UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC EN ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE

AUTONOMY FOR SUCCESS:
CONTRIBUTION OF THE ADULT-BASED LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO TO
ESL STUDENTS' AUTONOMY

PROJET DE RECHERCHE PRÉSENTÉ
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE
DE LA MAÎTRISE EN ÉDUCATION (M.Ed.)

PAR
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NOVEMBER 2019

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in an ESL classroom in the Quebec Adult General Education system, where the individualized instruction method that is in place requires learners to be autonomous. Moreover, the development of oral skills is particularly important, since 40-60% of evaluations are of oral proficiency. Research suggests that some students lack learning tools and strategies and recommends self-evaluation and monitoring tools to prepare them to cope with this unique educational method (Gagnon & Brunel, 2005). The Adult-Based Language Portfolio (Poirier & Clavet, 2017) is a pedagogical tool aimed at developing learner autonomy while learning a second language (L2); it incorporates the CEFR, a self-evaluation tool with descriptors that illustrate what learners can do with the language in the context of each skill (Council of Europe, 2001; 2017a).

The goal of this study was to explore the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills, guided by three principles: learner involvement, reflection, and language use (Little, 2007). The findings show that the role of the teacher was key, especially in creating opportunities for oral interaction. Working in small collaborative groups with the portfolio proved to be a valuable strategy; it helped build relationships, encouraged socialization, and allowed for a dynamic of building confidence and oral skills. The portfolio pedagogy helped students get involved in their learning, reflect on their cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and most importantly, develop their L2 by improving their oral skills.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude a été menée dans une classe d'anglais langue seconde de la formation générale des adultes au Québec, où la méthode pédagogique utilisée est l'enseignement individuel. Cela implique que les apprenants doivent être autonomes. En outre, le développement de leurs compétences orales est primordial, puisque 40% à 60% des évaluations mesurent les compétences orales. La recherche suggère que les étudiants manquent d'outils et de stratégies d'apprentissage, et recommande l'utilisation d'outils d'auto-évaluation et de suivi afin préparer les apprenants à transiger avec cette méthode d'apprentissage unique (Gagnon & Brunel, 2005). Le portfolio des langues pour adultes (Poirier & Clavet, 2017) est un outil pédagogique conçu pour accroitre l'autonomie de l'apprenant tout en développant une langue seconde (L2). Il intègre le Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (CECR), un outil d'auto-évaluation avec des descripteurs qui illustrent les aptitudes langagières de l'apprenant pour chaque compétence (Conseil de l'Europe, 2001; 2017).

L'objectif de cette étude était d'explorer la contribution du portfolio des langues pour adultes à l'autonomie des étudiants lors du développement de leurs compétences orales. L'autonomie est guidée par trois principes : l'engagement, la réflexion et l'utilisation de la langue (Little, 2007). Les résultats montrent que le rôle de l'enseignant a été essentiel, en particulier dans la création d'occasions d'interaction orale. Le fait de travailler en petits groupes collaboratifs avec le portfolio a été une stratégie utile; cela a permis d'établir des relations, a encouragé la socialisation et a permis un environnement favorable au développement de la confiance et des compétences orales. L'utilisation du portfolio comme outil pédagogique a poussé les étudiants à s'impliquer davantage dans leur apprentissage, à réfléchir à leurs stratégies cognitives et métacognitives, et, surtout, à développer leur langue seconde tout en améliorant leurs compétences orales.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Introduction

When I started my master's degree studies, I was teaching English as a Second language (ESL) at *Le Retour* Adult Education Centre in La Sarre, in the remote region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Quebec. My students' goal was to complete the institution's English requirements to receive their secondary school diploma or achieve the necessary level for a technical program or to enter the workforce. Observing learners working with the individualized instruction method made me question the importance of learner autonomy in this educational context, mainly towards the development of oral skills. My students seemed to lack metacognitive strategies in general and language learning strategies in particular, as well as focus on and awareness about the learning process. With this in mind, I started a literature review related to adult education and learner autonomy. When I discovered the language portfolio, I realized it was what I was looking for; a tool to make the learning process more transparent to learners, assist them in setting and reaching learning goals, help them develop the capacity for reflection and self-regulation, and enable them to gradually own their learning process. The present study explores the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio (Poirier & Clavet, 2017) to students' autonomy concerning oral skills development.

In the first chapter, I examine the Quebec Adult General Education system, its population (Marcotte, Villatte & Lévesque, 2014), and the individualized instruction method. Next, I explore the connection between autonomy, motivation, and success in this setting, and present empirical studies that suggest that learners need tools to cope with this pedagogical method (Gagnon & Brunel, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2010). This is followed by the ESL programs and the linguistic context of the present study - a community where English is a minority language. In an environment like this one, learner autonomy is of particular importance for ESL students, because they need to take initiative if they want to progress in their learning (Altunay et al., 2009). The chapter ends with the general objective and expected contributions of this research.

In the second chapter I present the literature review. I start by discussing definitions of learner autonomy and describing models to develop it (Oxford, 2008; Dam, 2012), as well as the principles on which the present study is grounded (Little, 2007). This is followed by the teacher's role in the promotion of learner autonomy and an outline of portfolios in education. I then present, in detail, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and its background, including the action-oriented approach (Piccardo, 2014) and the Common European Framework of References for languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001)**.** This is followed by an exploration of the ELP's pedagogical function, practical use and its role as a mediation tool for reflection, awareness, and self-regulation. I then continue with an overview of the CEFR and language portfolios in Canada and a brief introduction of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio. In the final sections of the literature review, I explore the role of the language portfolio in fostering learner autonomy according to the principles that guide the present study - learner involvement, learner reflection, and target language use - and review the teacher's role in this endeavour (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002; Kristmanson, Lafargue & Culligan, 2011 &

2013; Esteve, Trenchs, Pujolà, Arumi, & Birello, 2012). The chapter ends with the research questions guiding the study.

This research comprises a pilot study guided by action research and a main study led by participatory action research (PAR). In the third chapter, I start by presenting the reason for this change in methodology, as well as the context of the study. I then present the pilot study: the action research methodology, participants, instruments, analysis, conclusions, and the resulting changes for the next cycle (the main study). After that, I describe the main study's methodology --participatory action research--, as well as the participants, the data collection tools and the way they were used, the data processing and analysis, and ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings obtained from the data gathering tools: students' portfolios, analytical observations, and interviews and discussions. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the results in light of the findings of previous research. I also discuss the pedagogical implications of this study, its limitations, and recommendations for further research.

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Acronyms

CEFR   Common European Framework of Reference for languages

ELP   European Language Portfolio

ESL   English as a Second Language

L2   second language

PAR   Participatory Action Research

CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

In this chapter, I start by describing the Quebec Adult General Education system, its population profile, success rate and attrition factors. I then discuss the individualized instruction method, along with its advantages and drawbacks. Next, I explore the connection between autonomy, motivation, and success in this learning environment. Afterward, I present ESL Adult General Education programs and a broad portrait of the linguistic context of the present study. The chapter ends with the general objective and expected contributions of this research study.

 1.1. Quebec Adult General Education

In this section, I explain the characteristics of the unique academic model of the Quebec Adult General Education system, some of the transformations it has undergone in recent years, as well as its success and attrition factors.

The Quebec Adult General Education system *(Formation générale des adultes* or *FGA)* gives adult learners the opportunity to finish secondary study in order to have access to college or to achieve the required educational level to enter the labour market. According to Statistics Canada (2015), the percentage of the population between the ages of 25 and 64 who had no secondary school diploma in 2015 was higher in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue (19.2%), where the present study takes place, than the province of Quebec as a whole (12.8%).

One of the purposes of Adult General Education is to enable adults to become more autonomous (Education Act: Basic adult general education regulation, 2017) and its ultimate goal was inspired by an educational concept promoted by the UNESCO's Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning (Voyer et al., 2014): lifelong learning.

The Quebec Adult General Education system is a unique model characterized by its openness, flexibility and accessibility - unusual but valuable qualities to be found in a public system (Voyer et al, 2014, p. 207, author's translation). The learning method in place is individualized instruction, where students are placed in multilevel groups and study individually.

The new century has brought systemic transformation to the Adult General Education system due to both external and internal factors (Voyer et al, 2014). One external factor is the demand for qualified labour to service continual innovation. Among the internal factors is the implementation of new programs, the introduction of flexible study arrangements, management approaches tailored to suit individual needs, and the rejuvenation of the population's age structure.

The success rate in Adult General Education was 48.9% in 2011 (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2014); this means the rate of students graduating with a secondary diploma or another qualification,

like a training certificate in sociovocational integration or semi-skilled trade (Basic adult general education regulation, 2017). Even though this rate has doubled from 23.2% in 1989, it still means that more than half of the learning population do not reach their goals. Concerning attrition factors, students generally leave school before completing their studies to enter the workforce (Rousseau et al., 2010; Brunet, 2007); they cite financial reasons, the difficulty of handling a job and studies at the same time, as well as learning difficulties in reading and writing. According to a recent report on the school dropout issue in the province of Quebec, 82% of respondents (age 18-34) deemed student retention as a collective responsibility (Léger, 2018). Nevertheless, according to Rousseau et al. (2010), students generally appreciate adult school.

1.2. Population Profile

The minimum age to register in the Adult General Education system is 16 (Gouvernement du Québec, 2015). In the 2010-2011 school year, almost half of registered students (46.9%) were 24 years old or younger (Voyer, Brodeur, Meilleur, & Sous-comité de la Table MELS-Universités de la formation à l'enseignement des adultes, 2012). In some remote communities, switching from regular secondary to adult school in order to obtain a diploma has become common (Rousseau, Tétreault, Bergeron, and Carignan, 2007).

A recent study carried out with 386 Adult General Education students aged between 16 and 24 yielded a student profile that showed students did not drop out of secondary school because of learning troubles. The majority of students (75%) had no major problems, neither psychological nor behavioural, and more than half (54%) had a good idea of who they were and possessed high self-esteem (Marcotte et al, 2014) (see Table 1.1).

As opposed to secondary school, Adult General Education students register out of choice, not obligation (Rousseau et al., 2010; Brunet, 2007). Moreover, a micro-technographic type case study undertaken by Rousseau et al. (2010) with 165 adult learners from five school boards in Quebec shows that a great majority of 16 to 18-year-old students have an appreciation of adult education centres - a radical difference compared to their perception of secondary schools. Some of the most appreciated aspects were the respectful environment and the maturity of students, which some participants suggested had fostered their own maturity. In general, findings show that the support received in adult centres has a positive influence on students' overall personal development.

Table 1.1: Adult General Education 16-24-year-old student profile

No major problems	54%
No major problems but more open-minded or resilient, and more engaged in exploration of identity and less in their studies	21%
Victimized or in distress	13%
In great distress and with behaviour problems	12%

Source: Marcotte et al, 2014

1.3. Individualized Instruction Method

The individualized instruction method in place in the Adult General Education system has not been the object of a systematic description (Voyer et al, 2014). As mentioned earlier, students join multilevel groups and study with their textbook at their own pace. The teacher provides explanations to individual students when needed, rather than to the whole class (Commission scolaire des Sommets, n.d.). In an attempt to prevent students from dropping out of secondary school, the Navigateurs School Board, for example, addressed a document to parents explaining individualized instruction and laying out key prerequisites for success in adult school:

> Individualized instruction requires a great deal of autonomy and will. It targets students capable of progressing without the need of orthopedagogical support. Moreover, your child should have good reading comprehension skills, since he/she will mainly learn by reading his/her textbook... Is [your child] autonomous and perseverant in school? Is it difficult for him/her to find motivation? (Bourget, 2015, para. 3, author's translation).

As with every educational method, individualized instruction has advantages and disadvantages. It is generally accepted that individualized instruction is one of the main features that attracts students to Adult General Education. Many students find that learning at their own pace allows them to go faster through concepts they understand well and to spend more time on complex ones. This, along with immediate feedback from the teacher, allows students to attain their educational objectives faster. Other students mention that individual explanations are clearer and suit their needs better. Moreover, since school regulations allow students to choose their own exam dates, evaluations are less stressful (Rousseau et al., 2010).

However, individualized instruction has drawbacks too. The document *État de la formation de base des adultes au Québec* reported that this model leaves students to themselves and does not promote the acquisition of knowledge in action or in teamwork (Roy & Coulombe, 2005); in other words, it does not support the social construction of knowledge. Moreover, individualized instruction does not encourage cooperation, nor does it help students develop a sense of belonging (Harmer, 2007). With regard to learning an L2, what is missing in the individualized instruction method is, primarily, oral practice.

Gagnon and Brunel (2005), in a study about motivation in the adult education system, emphasized that one of the reasons students quit school is their failure to adjust to individualized instruction. Specifically, these authors recommend "the creation of self-evaluation grids and monitoring tools, as well as workshops about learning methods, time management and problem resolution, in order to help students develop their autonomy and prepare them to cope with individualized instruction" (p. 327, author's translation). They also suggested treating students like clients instead of submissive students (p. 328).

1.4. Autonomy, Motivation and Success

Some of the challenges that adult education students face are lack of motivation and weak self-perception of competence and autonomy (Gagnon & Brunel, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2010; Vallerand, Fortier & Guay, 1997).

A study carried out by Vallerand et al. (1997) in the Quebec school system suggests that autonomy leads to intrinsic motivation and thus to success. The study was based on self-determination theory, which is founded on a holistic view of education and states why schools should support and facilitate self-development foremost. According to this theory, the regulation of intentional behavior varies from autonomous to controlled (Deci & Ryan, 1987); it deals with the whole spectrum of motivations and proposes intrinsic motivation as the strongest motivational force for learning.

Vallerand et al. (1997) tested a motivational model of dropouts with 4,537 secondary school students. Their findings show that social agents (parents, teachers, and school) "behave in a more controlling way toward future dropout students than toward persistent students" (p. 1172). In other words, dropout students "reported feeling significantly less autonomous… [and] perceived their teachers as being less autonomy supportive than did persistent students" (p. 1166). The authors suggested that when social agents support students' autonomy, they influence students' perception of competence and autonomy and, hence, self-determined motivation. Since many dropouts will be future adult education students, it may be inferred that they need an environment that is supportive of their autonomy.

Another study carried out in Abitibi-Témiscamingue also implied that autonomous students are more likely to succeed. Sioui and Beaulieu (2011) explored the conditions that support student retention and success from the point of view of 178 14- to 24-year-old students who took part in 28 discussion groups and individual interviews. Findings suggest that the most favourable conditions for academic perseverance are: having high or specific personal goals, developing a learning to learn attitude and acquiring metacognitive skills, methodical work at school (paying attention and participating in class) and at home (to study concepts more in depth), positive social integration at school, a trusting relationship with teachers, committed and motivating teachers with a positive attitude, passion and humour; and adaptability.

In the language learning field there are various models for teachers to support learner autonomy, some of which will be explored in the second chapter of this study, including the use of language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies (e.g. planning, reflecting, and evaluating), and language portfolios.

1.5. ESL Adult General Education Programs

Adult secondary school is divided in two cycles: the Common Core Basic Education (CCBE) program includes the Presecondary and Secondary Cycle One courses (secondary years 1 and 2) (MELS, 2007); and the Diversified Basic Education (DBE) program includes the Secondary Cycle Two courses (secondary years 3, 4 and 5) (Ministère de l'Éducation, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2015).

Similar to primary and secondary school programs, the Adult General Education curriculum has changed from a goal-based approach to a competency-based approach. The CCBE program has been compulsory since September 2016, and the DBE program as of September 2017 (Comité de planification et de coordination BIM-FGA, 2016).

The competency-based approach is in line with the theory of andragogy (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002, p. 8), a learner-centred pedagogy focused on the learning process. This new approach is also intended to foster learner autonomy. According to *"L'approche par compétences. Pour accompagner les apprenantes et apprenants jusqu'à l'autonomie"* (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002), one of the characteristics of a competency is that it blends the two stages of the learning process: integration and transfer. Integration requires skills to be put into action, while transfer demands initiative and autonomy in order to adapt knowledge and skills to new contexts. We can thus say that autonomous learners "transcend the barriers between learning and living" (Little, 1995, p. 175).

Both the CCBE and the DBE programs reflect the significant role of autonomy. The CCBE program is based on the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 - English as a Second Language for Adults* and is designed to help adults deal with real life situations in an autonomous way. It "encourages adult learners to discover and use effective strategies that will help them learn how to learn and that will be useful throughout their lives" (MELS, 2007, p. 1), for example, introspection and self-evaluation. As for the DBE program, it was adapted from the youth sector and demands self-regulation, reflection, and other metacognitive strategies for students to build self-knowledge and become autonomous learners (MEESR, 2015, p. 22).

Another of the salient features of the new programs is the priority given to the development of students' oral skills, since 40 to 60% of evaluations conducted are of oral proficiency. This is a focal point in the present study, given the challenge that oral practice represents in the context of individualized instruction.

As a means of supporting the implementation of the new programs, the ESL Adult General Education system created a website with regularly updated information and resources for students and teachers (Brandow & Charchuk, 2019).

While programs are compulsory in Adult General Education, school boards and teachers may determine their own methods (MELS, 2008, p. 5). Indeed, teachers in Quebec are considered professionals and not merely technicians implementing curricula. As Kohonen (2001) suggested, professional teachers are facilitators of learning and implement a more process oriented than product oriented teaching practice. The transition from old to new programs in Adult General Education requires teachers to be facilitators of learning and calls for ways to marry individualized instruction to the new competency-based approach.

1.6. Linguistic Context

In order to understand the context of the present study, I start with a brief linguistic portrait of the province of Quebec. I then compare and contrast what it means to study ESL in Montreal - the metropolis nearest to Abitibi-Témiscamingue[1] - with what it means in the region where this study took place.

In spite of the cultural diversity brought about by its immigration policy, Canada is a predominantly English-speaking country. Nevertheless, in Quebec, the official language is French; both languages coexist, although there are different degrees of use, depending on the region. The 2011 census shows that English is the mother tongue of only 7.6% of Quebec's population; many Anglophones left the province after the adoption of the Charter of the French Language in 1977 which declares French the language of all Quebecers (Leclerc, 2015). Despite this, bilingualism is encouraged throughout the nation, and bilingualism in French Quebec continued to increase between 1996 and 2006 (Paillé, 2011).

Montreal is the most cosmopolitan city in Quebec. According to the 2011 census, the percentage of Anglophones in Montreal, at 11.6% (Leclerc, 2015), is higher than the provincial average of 7.6%. Montreal is also more multicultural, and this feature is reflected in ESL classrooms. A study with adult ESL students in a community centre in Montreal described the class as multiethnic, with an average age of 40 and eight different mother tongues among the 19 participants: Farsi (7), Romanian, Polish and Russian (5), Spanish (3), Korean (2), Arabic (1) and French (1). Hence, these students with such diverse linguistic backgrounds engaged in the beneficial activity of using English as a lingua franca to communicate among themselves, despite it not being the dominant language of the immediate community (Dytynyshyn & Collins, 2012).

The linguistic portrait of Abitibi differs greatly from that of Montreal. First, the region is much less multicultural; second, in 2011, English was reported as the mother tongue of only 3.8% of the population (Bellot, 2015). A common belief, and expression, is that *L'anglais s'attrape et le français s'apprend*, which means that an effort is required to learn French, while English is easily picked up. However, this adage is not the case in Abitibi, where chances to practice English are very limited. Thus, along with a willingness to

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[1] Abitibi-Témiscamingue is one of the 17 administrative regions of the province of Quebec. Its economy is based on logging, mining and agriculture. The city of La Sarre, where this study took place, is located almost 700 km NW of Montreal. In this paper, Abitibi-Témiscamingue will be referred to as Abitibi.

communicate, ESL students require autonomy - a characteristic of good language learners that is especially important in a context where students do not have the occasion to hear or use the target language in everyday life and need to seek out opportunities to practice it (Altunay et al., 2009).

In light of the linguistic context of the present study as well as the characteristics of the Quebec Adult General Education system, it is clear that learner autonomy plays an important role in the ESL teaching and learning process.

1.7. General Objective

Even though there are multiple definitions of learner autonomy, there is a consensus among researchers that it is much more than simply working alone and is a competency that needs to be developed. Successful learners have always been autonomous; hence, by pursuing autonomy as an explicit goal, teachers can help more learners succeed (Little, 1995).

With this in mind, I now present the general objective of this research study.

Given that:

- the Quebec Adult General Education system is a unique model whose purpose is to enable learners to become autonomous from a life-long learning perspective;
- the rate of students graduating with a secondary diploma or other qualification in Adult General Education is less than 50% (MELS, 2014);
- research show the importance of supporting autonomy in adult education students;
- ESL Adult General Education programs point towards learner autonomy and the development of oral skills;
- ESL students in a French community like Abitibi need to take initiative in order to practice English and advance in their language learning;
- learner autonomy is a skill that needs to be developed;
- the individualized instruction method in place requires learners to be autonomous and use tools to help them to cope;
- a language portfolio based on the ELP is a pedagogical tool to develop learner autonomy simultaneously with the language;

The general objective of this study is to explore the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to adult ESL students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills at Le Retour Adult Education Centre in La Sarre, Quebec.

1.8. Contribution of this Research Study

According to an extensive interdisciplinary project carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), autonomy is one of three "key competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning society" (OECD, 2003, p.1). This places autonomy in a privileged place regarding not only individual, but social development, as well; "[i]ndividuals must act autonomously in order to participate effectively in the development of society and to function well in different spheres of life including the workplace, family life and social life" (OECD, 2005, p. 14). In this way, the autonomy students exercise in the classroom, being aware and taking control of their learning process may reflect in other aspects of their life and contribute to their individual and social development.

In the language learning field, there is a need to empirically understand how autonomy varies according to different cultural contexts and settings (Benson, 2007). Considering the extent and complexity of obstacles that adult students encounter, Roy and Coulombe (2005) make suggestions for future research. Among their recommendations, they encourage researchers to deepen their knowledge about these obstacles in a more systematic way and on a broader scale, as well as to thoroughly gather information about new teaching practices in particular contexts, especially rural. They suggest that the promotion of new teaching practices in particular contexts should be favoured. The present study explores the contribution of a language portfolio, which is a new teaching practice in rural contexts, on students' autonomy. The portfolio includes self-evaluation, monitoring, and time management tools, which are some of the recommendations that Gagnon and Brunel (2005) suggest preparing students to cope with individualized instruction.

There is not much research in Quebec Adult General Education (Voyer et al, 2014), but there is a need to know more about this population in order to offer the most suitable service to adult students and support the development of their full potential (Direction de l'éducation des adultes et de l'action communautaire, 2009). Overall, this study aims for a better understanding of the obstacles ESL students face in this learning context. One of its major contributions will be the exploration of a language portfolio as a tool to develop learner autonomy in the Francophone context of Abitibi, which may provide teachers with another tool to guide students' success.

Finally, according to the document *État de la formation de base des adultes au Québec* (Roy & Coulombe, 2005), adult education teacher training is one of the most neglected aspects of teacher training programs (p. 83). On the whole, ESL Adult General Education teachers are interested in tools to foster learner autonomy. This interest was indicated via posts in a professional online forum (ESL FGA, September 30, 2016, Moodle), as well as in a teacher's research project suggesting that "the important demand on the teacher's time required the students to be more autonomous" (Madill, paper submitted for EDU6237 course, UQAT, April 22, 2014, p. 9). The present study explores a pedagogical tool that may address some of the teachers' and learners' needs.

In the next chapter, I present the conceptual framework of the present study. I discuss various paths to developing learner autonomy, as well as the one that I have chosen for this study - the Adult-Based Language Portfolio (Poirier & Clavet, 2017). This pedagogical tool is based on the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and promotes the development of both learner autonomy and language learning (Council of Europe, 2004).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical studies show the importance of supporting learner autonomy, and Adult General Education students need tools in order to cope with the individualized instruction method. Learner autonomy is of particular importance for ESL students in a community where English is a minority language, such as the one in the present study, because they need to take initiative if they want to advance in their learning.

I start this chapter by discussing definitions of learner autonomy, some models to develop it, and the principles on which this study is grounded. I then explore the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy and outline portfolios in the education field. I follow by describing the European Language Portfolio (ELP and its background - the action-oriented approach and the Common European Framework of References for languages (CEFR). The pedagogical function of the ELP is next, along with its role as a mediation tool for reflection, awareness and self-regulation. The section ends with a review of the use of the ELP.

I continue with an overview of language portfolios in Canada and a brief introduction of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio. I then discuss the role of the language portfolio in fostering learner autonomy according to the principles that guide the present study: learner involvement, learner reflection, and target language use. The role of the teacher is also examined. The present chapter ends with the research questions of this study.

2.1. Definitions of Learner Autonomy

Autonomy is "a bit like art; we can't agree on its definition, but all seem to know what it is" (Reinders & White, 2011, p. 1). It is often confused with self-instruction and it is unclear how it can be operationalized. However, learner autonomy implies that learners accept responsibility for their learning and transcend the barriers between learning and living (Little, 1995).

Autonomy has been identified as one of the major characteristics of good language learners (Wong & Nunan, 2011) and also as the process of acquiring learning strategies (Oxford, 2008). In self-directed instruction contexts, learner autonomy is the key to success (White, 1995). In adult education, according to Cembalo and Holec (1973), pedagogy should be a system where adults take charge of their learning so that each learner is his own teacher.

There is "consensus that the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others" (Little, 2003, Definitions section). Indeed, learning is never solitary. According to Benson's (2007) state-of-the-art article about autonomy in language teaching and learning, the theory of autonomy considers language teaching and learning a social process. However, autonomy is, foremost, a skill to be developed (Esteve et al., 2012). Among the benefits it yields are critical thinking and the development of life-long learning skills (Karlsson,

Kjisik & Nordlund, 1997), as well as efficiency, motivation, and the capacity for spontaneous communication (Little, 2003).

Considering that Henri Holec is known to have brought the concept of autonomy to light in the language teaching field and that there is general agreement on the meaning of the term as he defined it, I will focus on his definition for the purposes of this study: autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning (Holec, 1979, p. 3)[2]

2.2. Models for Developing Learner Autonomy

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a consensus that autonomy is more than working alone; it is a skill that needs to be developed (Little, 2004; Schärer, 2000; Ushioda & Ridley, 2002; Kristmanson et al., 2013; Oxford, 2008; Dam, 2011; Esteve et al., 2012). Autonomy development is a whole-person approach by which we teach learners rather than language (Kohonen, 2012).

In the present section, I discuss three models to develop learner autonomy: autonomy as learning strategies; autonomy as planning, reflecting, and evaluating; and autonomy as involvement, reflection and language use. The latter model includes the principles of learner autonomy that are the foundation of the present study.

2.2.1. Learner Autonomy as Acquiring Learning Strategies

For some researchers, the means to achieve autonomy in language learning is related to the process of acquiring learning strategies (Oxford, 2008; White, 2008; Gascoigne, 2008; Ceylan, 2015). In this line of understanding, more proficient L2 learners use and combine more strategies than less proficient ones. Learning strategies are "the goal-oriented actions or steps... that learners take, with some degree of consciousness, to enhance their L2 learning" (Oxford, 2008, p. 41). The use of strategies implies taking active responsibility for one's learning process. However, students must learn to use and master the strategies and tactics they need, because they are not innate. This learning process is what Oxford (2008) calls learner development, and it leads to autonomy. She proposes that strategy instruction "should be part of broad-scale, culturally relevant learner development, which involves learners in thinking about themselves as learners, about language, about why they are learning a language and about how to make the greatest progress in their L2 learning" (p. 54).

Oxford proposes various ways of integrating strategy instruction in independent settings, such as online tutorials, printed material, online chats, discussion forums, tutoring and including strategy suggestions in

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[2] *Dans l'apprentissage des langues, l'autonomie est la capacité de prendre en charge son propre apprentissage* (Holec, 1979, p.3).

lessons. Although the context of the present study is not entirely an independent setting, some of these suggestions are already in use by adult education teachers. This is because strategies are an important part of education, as stated by the DBE program: "strategies help adult learners build self-knowledge, become autonomous learners, and make adjustments that ensure their continued development as readers, listeners and viewers" (MEESR, 2015, p. 27). However, as Little (1995) argues, even if continually making learners aware of possible strategies is feasible and effective, this does not automatically translate into autonomy.

2.2.2. Learner Autonomy as Planning, Reflecting and Evaluating

I now present the autonomy model proposed by Leni Dam, inspired by Dewey, Freinet, Holec, Montessori, Rogers and Vygotsky. Dam is a practitioner who, for several decades, has been promoting learner autonomy in the classroom. Her simplified model for developing learner autonomy in the classroom implies the following steps which have to be done in co-operation between the teacher and learners: (a) looking back, (b) planning ahead, (c) carrying out the plans, and (d) evaluating the outcome (Dam, 2012). In order to establish an environment that promoted autonomy, Dam devised an instructional process by which her students became directly involved in their learning process, discussed hereafter.

As with many language teachers, Dam confronted the challenge of inactive learners "used to being spoon-fed… [and] ministries, school boards, and parents focus[ing] on good results at exams" (Dam, 2012, p. 4). In order to engage her students in their learning process, she "*forced*[3] them to be involved in the planning" (p. 10), which gave them choices of learning tasks and procedures. She also encouraged them to work in groups. By choosing and working in groups, students took an active role and became co-responsible for their learning. In turn, their personal involvement provided a good foundation for monitoring and evaluating their learning processes which, subsequently, supported students' self-esteem and meant, again, more involvement.

The following are Dam's basic principles and tools for nurturing lifelong learning and learner autonomy (2012):

- Start from what the learners bring to the classroom.
- Provide choice.
- Encourage group work, social learning and peer-tutoring. The role of the teacher is to support this learning.

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[3] *Italics* in the original.

- Provide support materials for learners to gradually develop a repertoire of useful learning activities. E.g., dictionaries, reference books, internet resources, learners' material, samples of learner-produced materials - all of this, rather than course books.
- Remember that the pivot of learner autonomy is evaluation. Self-assessment enhances the awareness of one's own learning and is a "pre-requisite for evaluating and assessing peers. Documentation of the learning process in logbooks and portfolios… supports this awareness" (p. 13).
- Focus on authenticity: "The autonomy classroom is seen as 'real life' with normal people acting as themselves, wanting to learn the foreign language" (p. 13).
- Use the target language. The teacher should use the target language from the beginning, and students, as soon as possible (working in groups, logbooks, evaluating).

The linguistic development of Dam's students was the object of study of the Language Acquisition in an Autonomous Learning Environment (LAALE) project (Dam & Legenhausen, 2016). The performance of her class, comprised of 21 mixed ability ESL students with an average age of 11, was systematically observed and tested over a period of four years, then compared with textbook-based communicative classes. The research questions were related to size and type of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and the development of conversational competence. Although the students in this project are much younger than the ones in the present study, it is relevant because they have certain elements in common: a mixed ability class; a comparison made with a textbook-based course; and some research questions related to the development of conversational competence. The results of the LAALE project showed that the autonomous class had better linguistic performance. Moreover, there were several non-linguistic outcomes as well, such as the strengthening of students' self-esteem; the creation of a climate of trust and mutual respect; and the promotion of life skills like team collaboration and self- and peer-evaluative competence. The Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" illustrates Leni Dam's way of promoting autonomy in language teaching. However, the success of this approach is better reflected in her students' words:

> I already make use of the fixed procedures from our diaries when trying to get something done at home... I have also via English learned… to become better at listening to other people and to be interested in them… I have learned to believe in myself and to be independent (Dam, 2012, p. 14).

> Most important is probably the way we have worked. That we were expected to and given the chance to decide ourselves what to do… The day [the teacher] didn't have the time, we could manage on our own (Dam, 2012, p. 14).

As we can see from Dam's students' excerpts, this model for developing learner autonomy that involves planning, reflecting, and evaluating contributed to learner growth in a broader sense, helping them transfer skills to other contexts.

2.2.3. Learner Autonomy as Involvement, Reflection and Language Use

The model that I present in this section encompasses the principles of learner autonomy that found the present study. It was developed by David Little, who participated in the creation and promotion of the European Language Portfolio. According to this model, learning the language and learning to be autonomous go hand in hand. Little, who has worked extensively with Leni Dam, summarized his observations in this way:

> Leni Dam showed me that the pursuit of learner autonomy facilitates the conversion of "school knowledge" into "action knowledge". By requiring her learners to set their own goals, select their own learning activities and evaluate learning outcomes, she gave them ownership of the learning process; and by insisting that all this must be done in the target language she ensured that autonomy in language learning could never be separated from autonomy in language use (Little, 2004, p. 21).

Little (2007) proposed three pedagogical principles of autonomy - *learner involvement*, *learner reflection,* and *target language use* - which act in synergy; by planning and reflecting in the target language, learners develop the cognitive and communicative functions they need, ensuring that language acquisition is taking place (National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, NCSSFL**,** 2011). These principles are hereby explained in more detail.

Learner involvement: learners are fully involved in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning. This principle implies that teacher and learners "share responsibility for setting the learning agenda, selecting learning activities and materials, managing classroom interaction and evaluating learning outcomes" (Little, 2007, p. 23).

Learner reflection: learners reflect continuously on the process and content of their learning, and self-assess regularly. Reflection should start simply, related to the learning tasks, then move on to deeper metacognitive analyses. Whereas reflection is already latent in learner involvement, since we have to ponder in order to plan, monitor and evaluate, the principle of learner reflection indicates "an explicitly detached reflection on the process and content of learning" (Little, 2007, p. 24).

Target language use: the target language is the goal and the medium of all learning, including reflection. This principle entails that "the target language is the medium through which all classroom activities are conducted, organisational and reflective as well as communicative" (Little, 2007, p. 25). To put it briefly, the raison d'être of projects to develop learner autonomy is to provide learners with the tools they need to use the target language on their own. Language learning and language use have the same psycholinguistic mechanisms; use of a language is required in order to learn it. Autonomy in the classroom from the earliest stages gives learners confidence to use the target language; this confidence is necessary for L2 development and, in turn, using the language in a personally-appropriate way builds up confidence. According to Little (1995), autonomy is relevant because "second language development is the single most

impressive achievement of successful projects to promote learner autonomy" (p. 176). All this depends on target language use (see Figure 1).

In the present study, learner autonomy will be operationalized according to the aforementioned principles. In developing autonomy, it is important to underscore the first-hand role of the teacher, for he/she has to enlarge learners' autonomy by gradually allowing students more control of the content and process of their learning. This is the subject of the following section.
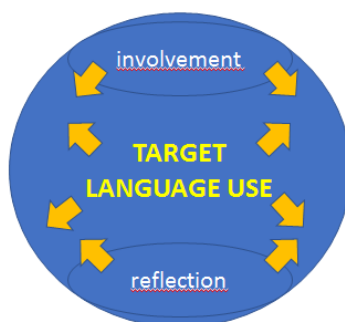
Figure 1: Learner Autonomy Principles (David Little, NCSSFL, 2011)

2.3. The Teacher's Role in Promoting Learner Autonomy

The role of the teacher in promoting learner autonomy is indispensable. Teachers should provide pedagogical spaces for discussion, reflection, and goal setting in order to help learners develop self-reflexive capacities (Kristmanson, Le Bouthillier & Lafargue, 2016). However, promoting learner autonomy does not happen magically:

> Stories abound of teachers who, inspired by the ideal of learner autonomy, have interpreted this argument all too literally, telling their learners that it is now up to them to be responsible for their learning and withdrawing to a corner of the classroom in order to manage the resources that will magically facilitate 30 or more individual learning processes. When nothing happens, the teacher usually concludes that learner autonomy does not work (Little, 1995, p. 178).

Guiding students to be autonomous requires a shift in the role of the teacher from transmitter of information to facilitator of learning (Little, 1995). According to Karlsson et al. (1997), who reported the results of the Autonomous Learning Modules Project (ALMS) of the Helsinki University Language Centre, the changing role of the teacher was found to be one of the most interesting aspects of learner autonomy. Given that learner autonomy requires students to develop self-awareness, the teacher forcefully undergoes a parallel change in attitude towards teaching and learning. In other words, "one of the core elements of autonomy - reflection and self-awareness - which we have set out to encourage in the students, is also a necessary prerequisite for the teachers involved" (p. 12).

Therefore, we can say that learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy. As Little (1995) suggested, the basis for teacher autonomy is the recognition that teachers can only teach their personal construct of an educational program - their own interpretation of it. In this way, teacher autonomy is the starting point for the negotiation process to bring learners to accept responsibility for their learning; not only affective responsibility, but also in the form or organizational initiatives (Alwright 1991, cited in Little, 1995). This process is a pedagogical dialogue where teachers draw on their disciplinary expertise, including knowledge of practical measures to make the development of learner autonomy more explicit, e.g. learner journals. Learners' acceptance of their responsibility brings about the development of their capacity to use the target language independently. Consequently, an essential aspect of the role of the teacher in autonomy projects is to create circumstances to use the language for genuine communication.

The teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy will be reviewed in Section 2.7.4. Before that, in the following sections, I introduce the language portfolio, the tool that I have chosen for developing learner autonomy.

2.4. Portfolios in Education and Language Portfolios

A portfolio is a document that can range from a collection of personalized student products to an array of works and teacher records. The purpose of the portfolio determines its contents and the way it is organized; for instance, a portfolio that promotes self-assessment and self-confidence will present a different structure than one that aims at providing a valid and reliable basis for formal evaluation (Wolf & Siu-Runyan, 1996).

Portfolios have been used extensively to promote reflection in teacher education. Insights from research on pre-service teachers' portfolios are pertinent to the present study because reflection is also a core element of language portfolios. An exploratory study conducted by Wade and Yarbrough (1996) analyzed the reflection process of 212 teacher education students. Their recommendations included encouraging student ownership of their portfolios, that the reflection process and its purpose are made clear and that learners are provided with some structure for reflection. In the same teacher education context, Zeichner and Wray (2001) proposed that the social interaction dimension should be taken into account when using a portfolio, because its value increased when students interacted with one another on a regular basis while creating it.

In language education, portfolios have been used for documenting the learning process, supporting awareness, and developing learner autonomy (Dam, 2012). The language portfolio used in the present study was based on the European Language Portfolio, which I discuss in the following section, followed by an overview of language portfolios in Canada.

2.5. The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The portfolio used in this study is based on the ELP, which is a ready-made tool for developing autonomy and is consistent with the principles that guide the present study (involvement, reflection, and target language use) (see Section 2.2.3).

The ELP was developed in 1991 by the Council of Europe (2004) and is the practical component of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR from which it was inspired. The CEFR is rooted in the action-oriented approach. The ELP was conceived "as a means of mediating the CEFR's action-oriented approach to learners and enabling them to steer and control their own learning" (Little, 2011, p. 390).

Before discussing the ELP in more detail, I will present its background, including the action-oriented approach and the CEFR. After that, I will thoroughly explore its pedagogic function before finishing the section with a review of the ELP from the onset - its pilot study phase.

2.5.1. The ELP and the Action Oriented Approach

The ELP is an intermediary between the learner and the CEFR, whose development was guided by the action-oriented approach. According to this approach, users and learners of a language are primarily social agents who accomplish tasks in a given set of circumstances, and language activities have only meaning as part of a wider social context (Council of Europe, 2001).

The action-oriented approach keeps the concept of communicative competence as its basis, but has also adopted "a broader notion of competence that now includes the capacity to act with ever-increasing autonomy" (Piccardo, 2014, p. 7). It also adds, at its core, the role of learners as social agents, responsible and autonomous, constructing their learning by action and drawing upon previous knowledge. This means that we use language to read, speak, or write in order to achieve a communicative (not a purely language) goal. If users/learners want to accomplish this goal, they must be aware of it and actively involved in attaining it.

In the same way, the target language is not only the object of study, but also the means that enables "users/social agents to act in society, interact with others, and advance along a personal path, constructing a richer and more open identity" (Piccardo, 2014, p. 52). Since the goal is the action, not the language skill in itself, learners build up their linguistic competencies by engaging in communicative language activities.

With regard to assessment, the action-oriented approach considers that assessment (in all its forms: formal, informal, formative, summative, self- and peer-assessment, etc.) constitutes, from the outset, an integral part of the learning and teaching process (Piccardo, 2014).

2.5.2. The ELP and the Common European Framework of Reference for languages

The CEFR was developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, which "played a key role in the advancement and dissemination of innovations in language teaching" (Piccardo, 2014, p. 8) with the publication of Threshold Level (1975) and *Niveau Seuil* (1976). Threshold Level was essential for the development of language curricula and textbooks based on the communicative approach. Nowadays, the CEFR embodies a shift from the communicative to the action-oriented approach; it takes the advances made with the communicative approach "to the next level, proposing a fuller and more thorough vision capable of linking teaching and learning, objectives and evaluation, the individual and the social, the classroom and the world beyond" (Piccardo, 2014, p. 13).

Basically, "the CEFR is a tool to assist the planning of curricula, courses and examinations by working backwards from what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language" (Council of Europe, 2017a, p. 26). CEFR-based syllabuses are structured according to real communicative needs and real-life tasks. The CEFR is now available in 40 languages and "has proved to be extremely influential in the promotion of plurilingualism in Europe, in syllabus design, curriculum planning, and in language examinations in a number of European countries" (Hulstijn , 2007, p. 1). It was conceived with the general aim of reflecting on how languages are learned in order to describe language proficiency, thus facilitating cooperation among educational institutions in different countries.

The CEFR's transparency is the basis of this cooperation, for it describes language use and language learning in terms of a flexible series of levels defined by descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001) that illustrate what learners/users *can do* with the language in the context of each skill. For example, the A1 descriptor for spoken production reads: "I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know" (Council of Europe, 2009). The CEFR organizes language proficiency in six levels (A1 to C2) grouped into three broader levels of Basic, Independent and Proficient (Council of Europe, 2018) (see Figure 2). Further subdivisions may arise, according to the needs of the local context.

A Basic User		B Independent User		C Proficient User	
A1 Breakthrough	A2 Waystage	B1 Threshold	B2 Vantage	C1 Effective Operational Proficiency	C2 Mastery

Figure 2: CEFR levels of language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2018)

The descriptors are summarized in three tables that are used to introduce the CEFR levels (Appendix 1). CEFR Table 1 shows a six-level global scale. CEFR Table 2 presents a self-assessment grid for learners to assess their level of proficiency per skill (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and

writing). CEFR Table 3 describes qualitative aspects of spoken language. It is important to mention that the description of levels of proficiency is not a closed system, but is open to further development (Council of Europe, 2001). Among the main aims of the CEFR are to help define objectives and mark progress in the language learning process, as well as to "build up the attitudes, knowledge and skills [that learners] need to become more independent in thought and action, and also more responsible and co-operative in relation to other people" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. xii). Hence, one of the uses of the CEFR is the "planning of self-directed learning, including: raising the learner's awareness of his/her present state of knowledge; self-setting of feasible and worthwhile objectives; selection of materials; self-assessment" (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 6). Consequently, each *can do* descriptor implies a learning goal, teaching/learning activities and assessment criteria, making it plausible to use the CEFR in individualized instruction settings. It promotes educational values and views language as a vehicle for opportunity and success.

A Companion Volume was published as a complement to the CEFR in order to update the illustrative descriptors. Some of the changes include descriptors for online conversation and discussion, phonology, literature, and mediation. Mediation incorporates, among other things, scales for collaborating in a group and for leading group work, as well as mediation strategies that are useful for teachers. Other changes are the inclusion of a Pre-A1 proficiency level and modifications to various descriptors, mainly C2 and plus levels (e.g., B1+; B1.2). Some of the main changes that have been added to the tables used to introduce the CEFR levels are: CEFR Table 2, *Self-assessment grid*, includes now online interaction and mediation, and CEFR Table 3, *Qualitative features of spoken language* has been expanded with phonology (Council of Europe, 2017a).

As previously pointed out, the ELP was designed to accompany the CEFR and mediate between it and the language learner in terms of enabling students to control their own learning. The next section explores the pedagogical function of the ELP and its mediation role.

2.5.3. Pedagogic Function of the European Language Portfolio

This section begins with a brief outline of the ELP functions, followed by a description of its components. I then explore its pedagogic function in detail, mainly by discussing the ELP's role as a mediation tool to help learners develop autonomy, awareness and self-regulation, together with the importance of reflection and the decisive role of the teacher. The section ends with some recommendations for the use of the ELP and the significance of joint decision-making between teacher and learner in the portfolio pedagogy.

The ELP was designed with two functions: "a pedagogic function to guide and support the learner in the process of language learning and a reporting function to record proficiency in languages" (Council of Europe, 2004, p. 5). According to the official report on the ELP pilot projects, its reporting function was particularly evident in the case of a group of refugee learners in Ireland. The portfolio was priceless in proving their ability to communicate in English when attending interviews for training and employment. It was reported

that "it was not unusual for prospective employers or human resource managers, having examined the contents of the Dossier, to comment that they would not have expected the individuals to be capable of such work in English" (Schärer, 2000, p. 52). Nonetheless, the majority of the ELP pilot projects focused mainly on the portfolio's pedagogic function, since "it soon became clear that there would be little of interest to report if the ELP were not fully integrated in the language teaching/learning process" (Little, 2012, p. 9). The present research study focuses only on its pedagogic function.

The ELP has three components that support the reflective cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating learning (Council of Europe, 2004; Little, 2007): a Language Passport, a Language Biography and a Dossier, and each part has a role to play when it comes to pedagogical function. The Passport summarizes owners' linguistic identity and intercultural experience, even if non-certified or academic, and also records their self-assessment according to the CEFR's global levels of language proficiency. The Biography describes cultural experiences in each language and guides learners through the planning and assessing processes. In this section, *can do* checklists are used for goal setting and self-assessment. Finally, in the Dossier, learners keep examples of personal work and intercultural experiences to illustrate language proficiency.

The ELP's pedagogic function is very straightforward: to guide and support learners. It is "a tool to promote learner autonomy… intended to be used to involve learners in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning (Council of Europe, 2004, p. 5). That is to say, learners working with the ELP plan their learning by setting language goals and self-assess by means of reflection. Goal setting is done with the CEFR descriptors; in the case of courses designed in conformity with official curricula, the manner and order in which goals are pursued are negotiated between teacher and learner (Little, 2007). In the following section, I explore the central role of reflection in the portfolio pedagogy.

2.5.3.1. The Portfolio as a Mediation Tool for Reflection, Awareness and Self-regulation

In order to promote learner autonomy, the control of learning activities has to be gradually transferred to the learner. This process is called mediation. The role of mediation is "to help students reach the next level of knowledge or comprehension… knowing at all times not just what they are doing, but how and why" (Esteve et al., 2012, p. 75). In this process, reflection plays a central role.

Learner reflection, one of the principles of learner autonomy, is a continuous process initiated and supported by the teacher that helps learners think about their learning at both the micro and macro levels. An example of reflection at the micro level would be trying to understand why a particular learning activity was or was not successful, whereas an example of a macro level reflection would be reviewing the school year's achievements (Little, 2004, p. 22). The ELP is a mediation tool for reflection that integrates instruments like self-evaluation sheets or reflection guides. However, it is not enough to solely provide students with instruments for reflection; instead, the mediation process must be led by the teacher and integrated in the

course methodology. The impact of the ELP as a mediation tool depends, thus, on how significantly the teacher promotes reflection, but research in this area is limited (Esteve et al., 2012).

The mediation process also leads to awareness. Through reflection, learners become aware of where they are in relation to their goals, of how they are advancing towards them, and of the best resources to aid in attaining their objectives. In turn, awareness shows the way to self-regulation, which encompasses monitoring and self-assessment. It can be stated that self-regulated learning is social since "self-regulation is reached through interaction with other individuals, and fosters higher cognitive processes" (Esteve et al., 2012, p. 75). Moreover, all self-regulatory processes "such as goal setting, strategy use, and self-evaluation, can be learned from instruction and modeling" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 69) and can also increase motivation and achievement. It is important to note that self-regulation takes place gradually, with the help of mediation.

With respect to developing self-assessment skills with the ELP, this is a challenge which requires a shift in perception of both teachers and students (Kohonen, 2012). As Little (2005) suggested, "self-assessment depends on a complex [set] of skills that must be mediated by the teacher, often in very small steps" (p. 322). One of the stages in the ELP journey consists of continually practising the use of CEFR self-assessment grids and checklists for monitoring proficiency per language skill (Kohonen, 2004). Students need constant guidance in the use of these assessment tools that will add coherence and transparency along the path to autonomy (Piccardo, 2014).

In the portfolio pedagogy the role of the teacher is decisive, for he/she must promote reflection which leads to awareness and the gradual development of self-regulation (see Figure 3). It is, thus, imperative, in order to create favourable conditions for the use of the ELP, that teachers receive appropriate training and support (Council of Europe, 2004; Kohonen, 2004). This also explains why teachers' professional growth is an essential component of the ELP.

Esteve et al. (2012) carried out a study about the ELP as a mediating tool for the development of self-regulation and issued some recommendations for its use:

- The learning context should be examined first in order to adapt the ELP.
- The ELP must be part of a learner-centred classroom methodology where self-regulation has "a much more relevant place than in teacher–led methodologies" (p. 94). The most important aspect is to put oneself in the learner's place.
- The methodologies that best provide spaces for reflection are those that advocate cognitive challenges and creativity. Criteria for reflection must be provided.
- Teachers should reflect with colleagues on the requirements of an autonomous learner-centred classroom and their mediating roles. The authors mentioned the example of some teachers who made their own ELP in order to "feel for themselves what it means to reflect on one's own learning process" (p. 97).

Ushioda and Ridley (2002), in their study on the use of the ELP in post-primary schools, signaled the importance of teachers and learners working together: "both teachers and learners understood the ELP's function and benefited from its use. However, this came about only when there was mutual agreement (negotiation) about the priorities regarding what was to be tackled, when and in what manner" (p. 51). Negotiation, it is clear, means joint decision-making. This study will be furthered analyzed in Section 2.7, which focuses on fostering autonomy with a language portfolio.
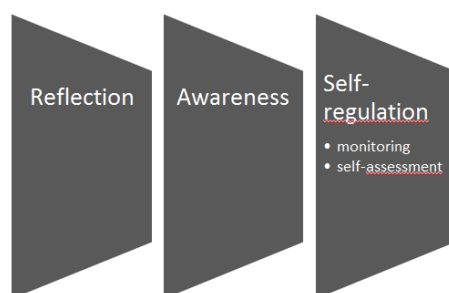
Figure 3: Reflection, awareness and self-regulation

The ELP has been in use for more than a decade now. In light of this fact, I now present a brief review of its use.

2.5.4. Review of the use of the European Language Portfolio

The potential and effects of the ELP, along with learners and teachers' perceptions, were explored during a pilot phase (1998-2000) with 30,827 students from primary to university, from 15 countries and 3 international language organizations, in a variety of cultural and educational settings. The final report (Schärer, 2000) shows an overall positive impact of this pedagogical tool. A great number of teachers (75%) found it useful in clarifying learning objectives with their students, and most learners appreciated being involved in reflecting on learning goals (p. 26). A majority of learners reacted best to the ELP when its use was voluntary and particularly liked student ownership. However, there was "common agreement that both learner and teacher training is vital for an effective use of the ELP as a pedagogic and reporting tool… [and] to facilitate and develop learner autonomy" (p. 12).

Concerning reflection, it generally focused on the learning process, the reasons for learning languages, and the definition of success: 68% of learners appreciated the ELP as a useful tool worth keeping, 70% of teachers found it useful for learners, and 78% of teachers found it useful for teachers themselves. Regarding learner self-assessment, it triggered considerable discussion (and sometimes controversy), being an innovative strategy; only 62% of teachers considered their learners able to self-assess their language competence, but 70% of learners found the ELP useful to assess their own competence and to compare the teacher's assessment with their own (p. 12).

In 2003, nine reports on the ELP in use were compiled (Little, 2003a). These reports show that the ELP supports the development of learner autonomy in very different cultural and educational contexts, and confirm "a high level of unity in diversity as regards implementation and learner response" (p. 1).

Half a million learners were estimated to be using it by 2007 (Little, 2012). From 2001 to 2010, 118 paper and electronic ELPs from various countries and educational contexts were validated by the Council of Europe. In view of the large number and wide range of models already available, the Council stopped registering ELPs at the end of 2014, but the ELP website continues to provide all the resources for compiling new models (Council of Europe, 2017b).

Nonetheless, according to Little (2012), the ELP has not been adopted as widely as previously thought, mainly due to the difficulty in making the paradigm shift needed to create a favourable pedagogical environment for its implementation. The biggest challenge posed by the ELP is self-assessment, firstly because it has been "difficult to establish clear links between the checklists and the curriculum" (p. 17) and, secondly, since there is no obvious relation between official language examinations and learner self-assessment based on *can do* descriptors. These obstacles can certainly be overcome if curriculum goals, learning activities and assessment tasks are directly connected to CEFR *can do* descriptors.

Research shows that the ELP has a powerful impact when it plays a central role in language learning (Little, 2012). Even if "those who have adopted it are often conscious of swimming against the tide" (p. 11), there is no doubt that it has been successful in many different educational contexts, and that the ELP, according to the principles and guidelines of the Council of Europe, is especially appropriate for adult and university education.

Language portfolios are not exclusive to Europe; the following section presents an overview of the creation and use of portfolios in the Canadian context.

2.6. Language Portfolios and the CEFR in Canada

The CEFR and ELP were introduced in Canada at a national workshop in 2005 (Kristmanson & Lafargue, 2014). It was found that the ELP had potential nationwide (Rehorick & Lafargue, 2005) and that the CEFR, "along with a Canadian version of the ELP, could provide the provinces and territories with common tools for documenting and tracking progress in language learning that would have currency in Canada and beyond into the international arena" (Vandergrift, 2006, p. 34). The portfolio, specifically, would facilitate mobility between provinces. In 2006, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) initiated a national project to explore the potential use of a language portfolio (Turnbull, 2011).

In 2007, researchers from the Second Language Research Institute of Canada at the University of New Brunswick started working on a multi-faceted study with a professional learning community at a local secondary school to develop materials related to the CEFR and language portfolio. They designed and

implemented the School-Based Language Portfolio (Kristmanson, Dicks & Lafargue, n.d.) and published a teacher's guide (Kristmanson & Lafargue, 2014). Results of this research study will be discussed in a forthcoming section.

In the 2009-2010 school year, a language portfolio based on the ELP was piloted in post-secondary institutions across Canada, and a survey was completed by 94 pre-service teachers and 7 instructors (University of New Brunswick, 2010). The overall reaction was very positive, as shown by the results; 91% of students and all the instructors responded that the portfolio allowed them to take control (at least in part) of their language development, and 75% of students indicated that the autobiography helped them plan and reflect. Although 87% of the students and all the instructors said that the portfolio was easy to use, many participants indicated need for a user guide.

In 2011, representatives from a number of Ministries of Education, universities, school boards and research organizations recommended that language portfolios based on the CEFR be developed and made available online to reach the greatest number of learners (CASLT, 2011). The challenge was said to be the transition to principles of learner autonomy, since "teachers, administrators and learners are not all ready for this paradigm switch in language education" (p. 23).

In 2012, a Canadian-made language portfolio was designed for adult immigrants needing to learn English in order to settle in the country: the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA). Rather than using the CEFR, this portfolio is referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), a descriptive scale of language ability in ESL (CLB, 2012). The PBLA was influenced by the ELP and by Manitoba's Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment.

In 2014, CASLT organized a CEFR research forum. According to participating teachers, some of the benefits of CEFR-informed instruction have been "authentic language use in the classroom, enhanced learner autonomy, student motivation [and] self-confidence in oral language ability" (Arnott et al., 2017, p. 36). Overall, the need for more studies examining student experiences of CEFR-informed pedagogy was reported in this forum.

The Adult-Based Language Portfolio (Poirier & Clavet, 2017) - the one used in the present study - was created for Canadians who want to learn an L2, mainly for employment (Poirier, personal communication, June 20, 2017). It was developed in New Brunswick by the CCNB-Language Learning Centre in consultation with the Second Language Research Institute of Canada. This portfolio is based on the ELP, incorporates the CEFR descriptors, and will be portrayed in the third chapter.

In brief, from 2006 to present, numerous initiatives concerning the CEFR and the ELP, such as research projects, the creation of language portfolios, the design of curriculum, the publication of teaching resources and the promotion of standardization of tests levelled to the CEFR (e.g., DELF) have been documented in the Canadian context (Kristmanson & Lafargue, 2014). The Edmonton Public School Board, the Institute for

Innovation in Second Language Education in Edmonton, The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education, and the Thames Valley School Board in Ontario are among the institutions that have used language portfolios based on the CEFR (Turnbull, 2011). The introduction of the CEFR to Canada "set a positive process in motion at the level of (re)conceptualization of tools and frameworks related to assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy" (Arnott et al., 2017, p.33).

2.7. Fostering Autonomy with a Language Portfolio

Given that the present study is about exploring the contribution of a language portfolio based on the ELP to students' autonomy, I start this section by discussing different understandings of autonomy in relation to this tool. I then examine the findings of three portfolio projects in light of the pedagogical principles of learner autonomy that guide this study (Little, 2007), and conclude with the important role that the teacher plays in this endeavour.

The use of the European Language Portfolio has been influenced by two different interpretations of learner autonomy: one that separates the process of learning to become autonomous from the process of learning the target language, and another one that integrates both. The latter is in line with the principles of autonomy that guide the present study (Section 2.2.3) and can be implemented with a language portfolio based on the ELP by guiding learners towards identifying learning targets, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes (Little, 2012).

The ELP has been shown to support the development of learner autonomy in a variety of contexts (Little, 2003a). In order to understand how autonomy can be promoted with a language portfolio based on this model, I will explore the findings of three research projects. The first one was designed to evaluate the use of the ELP in Irish post-primary schools and focussed on four key issues, two of which will be discussed here: "getting learners to accept responsibility for their learning; [and] fostering the use of the target language in the classroom" (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002, p. 4). This will be referred to as the Irish study. The second study is a two-part action research project intended to explore the CEFR and the ELP in a large urban secondary school in New Brunswick. The first part focused on students' experiences with a language portfolio based on the ELP (Kristmanson et al., 2013), and the second on the experiences of a professional learning community (Kristmanson et al., 2011). This will be referred to as the Canadian study. The third study concerns the ELP as a mediating tool for developing self-regulation in foreign language classrooms at the university level in Catalonia (Esteve et al., 2012). It will be referred to as the Catalan study. In the following sections, I discuss these studies according to the three pedagogical principles of learner autonomy that guide the present study: involvement, reflection, and target language use (Little, 2007).

2.7.1. Learner Involvement

According to the principle of learner involvement, learners are fully involved in planning (setting goals), monitoring and evaluating (self-assessment) their learning. In this section, I examine the Irish and Canadian studies. I start by generally discussing learner involvement as it pertains to both studies. I then present the results of goal-setting and self-assessment separately.

First of all, it is important to note that students' motivation and interest increased in both studies, due in part to having choices of objectives and tasks. In the Canadian study, most students perceived teachers' effort to support autonomy in a positive way. For some of them, ownership of the learning process became very clear with the use of the portfolio (Kristmanson et al., 2013). One of the teachers in the Irish study put it this way: "The pupils love the concept of the ELP and feel empowered by it: it's waiting to be filled up!" (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002, p. 47).

Concerning self-assessment and goal-setting, the Irish study results show that planning, setting objectives, and self-monitoring of progress was a real incentive for students. The researchers noted that learners were anxious to achieve the goals they had set themselves (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002). Several teachers observed that self-assessment gradually got easier, i.e., it became easier for students to recognize a sample of good work for the Dossier by looking at peer examples. The same happened with goal-setting, as learners began to see a pattern of choosing goals and deciding how to work towards them. The most advanced group in age and language proficiency was, at the beginning, the most resistant to be autonomous. According to one of the teachers, they seemed 'afraid' of setting goals and still expected to be given all the answers. The teachers started by guiding these learners towards reflecting on curriculum targets, which helped them gain confidence as they realized what they knew. They could then set language goals and even enjoy self-assessment. To sum up, all types of learners need help in setting targets, which underlines the significance of mediation.

With respect to self-assessment and goal-setting in the Canadian study, mixed reactions were reported since some students were not comfortable with the portfolio, whereas others loved it (Kristmanson et al., 2013). One student mentioned the pride and confidence she had gained from knowing what she could do, and another one said that having clear learning goals was a real advantage. Other positive comments included the coherence and consistency of the portfolio at covering language objectives over a long term, as well as students seeing their progress and shortcomings for themselves (Kristmanson et al., 2011). Another student went further and declared that the portfolio was a kind of record to ensure that the learning process was efficient and you did not relearn what you already knew. In this study, the majority of concerns were related to self-assessment and the difficulty of providing evidence of proficiency, e.g., one student found the CEFR scale intimidating. A very interesting finding suggests the importance of not inundating students with these practices, for "it appears from the data collected in this study that an overemphasis on these components may have unwanted consequences" (Kristmanson et al., 2013, p. 481).

2.7.2. Learner Reflection

According to this principle, learners reflect on the process and content of their learning continuously and self-assess regularly. As mentioned earlier, reflection leads to awareness and self-regulation.

Results of the Canadian and Irish studies concerning learner reflection show that the portfolio triggered students' awareness of not only what and why they were learning, but also their degree of success. One teacher even added that this awareness and interest in their learning contributed to students' proficiency.

The Catalan study concerned the role of the ELP as a tool for mediating reflection. This study proposed that a planned pedagogical strategy to support learners' reflection at both micro and macro levels is necessary to promote autonomy in the classroom. In order to analyze the significance of the ELP as a mediation tool for reflection, students' and teachers' perceptions were collected. In general, learners appreciated autonomous work to explore content in depth and considered the grids designed for reflection as a bridge to autonomy and awareness. Teachers, unfamiliar with the ELP, felt unease and insecure with it and perceived students as lacking the reflective practice and maturity to work towards autonomy (Esteve et al., 2012).

Results from this study show that the backbone of the ELP was the Dossier; "in adult education, the Dossier seems to make up the basis for acquiring awareness because it helps to document the development of linguistic competences clearly" (Esteve et al., 2012, p. 83). The researchers also reported that self-regulation tools were considered useful when students perceived a close link with the tasks in which they had to actively use the language. The more concrete the reflection was, the more learners could identify their progress, which confirmed that, with regard to self-regulation, the cognitive level precedes the metacognitive. Mediation tools should be designed with this in mind in order to gradually foster autonomy.

2.7.3. Target Language Use

According to this principle, the target language is the goal and the medium of all learning, including reflection. Indeed, *can do* descriptors are an effective resource for reflecting about the learning process in the target language, as mentioned by various reports on the portfolio use: "students in various countries, from upper secondary to university, as well as adult immigrants, have all spontaneously written reflective comments in the target language" (Little, 2012, p. 14).

The following comment from one of the teachers in the Irish study is a clear example of how students can practice autonomy while learning the target language: "I was amazed today to see them setting a new goal ... using some of the phrases and vocabulary of the previous goal that I had given them, and I thought it was a fantastic moment. Without me even telling them. Brilliant. I think that's definite proof of [the ELP] working" (p. 47).

In the Canadian study, most students reported the importance of 'real world' language, which was brought to the classroom by authentic texts like music videos, news or interviews. Many students mentioned the importance of "the content of their language class to be practical and applicable outside the classroom" (Kristmanson et al., 2013, p. 475), which is in line with the principle of target language use as a basis for autonomy, and the action-oriented approach as well.

I conclude this reflection about fostering autonomy with a language portfolio with some thoughts from the Canadian study. In general, students liked the meaningful and experiential aspect of the portfolio, even if some viewed it as an imposition. As Kristmanson et al. (2013) suggest, working towards learner autonomy brings about opportunities and challenges. One of the greatest advantages of working with a language portfolio is the personalization of the teaching-learning process, which allows students to work at their own pace and perfectly suits the educational context of the present research study.

2.7.4. The teacher's role

Given that the CEFR and language portfolio are sometimes considered exclusively learner tools, the role of the teacher might seem confusing (Kristmanson et al., 2011). Learner autonomy depends on a shift in the role of the teacher from transmitter of information to facilitator of learning (Little, 1995; Karlsson et al., 1997), and this determining role should be governed by the three pedagogical principles of autonomy. This means that the teacher needs to thoroughly guide students through planning, monitoring, evaluating and reflecting, ensuring that this takes place in the target language (Little, 2004). Teachers need training and support in order to effectively use the ELP, and professional growth is one of its essential components (Council of Europe, 2004; Kohonen, 2004). Most importantly, if students are to take control of their learning, they will do so gradually and with the mediation of the teacher (Esteve et al., 2012; Little, 2005; Piccardo, 2014).

I will now discuss teachers' experiences in promoting autonomy with the portfolio from two of the studies examined above - Canadian (Kristmanson et al. 2011, 2013) and Irish (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002). I will focus on the following aspects: 1) the role of the teacher as a facilitator who helps students take control of their learning; 2) how the portfolio paves the way for mediation towards autonomy; 3) learner motivation; and 4) the challenges and professional growth that working with the language portfolio brings about for teachers. Although the Irish portfolio is a registered version of the ELP and the Canadian one is based on the ELP, I will refer to both not as "ELPs" but instead as "portfolios" or "language portfolios".

In both studies, the portfolio helped teachers assume a role that facilitated autonomous learning and was more aware of learners' needs. It was helpful even for those teachers who were uncertain about working towards autonomy until they realized that learner reflection increased intrinsic motivation (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002). In order to involve students in decision-making, teachers in the Canadian study tried out several strategies, such as "providing choice of activities, taking polls of student interests and preferences, and asking for student opinions of particular tasks" (Kristmanson et al., 2011). We can sum up the role of the

teacher involving students with this remark: "This is your language learning journey. I'm just part of it. I'm just helping you in your journey" (p. 60).

As mentioned earlier, mediation is the gradual transfer of control of learning activities to the learner (Esteve et al., 2012). In the Irish study, it was evident that mediation with the portfolio became easier as students became aware of what they needed to know. For example, one of the teachers used to her advantage the fact that learners were becoming aware of the different requirements for skills (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002). In short, the portfolio helped the learning process become more transparent to both teachers and learners.

The use of a language portfolio as a tool to promote autonomy presents challenges for teachers, the biggest ones being how to encourage reflection and self-assessment (Kohonen, 2012; Kristmanson et al., 2011), as well as the difficulty of linking *can do* statements to curricula (Little, 2012). Time is, definitely, another challenge (Kohonen, 2012). Working with the portfolio requires planning time and effort in order to fit principles into practice (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002; Kristmanson et al., 2011). In the Canadian study, the professional learning community articulated a philosophical stance and action plan for the semester, which took time and intense collaboration for all teachers involved. This philosophical vision was based on guiding uninvolved, unmotivated, and unaware students to become decision makers, goal setters and explorers who think critically throughout their life-long learning journey. This action plan was rooted in ELP principles, in addition to concepts such as creativity and adaptability. One of its features involved students who were more experienced in the approach introducing the CEFR and portfolio to new students with a Prezi presentation (Kristmanson et al., 2011). In order to summarize the challenges brought about by working with the language portfolio, we can say that "to have any learner uptake with respect to autonomy, dedicated and targeted instructional time needs to be given to the development of metacognitive strategies such as evaluation and monitoring" (Kristmanson et al., 2013, p. 467).

In contrast, the use of the portfolio is not without rewards, such as an increase in learners' motivation and quality of learning, as well as teachers' professional growth. One teacher suggested that her students "[saw] themselves as serious learners" (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002, p. 46). Another one said that, since students knew what they needed to learn, they were motivated enough to focus on grammar and accuracy: "The use of the ELP has certainly achieved more in these vital aspects than any of my traditional methods (p. 45).

I will conclude with an example from the Irish study of how the portfolio pedagogy brought about teachers' professional growth:

> …the process of overseeing the ways in which each member of the class engaged with the ELP helped the teachers to understand more about the benefits of the explicit and reflective aspects of language learning and teaching. Their own professional knowledge was thus enhanced. This came about partly because they had allowed time in the week for learners to work at their own pace on something they had chosen, which allowed them the opportunity to observe individuals close up and provide encouragement where necessary (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002, p. 50).

The aforementioned situation corresponds exactly to the adult education context of the present study where learners work at their own pace. The studies presented in this section suggest that it is possible for teachers to become facilitators of autonomous learning with the help of a language portfolio based on the principles of the ELP, and that this can lead to increasing learners' intrinsic motivation.

2.8. Research Questions

The general objective of the present study is to explore the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to adult ESL students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills in Le Retour Adult Education Centre. As previously mentioned, focus has been placed on the development of oral skills because, while 40-60% of evaluations are of oral proficiency, oral interaction is not often present in the individualized instruction setting.

The first three research questions are based on the principles of learner autonomy - involvement, reflection, and target language use - (Little, 2007) and will allow the achievement of the general objective. The fourth question regards the role of the teacher since, as it has been explained in this chapter, the role of this mediation is vital to facilitate student learning.

1. What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their decision-making capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning? (Principle of learner involvement);

2. What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to critically reflect about their learning? (Principle of learner reflection);

3. What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak in English in an appropriate, spontaneous and independent way? (Principle of appropriate target language use).

4. What is the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy concerning the development of oral skills with the portfolio?

2.9. Summary of the Literature Review

Since the general objective of the present study is to explore the contribution of the language portfolio to ESL students' autonomy, the literature review covered both of these fields. I began by defining learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's learning. I then presented various models to develop autonomy, including one that encompasses the synergetic principles that are the foundations of this study: learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use. In this model, learning the target language and learning to learn go hand in hand. I explained that the purpose of autonomy-promoting projects is to

provide learners with the tools they need to use the target language on their own, since autonomy in the classroom gives them the necessary confidence for L2 development. I then argued that teachers play a decisive role in promoting autonomy by bringing learners to accept responsibility for their learning, and that learners' acceptance of this responsibility increases their capacity to use the target language independently.

Turning to the field of language portfolios, I first presented portfolios in education. I then explained in detail the European Language Portfolio (ELP), - the basis of the portfolio used in this study - starting with the context in which it was created: the action oriented approach and the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). I presented the CEFR and its *can do* descriptors as a tool for teaching and self-assessment that provides a clear, shared roadmap for learning. I then synthesized the pedagogical function of the ELP, including its role as a mediation tool for reflection, awareness, self-regulation and, consequently, the development of learner autonomy. I mentioned that its impact is powerful when it plays a central role in language learning.

A brief history of the CEFR and language portfolios in Canada were presented, including the Adult-Based Language Portfolio. This portfolio was developed in New Brunswick under the principles of the ELP and is used in the present study. This section was followed by a thorough review of three research projects related to the use of the language portfolio in light of the pedagogical principles of learner autonomy. It was pointed out that one of the advantages of working with a language portfolio is the personalization of the teaching-learning process and allowing students to work at their own paces, which corresponds exactly to the educational context of this study. To conclude, I discussed teachers' experiences in promoting autonomy with the language portfolio, focusing on four aspects: the role of the teacher as facilitator, how the portfolio paves the way for autonomy, the resulting increase in learners' motivation, and teachers' challenges and professional growth.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I start this chapter by specifying the empirical methodology used and broadly explaining that this research comprises both a pilot and main study. I then describe how I answered the four research questions and, next, delineate the context of both the pilot and main studies by giving information about the school and English class. I continue by presenting the pilot study in its entirety: the action research methodology, participants, data gathering instruments, analyses, conclusions, and the resulting changes for the next cycle. Afterwards, I thoroughly describe the methodology pertaining to the main study: the participatory action research methodology, the characteristics of the participants, the way in which data collection tools were used, and information on data processing and analyses. The findings in the main study will be reported in Chapter 4. This chapter concludes with the ethical considerations taken into account.

I want to mention here that a Research and Special Initiatives Grant for Teachers was conferred for both the pilot and main study by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT).

3.1. Type of Research: Pilot Study and Main Study

To address the research questions, a qualitative approach guided by an action research methodology (which is cyclic) was selected. The first cycle consisted of a pilot study conducted in order to validate the data collection tools. The results from the pilot study informed and guided the process for conducting the main study, which was the second cycle, led by participatory action research. The reason for this change is that, at the time of the pilot study, I was teaching the ESL class at *Le Retour* Adult Education Centre, where this research took place. During the main study I was not the teacher, but the student-researcher. In order to include the classroom teacher and learners, I decided to use participatory action research.

As I mentioned in Section 2.8, the first three research questions are each linked to one of the pedagogical principles of learner autonomy (Little, 2007) that serve as foundation of the present study, and the fourth question concerns the mediating role of the teacher.

In order to approach the four questions, I compared and contrasted answers to the interview questions, the content of the discussions and portfolios, and the analytical observations with the corresponding principle of learner autonomy, as follows:

In order to approach the first research question - *What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio[4] to ESL students' autonomy regarding their decision-making capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning?* - I compared the data with the principle of learner involvement.

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[4] From now on, in this paper, the Adult-Based Language Portfolio will be referred to as portfolio.

For the second question - *What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to critically reflect about their learning?* - I compared the data with the principle of learner reflection.

For the third research question - *What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak English in an appropriate, spontaneous and independent way?* - I compared the data with the principle of target language use.

As for the fourth question - *What is the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy concerning the development of oral skills with the portfolio?* - I compared the data with the three principles of learner autonomy.

3.1.1. Context

3.1.1.1. Centre de formation générale Le Retour

Le Retour is an Adult Education Centre located in La Sarre, a city in the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue (Quebec). *Le Retour* is part of the Adult General Education system *(FGA)* and gives students older than 16 the opportunity to finish secondary studies or achieve the requirements to pursue a technical program or enter the labour market (see Section 1.1). In the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years, the centre reintegrated into the school system 91% of the students who had quit the youth sector during the same periods (Centre de formation générale Le Retour, 2015, 2016).

In the 2015-2016 school year, the attendance rate was maintained at 81%, despite an increase in student health problems. At the end of the cycle, 10 students obtained their secondary school diploma, 16 students registered in college, 1 in university, and more than 74 in vocational training (Centre de formation générale Le Retour, 2016).

In regard to English, the school offers five ESL secondary courses, plus a pre-secondary one. From the 2012-2013 to the 2015-2016 school year, there were 357 students registered in the five levels (Centre de formation générale Le Retour, 2017). Their success rates were as follows (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Le Retour ESL students' success rates from 2012 to 2016

ESL Secondary I	ESL Secondary II	ESL Secondary III	ESL Secondary IV	ESL Secondary V
48%	55%	51%	58%	74%

Source: Centre de formation générale Le Retour, 2017

3.1.1.2. Information about the ESL Class

There is only one multi-level English class, and it extends from pre-secondary to secondary 5. As mentioned in the first chapter, attrition is high in Adult General Education. In Table 3.2, the enrollment for three consecutive school years is compared in terms of the total number of students enrolled in the English course, and the number of students registered at the beginning and at the end of the pilot study and the main study (Centre de formation générale Le Retour, 2019).

The workbooks for the ESL courses were *Step Forward Canada 1: Language for Everyday Life* (Rajabi & Spigarelli, 2008) for Secondary 1, *Step Forward Canada 2: Language for Everyday Life* (Rajabi & Wisniewska, 2008) for Secondary 2, and *Connecting Doors* series (Gibbs & Tzinevrakis, 2014) for Secondary 3, 4 and 5. There were several dictionaries in the classroom - *Harrap's Shorter English and French Dictionary* and *Oxford English Dictionary*, as well as varied learning material for grammar concepts and developing listening and reading comprehension skills. There were also six computers and several iPads available. Of particular interest are learning and evaluation situations (L.E.S.) per level that both learners and teachers can access in the ESL Adult General Education website (Brandow & Charchuk, 2019). In addition, learners could use their cellphones for research, access online dictionaries and for listening comprehension activities.

Table 3.2: ESL class enrollment

SCHOOL YEAR	TOTAL	BEGINNING	END
2016-2017	90	-	-
2017-2018 Pilot study	73	30 March	19 June
2018-2019 Main study	82	42 September	32 December

Source: Centre de formation générale Le Retour, 2018; 2019

The ESL teacher's schedule is divided into a maximum of eight teaching periods per week, each being 3 hours (a.m.) or 2.5 hours (p.m.) long. Students have individualized schedules, which can vary from attending English class for a minimum of 3 hours per week to full-time (up to 17 hours per week). This means that there is rarely the same group of learners in the classroom at the same time, which poses a challenge when organizing activities such as oral interactions.

3.2. Pilot Study: Action Research Methodology

To present the pilot study, I start with a detailed description of the action research methodology, followed by the participants and the procedure for recruitment. After this, I provide information about the data

gathering process, the research instruments, and how they were used. A complete analysis of the pilot study is next, in order to illustrate the validation of the data collection tools. This is followed by the conclusions from the pilot study and the changes that emerged and shaped the main study.

Kurt Lewin coined the term *action research* in 1946 to describe "a spiral action of research aimed at problem solving" (Walter, 1998). In the context of English language teaching, Burns (2010) defines action research as a "self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring [teachers'] own teaching context" (p. 2), where continual reflection and preliminary analyses are required as data are collected. Action research methodology is guided by a process of inquiry and reflection that helps articulate and deepen teachers' theoretical ideas about teaching, fostering their professional development. Its ultimate goal is to bring about improvements based on data, and one of its core ideologies is to promote the effective learning of students. Furthermore, Burns (2010) stated that action research may be useful to explore ways to increase learner autonomy in the classroom and Little (2011) promoted the use of action research to explore and evaluate portfolio projects.

The two main characteristics of action research are that it seeks the change of a given practice and that it occurs in cycles. First, action research seeks change. According to Kemmis & McTaggart (2005), since practices are built in social interaction, changing practices is a social process. Focusing on a practice in a specific and concrete manner makes it accessible for reflection and discussion, thus opening communicative space. An example of this is action research in the classroom, where teachers work together or with students to improve the teaching and learning process. In the context of this study, the change was directed towards meeting the ESL class' specific needs; students need tools to work autonomously (Gagnon & Brunel, 2005) and opportunities to develop oral skills in individualized instruction. Second, the action research methodology is cyclic. It is a spiral of self-reflective cycles of "*planning* a change; *acting* and *observing* the process and consequences of the change; *reflecting* on these processes and consequences" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 563) planning again, and so on. These stages are not linear but overlap, since adjustments can be made on the way as a result of what the researchers learn in the process. In this project, the pilot study was the first action and observation step. I reflected upon the findings, made some adjustments, and it served as a springboard to the data gathering in the main study.

According to Morrissette (2013), other features of action research are the key role of professional development and the importance of collective meetings and journal keeping by the participants.

Professional development is another key concern in action research. I mentioned that one of the goals in adult education is for students to become life-long learners, but the same goes for teachers if they want to keep up with students in this changing era (Morales, 2016). Action research, with its reflective component, points in this direction. For example, in an action research study with elementary teachers in Namibia, O'Sullivan (2002) implemented a structured reflective approach that proved to be an important factor in teachers' professional development. In the present study, learner autonomy called for a switch in the

teacher's role from transmitter of information to facilitator of learning. The very opportunity of putting learner autonomy theory into practice with action research cycles - plan, act, observe, reflect - has already fostered a great leap in my professional development.

In the pilot study, learners used the portfolio during a 13-week period, during which the teacher and some students kept journals. Keeping a journal is essential to document the change, the definition of the problem that can transform with each cycle, and the evaluation of each attempt to solve the problem. The teacher journal fulfilled all these functions. As for collective meetings, they are important because they help objectify the research process. Near the end of the pilot study there was a group interview; it was a highlight moment in the study where we discussed the research objectives in relation to the learning process. The group interview created a communicative space and rendered the research process and practices more concrete.

3.2.1. Participants

At the time of the pilot study I was teaching the ESL class at *Le Retour.* Participants were thus the teacher/student-researcher (myself) and the students.

Teacher/student-researcher. I am a native Spanish speaker. I hold a Certificate of Proficiency in English and a B.A. in Teaching ESL. I have taught various ESL and Spanish courses in continuing education programs at the college level. I taught ESL at *Le Retour* Adult Education Centre for most of the 2015-2016 school year and the whole of 2017-2018.

Participating Students. There were four participants in the pilot study: three in Secondary 3 and one in Secondary 5. All were Francophone, except one who was learning English and French simultaneously (S1). The group met with the teacher one to three times per week, for 1 to 3 hours, for 13 weeks.

Procedure for Recruitment. Participants were recruited using probability sampling, which means that any representative sample reflects the characteristics of the population from which they are selected. Students participated on a voluntary basis and the sample was random. I gave an oral invitation to participate in an information session to all students in the ESL class. In this session, I explained the pilot study, its goals, and students' role. I explained that their participation would involve taking part in one to three weekly workshops of 1 to 3 hours during the 13 weeks, during which they would work with the language portfolio and develop oral skills. Students were informed of the fact that their participation, or lack thereof, would not influence their grades. In Adult General Education, the only exams are Ministerial individual final evaluations that students take in the exam room when they are ready. There is no summative evaluation in the class, which is another factor why their choice to participate or not in the study would not influence their grades.

3.2.2. Data Gathering Instruments

In accordance with action research, the data gathering and processing occurred in self-reflective cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The three data gathering instruments are described in the following sections: the Adult-Based Language Portfolio, analytical observations, and interview.

3.2.2.1. Adult-Based Language Portfolio

The *Portfolio des langues pour adultes*/Adult-Based Language Portfolio (Poirier & Clavet, 2017) is a version of the ELP (Council of Europe, 2004) adapted for the Canadian context. As mentioned in Section 2.5, the ELP is the practical component of the CEFR and an intermediary between the action-oriented approach and learners.

The Adult-Based Language Portfolio was developed in New Brunswick by the CCNB[5]-Language Learning Centre in consultation with the Second Language Research Institute of Canada. Its content is based on the ELP, the *Core Inventory for General English* - British Council/EAQUALS (North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010), and the EAQUALS Descriptors (2008). It is a bilingual document – English and French – and its format (7 x 8.5 inches), design, and layout make it practical and easy to use.

The Adult-Based Language Portfolio was created for learners "who would like to improve their language skills for personal and professional needs" (Poirier & Clavet, 2017, p. 1), which fits the population profile of the present research. The portfolio is presently used in a number of L2 classes, and teacher training is ongoing, for it takes time to get acquainted with. In a conversation with one of the authors, she said that it is a transition period and added that "students take time to realize that they can only learn so much in the classroom" (Poirier, personal communication, June 20, 2017) and need to study on their own. The portfolio has been shown to employers, who value it because they know exactly what a person can do in the target language.

In compliance with the Principles and Guidelines of the ELP (Council of Europe, 2004), the Adult-Based Language Portfolio has three parts: Passport, Biography, and Dossier.

The Passport includes the CEFR self-assessment grid - where language skills are defined according to levels of proficiency - and a linguistic profile of the learner. The Biography has two sections: Autobiography and Self-assessment. In the Autobiography, the learner records the languages he can use, the language training received, as well as linguistic and cultural experiences. The self-assessment section includes a reflection scale, self-assessment checklists, and a language learning goals table. The reflection scale serves as a self-assessment tool related to specific *can do* statements and facilitates goal setting (see Figure 4).

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[5] *Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick*

Mon objectif est de pouvoir faire cela.	→	I want to be able to do this.
Je peux faire cela mais avec difficulté.	✓	I can do this but with difficulty.
Je peux faire cela bien et facilement.	✓✓	I can do this well and with ease.

Figure 4: Reflection Scale (Poirier & Clavet, 2017, p. 9)

The self-assessment checklists (see Table 3.3) provide descriptors in the form of *I can* statements per language skill for proficiency levels A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1. Each level is broken into two sub-levels: A1.1, A1.2, etc. Level C2, Mastery, is not included. The language learning goals table provides clear and simple directions for goal setting, as well as one example in English and another in French (see Table 3.4).

As for the Dossier, it "collects a list of the diverse works documenting the learning process… Here are some examples: an article read; the recording of a discussion in which the person participated; an oral presentation; an email or an essay written" (p. 32). The documents, which are evidence of the goals attained, are gathered in a binder and/or computer file and listed in a table (see Table 3.5). In the pilot study, students had a binder or file folder and a USB key (see Appendix 2, Portfolio Contents, for the cover page of the pilot study's Dossiers).

In the pilot study, participants used the portfolio for 13 weeks, during which time I guided them and took notes about how they used it according to their language goals. In order for participants to choose language learning objectives from the CEFR descriptors, I linked some of the curriculum goals to the portfolio *can do* descriptors with the help of the British Council – EAQUALS' *Core inventory for general English* (North et al., 2010) in consultation with a colleague (see Section 3.2.3.2 for more details on this process). At the end of the 13 weeks, the data collected via the portfolio (i.e., the self- assessment grids, checklists, reflection scales, and evidence in the Dossier) and my observations were compared with the categories issued from the principles of learner autonomy in order to explore the contribution of the portfolio to students' autonomy.

Table 3.3: Self-Assessment Checklist for Spoken Interaction, Level A1.2 (excerpt)

A1.2		ME	DATE COMPLETED TASK	I CAN
SPOKEN INTERACTION				1. Indicate time phrases *(next week, tomorrow, this morning, etc.)* and location phrases *(here, home, beside, etc.)*.
				2. Request or offer assistance or basic information.
				3. Ask and answer questions on familiar topics when asked to me slowly and clearly.
				4. Make purchases using gestures when needed to make myself understood.
				5. Ask for directions.

Source: Poirier & Clavet, 2017, p. 13

Table 3.4: Language Learning Goals (excerpt)

LANGUAGE	SKILL (*Can do* statements from Self-Assessment section)	PLAN (Specify how and when)
EX. Français	B1.2 Écrire (1 et 4)	Écrire un courriel à mon employeur pour lui demander de me permettre de participer à une session de formation en lien avec mon travail. Le courriel comprend également un court résumé des avantages de cette formation pour mon travail.
EX. English	A1.2 Spoken Interaction (1 and 3)	Respond to a colleague regarding the location of a document or an object in our work environment.

Source: Poirier & Clavet, 2017, pp. 30-31

Table 3.5: Dossier (excerpt)

LANGUAGE SKILLS	DOCUMENT, EVIDENCE, PROOF, WITNESS (Ex. transcript of marks, certificate of participation, specific task…)	DATE
EX.[6] B1.2 Writing (4)	Cover letter (specific task)	June 12th, 2016
EX. A1.2 Spoken Interaction (3)	Signature of a teacher related to cultural experience activity in the community (attestation)	June 14th, 2016

Source: Poirier & Clavet, 2017, pp. 33-34

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[6] EX. (for example) in the original.

3.2.2.2. Analytical Observations

Observation notes are descriptions and accounts of what happens in the classroom. The types of notes I used were analytical observations, which include descriptions, reflective observations, and an initial analysis of those observations (Burns, 2010). To record them, I had a grid with four entries: sequence of actions, students' responses, duration (time), and analysis, as inspired by Aldana (2005). In the end, I never used it because what I observed was far richer and could not be done justice by entering facts into a table. My observations were thus written in a journal. During and after the workshops, I took notes about the way the participants used the portfolio. At the end of the pilot study, I compared the data collected via my observations with the principles of learner autonomy.

3.2.2.3. Interview

An interview is a common example of non-observation data which allows researchers to explore "what people think, believe and perceive and also the way they explain their personal […] experiences and actions" (Burns, 2010, p. 74). It can be described as a conversation with a purpose (Burguess, 1984, cited in Burns, 2010). From the existing interview types, I chose semi-structured, which is organized, but still open according to the interviewee's responses. This type of interview enables the researcher to make comparisons across participants' responses while also allowing for individual flexibility and diversity. Its advantage is to explore topics or concepts in more depth, thus obtaining richer information (Burns, 2010).

I conducted a semi-structured group interview with guiding questions near the end of the pilot study. It originally consisted of 17 questions, but some changes took place. I eliminated a number of questions, changed the order of others, and added new questions that arose from conversations during breaks. In the end there were 18 questions, and the interview lasted 40 minutes. Students had the choice to answer in English or French but all answered in English and, when they felt the need to further elaborate on something, switched to French. I recorded the interview and transcribed it later. Some questions were adapted from Kristmanson et al. (2013) and Esteve et al. (2012) and aimed at obtaining insights into learners' work with the portfolio, i.e., goal setting, reflection and working in collaboration (see Appendix 3, Student Group Interview, Pilot Study). Some of the questions were:

- Is this the first time you set English learning goals?
- Is it useful to work with descriptors of what you can do in English?
- Has this project helped you reach your English goals at school?
- Does the reflection scale help you evaluate your progress?
- Has writing about how and what you learn helped you? If yes, how?
- Has your English improved?
- Are you proud of your progress in English?

Responses were compared with the categories related to the principles of learner autonomy in order to explore the contribution of the portfolio to students' autonomy.

I now present the analysis and conclusions from the pilot study, followed by the modifications issued from it that shaped the data gathering for the next cycle.

3.2.3. Pilot Study Analysis: Validation of Data Gathering Instruments

There is questioning and a need for more discussion amongst researchers about the process and results of pilot studies. For instance, successful pilot studies do not guarantee the success of the main study and may be the source of inaccurate assumptions. There is also the risk of contamination when data from the pilot study are included in the main results; or else when pilot participants also collaborate in the main study, for they may react differently than new ones. In any case, Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001), argue that "researchers have an ethical obligation to make the best use of their research experience by reporting issues arising from all parts of a study, including the pilot phase" (p. 4). In qualitative research, where data collection and analysis are often progressive, like in action research, there is less concern.

A pilot study can be used to evaluate, among other things, the implementation of a novel intervention (Leon, Davis, & Kraemer, 2011) as well as to gain insights to improve interview questions – both of which were the case in this study. Also, sharing pilot studies along with improvements made to the research design can provide new perspectives for other researchers.

Data analysis in action research is "a continuing process of reducing information to find explanations and patterns" (Burns, 2010, p. 104). Given that action research is a recursive cycle of actions and reflections, the data are examined and analyzed from the very beginning in a dynamic way. Actually, reflecting on data "*in combination* with doing the action is essential" (p. 104) and allows teacher-researchers to distance themselves from the classroom and be more objective. Indeed, I had a whole new perspective of learner autonomy and the portfolio after analyzing the pilot study data.

In the same light, before getting into the details of the study, I will briefly report on my first experience with the portfolio pedagogy with one of my students who did not participate in the research because she finished her course and left school before it began. I showed her the A1.1 checklist and she immediately wrote a description of herself and read it to me, in an attempt to make it meaningful, which made me realize that working with the CEFR descriptors can be motivating, since it is easy to relate to them. She then chose understanding numbers as her goal, and organized a Bingo activity from A to Z; after some weeks, doing homework with her son, she realized she knew her numbers. This is an example of two things: first, having a clear goal in mind allowed this student to monitor and evaluate herself over a short period of time; and, second, playing an active role in learning can enhance it. As indicated by Allwright (1991, cited in Little, 1995), autonomy is accepting responsibility for learning - not only at the affective level, but undertaking

organizational initiatives. Finally, as my earlier student liked to write, I had told her to keep a journal and then asked if writing helped her to see her progress. She responded: "Very much. I realize when I reread from where I left and where I am now." We can see how the portfolio pedagogy, through reflection, helped this student gain awareness of her learning process. This experience with the portfolio was an encouraging beginning.

I now present the pilot study's process and conclusions, after first recalling its objective: to explore the contribution of the language portfolio to students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills in the context of Adult General Education, where opportunities for oral interaction are very limited. With this in mind, the pilot study intended to validate the research instruments: the portfolio, analytical observations, and interview.

The pilot study consisted of one to three weekly workshops of 1 to 3 hours, conducted by the teacher, where the participating students used the portfolio. It amounted to about 100 hours in a 13-week period. I present the pilot study according to the steps that were involved in conducting it as per action research methodology: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Burns, 2010). In the reflecting section, I will justify the validation of the three data collection tools and elaborate on the importance of collaboration (a new element issued from this first research cycle) when working towards learner autonomy.

3.2.3.1. Planning

The first step was to prepare an action plan, which included the following activities:

- Link courses' objectives to CEFR descriptors;
- Invite all students, orally, to the presentation of the project;
- Present the project and portfolio, using CEFR videos;
- Recruit participants;
- Elicit learners' ideas on how to use the portfolio;
- Have learners do self-evaluation (Passport) and set listening/speaking goals (Autobiography)
- Design multilevel collaborative activities according to learners' goals;
- Encourage students to bring learning material, e.g., videos;
- Teach concepts such as grammar forms related to students' goals (this is only seldom done in individualized instruction);
- Every workshop, keep learning goals in mind;
- Keep a journal; learners (free form) and teacher (grid for analytical observations)
- Evaluation at end of each month (3): review Dossier, assess progress (compare learners' and teacher's); if goals are achieved, select evidence for Dossier; conduct group discussion on progress towards goals and the use of the portfolio;
- Conduct final individual interview.

3.2.3.2. Acting

As per Esteve et al.'s (2012) recommendations for the use of the portfolio, I first examined the learning context in order to link CEFR goals to curricula. To correctly match the curriculum of each course with the CEFR descriptors had been a concern, since the ESL class comprises the five levels of secondary. I consulted with a colleague and, using the British Council – EAQUALS' *Core inventory for general English* (North et al., 2010), we selected some of the learning objectives of the Secondary I course to fix a starting point, and some of the Secondary V expected outcomes as an ending reference point. For instance, two of the Essential Knowledge Language Functions of the ANG-1101-4, Secondary I, course (MELS, 2007, p. 38) are *Asking for and giving information* and *Asking for and responding to directions and instructions*. According to the *Core inventory for general English* (p. 11), the *Directions* and *Giving personal information* functions correspond to the A1 level. In the portfolio, these functions correspond to descriptors 1, 2 and 5 of the A1.2 spoken interaction checklist (see Table 3.3). This was the starting point to link *can do* descriptors to some curriculum objectives. We then looked at the expected outcomes of the Secondary V exams and determined that some corresponded to the B1.2 level and others to B2.1. With these two reference points, we linked curricula to the CEFR levels in a general way (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: CEFR levels and curricula

Secondary	CEFR Level
I	A1.2
II – III	A2.1
III - IV	A2.2
IV	B1.1
V	B1.2 – B2.1

This decision made, the workshops developed according to the action plan, and other students from the ESL classroom attended on occasion. The activities targeted the development of oral skills guided by learners' goals, while both the teacher and students became familiar with the CEFR levels and the learning material related to the *can do* statements, e.g., the difference between an A2 and B1 listening task. Some of the activities were as follows:

- Oral presentations on travel experiences (other teachers were also invited to present)
- Discussions about videos
- Roleplay
- Games
- A rally (designed by a guest student)
- Grammar and pronunciation lessons and practice

3.2.3.3. Observing and Reflecting: the Portfolio, Learner Autonomy and Collaboration

The observing and reflecting stages involved a great deal of organizing and classifying of data and information. I now present my notes, gathered from the three instruments, students' portfolios, my observations, and the interview, in order to validate them.

First of all, the pilot study was an opportunity to get acquainted with the portfolio, since this was my first experience teaching with it. I learned by both experience and literature that putting the portfolio principles into practice requires time (Kohonen, 2012; Ushioda & Ridley, 2002; Kristmanson et al., 2011). Learning material for CEFR descriptors concerning oral skills and grammar was easy to find. One student (S2), showing signs of an incipient awareness, looked on his own for material related to his goals via the Internet. Other than that, all participants found the portfolio user friendly. Its design and format make it practical; the descriptors are phrased in a simple way and, if needed, learners could see the French equivalent. Participants also found the reflection scale easy to use, a fact I will return to when discussing monitoring and evaluating.

Secondly, setting goals and reflecting fostered students' awareness of their learning processes. For example, S2 (registered in Secondary V) realized right away he did not have the required level and chose appropriate goals. However, while all the participants agreed that the portfolio is a guide for learning English even outside of school, they emphasized the need to have a teacher's guidance.

Since the general objective of this study was to explore learner autonomy, I will continue my observations and reflections in this light: learner autonomy as involvement - planning, monitoring, evaluating, reflection, and target language use.

Planning started with students setting learning goals, and was the first time all of them set specific language learning objectives. Since I was also learning to work with the portfolio, I decided on the activities based on their goals. Given that this project concerned the development of oral skills, goals involved listening and spoken production/interaction and ranged from level A1.1 to A2.2. See Appendix 2, Portfolio Contents, for a list of the *can do* descriptors we worked with. Students had the choice as to which grammar points to study in the workshops or which videos they preferred to work with. In general, they knew in advance what was expected of them and how the activities would unfold. As for planning learning activities, S2, always a step ahead, wrote in his journal what he was going to do in the following English class.

With respect to monitoring and evaluating, learners found the reflection scale easy to use, useful and accurate: *I want to be able to do this; I can do this but with difficulty; I can do this well and with ease* (see Figure 4, Section 3.2.2.1). They could see if a *can do* descriptor was easy or difficult to do, though they only used the scale when I asked them to. As for the descriptors, while all participants found them useful, two students mentioned that the progression from one level to the other was not always clear.

Even if the plan was to evaluate monthly, we only did it once. Two students presented oral proof of their knowledge, listed it in their Dossiers, and I signed as a witness. Here we can see the descriptors and the evidence presented (see Table 3.5 for an excerpt of the Dossier):

Language Skills	Document, evidence, proof, witness	*Adapted from students' Dossiers*
A2.2, Spoken Interaction #4 Answer questions of a personal nature in an interview if asked in simple language, with a slow and clear flow.	A job interview	S3
A2.1, Spoken Production #2 Express simply and comprehensibly if I like or do not like and why.	An explanation of why she likes several animals	S4

Reflections were rich and productive. They came mainly from the group interview, but also from the linguistic profile, Autobiography, and participants' journals. For all students, again, it was the first time they had thought about their ESL learning process in a structured way. Reflection in their journals was anything related to learning English; what they did that day, what they learned, what they had to do next, notes on grammar and pronunciation, new vocabulary, etc. As for the benefits of writing about their learning process - even if there was a divided opinion - participants had the chance to verbalize their reflections. Some said writing was good for motivation, focus, and to see their progress:

> It's essential for good attitude, positive, because you check what is your progression. In the first time, I don't do it and now I can, and now I'm better… (S2)

> It's a good help for me, because I like working my words *en écrivant, ça l'aide pour apprendre*, to form the sentence complete (S4).

For other students, it was not as important:

> *Moi, j'écris pas beaucoup. Ça m'arrive, mais je suis plus à l'écoute qu'à l'écriture. J'ai tendance parfois à oublier que j'ai écrit cela, faut que je l'écoute, faut que je le pratique. C'est comme ça, ma manière à moi d'apprendre* (S3).

> Me, it's not important. It's more important what we're doing, not what I write (S1).

Using the language is the essence of learner autonomy. In Little's (2009) words, "language is the tool with which knowledge and skill are mediated and the learning process is shaped". Workshops were held in English, except for occasional grammar explanations in French. One of the main outcomes of this study was the development of oral skills, as suggested in this comment from the group interview that also shows the student's initial awareness: "In beginning not really speak in English and write in English, but now I'm really in Secondary IV" (S2, who is in Secondary V).

All participants appreciated the chance to practice oral English, as well as to receive grammar and pronunciation lessons. S3, who had learned English by watching videos, was straightforward: "I can't learn English in a book. I need to hear it." Some students even suggested making oral interaction a part of the English class in the school schedule.

Analytical Observations. As explained in Section 3.2.2.2, I recorded my observations in a journal, which proved to be an invaluable tool for professional development. Morrissette (2013) stresses the importance of journals in action research to document changes, define problems, and the attempts to solve them - all of which were the case in the pilot study. However, the journal was in a notebook, and that format did not allow for adding the reflections that came upon days after a workshop, which led me to designing an observation grid for the main study (see Appendix 4). The new grid was to allow observations related to learner autonomy, as seen in this excerpt (Figure 5), and in the main study, where I used it along with my journal.

Actions or goals	Students responses		Teacher's role	Analysis
	Plan / Monitor / Evaluate / Reflect / Use English / Collaboration	Other observations		

Figure 5: Observation grid (excerpt)

Interview. Discussion and evaluation of possibilities are required in action research and, as Little and Perclová (2001) said, the best learning comes from discussion with others and personal reflection. According to the action plan, I was to do two group discussions and a final individual interview to reflect on goals and the learning process. In the end, the nature of the study and the time available only allowed for a final group interview, which became the highlight of the study with regards to reflecting, exchanging, and objectifying the research process (Morrissette, 2013; Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Participants had a chance to talk about how they learned and developed English language skills, and they took advantage of it. It was also a chance to explore students' language and my interviewing capabilities.

The interview was semi-structured, which allowed for changes in line with action research (see Section 3.2.2.3 for details on the interview, and Appendix 3 for the questions). I recorded and transcribed the interview and, in order to be detached and objective (Burns, 2010), analyzed it two months later. All participants were really invested in the conversation; they brought up new subjects during breaks and I added questions accordingly. It was the longest conversation in English we had had during the pilot study. Students' remarks are reported earlier in this section. My first overall comment is that the ambiance was very pleasant, relaxed, fun, and sprinkled with laughs. The interview questions allowed me to access

students' mental process by eliciting reflection, bringing me to consider a central point in this research study: How does the portfolio elicit student reflection? How do students exercise their metacognitive skills? These considerations helped me greatly while conducting the analysis of the main study. I will thus elaborate further when presenting the findings of the following research cycle concerning reflection (Section 4.5).

Learner Autonomy and Collaboration. In this study, collaboration emerged as a new element in the path towards autonomy, as it provided an opportunity for students to work together to develop oral skills, and was also a chance to socialize and make friends. Peers supported each other in various ways: explaining to each other, building oral interaction, learning together, suggesting tasks, etc. which, overall, led me to confirm that interaction and collaboration are important factors in the promotion of learner autonomy (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000)**.**

3.2.4. Conclusions from the Pilot Study

The goals of this pilot study were two-fold: to explore the contribution of the language portfolio to learner autonomy - involvement, reflection and language use (Little, 2007) - in the development of oral skills, and to validate the research instruments. As Dam and Legenhausen (2016) suggest, small-scale action research projects can result in immediate changes, and such was the case in this study.

Five key findings emerged from the pilot study. First, action research facilitated the linking of theory and practice and fostered my professional development as a teacher. Second, all research instruments were validated, and the group interview was found valuable for reflection, exchange, and objectifying the research process. Third, the portfolio encouraged students' awareness of and reflection on the learning process and promoted the development of oral skills. Fourth, collaboration was found to be a key factor in promoting learner autonomy. Fifth, the teacher's role as mediator and language model was confirmed.

One of the most significant benefits of action research, as reflective practice for teachers is that it "facilitates the linking of both theory and practice" (Calderhead, 1988, in Morales 2016). That certainly was the case in this study, for I had a much broader point of view of the portfolio and learner autonomy theory after having put it into practice in an authentic setting. Since professional development is one of the essential components of both the portfolio (Council of Europe, 2004; Kohonen, 2004) and action research (Morrissette, 2013; Morales, 2016; O'Sullivan, 2002), familiarity with the portfolio in action has been an enriching professional experience and provided insight into students' learning processes. Specifically, I have found the CEFR descriptors and the reflecting aspect of the portfolio to be effective tools in the promotion or learner autonomy. The pilot study was also an opportunity to practice adapting speaking activities to a multilevel group.

All research instruments (the portfolio, observations, and interview) were thus validated.

As mentioned before, a pilot study can be used to evaluate the implementation of a novel intervention (Leon et al., 2011), like the use of the language portfolio; it takes time to get acquainted with it, but such time is well spent. The portfolio fostered awareness, reflection, and the development of oral skills. The pilot study shows that through awareness, a prerequisite of learner autonomy guided by the portfolio and the CEFR descriptors, learners became aware of their language level and specific needs in English. The portfolio also provided a first attempt for students to reflect on their learning, and I could access their learning processes. Moreover, participants were proud of having improved their oral skills, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, which helped them achieve some of their goals at school.

As for the analytical observations and interview, they both helped explore the role of the portfolio in promoting learner autonomy. The observations in my journal allowed for deep reflection, provided relevant information and led to a new observation grid for the main study. The group interview also provided valuable data as a collective means for reflection and exchange, rendered the research process more concrete (Morrissette, 2013), and led to the improvement of the interview questions.

The group's learning environment was enjoyable and participants supported each other. Working in collaboration towards learner autonomy (Murphy & Jacobs, 2000) was important to reach goals concerning the development of oral skills, and emerged as a new element to consider in the main study.

As for the role of the teacher, learners pointed out the need to have a language model. The teacher's role as mediator was also confirmed from my observations, since I realized learners needed a lot of modelling and guidance. This pilot study resulted in an initial step to transfer control; if students are to take control of their learning, they will do so gradually, and with the mediation of the teacher (Piccardo, 2014).

In action research and participatory action research, a new cycle does not repeat an old one. Instead, the previous cycle shapes the new one. I will now present the modifications that this pilot study inspired for the next step, the main study.

3.2.5. Changes to the Main Study from the Pilot Study Results

In the pilot study, the research instruments were validated and I got acquainted with the portfolio. The second research cycle was the main study, where I could focus on exploring strategies for learners to develop oral skills with the portfolio in the individualized instruction setting. To this end, the knowledge gained during the workshops in the pilot study led me to consider the following factors: strategies had to be flexible and useful for the classroom teacher, had to serve multilevel goals, and had to be centred in action-oriented tasks based on *can do* descriptors (Kristmanson & Lafargue, 2014); tasks had to include learner strategies and the sample language needed to accomplish them (CASLT, 2012), and be evaluated by the participants and modified accordingly (Calvert, 2015).

As previously mentioned, changes from the pilot study also included a new observation grid for analytical observations, as well as some modifications to the interview questions. Other elements to be included in the new cycle were teaching planning and setting cultural goals, so as to increase learners' awareness and involvement in the learning process.

As suggested by the pilot study, collaboration is a key factor in promoting learner autonomy, and the role of the teacher as mediator and language model is crucial. These two factors were central in the main study to guiding learners to gradually be in control of their learning process and develop oral skills.

3.3. Main Study: Participatory Action Research (PAR) Methodology

After the pilot study, the next cycle was the data collection for the main study. The main study was shorter, at only twelve workshops; it was thus essential to focus on the general objective: to explore the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to adult ESL students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills in *Le Retour* Adult Education Centre. Given that I had the opportunity to work with another teacher, I decided to use participatory action research to collect data.

In the following sections, I describe participatory action research, followed by a portrait of the participants in the main study and the procedure for their recruitment. I then present the data gathering and the way in which the three instruments were used. After that, I describe how the data processing and analysis were done.

Action research and participatory action research (PAR) are like ''cousins'' (Morales, 2016), for they share several features; both require commitment and involvement, seek change and problem solving, are cyclic, and their characteristics foster professional development and help improve learning quality. One of their differences is that, in PAR, participants are also co-researchers in the process of creating knowledge (Gonzalez-Laporte, 2014). By way of illustration, Ginns, Heirdsfield, Atweh, and Watters (2001) reported a PAR study designed to foster professional development in a group of beginner primary school teachers. Findings clearly show that the method's attributes -participatory, social and collaborative - promoted professional growth. According to Bell et al. (2004), PAR also relies on the reflective practice of the researchers in action.

However, as Walter (1998) suggested, "the key to PAR is in its name" (p. 1). Action and participation - action towards positive change and equal and collaborative participation of the community. Participatory action research takes action towards change by empowering communities through the construction of knowledge. It is guided by a research question that emerges from its core. Its design suggests that all participants achieve learning, as their growth and development are an important part of the desired outcome. In this study, the research questions were issued from my teaching practice in Adult General Education, and all participants' development was expected.
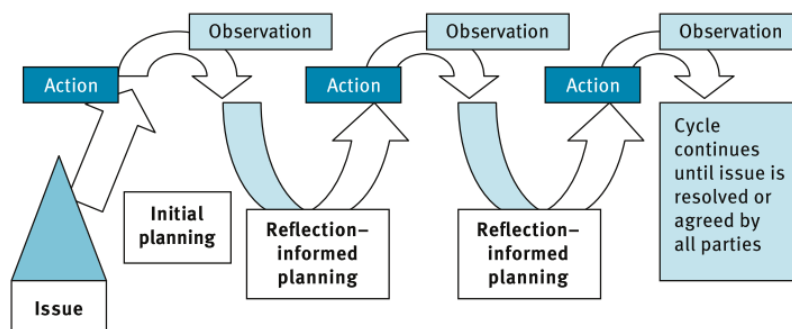
Figure 6: The PAR cycle (Walter, 1998, p. 3)

In PAR, participants collaborate at all stages and each is involved in a specific way that values local and experiential knowledge (Walter, 1998; Bell et al., 2004; Bergold & Thomas, 2012). It is a unique method "because participants are regarded as experts due to their lived experiences related to the research topic, ensuring that relevant issues are being studied" (Watters, Comeau & Restall, 2010, p. 5). PAR involves participants and researchers throughout the process, from the initial stages to gathering data and communicating results. Specifically, all participants take part in the planning, implementation and analysis, as well as in applying the results of the research (Bell et al., 2004).

