



USING ISSUE LOGS TO FOSTER LEARNER AUTONOMY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING AT HIGHER LEVELS

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Outline of the Presentation

- Defining “learner autonomy”
- Learner autonomy and target language proficiency
- How to foster *language* learner autonomy
- Introducing the “issue logs” activity and its rationale
- Challenges in implementing issue logs in the curriculum
- How to implement issue logs
- Discussion and Q/A

Learner Autonomy

According to Holec (1981), learner autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”.

Autonomous learners are capable of --

- ✓ setting their own learning objectives
- ✓ Defining the contents and progressions of learning
- ✓ Selecting methods and techniques to be used
- ✓ Monitoring the learning process, and evaluating learning outcomes

(Holec, 1981, cited in Little, 2007)

Learner Autonomy and Target language Proficiency

“...the development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency are not only mutually supporting but fully integrated with each other.”

(Little, 2007: 15)

How to foster language learner autonomy : Conditions

- ✓ cognitive and metacognitive strategies on the part of the learner
- ✓ motivation, attitudes, and knowledge about language learning

(Thanasoulas, 2000)

How to foster language learner autonomy : Principles

The three interacting fundamental principles:

- ✓ ***Learner involvement:*** engaging learner to share responsibility for the learning process
- ✓ ***Learner reflection:*** helping learner to think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning
- ✓ ***Target language use:*** using the target language as principal medium of language learning and learner reflection

(Little, 2007: 23-26)

Defining the “Issue Logs” Activity

Students choose an issue or a topic they are interested in and gather information about it on their own for a sustainable period of time. In the process, they keep learning logs about what they learnt and about their learning process. Periodically they report in class. Eventually, they will give a prepared presentation.

Expected Means of Info-gathering for Issue Logs

- By reading books, online/print articles and reports
- by interviewing and talking to people
- By listening to news broadcasts and audios
- By watching online video clips

Rationale: the Cognitive Aspect

- Applying Medina's brain rules of "sensory integration" and "exploration" (2013)
- Applying Nation's "four strands" concept to language learning, esp., the idea of linking and integrating skills (1996; 2013)
- Providing good conditions for language learning such as repetitions, skills integration and a strong focus on meaning

Rationale: the Metacognitive and Affective Aspects

- Building learner autonomy
 - Choose one's own topic
 - Set personal learning goals
 - Select means for data collection
 - Reflect on and monitor one's learning
 - Evaluate its effectiveness and make adjustments
- Promoting learners' motivation and deeper engagement

Potential Challenges

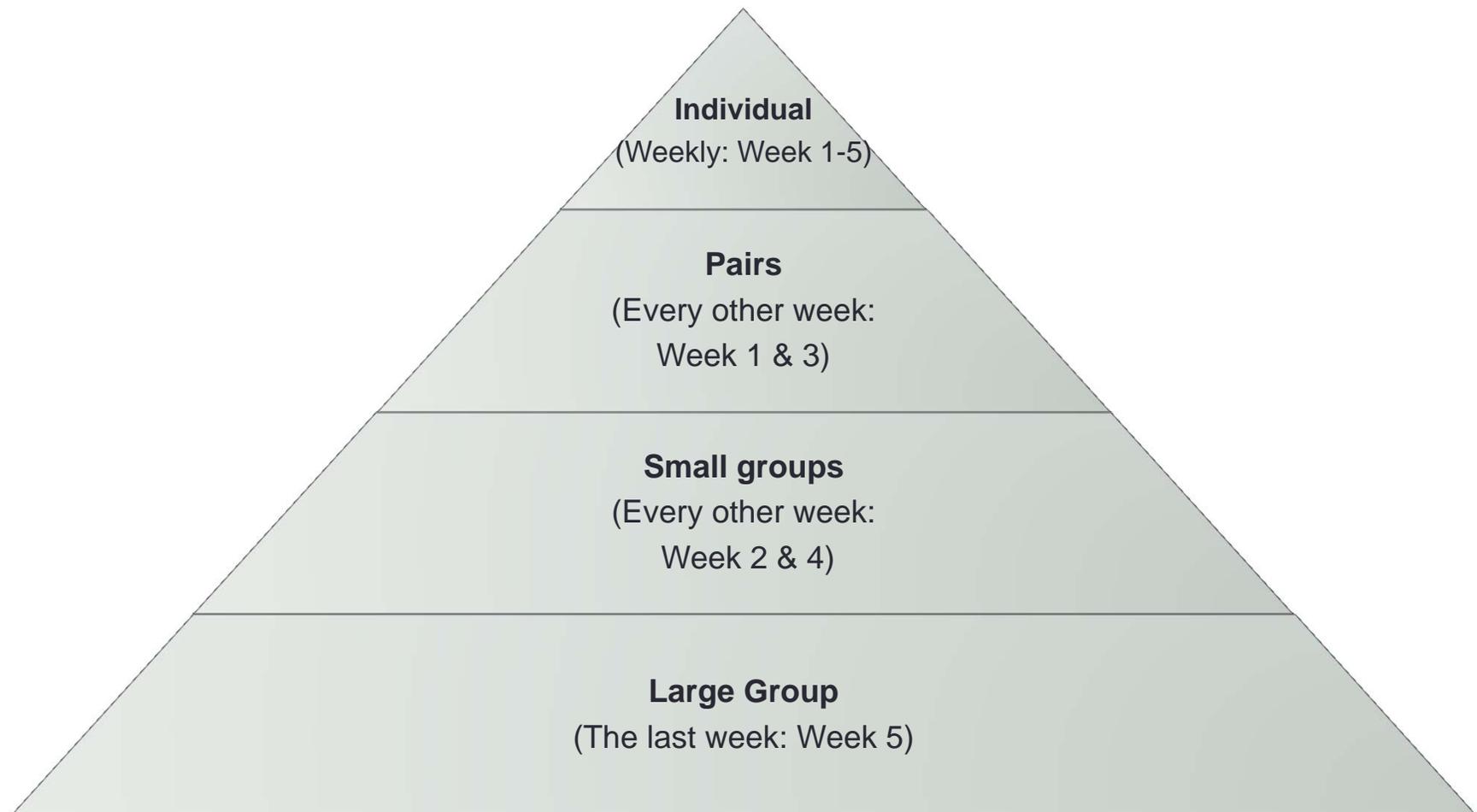
- How to hold learners accountable for what is expected of them throughout the process?
- How to create prime conditions to motivate and engage learners throughout the process?
- Is assessment of learners' work necessary? If yes, how?
- How to balance learner's autonomy and teacher's guidance ?
- What if a student chooses a very specialized topic?
- If a sharing session is held in class, how to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary from learners working on different issues/topics?

