Learner Autonomy and the European Language Portfolio

Language Learner Autonomy is one of the most important principles and benefits of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As a central CEFR principle, it also guides the development of a Common Framework of Reference for Languages in Canada (CFRLC), a national project involving various education stakeholders and led by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT). Its application in practice is supported by the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and by its Canadian versions, including CASLT’s The Canadian Language Portfolio for Teachers and its Assessment in Action Toolkit.

**What Do Autonomous Learners Do?**

Autonomous learners:
- become actively involved in all aspects of their language learning: planning, implementing, and evaluating
- understand the purpose of their learning program, as they set up their own learning goals
- grasp the usefulness of each competence developed, as they monitor and apply them in real-life contexts
- are able to self-assess, based on a series of positive descriptors (“Can Do” statements) associated with each of the CEFR levels
- recognize that they are responsible for their own learning progress
- adopt a proactive attitude towards language learning
- fosters self-confidence in learners, who also develop life-long learning skills

In Canada, developing learner autonomy may be the motivational tool needed to:
- help improve the outcomes of second language programs
- decrease student attrition in these programs

**What Is the Teachers’ Role in Learner Autonomy?**

While considering the maturity and language levels of the learners, teachers can:
- fully involve learners in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning
- encourage learners to reflect continuously on the process and content of their learning
- help learners to engage in regular self-assessment
- ensure that the target language is the medium, as well as the goal, of all learning (see Little 2007)
- facilitate a wide range of roles for learners (i.e. conversation between friends, formal discussion/meeting, addressing an audience, etc.)
What Are the Next Steps for Teachers to Increase Learner Autonomy?

- review provincial or territorial curriculum documents for learner outcomes related to learner autonomy, self-reflection, and goal-setting
- examine textbooks and programs and note where learner autonomy is encouraged
- support setting individual student goals to encourage autonomy and promote greater learner involvement and responsibility
- become familiar with the CEFR and the ELP, as well as with its Canadian versions, and employ them as teaching principles and tools, incorporating the CEFR self-assessment grids

Where Do I Find More Info on Learner Autonomy?

To find more information on language learner autonomy, consider the following:

- research and identify complementary resources on the web, such as:
  * www.ailarenla.org
  * http://innovationinteaching.org/autonomy/practical-tips/
  * http://www.innovationinteaching.org/autonomy_bibliography.php
- join a professional learning community to discuss classroom initiatives and successes related to the CEFR and the ELP implementation in Canada with colleagues, such as CASLT’s Online Professional Learning Community (OPLC) or Online Discussion Forum.

Publications on Learner Autonomy and CEFR

Here are some examples: