THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE CLASSES IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT: School failure is a problem, along with many others, which has surrounded our schools, and it has been related to learning difficulties. The present article aims at reporting on a study investigating the effects of the teaching of LLS (Language Learning Strategies) on the learning process of EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners with learning difficulties. Also, it introduces the Language Learning Strategy Instructional Program (LLSIP) devised for the purposes of the study and discusses the importance of the explicit teaching of LLS in AL classes. There were 16 participants in the study: six in the experimental group, and ten in the control group. The analysis of the data collected through 46 90-minute classes observed, questionnaires, learner diary pages, and interviews showed that (1) participants had difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, (2) most participants in the control group remained with the difficulties identified in the beginning of the course, and (3) after attending the LLSIP, the experimental participants had changes mainly in regard to their attitude towards English, since they became more willing to participate in class, seemed to be more motivated and to believe they could overcome their difficulties. These results strengthen the importance of teaching LLS to students with learning difficulties and suggest the inclusion of LLS in the Brazilian AL classes.

KEYWORDS: Learning Difficulties; Language Learning Strategies; Teaching; Learning.

RESUMO: O fracasso escolar é um problema, além de muitos outros, que tem estado presente em nossas escolas e tem sido relacionado com dificuldades de aprendizagem. Este artigo tem

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como objetivo apresentar um estudo que investigou os efeitos do ensino de EAL (Estratégias de Aprendizagem de Língua) no processo de aprendizagem de alunos ILA (Inglês como Língua Adicional) com dificuldades de aprendizagem. Ainda, tem o objetivo de apresentar um Programa de Instrução de Estratégias de Aprendizagem de Língua (PIEAL), desenvolvido para o estudo em questão, e discutir a importância do ensino explícito de EAL nas aulas de ILA. O estudo contou com 6 participantes no grupo experimental e 10, no grupo de controle. A análise dos dados coletados através das 46 aulas de 90 minutos observadas, dos questionários, dos diários e entrevistas mostrou que (1) os participantes apresentavam dificuldades nas quatro habilidades (ouvir, falar, ler e escrever), (2) a maioria dos participantes no grupo de controle continuou com as dificuldades identificadas no início do curso e (3) após atender o PIEAL, os participantes do grupo experimental apresentaram mudanças em sua atitude com a língua inglesa, tornado-se mais dispostos a participar nas atividades propostas em aula, aparentando estar mais motivados e acreditar que são capazes de vencer suas dificuldades. Esses resultados dão força à importância do ensino de EAL para alunos com dificuldades de aprendizagem e sugerem a inclusão de EAL nas aulas de uma língua adicional no Brasil.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dificuldades de Aprendizagem; Estratégias de Aprendizagem de Língua; Ensino; Aprendizagem.

1. Introduction

Language learning strategies (LLS) are defined here as the steps or the actions consciously selected by learners either to improve the learning of an Additional

Language (AL[15]), the use of it, or both, being consciousness on the part of the learner the essential element in the use of a strategy (COHEN, 1998: 4).

Research on language learning strategies formally started in 1966 with the publication of *The Method of Inference in Foreign Language Study*, by Aaron Carton, in which a discrepancy in learners' propensity to make inferences and in learners' willingness to take risks and their ability to make reasonable inferences was identified (RUBIN, 1987: 19). Subsequent studies started to identify what actions were taken by "good learners" and by "bad learners" in order to learn a language, so that the LLS could be classified. In the scenario of English learning as an AL, these studies have demonstrated that the use of LLS aids students to improve their performance in the language (PAIVA, 2004; LUCENA & FORTKAMP, 2001; LESSARD-CLOUSTON, 1997; VARELA, 1997; YANG, 1996; DADOUR & ROBBINS, 1996; WOLLSTEIN, 1995; OXFORD, 1994; OXFORD, 1989; O'MALLEY et al., 1985; POLITZER & MCGROARTY, 1985; COHEN & APHEK, 1980).

My experience as a teacher has introduced me to different classroom environments from language (private) to public schools. Although each of them differs in manifold aspects, they seem to share one aspect, which is the heterogeneity of learners' behavior towards studying and learning the AL. One aspect that has caught my attention most is the lack of commitment to learning and has made me reflect on the reasons for this lack. The answer came when I started to understand the varied reasons why some learners are seen as uncommitted. Two resources brought me insights on that. The first one was Ehrman's *Understanding Second Language Learning Difficulties* (1996). In her book, Ehrman demonstrates that many of the behaviors that students have inside classrooms are more related to their difficulties to learn rather than to an inherent

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[15] The term Additional Language here refers to any language other than one's first language, avoiding the distinctions between foreign language (FL) and second language (L2). Yet, it encompasses a third language (L3) or as many languages one wishes to learn.

lack of commitment or to an inherent desire of being undisciplined. That is the same subject approached by the movie *Misunderstood minds*, which led me to rethink about the learners' behavior in class. Blumenthal (n.d.) makes use of this movie to address the kind of student whom I tended to label as undisciplined and/or non-committed to learning. As she puts it, they are in regular classrooms, they struggle to learn – some have trouble reading, some cannot express themselves orally or in writing, others try hard to pay attention and stay focused, and others act out and become discipline problems. The author states that these students are frequently mistaken and if their real problems with learning are not considered, these problems can have "a devastating impact on the student's self-esteem and future academic and social success" (Introduction, 2nd paragraph, 3rd line).

> Adam Dunning was typed as the 'good kid, but lazy student' by his teachers. Not being able to keep up with his friends, especially in reading, made Adam feel dumb and angry. Despite school tests that found him 'average', by seventh grade Adam was severely behind in reading. Rather than face the daily humiliations of not being able to keep up in class, Adam started skipping school, became involved with drugs and alcohol, and eventually crashed a car he had stolen. Landing in juvenile detention for three months, Adam actually thrived academically. The small classes, individualized attention and differentiated **learning strategies were what he needed** [bold mine]. Unfortunately, once out of juvenile detention Adam's return to school was not positive. At the end of the series, Adam has dropped out of school, and is working odd jobs around town. In March 2002 Adam was arrested at a party that got out of control. Dr. Andrea Weiss, who evaluated Adam when he was in seventh

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grade and saw him before his second arrest, presaged Adam's continued

downward spiral. 'When you don't give a student what they need, the

potential for falling apart and giving up is so high.' (Blumenthal, n.d.,

The story of 5 kids, 5th paragraph)

As Blumenthal underscores, among the many students in our classrooms teachers can find other *Adams* and students with difficulties to learn. These students are not those labeled as students with special needs, because their disabilities are not so severe, thus offering them the support that APAE[16] offers their students seems to be unnecessary. Rather, they are called students with learning difficulties, that is, learners who face problems in learning, who under the appropriate intervention may get over their learning problems. It was then that I understood how LLS would help the students whom I used to label as undisciplined or non-committed to learning. My hypothesis was that LLS would assist in overcoming their difficulties and thus in reaching more success in class and consequently in life.

Some studies in Brazil touch upon a problem that has surrounded our schools: school failure (CARNEIRO, 2002; ZUCOLOTO, 2001; SOUZA, 2000; BAZI, 2000; and BISPO, 2000), and most of them relate school failure to learning difficulties. Although these studies have considered learning difficulties, it is my belief that teachers, in general, may not consider students' misbehavior or dearth of success in class as signs of learning difficulties, just as I did not use to. Students with learning difficulties – who at times do not know what way to take to study vocabulary or to keep their attention held at what is important in class, and are not able to develop their own strategies to reach success in learning – may be simply coined as bad or unsuccessful

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[16] APAE stands for Associação de Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais.

learners. This action of categorizing is not bad itself, since it demonstrates that teachers are aware of their students' performance; it also demonstrates that teachers can assess to what extent their students are learning. Nevertheless, as Moura (1992: 3) puts it, although teachers are able to group their students into bad or good learners, teachers usually and unconsciously tend to favor the good students, by segregating the ones under the "bad learner" label. My position is that if teachers are aware that in their classrooms there is the presence of "bad learners" (to whom I refer here as students with learning difficulties), they can do more than simply label. They can help these students overcome their difficulties, since ultimately most teachers want their students to learn. In addition, if LLS show to be effective to language learning students with learning difficulties, teachers will then have one more tool with which to assist their students.

Research carried out with students with learning difficulties has suggested that when these students employ learning strategies they may cope with most of their difficulties and thus achieve the success in *general learning* that they are expected to reach (BOUDAH & WEISS, 2002; FINLAN, 2001; STUROMSKI, 1997; BLUMENTHAL, n.d.; GERSTEN & BAKER, n.d.; LAMB et al., n.d.; LYON, n.d.)[17]. Although studies on LLS abound in the literature, not many of them address the use of LLS by students with learning difficulties. Studies deal either with the use of LLS or the explicit teaching and use of LLS for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners in general, in order to investigate either strategy use or the effects of instruction on students' performance or the frequency of strategy use, with focus on one specific skill.

In Brazil, to the best of my knowledge, few studies involving learners with learning difficulties and LLS use have been conducted. Sardo, Oliveira and Ostroski

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[17] These studies were mainly carried out with a focus on issues such as Math learning and L1 learning rather than with a focus on AL learning.

(2001) ran a study on the styles and difficulties in learning English, involving four groups of elementary school students, two groups of public high school students, and one group of first-year college students. Participants answered a written questionnaire, which revealed that students need to be given more planning time for communication in class, and to be taught strategies and conversational devices. Silva (2006) investigated the use of LLS by tutors, successful and not so successful students. Participants wrote narratives of how they learned English and the strategies reported were tabulated. Results showed that the participants with more success in learning (more proficient AL speakers) made more use of LLS than did the participants with less success in learning (less proficient AL speakers) did. The study highlighted the importance of the explicit instruction of LLS in AL classes.

The present article aims at reporting on a study investigating the effects of the teaching of LLS on the learning process of EAL learners with learning difficulties. Also, it introduces the Language Learning Strategy Instructional Program (LLSIP) devised for the purposes of the study and discusses the importance of the explicit teaching of LLS in AL classes. The remainder of this article includes (1) a description of the participants, (2) the instruments and procedures for data collection, (3) the LLSIP, (4) the discussion of the results triggered by the use of LLS prompted by the LLSIP, (5) a discussion on the importance of the explicit teaching of LLS, and (6) the references.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were from English 1 classes at an Extracurricular Language Course. Two English 1 groups were chosen aiming at controlling for proficiency level and for repertoire of strategies. Since the study included an instructional period, it was thought that learners at a higher level of proficiency could also have a broader repertoire of strategies, which would later interfere with the instruction. Although the two groups selected summed 42 students, only 16 with LD participated in the study. In order to identify which students showed LD, the 42 students answered a questionnaire, their teachers were interviewed and the 42 students' behavior while in class was observed.

The participants chosen filled in a schedule chart and were assigned to two groups, experimental and control, according to their availability to attend the LLSIP. Both groups answered to 5 questionnaires. Participants in the experimental group attended the LLSIP, were interviewed both before and after attending the LLSIP, and filled in summary pages and learner diary pages.

At the time of data collection, participants' age in the experimental group ranged from 14 to 23 years, with a mean of 18.5 years, while in the control group, participants' age ranged from 20 to 36 years, with a mean of 26.5 years. All participants in the experimental group only studied. In contrast, in the control group, six of the participants held a job position, and four of them both held a job position and studied. Except for one participant, all participants were originally from cities other than Florianopolis. At the time of the study, length of residence in Florianopolis varied from four months to 16 years, with a mean of 4.9 years of residence. Participants were from different areas of

study, but shared some interests. Their academic performance in high school/undergraduate courses varied from average 6 to 9, with a mean of 7.6.

2.2 Language learning difficulties

There were 6 participants in the experimental group and 10 participants in the control group. According to the analysis of the questionnaires, the notes taken and the audio recorded during the observation of 14 ninety-minute classes, as well as the interviews with the teachers, participants in both groups showed to have difficulties in all the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with varying levels of difficulty, under the *perceptual*, *sequencing*, *simultaneous processing*, *abstraction*, *memory*, *motor*, and *general functioning* categories of the components of learning that are affected by LD (Input, Integration, Memory, and Output – EHRMAN, 1996: 263). Difficulties with speaking and listening were striking. Difficulties with the retention of new vocabulary for later retrieval were also identified. Some of them had problems to concentrate and some were considered slow learners. Some signs that suggested the difficulties were: (1) dearth of interest in class; (2) inattentiveness; (3) short concentration span; (4) misperception of part of what was said by others, (5) difficulties with organizing notes and learned material, (6) problems in doing two things at once (e.g., listening and taking notes), (7) need of a great many of repetitions; (8) negative self-image; (9) not being a risk taker or volunteer; (10) lack of engagement in classroom activities; (11) exhibition of anxiety or emotional strain when in class; (12) lack of required background knowledge; (13) need of additional time to process sounds, words, and sentences; (14) tendency to give up easily when performing tasks in English; (15)

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frustration; (16) lack of confidence; (17) misperception of visual and auditory stimuli; (18) class absences; (19) struggle to learn; and (20) problems with making associations.

2.3 Instruments and procedures

A total of 46 90-minute classes were observed. From these, 34 were observed through note taking and 24 were also audio-recorded. Note taking or audio recording were only used after the fifth class observed. This delay in using such instruments avoided resistance from students and allowed for some more interaction between the researcher and the students. Informal conversational interviews took place mainly during the LLSIP to verify students' comprehension of what was taught, as well as to gather other pieces of information, such as their previous strategy use. Semi-structured interviews were used in two phases of the study: the pre-instructional and post-instructional phases. In the pre-instructional phase, the teachers were interviewed on their opinions about who the students with LD were. In the post-instructional phase, interviews were carried out with the teachers and the participants in both experimental and control groups. Teachers were asked about the participants' development along the course, and their own interest in explicitly teaching LLS in regular English classes. In an attempt to identify participants' strategy use, they were asked whether they had studied for the oral test (part of their classes' regular evaluation system) and, if so, how they had done that. They were also asked about their interest in learning (more) about LLS and how they would like to have access to this teaching of LLS.

A total of five questionnaires were administered. Questionnaire 1 was answered by the 42 students and briefly asked factual questions and assessed English language learning data. Questionnaire 2 had two parts and was applied to the 16 learners who

actually participated in the present study, before they were assigned to the experimental and control groups. It investigated the learning styles favored by participants and their availability to attend the LLSIP. Questionnaire 3 addressed participants' LLS use prior to and right after the LLSIP, as well as their assessment of the LLSIP concerning their learning. It was administered only to the experimental group. Questionnaire 4 was administered in the post-instructional phase to both control and experimental group. It asked for additional factual information. Questionnaire 5 was answered by both groups, and aimed at (a) detecting the difficulties that participants' experienced while taking the midterm and the final tests in their English course.

A Language Learning Strategy Instructional Program (LLSIP) was devised based on students' LD and learning styles. The LLSIP will be described in section 3.

Finally, learner diary pages were filled in by both control and experimental groups immediately after each of the 6 last classes. They aimed at collecting information about what participants in the control and experimental groups could summarize from the class, their difficulties, the strategies used, and short-term objectives for their learning.

2.4 Data Analysis

Questionnaires 1 and 2, the notes taken during the observation of classes (carried out in the first third of data collection), and the first interview with the teachers were analyzed in order to provide ground for (1) the selection of the students with LD, (2) their assignment to the control and the experimental groups, and (3) the identification of their learning styles in order to devise the LLSIP. The Summary Pages and the interviews carried out during the LLSIP were considered as to verify the experimental

participants' comprehension of what had been taught in the program. Finally, questionnaires 3 and 5, the notes taken during the observation of classes (during and after the LLSIP), the Learner's Diary Pages, the second interview with the teachers, and the last interview with the participants were examined in order to verify the changes, if any, in participants' LD in the experimental and control groups.

3. The Language Learning Strategy Instructional Program

Varela (1997: 127) reinforces the importance of teaching a combination of many LLS categories, because this kind of combined instruction may be more effective than the instruction of isolated strategies. In this sense, the strategies that were selected to be taught in the LLSIP were all related to the participants' difficulties and belonged to different categories. These categories were metacognitive, cognitive, memory, and social-affective. The objective of the LLSIP was to teach 15 LLS to students, raising their awareness about how, when, and why to use each LLS the LLSIP comprised.

Participants in the experimental group attended this 12-hour LLSIP, which was divided into three different four-hour sessions.

3.1 The first session

The first day of instruction started with the song "Let it Be" (see Appendix I)[18], which was listened to and was discussed, with visual aid (OHP transparency with the lyrics and pictures related to the song). Participants were invited to make associations of the pictures with the lyrics and then the general message of the song was conveyed.

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[18] Due to space constraints, the appendices are available online. Please, click on the links to access them using your internet connection. Appendix I: http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20I.pdf

They were given a handout containing the lyrics and were encouraged to do what the song says: let it be (understood as "let learning happen, relax"). Finally, the lyrics were read aloud as a way of getting used to the word pronunciation and the song was sung.

Next, students were asked to work in pairs. Each pair was given a situation (see Appendix II)[19], which should be discussed. The results of this discussion led the participants to define LLS first with their own words to later receive a definition of LLS based on Cohen (1998)[20].

After understanding the meaning of LLS, participants were presented the strategies in the instructional program[21]: 1) metacognitive strategies (Organizing, Planning for a Language Task, Paying Attention, Self-evaluating), 2) cognitive strategies (Reasoning Deductively, Taking Notes, Highlighting, Summarizing), 3) compensation strategies (Asking for Help, Using Clues), 4) memory strategies (Grouping, Making Associations, Structured Reviewing), and 5) socio-affective strategies (Talking to Yourself, Relaxing, Taking Risks Wisely, Cooperating with Others). The definition and examples for these strategies were adapted from Oxford (1989). In the sequence, strategies started being taught. First of all, the definition of each strategy was brought by means of an OHP transparency, as all the material in the LLSIP, and was explained in their mother tongue so as to ensure that participants would understand the contents. The definition was immediately followed by a practical example and by an activity in which participants had to make use of that strategy. Both practical examples and strategy tasks were mostly based on Oxford (1989).

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[19] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20II.pdf
[20] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20III.pdf
[21] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20IV.pdf

The LLS taught in the first session were: 1) Grouping, 2) Making Associations (using imagery and sounds), 3) Structured Reviewing, and 4) Summarizing[22]. Participants were given handouts containing all the information conveyed.

In the end of this session, students were informally interviewed on whether they had already made use of such strategies and were asked to fill in a summary page[23], consisting of two questions, which allowed the researcher to assess participant's comprehension of the contents in the first session.

3.2 The second session

This part of the LLSIP started with the song *Let it Be*, this time working with the pauses present along the song. It is the researcher's belief as a teacher and as a musician that the awareness of the occurrence of such pauses may help students correctly breathe while singing the song, allowing them more concentration on the words in the lyrics.

In the sequence, a review of the first session was carried out (see Appendix VI)[24], in which students were motivated to recall the meanings of strategies, by performing the activities proposed. After that, the following strategies were taught (1) Organizing (finding a proper place and atmosphere to study, finding time to study, keeping a notebook), (2) Planning for a Language Task, (3) Asking for Help, (4) Self-evaluating (using checklists and diaries, recognizing your emotions in relation to the language, making decisions), (5) Paying Attention (direct and selective attention), (6)

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[22] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20V.pdf

[23] The summary page was adapted from the one used by Varela (1997). The Summary Page answered in the first session addressed the meaning of the LLS taught. The second differed in its structure, but had the same purpose in the three versions, which was to make participants summarize the LLS learned in each session.

[24] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20VI.pdf

Taking Notes, and (7) Highlighting (marking parts of the written material). Each strategy was modeled and practiced in this session (see Appendix VII)[25].

On the whole, this session consisted of the same steps as the first session. After the strategies part, students were informally interviewed about their use of these strategies before the instruction, and were asked to fill in the summary page.

3.3 The last session

This session ends the instructional phase. It was started with the song *Let it Be*, as in the previous sessions, except for its purposes. This time, its sentence internal stresses were identified and practiced in order to help students with the rhythm of the song. Next, a review of the second meeting was carried out, leading participants to recall the strategies already taught and their importance (see Appendix VIII)[26].

The strategies learned in this part were six: 1) Using Clues (linguistic or contextual cues), 2) Reasoning Deductively, 3) Cooperating with Others, 4) Taking Risks Wisely, 5) Talking to Yourself (encouraging yourself), and 6) Relaxing (using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, meditation, music or laughter)[27].

Differently from the other sessions, this meeting had an awareness raising moment, which had the specific purposes of ensuring that students were in fact aware of when, how and why to use the strategies learned. This moment was comprised by three particular activities (see Appendix X)[28]. The first was called *grouping activity* and aimed mainly at the use of the following strategies: Grouping, Cooperating with Others, and Reasoning Deductively. The second one was an adapted jigsaw activity and the use

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[25] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20VII.pdf

[26] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20VIII.pdf
[27] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20IX.pdf
[28] http://dl.dropbox.com/u/53510974/LLS%20Appendices/Appendix%20X.pdf

of the following strategies was possible: Cooperating with Others, Using Clues, Paying Attention, Taking Notes, and Making Associations. Finally, the last one was a video clip activity, in which the use of the following strategies was possible: Reasoning Deductively, Using Clues, Cooperating with Others, Paying Attention, and Taking Notes.

After the awareness raising activities, students were informally interviewed on their use of these strategies before the instruction and then were asked to fill in the summary page. Next, they listened and sang the song *Let it Be* along with the CD. In the sequence, the CD was left apart; participants cheerfully sang the song *Let it Be* with the researcher, who played the guitar. Finally, students answered questionnaire 3 in which they had to formally report the strategies they used prior to the LLSIP, and their opinion about the effects of receiving explicit teaching of LLS.

4. Discussion

This article reports on a study that investigated the effect of LLS instruction on the learning process of EAL learners with LD. The analysis of data showed that participants had little, if any, knowledge about LLS prior to their participation in the study.

Regarding strategy use, even though participants in the control and experimental groups might not have been aware, they both made use of strategies prior to the LLSIP. However, as the participants in the experimental group themselves reported, they were unaware of such actions as being strategies and of the way these strategies would benefit their learning. The analysis of data showed that this unawareness seemed to lead them to the incorrect use of some strategies, such as Taking Notes (randomly),

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Summarizing (with the purposes of studying from the summary, not of checking their understanding of the topic), Organizing (not actually organizing themselves to the study of English), Talking To Yourself (saying negative statements), Asking for Help (as the first resource, not the last), Paying Attention (direct attention, while selective attention would be more effective), Reasoning Deductively, and Using Clues. The recognition of the inadequate use of these strategies and the awareness of how and when to use them as well as the others taught in the LLSIP encouraged participants to make use of more strategies and/or to continue using the ones reported (but more consciously now). Except for one participant, there was no strategy of which they would never make use[29]. All of them reported their desire to use other strategies in the future, as soon as they would have the opportunity to.

Participants in both groups showed difficulties in the many skills involving language learning, as well as anxiety and uneasiness about learning. Regarding the effects of the LLSIP, in general, the experimental participants reported that taking part in the LLSIP helped them to become aware of the steps that can help them learn and the kind of behavior they should avoid in learning situations. They started making conscious use of strategies. Participants E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, and E6 changed mainly with regard to their attitude towards English, since they became more willing to participate in class, in pair work tasks, or in tasks involving a group or the whole class. The ones who seemed to avoid speaking English previously, towards the end of the term sounded more willing to try, more confident and motivated. Possibly due to this willingness and motivation to study, most of them had their level of attention increased and outcomes in specific skills, such as listening, improved. Their difficulties still mentioned in the Learner Diary Pages seemed to be more linked to specific pieces of

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[29] Only participant E1 mentioned not intending to use the strategy of Taking Risks Wisely.

language than to a specific skill, but it is doubtful whether those difficulties have disappeared. Rather, they may have remained to a certain degree. However, the participants' attitude towards such difficulties may have affected their behavior in learning, cheering them up and making them believe that they could overcome their difficulties. Although the analysis of data was inconclusive regarding whether participants in the experimental group overcome their LD with speaking, listening, reading and writing, some aspects that involve their classroom and learning routine could be raised:

- Time optimization. Students with LD may spend a significant period of time just considering the ways to deal with the contents to be learned in order to learn them. Even having figured the ways out, sometimes students with LD did not choose the steps that would lead them to an effective learning, which made them need to study even more to learn a specific subject. The use of LLS optimized participants' time, that is, provided them with many options from which they could choose when having to study. Having received explicit instruction on how, when and why to use the LLS taught enabled them to choose the most appropriate strategy, leading them to a more successful learning. In addition, the strategy of Organizing helped them manage their schedule, allocate some (available) time and opportunities for the study of English, have a quicker access to their notes about homework, new vocabulary (Keeping a Notebook), and also choose the correct place to study.

- Motivation. Having difficulties many times means being frustrated. Students with difficulties frequently have to face situations that embarrass them, which may make them unmotivated. Oxford (1989) argues that motivation grows as students begin to understand the relationship between their use of strategies

and their learning. The results of the present study corroborate this assertion. Results showed that being aware of strategy use made participants feel more confident to take risks and surpass difficult situations, encouraging them to believe that they were able to accomplish the tasks requirements (strategy of Talking to Yourself). The more they continued using strategies, the more they got motivated to study, and the less they feared getting frustrated or failing. Consequently, this motivation led them to study more and thus to learn more.

- Ways to study. As stated in the *time optimization* aspect, students with LD tend to have problems in figuring out the best way to study. LLS had a positive effect over this difficulty since they are actually tools, ways, steps which are taken by the students (Oxford, 1989). When students with LD are explicitly taught on how, when, and why to use a LLS, it may get less troublesome and less time consuming to find a strategy that will be effective to a given situation.

- Facilitator. Alexander et al (1998) list six attributes for LLS. One of them is that strategies are *facilitative*, that is, they enhance performance. For students with LD, learning basic language items may be troublesome. The use of LLS seems to ease the learning of such items and the learning process itself.

- Difficulty awareness. Learners with difficulties may tend to make their difficulties seem worse than they actually are, may not recognize the cause of these difficulties, and may not understand how to use their learning strengths to compensate (or overcome) for difficulties (ALRC, 2004). The use of LLS may give students the steps to assess their actual difficulties and evaluate their own learning. Being aware of their own difficulties enables students to deal with and probably surpass their difficulties as time goes by.

Besides these aspects aforementioned, participants in the experimental group reported that LLS also helped them in other academic subjects, in their undergraduate courses or high school. All these aspects mentioned lead us to the concept of "learner's autonomy". According to Wenden (1991: 163) an autonomous learner is "one who has acquired the strategies and knowledge to take some (if not yet all) responsibility for her language learning and is willing and self-confident enough to do so". Participants in the experimental group became more autonomous in varying levels.

If, on the one hand, undergoing the LLSIP caused the participants in the experimental group to have some helpful changes in their attitude towards learning, on the other hand, participants in the control group, who did not undergo the LLSIP, mostly seemed to remain with the same difficulties and attitude identified during the first half of the study, except for C7 and C10. The former showed improvement in his participation in class and a considerable enhancement in the quality of his pronunciation of English words, but asserted having difficulties with writing. The latter, although still being a "weak student", because of her interest and motivation to learn (which was present since the beginning of the course), succeeded in improving her performance as an English learner. In light of the results obtained with the experimental group, it seems possible to suggest that, should the control group have gone through the LLSIP, they could have undergone considerable changes in their behavior in class, mainly concerning their attitude towards learning English, motivation, interest, and level of attention, which could have led them to study more and, thus, learn more of the AL.

5. The importance of LLS Instruction

The literature on LLS shows that the issue of whether or not LLS should be included in the curriculum of regular EAL classes is beyond dispute.

Students who share the characteristics of the participants in the research reported in this article may face problems when starting to study an additional language, due to the fact that they may lack strategic ability and thus may not know how to study – that is, they may not take actions that can help them learn about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, or develop their listening, speaking and reading skills, and thus take the most out of the AL classes. In an educational system surrounded by school failure and numerous classrooms, these students would hardly ever cope with their difficulties by themselves. Considering (1) the fact that guidance and support from teachers "can do much to foster strategic use and strategy development" (ALEXANDER et al., 1998: 146), by explicitly teaching, modeling, and helping learners acquire "relevant" strategies, and by creating situations to promote strategy use to bring about their value and reward, (2) that LLS instruction and use help students learn and also provide them with more opportunities to take responsibility over their own learning (LESSARD-CLOUSTON, 1998), and (3) the results of the present study, a possible solution to minimize this problem is the insertion of the teaching of LLS in the curriculum of EAL regular classes of schools which belong to the Brazilian Educational System. The LLS instruction advised here may lead students to becoming more autonomous, motivated, and interested in their own process of learning. In other words, LLS instruction may help them see themselves not as a knowledge recipient, but as a "knowledge seeker" and "producer".

