Facilitating Learner Autonomy in Blended Learning Environments

Phil Hubbard
Stanford University

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Outline

• Blended learning and autonomy
• Facilitating autonomy with learner training
• The teacher’s changing role
• Example: developing autonomy in a blended listening course
• Conclusion
Blended Learning

• Any approach mixing face-to-face with significant time outside of class mediated by technology

• Especially, courses that replace a percentage of class time with outside technology-mediated activities

• Crucially, this often includes a shift in “locus of control” from teacher to learner
Blended Learning

• Are learners ready for taking that control?
• Enter autonomy....
Autonomy

• Holec (1981) – autonomy = taking charge of one’s own learning
• Autonomy is going mainstream
  – Benson (2006): autonomy “has reached a point where it has begun to overflow the banks of the specialist literature.”
• We focus here only on the autonomous learner
Autonomy and Blended Learning

• The portion of blended learning outside the classroom
  – is likely to be more effectively handled by autonomous learners, and
  – can support development of autonomy, but
• “…learners do not develop the ability to self-direct simply by being placed in situations where they have no other options” Benson (2006: 22).
My Claims

1) Taking charge of one’s own learning requires conscious, expert control over applications of the computer as a language learning tool

2) Achieving a useful level of that control is possible

3) Learner training is usually the most efficient way to reach that level
Video Listening Example

- Consider an authentic video listening experience today…
- Controls: pause, rewind, slider, window size, jump, play speed, graphic equalizer
- Language supports: supplements, L2 captions, L2 transcripts, electronic dictionaries/glossaries, L1 supports
Video Listening Example

Research Evidence for LT

• Barrette (2001): Showed generalized computer literacy not sufficient for foreign language classes

• Winke & Goertler (2008): In survey of over 900 US university students, showed most need training in specific uses of technology for language learning tasks

• Hubbard (2005): In survey of 78 research studies, showed 29% concluded training could have improved results
A Learner Training Model

• Technical: How (knowledge & skill)?
  – General
  – Application specific
• Strategic: What & when?
• Pedagogical: Why?
Changing Role of Teachers

Plans to include speaking & writing on National English Ability Test (NEAT) by 2015; fully computer-based test

1) Integrating technology effectively in a blended setting

2) Releasing control to students while finding ways to hold them accountable

3) Preparing students for that control
TESOL Technology Standards

• Standards Framework (2008)
  – Teacher Standards
  – Learner Standards

• Learner Standards, Goal 3
  – Language learners effectively use and critically evaluate technology-based tools as aids in the development of their language learning competence as part of formal instruction and for further learning.
TESOL Technology Standards

- **Standard 1**: Language learners effectively use and evaluate available technology-based productivity tools.
- **Standard 2**: Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based language skill-building tools.
- **Standard 3**: Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based tools for communication and collaboration.
- **Standard 4**: Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based research tools.
- **Standard 5**: Language learners recognize the value of technology to support autonomy, lifelong learning, creativity, metacognition, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity. [see Healey et al., 2011]
Blended Class Example

• EFS 693B Advanced Listening & Vocabulary Development: www.stanford.edu/~efs/693b

• Major shift in 2009 to 50% less class time

• Note: this will be described in more detail in my presentation later today

• Examples of developing autonomy in one student’s reflective reports
Week 3. Besides reviewing previous words and looking for new ones in videos, I put most of the transcripts ...to the vocabulary checking website [www.lectutor.ca/vp/bnc]. ... when reading materials, I put them into that system also, just for fun...It really encourages me. [He shows independence in expanding the use of the vocabulary profiler, noting how actions affect motivation.]
Developing Autonomy

**Week 8.** I find that it is important to analyze, when find somewhere not easy to understand, the reason why it is not easy to understand. [He generalizes about the value of analysis.]

I found most of the reason is because of new words and joint pronunciation between words, and for the latter reason, most times the jointed words are…phrases or short sentences that is very commonly used. [He demonstrates an understanding of specific reasons for not comprehending (only possible with text support)]
Week 9. It feels bad when watching the play [a TV drama] and thinking that I should collect some new words and put them into my word list. If so, I could hardly focus on the story, or the meaning of the sentences. [Recognizes that stopping to look up words negatively impacts global comprehension, especially in longer videos (in this case an episode of *Desperate Housewives*)]
Developing Autonomy

Week 9 (continued) But still, some characters …use some words very often. I could collect lots of words like that without putting them into my word list…while they are using the words again and again, the words become easy to remember…Perhaps it is not very efficient, but the result and pleasant I get while doing this, is very good. [Recognizes value of incidental vocabulary learning during extensive listening to the same type of material because of naturally recurring words—and how important his enjoyment is for sustaining motivation.]
Implementation Issues

To incorporate a blended curriculum, and build learner autonomy, consider:

• What do you need to teach them about how to learn while online? And when?
• How do you teach them that?
• How do you hold students accountable?
• What is the cost vs. the benefit?
Conclusion

• Blended learning = greater autonomy
  – But development of autonomy needs more than just a blended learning environment

• Learner training can provide that support
  – But we need to get better at understanding and sustaining it

• Teachers and students will need to redefine their roles as the control shifts
References


Thank You

PP at
www.stanford.edu/~efs/KAMALL1.pdf

Email
Phil Hubbard efs@stanford.edu