselves what has gone wrong, in the
> ROCs under which they went wrong (ibid.)

We are now talking about self-monitoring and self-evaluation of one's own performance, two metalinguistic strategies that enable learners to analyse their performance and evaluate it. In the case of analysing, Johnson suggests the recording of performance for description and examination purposes. The self-recording, self-transcribing and self-analysing of performance has proven to be an effective strategy within a self-directed scheme (Clemente 1996b). I will deal with this in the following sections.

7.2.3.3.2 Triggering proceduralisation

On the line of this discussion, we have seen that the "now, go and practise" approach is not the best way to cope with proceduralisation. Much more is needed to be done. As I see it, the learner has to be provided with the necessary tools to manage her practice.

According to Johnson, the first step is to be aware of one's own mistakes. This is followed by a stage of self-analysis and evaluation. A third step, says Johnson, is necessary to achieve proceduralisation. This is retrial, or "the opportunity to practise again" (ibid,128).

It is the belief underlying this study that in general (not just for mistake correction purposes), practice needs to be controlled in a way that learners can make the most of it according to their individual needs.

Several authors have talked about this manipulation of practice. In this study I will make reference to Batstone (1994), Skehan (1996) and Johnson (1996). These three scholars refer to tasks and the way they can be handled.

Batstone talks about *regulating language use* and refers to a task-based approach that cares for the "qualities of 'good' tasks". Within the task factors to regulate, Batstone mentions time pressure, topic, familiarity and shared knowledge. Actually, according to Batstone,

> Carefully regulated process work can give learners repeated opportunities to
> notice and restructure their working hypotheses about language, as well
> as to progressively proceduralise this knowledge. (1994, 79)

Skehan (1996) talks about *task implementation*. He proposes a whole framework in which several factors are considered to affect the implementation of tasks. Among these factors, code complexity, cognitive complexity and communication stress must be taken into consideration when sequencing tasks for the development of accuracy, fluency and complexity.

For Johnson, the control and manipulation of language practice is *called task grading*. For him, appropriate task grading results in linguistic automization. Automization, or proceduralisation, as it was stated before, is the conversion of declarative into procedural knowledge. Johnson defines it as follows

> The skill of automization is the ability to get things right when no
> attention is available for getting them right (137)

From this definition, it seems that awareness, in its function of attention, or the *lack* of it, plays an extremely relevant role in the conversion of knowledge. While in the declarative stage the more attention the better, in the procedural stage it is the other way around, less attention results in better proceduralisation. This also implies a strategy that allows the learner to decide when she will approach the language from a top-down perspective and when she will stay using a bottom-up processing approach (Ridley;1997,64). This balance is important if we are aware of the fact that

> All language users as well as non-native speakers, remain language learners
> for as long as they are involved with the language in question (Little;1997b,228)

According to Johnson, automization can be achieved by what he calls **ra-1**, which is his formula to control task grading. 'ra' stands for required attention, so

> the formula ra-1 indicates the strategy where we consistently put learners
> in a position where they have less available (one unit, as it were) than they
> actually need to perform a task with comfort (1996,141).

Making reference to Skehan, Bygate and himself, Johnson mentions four factors to take into account when task grading: degree of form focus, time constraints, affective factors and cognitive and processing complexities (ibid.).

These three approaches of practice managing were thought in a classroom practice context. In fact, in the three of them, emphasis is given to the role of the teacher in controlling the different factors mentioned in each one. The question is to consider if it is possible to implement this approach in a self-directed scheme. This question was positively answered in Clemente (1996b). With the belief that self-directed learners need psycholinguistic tools to manage their studies, I worked with six SAC language learners in order for them to develop metacognitive strategies. Among other things, they learned how to analyse the internal and external factors of their performance. In relation to the internal factors, they recorded, transcribed, analysed and evaluated their oral performances.

In regards to external factors, they considered all of these that influenced their performance. The external factors considered were goal, task type, interlocutor, topic and time. These five factors made up what was called a "psycholinguistic context"(PC). The skill they developed consisted of making decisions about the most appropriate psycholinguistic context to enhance their oral performance. In order to make the right decision they analysed and discussed four previous personal performances in which the

factors of the PC were different. It is interesting to notice that

> "The most appropriate" did not mean the easiest, or the most comfortable
> context. It meant the PC that best favoured their control and regulation of
> either fluency or accuracy and sometimes that meant not going for the
> easiest context. As subjects were aware of the fact that some pressure would
> add to their learning and would take them closer to real linguistic use, some
> of them tried to construct the most appropriate PC with a certain amount of
> pressure. (Clemente; 1996b, 24)

This conclusion seems to be very much on line with Johnson's formula **ra-1**. In general, the results of the study showed that self-directed learners can self-regulate task factors in order to make the most of their practice. I believe that the concept of appropriate psycholinguist context is extremely relevant for a self-directed scheme.

7.2.4. Conclusion

As a way of a conclusion, Fig. 7.10 shows what I consider the most relevant findings from the data gathered in the Oaxaca/97 project, and the reflections that it generated. This figure is divided into three sections. In the middle we can see the different stages that were analysed from the learning processes of the participants. On both sides of these stages I have summarised the findings/reflections into two main sets: external and internal forces. As the reader may have noticed, analysing internal and external elements was a recurrent topic of all the stages discussed (except for structuring, for there were no instances of it). This distinction highlights the importance of both external factors along with internal ones. The latter obviously correspond to self-management, while the former are other-directed factors.

The nine learners in this project presented a varied proportion of external/internal forces, according to a number of different factors. However, I have noticed that awareness plays an important role in this proportion. It seems to me that the more aware the learner is, the better she can manage her internal forces. Furthermore, as it was stated above, the most experienced self-directed learners and the most linguistically advanced were noticed to be the most aware learners.

However, I want to emphasise the fact that self-directed learning schemes not only depend on the self-management of internal forces. This is important, above all, because I strongly believe that, for elementary learners (in both areas, target language and self-direction) to have access to the management of internal forces, it is necessary the action of external forces in order to make up for the weakness on the internal

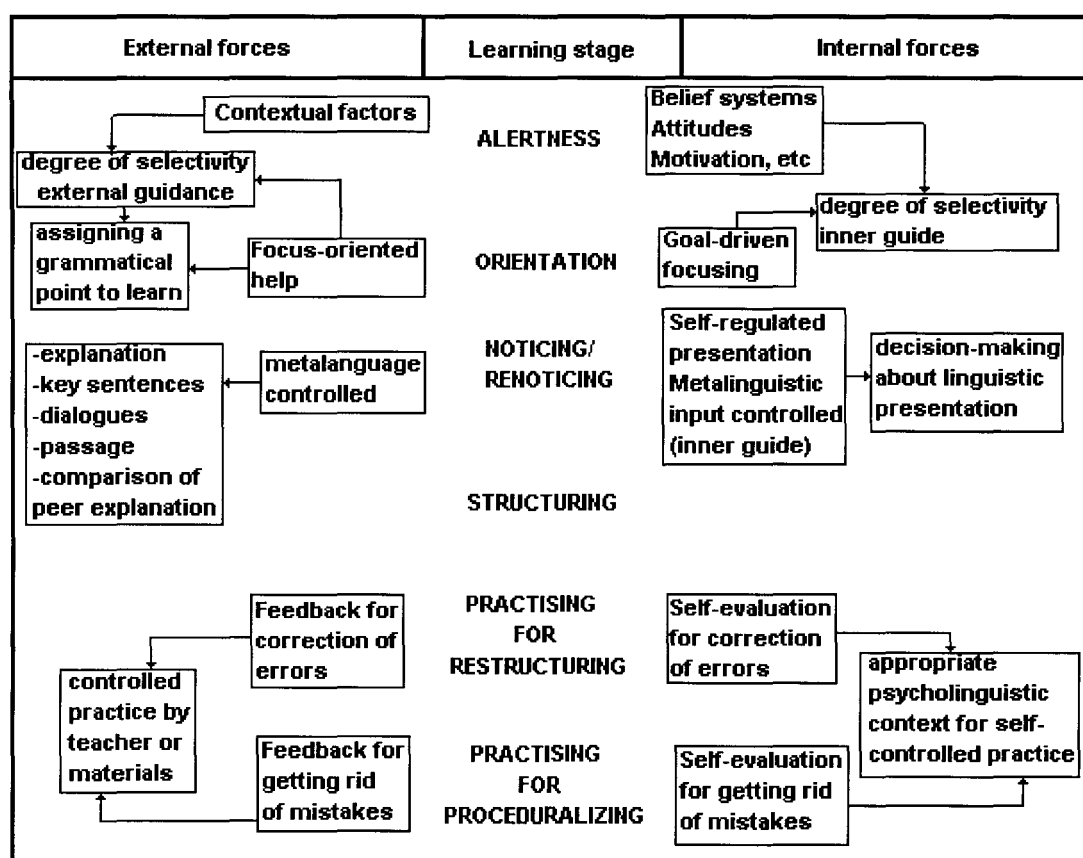elements. It is obvious here the role of the SAC material and human resources.

External forces	Learning stage	Internal forces
Contextual factors degree of selectivity external guidance assigning a grammatical point to learn ← Focus-oriented help	ALERTNESS	Belief systems Attitudes Motivation, etc degree of selectivity inner guide
	ORIENTATION	Goal-driven focusing
-explanation -key sentences ← metalanguage controlled -dialogues -passage -comparison of peer explanation	NOTICING/ RENOTICING	Self-regulated presentation Metalinguistic input controlled (inner guide) → decision-making about linguistic presentation
	STRUCTURING	
controlled practice by teacher or materials → Feedback for correction of errors	PRACTISING FOR RESTRUCTURING	Self-evaluation for correction of errors → appropriate psycholinguistic context for self-controlled practice
Feedback for getting rid of mistakes	PRACTISING FOR PROCEDURALIZING	Self-evaluation for getting rid of mistakes

Fig. 7.10 Stages of learning and internal/external forces

7.3 BELIEFS RELATED TO PERSON

C: Most SAC users are here for two reasons. Either they are new and still have hopes (and a high degree of motivation), or have been working here for a long time (from six months to 2 years) are too proud to leave and admit that they have not learned. But still, they are lost and dizzy. And then they go to the counsellor and ask (not an everyday question such as "Where is this cassette" or "What is the password for this computer program") a difficult question like: I have been working here for six months and I don't learn". Maybe the problem is that the counsellor cannot say anything. She may think "Gosh, what do I say?" or "This guy cannot learn English, how do I tell him to leave?" Maybe this is the conclusion of the counsellor, don't you think? "He has been here for six months and I have told him about all the materials he could work with and he didn't learn, *Ingles sin Barreras* and "I don't learn", *Family Album* and "I don't learn either", "Well, try with materials without videocassettes", and the result was the same. And I am sure that this not a unique case, there are hundreds of them, and they drop out.

This is an extract from my own participation in a group discussion when the participants and I were analysing the role of counselling. When listening to the tapes, I found myself openly expressing my own views about SAC matters. This is just a sample of how I conveyed my ideas. A second reading would reveal a lot about my beliefs. Actually, it is amazing the amount of beliefs one can find in a fourteen-line paragraph. As I see it, there is:

1) a belief that SAC is not working for most of the learners
2) a belief that there are different types of SAC users
3) a belief that learner/counsellor interaction is very superficial
4) a belief that the learners that contact a counsellor believe in her
   capacity
5) a belief that the learners that contact a counsellor can openly address
   their failures
6) a belief that there is no communication between counsellor and user
7) a belief that the counsellor is not able to cope with the situation
8) a belief that there is a negative attitude in the counsellor
9) a belief that there is unawareness of 7 and 8

I am not going to reflect on all of these beliefs. Doing so would be a mere repetition of several sections of this thesis. However, I would like to specifically reflect on two general points: What I believe about SAC learners and what I think of counsellors.

7.3.1. Beliefs concerning different types of SAC learners

My experience in working in the SAC Oaxaca for five years has shown me that there are different types of learners. Basically when I say "Most SAC users are here for two reasons" I am dividing the population of SAC into three separate groups: a) the hopeful new ones, b) the too-proud-to-leave old users and c) the few who are not included in the "most". The first group has two possibilities, either leave within the first two to six months of SAC work or find a place in groups b) or c). Group b) is made up of all the SAC users who are struggling to learn a language in a self-directed way but have not made progress, at least not in relation to the effort and time they have invested in it. This type of learner has up and down motivational cycles that keep them trying. A good example is A:

C: Have you ever thought about dropping out?
A: Yes several times, when I become really bored and disappointed about my progress. Then I happen to go to the USA and I realise that I need to learn English. I come back very motivated and willing to work harder.

Group c) is formed by the learners I am not referring to in the quotation. That is

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to say, this is the type of learners who have been working in the SAC for more than six months but they neither feel lost nor they need the help of the counsellor to solve major learning problems. Basically, these learners have both, a good sense of achievement and very steady level of motivation. I believe that these two factors feed each other very appropriately.

According to this scheme, the participants I work with would be classified as follows:

Group a)	Group b)	Group c)
T, E, Gl	A, S, J	K, Ga, F

Fig. 7.11 Personal classification of participants

It is important to remind the reader about the nature of the content of this chapter. It deals with my own beliefs about the research in question. The reader, then, will notice that although the criteria I used to place people in different groups seems to be objective (SAC data about the time the learners spend in SAC, data reported by the participant - such as the sense of achievement or the type of counsellor/learner interaction), the classification is far from being objective. First, there are value loaded statements in the quotation above (such as "too proud to leave and admit...") that are the product of my own perspective. Second, I myself decided what criteria take into account to make such a classification. The previous chapter has shown us that the learners use different criteria to compare themselves with other learners.

This issue about subjectivity and the way to classify learners leads to another important element in the relationship counsellor/learner. In section 3.3.1 I already referred to previous research I carried out on counselling. Specifically, I want to talk about the developing of *good/bad records* (Erickson and Schultz;1982) on the part of the learner mainly because I am aware that I am not free from that predisposition of the counsellor to develop a good or bad record of learners. In the Oaxaca/97 project I found that two learners (F, S) developed bad records while the others developed good ones. To develop a record means that one of the participants of a counselling session, in most of the cases the student, behaves in such a way that the counsellor may create a good or a bad opinion of her. In a way, it can be said that it is the good or bad impression that the student gives about herself to the counsellor.

In Clemente (1995a) I stated that there are three aspects that influenced the developing of a record. These are comembership, institutional identity and universalistic attributes. It is basically the presence of these elements that help to develop good records of students. *Comembership* refers to "an aspect of performed social identity that involves particularistic attributes of status shared by the counsellor and the student" (Erickson and Schultz; 1982). In the counselling sessions analysed at that time, I found out that sharing the same interests/problems was the main factor that built up a comembership between counsellor and student.

I define *institutional identity* as the degree of agreement the learner has about institutional procedures and situations in the SAC. It was found that when the SAC users showed the counsellor that they were happy about the way the SAC works, when they agreed to do what they were told to do, they probably developed a good record on the counsellor.

Universalistic attributes, according to Erickson and Schultz, are "those which potentially could be achieved by any individual, given the requisite motivation, talent, opportunity and perseverance" (1982, ibid.). Showing a good command of English, in the case of advanced students, or a potential aptitude, in the case of beginners, apart from a high motivation, and a constant effort, helps to develop a good record. Developing good or bad records proved to have consequences in the interactional and illocutionary levels of discourse. That is to say, it clearly affected the communication between counsellors and learners.

