Menegale, M. (ed.) (2013). *Autonomy in Language Learning: Getting Learners Actively Involved* [ePub]. Canterbury, UK: IATEFL

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Quoting a sentence by Carmel Mary Coonan in the foreword of this volume, we agree that this «is a timely contribution to an area [i.e. learner autonomy] that needs considerable attention». This is particularly true if we think about 'lifelong learning' and 'learning to learn', concepts that have acquired the characteristics of urgency and necessity in today's society. Menegale presents a series of noteworthy essays by several notable experts in the field of learner autonomy, as well as researchers and practitioners from several countries. The aim of these contributions is to offer teachers suggestions, strategies, and tools to sustain the effort of «actively involving learners» and helping them become more autonomous in their learning process. The present volume proposes a number of meaningful experiences with learners of different ages, from adolescents to young adults, and reports projects carried out by both researchers and teachers through action-research.

Menegale's book is subdivided into four sections, each of which represents one sub-topic connected with the main subject of learner autonomy. The four sub-topics are: research, curriculum, strategies and knowledge transfer. In the first section, *Researching Language Learner Autonomy*, we find five empirical studies which share the general intention of offering the results of some experimental learner autonomy oriented approaches. Legenhausen (Ch. 1) reflects on data resulting from a large-scale study in which an autonomous classroom and a traditional one have been compared. The autonomous classroom showed far better results in terms of vocabulary, grammar, proficiency and quality interactions. Autonomous learners, being in charge of their own learning, **plan** what to do, **work** according to their plans, **document** their own actions and those of their teacher, and finally **evaluate** the outcomes. Clarke (ch. 2) reports the findings of her action-research project, aiming at the transition from teacher-centred to learner-centred lessons. She explains how autonomous learning has been implemented and developed and, above all, what the learners' perceptions of this new approach were. Her adolescent learners perceived it very positively but failed in adopting learning strategies and developing aware-

ness of metacognition. The author suggests that in order to overcome these difficulties, more discussion among learners should be encouraged. Minakova (ch. 3) reports on her action-research carried out with young adult students. Learner autonomy was fostered through an experiential way of learning (a project-based assignment, in this case) which promoted considerable results both in terms of improvement of language skills and increased positive attitudes towards learning English. In particular, motivation (seen as individual effort) was the most affected area in the learning process. Geiller (ch. 4) reflects on the importance of reading in autonomous language learning. In his project, reading was promoted as a repository of grammaticalized lexis and thus as a learning tool that impacts on writing. Learners benefited from reading in that they were able to memorize native-like utterances to be later adapted and used in their written essays. Finally, Kojima (ch. 5) reports the results of the implementation of a portfolio program under Collaborative and Reflective Supervision which enhanced both learner and teacher autonomy, in a reciprocal development through positive interdependence. Learners benefited from reflection on learning, peer-assessment and cooperative learning; the teacher profited from reflective teaching and thus professional awareness.

In the second section of the book, *Language Learner Autonomy in the Curriculum*, we find four contributions aimed at connecting theories and models of learner autonomy to everyday classroom practice. Dam (ch. 6) offers some examples of her own efforts to develop language learning autonomy in her classes since the late Seventies. Inspired by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Roger's view of the learning environment, the author proposes a simplified model of autonomy development in which the teacher and the learner are mutually interdependent as they share a common responsibility for the learning process. Chamot (ch. 7) reflects on the role of learning strategies and differentiated instruction in helping even less effective learners to become more autonomous. The author maintains that strategy instruction and differentiation (i.e. helping learners identify those strategies that particularly suit their learning style) should be integrated in everyday classroom practice in that, being the tools of learner-centred instruction, they promote development in metacognition, higher learner awareness and self regulation. Mariani (ch. 8) discusses the role of intercultural communication strategies in terms of both compensation and enhancement purposes. The author holds that learners should be explicitly trained in these strategies in that, helping learners monitor, understand and adapt to unfamiliar cross-cultural situations, communication strategies increase learner awareness and self-confidence, thus promoting autonomy. Finally, Ali (ch. 9) proposes a 'dialogic curriculum' which presupposes a dialogue not only with students but also with colleague-teachers. The author claims that an autonomous classroom climate, built through the constant negotiation between curricular factors (learner, teacher, subject

matter and milieu), is a more favourable alternative to the teacher-centred approach because it highlights that learners are unique individuals.

In the third section of the volume, *Tools for Self-reflection in Language Learner Autonomy*, we find contributions which consider the role of meta-cognitive strategies and pedagogical instruments in promoting effective learning. Little (ch. 10) adopts a Vygotskian perspective in order to ponder the role of reflection as a means to developing language proficiency. The author suggests that in the autonomous classroom Vygotsky's mediation should be made both explicit through tools such as posters, logbooks, intentional learning activities (word games, for example) and implicit through the dialogic, problem-solving talk supported by the explicit tools. This type of talk, leading to the internalization of the target language, promotes inner speech, a metacognitive tool promoting proficiency. Del Vecchio (ch. 11) argues that instructional and collective scaffolding in an ESP task-based setting allows learners to move from an interpsychological level to an intrapsychological level, thus allowing greater cognitive and metacognitive awareness and enhancing autonomy. Canga Alonso (ch. 12) concentrates on the role of portfolios as assessing tools through which learners implement self-formative assessment. Promoting learner involvement, communicative competence and reflection, portfolios are seen as effective instruments to develop metacognition. Bozzo (ch. 13) adopts an experiential and constructivist approach and proposes the experience of 'blended learning', which makes use of several online materials and tools (learning-style interview, pre-task guidelines, self-editing checklist, peer review guidelines, logbook, self-assessment grid, to name a few). The main role of all these tools is to foster learner autonomy by stimulating cognitive and metacognitive competences. Here, reflection is perceived as the 'bridge' between practical experience and theoretical conceptualization. Finally, Tiefenthal (ch. 14) reflects on the role of feedback as a means of support for learning. In an autonomous setting, the teacher is not the only source of giving grades in that s/he is seen as a partner, a learning advisor. Feedback derives from different sources (it may be given by the teacher but also by peers, friends, family, significant others…) and supports autonomous language learning in that it helps critical self-evaluation.

The fourth and last section of the book, *Connecting In and Out-of-class Language Learner Autonomy*, deals with knowledge transfer. McCarthy (ch. 15) recommends the adoption of advising tools, i.e. reflective and self-directed learning strategies, in the traditional classroom but also in out-of-class learning in order for learners to develop higher awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and to promote improvement. Menegale (ch. 16) is concerned with the learners' capacity of knowledge transfer between classroom learning and out-of-class learning. Reporting results of an inquiry conducted among high school students and teachers all over Italy, the author stresses the urgency to promote language learning awareness

in order to help learners become more conscious of what using a foreign/second language implies and of the opportunities for integrating formal and informal learning to achieve higher language proficiency and learner autonomy. In the last chapter of the volume, Cacchione (ch. 17) reflects on the results of a European-funded project, for which a mobile app was created in order to support students' autonomy in their language learning. The author states that it is important for learners to be guided in the process of becoming autonomous because being 'digital natives' does not imply having the capacities to fully exploit the possibilities that ICTs allow. Thus teachers should adopt a guidance role to help his/her learners' transition from a teacher-led to a student-led approach.