



Guidelines for Maximising Student Use of Independent Learning Centres: Support for ESOL Learners

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Biographical Statement



Kerstin Dofs is currently the Manager of the Language Self Access Centre (LSAC) at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) where she has worked for nine years. She has previously worked as an English language teacher in Sweden and New Zealand and has recently finished an advising qualification, a Masters of Arts in Language Learning and Technology, through the University of Hull, UK. Her research interest lies in the area of language learning strategies, self-access and autonomous learning.

Moira Hobbs has worked at Unitec in Auckland for the past thirteen years – initially as an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher, but now she has a 0.5 role as Manager of the Language Learning Centre and Teacher Resources at the main campus in Mt Albert. The other half of her work is as an Academic Development Lecturer for students from a range of vocational disciplines at the Northern campus. Both these positions exhibit a continuing commitment to helping students achieve their short and long term learning goals and satisfy her long-term research interests in self-access learning and autonomy.

Thus, from a background of ESOL language teaching and learner advising, both researchers have been managing and developing Self-Access Centres in their respective tertiary institutions for several years. Over this time, they have formed a fruitful collaborative research and peer support partnership, and have been attending and presenting their various research interests at a range of conferences over the past ten years or so – from Hong Kong and China to Harrogate, from Melbourne to Japan, and from Auckland to Dunedin.



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Executive Summary

Rationale

Self-Access Centres (SACs) and Independent Learning Centres (ILCs) have been an integral part of many tertiary language schools around the world for several decades. However, over the past five years or so, there have been restructurings, new developments, financial constraints and an on-going burgeoning interest in distance and blended learning, all of which have had some influence on the functionality, utilisation, effectiveness and management of ILCs. Therefore the pertinent question and focus of this study was What is Good Practice regarding student support in Independent Learning Centres in New Zealand today?

The research project

These Guidelines were developed as an Ako Aotearoa-funded qualitative descriptive research project which involved 14 tertiary institutions throughout the country, to benchmark existing frameworks and services of their (mainly language self-access) centres and discover what current leaders in this field believe is Good Practice and how they can best deliver this

Data collection was triangulated from questionnaires, interviews and personal observations to give a more complete overview and differing perspectives

After a review of current literature, qualitative data was gathered via centre visits and interviews with managers and other workers involved. These visits and interviews focused on three major issues relating to maximising student use of ILCs and included:

1. **Enquiry into the successful management of centre staff and resources to ensure the best possible array of services and resources to enable positive outcomes for learners**
2. **Methods of engaging learners in the centre and their learning**
3. **Fostering autonomous learning in general**

The researchers were also taken on centre tours, so could make first-hand observations and take photos where possible. This data was then analysed using a method of structured, focused comparison as suggested by Creswell (2009) to track and document the major themes. Therefore, the study was narrated through a description of each centre and themes within these centres then thematically analysed.



After this initial analysis, a follow-up questionnaire was sent out to some centres. This ensured that there were responses to similar questions regarding what contributes to a good centre. Five major themes which emerged from the study were:

1. **The roles of people involved in the centre**
2. **The resources and activities provided for learners**
3. **The range and organisation of support services being offered**
4. **The philosophical and physical place of ILCs within institutions and student programmes**
5. **The support for the centre from the teachers, schools and institutes**

This then, formed an up-to-date description of the centres visited in 2009-2010, which was subsequently used as a source of Good Practice ideas for these Guidelines. ILCs and institutions do not work in isolation, therefore these Guidelines also describe some other national and global influences and networks relevant to the study. This research project was also an important next step following previous action research studies involving three centres completed by the researchers. The studies conducted by Dofs and Hornby (2006) and Dofs (2008 & 2009) investigated the use of a SAC, suggested strategy training for teachers and learners to enhance the learning outcome for students and then evaluated and researched the effectiveness of this. Hobbs' previous research was into advisory services (Hobbs & Jones Parry, 2005) and learning and assessment technology (Haines & Hobbs, 2007). Other relevant publications involving ILCs in New Zealand are written by Reinders, Anderson, and Jones Parry (2003) and Lázaro and Reinders (2008).

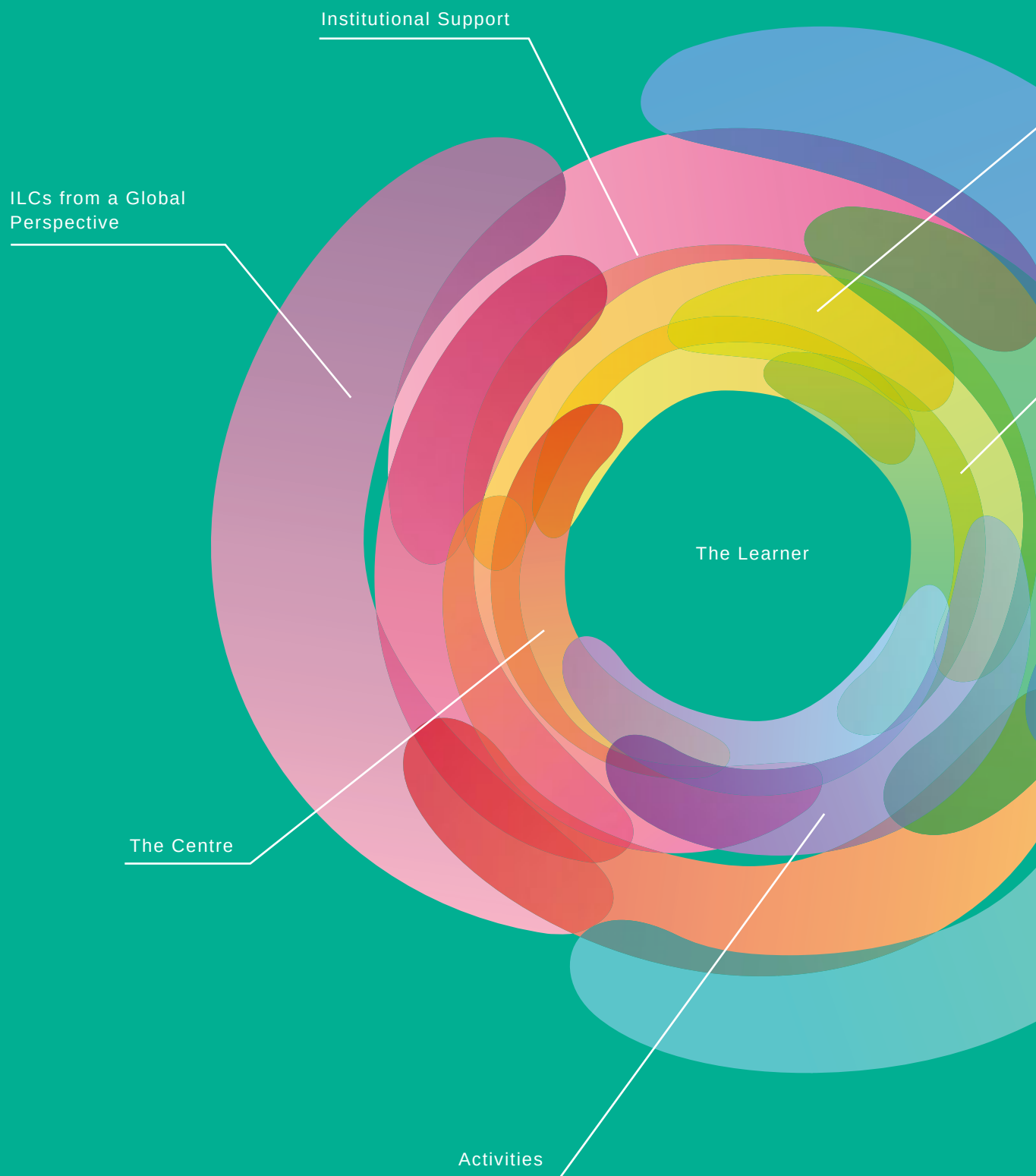


Identified Good Practice

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This current study aimed to provide examples of Good Practice in the running of ILCs, with the aim of maximising student use, and these have been compiled in the following Guidelines for easy reference by anyone seeking to set up a centre or improve the service they already offer. Sections 1-8 include all the Good Practice suggestions that have emerged. More work clearly needs to be done in the area of evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of self-access learning and self-access centres as well as in assessing the development of autonomy and/or proficiency gains from the learners' perspective. However, this study indicates a desire from a range of tertiary institutions to provide some form of useful and beneficial independent learning centre, to encourage life-long learning, and to support students toward taking more control of the process. The best way to do this within existing funding mechanisms and other institutional demands is a challenge, but one that is being met in a range of ways and using various strategies, by different departments and schools within these institutions.





The Rose

Managers and Staff

Resources, Materials
and Equipment

ILCs from
a National Perspective

After working together on this project for nearly two years, the researchers decided to use the metaphor of a rose to encompass the concept and explanation of what they were doing and what they found out. The learner is the starting point and continual central reference point for any tertiary institution, its staff and programmes. Therefore, the image of a rose, having multiple layers of petals emanating from the central core was a great metaphor for the learner-centred approach. This approach also incorporates an overlapping of support structures, scaffolded development, and a blossoming as awareness, learning and personal growth are awakened and fostered. The rose also represents caring, safe hands surrounding and nurturing the developing learner. The image is also applicable to the work of ILCs - the petals radiate from the learner through the ILC's physical and human resources to the higher levels of institutional management and out into the global arena.



How to use these Guidelines

These Guidelines are indicators of Good Practice and are designed to be used by existing centres looking to enhance their provision, and for other institutions wanting to establish a centre of some form or other, for example, a self-aided centre alongside a regular academic learning support centre. Centre workers can simply use the example boxes, the lists of suggestions, the checklist for materials and resources and then refer back to the Guidelines for more background information.

The Guidelines follow the rose metaphor as well, with the findings and discussions also using the learner as the centre point. This basic principle, whereby everyone involved continually checks if and how the learner's needs are being met, underpins the information and examples presented in the following sections. Therefore, section 1 focuses on the role of the learner, while each subsequent section reflects another layered petal of learner support or enabling infrastructure to enable learning to be fostered. Thus sections 2 and 3 describe some good activities, resources and materials that learners can use for autonomous learning. Section 4 outlines the support available in an ILC from the manager and other staff members while section 5 considers the ILC and the philosophies underlying its layout and explores student use. Moving outwards further from the learner's standpoint, section 6 describes and analyses the support needed for the ILC itself at an institutional level. The two final sections, 7 and 8, overlay a national and international perspective to reflect the connection between learners, ILCs and the wider community.

The information included in these sections has developed from a combination of complementary sources; existing literature, the data and results from the research project and the researchers' own experiences. Through identifying and celebrating examples of Good Practice already evident around New Zealand, the authors aim to foster and enhance effective learning and teaching within all centres. Aotearoa will be an easily accessible repository of this knowledge and the web host for an e-Community of Practice (CoP), so that people from all sectors of tertiary education with an interest in self-aided autonomous learning and ILCs can share ways of promoting educational opportunities and expectations for the learners. It is hoped that the CoP will comprise a form of virtual communication including a "question and answer" forum, suggestions for good resources (both online and in book form), and a current list of conferences relevant to our work interests. (see <http://aotearoa.ac.nz/research-register/781>)



Background: Description of the Research Project

Rationale

Self-Accredited Centres (SACs) and Independent Learning Centres (ILCs) have been an integral part of many tertiary language schools around the world for several decades. However, over the past five years or so, there have been restructurings, new developments, financial constraints and an on-going burgeoning interest in distance and blended learning, all of which have had some influence on the functionality, utilisation, effectiveness and management of ILCs. So the pertinent question and focus of this study was 'What is Good Practice' regarding student support in Independent Learning Centres in New Zealand today?

The study of ILCs throughout New Zealand is an important next step following previous action research studies completed by the researchers which involved three centres. The earlier studies investigated the use of one SAC, suggesting strategy training for teachers and learners to enhance the learning outcome for students and then evaluating and researching the effectiveness of this (Dofs & Hornby, 2006) and (Dofs, 2008 & 2009). The other studies investigated advisory services at two centres (Hobbs & Jones-Parry, 2005) and learning and access to technology in a language school (Haines & Hobbs, 2007).

This research project aims to produce some useful Good Practice Guidelines for centre workers, teachers and senior institutional managers in New Zealand. Another aim is to add to a growing body of knowledge in the field of self-paced and autonomous learning by investigating

In this section

- ▶ Rationale
- ▶ Literature review
 - Autonomous learning
 - Centres and their management
 - Learner involvement
 - Advising
 - Learner training, skills practice and strategy awareness
 - Teacher involvement/classroom connection
 - Support structures
 - Evaluation
- ▶ Method
- ▶ Results



and presenting an up-to-date snapshot of current practices of student support in a range of ILCs throughout the country. It will identify some of the issues currently facing these centres and suggest some solutions to counteract them. As a result of the collaboration with the participating centres, and guided by relevant literature, a valuable resource of innovative Good Practice ideas is expected to evolve.

Literature review

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This literature review is a brief overview as ideas and sources have been included and referenced throughout the Guidelines.

Autonomous learning

There is an on-going debate about autonomous learning which revolves around its definition and value for successful learning. Many different views on what autonomy entails have emerged over the years, for example, Benson and Voller (1997) suggest that autonomy does not necessarily mean total learner control and they provide five common interpretations of what autonomy stands for:

- “1. for situations in which learners study entirely on their own*
- 2. for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning*
- 3. for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education*
- 4. for the exercise of learners’ responsibility for their own learning*
- 5. for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning” (pp.1-2).*

If institutions choose to encourage autonomous learning they can in fact adhere to all the above definitions by setting up self-access centres and/or incorporating self-study time into the curriculum. In so doing they can provide for self-study situations (1.), teach transferable skills for independent studies (2.), actively encourage



learners to use their innate aptitude to learn (3.), create opportunities for learners to take advantage of for their own learning (4.), and let learners take control of their own learning as much as possible (5.).

Benson (2001) brings social and economic factors and ideological perspectives into the debate in support of encouraging autonomous learning. He argues that:

“Socio-economic and ideological changes are rapidly bringing the notion of the autonomous learner into harmony with dominant ideologies of what it means to be a fully functioning member of a modern society” (p.19).

This is also in line with Weinstein's (2009) opinion that key elements for success are the ability to take initiative and employ self-direction on the part of the learner. Another prerequisite is having innovative support systems to help students master the multi-dimensional skills required by institutions in the 21st century.

Centres and their management

SACs, ILCs and Language Learning Centres (LLCs) all have similar ultimate goals – to help students maximise their learning opportunities and to foster autonomous learning. Benson (1997) claims that provision of a self-access centre alone does not necessarily lead to autonomous learning. Rather, it is the approach applied in the centre that leads to the development of autonomous learning and independence. Gardner and Miller (1999) add that if institutions provide insufficient management support for SACs they are wasting their resources because it would lead to less uptake of the facilities by learners. Morrison (2007) also reinforces that centres need to be both effectively organised and supported by the institutions. Morrison (2008) extends this by focusing on the actual centre level and he outlines the four main roles of a SAC as



“...bringing together language learning and independent learning, enabling the learner to improve both linguistic proficiency and independent learning skills; providing the necessary resources and providing learner support...”
(p.123).

He outlines the specific value and the central role of a SAC and points out the importance of knowledgeable staff:

“...specifically in terms of identifying learner needs...”
(p. 134).

He also espouses the need for suitable facilities with a good supply of appropriate, varied, relevant, structured and accessible learning materials, which all form the basis for efficient learner support for autonomy in a SAC:

“...the SAC acts as a catalyst for independent learning and as a provider of both human and non-human learner support...” (p. 134).

Two of the foci of this study were to find out current approaches regarding autonomous learning at centres (including the management of the centres themselves), and to gather Good Practice ideas for autonomous learning support.

Learner involvement

Another focus of this project was to investigate the techniques and levels of learner involvement in New Zealand centres. Learner involvement and its implications on the viability of centres has also been investigated by other researchers (Sheerin, 1989; Aston, 1993; Malcolm, 2004). It is mutually beneficial for students and an ILC if students develop a feeling of ownership over the centre, as Sheerin (1989) points out:



“...the advantages are many: students become more self-reliant and responsible...and they have more opportunities for getting to know the system well, and of influencing its development.” (p. 33).

Advising

Mozzon-McPherson (2001) argues that learner advising is a key element for successful independent studies. She clarifies later (2007) that a SAC, having an aim to gradually develop autonomous learners, generates a need for staff in an advising role to supplement the role of the teacher:

“...advisors have a significant highly skilled role as mediators between traditional models of teaching delivery and a transformed model in which dialog is a pedagogic tool in developing learners’ understanding of the mechanics and contextual role of language learning.” (p.82).

Moreover, she declares that centres offering one-on-one advisory sessions and individual guidance need to be aware of the conditions necessary for the advisory service to work as intended - students sometimes may demand one-on-one teaching rather than learning how to become more autonomous learners. Conversely, newly qualified advisers may be overly supportive in their attempt to help. It is therefore important for advisors to be aware of and learn to maintain the balance between over-informing students and encouraging them to seek out answers for themselves.

In research into student opinions of language advisory services, Hobbs and Jones-Parry (2007) found that there appeared to be a:

“...shift in learners’ attitudes and willingness to take responsibility for their learning...” (p.139).



and they showed signs of:

“...heightened metacognitive awareness and an increased confidence in their ability to manage their learning.” (p.139).

Learner training, skills practice and strategy awareness

Sheerin (1989) argues that provision of self-access centres does not guarantee a full and efficient use of those facilities by students. Some kind of guidance or learner training is needed so learners can learn the skills to make the best use of it. This is expressed by Sinclair (1996):

“...experience has shown that the average learner needs a period of guided induction and adjustment to the demands of self-directed learning, especially when it is presented in an institutionalised way in the form of a self-access centre.” (p.159).

Learner training aims to prepare learners for autonomous learning and to help students become more effective language learners. Ellis and Sinclair (1989) suggest that this should include discovery of suitable learning strategies and learning about factors that affect language learning. Wenden and Rubin (1987), Oxford (1990), and Brown (2002) have all suggested that learner strategy training should be initiated by the teacher in the classroom. Crabbe (1993) proposes that, when introducing tasks for improving language skills in the classroom, teachers should try to encourage autonomous learning by being overt with the purpose of the task, the difficulties it might present, and suggest some appropriate learning and communication strategies that can be used to meet those difficulties. This should allow for knowledge transfer from the classroom to students' own study situations outside the classroom, that is students can become more autonomous as a result. Dofs (2007) adds to this by suggesting that learner training in the classroom should be integrated with studies in a self-access centre. She refers to Brown's (2002) ideas of learners bringing useful

strategies for self-studies as an important part of this integration.

An important part of becoming an autonomous learner, as noted by Little (2003) is to utilise the capacity for self-management in learning:

“...a capacity to set one’s own learning goals, monitor one’s own learning progress, and evaluate one’s own learning outcomes...” (p. 223).

Sheerin (1997) prefers to call this “Learner Development” which implies a process in which students learn more about what they should include to make their own learning more efficient and not simply use a set of skills presented by their teachers or learning advisors. Brandon (2003) suggests the term “Guided Individual Learning” which entails a learner-centred process, and this incorporates a range of additional roles for the teacher such as guide, facilitator, counsellor and mentor. She places the control and responsibility for learning jointly between teachers/advisors and learners. Moreover, she states that best practice in guided individual learning can be defined as providing the most appropriate response to student goals and needs within the available pragmatic frameworks of budget and time.

Teacher involvement/classroom connection

As mentioned earlier, support for autonomous learning can be given both in the classroom and in an ILC. Lazaro and Reinders (2008) argue that independent learning is more effective when it is combined with classroom-based learning. The Socrates Lingua Learner Autonomy Group (2004) maintains that learner autonomy development and learners taking charge of their own progress can only be successful if the control over and responsibility for the learning situation is gradually transferred from teacher to learner. However, Sheerin (1989) points out that this requires a teacher attitude change which may not be easy for teachers as she notes that:



“Most teachers have been trained and gained their experience in the traditional mode” (p.7).

Kanana (2007) suggests a model for fostering learner autonomy through “apprenticeship of learner strategies” in which :

“Teachers’ metacognitive knowledge and skills for critical reflection should be shared through teacher-student dialogue. Students should be guided in a scaffolded way with explicit instruction in the beginning, and then, the locus of control should be gradually shifted to the side of the learners.” (p.6).

Support structures

Gardner and Miller (1997) state that, besides providing money and space for the ILCs institutional support should also include specialised training for the managers and as Morrison-McPherson (2007) argues the institution needs to provide the necessary infrastructure so that all parts of the self-access system work efficiently as a learning scheme. Dofs and Hornby (2006) also identified a number of recommended institutional support measures for ILCs from Boxen (1993; Curriculum and Independence for the Learner (CIEL) language support network 2000; Cotterall & Reinders 2001; Brandon, 2003; Vinkler, Lotoile, & Jones Parry, 2004; and Chanok (2004).

In summary, institutions and their senior management should:

1. **Provide adequate funding for staff, resources, materials and facilities**
2. **Be positively oriented to, and supportive of, an ILC culture**
3. **Provide on-going staff induction and professional development relating to an ILC**
4. **Oversee relationships with other organisations, faculties and departments**



5. **Include ILC considerations in programme documentation and course outcomes**
6. **Provide pre- and in-service training for teachers in the advisor/counsellor/mentor role**
7. **Fund the development of information guides for learners and teachers about ILC provision**

Evaluation

Evaluation of learner gain in an ILC has proven to be difficult. Mozzon-McPherson (2007) states that the difficulties arise because:

"...learning consists of the reorganisation and restructuring of the learning experience rather than the gradual internalisation or discovery or pre-determined knowledge ... subjectivity, rather than objectivity, comes to the fore and with it an emphasis on learner's representations, beliefs and behaviours." (pp.12-13).

This subjectivity makes it imperative to undertake further follow-up research with the key stakeholders to get a true picture of the success or not of the ILC in terms of student outcomes and satisfaction. Mynard (2006) suggests that it is:

"...far more beneficial to describe and discuss evidence of learner autonomy in a given context rather than attempt to measure it." (p. 3).

Morrison (2005b) proposes the use of learning diaries, tests, learner portfolios, focus groups and various types of self-assessment as evaluation tools. He maintains that it is possible to evaluate learning gain but not necessarily from an objective view point. His proposed tools can:

"...help the learner to make an informed judgement about the degree of learning gain achieved. It is for the learner to decide which of these to use and how, with the support and guidance, where appropriate, from the SAC teacher." (p. 286).



A more recent research project on evaluation of learning gain in a Self Access Centre was done by Law (2011). This study identified the kinds of learning gain that participants perceived they had in the self-access language learning process. A tentative conclusion was that providing appropriate learner support enhances the learning gain of learners

Method

The aim of this research project was to present an up-to-date snapshot of current practices in some ILCs (mainly language self-access centres) throughout New Zealand, to identify some of the issues currently facing these centres and to create a store of innovative Good Practice ideas for maximising student use of ILCs

A qualitative descriptive methodology was employed for the study. With regard to presenting a snapshot of current practices, data was collected through a telephone interview with one manager and face-to-face interviews with key personnel at the other thirteen tertiary institutions visited – a selection of polytechnic universities and private training enterprises. They were situated throughout the country in; Auckland (5), Hamilton (2), Rotorua (1), Wellington (1), Nelson/Marlborough (1), Christchurch (3), and Dunedin (1).

Table 1 shows key interventions at critical times throughout the research project.

Table 1. Overview of the research project

Intervention	Time
Visiting institutions	2009 - 2010
Interviewing key staff members	2009 - 2010
Data processing	2010
Completing questionnaires	2010
Data processing	2010 - 2011
Reporting	2011



The visits enabled an exploration and documentation of current facilities and practices at the institutions. The interviews took about one hour each and focused on issues relating to maximising student use of ILCs. A follow-up questionnaire was sent out to ensure that all the enquiries were fully covered.

The combination of observations during visits, interviews and questionnaires enabled triangulation of data and facilitated investigation into Good Practice initiatives. All data was analysed using a method of structured, focused comparison, as suggested by Creswell (2009), to track and document the major themes which means the study was narrated through a description of each aspect (entre). Major themes which emerged from the study included:

1. **Whether institutions had a physical centre or not**
2. **If it was a dedicated language learning centre**
3. **Current issues and ideas about how to respond to them**
4. **The range and organisation of support services being offered through the centre**
5. **Various ways of advising learners**
6. **The roles of the manager of the centre**
7. **How learners were involved in the running of the centre and their learning**
8. **The resources and activities provided for learners**
9. **The philosophical and physical place of ILCs within institutions and student programmes**
10. **The support structures for the centre from the teachers, schools and institutes**
11. **How autonomous learning was fostered**

Data from all sources together with the authors' existing operational knowledge of ILC management were finally cross-referenced against the elements of Good Practice identified from the literature, and Guidelines for Good Practice for ILCs were identified.



Results

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Results from the following enquiries, reflecting the themes which arose, are described below.

Did institutions have an ILC or did they provide solely library/learning services support?

Did they have a dedicated language learning centre?

The results of the two questions above are outlined below. As Table 2 shows four of the institutions in the study were English language schools therefore their ILCs were for English language students only. Two institutions offered learning services through a library, that is they had no ILC so no special support for language students. Five institutions offered services in two separate entities on their campus. One was a dedicated language centre for English language students including foreign languages plus Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students studying in mainstream, while the other was for academic and maths students through Learning Services. Two of the institutions provided combined support in their learning centres that is for English language, academic needs, and maths. ILCs and student support are utilised by a variety of students at the institutions. Who may be using the centres depends mainly on the support offered, and on who is deemed to be able to have access to their service, for example, language students only, certificate students only, 'at risk' students only etc.



Table 2. Target groups for student support services

Inst itution	Who the s ervice is offered to	Comment
1	Englis h language s tudents Aa demic needs s tudents Maths s tudents Ree arb ers	A o mbined learning e ntre
2	Englis h language s tudents	
3	Language s tudents and NESB s tudents in main s ream t a s s + learning s ervice s for s tudents in mainstream t a s s	Ree ure s for Englis h as well as foreign languages are offered
4	Englis h language s tudents	
5	Englis h language s tudents	
6	Englis h language s tudents Aa demic needs s tudents Maths s tudents Ree arb ers	A o mbined learning e ntre
7	Aa demic needs s tudents Maths s tudents	
8	Englis h language s tudents and NESB s tudents in main s ream t a s s + learning s ervice s for s tudents in main s ream t a s s	The ILC is mainly for Englis h language prat ie
9	Language s tudents and NESB s tudents in main s ream t a s s + learning s ervice s for s tudents in mainstream t a s s	Ree ure s for Englis h as well as foreign languages are offered
10	Englis h language s tudents and NESB s tudents in main s ream t a s s + learning s ervice s for s tudents in main s ream t a s s	The ILC is mainly for Englis h language prat ie
11	Language s tudents and NESB s tudents in main s ream t a s s + learning s ervice s for s tudents in mainstream t a s s	Ree ure s for Englis h as well as foreign languages are offered
12	No specific centre	
13	No specific centre	
14	Englis h language s tudents	



What were the current issues and what ideas were there about how to counteract these?

The ILCs in the study seemed to be faced with a variety of issues with the following issues having the highest priority

1. **Receiving enough funding for the development and on-going maintenance of centres.** A few managers did not mention this as an issue and they seemed to have been pre-occupied with promoting the value and use of the centres amongst students and staff. They pointed out the importance of support from an understanding senior management at the institution as one reason for this issue.
2. **How to best promote the ILC and maintain support.** It was pointed out that managers could make sure they participate in a variety of committees and meetings at the institution to get insights into trends and developments that may affect the ILC. Some centres participated in and/or ran ILC specific interest support groups to gain knowledge and feel connected with the stakeholders of the ILC.
3. **How to deliver sufficient high quality service when more and more students arrive but the service may have been down-sized and therefore already stretched.** This may be best approached by well planned inductions for students working in the centre, so that they are well equipped for self-study. Student involvement in the running of the centre could also make a difference to the student-staff support ratio.
4. **How to best and most efficiently support student learning.** Initially some students were reluctant to use study booklets and advice sheets preferring to use their already established ways of studying which may not be the most efficient or effective. An action research based approach could be applied to making informed decisions about what and how to respond to this issue.



5. **The difficulty for managers to communicate on a regular basis with students, to be able to get information across to as many students as possible.** One of the managers complained about minimal utilisation of institutional email addresses. Some centres had set up Moodle sites for distribution of information, and Facebook and blog sites to reach students for less formal communication.
6. **Managers being faced with a wide array of tasks and responsibilities which may be difficult to accomplish.** This can be the situation if the centre is under-staffed or too small to accommodate more staff. If this is the case, a documentation and explanation of all tasks could be included in reports to senior management to alert them to the need for making the work situation more manageable. There may also be a need for some unconventional solutions such as temporarily engaging volunteers from outside the institutions or, as seen at one of the institutions, 'employing' student volunteers who get free tutorials in return for their services.
7. **Difficulty in incorporating online learning with learning in the ILC.** On-line learning offers a vast area. One idea could be to involve the ILC as a meeting place for students enrolled in blended learning courses that is, courses which have a component of face-to-face learning included in the on-line courses. Other examples found were: internet guides with specific websites and computer programs for individualised skills practice, vocabulary and grammar learning. Moodle sites were also used to direct learners to specific resources for autonomous learning. A summary of these sections is outlined in Table 3.

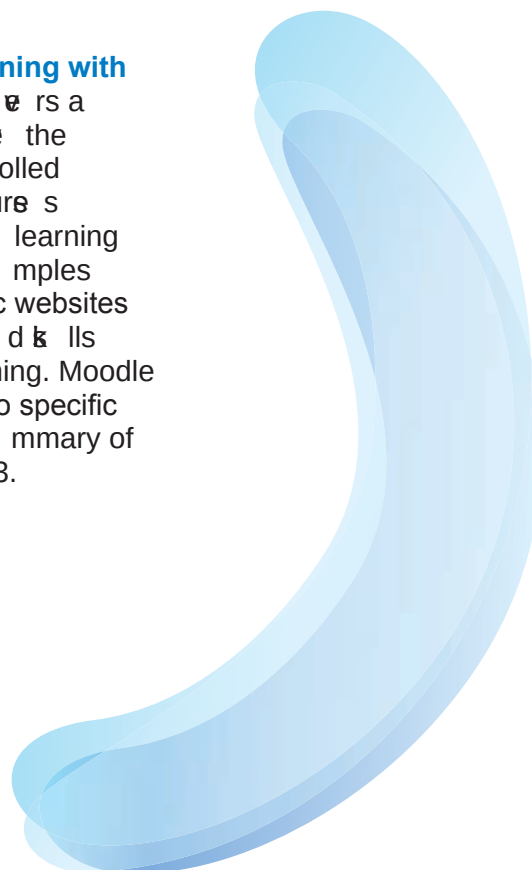


Table 3. A summary of issues ILCs are faced with and suggestions for creative solutions to counteract some of the issues

	Issues	Suggestions for solutions
1	Funding for development	Make sure there is support and understanding from the senior/institutional management level
2	Promoting and maintaining support	Managers should be members of a variety of committees and attend meetings at as many levels as possible in the institution
3	Service is always stretched	Have well-organised student orientations and introductions and involve students in peer teaching
4	How to best support students and give study guidance	Use of an action research based decision process could remedy this
5	Communication to reach students and institutional emails not working	Make use of Moodle, Facebook blogs as well as information about using the email system provided by the institution
6	Providing a wide range of tasks / being overworked	Communicate the situation to higher levels of responsibility and make use of volunteers
7	Incorporating online learning	Use the ILC as part of a blended learning course

What was the range and organisation of support services being offered through the centre?

Study support was provided in a variety of ways. All the centres featured somewhere on a continuum; from a comprehensive centre which included an established, viable and effective advisory service within an ILC on the one hand, to a centre solely for self-study on the other hand. The utilisation of ILCs also ranged from being included as part of the curriculum to being totally 'drop-in' based. Some institutions have not established learning centres yet, while others have cut back on their funding and services or disestablished them entirely. This study looked at ILC support levels as framed by the following questions:

Advising	Do students have an opportunity for one-on-one time with advisers in the centre?
Teacher involvement	Do teachers give guidance and support for autonomous learning in the centre and/or in the classroom?
Skills training	Is there any training of transferable skills conducted in the classroom which enhance student use of the ILC? Is there any skills training in the ILC, including skills advice sheets?
Learner training	Does the centre provide training in how to become a more autonomous learner? Can students learn about how to best utilise their study environment, understand their own beliefs/learning styles and associated relevant strategies? Can they be involved in self-awareness activities, learn how to analyse their needs set goals, make plans, assess their own work and evaluate their learning?
Strategy awareness	Is raising awareness about useful strategies part of what the ILC offer?
Classroom connection	Were there clear links between studies in the classroom and the ILC? Were ILC studies clearly integrated into the curriculum?
Peer involvement	Were there support structures built up amongst students which aimed at helping each other gain knowledge?



The answers have been collated in Table 4 and displayed in Graph 1.

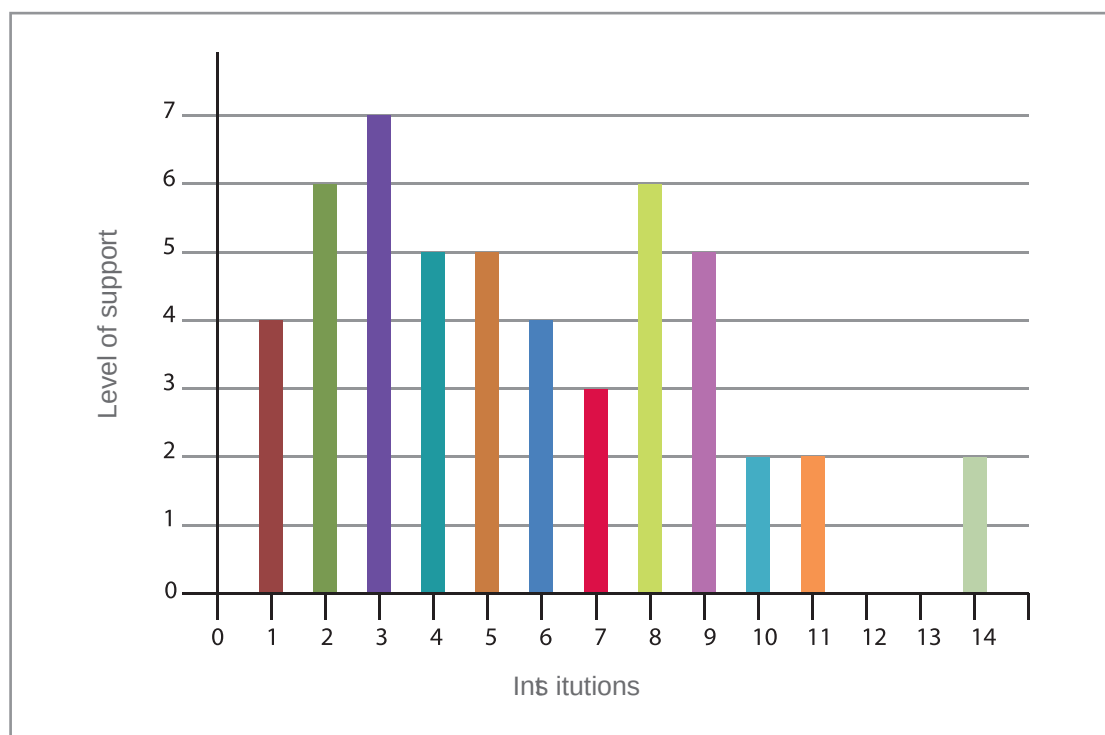
Table 4. Student support services offered at the 14 institutions

Institution Type of Support	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Advising	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X
Teacher involvement	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓
Skills training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X
Learner training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓
Strategy awareness	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X
Classroom connection	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Peer involvement	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X

The graph shows that two of the institutions seemed to not be focusing at all on autonomous learning, and institution number 12 had even disestablished their self-assessment centre. The student support service at institution number 13 was under reconstruction and had been not to include any specific ILC. It seemed at the time of the visit that a focus on autonomous learning support was not a priority.



Graph 1. Student support services offered at the 14 institutions



How was learner advising carried out?

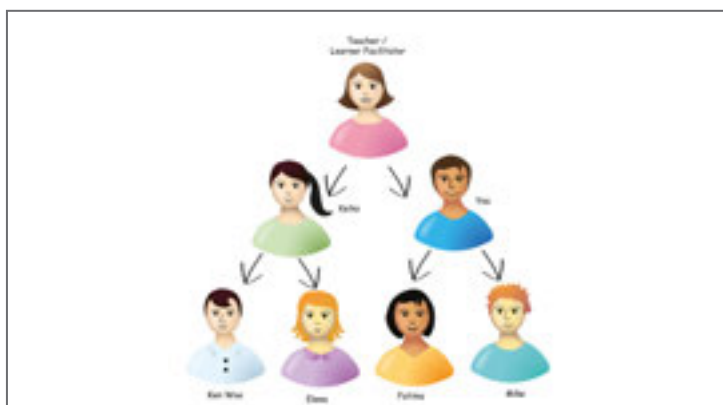
A range of ways of advising learners was found at the institutions including:

1. Teaching and learning study skills
2. Strategy advising
3. Utilisation of planning sheets
4. One-to-one sessions
5. Class workshops
6. Small group work such as:
 - a. Interactions with peers for example:
 - i. shared reflection
 - ii. self-knowledge exercises
 - b. drop-in advice
 - c. Peer Tutor and Learning Facilitator guidance
 - d. fan teaching



Fan teaching is a method that was developed as part of the self-study time at one of the institutions. It worked as follows:

The learning facilitator or the teacher showed two students how to, for example, use a piece of equipment, do an exercise, or use a learning technique for skills improvement. These two students then passed this knowledge on to another two students and so on, until all students who wanted to learn it had learnt it. It “fanned out” from the starting point.



What were the roles of the managers of the centres?

It was interesting to discover that titles were evenly split between higher status titles (Manager and Head) and lower status titles (Co-ordinator and Administrator). The latter title obviously reflects the nature of the contract, although some others paid on an administrative contract were also called managers.

Title	Number of centres
Manager	5
Co-ordinator	4
Administrator	2
Head	1



While philosophical and financial concerns tend to govern the human resources available in the centres, it was noticeable that only three centres had full time managers whereas four were half time positions. This clearly limits the services that the centres can offer (especially advising which is by its very nature, very labour-intensive). It may also limit other initiatives like organising orientation groups providing drop-in advice, preparing materials, creating food and workbooks and developing hand-outs etc.

Time allowance	Number of centres
Full time	5
Half time	6
5-7 hr/wk	1

The learning centres, although largely for language students, fell under the auspices of four main areas: Learning support, Language studies, Library commons and Foundation studies. Whichever area a centre comes under can affect the centre considerably. This could be in terms of management of day-to-day issues overall funding and staff performance. Other affects are budgetary control for centre materials, staffing allowances, funding for research, entitlement to professional development and academic leave, availability of time release to enable managers to undertake studies and networking opportunities. It was also noted that some centres under direct control of language schools suffered a managerial decrease in "centre time" and an increase in "teacher time" as the national and global economic situation became less buoyant.

Line management	Number of centres
General learning support	4
Language school	4
Foundation studies	1
Library commons	2



As language learner advising is heavily resource driven, it appears that regular advising is only offered by centres with full time managers although centres with part time managers could offer (a lesser) degree of advising.

Advising
3 of the 4 centres having FTE managers also offer regular advising sessions
3 other centres offer some advising for booking times

There did seem to be a correlation between management coverage and learner involvement - half of the centres with a notable amount of learner involvement had full time managers and another had a 0.5 full time equivalent (FTE) manager.

Learner involvement
6 centres recorded learner involvement
with 3 having full time managers

Besides the managers who also sometimes doubled as advisers there were a number of other personnel employed in the centres. Some of their titles were: lab supervisor, technician assistant, resource coordinator, facilities technician and administrative assistant.
(see section 4 Managers and Staff)



How were learners involved in the running of the centre and their learning?

(see section 2 Activities)

What resources and activities were provided for learners?

(see section 2 Activities and section 3 Resources, Materials and Equipment)

What was the philosophical and physical place of ILCs within institutions and student programmes?

(see section 5 The Centre)

What support structures for the centre from the teachers, schools and institutes were found?

(see section 6 Institutional Support)

How was autonomous learning fostered?

(see section 4 Managers and Staff)



Discussion and Implications for Teaching and Learning

After collating and analysing the results and aligning these with the petals of the learner rose, we can now consider the ideas noted, and the implications of some of these. The following sections have been compiled once again in a layered structure to reflect the learner as the central starting point of the discussions while still being mindful of the outer layers which encompass the learners from within the centres through to their membership within the global community.



1

The Learner

Students at the central core

.....

The overarching purpose for an Independent Learning Centre is to create a place centred around learners. Picture again the learner as a rose-bud, having a series of petals gradually opening out, allowing fulfilment from the students themselves and from their various interactions within and outside the centre. Each petal needs those beneath it, beside it and above it, interwoven and supported by each other to form a complete whole.

Tinto (2003) asserts that supporting students in a range of ways can be extremely beneficial for the students:

"Second, students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic, social, and personal support. Most students, especially those in their first year of college, require some form of support. Some may require academic assistance, while others may need social or personal support. Support may be provided in structured forms such as in summer bridge programs, mentor programs, and student clubs or it may arise in the everyday workings of the institution such as in student contact with faculty and staff advisor. Whatever its form, support needs to be readily available and connected to other parts of student collegiate experience, not separated from it" (p. 3).

In this section

- ▶ Students at the central core
- ▶ What the students can do
 - Orientation sessions
 - Learner profile
 - Needs analysis
 - Learning plans
 - Learning how to learn
 - Interaction and respect for other students
 - Self-evaluation and self-assessment
 - Peer support



Of course, having happy, successful students is also an imperative of many institutions which are having to adhere to more rigorous audits in the current financial climate, especially in terms of fees and retention statistics as these relate directly to Government funding.

Underpinning the philosophy of student/learner interface with the centre is the role that students have with their own learning - what they think the teacher and the learner roles are, their own learner beliefs how self-aware they are, their own understandings of what being a learner entails, and the self-belief and self-confidence that they can be successful learners. This will then influence how they view and develop their relationship with the centre and with the skills development support offered. These are all aspects of successful student engagement as stated by Currant (2010) and involvement of students as suggested by Tinto (2006).

At the core is also whatever philosophy of learning students may have in their learning goals and outcomes. This can influence their feeling of being part of a centre "family/whanau", members with a sense of belonging and ownership, and a stronger sense of engagement in their own learning. They are then in a Community of Learning, just as the staff are in a Community of Practice at another level. Other important aspects of autonomy can also be fostered within the learner in a social well-being centre, such as a growth in self-efficacy and self-esteem, and an understanding of their own student belief systems which in itself can be used to indicate "readiness" for autonomy as suggested by Cotterall (1995). Along with this self-awareness and 'self' control and ownership of emotional attachment and connection with the centre and the staff/peers within it, which in turn can feed into motivation. Ushioda (2011) describes how the key to enabling students' own motivation to grow and develop seems to lie in organising the social learning environment in such a way that students want to learn.



What the students can do

.....

In terms of maximising learner interactions at the “grass roots” level in the centre, there are several major factors that need to be considered in terms of action points for students, particularly if it is their first experience of the centre:

1. Orientation sessions

Students can attend one or two orientation sessions either:

- in class as part of the initial introduction to the School and/or course of study, presented by one of the staff members that students will be most in the ILC, and with the class teacher present
- in class or in a small group in the ILC
- individually in the ILC

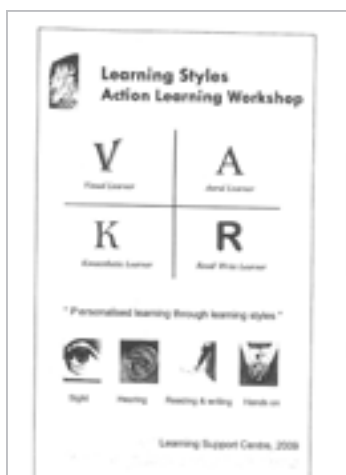
These orientations work better if students are given associated worksheets tailored to suit the appropriate level and/or study focus and some centres also provide one-pagers giving ideas of the range of resources available at a certain level of learning.

It is also useful to keep the initial introduction brief and visual, preferably with realia (objects from real life used in class room introduction to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real life situations), and then follow this up with a more detailed introduction and orientation after a week or two of classes. By this time students should have settled into their routine and know more about the course, the timetables, the requirements, and their own needs to succeed in the course.

2. Learner profiles

It is important to discover and understand what kind of learner a student might be, taking into consideration socio-cultural and academic backgrounds. This can be very useful for students discovering or reinforcing their own learner identities and beliefs and can be done in a range of ways.





- a. a simple self-questionnaire format (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989)
- b. information sheets about learning styles both pictorial and textual (Ward & Daley, 1988)
- c. “in house” worksheets for students to consider their own preferences and learner identities
- d. a free online profile questionnaire such as <http://www.marklearn.com/english/index.asp>
- e. more in-depth analyses (Willing, 1989, Oxford, 1990)
- f. a more general (Briggs Myers 1998) or business focused (Honey & Mumford, 1993) analyses

3. Needs analysis

Learners **a**n do a form of needs analysis which will vary for different learners for example:

- a. questionnaires or forms developed by individual centres to more closely reflect the needs and course requirements of the various student groups
- b. short ready-made questionnaires (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989)

4. Learning plans

Learners **a**n set up a learning plan and/or formulate a list of ideas about what they may want to do in the ILC. One **a**gain, this is largely influenced by their needs analyses and goals, both academic and personal. These may simply be closely aligned with the study goals and outputs but **a**n also include a wide range of personal goals depending on what the learner decides to study and focus on during their **e**lf-assess and/or independent study time. This is an ideal opportunity for learners to think about and take control of their learning – both in terms of **e**t **a**rrival, and also in terms of other **k**ills topics or content they may want to extend.

5. Learning how to learn

To build up life-long transferable learning **k**ills learners need to understand the process at a meta-cognitive level and trial specific strategy



training to practise techniques in a variety of ways including:

- a. strategy awareness and practice
- b. learner training, either individually or with ILC staff or the classroom teacher (or a combination of these)
- c. using content, skill or topic based worksheets

White (2008) supports this when he claims that language learning strategies contribute to the domain of independent language learning, as learners need to:

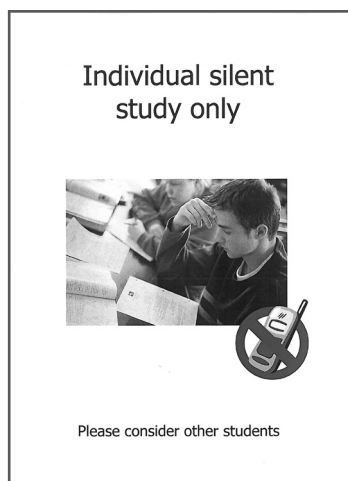
"...develop the ability to engage with, interact with, and derive benefit from learning environments which are not directly mediated by the teacher ... largely by constructing a personally meaningful interface with the learning context, and that strategies play a key role in this regard." (p. 3).

Oxford (2008) similarly reinforces the value of strategies and states

"Learning strategies (and their associated tactics) such as those in the metacognitive, affective, cognitive and social-interactional categories ... are crucial because they concretely help independent learners become autonomous" (p. 58).

Note that elements of (3), (4), and (5) above are also well covered in Gardner and Miller (1996), Willing (1988 & 1989) and other more general learning student resources (Cottrell, 1999; Lewis & Reinders, 2003; Brown, 2002). Some centres display a selection of these books plus suggestion sheets, and specific activities that students may choose to try, along with some background information about how and why these methods can work. This information is usually a combination of sheets made up by the centre staff themselves as well as some ready made sheets from other sources (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Ward & Daley, 1988; and Gardner & Miller, 1996).





6. Interaction and respect for other students

As all teachers know, class hours alone are not enough to enable students to pass a course of learning, and it is important for learners to understand this as well, and to make use of another valuable resource – their peers. This is encouraged in some centres by organising the furniture in a way that a sense of community is fostered whenever possible and appropriate, and by promoting orientation groups and discussions within the centre. Another important requirement of course, is for learners to respect each other's needs for space and quiet, and this can be assisted by planning spaces for less noisy areas as you enter further within the centre, and by signage to remind others to work quietly in certain areas. Some centres also have separate rooms which can be booked for noisier group work and shared discussions.

7. Self-evaluation and self-assessment

One of the main attributes of being autonomous and being able to undertake a useful self-study is to be able to self-assess and reflect on the nature of learning and the task completed. This can be encouraged in several ways:

- by producing sheets outlining the process
- by having a quick checklist for students once they complete a section of work
- by asking students to reflect on the value of the completed task and what they would do to do in the future

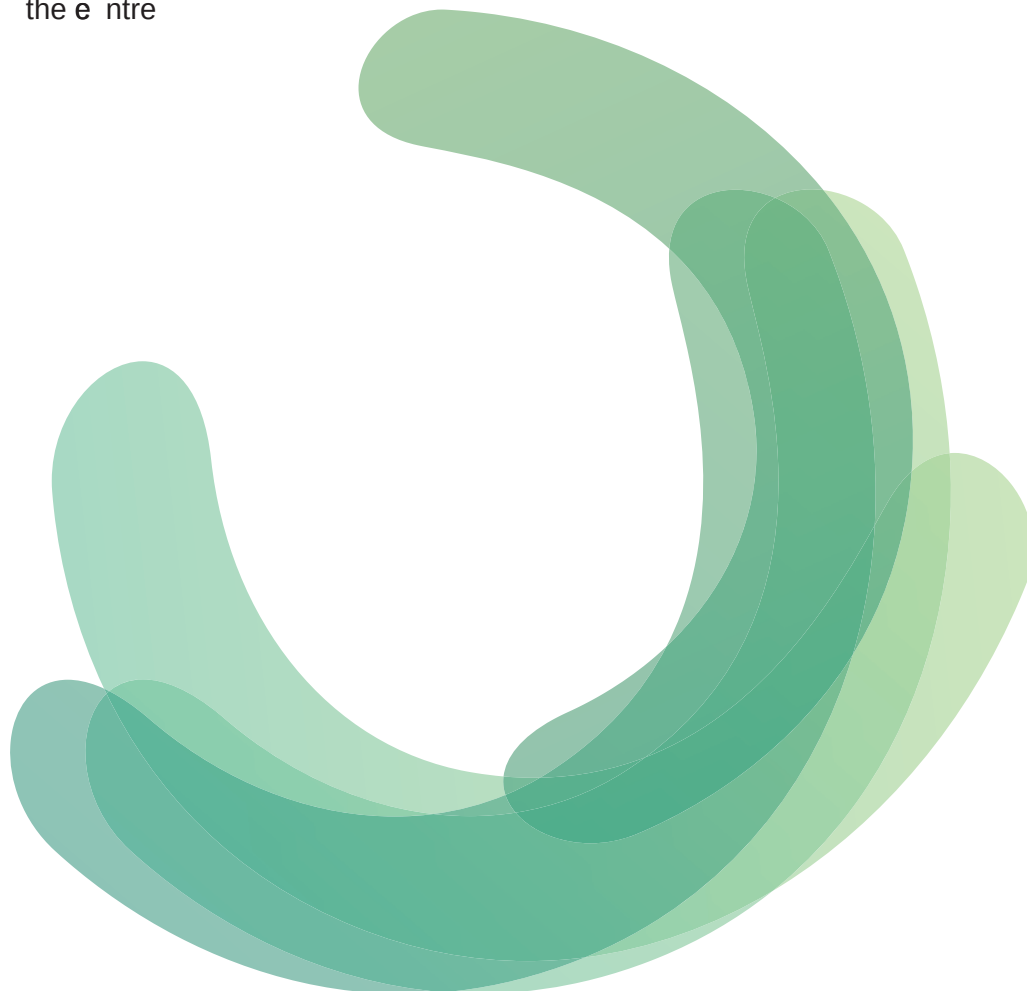
8. Peer support

One of the most valuable resources within a centre is the learner's own peer group (for assistance at the current level) and the general collegial body of students (for assistance with current learning and also as a way of stretching the learner's boundaries sideways or upwards to more difficult work, which encompasses looking forward to future studies). This peer support was undertaken in several ways:

- having bookable tutorial rooms for paired or small group work



- b. hosting organised speaking/oration/ discussion groups. One again this can take several different formats such as
 - i. sessions organised by the centre with either paid staff or volunteers
 - ii. sessions organised by a School or Department (such as Business, Tourism, Sport and Language, either independently or all together)
- c. being part of PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions), a voluntary academic assistance program that utilises peer-led group study to help students succeed, and usually managed at the institutional academic support level
- d. arising in 'fantabling' talks
- e. learners simply asking questions of other students and offering to assist other students in the centre



2

Activities

In this section

- ▶ Advising
- ▶ Learner training
- ▶ Mini lessons
- ▶ Workshops
- ▶ Extension of classroom learning
- ▶ Student involvement

Many of the centres visited hosted a range of learning opportunities and associated activities so that students could “pick ‘n mix” what suited them best, and try out different techniques for learning. Some of these were to assist the learner in meta-cognitive awareness and strategy use while others were more specifically targeted on discrete learning items and skills such as different writing styles and genres, grammar and vocabulary. This section will outline some activities found in the centres

Advising

.....
 Providing advice for language learning took many forms for example, from provision of planning sheets, study skills and strategy advising materials through peer student initiatives, to one-on-one sessions with qualified language advisers or learning facilitators

Learner training

.....
 At some institutions an important function of the ILC was to bridge the gap between learning in the classroom and in the ILC. Studies in the ILC complemented classroom work, and teachers conducted awareness building lessons on language learning skills and strategies in the classroom. Students then practised these strategies later themselves in the ILCs. This is one good example of a way of maximising student use of the ILCs outside regular class time.



"It has long been recognized that the most successful learners of languages are those who understand their own abilities and capacities well and who autonomously engage in systematic efforts within and beyond the classroom to reach self-determined goals of acquisition." (Brown, 2002, p. vii).

Mini lessons

.....

Some centres had introduced mini lessons to help learners understand a number of concepts within each skills area or for vocabulary gathering and grammar knowledge, and these also helped to embed them into continuing self-learning materials

Examples of mini lessons from the study are:

- Demonstration of listening techniques
- Pronunciation of a selection of words
- Specific grammar items
- Different techniques to gather and keep vocabulary such as mind maps, word families, topic lists, word cards on a ring, etc
- Current affairs discussions about what is in the News
- Conversation tips
- Tips for how to deal with different writing styles and genres



Workshops

ENGLISH CONVERSATION GROUP WORKSHOP

The English Conversation Group is for students who wish to improve and enhance their English oral communication skills.

Within these sessions students will develop language skills such as communication, vocabulary and the clear expression of ideas and opinions through the introduction of discussion items covering a range of topics. These topics are designed to increase vocabulary and knowledge in areas such as New Zealand life, academic life, culture and popular entertainment.

The English conversation sessions are:

No registration required

Date	City campus
Wednesday, 5 th May 4:00 – 5:00pm	WB306
Wednesday, 12 th May 4:00 – 5:00pm	WB306
Wednesday, 19 th May 4:00 – 5:00pm	WB306
Wednesday, 26 th May 4:00 – 5:00pm	WB306

A common thread for several centres was to have more interactive forms of learner-focused workshops

Examples of workshops for speaking found at some centres were:

- Students were in control of making a group, choosing a topic, setting a time and then inviting a teacher or an ILC-staff member to facilitate
- Teachers invited a speaker to give a short talk then students were broken into small groups each with a Tutorial Assistant (TA) or Learning Facilitator (LF) to discuss
- Volunteers from the wider community came into the centre and joined weekly orientation groups
- Students made cards with orientation starters and continuers to use with other students and staff
- Classroom teachers gave TAs and LFs the range of topics and skills students have been working on during the week in class. These could be incorporated and used in small group discussions on workshops to help make the orientation practice more relevant to their studies

Extension of classroom learning

Besides the learner training work already mentioned, students could complete work in the ILCs which was begun in class or do their homework. Some also chose to do activities that reinforced knowledge gained in the classroom. A few centres offered substantial workbooks for students to complete at each level of English and these were used as scaffolding tools for the students. They served to familiarise students with a range of materials and facilities in the centre and helped students start thinking of ways of becoming more autonomous that is, encouraging self-evaluation and reflection leading

to them making their own decisions about their future studies and learning.

Student involvement

.....
Some centres involve learners in the day-to-day activities in the centre. Engaging students in the running of the centre optimally leads to students developing a feeling of ownership over the centre and this is mutually beneficial for students and an ILC, as Sheerin (1989) points out:

“...the advantages are many: students become more self-reliant and responsible...and they have more opportunities for getting to know the system well, and of influencing its development.” (p. 33).

Making use of students for creating materials and exercises in the ILC is one way of involving them. The rationale behind this is explained by Malo Im (2004). She points out that learners are learning languages themselves so they know what might work best for others too and they are often willing to share ideas and to help each other. They have years of experience as language learners and have been exposed to a variety of materials and learning resources during this period. Teaching others is also a good way to learn and preparing materials for others to use is a form of teaching, which requires reflection as well as selection to make an effective product. Current students know the target learner group so have a good appreciation of their likes, dislikes, preferences and interests. Some other reasons why this form of activity is so valuable are that learning is individualised to cater for each student's needs and the learner's self-esteem, and responsibility for learning can be enhanced. As students also need support and praise for their contributions, incentives such as marks or other forms of recognition of students' involvement might be needed.



Malo Im (2011) later evaluated this mode of student involvement and came to the conclusion that student-driven initiatives prove the most worthwhile:

“...true learner involvement depends on keeping channels open for the learners to contribute in a way consistent with their own particular wants and needs. In other words, a “bottom up” approach, originating from the students’ own ideas may be more valid than a “top down” one, based on instructors’ conceptions of what is needed to help students on the road to learner independence.” (p. 72).

The centres in this study had different levels of learner engagement in the management and running of the centre, some paid and some voluntary. Several used learners as Peer Tutors (PTs), Tutorial Assistants (TAs) or Learning Facilitators (LFs), to help fellow students either in classes in language labs and computer labs or in the learning centre. They helped run voluntary groups helped students study the academic word list, facilitated speaking groups helped students to use the materials effectively, informally communicated with students and helped them to use ‘fan teaching’.

Other learner involvement initiatives noted in the study included a range of extra-curricular activities such as

- Language exchange
- Photo competitions
- Movie and book reviews posted on the walls
- School blogs
- Facebook groups
- Magnet boards for poems or other general messages
- ‘Organic whiteboard’ on which suggestions that students keep adding to
- Origami collections
- Student posters on walls



- Opinion polls
- Suggestion boxes
- Evaluation sheets
- Notice boards
- Study tips from students on display in the centre
- Classroom project boards

The following examples are inspired by Malo Im (2004 & 2011) and describe materials students can make for other students to help increase student involvement and usage of the learning centre.

Reading exercises using:

1. **Extracts from a magazine** - a worksheet with true/false, short answer and vocabulary questions can be made to accompany the article.
2. **Internet readings** - questions similar to those mentioned above can be provided for the article. Some exercises of this type can be question-only sheets with students needing to find the information from websites.
3. **Books** - a worksheet can be created based on a book with lots of visual aids and a small amount of text. This worksheet can include some true/false questions or suggestions about how to use the book to improve English (for example, read and summarise the chapters discuss the content with a partner; learn new vocabulary). Suggestion sheets and guides can be laminated and put near the materials.



Grammar exercises/guides:

1. **Gap-fill exercises** - a short article selected from a newspaper, or any other source from which selected grammatical items are deleted (for example prepositions, articles, articles, past tense verb forms).
2. **Sentence-combining exercises** - students work alone or together (preferably) to join two lists of half sentences.
3. **Grammar guides** - a guide for a specific grammar point can be made (for example past or present perfect) noting the pages where it occurs and texts where these can be found in reference books. An interesting and creative grammar guide can be made using origami-style folded papers each of them explaining a different verb tense, with an example and a fill-in-the-blank question. The folded paper must be unfolded to read the explanation and the question, and the answer is on the back.

Writing practice:

1. **Outlining exercises** - students can make a sample outline for a piece of writing.
2. **Letter writing** - students can create a model for writing a business letter.
3. **Web guides** - for useful internet sites to assist students with their writing.

Listening practice:

1. **Recording a text** - students with good pronunciation can read a text and make a gap-fill exercise.
2. **Interviews** - comprehension questions can be made based on student interviews of their teachers, tutors or higher level language students.
3. **Video listening** - students can make exercises for noting key words in a section of a video.

Comprehension questions about the whole video can be made to highlight certain skills such as listening for main points, listening for gist etc

Games:

1. **Card or board games** - Students may want to donate or create games for the ILC, for example, Scrabble, Mind Maze. The latter has questions written on note cards with answers on the back. Rules for the game have to be made clear and to be more useful the questions should relate to our topics.
2. **Role plays** - Students can make up a scenario and role play the situation written on it. One again, usage will be maximised if these relate to students' lives or studies in some way.

Vocabulary:

1. **Word puzzles** - Students can make their own mental linguistic challenges appropriate to their level, our subjects and interests. For example, Word Find - simple crossword words with a secret word in the middle.
2. **Spelling exercises** - these are based on students' vocabulary or materials and can have letters scrambled or words deleted altogether.
3. **Crosswords** - Students can use websites for making crosswords for each other, for example, from <http://www.armoredpenguin.com/crossword/>

Other examples of student involvement were:

1. **Recommending books for the ILC to hold.**
2. **Making versions of ILC orientation videos, scripted and directed by students.**
3. **Creating ILC brochures.**
4. **Being members of an ILC special interest group.**





5. **Making cue cards to take out of the centre and extend learning in the wider community** - cards for freer speaking practice are written onto cards which can be lent to students so they can practice in authentic situations like the campus café, the student common room, with library personnel, etc
6. **Making flash cards for themselves and their peers** - flashcards appeal to students with varying learning styles because they can be handled and manipulated, they involve visual memory, and can be used in group situations and they involve spoken and heard memory as well. A problem is written on one side of the card and the answer on the other side, for example:
 - a. Vocabulary item / definition
 - b. Picture / vocabulary item
 - c. Vocabulary item / native language translation
 - d. Base verb form / irregular past tense form
 - e. Noun / related adjective
 - f. Adjective / opposite
 - g. Sentence with some element missing / missing item

These cards can be utilised in a variety of ways

- a. Individually - students can test themselves silently or aloud
- b. In pairs or groups - students choose a quiz master to ask the questions and the others give the answers
- c. Students can use them for fast, competitive games or slow, deliberate checks without time pressure

Many of the activities and exercises available to students in the ILCs also relate to the range of skills practice which is outlined in the following section.



3

Resources, Materials and Equipment

Resources

.....

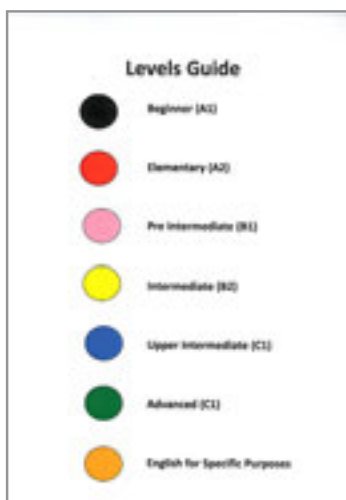
A highly functional and well-utilised centre needs interesting and useful resources adapted to a self-study situation, which should ultimately also encourage autonomous learning. The resources should be catalogued, clearly labelled and ordered according to levels, skills and topics for easy access by learners having a wide range of language abilities and academic literacies. The most common ones used were colour numbers or letters or a combination of these. Another key resource is a checklist as they enable learners to check their answers and assess their own learning, a prerequisite before they can reflect on their learning and become more autonomous.

There are many good self-study resources readily available from publishers but it may still be a good idea to adapt or make in-house materials for several reasons to help create a clear profile of the centre, to inform students about the local area, to include information about the local culture, to more closely align the resources with the learning needs and styles of the learner cohort, or for other particular centre-specific purposes. An example of this would be resources developed in the centre, (whether suggested by or created by learners for other learners), and materials created by classroom teachers that have a particular layout specific to the ILC. Several centres incorporated into their practice the policy of using New Zealand or at least Australasian materials and resources if at all possible, for example, subtitled movies.

In this section

- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Learning materials
- ▶ Technical equipment
- ▶ Resources for language skills practice
 - Speaking
 - Listening
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Grammar
 - Vocabulary
- ▶ Online resources
- ▶ Computer software
- ▶ Checklist for materials and resources





listening, pronunciation and reading texts and a range of media files (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines etc.). The use of locally produced materials is important so that students of the language can also experience and learn through the culture and become familiar with the Australasian context. This is particularly pertinent for the process of migrant language learners' socialisation and construction of identity, as outlined by Riley (2003):

"There is, then, an increasing weight of evidence drawn from disciplines across the board that identity is socially constructed, that our sense of self can only emerge as the result of communicative interaction with others." (p. 102).



This interaction can be mediated, at least in part, through the mediation of language learning and advising in ILCs

Learning materials

Ideally, language centres and other mainstream support centres to a lesser degree, should offer materials within the following areas

- Materials for the major language skills
 - speaking, including pronunciation
 - listening
 - reading
 - writing, including spelling
 - grammar
 - vocabulary including dictionary use
- Study skills including learning to learn and strategy training
- NZ/Oceania content and context
- Media, including newspapers, magazines, journals, TV and radio programmes
- English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

- English for Specific Purposes (ESP), that is, English for main stream subjects at the institution, for example; work place, business, medicine, IT, engineering, etc
- External examination practice (for example, IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, KET, PET, FCE, CAE etc)
- DVDs CDs including lectures, discussions, songs, entertainment DVDs, reference materials etc
- CD-ROMs
- Academic literacy, as well as referencing information, research skills, formal writing structures etc
- Online resources
- Computer software programmes

Technical equipment

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Recorders and players for listening and speaking activities are needed in the centre. In this day and age it might be tempting to equip the ILC only with computers as they can perform both these functions and more, and it is important to keep centres up to date with modern technology to ensure high rates of student utilisation. However, one has to be careful about the sometimes distracting misuse of computers. In this study a mix of the following technologies was noted; audio cassette players, TVs, Video and DVD players, CD players, MP3 players, digital recorders and computers, both PCs and laptops.

Resources for language skills practice

Speaking

Studies in an ILC not only involve quiet activities but also offer opportunities for learners to study and practise whatever part of language they need and want (Gardner & Miller, 1999). Therefore an important aspect of many



centres is the co-ordination of one-to-one and discussion groups for learners of English who do not have many opportunities outside of class to practise, and use their English naturally. These activities take several forms depending on the needs of the students and the facilitation capacity of each institution. This is an essential role for the ILCs in spite of the challenge of meeting speaking needs in a self-study environment.

Some examples found in the study include:

- Conversation clubs with snacks and drinks
- Speaking as an option in scheduled ILC time
- Pre-organised speaking topics for timetabled groups relating to course work
- Language exchange themes that is native English speakers learning other languages matched up with English language learners
- Computer programmes requiring verbal language input from students
- Workshops
- Conversation classes run by peer students
- Food speaking practice - determined by student choice of food as a way to fluency, appropriateness (register), intonation, vocabulary, and/or grammar etc
- Peer student small group discussions
- Conversation groups with TAs or LFs
- External volunteer one-to-one partners
- Pair and group exercises in a speaking area

The ILCs also held a range of pronunciation practice materials for example: opportunities to record words and check these against a master recording; computer programs for spelling, comprehension, and pronunciation practice; and making mp3 files with audacity.

In some centres a specific speaking area was set up for pronunciation and verbal interaction. It was either in a room on its own or in an area where the speaking activities did not disturb others too much. However, a corner of the centre with a small table, a couple of chairs and a screen to give some privacy, can also be sufficient

for this purpose. The area can then be equipped with a recording and playing device and supplied with pair and small group exercises, tasks, activities and games with instructions and explanations. Many teachers reuse books, have photocopiable board games for speaking practice which can be laminated to make them last longer.

Listening

Listening is a big area of need for students in many centres as students find listening particularly difficult and there have previously been very few opportunities for authentic practice in their own home environments.

Listening materials can be made from a range of resources:

- Authentic materials such as TV and Radio News with transcripts and/or exercises sheets
- Books with audio and transcript
- Songs with lyrics
- Short stories with audio and transcript
- Chapters of books, with audio files and transcripts
- Specific self-study materials from different publishers
- Tests or exam practice
- Movies with transcripts or study guides and worksheet
- In-house materials used in the classroom
- In-house materials developed specifically for use in the ILC
- On-line listening (see recommended websites later in the section)



Students in some ILCs were advised to keep a record of their listening in a diary and to include the following information:

- Date and the time they began and the time they finished
- Type of material and the title if available
- Their listening strategies, reactions and questions
- What they learned from the listening

More examples of listening activities students can choose to do in the ILC.

- **Choose a radio ad in which people are talking**
Answer questions like: What is being advertised? Describe the people, their relationship and the situation. Then transcribe the conversation. The ILC could provide a recording of commercials or refer to a website.
- **Choose an ad from a commercial TV recording**
Answer questions like: Why did you choose this ad? What did you like about it? Does the ad tell you anything about NZ culture?
- **Listen to the Radio New Zealand News and/or Weather**
Answer questions like: What did you learn from it? Write down at least three things that you remember from the listening. The TV news is especially useful because it has many visual cues as well, and sometimes includes captions.
- **Choose a favourite song in English and transcribe it**
They can break their own work against the lyrics to the song. Choose two or three sounds to work on and improve. Listen to any English song, paying attention to these sounds whenever they occur in the song. Write down all the words with the sounds chosen. Check by looking at the lyrics and reflecting on their efforts.



- **Choose an audio recording**

Listen to an excerpt at least ten times over a period of several days. The task is to write down something new each time they listen to it.

- **Listen to a weather forecast in English on any news broadcast**

Write down the temperatures and conditions of at least two cities. Compare the weather in these cities to the weather in their own town for the same day.

- **Watch sports on TV or the computer**

Write down notes about what was heard and answer questions like: What teams played this week? What were some of the scores?

- **Choose one of the TV series held by the ILC**

For example, Shortland Street, Outrageous Fortune, Friends, Lost etc. Watch it and choose one scene. Describe the people, their relationship and the situation, then transcribe two minutes of it, and find any idioms and colloquialisms.

- **Choose a movie in the ILC and arrange to watch it once with other students**

The following week choose three scenes from the movie. Describe the people, their relationship and the situation. Transcribe the scenes together. Then try to act out one of the scenes.



Reading

A good idea is to arrange for a special, quieter, place for reading in the ILC. From the centres visited, reading areas were equipped with some or all of the following: comfortable furniture, reading lamps, audio players and a wide array of reading materials, both informal and formal at all levels.

Some examples of reading materials in the ILCs:

- Specific reading skills practice books
- Newspapers and magazines and other authentic materials - for example, a recipe from a magazine or from the internet for students to use at home
- General reading - readers in the ILC, some graded and some with audio, plus other fiction and non-fiction available in the library
- Internet articles and items - guides about useful websites for articles, jobs, flat rooms, information on countries and culture, etc
- Public service information - from the Government, Department of Internal Affairs, City Council etc
- Internet-based programmes - for example, "Newsademic"

The ILC can provide purpose-made materials for reading skills practice - either ready-made commercial publications or made by centre staff from a selection of materials with detailed tips, ideas and explanations, often encompassing the following key areas:

- Short texts suitable for *previewing*, with clear titles, section headings and photo captions for reviewing to enable access of the structure and content of a text
- Texts with student-centred topics for *predicting*, in which learners can:
 - use their knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension



- use their knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure
- use knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary and content
- Short texts for *skimming* practice, or reading for gist. These should have set questions so students can read through the whole text quickly and gain a general idea of the meaning. They should also have an answer key at the back
- Texts for *scanning*, or reading to find specific details, with questions and instructions to look for key words to help find the answer
- Texts and questions to use when *guessing from context*. As with predicting, students should be encouraged to use prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words instead of stopping to look them all up
- Texts to practice *paraphrasing*. These should have instructions and a model for how to stop at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text
- Tasks for *knowledge transfer* from a first language to English. Students can read a story in a newspaper in their own language first and then read the same story in an English newspaper. Most of the story will probably be the same, so the story in their own language will help them to prepare for reading in English - it will give them vocabulary, so when they read the English story and there is some vocabulary that they do not know, then they can use their knowledge of the story to guess what the new vocabulary might be



Writing

Writing practice in a self-study situation presents a challenge as students sometimes need their writing checked and the centre may not want to take on this potentially considerable workload. Various centres in this study solved this in a range of ways as shown below:

- The ILC gave some guidance for writing if time allowed. For example, answer short/easy questions, spelling or finding resources for self-corrections
- Students made use of the materials and did their writing in the ILC, and then handed it in to their class teacher
- Peer feedback - A more informal method for students to give and receive feedback on their writing was to encourage them to comment on other students' writing on display in the ILC
- Students could be involved in a "Writing checking service" from which they ultimately gained deeper knowledge. Examples of how this was done are:
 - copies of students' texts were kept in the ILC for other students to check
 - an on-line wiki for sharing texts and correcting each other's writing was set up
 - students were involved in correcting writing through e-mails or Moodle sites

Examples of writing materials the ILCs provided:

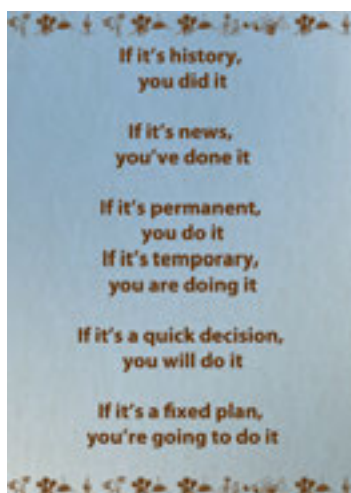
- Models with typical format, explanations and instructions for text types such as
 - narrative
 - exposition
 - explanation
 - recounting/reported speech
 - information reports
 - procedure
 - discussion
 - memo/letters

- Books or in-house materials that combined skills (writing and reading, writing and grammar, or spelling and pronunciation)
- Instructions about how students could keep a log book for writing
- Information on writing strategies
- Instructions about free writing or journal writing for 5 - 10 minutes each day on whatever topic they choose
- Ready made posts cards students were encouraged to write posts cards or letters to each other. These were on display in the ILC as models for others
- Paper for students to write reviews and recommendations for books was provided. The ILC displayed these in an area close to the readers
- Students wrote reviews and ideas of YouTube clips that other students might like to watch
- Students wrote messages to other students and explained what they were learning (a form of peer teaching)
- Books and materials about the writing process
- Hand-writing models for students who have different writing scripts in their first or other languages
- Punctuation guides and exercises which show why correct punctuation is important
- Materials and models for writing research papers essays letters etc
- Tips about websites for writing
- Computer software for writing, such as issues in English, Spelling Fusion, EASE etc
- Authentic forms for students to practise filling in
- Newspaper articles with questions as prompts for writing
- A Facebook site which encouraged written communication
- A newsletter to which students could contribute
- A magnet board with letters and/or whole words to use to write poetry or messages



Grammar

Materials that support students' understanding of grammar could be provided in the ILC, but students may also need help with identifying their own grammar problems. Some grammar books have units on "testing your grammar knowledge" from which students decide to learn grammar items in isolation (Swan & Walter, 1997). These books seem very popular with students; however, the ILC could also provide materials that encourage students to learn grammar in context, for example:



A poster for verb tenses found in one of the ILCs

- Study guides for learning grammar
- Reference books both grammar-only books and also those with a combination of grammar and language skills practice
- Readers for students to experience grammar in use
- Specific grammar websites and sites where it is embedded
- Specific computer software for grammar practice
- Posters showing grammar in use can be displayed in the ILC to raise awareness of certain grammar items
- Exercises that relate form to meaning and use, with an outline of the grammar point and examples given, such as
 - a task to practice the grammar point with a peer using the examples
 - a task in which students can practice the grammar item more
- Exercises that relate the use of the grammar item to meaning and form, with an oral or written input from a chosen topic (audiotape or reading selection which can be from different genres and at different levels), such as
 - a task to analyse how and why the grammar item was used; to become aware of meaning and form
 - a task for students to practice the grammar point in a communication situation which focuses on the topic

Vocabulary

Learning vocabulary is an important skill in language learning. Many ILCs provided a range of resources and materials to support students' learning and encouraged revision to ensure retention. It was noted that vocabulary materials in the ILCs fell within the four strands in balanced language learning, as outlined by Nation (2001).

The first strand is *learning from comprehensible meaning focused input*. With respect to this strand, ILCs provided a variety of texts on interesting student-focused topics. Students were encouraged to choose a text with only 5% unknown words. They also had to choose texts within their level or at a lower level, and focus on understanding the text more than studying the unknown vocabulary. They then learned the vocabulary by inferring meaning and guessing from context.

The second strand is *form focused learning*, whereby students learn vocabulary by direct study of vocabulary, including the study of the form, meaning, usage, word families, and building up deep knowledge through word associations. ILCs visited had various word lists, dictionaries, test your vocabulary knowledge books, grids to use for analysing vocabulary items, vocabulary software, tips of useful websites, and thesauruses.

The third strand focuses on *meaningful output* and includes practice in conveying meaningful information. According to Nation (2001), learners focus on words in a different way when they practise productive skills (speaking and writing) than when they practise receptive skills (listening and reading), that is they speak like a listener and write like a reader. Some ILCs supported students' vocabulary learning by providing opportunities for practising the productive skills while at the same time strengthened knowledge of previous met-vocabulary.

The fourth strand deals with *development of already known vocabulary* so that students become fluent in the use of vocabulary in context. For this strand the ILCs provided plenty of readers and listening texts at all levels. The same topics were covered by more than one kind of text, and there were many opportunities to practise speaking, and purposeful writing.



Table 5 shows some other materials and resources for vocabulary extension found in the study. They are broadly grouped into the four strands mentioned above.

Table 5. Materials and resources divided into four strands

Learning from comprehensible meaning focus input	- Magazines and newspapers - Tips on useful websites for vocabulary learning - Lending materials with scripts - Texts with high or low frequency words (academic texts etc.) - Graded readers - Vocabulary post-it notes on equipment and items in the ILC - Enjoyable readers for extending reading and vocabulary learning - Authentic reading texts - Academic texts
Form focused learning	- Vocabulary study books - Dictionaries and information on how to make the most of a dictionary - Thesauruses "Themasaurus" – a thematically organised thesaurus - Books for studying phrases or word-banks - Books for studying collocations, idioms and phrases - Test materials and course books - Worksheets - Glossaries - Packs of vocabulary lists and texts at the same level/area - Word lists - high and low frequency - Academic word lists
Focus on meaningful output	- Exercises for pair-work, being understood, playing games, communicating etc. - A range of opportunities to practise and rehearse vocabulary, orally (with peers and staff in the ILC) and in written form, with feedback from peers and staff

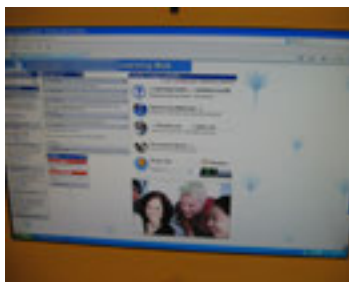


Development of already known vocabulary

- Matching cards words with meaning, words with pictures words with sounds etc
- Flash cards
- Vocabulary quizzes
- Memory games
- Cross word puzzles
- Reading texts audio clips and speaking and writing tasks which cover the same topic
- Tips on how to organise vocabulary learning
- Computer software
- Vocabulary sheets for DVD watching, plus some readers of these same movies
- Dictation exercises
- Vocabulary quizzes based on Radio New Zealand News
- Vocabulary competitions for example How many words can you form out of the word "TENSES"?
- Ideas on how to keep records of vocabulary
- Multiple choice tests
- Pictures with numbers to add correct words



Online resources



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There is an increasing range of online resources and learning software available for students to use freely either at home, in a language lab, in the class room or in a learning centre. These can offer an alternative and more attractive learning mode to students with a preference for computer-based learning (especially those who are digital natives). It is particularly useful for the ILC to host some of the programmes that need an individual or satellite licence as neither students themselves nor the main campus computer labs and language tools can afford such an outlay. Most of these have been developed as self-access resources, so teacher contact is not necessarily required, although of course having a trained staff member to answer quick questions is beneficial.

Examples of some of the longer lasting online resources and software for reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary and grammar:

<http://www.studysonet/reading.htm>

<http://www.itsawords.com/>

<http://www.es-lab.com/>

<http://www.ello.org/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/english/>

<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk>

<http://www.manythings.org/>

<http://a4es.org/>

<http://www.englishpage.com>

<http://www.teach-nology.com/gi-bin/cosword.cgi>

<http://www.eleasoon.com/>

Computer software

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Some examples of software for reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary and grammar, currently used in centres (and sometimes in computer labs) :

- **Ease** – **Essential Academic Skills in English**, by Warwick University, UK
- **Interactive Picture Dictionary**, by ProteaWare, Australia
- **Issues in English 1 and 2**, by ProteaWare, Australia
- **Pictures that talk English** by TeAo Software, New Zealand
- **Spelling Fusion**, by ProteaWare, Australia
- **That's Life**, by AMES, Victoria, Australia
- **The Alphabet**, by ProteaWare, Australia
- **VILC**, by AMES, Victoria, Australia

For more ideas on materials and resources (see Gardner & Miller, 1996; Sheerin, 1989)

Checklist for materials and resources

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Whatever resources are selected for use within a centre, there are certain criteria that should be considered and met to make them as user-friendly as possible and fit-for-purpose. All of these help contribute in some way to a Good Practice centre.

Table 6 covers some aspects to consider for making and holding materials and resources in an ILC.



Table 6. Some aspects to consider for materials in the ILC

1. Access	☐ Can they be accessed easily? ☐ Are they readily available and how will students find them? ☐ Can they be used by more than one student at a time? ☐ Are they for use in the ILC only? ☐ Can the materials be borrowed?
2. Making	☐ Do the materials need to be adapted? ☐ Are the materials worth the costs and the effort and time it takes to adapt them? ☐ Can the ILC make some of its own materials? ☐ Can learners suggest and create exercises for other learners? ☐ Can the ILC make use of suitable in-house materials created by teachers? ☐ What makes the materials attractive? ☐ Can they be made more attractive? ☐ What instructions would they need? ☐ Are the instructions clear? ☐ What is the noise level going to be if used by more than one? ☐ Should the ILC provide answer sheets? ☐ Can students give feedback on the materials? How?
3. Technology	☐ Does the ILC have the necessary and purposeful technological equipment? ☐ What equipment is required to use the materials? ☐ Can students manage the equipment by themselves or do they need training?
4. Autonomy	☐ Do they encourage autonomous learning? ☐ Do they have answer keys? ☐ Does the ILC need to provide model answers? ☐ Do they complement classroom work? ☐ Do the materials motivate student learning? ☐ Are they inspiring?



4 Managers and Staff

An important element in the effective utilisation and successful continuation of ILCs is the type and level of the overall management of the centre. This relates to the nature of the Manager's role itself and to the support for the centre from teachers from upper management in the host institution if applicable, from library staff (especially if the centre is housed within the Library) and the senior management team of the tertiary institution as a whole. The precise nature of the Manager's role and number of staff members in the ILC itself has to be based on a range of factors such as the number of students studying in the centre, the range of services the ILC offers and budget restrictions. The following categories of staff were found: managers/advisors, teachers, tutorial assistants, language facilitators, peer students, administrators and their assistants, resource coordinators and technicians.

In this section

- ▶ Managers
- ▶ Learning Advisors
- ▶ Teachers
- ▶ ILC assistants
- ▶ Administrators
- ▶ Technical support

Managers

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The manager is naturally a key person in any ILC. The employment conditions for this position differed a lot between the participating centres in this study. Some were on administrative contracts and others were academic staff members. There was also a range of titles for this position; manager, head, administrator, and coordinators were the most common. From this study it was also clear that the role and tasks were very diverse – not one manager/coordinator/administrator seemed to have the same job description, and they were allocated varying proportional times to fulfil this role. A whole range of different tasks and responsibilities were found which



fall broadly into the following five areas; (1.) managing the centre, (2.) training staff and students (3.) developing and maintaining the collection, (4.) maintaining the profile of the centre, (5.) being research-informed.

1. Managing the centre

This role included various combinations of the following tasks

- a. Recruiting and managing staff
- b. Attending Departmental and School management meetings
- c. Co-ordination of centre staff, students teachers and activities
- d. Booking rooms for out-of-class sessions
- e. Making decisions for the day to-day running of the centre
- f. Overseeing the services offered
- g. Managing specialist rooms such as computer labs language labs and speaking rooms
- h. Organising student activities
- i. Organising language workshops maths
- j. Conducting pastoral care for staff, especially amongst peer students working in the centre
- k. Co-ordinating with the Library about opening hours security, holiday coverage, building maintenance, purchases etc
- l. Managing the operational Income and Expenditure budget and Capital Expenditure budget for the centre

2. Training staff and students

- a. Conducting staff training
- b. Holding professional development sessions around autonomous learning
- c. Leading special interest groups
- d. Training teachers in the use of specialist rooms



- e. Training teachers in the use of technical equipment
- f. Supporting teacher development within autonomous learning
- g. Holding workshops for students in skills training
- h. Giving orientation sessions
- i. Running professional development workshops for LFs and TAs

3. Developing and maintaining the collection

- a. Deciding what resources to develop and hold
- b. Making materials
- c. Purchasing materials and resources
- d. Adapting materials
- e. Purchasing course books for classes
- f. Ordering resources and materials
- g. Creating autonomous learning initiatives in the centre

It was also noted that one institution that had made the conscious decision not to have a self-access centre at all had no-one managing that area of resources, with the result that the materials were in disarray, were not being updated and there were few facilities where students could make use of the materials. On the site visit, there were no students visibly using the area, as would be expected.

4. Maintaining the profile of the centre

- a. Participation in School/Departmental management and Faculty Boards
- b. Being a member of the School research committee
- c. Interacting with other departments within the institution
- d. Liaising with libraries regarding faculty resources kept in the library



- e. Promoting the ILC in classes and at the institution
- f. Creating a recognised profile for the centre for example, vision statement and strategic plan
- g. Maintaining networks and links with other mainstream learner support
- h. Publicising services to relevant Schools and lecturers
- i. Communicating with department staff about relevant readings, research, conferences etc.
- j. Being on conference organising committees

Those centres where the Manager had a high profile with the library, the students' regular classes and teachers, other mainstream learning support, and in one case on the faculty board, there seemed to be a wider base of institution-wide support. This was in terms of having dedicated budgets for centre upgrades and general materials development, including new resources and technical expertise to digitise existing resources.

5. Being research-informed

- a. Conducting research
- b. Keeping up to date with current literature
- c. Participating in research-oriented activities in the faculty such as board meetings, evaluations of research proposals etc.
- d. Keeping up to date with new resources and technology
- e. Attending relevant conferences, to listen and to present
- f. Follow peer discussions on email, list-servers, twitter etc.
- g. Being reviewers for relevant journals and conference proceedings

It was apparent that the managers interviewed were all extremely interested in the current project and were very willing to give many hours in total, during the interviews, during the centre visits, and (for some managers) when



completing follow-up questionnaires. They were happy to share their own experiences and views about their centres and what they believe has proved effective for their learners. This interest in research is continually bringing new and challenging ideas into the centre, as managers and their staff strive to offer students as comprehensive and worthwhile a service as possible, within their particular time, space and financial limitations.

The three largest and seemingly well-used centres also had managers who were directly involved in co-ordinating a wide range of activities – one individually, but the others with the assistance of several part time staff. It was also noticeable that in two of the centres, the managers were encouraged to have active research interests and were given time and funding to support this – both in terms of professional development opportunities and time. Many other managers and some staff members were encouraged to attend relevant national conferences, and to make presentations if possible, although availability of funding is an on-going issue. Similarly, workload arose as an area of concern for some of the managers whose roles were far-reaching. For the centre whose allocated managerial time had been reduced (due largely to fiscal pressure at the institution) there was a direct correlation with a reduction in the advisory service offered.

Learning Advisors (LAs)

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The LA role is largely that of an advisor, guide or facilitator. They typically help students decide on pathways for their studies, give guidance about the choices available, help them become aware of how they might learn best, show them some strategies they can use, and generally encourage autonomous learning. This category of staff member is not well represented in New Zealand ILCs. In the language-focused centres there were only a few staff members working solely in the area of language advising for ESOL students. In the general learning service of several institutions there were advisors employed to work with mainstream students, giving English language advice and guidance both to ESOL and New Zealand-born students.



While some centres required teachers to work as advisers others preferred teachers to self-select the advising role. However, this can pose some difficulties as students and teachers may not recognise the (sometimes conflicting) different roles of classroom teaching and advising. In Table 7 below, Riley (1997) lists some differences between counselling and teaching which can be used to raise awareness amongst advisers and to make them realise that the role is more one of counselling than one of teaching.

Table 7. Some differences between teaching and counselling. (Riley, 1997, p.122)

	Teaching	Counselling
1	Setting objectives	Eliciting information about aims, needs and wishes
2	Determining course content	Why, what for, how, how long: giving information, clarifying
3	Selecting materials	Suggesting materials, suggesting other resources
4	Deciding on time, place, pace	Suggesting organisation procedures
5	Deciding on learning tasks	Suggesting methodology
6	Managing classroom interaction, initiating	Listening, responding
7	Monitoring the learning situation	Interpreting information
8	Keeping records, setting homework	Suggesting record-keeping and planning procedures
9	Presenting vocabulary and grammar	Presenting materials
10	Explaining	Analysing techniques
11	Answering questions	Offering alternative procedures
12	Marking, grading	Suggesting self-assessment tools and techniques
13	Testing	Giving feedback on self-assessment
14	Motivating	Being supportive
15	Rewarding, punishing	Supporting



Gardner and Miller (1999) add that advisers are typically reflective listeners, they help learners to self-monitor, encourage them to reflect, and they collaborate with the learner. In contrast, teachers traditionally take control over students. Gardner and Miller point out that it is also important for advisers to feel comfortable working on a one-on-one basis “on the spot”, with little or no pre-knowledge of individual learners and to have good knowledge of language learning strategies for all language levels. He states that they should also be knowledgeable about the materials and resources in the centre so they can guide learners in the use of them, and they have to have sufficient counselling skills or be interested in developing them. In this way, advising for language learning is a viable way which can stimulate students' autonomous language learning. Gremmo (2009) extends the nature of advising in terms of advisers' expertise, use of language, and the communicative process. She illustrates some verbal interactions which can trigger students' behavioural change:

“... advising can trigger off behavioural change in learners through the negotiation process which is at the heart of the advising conversation” (p. 154).

Teachers

As analysis progressed, it emerged that teachers can play a key role in promoting and maintaining students' interest in self-actualising learning, and that a successful ILC involves teachers in the running of the ILC. This is also pointed out by many researchers who suggest ways for teachers to introduce learner training and strategy use to students (Crabbe, 1993; Gardner & Miller, 1999; and Benson, 2001). Crabbe (1993) suggests instructions for transferable skills to be part of classroom teaching, that is teachers promote autonomous learning in the classroom by teaching techniques, methods and strategies for study and language skills thereby supporting students on their out-of-class learning journey. Miller (1999) reinforces this notion when he suggests that teachers should make learner training and strategies instruction part of their classroom management skills. In relation to this teachers at the institutions in this study seemed



to welcome a sense of belonging to the ILC and were involved in some appropriate activities as

1. **Participating in ILC special interest groups**
2. **Running workshops in the ILC**
3. **Booking rooms in the ILC for speaking assessments**
4. **Using materials from the ILC adapted to the classroom**
5. **Requesting certain materials to be put in the ILC**
6. **Promoting the ILC amongst students**
7. **Holding class sessions in the ILC**
8. **Making resources for the ILC**
 - a. worksheets for the weather and the Radio /TV News
 - b. readers for lower levels
 - c. film guides and listening exercises for movies

The contacts between the ILCs and teachers also worked the other way. It was found that the ILCs supported teachers with:

1. **Individualised temporary study solutions for students**
2. **Recommendations for resources**
3. **Information re current trends and research results in the area of autonomous learning**
4. **Notifications about new online journals, for example, SiSAL (<http://sisaljournal.org/>) and TESLJ (<http://iteslj.org/>)**
5. **Information about new resources**
6. **Information about current issues covered by online resource providers, for example, The Virtual Independent Language Centre (VILC at <http://www.virtualilc.com/>) or English-to-Go (<http://www.english-to-go.com/index.htm>)**



ILC assistants

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Other staff members found in the centres were; Learning Facilitators, Tutorial Assistants and Peer Students. They all play important roles in the running of an ILC as they participate in creating a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for students. The Learning Facilitators worked with classes in the ILC and could offer personalised support. The Tutorial Assistants worked both in the classrooms and in the ILCs thereby creating a bridge between studies in the classroom and the ILC, integrating the different kinds of studies. Peer Students were mostly employed as part of the whole institution's Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS). They helped out with study support for their fellow students, and also had some clerical and administrative tasks.

Administrators

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Some, but not all centres, have administrators to help keep the centre open, prepare the purchase orders, catalogue and display the resources etc. Part of their role may include handling "desk copy" resources such as headphones, CDs, copyrighted materials, teacher-donated resources etc. They can also help students find materials they may be looking for, or make suggestions. At one of the centres the administrator helped organise the conversation groups. In some centres they are sometimes asked to "tick off and sign" that students have attended and/or completed some work. If they are qualified in research or language teaching they can play an important part in providing "drop-in" help to students as well. Some centres find administrative help is vital to free up the manager for some of their higher-level management duties, so they can proceed with their research, attend meetings, attend staff development sessions, and run workshops etc. as necessary.