In the case of my own counselling in the Oaxaca/97 project, I discovered an interesting phenomenon. Being aware of the aspects that influenced the counsellor to develop good or bad records of her students, I tried to consciously prevent them. That was certainly true with the case of universalistic attributes. It was evident to me that the fact that they were good of bad, successful or unsuccessful language learners did not develop into a bad record. As I see it, as a counsellor, I do not take into account universalistic attributes to develop records of my counsellees. I am very aware that I have always believed (as a language teacher and as a SAC counsellor) that anyone, giving the appropriate conditions, is capable of learning a foreign language. I strongly believe that this is the reason underlying the fact that the participants did not develop a bad record merely having reported serious problems learning the language, E and Gl (group A) and A and J (group B).

However, I am afraid, the same did not happen with the other two factors. In

other words, according to the analysis I made from my reaction when working with the participants, I have to admit that the aspects that influenced in my developing good or bad records of students were *comembership* and *institutional identity*. Let me now analyse the case of the two learners that developed bad records.

The case of F, as I see it, is related to the degree of agreement he had about the project procedures, which in this case represented the institutional procedures. On several occasions he gave evidence of his lack of commitment with the project. My reaction to this attitude was reflected in my field notes:

> C: Is F developing a bad record...?
> What is going on with F? I think that he doesn't want to work in a methodical
> way. He either arrives late or doesn't arrive. Or, what is worse, he
> is here in the SAC but forgets that he has an appointment with me. He is
> intelligent but right now he is not interested in learning something specific.
> In order to carry out one of the tasks of the project, he asked me to help him
> to find some materials. I gave him two books to work with the things he said
> he was interested on. He just lost one (and he cannot find it because he
> doesn't remember which one it was) and said that he didn't like the other
> because it represented too much work. I also feel that I am not very willing to
> give much time to him... Why is he in the project? His motivation is only
> instrumental. He wants this to be part of his social service for the BA and
> he also is asking for a letter from me saying that he took part of the project.

F himself was very aware of his lack of motivation. Apparently, this was due to his own way of learning and working:

> F: This project helped me to confirm that I don't like to work under pressure,
> either this pressure means coming to the SAC in specific hours, doing homework
> or writing diaries. I don't like to be methodical.

It is a pity that the organisational features of the project called for this "methodical" element that required the participants to do several things: to attend to input sessions, group discussions and individual meetings, to work in the SAC and to share the evidence (what they call homework) to the counsellor, and to reflect on their experiences by means of a diary. Without such systematic conditions, I believe that F would have been happier. However, without such "systematic conditions" I believe that the project would have been very difficult to carry out. I strongly believe that if you agree to participate to work with other people you need to respect the "institutional" rules that the shared experience implies. I believe that a high degree of institutional identity is needed in order for a learner/counsellor interaction to take place. In a way, this is very much related to collaboration, an aspect that I will reflect on in the next chapter[9].

The case of S was different. He basically accepted his "obligations" as a

participant in the project. That is to say, he attended regularly and showed some evidence of his work in the SAC. However, the communication with him was very difficult [10]. Very often, when talking to him, I had the feeling that we were having two different conversations, rather, it was like having two monologues that did not overlap in a very polite way. Analysing the different interactions with him, it is difficult to find anything that would have made me be aware of comembership of any kind. Most of the times I had the feeling that my questions and his answers did not match. My field notes reveal my concern about our interaction

> C: What is going on with S?.... He is not aware that he needs to
> practise, however his answer is always "with practise". I don't think that we
> are communicating at all..How can I tell him...This time S didn't remember
> what he had to do for this session, but he read me a text he wrote about
> Oaxacan ethnic groups.....Why I don't find myself with him? Why I don't feel
> satisfied with what he does? Why do I feel that I cannot help him? .....Maybe I
> don't function with S because......

Furthermore, from his part, there never was a reference of the input I provided (which was not the case with most of the participants), something that, I believe (see 7.2.3, p. 222), proved to be a good way to develop comembership between the participants and I.

Actually, the fact that the participants agreed, or did not agree, to work under the same scheme I put forward in the input sessions was not enough to develop a record, either good or bad. T provided evidence to support this view. Along the whole project he expressed his disbelief in certain elements of the scheme. He was always direct and open about this. On one occasion, for instance, I asked everybody to give personal examples of all the different stages of the learning process we had been working with. He said:

> T: I didn't do that part. Don't expect me to remember all the things that you
> said. You know, I don't work that way. I don't believe in that.

I think that the difference between T and S is that with T, his open and straightforward manner, made me realise what to expect from him. In the case of S, I had no expectation because it was so difficult for me to say what his position was. I said, there was no communication, and communication for me is essential to interact with learners. To speak the same language, so to say, is an essential comembership element for the good development of counselling sessions.

In short, two strong beliefs of mine were the cause of F and S developing bad records, one is the belief that there should be a commitment by both parties in a counselling relationship, and second, the belief that without communication it is

impossible to carry out productive relationships between counsellors and learners.

7.3.2 Beliefs concerning the SAC counsellor.

In section 3.3.4 (p. 63), I talked about the counsellor in SAC. Everything I said is reflected in the beliefs listed at the beginning of section 7.3 (p. 236). It is obvious that I believe that the interaction between the learner and the counsellor is superficial (the latter basically answers questions about location of materials), that there is a mismatch of expectations and goals about counselling sessions, that most counselling sessions end up as failed attempts to communicate or solve learner's problems, that there is a tendency to develop subjective (good/bad) records about learners, and that counsellors are not aware of these problems. And in fact there are good reasons to believe all of this.

However, I think that my attitude was not the right one. It is too idealistic to think that all of these problems can be prevented. It is unreal to expect that all the counselling encounters in SAC should be perfect. In spite of the fact that I am aware of all these flaws, I myself experienced several sessions that were far from being perfect. The analysis of my own performance and the beliefs that underlined it have made me realise that I developed good and bad records of the participants, I made wrong decisions and I handled some of their learning problems badly. All of this has also made me realise that communication between counsellor and learner is human communication, and hence, it is not free of flaws. As human beings, we are bound to develop good or bad records of our interlocutors and our own beliefs and attitudes will inevitably manage our interaction with others.

7.4 CONCLUSION

The writing of this chapter has been a difficult process. Analysing one's own beliefs is not an easy matter. Analysing one's own beliefs means self-evaluation of behaviours and attitudes. However, I think that it has also been a very rewarding experience in several ways.

First, it has made me more secure about things that I already thought before, but I did not have any evidence of. A good example of this is the belief I have always had that being a counsellor implies, in several ways, the role of being a teacher. I played the role of a teacher in two situations: teaching the learners about learning matters (sharing part

of my psycholinguistic knowledge in order for them to take advantage of it) and analysing with them linguistic matters (which allowed for an insight of their learning processes which both, they and I, took advantage of). The acceptance of this fact, I believe, makes me surer of my own abilities as a SAC counsellor. After all, I am proud of my expertise as a teacher of language and psycholinguistics.

Second, it has made me aware of things that I had never considered before. It is amazing the amount of factors that I discovered in the analysis of my own performance. Among them, I want to mention the one that I consider the most relevant of all. This is the assumption that when being a counsellor you need to have your own model of learning, your own theory of how things work. This is one of the main differences that I noticed between the way I worked as a counsellor before and after the Oaxaca/97 project. To have developed a theoretical model of self-direction certainly changed my way of working with learners. Every moment I was working with learners, I had my model in mind. That helped me to make sense of what they were saying and doing. It was my own way of understanding self-direction.

With this I am far from assuming that my model is *the* model for self-directed learning. By no means do I want to imply that. I am very aware that my model may be wrong. My model is valid to the extent that it works for me, that it makes sense for me. What is important is to have a working theory of learning, something I can compare with the learners' process. I have realised that without it I cannot help learners. It would be like a blind guide trying to help people to find their way. Hopefully, in the end, the different experiences and contacts with learners will have the role of enhancing and polishing this "working theory".

Third, writing this chapter and analysing my own performance, with all the decisions and changes that it involved, I have realised that I have to "enhance and polish my working theory". Working with the participants in the Oaxaca/97 project made me realise that, even though there were several things that I confirmed there were others that I had to reconsider. One of the most relevant is the role of awareness in the practice stage, basically in the processes of restructuration and proceduralisation. As the reader will remember, I depicted awareness as a state of mind, in different forms, which had to be present along the whole process of learning. However, I did not reflect on two facts. First, it is important to state that at a practice stage awareness has another function (apart from the three already mentioned): awareness of flawed performance. Second, two of the functions that I had considered within awareness (attention and awareness of

understanding) have to be necessarily reduced to a minimum, and eventually disappear, in order for proceduralisation to take place. My reflection on the practice stage, after realising the problems the learners have with this, made me change my way of conceptualising awareness. Needless is to say further empirical research needs to be carried out in order to delve into these matters.

Finally, reflecting on what happened during the Oaxaca/97 project and adjusting this experience to my own schema of self-directed learning, made me think that I was not just describing a learning culture that already existed in Mexico. Instead, I was describing something that was being originated by the participants of the Oaxaca/97 project and myself, along with the thousands of SAC users and counsellors that are nowadays working in self-access centres in Mexico. This is the topic of the following chapter: the creation of a learning culture.

NOTES

1) However, nowadays people keep using this type of instruments as it can be seen in the inventory called *Building Excellence* ^{TM} *The Learning Individual* developed by Rundle & R Dunn, 1996.

2) Although in most of the cases, alertness and orientation do not refer to actual strategies but to states of mind and approaches to learning, most of what was said about alertness and orientation relates to the learners' concept about planning as a metacognitive strategy. O'Malley et al use the terms planning and directed attention to refer to some of the strategies mentioned above.

3) I need to say that when I wrote these field notes, I had not realised which learners belonged to the "guided learning" group. However, the learners of the other groups (independent learning and optional counselling) accepted the "imposition" in a very open-minded way.

4) Although Batstone (1994) is only considering awareness as an element of noticing in its attentional dimension, here I am also referring to the two other elements of awareness (intention and awareness of understanding) as the term was defined in Chapter 4.

5) Finally not all of them are capable to do the top-down/bottom-up combination that K suggested in her strategy to learn phrasal verbs.

6) Johnson also makes reference to the different use of the term 'proceduralisation' in different sources. While for Anderson, proceduralisation is a sub-process of the knowledge compilation stage, for Johnson is a macro-process that involves declarative and procedural knowledge.

7) I am aware of the potential problem of drawing this parallel, for it underlies an old Discussion on the parallel between competence/declarative knowledge and performance/procedural knowledge. Such a discussion falls beyond the limits of this research.

8) This phenomenon is reinforced by the fact that, as Ridley has found, "it is learners with experience of learning languages who are more likely to be able to give their own insights into how they approach specific tasks" (1997,39)

9) F's attitude may be reinforced by the fact that a self-directed style of learning is independent work (see section 6.2.4) which means that he is rarely involved in an interaction with a counsellor.
10) It is only from my perception. I don't know what he thinks. He didn't hand in a diary.

8. CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE

Although I have dealt with some reflections and proposals in the previous chapter, in this, the final chapter, I would like to focus, on the creation of a learning culture, as a conclusion to this thesis and as the proposal for further research on the issue. But, in order for the reader to make sense of it, I consider it necessary to go back to certain points covered previously in order to recapitulate what I have said so far.

I started this thesis with a narration that makes up the history of self-directed learning in Mexico. Within this chronicle, I included a description of the Self-Access Centre in Oaxaca, the definition of key concepts in the field of self-direction (based on a review of the literature) and the description of the roles I played at the various stages of the project. As the reader will have noticed, the last two elements were deeply linked; my own conception of self-direction changed according to the different roles I played and the experiences that these roles encompassed. All this was included in the first three chapters of the present study.

The writing of these three chapters was a learning process. The outcome of this learning process was the fact that I became aware that I needed to make sense of the knowledge and experiences I had acquired. I also realised that it was impossible to make sense unless I had a working theory that explained to me the way learners learn in a self-directed mode. This was the reason for putting forward a cognitive model for self-directed learning on Chapter 4. Starting with the analysis of a cognitive model for language learning, I reflected on the different functions that the mechanisms of cognition play when self-direction takes place. The development of this model allowed me to reflect on the definition of key elements of self-direction, such as awareness, motivation, and learner beliefs. This also permitted me to conclude my discussion of autonomy (started at the beginning of the thesis, Autonomy 1) and to realise the difference, to my mind, between *autonomy* and *self-direction*.

Of course, my own learning process did not end there (in fact it has not ended!). Having defined my own cognitive theory for self-direction, I needed to go back to reality (go back to Mexico) and put it into practice, or better, reconsider practice again and see if my model matched with learners' practice.

From this confrontation of theory (Chapter 4) and practice (Chapter 6 and 7) I became aware of the principles that underlie my conceptualisation of self-direction, the rationale that made me think that the self-directed language learning scheme that I was proposing was in fact the beginning of the creation of a learning culture. After all, I did not go back to Mexico and "quietly observe" people working in the self-access centre. On the contrary, I met them, got to know them as learners, I intervened in their learning processes, I "contaminated" them with my ideas, I got highly involved, working with them as a counsellor, as I understood the counselling role, and, definitively, I learned with them. But above all, we, the learners and I, did things together. And this is what I mean by the *creation of a learning culture*.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will be dealing with different issues related to the creation of a learning culture. I am aware that what I mean by *creation* other researchers have identified as *development* and has been often discussed through the discourse of *innovation*. I have also realised that I am actually dealing with the development of a learning culture (and hence the use of *initiator* and *developer culture* on page 112), understanding development as gradual growth, and that certain elements of the innovation discourse are related to the content of this chapter. However, I have chosen the term creation because it especially brings with it the connotation of human beings as having the ability to create, that is, as *active agents within a learning culture*. As the reader will notice, I believe that the role of learners and educators in such a process is essential for the development of a learning culture, and in this sense, it is creative.

Within this perspective, the content of this chapter will deal with the following: a working definition of learning culture (section 8.1.1), a discussion of the process of creation of a learning culture (section 8.1.2), and an analysis of some findings of the Oaxaca/97 project relevant to this discussion (section 8.2). I shall conclude on section 8.3 with some reflections on the role of interaction between the creators of a learning culture.

8.1 A CULTURAL APPROACH

When I defined the word "culture"(p. 111), I stated my concern about the different connotative possibilities that such a word presents. However, I found Holliday's difference between "large" and "small" cultures, very appropriate to refer to the particular way in which I want to use the word "culture". Basically I said that my cultural approach deals with the "small" culture because this term refers to "any cohesive social grouping" (Holliday,1997b), as opposed to "large" culture that has ethnic, national or international connotations.

Reviewing the language education literature on cultural issues, I found that it was very difficult to make a correlation between my own concept of culture (a small culture approach) with what has been written. I have the impression that most language education writers interested in cultural issues are either talking about the target culture (and the old question about teaching culture when teaching language as in titles such as "The inevitability of teaching and learning culture in a foreign language course" Valdes, 1990 and other articles in Harrison, 1990), or are dealing with cross-cultural issues (as in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, Kramsch,1993), or, following a trend that has become important in this field, are critically analysing the ideology and hidden agendas of teaching English in other cultures (the best examples of this are Pennycook's *The cultural Politics of English as an International Language*,1994 and Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism*,1992)[1].

However, very few writers understand culture in its sense of small culture. It seems to me that, worried about macro cultural clashes, we have forgotten about microcultural possibilities. In this discussion, it is important to remember that micro is used in the sense of "small social grouping" (Holliday, 1997,1), that is, fewer people but not in the sense of less important. It is true that there are authors who focus on classroom life (Breen;1985, van Lier; 1988, Prabhu;1992, among others), but I have hardly seen the word culture related to their work[2]. With this issue in mind, the reader will understand why it has been necessary to look outside the field of language education and make use of literature in education in general (and in other specific areas) to discuss the concept of *learning culture* and work on my own definition of the process of *creating a learning culture.*

8.1.1 A learning culture: a working definition

A good start for this discussion (and one within language education), is Riley, who defines a learning culture as (see section 4.4):

> a set of representation, beliefs and values related to learning that directly influence (the learner's) learning behaviour (1997,122).

Learning, says Riley (1988), is a "social process and varies according to the nature of the society in question" (20). Therefore, this "set of representations, beliefs and values", that I will call *belief system*, is defined by the learning nature of "the society in question". Moreover, the features of a learning culture are always present in any learning interaction occurring, for instance, inside the classroom when formal teaching/learning takes place. This also means that young adult learners and teachers of a given culture, and at a given time, have been so exposed (since they started learning) to the patterns originated by these belief systems, that they know perfectly the system and the rules that it encompasses. This fact, of course, is what allows researchers to get to know a learning culture. Here, I am obviously referring to an ethnographic, and not anthropological, approach to learning (Riley, 1996b, see section 4.3.5). The ethnography on education is rich in accounts of this sort[3]. In this sense, the data analysis that was presented in Chapter 6 is, I believe, a good account, though not exhaustive, of the learning culture of the learners I worked with. In it, I delved into the metacognitive knowledge of the learners and explored their belief systems about person, task and strategy.

However, the learning process is not *only* influenced by one set of belief systems. The educator (that is, the teacher, or the parents and siblings at home, or the priest at church, and so on), another important agent of formal and informal learning processes, is also present, and her presence also implies a good amount of representations, beliefs and values. Thus, a learning culture not only refers to a set of belief systems from one person, that is, from one side of the learning encounter; rather, a learning culture implies a combination of *two* sets. Thus, according to Riley, within a self-directed learning scheme, the learners bring their representations of "language and language learning" and the counsellor contributes with her "expert knowledge of language, learning and self-access system" (1997,123), among other things. I certainly believe that this combination of sets of belief systems was very well illustrated in Chapter 7, when I described the Oaxaca/97 project, my way of putting in practice my theory, that is, my own "set of representations, beliefs and values", and the reaction of the participants to this.

With regards to this issue, I find it particularly useful to refer to what A. Little calls a *learning arena*:

> In a learning arena there are learners and educators who engage in joint
> activity with a sense of expectation about the content of learning, the manner
> of learning, the motivation of learning and the outcome of learning (ibid, 9)

One of the fundamental features of learning arenas, according to A. Little, is the *encounter* of two sets of beliefs systems. There are two factors to take into account. First, the sets of beliefs about the "learning content, learning method, learning motivation and learning outcomes"(ibid.) are -or better- should be, *different* in some way. Second, this encounter necessarily involves the *confrontation* of the two sets of beliefs in question. I highlighted the words 'different' and 'confrontation' because these are essential conditions for a learning arena to act as such. A. Little expresses these features in terms of *familiarity*:

> The learner brings to the arena familiar knowledge, familiar reasons for
> learning and familiar ways of assessing learning. The educator offers the
> learner unfamiliar knowledge, unfamiliar methods of learning, unfamiliar
> reasons for learning and unfamiliar outcomes of learning - or some
> combination of these four (ibid.).

As I see it, the term "familiar" is relative. For each individual, the familiarity/unfamiliarity issue depends upon her particular background, specific experiences, and personal needs and interests. Nevertheless, in any case, the *difference* in sets of beliefs represents a gap between them, and the *confrontation* I mentioned above is the attempt to bridge that gap. This is the way A. Little understands learning within the concept of learning arena:

> Once the gap has been brigded the learner possesses new knowledge, a new
> method of learning, a new reason for learning, and/or a new outcome of
> learning (ibid.).

Thus, to elaborate on Riley's definition, drawing on A. Little, a learning culture is an arena for learning in which two (the learner's and the educator's) different sets of representations, beliefs and values are confronted in order for learning to take place. The descriptive features of a learning arena or culture are, according to A. Little, multiple outcomes, social interaction, challenge and dynamism. The outcome of learning can be knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours, either all of them or any combination of some. Generally speaking, a learning arena implies social contact, face-to-face interaction and joint activity between the learner (or learners) and the educator.

In these days, we are experiencing other forms of formal learning that imply a certain degree of distance (either in space or in time, or both) as in what is commonly called *distance learning*. In this case, the learning materials (apparently more interactive) and the possibility of using different media, such as e-mail, make up for this social interaction. According to A. Little, the learning challenge lies in the difference, i.e. the unfamiliarity, between learner's and educator's beliefs. The gap between belief systems must be big enough to represent a challenge but not so big that the challenge cannot be faced.

> If the gap between the culture of the learner and the culture of the educator
> is too wide then learning equilibria will not be achieved and learning may
> become less and less effective over time. Conversely if the gap is too narrow
> then learning may not occur at all. (A. Little, 1994,69).

Finally, learning arenas are dynamic in the sense that any successful learning experience leads to the possibility of facing new challenges, that is, to set more demanding learning goals. It is a kind of spiral phenomenon that explains learning as a "dynamic, fluid and changing" process.

Everything that has been said so far about *learning arena* applies to the concept of *learning culture*. However, I have chosen to use the word culture instead of arena for two main reasons.

First, as I see it, culture, in opposition to arena, carries the idea of permeability. This means that cultures are open to influence from other cultures:

> Cultures are ideational entities; as such they are permeable, susceptible to
> influence from other cultures. Wherever exchange among human occurs,
> the possibility exists of the influence of one culture by another. (Fay, 1996, 59)

If we then add this feature to the ones stated by A Little, we end up with the following definition of learning culture:

> *a permeable, dynamic, challenging and interactive arena for learning*
> *in which two sets (the learner's and the educator's) of belief systems*
> *(about the content, the manner, the motivation and the outcome of*
> *learning) are confronted in order for the learning of knowledge, skills*
> *attitudes and/or behaviours to take place.*

The second point I want to emphasise is the way I feel about *culture*. As I said before, most studies in language education deal with "large" cultures, and in most of them there seems to be a conflict between the cultures concerned, either because they cannot co-exist or because one is imposing cultural values on the other. This stance somehow arouses negative attitudes about cultural issues. Actually, this is not a

phenomenon exclusive to language education matters. A. Little, who works not in languages in education but in comparative studies in education, says:

> For too long culture has been invoked by many in development studies
> as an explanation of past failure rather than of success, of present problems
> rather than achievements and of future difficulties rather than possibilities.
>   (Little,A, 1992,9)

The present study stands for a different approach to culture. I believe that, on the one hand, many of the cultural features underlying the learners' attitudes and beliefs are more than appropriate to support the kind of cultural learning development I am proposing to them and, on the other hand, after taking the necessary provisions for an ethnographic approach to learning to learn, the sort of approach developed by Riley (1996b, see section 4.3.5, p. 110), I believe that more than a clash of cultures we can talk in terms of the *creation of a new learning culture.*

8.1.2 The process of creation

Following the discussion of the previous paragraph, I consider that creating a learning culture is a process more related to the future of a culture than to its past:

> the microcultures or arenas in which learning takes place involves novices
> (learners) and experts (educators) interacting in specific ways to produce
> learning outcomes which become inputs to or the force for future learning
> and development (Little,A; 1992,9)

Basically, creating a learning culture is trying to adjust the set of representations, beliefs and values to a new scheme for learning, which may involve a change in the content, the manner, the motivation and/or the outcome of learning. The permeable, dynamic and challenging features allow for learning cultures to change and develop, whereas, the social interaction facilitates the change. In the section which follows I shall discuss the features of human beings as learners and the conditions that make the creation of a learning culture feasible.

8.1.2.1 Features of human beings as learners

I believe that it is possible to create a learning culture if we take into account the nature of the learners we are working with. Human beings are, in general, according to Thelen (1981), *adaptive, participative* and *transcedental.* In his words:

> every person is to be regarded as a member of species, of society and
> cosmos. The aspects of his life viewed from the standpoints of
> these belongingness are, respectively, adaptative, participative and
> transcendental. These components are in continual dialectical interaction

within the person as, in each situation, they stimulate, provoke and weave in
and out of trade-offs and balances with each other (Thelen, ibid., 85)

Understanding human beings as learners with these characteristics means that it is believed that first, they are able to *adapt* to different situations and environments; second, that they can, and are inclined to, *participate* in group activities and play different roles and fulfil different functions, and third, that human beings have a sense not only of being but also of becoming, or *transcending*. This last feature has been connected to the term self-realisation which is said to imply the "reconstruction of meanings" (Thelen,75). In this sense we can understand the difference between education and training, which means that training does not encompass transcendental experiences whereas education does. This view articulates with the work of Widdowson who refers to training and education in the field of language education:

> training seeks to impose a *conformity* to certain established patterns of
> knowledge and behaviour....Education, however, seeks to provide for
> *creativity* whereby what is learned is a set of schemata and procedures for
> adapting them to cope with problems which do not have a ready-made
> formulaic solution (italics in the original,1983,19)

In this sense, creativity and transcendence depend on each other.

8.1.2.2 Conditions for the creation of a learning culture

For some, creating a learning culture, or rather, making educational innovations, seems just a matter of innovating by "outside change agents" (Shimim,1996, 105), that is, making authoritarian and imposed decisions at high institutional levels. This approach is somehow, more concerned with large rather than small cultures. In spite of this, as Shimim states,

> Many of us believe that a teacher-initiated innovation at the grassroots level
> of the classroom is more effective as it is often introduced directly in response
> to an immediate problem in the specific context in the classroom. (ibid)

However, Shimim admits in her article that her "teacher-initiated innovation at the grassroots levels" was not effective due to the learner resistance to change. According to her, one of the reasons for this failure was

> incongruity between the assumptions of the proposed methodological
> innovation and the cultural orientation of the participants in the classroom
> situation, which is essentially a microcosm of the wider community. (ibid,118)

As I see it, however, at a microcultural level, there are conditions that need to be met. Let me now refer to two authors, Titchen (1997) and Thelen (1981), who talk about this issue

according to different perspectives. First, Titchen (1997) reports, a successful strategy, in hospital nursing, for creating a learning culture and transforming the traditional way of nursing practice. As the reader can see, this is a completely opposite result from Shamim's outcome. The main difference lies in the fact that, apart from accepting that "cultural change was slow (three years) and painstaking and required tolerance and patient repetition"(254), Titchen states that there were three principles, or facilitators of change, that helped in the creation of the learning culture.

a) a commitment on the part of the facilitator...
b) explicitness of values, beliefs, attitudes and norms, either from the current learning culture or from the proposed one....
c) ...building 'time-out' opportunities for reflection and discussion (ibid)

Point a) seems to be pretty obvious. To be successful, any innovation should necessarily count on the commitment of the facilitator. Some innovating attempts, however, seem to take this for granted, for political and economic reasons.

Points b) and c) are, to my mind, essential for the positive results in the creation of a learning culture. They imply awareness; they rely on human beings' capability of metacognition. That is to say, they are based on the learners' potential ability to reflect on cognitive activity (see Flavell, section 3.3.2.2, p. 56). I strongly believe that when dealing with learning issues, it is essential to bring about metacognitive awareness.

In relation to the Oaxaca/97 project, I believe that the exploration of shared concepts and current values and norms (during group discussions, section 7.1.4, p. 205), was a good way to make them explicit. Moreover, the introduction of new concepts, such as self-direction, metacognitive knowledge and strategies, awareness, etc. (during input sessions, section 7.1.2, p. 192) offered the possibility to relate and contrast old and new norms and values. But, above all, the participants' experience of learning with a different approach (by themselves, in one-to-one interactions with the counsellor and as members of a group) was a good demonstration of the theory in practice. Furthermore, the processes of communication and negotiation, along with the realisation of conflicts and misunderstandings, helped to set the foundation for the set of norms and values that constitute the new culture.

Apart from the empirical research, Thelen's scheme offers a theoretical and reflective account for improving educational quality, in his own words, "a conceptualization of...the way of life of students in classrooms to be changed" (1981,2). In Thelen's scheme, there are three "education-relevant values" that should be born in

mind for culture-changing processes. These are: *authenticity*, *legitimacy* and *productivity*. They are necessary, according to Thelen, to "optimize the dialectical processes among (the) three components" (ibid,85) that characterised human beings-as-learners. Thelen understands these values, or conditions, with specific connections to the three paradigms which, in turn are intrinsically connected (Fig. 8.1). Thus, being adaptative, depends, among other things, on the authenticity and productivity of the learning situation in which one is involved. Being participative can be induced by legitimate and productive conditions and authenticity, in combination with legitimacy, can contribute to transcendental experiences in the individual. Let me now elaborate on these three conditions and analyse them in relation to self-direction in language learning.
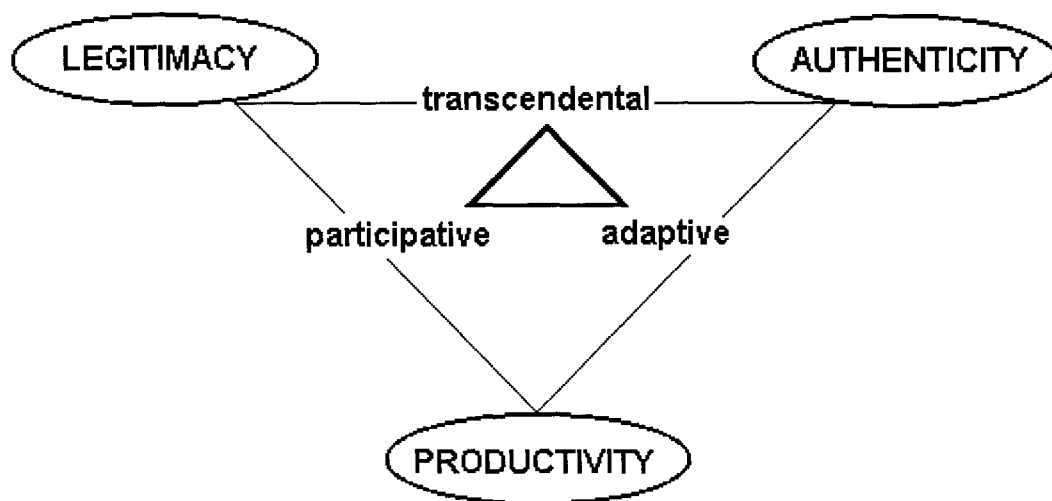
Fig 8.1 Conditions for creating a learning culture (based on Thelen;1981)

8.1.2.2.1 Authenticity

Authenticity relates to personal meaning. According to Thelen, it enhances the dialectical interaction between adaptation and transcendence, i.e., what I am as a *given* and as a *becoming*.

> An activity is authentic for a person when he feels emotionally
> 'involved' and mentally stimulated; when he is aware of choices
> and enjoys the challenge of making decisions; when he feels he
> has something to bring to the activity and that its outcome will be
> important for him; when it has the quality of 'life' and is not
> comparmentalized or merely a game; when through the activity new
> relationships develop among his thoughts, attitudes and action tendencies;
> when his internalized culture...undergoes reconstruction. (ibid,86)

The reader will have noticed the resemblance of this quotation with the self-direction scheme put forward in this study. Making decisions (when *planning* and *evaluating* but also within psycholinguistic processes as *noticing* and *structuring*, p.212, 222), being aware of choices (such as the proposed *psycholinguistic context*, p. 234), contributing to the activity (as when participating in *group discussions*, section 7.1.4, p. 205, or designing their *own study plans* and *activities* 7.2.2, p. 212) and realising that new relationships develop among their thoughts (like K suggesting a process of *restructuration*, section 7.2.3.2, p. 226), their attitudes (in favour or against the *SAC*, the *counsellor*, the *teacher*, the *Mexican student*, etc., sections 6.1 and 6.2) and many other instances illustrate the way learners can become "emotionally 'involved' and mentally stimulated" (ibid).

How is this authenticity achieved? According to van Lier, authenticity depends on free choice and expression:

> An action is authentic when it realises a free choice and is an expression
> of what a person genuinely feels and believes. An authentic action is
> *intrinsically motivated* (italics in the original, 1996, 13).

In van Lier's scheme, as I said before (p. 103), authenticity is intrinsically related to two other concepts that are the core of the development of this study: autonomy and awareness.

Likewise, in my own elaboration of the definition of the concept of autonomy (section 4.3, p.101) the reader will remember, I used the term authenticity to analyse the three dimensions of autonomy (universal, cultural and individual). Within this context, and taking into account the findings of the empirical research (Chapters 6 and 7), I think that an authentic interaction in self-direction can be achieved when we counsellors get to know the students as persons and as learners (taking into account their learning styles: independent, guided or assisted, section 6.2.4, p. 173). So it is not a matter only of the learner asking *who am I?* and *who am I becoming?* but of the counsellor getting to know *who are you?* and *Who are you becoming?*

8.1.2.2.2 Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to social meaning and implies the connection between participation and transcendence. That is to say, it responds to the *'who I become from my interaction with others and the rules that underlie that interaction'*. According to Thelen, legitimacy deals with

> (the) set of agreements, having what sort of authority, (that) provide the
> justification for the activity and the rationale for interpretations of experience
> in the activity...(the) principles, morals, policies, laws and the like (that)
> are illustrated, exemplified or embodies in the class's awareness of their
> activity. (Thelen,88-9)

These agreements need to be understood as "authoritative cultural agreements" to use Thelen's term (88). As I see it, the obvious question here is: What are the authoritative cultural agreements that can enhance self-directed learning? To answer this question it is necessary, first of all, to remind ourselves that legitimisation is achieved when both parties (the learner and the educator) agree on the rules underlying the creation of the learning culture. There are several issues that related to legitimacy in creating a culture for self-direction:

First, the creation of a learning culture is not begun from scratch. The former mode of learning (in this case the formal classroom context/teacher led learning) provides a coherent frame of reference to start with. It is unwise to think that when creating a learning culture, one has to deny everything from the former way of doing. I think that the key word here is *selection*. One has to be selective and decide what are the principles of former learning schemes that are still valid for the new proposal.

From the data I gathered in the Oaxaca/97 project, it is easy to recognise that there are some aspects from their learning experience that the learners would like to have in the self-directed learning scheme. The reader will remember the participants talking about the interaction teacher/student, the close contact with the teacher and the responsibility of the teacher in front of the group. Above all, they emphasised the social relationship teacher/student that is established inside the classroom.

On the part of the educator, the most important contribution for "authoritative cultural agreements" is *her own learning theory*, that is, the rationale in which she believes and that underlies the proposal of learning culture she is putting forward. This learning theory, I strongly believe, has to be analysed, understood and shared. This is part of the dialectical process of turning the unfamiliar into familiar and of bridging the gap. It encompasses, in this specific situation, propositions for self-direction, for learning a language and for self-regulating linguistic processes, among other things. Furthermore, as I have realised from my own experience, it is the only way a counsellor can make sense of the learners' learning processes.

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Productivity has to do with the relationship between adaptation and participation: *who I am within the context and the rules I have agreed to follow*. According to Thelen productivity is related to several aspects of learning:

> the amount and quality of product or output...; the quality of the process
> through which the product was produced or the conclusion reached; and the
> growth of capability to produce more effectively (1981,90)

As I see it, productivity is the most salient element from the learner's perspective for several reasons. First, there are aspects of productivity which are tangible, which means that they can be translated into behaviour. In the case of language learning, a written letter, or an utterance pronounced are tangible examples of productivity. Second, although sometimes the product of learning is not observable behaviour, like the understanding of a conversation or the comprehension of written text, the learner is very aware of the degree of understanding or comprehension she has achieved. In other words, she is aware of that element of her productivity. Third, from her experience in formal learning, the learner is used to thinking about production in relation to assessment and evaluation. Results in exams and final grades are the most common, although not always reliable, way the learners sense their productivity. In fact, it can be said that productivity, mostly in terms of outcomes, is the only condition the learners are conscious of, and certainly the one they are most worried about.

In relation to the self-directed scheme in question, the amount and quality of the product refers to *how much* one has learned in terms of linguistic outcomes. The amount and quality of process and the conclusion reached implies *how well* one has learned, that is, metacognitive outcomes. And the capability to produce more effectively falls in the realm of decision-making processes, that is, *to what extent* one can make decisions concerning one's own learning processes.

8.2 THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

As I see it, authenticity, legitimacy and productivity (ALP) seem to be universal values for learning. All formal and informal educational schemes would always have some elements that correspond to these values. The reason ALP are universal lies in the fact that they are relative. That is to say, their meaning is different in different learning

cultures. In regards to this, we could say that ALP are *anthropological values*, while their realisation in actual learning cultures are *ethnographic instances*. In our current discussion of the creation of a learning culture, then, it is vital to find out the ethnographic considerations that should be taken into account for the creation of the learning culture to be appropriate. Before dealing with what I consider important, according to my experience, let me just say that I do not see the following as a prescription of what should be done in self-direction in Mexico. On the contrary, this is my interpretation, a result of my close contact with the learning culture I work with. However, as interpretative as it is, I believe that it makes up the foundation of a learning culture. This foundation may be useful for counsellors and learners working in SACs in Mexico to state the norms and values for self direction as a scheme for learning foreign languages.

Some paragraphs above, I mentioned three features of human beings-as-learners - adaptation, participation and transcendence- and their relation with what I called the three conditions from the creation of a learning culture, authenticity, legitimacy and productivity (based on Thelen's scheme, see Fig. 8.1). Actually, I found that there are elements of the three conditions that are particularly relevant in the context of the present research. However, the reader will notice that there is an imbalance in regards to the depth in which these three elements are discussed. This is due to the very particular way in which my empirical research was developed. As I see it, the fact that authenticity, as a matter of being and becoming ready, was a constant issue during the Oaxaca/97 project. Legitimacy is less developed than authenticity because of nature of the empirical research I carried out. As I said before, it implies social agreement. As I see it, it should necessarily involve the analysis of the discourse of most of the community concerned. This consensus, moreover, needs time to be achieved and my study was short-term in nature. In relation to the third condition, productivity, it became obvious that, because of the characteristics of most of the learners, the present research did not give much information about it (although the lack of information was in itself a salient factor). Having said that, let me now discuss each condition from the ethnographic perspective of the culture concerned.

8.2.1 Authenticity: a matter of being and becoming ready

As I see it, on the issue of being and becoming, that is, authenticity, the way Thelen conceives it, there are three aspects that proved to be worth mentioning. These are *readiness, attitudes* and *self-esteem*. Within the context of this study, readiness seems to play a relevant role in self-direction in two different ways. First, there seems to be a conflict between *being ready* and *becoming ready*. This issue arose when I introduced the process of language learning and established "being ready" as an essential stage to start a learning process. Generally speaking, I can say that the participants seemed to be more oriented towards the 'being ready' side. As I saw it, they had not considered the possibility of becoming ready for learning a language. When I asked the participants if they were ready to learn English in the SAC, all of them answered positively, (see section 7.1.3, p.199). As a member of the same larger culture, I can provide an attempt of explanation for this fact. We live in a context lacking in resources and with few opportunities. I think that this makes us believe that we need to be ready. Being ready, then, means to be prepared for anything and everything, to take advantage of any opportunity, to face the unexpected, and to survive adversities. As one of the participants put it

X: If you aren't ready you lose your chance!

Moreover, being ready, in Mexican Spanish, (*ser/ponerse listo*) also means being smart, clever, intelligent, aware. Not being ready, then can also mean a disability for learning a foreign language, a sort of belief *that "No soy lo suficientemente listo para aprender ingles"* (I am not clever enough to learn English). None of the participants, fortunately, had that extreme belief.

Therefore, coming back to our main discussion, I will suggest that, for the creation of a learning culture, and in this particular case, for the adoption of self-direction as a learning scheme, the learners have to be aware they can *become ready*. That is, they have to become aware that, on the one hand, they are not necessarily ready (and they are not expected to be ready) for learning a foreign language, and on the other, that it is not an either/or matter between smartness and dullness.

I believe that a learning to learn scheme like the one I developed during the Oaxaca/97 project is a means to "become ready" and, if understood and accepted as such it can be extremely beneficial for learners in a self-directed scheme. Learners need to be

aware that they can develop "behavioural capacities" for self-direction, that these capacities are procedural and they can be learn through practice (Little,1998,1). An important difference to emphasise here is the fact that self-direction is not the gift of a few (while autonomy is a gift of all human beings, as has already been stated on section 4.3.3), but a capacity that anybody has the potential to develop. I think that the belief that the learners need to "be ready", without being aware of the fact that they can always "become ready", leads to an attitude that may easily work against self-direction. Based on the information and contact I had with the participants, my view is that although they already have several traits that make them ready (high motivation, clear goals, good strategies for self-regulating the first stages of their learning processes), these learners need to work on certain aspects of their psychological and methodological aspects of self-direction. In the following sections I will discuss the methodological element. For now, I will say something about the psychological element.

At the beginning of this section I said that readiness is important in this context in two different ways. The first, which deals with cultural matters, has already been discussed. The second is related to the psychological aspect of learning to learn. Becoming ready, as I see it, is in part a matter of working with attitudes. This means that learners have to become aware of the attitudes that work counter to self-direction in relation to metacognitive knowledge (self, task and strategy) and to reinforce and/or develop the ones that may enhance it. Let me now say some things about attitudes.

On page 95, I defined attitude, in the context of this study, as the stance learners adopt towards self-directed learning. According to Mager (1990, 14), there are *favourable*, which imply "moving towards responses", and *negative* attitudes, which encompass "moving away from responses". From this he talks about *subject matter approach tendencies* (SMATs) and *subject matter unapproach tendencies* (SMUTs)(ibid,25). Basing his study on tendencies towards or away from subject matters, he provides examples of learning subject matters such as mathematics, baseball, Bach or writing. In order to be clear, within the context of this study, I would like to reserve the term *subject matter* for the learning of a foreign language, and I would like to use the term *medium* to refer to self-direction. With this difference in mind, in general, it is believed that the SAC learners of languages have an *approach tendency* towards learning English as a subject matter, but an *avoidance tendency* towards the medium, i.e., self-direction as a scheme for learning it (which may have been developed before or during their stay in the SAC). However, if one gives a closer look to the information gathered in

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this study, we can see that the situation is not that simple. Although the participants showed positive attitude towards learning English, they proved to have an avoidance tendency towards certain elements of it, such as practising the target language (writing, speaking, etc.).

Mager also mentions *positives* and *aversives*, which are "universal...conditions or consequences that cause physical or mental discomfort" (1990,55). Among the aversives we find pain, fear, anxiety, frustration, boredom, embarrassment, humiliation and physical discomfort. As the reader may have notice, the content presented in Chapters 6 and 7 is rich in references to aversives, which, I believe, have been the cause of negative attitudes towards both the subject matter and the medium, that is, learning languages and self-direction. It is important to be aware of them and make any possible effort to prevent them. If the function of the teacher (and the counsellor) has been defined as setting the best conditions for learning to take place, I am sure that preventing aversives is a relevant function of the teaching (and the counselling) profession. I have to say, though, that because the counsellor is not in control of the media the learner uses, her limitations are evident. However, these can be overcome by her interaction with the learner. In this way, she can inform, make aware and discuss matters with the learner.

Furthermore, in regards to learning a language, the counsellor has also to bear in mind the characteristic elements of the learning process of a language. There are unavoidable aversives that are at the very core of the learning of languages. Anxiety is a good example. In section 7.2.3.3.2 (p. 233), I talked about regulating language use by the control or grading of tasks. In it, it was made clear that the learner needs to face learning situations with a certain element of discomfort, or pressure, in order to force herself to deal with linguistic situations that are nearer to real operating conditions (this is the rationale for Johnson's formula **ra-1**,1996,141). It is inevitably that this element of language learning represents a certain amount of anxiety and even fear for many learners. One of the main roles of the counsellors is to discuss and analyse these matters with learners to make them aware of the importance of these elements. In the Oaxaca/97 project I carried out different types of sessions that had the purpose of making some of the learners' attitudes and beliefs conscious and open to discussion. Moreover, I believe that the input sessions in particular, were highly important for attitude change. According to Triandis,

> A person may receive new information either from other people or
> through the mass media that could produce changes in the cognitive
> component of their attitude. Since there is a tendency for consistency

among the components of any attitude, changes in the cognitive component
will be reflected in changes in the affective and behavioural components.
(1971,142)

I strongly believe that most of the information that I gave to the participants was useful more or less, depending on each individual situation, to change certain attitudes towards self-direction. Moreover, the experience of trying things out in a self-directed mode that the learners experienced may also enhance the possibilities to change their attitudes. As Triandis explains, attitudes may also change "through direct experience with the attitude object" and by behaving "in a way that is inconsistent with his existing attitudes" (ibid.).

In fact, I did not arbitrarily choose the example of anxiety to discuss the issue of negative attitudes and aversives. I purposely selected it because it connects perfectly with self-esteem, the last aspect that I want to mention under the heading of authenticity. Self-esteem has proven to be an issue in learning. It definitively marks a difference in learning outcomes. The story of E as a language learner and her results in the self task (p. 156) provide an excellent illustration of low self-esteem and its detrimental effect on learning outcomes. Obviously, this is an important factor to take into account when working with students with this tendency. However, I think that self-esteem has to be considered in a broader sense, and here is where we can use anxiety, and its role in the regulation of language use, again as an example for self-directed learning pursuit.

It is a common practice in education to overcome self-esteem by praising and encouraging. However, the danger is that for students who have learning problems, according to Barber, the praise and encouragement goes for any "shoddy work" (1997,182). In other words, the expectations seem to get lower in order to praise not to be out of context. However, this treatment for self-esteem seems to go contrary to the regulation of language use, as stated above. Lowering expectations would certainly not work for the production in language learning for it is the pressure of trying new experiences that will force learners to develop their interlanguages and become users of the target language languages.

The pupil who expects little of her or himself and of whom little is expected
is, very likely, headed for failure (ibid.)

This is certainly true within the particular context of language learning. Let me reproduce here, Barber's diagram showing the relation between expectations and self-esteem (Fig. 8.2):
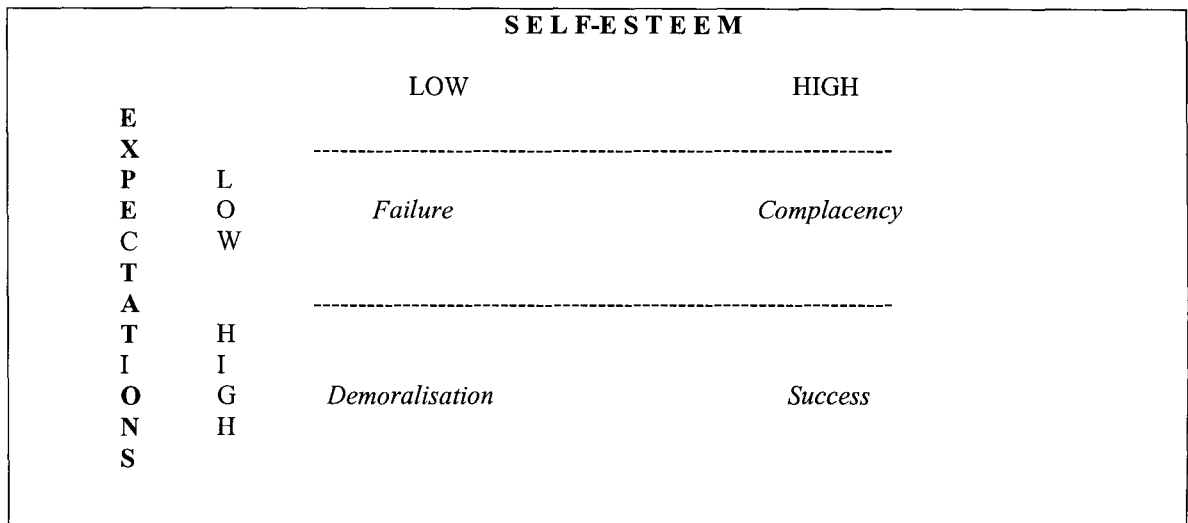
	SELF-ESTEEM	
	LOW	HIGH
EXPECTATIONS LOW	*Failure*	*Complacency*
HIGH	*Demoralisation*	*Success*

Fig. 8.2 Relation between self-esteem and expectations (Barber,1997,183)

Thus, as Barber states, the point is to "raise pupils' self-esteem while simultaneously maintaining, or even raising, expectations" (ibid).

8.2.2 Legitimacy: Changing some rules of the learning game

As I stated above, the legitimisation of a new learning culture mostly consists of the agreement of rules, norms or principles that justify the activities carried out. In the situation we have been dealing with in this study, there are obvious rules that seem be agreed upon by both parties of the scheme (learners and educators). Some examples of these new rules are:

- learners decide on their pace and schedule;

- counsellors do not exercise some of the rights they have when working with a class, such as: assigning homework, checking attendance, giving exams, assigning grades, etc.

From the findings discussed in Chapter 6, it became evident that there are some matters, however, that have not been agreed upon. Examples of these are decisions about:

- content,

- materials,

- evaluation/feedback,

- interaction learner/counsellor, etc.

As the reader can see, on the one hand, some of these aspects were, in the former scheme, i.e., the classroom, the responsibility of the teacher. while, on the other hand, other aspects (as the interaction learner/counsellor) belong to a completely new genre for both parties. It is evident that underlying this problem there is an authoritative/authoritarian issue (partners have agreed on authoritarian aspects -calling for attendance, giving exams- but are not so sure about authoritative elements -content and material matters-), and hence, a difficult decision must be made. Moreover, it also depends on individual factors (self-directed learning styles, section 6.2.4, p. 173). Nevertheless, it is still an ambiguous situation. *Perhaps* the norm here would be to make decisions according to the specific situation and the specific learner involved.

I also believe that we (learners and educators) need to change our idea (and attitude and behaviour) about group work in two senses. First, we need to have the possibility to work in more co-operative than competitive atmospheres. Second, we need to understand that self-direction does not necessarily mean "working alone". As Little states,

> in formal educational contexts...learning can proceed only via interaction,
> so that the freedoms by which we recognize learner autonomy are
> always constrained by the learner's dependence on the support and
> cooperation of others. (Little, 1996c, 204)

As I see it, the introduction of the possibility to work in groups *would* give the learners (and the counsellors) the contact and interaction they are missing in the current situation in SAC.

In the last paragraphs I consciously used the words 'perhaps' and 'would' to emphasise the hypothetical nature of the statements I made. It is evident that I cannot decide about the norms that will regulate a new learning culture. I represent only one side of the culture. I need to negotiate these possibilities with the other side (and other members of my side). Negotiation for validation is an essential element to achieve legitimisation and prevent new negative attitudes:

> a group norm exists to the extent that the group members share positive
> attitudes to any such regularity (Cortis;1977, 28)
> ....but rules only work if pupils accept them (ibid, 59)

As I see it, negotiation, and the necessary interaction that it implies, is an essential element of both the creation of a learning culture and the realisation of self-direction as a learning scheme. And it is a happy coincidence we need to take advantage

of. We start negotiating for the validation of norms for the learning culture and then we keep negotiating and interacting for the sake of communication within a self-direction scheme. Negotiation, as Bloor and Bloor defined it, "is not a bargaining process but a joint exploration of possibilities and targets...a process of reaching agreement through discussion" (1988,63). The process of negotiation leads itself to the discussion of any aspect of self-direction, from planning to evaluation. As Widdowson has said, negotiation consists of "the establishment and maintenance" of the necessary conditions to achieve understanding (Widdowson;1984,115). In fact, negotiation is at the core of communication (and certainly at the core of counselling) as when used, again by Widdowson, to understand discourse as "the negotiation of meaning through interaction" (ibid,100). According to him, negotiation consists of "different devices for achieving agreement, for establishing solidarity" (ibid,116). As I see it "achieving agreement" and "establishing solidarity" are essential elements in the creation and maintenance of a learning culture for self-direction.

8.2.3 Productivity: The great problem

Productivity proved to be the great problem for most of the participants. Almost all of them were very concerned about the amount and quality of the learning outcome. Moreover, they think that it was the way they were trying to learn, the learning process, which was causing that problem. Certainly all of them had considered the possibility of changing strategies for more effective production; however, with the exception of F and Ga, they have not had any better results.

The temptation here seems to be to focus specifically on the aspects that make Ga and F successful self-directed learners. However, I deliberately do not want to work on a model of the good self-directed learner. I do not want my students to copy a model that has little or nothing to do with their own learning styles and personalities. My role as a counsellor is not that. Rather, to use Thelen's words, I want to "facilitate each student's growth toward whatever self-realisation and effectiveness he is ready for" (Thelen,85)

As I see it, the proposals I put forward in Chapter 7 about the possibility of combining and balancing external and internal forces (Fig. 7.10) in order to introduce and/or enhance self-regulation of learning processes represents a feasible way to improve the element of productivity. Particularly, I think that the focus on the regulation of language use and the appropriate psycholinguistic context (section 7.2.3.3.2) will result

in triggering proceduralisation, which means more productivity on cognitive (linguistic) and metacognitive terms. Furthermore, it is expected that the pursuit of authenticity and legitimacy reinforces the productivity element.

8.3 CONCLUSION

As the reader will have noticed, the three conditions, authenticity, legitimacy and productivity, are extremely important in the creation, maintenance and development of a learning culture. Throughout the description and analysis of these three elements one factor stood out: the role of interaction between learners and educator. In this sense I subscribe to Thelen's stance:

> It is our view that dialogue is the heart of the educative process; and that
> educative dialogue develops the classroom culture, including the role
> expectations and controls over the participative aspect of life; and at the
> same time, development of this culture in an educative direction enhances
> the personal capability of students in the affective-instinctual personal
> domain. (1981,91)

Dialoguic activity implies two parties actively participating in the construction of meaning. It implies two actors, it implies action. In this sense, I believe that the creation of a learning culture is in the realm of *action research*, as it was defined above (section 5.2.1), where the roles of *actors* and *researchers* lie in both learners and educators. Talking about the "active role of culture-bearers", Fay, following Burke's metaphor, concludes that

> "culture" is not a noun but a verb; it refers to a process in which agents
> don't just reproduce the terms by which they live but extend, alter, *and*
> *sometimes transform them*. Culture is thus an evolving connected activity,
> not a thing. (my italics,1996,62)

In this context it is not surprising the connection that Thelen makes between *dialogue, action* and the "quest for *awareness*":

> With awareness, life becomes an altogether different ball game because
> the person is transmuted from involuntary reactor to *autonomous actor*
> (my italics,1981,47)

I do not think that it is necessary to explain the connection of the creation of this culture, as it has been explained here, and the relevant role that awareness particularly plays in self-directed learning, as it was theoretically explained in Chapter 4 and operationally illustrated in Chapter 6 and 7.

Throughout this thesis, my purpose has been to show the reader my stance as a researcher/practicioner in the field of self-direction in language learning. I realise, of course, that more research needs to be done in order to delve into areas that still remain uncovered (for example, the potential of introspection in self-directed learning, p. 203, the enhancement of awareness through group discussion, p. 206, and the relationship between awareness in practice stages of language learning, p. 244). Personally, in some months, I see myself back in the Oaxacan context, dealing with learners and counsellors that want to take active part towards the creation and development of a self-directed learning culture. This will allow me to get involved in long-term research in order to pursue the issues that the present study has uncovered. In the meantime, let me finish this thesis with two quotations that on the one hand, highlight the relevance of the creation of a culture as a social human process and on the other, reflect my stance as an active agent of this creation:

> It is this process of 'joint culture-creating', in which two subjective worlds are made to overlap, however partially or fleetingly, to form an intersubjective world, that defines the individual's participation in learning (Riley,1988, 33)

Or as Thelen understands it:

> One may act like an educated man when that is the normal adaptation to an existing educative culture; but one becomes an educated man by participating in efforts to make his own culture more educative
>
> (Thelen, 1981,91)

NOTES:

(1) This trend has become a sound foundation for ideological discussions on autonomy. A good example of this are some of the articles edited by Benson and Voller (1997).

(2) There are a few examples such as Holliday's work, but still, they are the exemption to the rule.

(3) Since Heath (1983) we have learned that when asked, members of a community can accurately inform the researcher about learning patterns within their culture.

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10. APPENDIXES

10.1 MAP OF OAXACA

ESTADO DE OAXACA

10.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GLL
(from Wenden, 1991, 121)

TABLE 8.1
A definition of a good language learner

The following definition is based on the research of Naiman, Frohlich and Stern, *The Good Language Learner*. They interviewed adults who had learned a second, third and sometimes a fourth language successfully. Here are their findings.

The good language learner finds a style of learning that suits him/her
When he is in a learning situation that he does not like, he is able to adapt it to his personal needs. In other words, he believes that it is always possible to get something out of any situation. He is also able to discover how he prefers to learn and chooses learning situations that are suited to his way of learning. For example, Jane knew that it was best for her to take a short course in the language when she first arrived in the country where it was spoken. Then, she was able to get involved with native speakers outside the classroom.

Good language learners are actively involved in the language learning process
Besides regular language classes, they plan other activities that give them a chance to use and learn the language. They know practice is very important. Sometimes they choose an activity because they are already familiar with the ideas. For example, Hiroshi listened to the news first in Japanese, his native language, and then in English. Carmen always went to movies she had already seen and understood so that she could concentrate on the language.
Good language learners can figure out their special problems and try to do something about them. Monica knew she had no confidence in her speaking ability, and so she hired a tutor and twice a week she spoke one hour to the tutor. They also do things they do not usually do to gain more information about their second language. Tom worked as a truck driver. He used the day more as a language course.

Good language learners try to figure out how the language works
They pay special attention to pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, and they develop good techniques for improving their pronunciation, learning grammar and vocabulary. One learner looked at people's mouths when they were pronouncing a sound she wanted to learn. Then she tried to imitate them. Others practise 'mock-talk'; they imitate the sounds of the language without using real words. When learning new words, some learners make a picture of the object in their minds. They compare the words with words in their native language to see how they are different.

Good language learners know that language is used to communicate
They have good techniques to practise listening, speaking, reading and writing. Walter made up conversations in his mind. Chou read comic books to improve his reading. Michele wrote letters to pen pals. In the early stage of language learning, the good language learner does not worry about mistakes. He speaks and tries to become fluent. They look for opportunities to speak with native speakers. Adela, for example, used to talk with senior citizens while waiting for the bus to come. They also try to learn the special cultural meanings of words; they try to use and learn language for different social situations.

Good language learners are like good detectives
They are always looking for clues that will help them understand how the language works. Sometimes, they make guesses and ask people to correct them if they are wrong. They compare what they say with what others say to see if they are using the correct form of the language. They keep a record of what they have learned and think about it.

Good language learners learn to think in the language

Good language learners realize that language learning is not easy and to overcome their feelings of frustration, lack of confidence
They learn to laugh at their mistakes; they know that it will take a long time and that it can get very boring. They learn to work with their feelings.

Source: Naiman *et al.*, 1978.

