

# Lessons Learned in Helping Students Become Confident Autonomous Learners

Maritza Escobar, Language and Culture Instructor

Ling Wang, Language Learning Counselor

Foreign Service Institute

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# Outline of the Presentation

- ✓ What is learner autonomy and how to foster it in language learning
- ✓ Introducing the “SWOT” analysis tool and the “Mindset” theory
- ✓ Introducing the “Four Strands” model for well-balanced self-study
- ✓ Sharing our experiences and strategies applying the tools and the theory
- ✓ Lessons learned



# 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 strategies for the task at hand
- ✓ Monitoring the learning process, and evaluating learning outcomes

(Holec, 1981, cited in Little, 2007)



# How to foster language learner autonomy : Conditions

The following are some conditions for empowering learners to be autonomous:

- ✓ *Motivation* for language learning and for taking charge of their own learning
- ✓ *Self-confidence and self-efficacy* in language learning
- ✓ *Cognitive and metacognitive strategies* for language learning

**A HOLISTIC APPROACH!!**



# 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)

# The SWOT Analysis

A metacognitive tool used the business community for—

- ✓ understanding one's **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses, and
- ✓ identifying both the **O**pportunities open to one and the **T**hreats one faces

Applied to education, this metacognitive tool has the potential for integrating the aforementioned principles and conditions to help achieve learner autonomy.

# Applying the SWOT Analysis to Language Learning

Students are encouraged to regularly use the SWOT Analysis to *critically* reflect on their learning—

- ✓ Realistically identify their strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Pinpoint opportunities and threats
- ✓ Do strategic planning for their continuous language development
- ✓ Come up with their **SMART** goals

**S:** specific

**M:** manageable (not necessary always “measurable”)

**A:** achievable

**R:** relevant

**T:** time-based

# Carol Dweck's "Mindset" Theory



Maritza Escobar - Ling Wang

The image is from [https://medium.com/](https://medium.com/06/05/2019)



# Adopting a “Growth Mindset” in Language Learning

Language educator can do the following to help students adopt a “growth mindset”

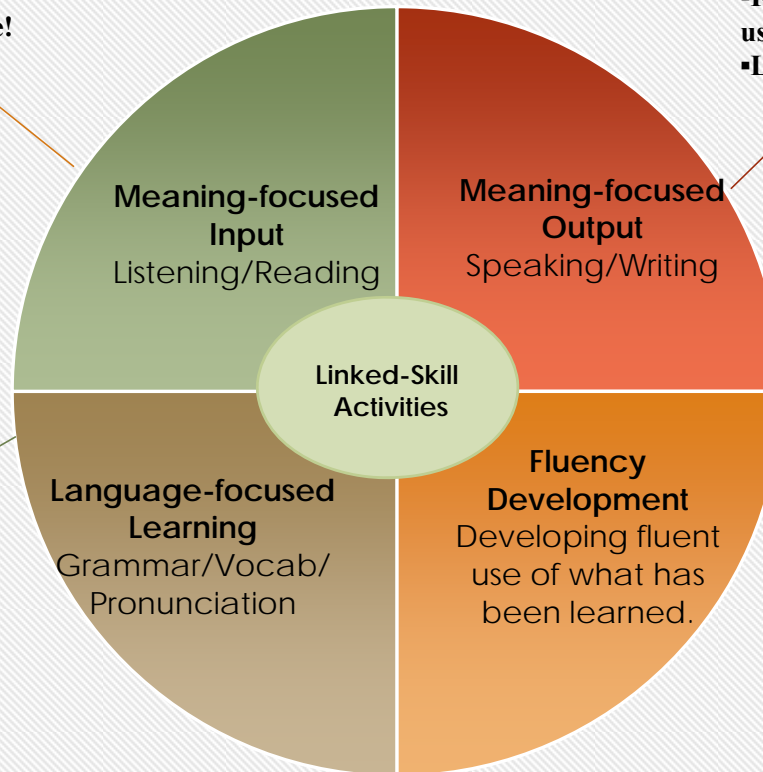
- ✓ Foster the belief that language competence is a changeable aspect of development
- ✓ Provide regular experiences of success
- ✓ Encourage regular self-evaluation and positive self-talk

# A Model for Well-Balanced Self-Study

Self-study should include a roughly even balance of the “Four Strands”

- Focus on *comprehension*
- Large quantities of practice!

- Focus on *conveying the message* using only familiar items
- Large quantities of practice!