The same implementation of strategy teaching could be also carried out in language schools such as the one at UFSC (Extracurricular) to help mainly non-strategic beginners to develop their own strategies to improve their learning. This implementation could be carried out in two different ways: A) through an LLS course, given within a term, to whoever is willing to attend it; and B) through the insertion of LLS into the curriculum, mainly for levels 1 and 2 (in which beginners are usually placed). According to participants in this research, both in the control and the experimental groups, the insertion of LLS into the course curriculum would be more effective mainly for two reasons: 1) students would not have to afford the time to take additional classes, since their schedule is already considerably tight; and 2) having LLS taught in tandem with the contents would allow them to use the strategies right after LLS were taught, to try them out, until they decide which one would more effectively benefit their learning, taking into account their individual learning styles. Regarding the strategies which should be taught, the data collected suggest that the strategy which helped students more effectively, according to their own opinion, was Organizing, because planning their time, keeping a notebook, and seeking the best place to study were definitely significant for the improvement of their learning process. Another strikingly used strategy was Making Associations, which was employed by participants in the experimental group mainly for the memorization of vocabulary. Taking Notes, Paying Attention, Highlighting, and Cooperating with Others were strategies also considerably used by participants. All in all, as stated by Varella (1997), a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, social, affective, memory, and compensation strategies are important to guarantee an effective instruction. Regarding the teachers' willingness to teach LLS together with English language contents, the two teachers involved in this study seemed to be interested and open to this idea. Although they have a positive

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attitude towards such an implementation, a survey about teachers' willingness to start teaching LLS in their beginners' classes is needed before stating that the implementation is feasible at present.

Most participants, both in the control and the experimental groups, were identified as having difficulties in speaking, mainly as regards the pronunciation of specific sounds. LLS that are helpful for speaking, such as Representing Sounds in Memory, Structured Reviewing, Repeating, Practicing Naturalistically, Using Music, Taking Risks Wisely, among others, would be helpful to lead those students to cope with their difficulties.

There is still the matter that, having the learners decided which strategies they feel comfortable using, there will always be the challenge for teachers to match their own teaching strategies to their students' learning strategies (POLITZER & MCGROARTY, 1985). A promising key for dealing with this challenge is presented in Tavares' (2004) study about learning styles. She argues that it is desirable that teachers use as many resources as they can to bring activities to class which favor different kinds of styles. Transferring this idea to the context of LLS, it is important to consider whether it would be desirable to have teachers making use of a range of teaching strategies which would possibly correspond to LLS used by their students[30].

In the past five years, the school where I teach has included LLS in their syllabus and that has shown positive results (not statistically speaking) in the students' attitude towards learning EAL. This inclusion, however, signalized a problem which I had already spotted during the conduction of this research: Most teachers lack knowledge of LLS. Taking into consideration my own experience with the Letras undergraduate course taken from 1994 to 1998, no references to LLS were made in any of the

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[30] The relationship between teaching strategies and learning strategies is subject to further research.

disciplines which comprised the course, neither in the Teaching Practice discipline. I am not aware of any university which offers this discipline to prospective teachers. Having in mind that it is surely essential to provide teachers with a basis on LLS before including LLS into AL curriculum, this LLS discipline would offer the basis to enable teachers to put the LLS teaching in practice, providing their students with opportunities to develop a more successful learning.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize that LLS is not seen here as the cure for all the illnesses that we teachers find in our classrooms and against which we try to fight. It is not the case that only by receiving LLS instruction our students will escape from difficulties during their learning process. However, LLS instruction is one of the ways to help our students, mainly those with LD, find their own path to learn and make the learning experience something more reachable and pleasant.

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