10.3 CALENDAR OF OAXACA/97 PROJECT

hour/day	friday 4	monday 7	tuesday 8	wed 9	thursday	friday 11	monday 1	tuesday 1	wed 17	thursday1	friday 19
10 to 10:30 10:30 to 11	Kikey	Salvador	Gabriela	Carmen	Joaquin	Kikey	Salvador	Gabriela	Carmen	Joaquin	
11 to 11:30 11:30 to 12	Franky	Gloria	Israel	Ricardo	Abraham	Franky	Gloria	Israel	Ricardo	Abraham	
12 to 12:30 12:30 to 1	Introduction of project	Quetina	Enrique	Antonio	Elizabeth		Quetina	Enrique	Antonio	Elizabeth	
13 to 13:30 13:30 to 14											
14 to 14:30 14:30 to 15											
15 to 15:30 15:30 to 16											
16 to 16:30 16:30 to 17											
17 to 17:30 17:30 to 18											
18 to 18:30 18:30 to 1	Introduction of project	Armando	Anabel	Benito	Geminiano		Armando	Anabel	Benito	Geminiano	
19 to 19:30 19:30 to 20											

hour/day	thursday	friday 8	monday1	tuesday1	wed 13	thursday1	Monday 1	Tuesday1	Wed 20	Thursday	Friday22	Monday2	Tuesday2	Thursday	Friday 29
			4th I/GS:	5th I/GS:	6th I/GS:		7th I/GS:		9th I/GS:			11th II/GS:			
10 to 10:30							Joaquin &		Joaquin &						
10:30 to 11			Kikey	Kikey	Kikey		Kikey		Kikey			Kikey			
11 to 11:30			Salvador	Salvador	Salvador		Gabriela &		Gabriela &			Salvador			
11:30 to 12			Gabriela	Gabriela	Gabriela		Salvador		Salvador			Gabriela			
12 to 12:30		3rd.	Franky	Franfy	Franky		Franky &		Franky &		4th.	Franky			5th.
12:30 to 13		DS	Gloria	Gloria	Gloria		Antonio		Antonio		DS	Gloria			DS
13 to 13:3	3rd.	3rd.	Antonio	Antonio	Antonio	4th.	Gloria &	5th. IS	Gloria &	10th.			Antonio	6th.	12th.
13:30 to 1	I/GS	IS	Joaquin	Joaquin	Joaquin	IS	Elizabeth	8th I/GS	Elizabeth	I/GS			Joaquin	IS	I/GS
14 to 14:30			Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Elizabeth								Elizabeth			
14:30 to 15															
15 to 15:30															
15:30 to 16															
16 to 16:30															
16:30 to 17															
17 to 17:30		3rd.													
17:30 to 18		DS													
18 to 18:3	3rd.	3rd	Armando	Armando	Armando	4th.	Armando	5th. IS	Armando	10th.	4th.	Armando	6th.	12th.	5th.
18:30 to 1	I/GS	IS	Geminian	Geminian	Geminian	IS	Geminian	8th. I/GS	Geminian	I/GS	DS	Geminian	IS	I/GS	DS

NOTES:
IS: INPUT   SESSIONS
I/GS: INDIVIDU OR GROU SESSIONS
DS: DISCUSS SESSIONS

hour/day	Tuesday	Wed 3	Thursday	Friday 5	Monday8	Tuesday	Wed 10	Thursday	Wed 17	Thursday	Friday19
		14th I/GS	15th I/GS:		16th I/GS	17th I/GS	18th I/GS:		19th I/GS	20th I/GS:	
10 to 10:30											
10:30 to 11		Kikey	Kikey		Kikey	Kikey	Kikey				
11 to 11:30		Salvador	Salvador		Salvador	Salvador	Salvador		Salvador	Gloria	
11:30 to 12		Gloria	Gloria		Gloria	Gloria	Gloria				
12 to 12:30		Franky	Franky	6th.	Franky	Franky	Franky		Gabriela	Franky	7th.
12:30 to 13		Antonio	Antonio	DS	Antonio	Antonio	Antonio				DS
13 to 13:30	13th.	Elizabeth	Elizabeth		Elizabeth	Elizabeth	Elizabeth	7th.	Elizabeth	Antonio	
13:30 to 14	I/GS	Gabriela	Gabriela		Gabriela	Gabriela	Gabriela	IS			
14 to 14:30									Kikey		
14:30 to 15											
15 to 15:30											
15:30 to 16											
16 to 16:30											
16:30 to 17											
17 to 17:30											
17:30 to 18											
18 to 18:30	13th.	Armando	Armando	6th.	Armando	Armando	Armando	7th.	Armando	Joaquin	7th.
18:30 to 19	I/GS	Joaquin	Joaquin	DS	Joaquin	Joaquin	Joaquin	IS			DS

NOTES:
IS: INPUT SESSIONS
I/GS: INDIVIDU OR GROI SESSIONS
DS: DISCUSS SESSIONS

10.4 HANDOUTS OF INPUT SESSIONS OF OAXACA/97 PROJECT

1. INTRODUCTION

      RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2. OBJECTIVES

      UNCOVER OWN LEARNING PROCESSES

            How we learn
            What we believe in
            How we make decisions
            What we do not know about ourselves

3. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

      PRELIMINARY STAGE
      DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROGRAM
      INPUT, INDIVIDUAL/GROUP AND DISCUSSION SESSIONS
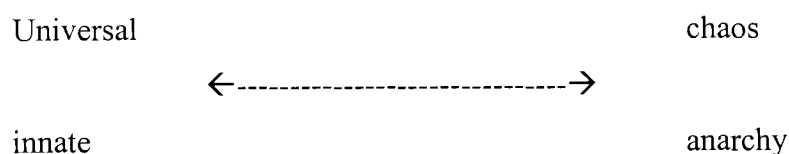   FINAL SESSION: AN EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

4. ACTIVITIES

      BIOGRAPHIES
      DIARIES
      QUESTIONNAIRES
      INDIVIDUAL WORK
      PAIR/GROUP WORK

5. SCHEDULE

PROCESS OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

1. Difference between some concepts: self-direction vs autonomy
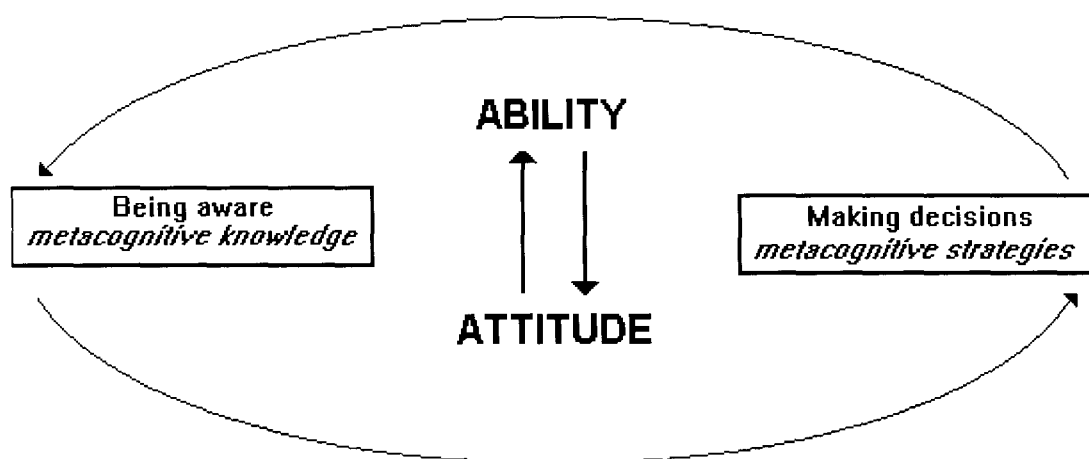
1.1 The autonomy cline:

Universal   chaos

←--------------------------------→

innate   anarchy

2. Definition of self-directed learning:

> *When the learner is able to manage her learning process in a conscious and effortful was, in order to acquire knowledge and/or skills through different means.*

Then:

Self-direction implies:

ABILITY

Being aware *metacognitive knowledge*

Making decisions *metacognitive strategies*

ATTITUDE

2. The process of self-directed learning

1	2	3	4	5	6
>	>	>	>	>	→
be ready	notice	structure (make hypothesis)	renotice & restructure (test hypothesis)	practise	use

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

1. LEARNING SELF-DIRECTION

1.1 Process of learning a language

| 1) be ready | 2) notice | 3)structure | 4)renotice and restructure | 5)restructure | 6)use |

1.2 Being aware (Metacognitive knowledge)

| 1) intention | 2)attention | 3) awareness of understanding | 4) and 5) attention and awareness of understanding | 6) less attention and awareness of understanding |

1.2 Making decisions (Metacognitive strategies)

| 1) are you ready? | 2) are you focused? | 3) did you understand? | 4) and 5) are you sure? | 6)are you able to produce it? |

2. METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

2.1 Concepts:

Cognition.- a mental process. Examples: read, sum up, learn.
Cognitive strategy.- strategy designed to **carry out** a cognitive process
Metacognitive process.- strategy designed to *have control over* a cognitive process

2.2 Clasification of Metacognitive strategies

A. PLANNING	before	organise
B. MONITORING	during	manage manipulate check
C. EVALUATING	after	judge

2.3 Conditions for metacognition

- willing to carry out thinking experiences
- this thinking experience has to be fallible and with possible errors
- willing to communicate, explain and justify this thinking experience
- willing to make careful and thoughtful decisions
- with a capacity and necessity to infer and explain psychological experiences

HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE ONLY ORGANISMS THAT HAVE THESE FEATURES!!!

VERBAL REPORTS

COMMUNICATION OF METACOGNITIVE EXPERIENCES

1. SELF-REPORT

        FEATURES:
- delayed or late
- generalisations about oneself as a language learners

        EXAMPLE:

- the biography you wrote at the beginning of the project

ACTIVITY: Try to find the characteristics of self-report in your own biography

2. SELF-OBSERVATION

        FEATURES:
- immediate or early
- preferred strategies

        EXAMPLE:

- the first individual counselling session at the beginning of the project
when you worked for 30 min. and then explained to me the way you did it.

ACTIVITY: Complete the task " Compound nouns" (photocopied)
                 Compare the way you did it with your classmates'

3. SELF-REVELATION

        FEATURES:
- simultaneous to the cognitive task
- actual strategies

        EXAMPLE:
- a schoolboy is multiplying two figures and at the same time he is explaining
the way he does it to his classmates

ACTIVITY: In the next session you are going to choose a movie with a specific learning purpose in mind
and for 15 minutes you are going to talk aloud about what you are thinking while watching it. (you will also
need a audiorecorder to record your voice).

METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE

<u>1.</u> Self-directed learning process

ABILITY

Being aware
metacognitive knowledge

Making decisions
metacognitive strategies

ATTITUDE
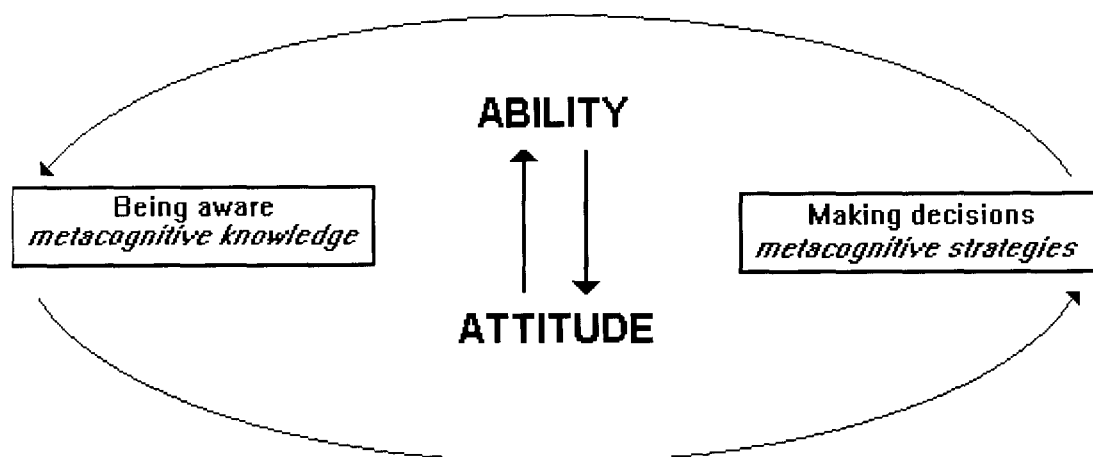
<u>2.</u> Being aware (Metacognitive knowledge)

1	2	3	4	5	6
>	>	>	>	>	→
be ready	notice	structure (make hypothesis)	renotice & restructure (test hypothesis)	practise	use

2.1 Being aware........of what?

Metacognitive knowledge
Definition

　　　Metacognitive knowledge is the segment of your stored knowledge that has to do with people as cognitive creatures, and with their diverse cognitive tasks, goals, actions and experiences (Flavell,1979,906)

2.2 Categories of metacognitive knowledge

PERSONA:

It refers to all the knowledge and beliefs about people as cognitive beings (from different perspectives: affective, perceptual, motivational, etc)

There are three possibilities:

Intraindividual differences:

"Please, sir, can you write the word on the blackboard (for me to understand it)" means: *I know I am a visual learner, so I learn better when I see a word than when I listen to it.*

Interindividual differences:

"I am aware that I always beat my parents in this memory game" may mean: *I think I am more intelligent that my parents*

"I think that my parents never jump into decisions" may mean: *My parents are more reflexive than some of my friends*

Universals of cognition

"I am sure that he is not going to remember the telephone number I gave to him" may mean: short-term memory is fallible and of a limited capacity.

TASK

The knowledge that we have about the nature of the **different types of information** that we have to process and about the **type of process** that we have to carry out.

"This is very difficult" may mean*: According to my experience, dense and complex information is difficult to process. In order to understand it, it is necessary to proceed slowly and carefully* . It may also mean: *According to what I know about my own knowledge and abilities, I don't think I can carry out this task.*

"This is very easy" may mean*: This information carries very little content, most of which I already know. To understand this I don't have to pay a lot of attention*

"For me this exercise (to tell about the poem I read) **is easier than the other one** (to memorise the poem)" may mean: *It is easier to get the gist of certain type of information than learn it by heart.*

STRATEGY:

The knowledge that we have about different strategies (cognitive and metacognitive) that we can (or cannot) carry out.

(See photocopy with list of strategies from O'Malley and Chamot, 1990)

1. Write down situations that threaten your levels of self-confidence
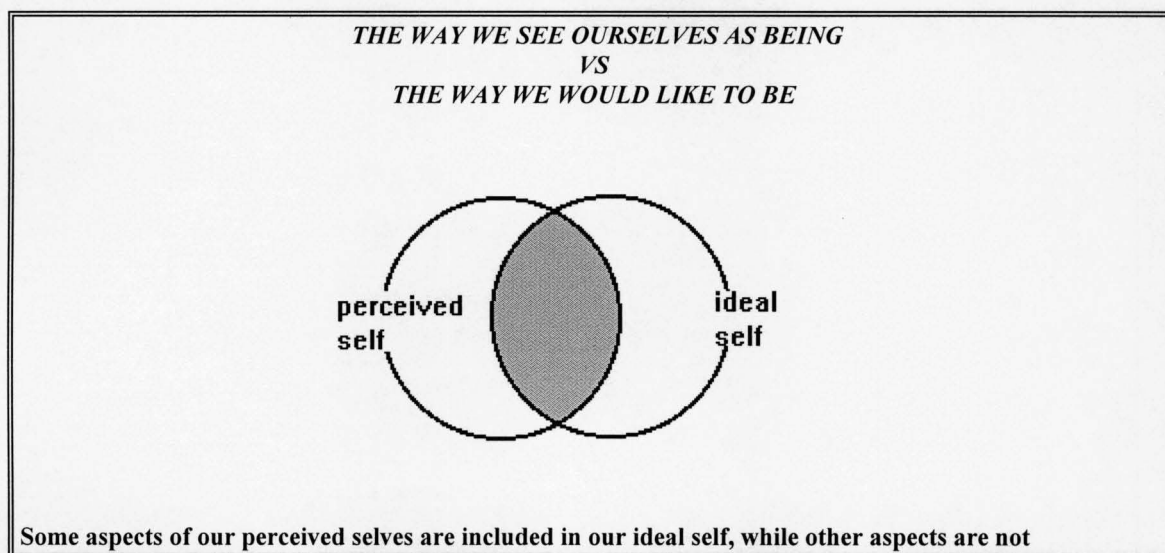_____
_____

2. Categories of the self
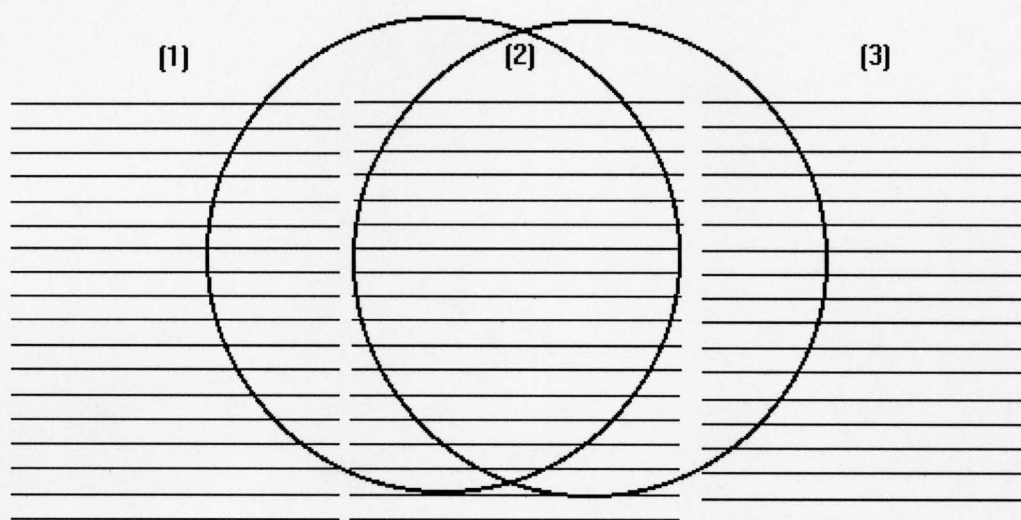   Our self can be described under four different categories

a) physical self   b) social adequacy   c) intellectual competency   d) emotional functioning

Classify your situations in 1 according to the categories of the self.

3. The two circles of the self

THE WAY WE SEE OURSELVES AS BEING
VS
THE WAY WE WOULD LIKE TO BE

perceived   ideal
self   self

Some aspects of our perceived selves are included in our ideal self, while other aspects are not

4. Write some the aspects of your experience on learning a language which are 1) in your perceived self but not in your ideal self, 2) in both and 3) in your ideal self but not in your perceived self.

[1]   [2]   [3]
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____
_____   _____   _____

5. What can you do to improve the congruence of your perceived self with your ideal self?

10.5 SAC QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE OAXACA/97 PROJECT (taken from Willing, 1989)

5 Aim: to consider the learning styles of AMES clients ▲

In October and November 1984, a major survey of AMES (NSW) clients was carried out, focusing on their learning preferences. The following questionnaire was the basic instrument. Over five hundred learners were consulted—through interpreters if there were any doubt about an individual's ability to understand and respond correctly to the written form (i.e. in practice intermediate down to ASLPR 1+ and below). An effort was made to randomize the sample across ethnic groups, age groups, speaking proficiency level, AMES programmes.

People were asked to respond honestly. It was explained that the experimenters would naturally expect that each person would want to answer 'No' to some questions, 'A little' to some, 'Good' to some, and 'Best' only if the learning method in question was one of their favourites or they judged it to be highly important.

Average response levels for each question were established by coding the answer 'No' as 1, 'A little' as 2, 'Good' as 3, and 'Best' as 4. The overall results for the first thirty questions were obtained (in rank order from the most highly rated question to the least).
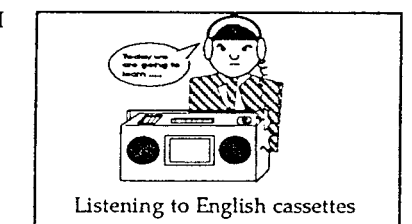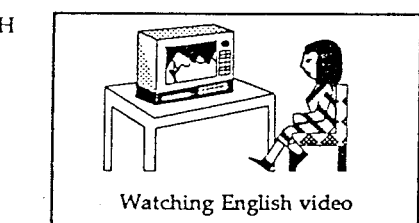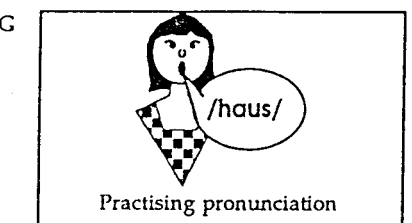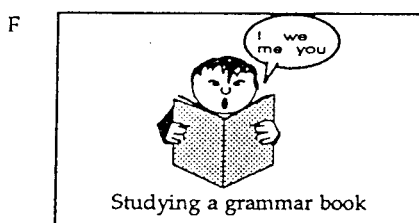
AMES Learning Styles Inventory

How do YOU learn best?

	Example:				
	I like to learn by listening to songs	no	a little	good	best

1.	In English class, I like to learn by reading	no	a little	good	best
2.	In class, I like to listen and use cassettes	no	a little	good	best
3.	In class, I like to learn by games	no	a little	good	best
4.	In class, I like to learn by conversation	no	a little	good	best
5.	In class, I like to learn by pictures, films, video	no	a little	good	best
6.	I want to write everything in my notebook	no	a little	good	best
7.	I like to have my own textbook	no	a little	good	best
8.	I like the teacher to explain everything to us	no	a little	good	best
9.	I like the teacher to give us problems to work on	no	a little	good	best
10.	I like the teacher to help me talk about my interests	no	a little	good	best
11.	I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes	no	a little	good	best
12.	I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes	no	a little	good	best
13.	I like to study English by myself (alone)	no	a little	good	best
14.	I like to learn English by talking in pairs	no	a little	good	best
15.	I like to learn English in a small group	no	a little	good	best

16.	I like to learn English with the whole class	no	a little	good	best
17.	I like to go out with the class and practise English	no	a little	good	best
18.	I like to study grammar	no	a little	good	best
19.	I like to learn many new words	no	a little	good	best
20.	I like to practise the sounds and pronunciation	no	a little	good	best
21.	I like to learn English words by seeing them	no	a little	good	best
22.	I like to learn English words by hearing them	no	a little	good	best
23.	I like to learn English words by doing something	no	a little	good	best
24.	At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers etc.	no	a little	good	best
25.	At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English	no	a little	good	best
26.	At home, I like to learn by using cassettes	no	a little	good	best
27.	At home, I like to learn by studying English books	no	a little	good	best
28.	I like to learn by talking to friends in English	no	a little	good	best
29.	I like to learn by watching, listening to Australians	no	a little	good	best
30.	I like to learn by using English in shops/CES/trains	no	a little	good	best
31.	When I don't understand something in English, I ask someone to explain it to me	no	sometimes	often	
32.	If something in English is too difficult for me, I try to listen to some part of it	no	sometimes	often	
33.	I watch people's faces and hands, to help me understand what they say	no	sometimes	often	
34.	When I'm reading—if I don't understand a word I try to understand it by looking at the other words	no	sometimes	often	
35.	When I am not in class, I try to find ways to use my English	no	sometimes	often	
36.	I am happy to use my English even if I make mistakes	no	sometimes	often	
37.	I think about what I am going to say before I speak	no	sometimes	often	
38.	If I don't know how to say something, I think of a way to say it, and then I try it in speaking	no	sometimes	often	
39.	When I am speaking English, I listen to my pronunciation	no	sometimes	often	
40.	If I learn a new word, I try to put it in my conversation so I can learn it better	no	sometimes	often	
41.	If someone does not understand me, I try to say it in a different way	no	sometimes	often	
42.	I like the sound of English	no	sometimes	often	
43.	I try to find my special problems in English, and try to fix them	no	sometimes	often	
44.	I ask myself how well I am learning English and I try to think of better ways to learn	no	sometimes	often	
45.	I try to understand the Australian way of life	no	sometimes	often	

7 Aim: to elicit information on how learners like to learn English in class

In English Class I like ...

A

Playing games with English words

B

Writing in my notebook

C

Talking to other students in English

D

Reading stories in English

E

Learning new English words

F

Studying a grammar book

G

Practising pronunciation

H

Watching English video

I

Listening to English cassettes
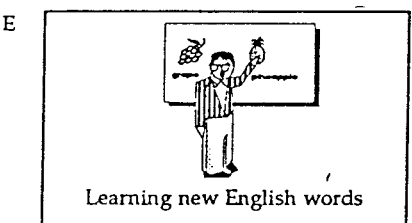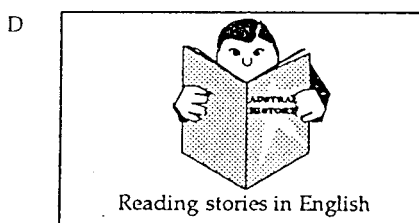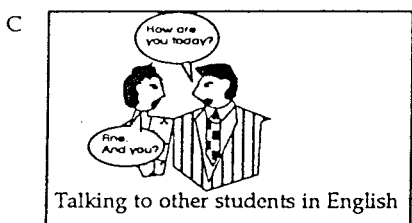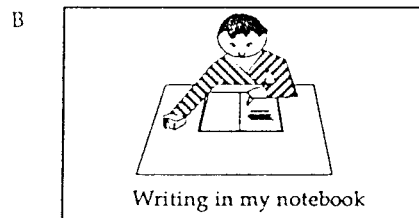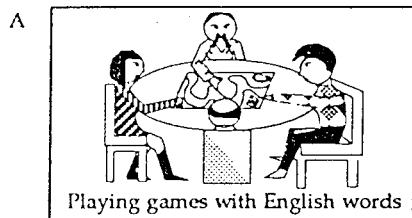
J   like   (1) .... best
    then   (2) ....
    and   (3) ....:.........................

(See *Activity Worksheets* p.13)

18 Aim: to increase learner awareness of senses of language ▲

Functional purpose grid

This is the natural end-point of learning, and these purposes, therefore, play no small part in the shaping of learning styles in the classroom.

Example

Discuss what you've filled in in groups.

I want to use English...	Very Important	Important	Not Very Important
1. in shops, offices...			
2. to speak with new Australian friends			
3. to read newspapers			
4. to understand the news on TV			
5. to understand movies on TV			
6. to study a technical subject			
7. to read stories			
8. to speak with immigrants of other nationalities			
9. to be able to speak by telephone			
10. to explain my ideas			

Learners can fill this grid in individually, interview other learners, or discuss and fill it in in groups. (See *Activity Worksheets* p.27)

Do you

1. ☐ repeat a word to make sure you understand;

2. ☐ repeat the sentence up to the part you did not understand, then ask for example. He ran around the ...... (what?);

3. ☐ ask the speaker to repeat the word or sentence.

4. ☐ ask the speaker to explain the word, sentence or phrase. (What does _____ mean?);

5. ☐ ask if what you have said is correct. (... ... Is that correct?);

6. ☐ ask people to repeat, using other words;

7. ☐ repeat what the speaker has said, according to your understanding. (Do you mean ... ... (say it in your own words);

8. ☐ ask if the other person has understood you. (... Do you understand?);

9. ☐ keep talking even if you are not sure that everything is correct;

10. ☐ ask the speaker to speak more slowly;

11. ☐ spell words to make your meaning clear;

12. ☐ use examples to explain your meaning;

13. ☐ use another kind of sentence if you are not sure of certain structures;

14.   Use any of the following clues to guess the meaning

   ☐ • the rest of the sentence

   ☐ • key words

   ☐ • the purpose of the conversation

   ☐ • gestures and expressions of the face

   ☐ • intonation of the speaker.

(see *Activity Worksheets* p.44)

(Adapted from Wenden, A. Materials for TESOL Conference 1984)

2b Aim: to increase learners' awareness of strategies to improve their speaking and listening ▲

Checklist: learning strategies

Here is another version you could use. (See *Activity Worksheets* p.45)

- If you're talking to someone and they don't understand you, do you try to say it a different way?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- When you're listening to a conversation in English and you don't understand everything, do you try to guess the rest?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- Do you listen to yourself speaking English so you can find your mistakes and try to correct them?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- If you see or hear something in English that you don't understand, do you ask someone to explain it to you?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- If you really want to explain something, do you try even if you aren't sure of the right English?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- After you've learnt something new in English, do you try to practise it outside the classroom?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- If you have an appointment with someone and you know you'll have to speak English, do you practise first?

  Yes   Someone   No

- Do you think about the things you can't do in English (and would like to be able to do) and try to find ways to learn them?

  Yes   Sometimes   No

- If you would like to improve your typing (or dessmaking, or carpentry etc.) would you enrol in a course that was only in English?

  Yes   Perhaps   No

- When you're learning English, what do you do that you think is most helpful?

10.6 A COUNSELLING SESSION FROM THE OAXACA/97 PROJECT

4/9/1997 Individual session. Kikey and Angeles (translated from Spanish. Language in italics was originally in English

Kikey is an advanced student of English. She was also very enthusiastic about the project, hardly missed a session and worked at SAC everyday. She also works twice a week as an English teacher for children and adults. She is about to begin the third year of a BA in TESOL in Oaxaca. Her English is very fluent and she regularly goes to the SAC to study and practice.

This is the transcript of an individual session two weeks before we ended the project. Up to this moment I had worked with Kikey in seven individual sessions. She had also taken part in six (out of seven) input sessions and six group discussions and about nine group sessions. There were several individual sessions aimed at the analysis of the participants' processes of learning with two specific goals (to learn the third conditional and to learn twenty verbs). In theory, this is at least the third time that she had studied the third conditional. In the previous individual session, she showed me her study plan. She knew that the grammatical structure was not something new for her but she had some doubts. She looked for grammar explanations in different sources. She also said that she wanted to practise it but she didn't know how. The aim of this session was to talk about the way she solved her doubts. The homework for this session was to think about the way to practise these specific items.

1A. So, What did you do?

2K. Excuse me?

3A. How did you start to work?

4K. Ah, Ok. To begin with, yesterday, I solved my doubt.

5A. Ahah (laughter)

6K. Definitively

7A. And now you have a good hypothesis about/

8K. Yes

9A.... how to form the third conditional

10K. Yes, now

11A. Mhm

12K. With the present perfect, isn't it?

13A. Mhm

14K.And the past, and the modal *would*, to form this grammatical structure.

15A. Why were you wrong? Or what? in a way... I mean, you said that "you solved your doubt". You didn't know? or were you wrong? or did you have a doubt?

16K. I had a doubt....because I had, I mean, at the very moment that you mentioned "conditional" I thought about *if clauses*, so I said, It's got to be the *if clauses*. But the structure, I had doubts about that.

17A. And you were mixing the past with *have*

18K. Yes

19A. With the modal

20K. Yes

21A. Aha

22K. Yes, I mean...

23A. And what happens is that they belong to two diferent parts.

24K. Exactly. That was the doubt. And then, I didn't know how and then I clarify my doubts.

25A. Mhm

26K. And, then... And now the thing is to look for examples and it is not the problem of focusing in the grammar, the structure.

27A. That is solved, That is/

28K. Now, to look for examples and to reinforce, to begin to master the structure. But what is causing me problems is the use.

29A. the use

30K. Yes, That's is causing a lot of problems. I thought about a game, but I said something. No, why not, but why not. At the end, there was something I didn't think, something that was not going to work, that was not going/

31A. In the game with phrasal verbs?

32K. Yes?

33A. Ah, no, but that was a different thing, I mean, to learn the phrasal verbs? But what about the third conditional?

34K. I don't know , I haven't found the way, yet. That's is why I arrived earlier...

35A. And the problem is that you haven't found anything because you still don't know how to do it?

36K. No. I know how to do it. What I don't know, I mean, I am used to...first find something in the books. Then I go to have my interchange session. I practise with her. That is to say, we together create a situation.

37A. OK How would you create a situation. Let's think that right now your "interchange" is here. How would you create a situation with her in order to use the third conditional.

38K. Well, for instance, more....usually she would tell me things about her life, all right? And, if I had doubts about the *if clause*, the third conditional ...that is, I explained to her what I had found in books and she would talk about her life creating a situation.

39A. Ah, Ok

40K. Yes

41A. She gave you examples.

42K. But then I talked with her and according to the conversation she talked and I talked. And that way, the two of us built something, like solving a puzzle. A puzzle with the pieces of the situation.