- Deliberate focus on *language features*

- Pressure to go *faster (4-3-2)*
- Plenty of practice on *familiar topics using familiar language.*

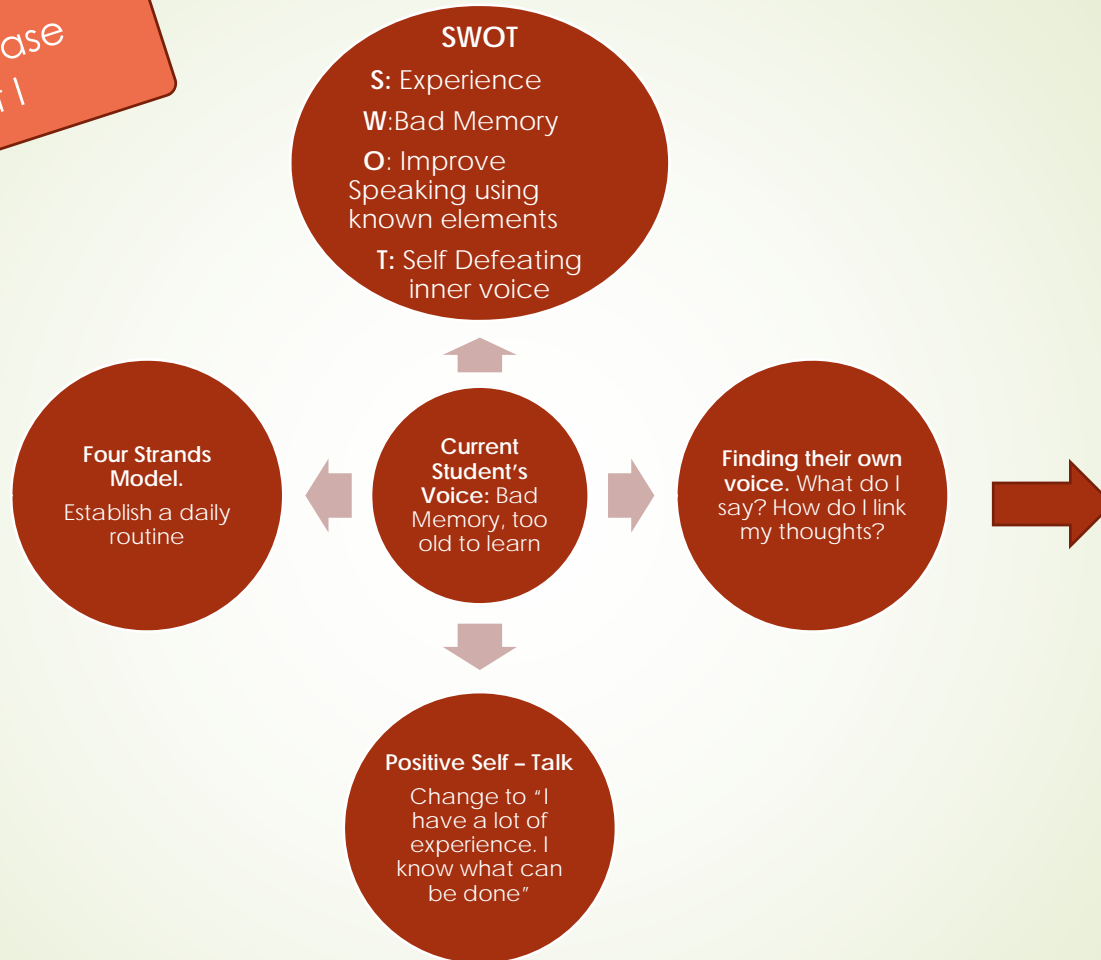
This model is based on Paul Nation’s “Four Strands” Concept (2013)

# Our Experiences and Strategies

- Share with students the SWOT analysis. This exercise needs to be done privately. Explain the advantage of doing it
  - Ask them to define his/her own needs
- Model for them how to auto-monitor themselves.
  - Questioning themselves; using open and challenging questions
- Share with them the advantage on Positive Self-talk, physical exercising and sleep patterns
- Ensure that students have well-balanced self-study based upon the “four strands” model.

# Our Experiences and Strategies

- Establish a daily routine that includes:
  - **Meaning – focused input activities:** Listening – Videos, podcast, FSI recordings, Reading - Extensive
  - **Meaning – focused output activities:** Speaking – use the reading to promote speaking, writing
  - **Language – focused learning activities:** Flashcards, grammar games
  - **Fluency development activities:** shadowing exercises, repetition of their own work
  - Physical exercise
  - breaks and sufficient sleep

Study case  
Part IGo to  
slide # 14

## Strategies:

- ✓ The students record themselves talking about 3 different topics, of their interest, in English
- ✓ They find the recurrent words or phrases they repeated during the recording
- ✓ They work with their instructor to translate them properly in the target language

## Study case Part II

**shadowing exercises:**  
Repeat some essential parts of the videos that you want to master

Fluency development activities:  
shadowing exercises, repetition of their own work

Four Strands Model.  
Establish a daily routine

Meaning – focused output activities:  
Tell what was the message of the videos  
In their own words

