Centre For Promoting Learner Autonomy

The key characteristics of an autonomous learner at Sheffield Hallam in 2010

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SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

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The autonomous learner

- What is an autonomous learner?
- What will they look like at Sheffield Hallam?
- What are the implications (by 2010)?

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What is an autonomous learner?

- **Autonomous:**
  Autonomous means self-governing; acting independently or having the freedom to do so.

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What is an autonomous learner?

- **Autonomous Learner**
  Someone who controls his or her learning

- We become more autonomous learners as we make more of our own choices about what we learn and how we learn it.

- the learner has much of the responsibility for planning and organising their learning, for doing it, for assessing its value to him or herself and even for suggesting the mark that the work produced should get.

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What is an autonomous learner?

the ability to take charge of one's learning

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

- Benson & Voller, 1997

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What is an autonomous learner?

- Someone qualifies as an autonomous learner when (s)he independently chooses aims and purposes and sets goals; chooses materials, methods and tasks; exercises choice and purpose in organising and carrying out the chosen tasks; and chooses criteria for evaluation.

- Holec 1982

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What is a ‘good’ autonomous learner?

- Appropriate goals
- Effective materials, methods and tasks
- Good organisation
- Relevant evaluation

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My definition

- **An autonomous learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning.**
- **They can identify:**
  - **their learning goals (what they need to learn)**
  - **their learning processes (how they will learn it)**
  - **how they will evaluate and use their learning**

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Characteristics of an ‘effective’ autonomous learner

- they have well-founded conceptions of learning
- they have a range of learning approaches and skills
- they can organize their learning
- they have good information processing skills
- they are well motivated to learn

STANCE TOWARDS LEARNING

Orientation to learning
Appropriate conceptions of learning
Deep approach to learning
A range of appropriate learning styles

WILLINGNESS TO LEARN

Balance of vocational, academic, personal and social motivations to learn
Intrinsic motivation
Extrinsic motivation
Goals
Short - Medium - Long
Confidence

INFORMATION

Information handling
Access to resources:

On line and Paper-based
Role models (people, exemplars, designs)
Equipment
Other learners
Contexts

MANAGEMENT

Study Skills
Planning and problem solving
Overview & co-ordination
Evaluation & Metacognition
Self-assessment
Focus & 'stickability'
Time and project management
Balancing social, work and learning needs
Assessment

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At Sheffield Hallam?

- Is it an oxymoron?
- Is it an aspiration?
- Is it a graduate outcome?
- What is it?

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It is a journey

- We become more autonomous learners as we make more of our own choices about what we learn and how we learn it.

dependence

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It is a journey

- We become more autonomous learners as we make more of our own choices about what we learn and how we learn it.

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An Oxymoron?

- Assessment
  - Aligned with learning outcomes and activities
  - Motivates and engages students
  - Formative
  - Flexible
  - Choice
  - Self and peer assessment

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Access at Sheffield Hallam

- Relevant learning environment
  - Skills in context of subject
  - Student-centred
  - Choice
- Wide ranging resources
  - Information, ICT, internet, staff, student support
  - Fellow students

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What else?

- High quality, cutting edge, responsive,
- Employability
- Support
- Forward looking

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Autonomy +

Professional skills

Teamwork and leadership

Communication skills

- Presentation
- Negotiation
- Questioning
- Responding
- Building

Progressive

Building on experience and skills

Cutting edge learning environments

Partnerships

With students

- Design
- Evaluation

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Implications (by 2010?)

- For students
  - To accept responsibility
  - To understand the nature of Higher Education
  - To understand the learning environment
  - To work together
  - To reflect on their own learning
  - To develop learning and information skills
  - To share their learning
  - To apply it
- For staff
  - To understand what it means in the context of their own discipline
  - To accept a change in their role
  - To provide support and direction
  - To give feedback
  - To balance reactive and proactive approaches
  - To develop their own skills as facilitators of learning

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Implications (by 2010)

- For staff
  - To understand the students
  - To work WITH students in a partnership
  - To involve them in setting goals (short, medium long)
  - To involve them in evaluating their experience
  - To listen to them
  - To take risks
  - To encourage the student to take risks

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Finally

- Developing learner autonomy is difficult
- Developing environments in which learners can become more autonomous is difficult
- Supporting students in becoming more autonomous is difficult

- But it is what higher education is about
- And it is what lifelong learning is about

- And it is a journey

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Thank you