43A. Well, let's think that....Well, first of all, tell me, what do you use the third conditional for? Let's start with that.

44K. For a hypothesis

45A. Mhm

46K. For a hypothesis that you have and ....yes, like/

47A. Could you give me an example?

48K. *If I...*

49A. But from here (pointing her notes) it is not necessary that you know it by heart.

50K. But that is the point! I want to see if I understood......

51A. Do you want to write it...or not? (giving her a piece of paper)

52K. (writing) *If I had...... If I had..... drive slow..... I wouldn't I wouldn't have an accident....* ehh...It is not *drive*

53A. (laughter)

54K. It is...well...hey! How can I forget the past participle of *drive*...it is...no..it is...

55A. *Drive... drove....*

56K. *drove*

57A. No, *drive* is the present form, *drove* the past form....

58K. No. It is past participle

59A. That's why, the third one...This is the past, I am trying to help you to remember the past participle. *Drive* is the present. *Drove* ...

60K. *Draiven!*

61A. *Driven*, you say *driven*

62K. Ah, *driven* (a little laughter).. *If I had driven slow ...I wouldn't* .....(writing the sentence) Why am I writing in this way... (a little laughter)

63A. Let's see, now check it with an example you have in your notes.

64K. *If I had* aha, *if I....* aha

65A. Are you right here?

66K. Yes.

67A. (reading from the notes) *If he had tried to leave the country.....he would have been stopped at the frontier.*

68K. *I would have... I would have...* No! *I would have* ...No. I am wrong.

69A. Aha, what happened?

70K. Here. I am wrong here.

71A. Mhm, let's see. Let's see another example... *If If we had found him earlier we could have saved his life.* Ok *If we had found him earlier we might have saved his life*. OK, instead of *would* .. Why are you wrong here?

72K. Why? Because I don't have the present perfect here.

73A. Ah, OK, then, that was what was missing.

74K. Then, I haven't understood it yet. I mean, not very well, not as I supposed I had. It is not the same as....

75A. What is missing here?

76K. A verb in participle.

77A. Of course, like what verb?

78K. Some *have*.....(looking at me)help me!

79A. What happens is that here, you have to use the same verb. *I wouldn't have had an accident*. This isn't the main verb. The verb is this. This verb is "haber". He wouldn't have had an accident. Haven't you used it?

80K. No

81A. (realising her expression)Is it weird?

82K. It is funny.

83A.Is it? Ok. Look, this word is for the verb "haber" and this for the verb "tener". In English this verb has two/

84K. Yes, yes

85A. senses

86K. two meanings, "haber" and "tener".

87A. Good, then, in this case, it happens that you have to put them together. Let's see. Do it with a different ending. Don't put...mhm... to have an accident. Put "to have died".

88K. But

89A. Put it. Change this. (reading) *if I had driven slowly....* Put he wouldn't have died.

90K. He wouldn't have died.

91A. He wouldn't have died, aha

92K.Aha, he wouldn't, this is right.

93A. Aha , then, if you see, here you have *have ....died* and *would,* well, in this case *wouldn't* . It is the same structure. It seems to be weird because here you are/

94K. again the *had*

95A. Exactly, but if you use another verb, you will realise that it is the modal with the present perfect. Then you have to use the past perfect here and the present perfect with a

modal here. Let's see if the examples of the books are similar. If we had found. Here is the past perfect.

96K. Yes

97A. *If we had found him earlier, we could have saved his life* , here is the modal and then the present perfect.

98K. Yes

99A. Aha, You have realised

100K. Yes

101A. Then it is the same here, What happened is that everything got more complicated because you were using this as a main verb and not as an auxiliary verb to form the presesnt perfect.

102K. That is right. It seems weird, like in Spanish when we say "**a a**eropuerto".

103A.Aha, it seems that you are just repeating the same sounds.
but think that they are two different verbs. They are written in the same way but they are two different verbs.Aha?

104K. Aha

105A. Then, we are here (pointing at her example). What do you use this structure for?

106K. What for? For a hypothesis, something unreal, in this case *If I had draiven...*

107A. What is unreal?

108K. The unreal is that if I had driven slowly.

109A. OK The unreal is to drive slowly. What really happened?

110K. That I didn't drive slowly (laughter)

111A. OK So, let's write this sentence here. I didn't drive slowly. Write it in English. Then, from this fact you build up an unreal situation and this unreal situation

112K. Yes

113A. And that unreal situation has to be written in third conditional. Why? Because, besides being hypothetical, it is a past event.

114K. Mhm

115A. That's why it has to be in third conditional and not another structure. Well, then, ehh... How can we get a lot of sentences like this one. To be able to develop a lot of sentences of this type. What would we have to. What situation could we...ehh... create, or maybe we could think about an specific situation to be able to generate a lot of sentences of this kind.

116K. Hypothetical situations, right?

117A. starting from?

118K. Starting from... from a

119A. from real situations. This is a real situation and

120K. Mhm

121A. and from a real situation we have to develop a hypothetical one, right?

122K. ?

123A. this is what happened (pointing at the sentence)

124K. Mhm

125A. Ok, well, so I am going to imagine what it could have/

126K. What you would have done

127A. happened...

128K. if the real thing had happened

129A. Mhm

130K. Ah. I got it.

131A. Then, what could you do, tell me. Think what could you do to be able to create a lot of sentences of this type

132K. Think about a reality

133A. Mhm

134K. No? to begin with

135A. in past

136K. Obviously

137A. For instance?

138K. For instance...mhm... to put it this way, relating it with my life, and if I had...

138A. No, don't imagine anything. Do not be hypothetical. It is the past, that is give me a real event of your life.

140K. Aha...

141A. Anything. there must be thousands.

142K. Yes (laughter) but from all of them....let's see. If I...

143A. No, do not begin with "if I..." . Tell me something that happened to you.

144K. Mhm....I didn't go to school for one year.

145A. OK. That's it. That's a real event. Now, tell me something hypothetical, something unreal related to this event.

146K. If I had gone to school during that year....I wouldn't have applied for the BA so late.

147A. Or you would have written your thesis, or you would have finished it, or you have graduated. You can say twenty things about it.

149K . Mhm

150A. Then it becomes rather simple

151K. Yes

152A. My parents got married, I was born, I have a brother, well... I don't know... ten, twenty, fifthy things that you want to say. If my parents hadn't gotten married, I wouldn't have been born. You can say so many things. And if you want to go back and back. If I hadn't been born my mother wouldn't have been so happy.

153K. Mhm

154A. Then, Why don't you make... a... list. Don't think about this (the third conditional). It is difficult to think in those terms. There are so many possibilities...Rather think about real facts in your own life. Aha?

155K Ah!!!

156A. And there you have your own exercise...Mhm? Make twenty sentences in past tense, afirmative and negative telling "my mother... studied to be a teacher"....

157K. There is an exercise in *Interchange*. It has a column with the real facts, and in the other column there are the if clauses.

158A. The difference. No, the difference is that you are going to create the column.

159K.Yes

160A. You are going to create the second one from the first one. But you are not going to start with the hypothetical one but with the real one. Ok?

161K. Yes

162A. Then, simply make a list.

163K. Mhm

164A. As many sentences as you want. The more you do the more you practise... from things that have happened to you, yesterday, and then...

165K. And starting with real facts

166A. And from that you start thinking, what would have happened if I hadn't been born...gosh, my brother would have enjoyed everything they have given to me.

167K. Yes!! (laughter)

168A. (laughter) What would have happened if I had met that guy before. Gosh, maybe I would have married. Aha.

169K. No, not that! (laughter)

170A. (laughter)

171K. No!

172A. Ok, then think in that way and work it. it is easy.

173K. Yes, I've realised

174A. One has to think in the use, the use for certain aspect of the language, the specific situation we are dealing with.

175K. Yes

176A. Later we are going to work it in a different way. Oral production, so that you can... you don't have to think so much and you don't have to write it in order to realise that you have mistakes. When you were speaking you didn't realise your mistake...until you wrote it.

177K. Yes

178A. Until you wrote it you said..."Ah, I haven't understood it well".

179K. Aha

180A. ---

181K..............Listen, yes! Right!

182A. (laughter)

183K. (laughter) That's right, then I need to write first.

184A. Aha, so it would be better if you write something in order to realise if you say it right or not.

185K. Mhm

186A. I think that, still, you will need to check your theory, aha, with your hypothesis and then decide. Later it won't be necessary, you will decide without checking. This is it and this is it. Here there is missing a modal, there is missing such and such. No, here there should be a present form and here there should be a past form. And you will play and try different things, And then/

187K. Mhm

188A. if we find some other materials and exercises we can try them. if not, with your own exercises and then the oral practice, to be able to speak, to produce it.

189K.Mhm

190A. Well, you were going to tell me something about the *phrasal verbs*

191A. About the *phrasal verbs*? That I still don't decide how to learn them.

192A. Mhm

193K. That is, I already chose them and, in fact, yesterday, I made my own material, but I decided not to use it.

194A. Why?

195K Because, I mean, I was doing. I want to do the same I do with my children's classes.

196A. Aha

197K. with games..

198A. These are some of ...

199K. Aha

200A. Let me see, let'me understand. This is the phrasal verb and you can... the blue ones are the meanings.

201K. Yes

202A. Then, there is always one for each.... This goes with this.

203K. Aha

204A. Then, what you are doing is trying to learn the meaning.

205K. Mhm

206A. But why are you undecided? Why don't you like it? Why isn't it working?

207K. Why isn't it working? Because I am going to learn the meaning but I still have a lot of doubts about the use.

208A. Mhm

209K. I mean, I found out that sometimes, I think, there are synonyms for the phrasal verbs.

210A. Mhm

211K. And then, how am I going to know when to use the phrasal verb and when the synonym?...So, I started looking for something that helps me more, that satisfies me more... (She shows me some books)

212A. Mhm

213K. to be ready

214A. In other words, for you it is not enough if you only know the meaning. You need to know how to use it, how to be able to "apply it".

215K. Yes

216A. Aha,

217K. I need to know the use

218A. Where did you get these verbs from? I mean, how did you select them?

219K. How did I select them? At random. I didn't have a reason. It was simply that, let's say, according to the frequency I come across them, from my "interchanges" or in the movies. I chose them if I remembered have heard them, the more common ones. If they rang a bell, if I think that I have heard them.

220A. Mhm, then, in a way, these are the most common phrasal verbs, according to your experience.

221K. Yes

222A. Aha, but if these are the ones that you may need, Why are you going to look for different ones?

223K. No, not to look for different ones, but to give me an idea of how... I can do an exercise to help me with the use.

224A. How they are used.

225K Aha

226A. And you cannot do it, yet. You cannot

227K. No, not yet, I mean, I still don/t have an idea of how I can learn... I mean, how I can learn not the meaning but the use.

228A. Mhm. Then, what you need to do is to look for them here, in these books that may tell you how...

229K. to look for, I rather believe I have to look for these verbs with a minimum of five examples, or eight examples, in order to be able to have an idea of the way they are used.

230A. OK. Perfect

231K. Yes?

232A. I think that's is a good idea

233K. The only one I have thought of

234A. No, I think that is a very good idea

235K. Yes, because, if I wait until I come across them in movies or a video...this is going to be difficult.

236A. Here (showing her a book)you have a reference section with at least one example, at least one.

237K. Aha

238A.Try to find more in this one. I think that in this one they also give an example, yes they do. Then you have now at least two, well if they include that verb. And then you have this one (another book)

239K. And then compare all the examples

240A. Aha... Yes, look, in this one there is an index. Then, for instance, you find turn out on page 78, and it is likely that you will find an explanation there/

241K. Yes because/

242A. But above all the example

243K If I just focus in one book it is going to be difficult, because one book may only give me one model and one situation whereas with several books I can...

244A.That's it

245K. You can have several situations

246A. So, you work with these two things for tomorrow

247K. Yes

248A. For tomorrow the past sentences with the hypothetical ones and this

249K. Yes

250A. The problem is that tomorrow I will see you at noon

251K. at noon? For this? Don't we have discussion tomorrow?

252A. Tha's what I mean. At noon for discussion, that means that I won't be able to work with you individually.

253K. Aha

254A. Well, but maybe tomorrow....I really would like for you to work more. Do two things: first do this, I will see you on Monday, then from her to Monday.... (the next participant arrived and interrupts the conversation. I stopped the recorder)

10.7 QUESTIONNAIRES FOR PARTICIPANTS OF THE OAXACA/97 PROJECT

NAME_____

PLACE OF BIRTH_____

DATE OF BIRTH_____

OCCUPATION_____

DATE OF ENROLLMENT IN SAC_____

ACTIVITY 1   FREE TASK (TIME 30 MIN)   RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

TITLE OF MATERIAL_____

OBJECTIVE (WHAT FOR?)_____

REASON (WHY THIS SPECIFIC MATERIAL?)_____

_____

OUTCOME (DID YOU LIKE IT?)_____

(DID YOU LEARN SOMETHING?)_____

PROCESS REPORT (HOW?):

_____
_____
_____
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_____
_____

NAME_____ DATE_____

1.Do you like studying in the SAC?   YES   NO

Why?

_____
_____
_____

2. How long have you been studying in the SAC_____

Have you stopped coming to the SAC for long periods?_____
Why?

_____
_____
_____

3. Do you think that by working in the SAC you have progressed in your learning of English?

                         YES   NO
Are you satisfied?   YES   NO

Why?

_____
_____
_____

4. Have you ever considered to stop coming to the SAC?   YES   NO

Why?

_____
_____
_____

5. Do you think that studying with a teacher and in a group would be more effective than studying in the SAC?
          YES   NO
Why?

_____
_____
_____

6. What do you think of the SAC: does it work?

_____
_____
_____

7. Why are you studying English and what are you going to use it for?

_____
_____
_____

8. (for the students enrolled in the BA in TEFL) Why are you studying TEFL?

_____
_____
_____

NAME_____ DATE_____

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEARN?

Thinking about your **own experience**, answer the following questions:

1. Do you know what exactly you want to learn from the target language?   YES   NO

2. If your answer to Question 1 was YES, then write a list of the different specific aspects of the target language that you want to learn

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. If your answer to Question 1 was NO, then, explain what would be, according to you, the best way to identify your learning short-term objectives, that is, what specifically you need to learn from the target language

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Do you think that **you are ready** to learn what you need to learn from the target language?

                    YES   NO

Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

1. Write ALL the activities that you carried out in order to learn the past or the 3rd conditional. Do not omit anything. Write even what you consider was not important. In this activity, EVERYTHING is important.

No.	ACTIVITY	EFFECTIVITY	FUNCTION

2. Now, try to evaluate those activities identifying those that were more effective form those that were less effective for you. For the most effective use a (+) and for the less effective a (-) in the column that says EFFECTIVITY

3. Which was the activity that you liked the most?

_____

Why?

_____

4. Which was the activity that you liked the least?

_____

Why?

_____

5. Now, try to identify which of these activities were useful for:

a) notice
b) structure
c) renotice
d) restructure
e) practice

Write this in the column that says FUNCTION

6. Do you feel now confident to USE the grammatical form that you studied?

( ) absolutely yes
( ) I think so
( ) I am not sure
( ) not yet
( ) I don't think so
( ) absolutely not

7. Explain your answer to # 6

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. What plans do you have for the learning of this grammatical form?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10.8 "THE LYNX", A GAME USED FOR METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS