



Exploring learner counselling through group tutorials

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Ruth Wilkinson
UCLM, Spain/ULB, Brussels

ruth.g.wilkinson@gmail.com



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The students

Why have you failed me?
I've learned the book!

- Spanish university students on degree of English Philology
- Second year English language class (aged 20-27)
- Accustomed to very traditional, teacher-controlled learning-style
- Very passive, exam-orientated mentality
- Don't know where they are going wrong and what to do about it

COULD THE ANSWER BE LEARNER AUTONOMY?!?



Key notions

- Developing students' autonomy requires significant changes in both students' and teachers' constructs (Little 1991)
- Need for awareness-raising process (Scharle and Szabó 2000)
- Takes us outside our own and our students' comfort zones (Broady)
- Gradual and fluid handing-over of responsibility (Dam 1995)
- Working for autonomy not about individualism, but interdependence (Benson 2001)
- Knowledge constructed through social interaction (Vygotsky 1978, Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976)
- Lasting and transferrable learning takes place by making connections with what is already known



The Action Research Project

Project 1

- Self-assessment and goal-setting
- Portfolio
- Choosing learning materials
- Homework sharing (Dam 1995)
- Grammar presentations
- Peer review compositions and oral work
- Series of written reflections

(Wilkinson 2010)



Outcomes

- Positive response
- Students much more 'awake'
- Changing attitudes and behaviours
(Wilkinson 2011)



Limitations

- Difficulties with self-assessment/goal-setting:
 - Goals very vague, not always appropriate
 - Some students found it threatening or de-motivating
- Some resistance, 'reluctant reflectors'
- Improbability of transfer to other areas: SS saw work as limited to this subject. Not applicable to other subjects which simply required memorisation of contents.



Project 2

As for Project 1 PLUS more in-depth work
on self-assessment, goals and
strategies...

AND



Group tutorials!

Why *group* 'learning to learn' tutorials?

Students' need for guidance>

- > Advising for Learner autonomy
- > Usually 1-1 and voluntary

Decision to use group approach based on:

- > Desire to reach all students
- > Generate interdependence/group scaffolding
- > Transmit message that SS can find own solutions together
- > Create rising spiral of success, motivation, renewed action...





Phase 1 Group Tutorials

WHEN? Late February (after first semester exams)

WHERE? In ordinary classroom

HOW? Groups of 2-4 students
15 minutes



Phase 1 Tutorials: Outcomes

Allowed students to:

- evaluate their own progress
- provide useful feedback on the new activities

Allowed the teacher to:

- ensure goals and methods for achieving them are relevant and appropriate
- clarify expectations, provide reassurance

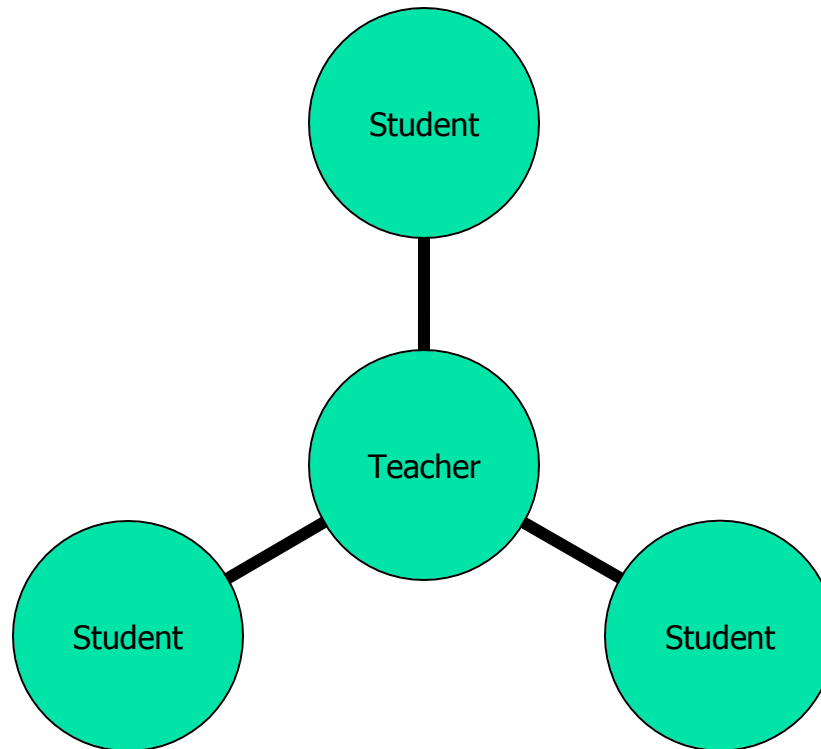


But...





Or rather...





Personal blocks or 'knots'...

'Cos I don't know how to lose the fear (*of speaking*), it's quite difficult to face your own problems. And, it's very different to develop a skill and to, erm...not be like you are, so you have to change your way of being.

It's my personality,
I'm shy...

I can't organise myself. I'm a
disaster.
It's my Mission Impossible

I just can't, it's impossible
for me... I'm not able to do
that



Phase 2 Group tutorials

WHEN? Just before final exams (late April)

WHERE? Cosy seminar room

HOW? 2-4 students
 50 minutes

Try to adopt more of a 'facilitating' role

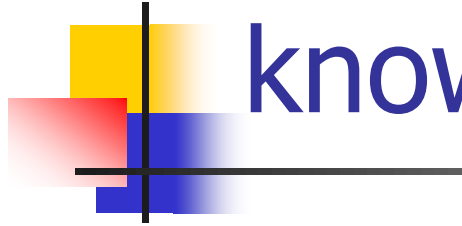
Catalyst > questionnaire on Emotional and Organisational strategies from ELP



Outcomes

- Changing teacher discourse
- Improved student-student interaction
- Group construction knowledge
(*see hand-out*)

Group construction of knowledge





In their own words...

“they make you think about what you need, what you can do to improve your learning”

“it forced us to think about our learning strategies, because we probably wouldn’t have done that otherwise...”

“and we tried to explain ourselves, so it’s something which helped us express ourselves”

“because you could also have our opinion about the matter, because if there is no relation between the student and the teacher then it’s just pointless”

“being in the group is good because you can share experiences and share ideas”

(Follow-up interviews, 1 year later)



Any disadvantages...

“If you are shy...”

“No, I feel great! Because it’s a personal, let’s say that it’s a care that not many teachers take, to know the pupils”.

My own conclusion

- GTs helped SS define relevant learning goals and methods for achieving them
- Monitor and celebrate progress
- Assimilate, develop and apply knowledge about the learning process and their own unique learning style to new areas of their lives and learning
- Find original ways to 'untie' their personal 'knots' with the help of their friends



And...

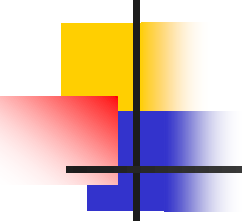
- Smooth out difficulties and resistance
- Transform T-S relationships
- Improve quality of T-S and S-S communication
- Enhance sense of group and class identity
- Improve their English!



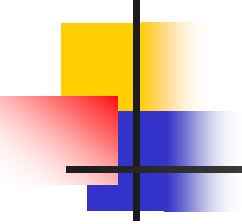
**It's like someone has
opened you a new
door....**

CLM





...you just see new things, and new ways to analyse things [...] it's been a general change also in myself, not just in the way I see studies, in the way I see everything [...] because before I centred myself more on trivial things than on the important things. Now I'm changing, I'm in the process...



“Success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom.”

Stevick (1980:4)



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