

Autonomy in language learning: the complete worms

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It seems only fitting that the final article in the Worms series (see Vera this issue) should be published just a short time before IATEFL returns to Harrogate for its 2010 conference. Four years ago, on Tuesday 11th March 2006 at the 40th International IATEFL Conference in Harrogate, the then newly renamed Learner Autonomy Special Interest Group (formerly the Learner Independence SIG) held its Open Forum. At the forum, incoming Coordinator Carol Everhard revealed to those present her idea of ‘releasing’ some of the ‘worms’ from a ‘can’ that had previously been introduced in *Independence*. There Carol had written:

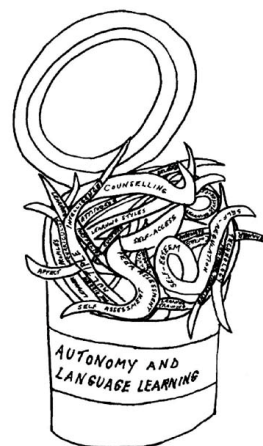
*While ALL [=Autonomy in Language Learning] seems a most logical and desirable aim, which most ELT educationalists would endorse, it remains, in many cases, an unfulfilled and unattainable dream. This may be because ALL does not appear to be achievable by practising any one teaching methodology, nor does ALL seem to be facilitated by any one principle or practice, but, on the contrary, seems to involve taking into account a whole range of issues. While many of these issues have been quite thoroughly investigated by specialists in the field and familiarity with their work inspires us with confidence, at the same time, beliefs, reactions and outcomes are not always predictable and the solving of one niggling issue in relation to ALL may lead us to several others which have either been neglected or ignored, or have become entangled and entwined so that they are of much greater complexity than is immediately apparent. In this sense, engagement with ALL can be viewed as something akin to ‘opening a can of worms’... (Carol Everhard, 2006, Autonomy and the language classroom: opening a can of worms, *Independence* 37: 2)*

Participants in the 2006 Forum proposed seven Worms for release, each relating to an issue in autonomy in language learning. The initial areas selected for the Worms were as follows:

- assessment
- autonomy and its appropriateness
- counselling/advising
- learner training
- motivation
- self-access
- teacher autonomy

Participants in the 2006 Forum then discussed which teacher, teacher educator or academic might be

approached to take up office as a ‘Keeper of a Worm’. This person would be asked to begin the process of ‘throwing light’ on the respective area of concern, by producing a piece of writing



to be published in *Independence*, and then to be responsible for passing the Worm on and guiding it across the globe. Thus, the idea behind the releasing of Worms was to generate a chain of correspondence and literature on each topic as the Worm was passed on from one correspondent to another.

Now, four years later, with the publication of the last Worms article in *Independence* 48, we can report that there were 11 chains of correspondence in total, with the following four Worms released subsequent to the 2006 launch of the ‘Magnificent Seven’:

- classroom research
- culture
- teacher education
- technology.

The Worms were primarily overseen by Carol, and also Richard Smith. As sole editor of *Independence* issues 38-44, Richard saw each piece of writing on a particular Worm into print. From *Independence* 45, Richard stepped

back from acting as main editor to become reviews editor of the newsletter. At about the same time, he also became the joint convenor of the *AILA Research Network on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning* (www.ailarenla.org).

As the Worms complete their cycle, we would like to take this opportunity to offer, on behalf of LA SIG members, our sincere thanks to Carol for creating the Worms and to Richard for guiding them deftly into print, as well as to wish Richard every success with his *AILA Research Network* responsibilities. We would also like to show our great appreciation to Jo Mynard for overseeing the virtual

presence of the Worms on the Learner Autonomy SIG's amazing website—and, of course, to say thank you to each author of a Worms article for contributing to the respective chain of correspondence.

Below you will find the complete worms bibliography in chronological order from first article to last: thus, the Keeper of each Worm is the first named author. To the Keepers, too, we would like to say a big thank you on behalf of Learner Autonomy SIG members for their engaging contributions to these discussions of issues related to the development of autonomous language learning.

The complete worms bibliography

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