

Teaching as Gradual Disappearance: Practical Steps Toward Learner Autonomy

Thank you for attending my talk on promoting learner autonomy. This handout is designed to provide you with a clear list of practical suggestions for doing just that. Here you will find a list of all the ideas mentioned in the talk, as well as a few extras. I hope you find them useful.

If you would like a copy of the slides used, email me at johnny.day@londonschool.com

Little Additions

- Evaluation (works well in skills-based lessons)
After a skills-based lesson, for example on guessing meaning from context or using spoken discourse markers to develop fluency, ask learners to evaluate how useful the lesson was and discuss when the skills they have practised could be useful. Use yes/no statements for lower levels.
- Gauging Confidence (works well in systems-based lessons)
Use a thumbometer – where learners hold their thumb up/down/in the middle - to show how confident and comfortable they feel with language just studied. This works for any level and can also be useful in helping more reticent learners to voice how they feel.
- Setting Personal Aims
Provided you have more than a week with your learners, work with them to set aims for the following week. Encourage learners to make their aims tangible and achievable, but take their lead and facilitate (don't dictate!). At the end of the following week, have learners assess the extent to which they have achieved their aims.
- Negotiating Lesson Menus
Board up what is to be covered in class each day, and ask learners in what order they would like to do things. Perhaps even give them the chance to omit things from the schedule, provided they can justify their choice and it doesn't leave you with nothing to do!
- Tick/cross/question mark (for vocabulary)
*When a coursebook presents a list of decontextualised vocabulary (or if you decide to), get learners to self-assess how well they know them. Considering meaning, pronunciation, part of speech and collocation, learners put ✓, ✗ or ? to indicate their understanding, and then work in pairs or small groups to share and peer-teach. The teacher monitors closely and interjects **when necessary**.*
- Three Steps (for vocabulary)
For vocabulary in context, have learners follow these three steps: 1 – ask your classmates, 2 – check in a learner dictionary, 3 – ask your teacher. Let them know that the third option is always available, but that they may often not need it.

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In-Class Activities

- Vocabulary Recycle Questions (teacher and student-made)
Produce A and B sets of questions that feature vocabulary from previous lessons. The vocabulary should be highlighted. Hand them out in A and B groups and have learners work together to remember the meaning and pronunciation of the highlighted vocabulary. Then put one learner from A with one from B and have them ask and answer the questions. If any problems arise with meaning, pronunciation, or use, it is the responsibility of the learner to help. Teacher monitors, but only interjects if needed.
- DIY: discussion topics
Elicit from learners topics that they would like to discuss and board them up. When it comes time for a discussion, have the learners vote on which topic they want to discuss.
- DIY: TED talk lessons
First, go through a standard TED talk lesson (introduce topic, listen for gist, listen for details with comprehension questions, end with discussion of topic). Then get learners to produce a lesson in the same vein: they choose a TED talk, find a way to introduce the topic, produce gist and comprehension questions, and lead a discussion on the topic.
- DIY: board game questions
If you play board games in class, first have a normal session with the class. Then get the learners to produce their own question cards for the game (this works well with games like Articulate, Trivial Pursuit, Taboo and Charades).
- Guided Worksheets
This is akin to handing the learners your lesson plan, only graded so that they can follow it. For a reading lesson, for example, list the stages on a handout: warmer Qs, read the text and give it a possible title, find unknown vocabulary and guess meaning before looking it up if needed, discussion Qs. Set a total time limit but not limits for each stage. Learners can complete it at their own pace.

Out of Class / Back Home

- Daily Encounter
Set homework that involves learners having some kind of natural encounter with English. This could be as straightforward as watching a YouTube video or listening to a podcast. It could involve having a conversation in a shop, at a library etc. and reporting it back to the class. It could also consist of taking a photo of an interesting advert or sign and bringing it to class to discuss the meaning.

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- Learner Journal
Suggest to learners that they keep a journal in which they can both record what they have been doing and use it as a way to recycle and practice new language. Set it first as homework, but encourage learners to continue it after they leave the class.

- Self-Dictogloss
First, do a few dictoglosses in class. A dictogloss involves the teacher either reading or playing a track of a short text, which the learners have to try to write down accurately and work together to reconstruct. Suggest that they can do this by themselves with any video that has subtitles. Choose the video, and use it in three stages: 1st – just listening, 2nd – listening and watching, 3rd – listening and watching with subtitles to check.

- Websites + Apps
 - Youglish.com – *great for raising awareness of natural pronunciation and collocation.*

 - Quizlet.com – *interactive flashcard site and app with some gamification options.*

 - Lyricstraining.com – *great for listening, learners listen to songs of their choice and try to complete words missing from the lyrics.*

 - Perfect-english-grammar.com – *traditional, comprehensive site that provides explanations, examples and exercises (with answers) for most core grammar areas.*

 - Teacherluke.co.uk – *engaging and entertaining podcast that provides listening practice while teaching learners new language.*

 - BBC: 6-minute English – *episodic series that can be used to develop listening and provides learners with six new pieces of vocabulary per episode.*

 - BBC: Tim’s Pronunciation Workshop – *Video series that guides learners through different features of pronunciation, including how to make individual sounds and the various features of connected speech.*