

ABSTRACT

Teacher/Student Responsibility in Foreign Language (French) Learning in an Era
of Technological Change

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This dissertation explored the concept of learner autonomy in relation to a group of advanced French language students. The study, which used an ethnographic approach, sought to discover students' conceptions of their role as learners. The study contended that students who think of themselves as passive consumers of language need to make a conceptual shift to accept agency for their learning and assume some of the responsibility traditionally vested in teachers. An important issue raised was whether students with an external locus of control could derive the maximum benefit from a technology-enhanced environment that was premised on their being active learners.

The study relied on an intervention to promote autonomy to challenge students to pose the question of their learning, differently. The study revealed that differences in the students' beliefs about language learning accounted for much of the variability in their reactions to autonomy. Thus, students who were willing to accept personal responsibility for learning and focus on the learning process derived greater benefits from an autonomous approach. By contrast, a student with expectations of teacher authority and direction and who focussed primarily on the product of her learning

remained constrained by those conceptions. The dissertation's focus on learners did not preclude attention to the teacher. The teacher, it was discovered, also needed to adopt an expanded vision of her role and assume greater responsibility for supporting students' learning.

To summarize, this dissertation explored the re-conceptualization of roles and responsibilities in a learning alliance premised on greater learner involvement. It suggested that the adoption of an autonomous approach to language learning could help students meet their learning objectives in a manner responsive to the dynamic era in which they are learning.

Keywords: Beverly-Anne Carter, learner autonomy; learner beliefs; technology; French language learning; advanced learners.

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