Suggestions for Dealing with the Challenges

- Make your expectations clear (provide timelines, sample work, log templates and rubrics).
- Encourage learners to choose an issue that they are interested in and can *easily* gather information about via different channels.
- Create an autonomous learning environment to ensure that students take responsibility for their own learning.
- Provide students opportunities to work collaboratively for peer support and learning (build a “reciprocal obligation”).
- Try using teacher modeling to demonstrate what is expected of the students.
- Have students keep learning journals for reflection and self-evaluation and assemble a *portfolio* that document the progress of their issue log project and their reflection of the learning process.

A Pyramid Design for the Issue Logs Activity

The “pyramid procedure” provides multiple opportunities and contexts for students to work on their reports. In all contexts the teacher and the learner only use the target language.



Step-by Step Procedures (1 of 4)

Individual Work (Week 1-5)

Students gather relevant info on their chosen topic and prepare a report on their own (both written and oral).

Suggestions:

- 1) In terms of oral reports, start shorter (5-6 minutes) and gradually expand into longer ones (12 minute for the final project sharing).
- 2) Each week, each student keeps a learner log in the target language (see “A Learner Log Template”).
- 3) Each week, the teacher conducts reflective dialogues with students in the *target language* for them to examine their learning process.

A Learner Log Template

Issue/Topic:	Week #:
What I know	
What I want to know	
What I have learned	
Evidence that shows how I learned it	
What's my next step	

Adapted from Faye Rollings-Carter <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/linguafolio/5795>

Step-by Step Procedures (2 of 4)

Sharing in a Pair (at the end of Week 1 & 3)

Students work in pairs to present to each other on what they have learnt on their own topic, followed by questions from the partner.

Suggestions:

- 1) Each pair stays the same for the 5-week cycle.
- 2) For each report, each student prepares a handout.
- 3) Provide feedback to each other using a rubric.
- 4) Consider repeating for another round of reports (e.g. A+B, C+D; A+C, B+D)

Step-by Step Procedures (3 of 4)

Sharing in a Group (at the end of Week 2 & 4):

Students present to the small group (of 4) on their own topic, and answer questions from the group mates.

Suggestions:

- 1) Two original pairs are grouped into a group of 4.
- 2) The current report should include some info from the previous ones and add some new info. Each student prepares a handout to be shared (refer to the “Sample Issue Log Table”).

A Reference Grouping Chart

A+B

C+D

A+C

B+D

E+F

G+H

E+G

F+H

I+J

K+L

I+K

J+L

M+N

O+P

M+O

N+P

Step-by Step Procedures (4 of 4)

Final Project Sharing (at the end of Week 5)

Students present to the large group on what they have learnt about the topic, and answer questions from the audience (students and teachers). Teachers collect students' portfolio for assessment.

Suggestions:

Students should have freedom to choose a format of their preference for the presentation (PPT, poster, and so on.)

Discussion and Q/A

“...the development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency are not only mutually supporting but fully integrated with each other.”

(Little, 2007: 15)

1. Do you agree with about what David Little says regarding the relationship between learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency?
2. What is your opinion about using the Issue Logs activity to foster learner autonomy and achieve higher language proficiency?

A Sample List of Issues/Topics

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Media influence on American society | 15) War on terrorism |
| 2) U.S. – China Relations | 16) North Korea nuclear issues |
| 3) Globalization and US Economy | 17) Smoking and health |
| 4) Copyright on the internet | 18) Global climate change |
| 5) The effects of cell phones | 19) The impact of China's one- child policy |
| 6) U.S. government debt | 20) Fast food chains & the obesity epidemic |
| 7) Healthcare reforms in the U.S. | 21) The impact of violent video games |
| 8) Gender inequality in the workplace | 22) Identity theft |
| 9) Immigration reforms in the U.S | 23) Home schooling |
| 10) Internet privacy | 24) Caring for old people |
| 11) Food shortage/world hunger | 25) Using animals in medical research |
| 12) Bullying in American schools | 26) Issues with the U.S. election process |
| 13) The future of newspapers | 27) My post-city: X |
| 14) The rise of China | 28) Marriage customs in X country |

Reference

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Thank you!

For more discussion and implementation of the activity,
please contact WangL2@state.gov