Technical support

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Technology plays a vital part in the educational context in the world today. Therefore, it is essential to give appropriate support for students and centre staff about how to use technology in the most efficient and beneficial way. Using technology can be quite temperamental so centres often need on-the-spot assistance available from technical support people as part of the daily running of the centre. In the bigger centres the technical support person might be dedicated solely to working with technology in the ILC. However, for smaller centres which may be on a tighter budget, the technical support person also fulfilled duties within the centre as a resource person, making and adapting materials and resources. Some centres had assistance from on-call technicians.



5

The Centre

How to set up and run a self-access centre has been described by authorities in the autonomous learning field over recent decades Sheerin (1989), Gardner and Miller (1999), and Dixon, Baba, Collins and Thomas (2006) have probably provided the most comprehensive sets of criteria and suggestions for this often-challenging undertaking.

Centres in this study took many forms depending on the institution, the finances available, the interconnections with other “Learning Commons or Hub” spaces and the Library, plus other smaller educational departments for example, Language Studies Departments and Foundation Studies Departments. Overall however, most centres try to offer a range of flexible learning spaces and provide as wide a range as possible of opportunities for learners to engage with the material at all times to whatever extent the learner wants. Each centre has some overarching philosophies which act as inherent guiding principles underlying the centre, its utilisation and the movement through it by students even if they are not clearly documented in a mission statement or similar. These fundamental beliefs dictated how the students could use the centre, how the resources were laid out, the arrangement of the whole area, and the learning opportunities being offered.

In this section

- ▶ Centre name
- ▶ Vision statement
- ▶ Student use
- ▶ Cataloguing and displaying
- ▶ Physical space
- ▶ Range of learner opportunities



Centre name

While five of the centres incorporated the word “learning” into their title, four of them also stressed the nature of the work involved, for example, self-actualising or self-directed. Three highlighted the focus on languages while another three were more generic using words such as Learning Centre, Resource Centre/Library or Learning Support Centre. One used the diminutive word “room”, and another was called a “lab”, also a rather limiting word for the range of resource usually available. Who might have input to thinking about a name, and the process about deciding on the name, can have far-reaching effects in the longer term. It can be very confusing for potential students if the centre names are acronyms such as LSAC, ELSAC, LLC, SAC etc. It would probably be worthwhile to try and standardise the name of independent learning centres so students can easily identify the type of services it stands for.

Vision statement



The underlying principles of a centre can be found in various forms such as Mission Statements and Vision Statements etc, which also encompass the underpinning philosophy of values of autonomy, independence and personal control of one's learning.

In fact, very few centres had a Vision Statement, and if so, it was not well displayed. This is interesting as many other schools departments etc have a Mission or Vision Statement from which a strategic plan is developed. It is seen a useful way to give greater status to the area and to raise its profile and professionalism to other staff, higher management and students.

Student use

At a philosophical level, some centres were managed according to various levels of structure and autonomy for learners. For example, some have classes regularly timetabled throughout the week with varying amounts of compulsory tasks. However, centres at the other end

of the spectrum were completely voluntary, demanding a high level of student self-direction and virtually no scaffolding to support students through their various stages of autonomous learning.

Cataloguing and displaying

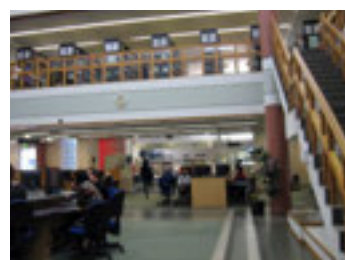
Materials and resources were organised according to similar principles as described above – some catered for complete self-access while others had more structured and supported activities often with teachers present. The centres set up on a more self-access basis facilitated easy browsing and selection of tasks and had all answers available so students could self-assess and self-evaluate. They were laid out with clear labelling and colour coding as well as alpha-numeric symbols to accommodate the needs of learners at all levels and to enable easy access and use of appropriate materials. Other centres had varying degrees of access mediated through staff, such as catalogues available for browsing, either on-line or hard copy, but with the materials being physically stored in another room and having to be issued by a staff member. A few other centres had limited issues for certain materials which were available on “desk copy” or short-term resource only, for example, IELTS texts CD-ROMs DVDs headphones and some basic texts or readings.



Physical space

Within the centre itself the actual spaces were arranged in many different ways and once again the rationale behind this organization depended a lot on the available footprint, the hardware included (computers CD players tables, chairs etc.), the materials and resources requiring display (books DVDs texts CDs resource packs etc.), and the number of students being catered for.

Also, some centres were planned so that, as the learner navigates through them, they can be guided into increasingly quiet and independent work spaces. For example, starting from the open area at the entrance where students can meet in informal ways, it then



comfortable chairs or sofas as they freely converse, through to more defined, quiet, separate desks with corrals etc. to discourage shared study, conversations and noise, and then to individual study areas and rooms. The physical spaces of the centres could be broken down into six broad functional areas, each having their own duality:

1. Public areas vs. Personal space -

large tables in shared study areas & in all rooms or separate tables with head height partitions on three sides



2. Formal serious study vs. Relaxed enjoyable 'work' furniture -

hard plastic chairs at hard wooden desks for "serious" study vs. soft furnishings with welcoming colours and comfortable sofas chairs etc for reading informal types of information & books as magazines and papers

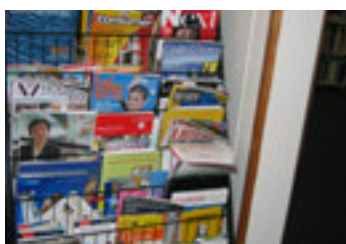


3. Formal academic vs. Casual learning -

structured class room programme use & non-structured use and drop-in sessions

4. Controlled resources vs. Free access -

restricted access to materials for certain students or a need to ask a staff member to have it issued & having all the resources and materials readily available for all students to see and use



5. Free selection vs. Focused choice -

the principle of being able to browse for materials & searching (a database or a catalogue etc) at the outset

6. Content-specific vs. High-interest materials -

very focused and course-specific resources vs. a freer range of magazines newspapers DVDs and other New Zealand resources

Range of learner opportunities

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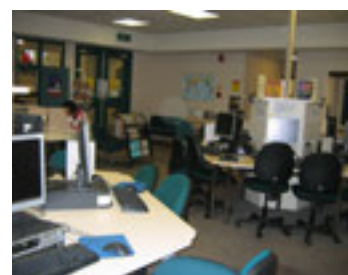
In various centres the opportunities provided could be framed in terms of pedagogy, content and/or skill.



Pedagogy

In the pedagogical sense these opportunities encompassed catering for learners who:

1. **May have preferences for a particular style of learning** such as Visual, Audio, Kinesthetic
2. **Demand a range of scaffolding and support structures**, for example from wanting regular appointment times with tutors to occasional drop-in assistance or being completely self-reliant and self-directed
3. **Work at their own academic capabilities and levels of autonomy**, having sufficient on hand to advise appropriately and ensure students attain and assess their knowledge with another benefits etc
4. **Prefer to work on their own, or in groups**, for example individual or shared desks, a round 'hub' of tables with computers available, and/or a comfortable sofa for people to meet or read in a relaxed way
5. **Have different levels of language or academic literacy**. Levels are often colour coded for easy reference (very useful for lower level learners)



Content

In terms of the content of the learning materials resources and activities it is important to have clearly labelled topics and subject areas that are relevant to students' lives both on and off campus. This ensures their interest and engagement in the subject matter which makes later manipulation of that information easier. Some of the topics and subject areas found were: Health, New Zealand Culture, Engineering, Media, Sports, Hobbies, Parenting, etc.

Skills

Most centres also specified the skill being focused on, for example, writing, listening, reading, speaking and pronunciation, and they had large clear explicit signage for this



6

Institutional Support

In this section

- ▶ Location of centres
- ▶ Attendees
- ▶ Funding
 - Establishing a centre
 - Day to-day running of the centre
 - Continued developments
 - Staffing
- ▶ Advisory service
- ▶ Embedded centre principles

As this project progressed it became evident that there are a wide variety of types of institutional support for all types of learning centres whether this be solely for language centres (most often for English as Second Language studies), self-access centres or general learning support centres for all students across all sectors of the institution. The support given to learning centres from Senior Management can influence the way the respective centres are perceived by staff and learners, and in turn, this may also influence whether it is being used to its maximum potential.

This institutional support can take many different forms including; the physical location of the centre/s, a financial contribution to setting up and running the centres on a day-to-day basis, and encouraging continued development within the centre. Institutional support can also take the form of a commitment to adequately staff the centre, support an advisory service, and the extent to which principles and goals of autonomy and self-determination are embedded (either explicitly or implicitly) within the educational programmes.

Location of centres

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Most institutions recognised the need to provide a centralised service for students and there was a definite trend of on-going developments at several institutes with respect to building projects for a new Learning Hub or Learning Commons complex. These endeavoured



to incorporate the typical library functions of storage, retrieval and study space as well as including research, information literacy services and learner support. Most are also in various degrees also managing information technology for students including drop-in computer labs and hosting other multimedia applications for students to use within the confines of the library. Several of the institutes also had banks of computers outside the actual library, mostly having complementary internet connections for free use as students walk to and from the Library Hub. Interestingly several of these Learning Hubs (confusingly, sometimes called a Learning Centre) have cafeterias nearby and actually encourage eating and drinking in the library, setting aside clearly labelled tables for this.



Some of the institutions also recognised the need for a specialised language centre service (or would like one), both for ESOL students and for other mainstream students who have a definite need of language assistance to complete their studies well.

There were centres that did not fare so well in terms of location, as they tended to simply be put somewhere out of the way with no support at all, or were generally hard to find and access. The language centre that was left most alone consisted of a series of blocks within a main library, but had no dedicated staff, cataloguing or display signage. The (out-of-date) books were simply placed on the shelves in no particular order, with no commitment to keeping materials up to date, and nowhere specific for students to use the resources. Perhaps as a direct result of this no-one was seen using any of the materials. Another language centre was 'hosted' by the Foundation Studies Department, but was actually housed about 15-20 minutes walk from the main campus. Yet another was situated in an obscure part of the building support, one again away from regular language classes and set within many narrow and winding pathways. However, there were some centres that had prominent positions within the whole institute and within the context of the Learning Commons Hub or language block in particular.

In several institutions the language centres were set right inside the library precinct in an especially dedicated space, were well signed and had clearly displayed materials for easy browsing and selection, and also had specialised information about autonomy and various



strategy suggestions to assist learning in general. However, even some of these centres had on-going philosophical differences with the library management with respect to overall management of the centre, the opening hours, access, food consumption, staffing levels, staff roles, cataloguing methodology and collection policies

Attendees

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Some of the centres were for students of language courses only (as other 'mainstreamed' students requiring learning support for language would access the institute-wide academic development support service). However, some of the centres had open access (including general with a permanent opening into the library). A number of centres were relatively relaxed about usage – indeed it seemed that ideas about this may be changing and it is now seen to be more beneficial for everyone if centres can be accessed by anyone wanting language help, including staff. Notably, one institution that currently has general learning support, but not specific language support, is looking into the possibility of setting up a language self-access centre, mainly to cater for an influx of international students who need to study language as well as their course content. An extra benefit of this open access is that there is better use of financial resources across the campus and better language (and academic) support across all sectors, overcoming the scope of all the courses being taught.

Funding

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The financial and management reporting lines for various centres were many and varied. Some are funded by the language department completely – including all hardware, software, resources and staffing, even when within the library. Others are funded by another department (for example, Foundation Studies or Continuing Education) or are completely separate and autonomous language institutes within the larger institution. Others are funded completely by the library (or Learning Hub) or by the general Learning Support for the whole campus. While it is difficult for the centres to attract funding, especially in an era of EFTs targets



and constrained finances for most universities and polytechnics at the moment, it may be possible to gain more institute funding if the centre is seen as part of the essential infrastructure of the institution, rather than just for a small group of students. For example, one centre ran practical sessions for engineering students. Another language centre advertised its presence to business diploma students and has materials especially for early childhood students and media students who may have language difficulties that need addressing at the same time as they are studying for their degrees.

Establishing a centre

The initial set-up costs for a centre can be considerable, so there does need to be good will from upper management at this stage of the development, even if further down the track actual day-to-day management is devolved to language schools or other departments. While tables, chairs, heating and other materials and resources may in some cases be bargained out directly to the language school or college, senior management still needs to be on board with respect to allocation and usage of dedicated space, whether this be within the library, the language school, or some other venue. There will be other hidden 'set-up' costs such as lighting, wiring for computers, TVs and DVD players, internet connections and payment for workers to install these items.

Day-to-day running of the centre

As mentioned above, different departments may be responsible for funding of academic or administrative employees (such as managers, office staff, technical support workers, tutorial assistants and learning facilitators). In some of the language schools, regular teachers were timetabled to work every week in the centre. The most heavily used centres had managers separately responsible for the day-to-day running of the centres, and they also co-ordinated the various activities and materials in the centre. These managers worked in this role for a range of proportions, from half to full time. In addition, they had a considerable co-ordination role alongside programme leaders and basic teachers with respect to materials held, visits to the centre, learner advising and the development of learner autonomy.



Continued developments

One of the initial set-up has been completed and day-to-day running is organised in a way suitable for the institute, it is sometimes still problematical to get extra funding or support for on-going developments - indeed, several centres found their funding streams cut throughout the year, and on into subsequent years. This was explicit in terms of materials budgets being cut and difficulty in getting capital expenditure for updating TVs, CD players etc. However, budget cuts have also occurred in less explicit ways such as reducing proportions of staff working in the centre. For example, in one of the centres the managerial role had decreased from full-time to half-time, an administrator's role had been increased to take on more work from elsewhere in the department, and other staff members usually had to leave the centre to work regularly in other parts of the School for one whole day, and/or several hours for two - three days. There is evidence that the current role of centre workers is expanding to take on more of the work that would have formerly been outsourced to other parts of the institute. Some centre staff are having to learn to be technicians and are undertaking the large job of digitising resource and materials (several centres are updating their stock of audio cassettes to a CD-only range, while video lectures and media programmes are being updated to a DVD format).



Staffing

Another example of disparity in funding issues is with respect to whether centre staff are on administrative or academic contracts (whether they work in a separate language centre or in general learning support), and if there is provision or not to fund learning advisers within the centres.

Advisory service

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Only one ILC had a dedicated adviser currently paid in that role, although in the past several centres had some funding for a part-time adviser. The position can be seen as a form of academic development aid for students or warrants employees with academic status who can give



academic input, who can manage and understand the role and function of the centre, and have the ability to make informed decisions. The advisory role is different from a librarian's or an administrator's role.

Overall very few centres have a comprehensive advisory service. Some of the centres have staff trained in this area who may contribute either in a semi-regulated way (working with purpose-designed workbooks) while others offer more "ad hoc" drop-in sessions whenever they are in. Other centres make use of teachers having a particular interest in advising by timetabling them to work with students in the centre and in some cases also giving them time released from teaching for this.

Another centre timetables all their classroom teachers to have regular sessions with students in the learning centre. Several of the centres who have no advisory staff nevertheless hold a wide array of "Helpful hints for learners" including practical leaflets about autonomous learning, basic needs analysis, goal setting, learning styles, self-assessment etc. as well as a selection of suggestions learners can try for themselves.



Embedded centre principles

Principles can be embedded in programmes of relevant books and/or whole institute. In some of the language books there are statements within the introduction that clearly state an aim to foster autonomy. In other situations this is an implicit requirement as students are expected to undertake "independent" study out of class time and/or "self-access" study for a certain number of hours a week.