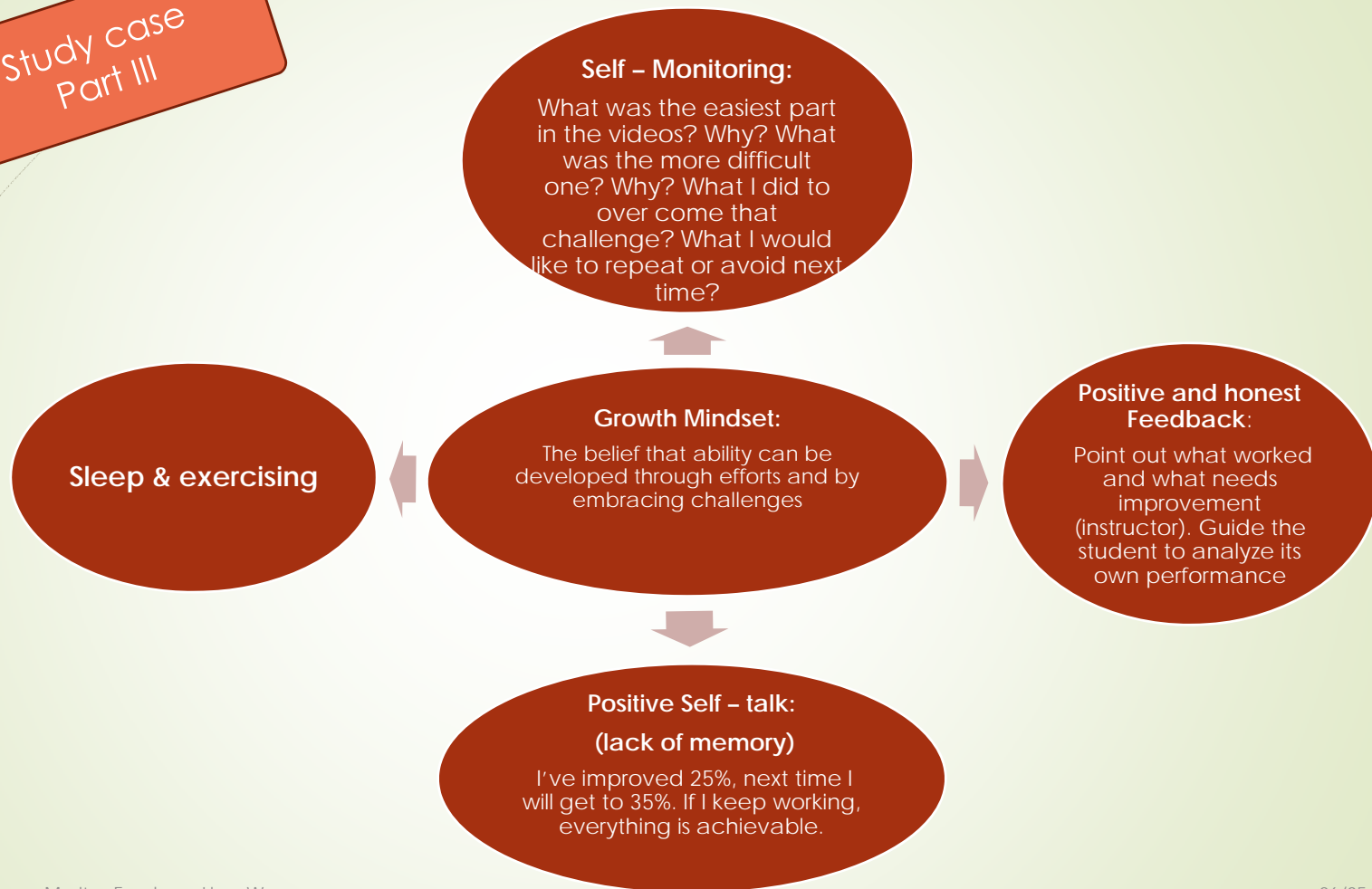
Meaning – focused input activities:  
Watch 3 videos, same topic, no longer than 3 minutes, pay attention to the message

Language – focused learning activities:  
Create flash cards with expressions that are useful in different situations

Pay attention to linking phrases and grammar patterns

### Strategies:

- ✓ Record your thoughts about the message in the videos
- ✓ Listen & monitor: Detect their own mistakes and correct them.
- ✓ Pay attention to linking phrases and grammar patterns.

Study case  
Part III

## Lessons learned: teacher to teacher reflections in promoting confident autonomous learners

Create a safe, cooperative learning environment

**Start with an open conversation:**

- ▶ Avoid bias
- ▶ Do not label people
- ▶ Avoid being authoritarian
- ▶ Be quiet and observe
- ▶ Stay humble



## Lessons learned: teacher to teacher reflections in promoting Confident autonomous learners

- ▶ Let the students propose and express their ideas.
- ▶ Remember everyone has their own vision of the world
- ▶ Do not project your own perceptions--let the students find their own road
- ▶ Do not send contradictory messages
- ▶ Incentivize students to question themselves

“Growth Mindset teachers see struggling students as a challenge-learners in need of guidance and feedback on how to improve”

<https://www.teachit.so/mindset.htm>

# Confident autonomous learners

➤ *Your investment by helping students to become independent learners **PAYS BACK REWARDS!***

➤ *Level of satisfaction and motivation raise*

➤ *Level of responsibility and self – control raise*

➤ *Students become more proactive*

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