Most schools departments and institutions come from a stance of wanting to support all learners to achieve to their maximum potential and to allow students the ability to interact on an equal footing in the educational process. Therefore, having a self-access learning centre can help promote and maintain this. In this way, centres are playing an important part in participatory collaborative education which, in Cornwall's (1999) words:





“...is a conscious move away from knowledge for the sake of knowledge to knowledge for action and empowerment.” (p.1).

This is a notion that fits very well with learner autonomy as well. While learning in an ILC is not necessarily in itself equivalent to autonomous learning, a centre can fulfil an important role in promoting awareness around key concepts of autonomous learning such as self-control, self-determination, self-reflection and a general growth in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-belief as a successful learner.



7

ILCs from a National Perspective

The outer petals in the rose metaphor are only indirectly connected to this study. However, English language learning is an important part of the national educational landscape, as New Zealand is the destination chosen by many students from various parts of the world, and international education contributes considerably to the export sector of the economy.

“English language education was the fourth largest export industry in New Zealand in 2007” (Department of Labour [DOL], 2007, p. 6).

With the current influx of students to New Zealand from many different educational contexts it is essential to know how to meet the individual needs of students from a diversity of cultural, social and religious backgrounds. Therefore, it is obviously very important that institutions and managers of ILCs keep up to date with current developments and trends within the autonomous learning field, both nationally and internationally, so they are able to give the best support available to all students.

The development of these Guidelines is a step toward restoring ILC profiles nationally, and toward promoting more recognition of the important roles that centres play in the life of our learners. Another outcome from this research project is to re-ignite, not only a passion for learning, but also a virtual means for like-minded individuals. This allows them to contribute to and belong to a group of professionals working in similar fields.

In this section

- ▶ Networking
- ▶ Inspiration sources for ILC staff



even though they are at some distance apart. Of course another beneficial outcome is the mutual peer support from other centre workers, as well as opportunities for peer collaboration on materials development and research projects.

These Guidelines have briefly outlined some areas in which centre workers can seek knowledge and inspiration and it is also suggested that a Community of Practice (CoP), an ILC-Special Interest Group (ILC-SIG), should be formed to further increase the quality of the collegial support.



Networking

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Through this study, a national perspective of centre practices and support, and the utilisation of these centres began to emerge. A couple of centre managers bemoaned the absence of an ILC-SIG, and as the study progressed it became clear that there was a perceived need amongst some of the other centre personnel for such a group to be put in place. This is already undertaken informally to some extent by ILC colleagues within 'fellow' institutions, as they arrange to meet, are given tours of centres, and share ideas via in-depth discussions about the resources, materials and services they offer. A once-active ILC-SIG (called SAC-SIG) dating back to 2005, has been dormant for some time due to restructuring and/or downsizing at some institutions, and changes of personnel at the most active centres. The group used to have formal regular SIG meetings, usually within the Auckland/Hamilton area, but involving visitors from around the country whenever possible. However, this valuable peer networking and sharing of practice has since gradually devolved as less time became available for the managers and other staff to attend these gatherings. So plans to revitalise the SIG and create a new CoP are in progress. The following ideas were pooled through the contacts and networks, established during the course of this study: to renew inter-centre meetings and visits by centre staff members, to form a supportive research community, to support each other's conference presentations, and to have an internet platform for discussions, collaborations and peer support.



Inspiration sources for ILC staff

Below is a list of some recognised researchers and authors in New Zealand to seek more inspiration and knowledge from:

1. Advising and study skills (Hobbs M. & Jones-Parry J. 2007; Lewis M. & Reinders H. 2003)
2. Autonomy and the classroom (Crabbe, D. 1993)
3. Good language learners (Griffiths, C. 2008)
4. Autonomy and ILCs (Hornby & Dofs, 2006, Dofs, K. 2008 & 2009; Cotterall S. 1995, 2000 & 2001; Reinders, H. 2001)
5. Vocabulary learning (Coxhead, A., 2011 a&b; Gu, P. 2003; Nation, P. 2008)
6. Distance education and strategies (White C. 2007 & 2008)

Some language organisations and other associations in New Zealand that people interested in autonomous learning can join and participate in are:

1. Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand, (ATLAANZ) <http://www.atlaanz.org/>
2. Association for Academic Language and Learning, (AALL) <http://www.aall.org.au/>
3. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, (TESOLANZ) <http://www.tesolanz.org.nz/>
4. Community Language Association of New Zealand, (CLANZ) <http://www.clanz.co.nz/index.html>
5. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, (HERDSA) <http://www.herdsa.org.au/>
6. Tertiary Education Research in New Zealand Conference, (TERNZ) <http://www.herdsa.org.nz/Ternz/2011/>



7. Independent Learning Association, (ILA) <http://www.ila.net.nz>
8. Community Languages and English as a Second or Other Language Conference, (CLESOL) <http://www.clesol.org.nz>
9. The Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, (ALAA) <http://www.alaa.org.au/>
10. The Applied Linguistics Association of New Zealand, (ALANZ) <http://www.alanz.ac.nz>
11. Language, Education and Diversity Conference, (LED) <http://www.led.education.auckland.ac.nz>



8

ILCs from a Global Perspective

While New Zealand may be physically a long way from other hubs of learning around the world, we are just the click of a mouse away from our international colleagues. Indeed, while historically autonomy and the development of specialised learning centres first arose in Europe, nowadays researchers from within ILCs in New Zealand have spread around the world – particularly to Japan and Australia. New Zealanders are active researchers and regular presenters to many international forums about learner autonomy research and provide practical examples for other educators and advisors to follow. This is one way of keeping ourselves and our centres pedagogically up-to-date and at the forefront of what is possible, always with the aim of enhancing the student experience and student success.

As important as it is to literally have a global presence, it is also imperative that ILC managers and staff take a metaphorical global perspective of their own centres in the sense of “standing back”, “seeing the big picture” and perhaps acquiring a more “objective” and “distanced” view of what the centre and staff are providing. It is sometimes useful to take a wider perspective, separate from the emotional and sentimental attachments that inevitably come with close association and ownership of the daily activities and day-to-day necessities of managing a centre.

As alluded to earlier, the whole notion of autonomous learning arose from the post-war European need for retraining and up-skilling a workforce which was not able to attend regular day classes. The term “learner autonomy” was in fact first coined by Holec (1981). As outlined

In this section

- ▶ Practical perspectives of ILCs
- ▶ Theoretical perspectives of ILCs





by Benson (2001), the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project, undertaken at CRAPEL, under the leadership of Holec focused on autonomy by providing resources to encourage and self-actualise learning to give students the opportunity for experimenting with self-directed learning. To a certain extent, a similar mindset is now evident in the world whereby there is a continual need for re-training and re-educating oneself throughout one's life, people nowadays are expected to have several different careers in one lifetime – not simply a job for life as used to be the norm. In recent years there has also been increased discussion and research about learning for the 21st century and a need for autonomy and creative support as previously mentioned by Weinstein (2009).

This need for flexibility and renewed academic pursuits throughout adulthood requires a certain amount of autonomy and the ability to be able to secure and study the required knowledge, to develop skill-sets, to gain experience, and to have the self-efficacy required to undertake these multiple changes in workplace and direction. The work histories of two of the centre managers, (which also required their own various types of study and exams etc in the respective disciplines), illustrate this very clearly. One current full time manager and advisor has also worked as a berry picker, full time mother, greenhouse worker, librarian, bus driver, taxi driver, and a classroom teacher. Another manager has had previous careers as a Government statistics department census administrator, petrochemical materials take-off technician (quantity surveyor), early childhood educator, full time parent, and a classroom teacher.

When considering the information gathered from personal visits, observations and experiences from centres around New Zealand, (and previously around the world) it seemed to fall naturally into two main categories in a global sense, one practical and the other theoretical.

Practical perspectives of ILCs

1. Learning Centres around the World

The authors have visited a number of centres in tertiary institutions around the world, including: Florence (Italy), Nanjing (France), Dublin (Ireland), Cambridge and Hull (England), Melbourne



(Australia), Hong Kong, Chiba (Japan), New Zealand, and Helsinki (Finland). This has informed them about the latest ideas regarding centres of excellence and autonomy from world-class educational institutions. These were housed in a wide array of settings – from old historic buildings in centuries old traditional universities to brand new purpose-built centres on new ‘green-field’ sites polytechnics.

2. Validation of Self-access Centres

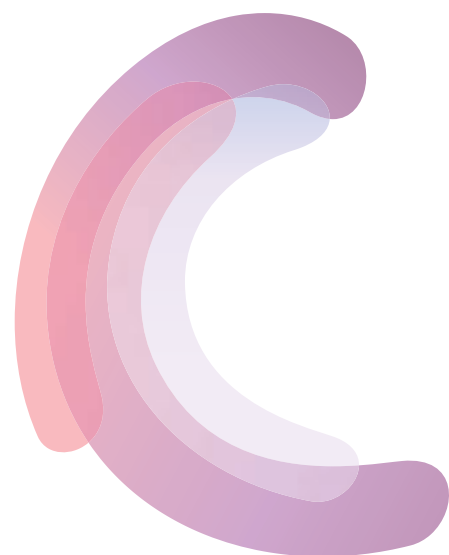
For the past couple of years, two well-known researchers in autonomy and self-access David Gardner (University of Hong Kong) and Marina Shaez (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) have been collaborating on a project to network and try to develop a set of standards. Through these self-access centres around the world can be evaluated, in terms of Good Practice and in relation to their own contexts and goals (see <http://a.d.e.le.unam.mx/a/c/>). This is much the same as what the writers are hoping to achieve with this Guidelines project.

However, in relation to evaluating centres, Morrison (1999) states:

“Any attempt to evaluate ... will have to in itself be flexible and responsive not only to changes in the centre but also changes in the learners and the wider learning environment.” (p. 132).

In a more recent paper Morrison (2002) proposed a mapping approach to reach a shared common understanding, incorporating viewpoints of the various stakeholders in the centre to give it more validity even if it is not entirely objective. Morrison (2005b) furthered this idea to include evaluating learning gain in some way as this is the main outcome that students want from a centre, in spite of the fact that:

“...the presence of numerous potential extraneous variables make it impossible to isolate the effect of the SAC on learning gain.” (p. 286).



Therefore, in order to do this, we suggest

“...a need for a new understanding of how to judge learning gain ... based upon perceptual rather than objective, verifiable data...” (p. 287).

from the learner, using such tools as learning diaries, test portfolios for groups and self-assessment to help the students make informed judgements

It is not only enterprise evaluations that pose problems but assessment of autonomy is also a difficulty for institutions around the globe. Cooker (2011) describes her current research investigating this, and finds that:

“...in institutions where learner autonomy is a pedagogical focus, learner autonomy is widely assessed, but there are no systematic approaches or tools for carrying out such assessments. Furthermore, assessment practices were rarely reported as involving learner themselves...” (para.1).

So now we are using:

“...Q methodology to understand learners' perceptions of the non-linguistic outcomes of learning in an autonomous learning environment ... to develop a learner-generated tool for the formative assessment of learner autonomy.” (para.1).

It seems that this aspect of evaluation needs more (a somewhat subjective) input from the prime user - the learner.

Practical Publications

Over the past decade or so, there has been a growing world-wide interest in setting up centres adapting and producing materials appropriate to certain types of students and subject advising, and devising various techniques for evaluating centres, self-access and autonomy. Some of the most widely used books for this purpose are:

1. **Setting up a Learning Centre (Gardner, D. & Miller, L. 1999; and Sheerin, S., 1989)**
2. **Handbooks for materials (Dixon, D. Baba, H. Coons, P. & Thomas, M., 2006; Esch, E., 1994; and LRC project partners, 2003)**
3. **Advising (Morrison-McPherson, M., 2001 & 2007)**
4. **Teacher involvement (Voller, P., 1997)**
5. **CRAPEL (Riley, P. 2003; and Gremmo, M-J., 2009),**
6. **Strategy training (Oxford, R., 1990; Wenden, A., 1991; and Brown, H. D., 2002)**
7. **Evaluating centres, self-access & autonomy (Morrison, B., 2005a & b)**

Theoretical perspectives of ILCs

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Autonomy has a solid foundation of research around the world today, and other researchers while not solely focusing on self-access or autonomy, investigate areas of great interest to managers and staff involved in ILCs. These areas include motivation, strategy training, tertiary study, and student engagement. Well-known authors in these fields are:

1. **Autonomy (Little, D., 1991; Crabbe, D. & Cotterall, S., 1999; Benson, P. & Voller, P., Pemberton, R., Toogood, S. & Barfield, A., 2009; and Scharle, A. & Szabo, A., 2000)**



2. **Motivation (Dörnyei, Z., 2001; and Ushioda, E., 2008)**
3. **Academic and social engagement (Tinto, V., 2006)**
4. **Student engagement (Currant, B., 2010)**
5. **Distance learning and CALL (White, C., 2008; and Levy, M., 2010)**
6. **Study skills (Lewis, M., & Reinders, H. 2003)**
7. **Tertiary study and open and distance learning (Hurd, S., 2008)**

The practical and theoretical perspectives mentioned above are bridged nationally and internationally by a raft of Academic Professional/Social organisations and networking opportunities as follows:

1. **Conferences, Proceedings, Reports and Journals from organisations: NZJALT, ATLAANZ, IATEFL, LASIG, ALANZ, TESOL, ILA, CLESOL, SiSAL etc.**
2. **Research groups: AILA Ren, IDP Database of Research on International Education <http://www.idp.org/idp-today/research-database/>**
3. **List-servers: TAILEARN, ilearn, AUTO-L**
4. **Social networking sites: Facebook, twitter**
5. **Professional development sites: Ako Aotearoa**



Limitations

This research is a relatively small scale descriptive study, so while tentative conclusions can be drawn, any results need to be interpreted cautiously and it is difficult to be able to generalise as there is too little data to make definitive claims. It should also be remembered that the data was collected from 2009, so some of the centres will now have been updated – anecdotal evidence suggests that at least one has been thoroughly re-vamped in a new “Learning Hub” part of the campus and planned developments at other centres noted in the project should have been put into effect by the time of publication. However, in spite of the small number of participants and the time-frame of the research, the results of this qualitative study are encouraging and indicative of Good Practice currently taking place in New Zealand centres.



Future Research

The next step would be to undertake a wider-reaching study to replicate this research on a larger scale. Another area already highlighted as a fertile ground for further research is with a focus on the students. This could take the form of the (often more subjective) learner viewpoint, particularly with regard to evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre, and to evaluation of the resources offered and used in the centre, and to the learning proficiency gains as perceived by the learners themselves.



Conclusions

The rationale for the provision of ILCs and the encouragement of autonomous learning by tertiary institutions was explored in the literature review. Even if the evaluation of student gain in ILCs proves to be a challenge, it is suggested that learners given the tools for independent studies can become more successful learners. These Guidelines aimed to provide examples of Good Practice in the running of ILCs in New Zealand, with the intention of maximising student use. The results showed that a range of initiatives for autonomous learning support is being undertaken by the ILCs and they demonstrated examples of advising. In addition, a number of practical advice and Good Practice suggestions for the running of an ILC emerged. The suggestions are best seen as indicators of Good Practice only as the centres wanting to utilise them may differ from the centres from which the ideas originated. Other results highlighted that the managerial role varied considerably between the ILCs and that there seemed to be evidence for the importance and need for robust institutional support, through both appropriate funding and commitment, for centres to be able to develop and thrive. The study indicates an aspiration by a range of tertiary institutions to provide some form of useful and beneficial independent learning centre in order to encourage life-long learning, and support students towards taking more control of their learning process. This desire is being met in a variety of ways using various strategies by different departments and schools within the institutions. It is hoped that these Guidelines will inspire and help tertiary institutions develop existing centres as well as provide encouragement for setting up new ones.



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