According to Walter (1998), participatory action research ends when the problem is solved, which is often unfeasible in the real world. In the present study, the "problem" would be the lack of oral interaction to develop oral skills, and this research is just a small step in the process of change. If final results are positive, I could issue recommendations in order to empower ESL students bearing in mind that, in the context of Adult General Education, school boards and teachers may determine their own methods (see Section 1.5).

One final consideration issued from Bergold and Thomas' (2012) discussion on participatory research methods: Whereas all participants certainly benefit from the research process, the interaction between science and practice does not come easily. In fact, trying to bring together the teacher's, learners', and researcher's points of view in order to shape each workshop was a time consuming process.

3.3.1. Participants

In the main study, participants were the student-researcher (myself), the classroom teacher and the students. In line with the requirements of PAR, we all contributed to the decision-making process when planning, carrying out, analyzing and applying the outcomes of the research.

3.3.1.1. Student Researcher

I was the medium facilitating change. I led the weekly workshops with students and guided them in the use of the portfolio as a learning tool. I also created opportunities for learners to develop oral skills (see Section 3.2.1 for more information on the student-researcher).

3.3.1.2. Participating Teacher (Classroom Teacher)

The participating teacher is a native French speaker also fluent in English. She holds a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education with a major in French, and has a good amount of work experience in English-speaking environments. She has been teaching ESL at *Le Retour* since 2014 and, at the time of the main study, she had a full-time position teaching English and French. She will be hereafter referred to as the classroom teacher.

The classroom teacher and I met before the main study to review the project and plan the invitation to students and the information session. We conferenced briefly almost every week to discuss and evaluate solutions; she suggested content for shaping the workshops and followed up on students' goals in the classroom. She also participated in the second group discussion, as well as in one of the workshops. Apart from her final interview, we had a one-on-one discussion that I recorded and transcribed (see Appendix 5). In addition, we went together to a teachers' convention in order to learn more about the CEFR, which was a good opportunity to talk at length, since we live in different cities.

3.3.1.3. Participating Students

There were six participating students, excluding two who were often absent and finally abandoned the study. All were Francophone. All but one (older) were between 18 and 24 years old, in accordance with the population profile presented by Voyer et al. (2012), indicating that 46.9% of the Adult General Education population is 24 years old or younger. One was in Secondary II; two were in Secondary III; two were in Secondary IV; and one was in Secondary V; and three had participated in the pilot study. In order to distinguish them when presenting the results in Chapter 4, I kept the number tags from the pilot study and assigned letters to the new participants (Figure 7).

Pilot Study and Main Study	Only Main Study
– Student 2 (S2)	– Student 1A (S1A)
– Student 3 (S3)	– Student 5A (S5A)
– Student 4 (S4)	– Student 6A (S6A)

Figure 7: Main study participating students

Students attended one 2.5-hour workshop per week, for twelve weeks, led by the student-researcher. Workshops took place during the regular English schedule in an adjacent classroom. Participating students contributed to shaping the workshops and collaborated with their expertise about their own learning processes. They reflected on what worked and what did not work in order to learn ESL autonomously and develop oral skills.

3.3.1.4. Procedure for Recruitment

In order to recruit participants for the main study, we used the same probability sampling as in the pilot study. Since students participated on a voluntary basis, no bias was involved in selecting the sample and each individual in the classroom had an equal likelihood of selection.

The classroom teacher made an oral invitation to all students registered in the class to attend an information session about a university study. In this session I explained the project, its goals, and what was expected from students. I explained that their participation would involve taking part in a weekly workshop, during which they would work with the language portfolio to develop oral skills. The schedule was decided along with the classroom teacher so that the workshops were held during English class time. Students were informed of the scientific research requirements and assured that their choice to participate or not in the study would not influence their grades.

Given that this study took place in a small community, participants were informed of the possibility of being identified when the results were published. Both the classroom teacher and the students signed an informed consent form (Appendix 6). They were also informed of a potential conflict of interest due to the classroom teacher and student-researcher's double role and the trust relationships they held with students. In order to limit the effect of this potential conflict, potential participants were informed and assured, both orally in the information session and in writing in the consent form (in French):

- about the details of the project and their expected participation, in a clear and complete way;

- that they were free to participate or not;

- that they could abandon the study at any moment;

- that their participation or lack thereof would not have any incidence on their academic evaluations.

3.3.2. Data Gathering for the Main Study

The data gathering for the main study was the second step in the action cycle of this research. As explained earlier, I moved from action research to participatory action research in order to include the classroom teacher and students. The PAR methodology is very appropriate for our context, since one of its aims is "to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people through research, adult education or

socio-political action" (Morales, 2016, p. 158). This is in accordance with the theory of andragogy, central to the ESL Adult General Education programs (see Section 1.5), which proposes that adults: need to know the reason for learning, need to learn by experience, use a problem-solving approach, and learn best when subjects have immediate value.

In Section 3.2.2, I described the data collection tools (the Adult-Based Language Portfolio, analytical observations, and interview). In the main study, I also used discussions with guiding questions. Triangulation of the data assured the validity of the research results and of overcoming any bias. The research instruments were validated in the pilot study and I made the modifications issued from it. I next explain how they were used in the main study.

Portfolio. I guided participating students in the use of the portfolio during weekly workshops, and the classroom teacher guided them in class. We helped students get involved in their learning, set goals, choose learning material related to their goals, reflect, and use the target language. Learning activities varied (see Section 4.2).

Analytical observations. Since the core of the PAR methodology is to collect data in a spiral fashion, allowing researchers to actually make decisions about the teaching process as the data is being collected, good field notes are crucial in order to keep track of one's reflections. I kept a journal and the classroom teacher and I made analytical observations about the participants' use of the portfolio using the grid issued from the pilot study (see Appendix 4). I collected the classroom teacher's observations orally, in our weekly conversations, the discussion, and the final interview.

Interviews and Discussions. I conducted individual interviews with the students and classroom teacher at the end of the main study. There was a recorded one-on-one discussion between the classroom teacher and me, and two group discussions in the workshops. Overall, I recorded and transcribed ten interviews and discussions. All interviews and discussions were semi-structured, with guiding open-ended questions asked in a simple way for all learners to understand. Some of the questions were modified following the evolution of the study, but the essence remained: to obtain insights into participants' experiences working with the portfolio. Interviews and discussions were in English, except for some students' individual interviews that were in French.

Group discussions had been planned for the pilot study, but only one final group interview was conducted. Given that this group interview had been rich in data and opportunities for oral interaction, and that the dynamics of the main study were conducive to it, I included two group discussions in the main study (see Section 4.2). In line with PAR, group discussions (O'Shea, 2017) are an effective technique to exchange on different subjects, to reflect, to develop oral skills, to build a sense of community, and to gather rich data. The difference with a semi-structured interview, even if both have guiding questions, is that group discussion allows for observing a group of people talking about a particular issue and the role of the mediator is less prominent.

The two group discussions took place on the tenth and the last workshop, and were about 20 minutes each. The second group discussion included a written questionnaire about what had been useful in the study and was followed by individual student interviews, which lasted about 20 minutes as well. My discussion with the classroom teacher took place after the ninth workshop and was 35 minutes in length, and her final interview was 70 minutes. See Appendix 5 for the guiding questions and subjects of all interviews and discussions in the main study.

In the findings (Chapter 4), when referring to interviews and discussions, I will use the following nomenclature (Figure 8):

Discussion and interview with the classroom teacher	Classroom teacher, Discussion
	Classroom teacher, Interview
Group discussions	Group discussion #1
	Group discussion #2
Individual interviews with students	Interview S1A
	Interview S2
	Interview S3
	Interview S4
	Interview S5A
	Interview S6A

Figure 8: Interviews and Discussions

3.3.3. Data Processing and Analysis of the Main Study

Data processing and analysis started with the pilot study. In this section, I describe how I reviewed and synthesized the whole set of data at the end of the main study.

At the end of the three-month period, using content analysis, the data collected with students' portfolios, analytical observations, responses to the interview, and comments in group discussions, were compared with the categories issued from the principles of learner autonomy in order to explore their contribution to students' autonomy. Content analysis is "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding" (Stemler, 2001, p. 1). It is, however, imperative that the categories are well defined, mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In order to categorize the data, I treated it according to a mixture of deductive and inductive coding. In deductive coding, the main categories are issued from the conceptual framework, and the data are compared to them. In this study, the main categories are based on Little's (2007) principles of learner autonomy (see Table 3.7), and I looked for instances in the data to match them (Burns, 2010, p. 107). On the other hand, inductive coding follows an emic approach, which means that the data gives the categories. I scanned the data carefully, analyzing participants' experiences with the portfolio from their own perspectives (Burns, 2010) to see what

subcategories emerged. For example, one element that emerged in the pilot study was the importance of collaboration in the path towards learner autonomy. As the results of the main study pointed out in the same direction, I included in the findings a section on collaboration.

In this manner, the data analysis consisted of examining and reporting on the portfolios, analytical observations, interviews and discussions. The way I explored and processed interviews and discussions was by doing a first analysis while transcribing them, and a second one along with analyzing my observations on the workshops, in order to grasp participants' insights at each stage of the study. The data collected from all instruments were classified into categories using QSR NVivo software for qualitative data analysis. Since the main categories are issued from the principles of learner autonomy and these principles act in synergy (Little, 2007), I compared data with all of the pertaining categories.

The following table gives an overview of the data collection and analysis for the main study:

Table 3.7: Research questions, instruments, categories, and portfolio sections

Research question	Data collection: instrument	Data analysis: categories/content analysis	Portfolio sections
What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio[7] to ESL students' autonomy regarding their decision-making capacity to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning?	Interviews and discussions Portfolios Analytical observations	**Learner involvement in their learning** -planning -monitoring -evaluating	**Passport** Global Scale Linguistic Profile **Autobiography** Languages I can use Language Training Language and Cultural Experiences **Self-Assessment** Reflection Scale Self-Assessment Checklists Language Learning Goals **Dossier** Evidence
What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to critically reflect about their learning?	Interviews and discussions Portfolios Analytical observations	**Learner reflection** -reflecting on the learning process -reflecting on the learning content	**Passport** **Autobiography** **Self-Assessment**
What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak English in an appropriate, spontaneous and independent way?	Interviews and discussions Portfolios Analytical observations	**Target language use** -speak English appropriately -speak English spontaneously -speak English independently	**Passport** **Autobiography** **Self-Assessment** **Dossier**
What is the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy concerning the development of oral skills with the portfolio?	Interviews and discussions Portfolios Analytical observations	Learner involvement Learner reflection Target language use	**Autobiography** **Dossier**

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[7] From now on, in this paper, the Adult-Based Language Portfolio will be referred to as portfolio.

3.3.4. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of the present study were undertaken according to the demands of the *Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue* (2017), which are:

– Participants must be notified of the goals, methods, anticipated benefits and potential hazards of the research, as well as of their right to abstain from or terminate their participation in the research at any time. They must also be notified of the confidential nature of their replies.

– No individual shall become a participant unless he/she is given the notice referred to in the preceding paragraph and provides a freely given consent. No pressure of any kind shall be applied in order to encourage an individual to participate in a research study.

– The identity of individuals from whom information is obtained in the course of the project shall be kept strictly confidential. At the end of the project, any information that reveals the identity of subjects of research shall be destroyed unless the individual concerned has consented in writing to its inclusion beforehand. No information revealing the identity of any individual shall be included in the final report or in any other communication prepared in the course of the project, unless the individual concerned has consented in writing to its inclusion beforehand.

All participants signed informed consent letters (see Appendix 6)

To conclude, the goal of this chapter was to explain the methodological approach used to answer the research questions related to the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills. I reaffirm that, given the social and educational characteristics that are intrinsic to action research and participatory action research, benefits for all participants are expected.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the results of the main study. As explained in Chapter 3, I collected data from three instruments: students' portfolios, observations, interviews, and discussions. I analyzed the data with QSR NVivo, following a qualitative approach and the principles of action research to classify and group the information in a cyclic way.

To present the findings, I start by describing the workshops. First, I describe the pedagogical framework behind them, followed by the way the study developed according to participatory action research (PAR). I thus present the main events of the workshops in chronological order to show the action research spiral, along with my reflections on the data and any subsequent actions. I then lay out the findings related to the four research questions:

1. What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their decision-making capacity to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning?

2. What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to critically reflect about their learning?

3. What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak English in an appropriate, spontaneous and independent way?

4. What is the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy concerning the development of oral skills with the portfolio?

Next, I present the findings concerning the new element in the path toward learner autonomy that emerged from the pilot study - collaboration - followed by the project's benefits for all participants in line with the PAR methodology. This chapter ends with a summary of the findings. I want to note that students' linguistic mistakes will be included when quoting them.

4.1. The Workshops: Pedagogical Framework

In this study, the classroom teacher and I (the student researcher) guided students in the process of learning to learn with the portfolio. I worked with them during twelve workshops (2.5 hours each, for a total of 30 hours), and the teacher followed up on their goals in the classroom.

In order to design the pedagogical framework of the workshops, my first consideration was the particular context of individualized instruction. The Adult General Education classroom is usually a silent one, with students working on their textbooks - very different from the workshops I had in mind. The general objective of this study concerns the development of oral skills, because 40-60% of evaluations are oral, according to the new program requirements. However, learning strategies had to be simple, since ESL teachers do not

have the time to design multi-level activities to develop oral skills (see Section 5.4, Implications, for a detailed account of ESL adult education teachers' workload). Therefore, whereas the pilot study was an opportunity to become familiar with the portfolio, in the main study I could focus on exploring strategies that students could use autonomously to develop oral skills. Considering all this, the pedagogical framework for the workshops was based on four key elements that blend harmoniously: the concept of learner autonomy; the pedagogic function of the portfolio; the Action-Oriented approach behind it; and the chosen methodology (PAR).

Pedagogic Function of the Portfolio. The pedagogic function of the portfolio is to guide and support learners. The portfolio is a mediation tool to help students develop autonomy, awareness and self-regulation. Its components - Passport, Autobiography, Self-assessment, and Dossier - support the reflective cycle of planning, implementing, and evaluating learning. Since mediation is the gradual transfer of control of learning activities to the learner, the role of the teacher is decisive.

Learner Autonomy. In this study, learner autonomy is involvement, reflection, and target language use (Little, 2007), and that is exactly what we tried to do - guide students to own their learning process, which is the teaching rationale behind the portfolio: the action oriented approach.

Action Oriented Approach. According to the Action Oriented approach, I designed authentic, open-ended and interactive tasks guided by students' CEFR goals and their roles as social agents motivated to interact orally with a genuine purpose of communication. Tasks included learner strategies and sample language (CASLT, 2012) and were evaluated by the participants and modified accordingly (Calvert, 2015). These CEFR inspired practices resulted in excellent opportunities for collaboration.

Participatory Action Research (PAR). The key to the PAR methodology is action and participation in consecutive cycles: planning, action, observation and reflection. In this study, the students, the classroom teacher and I participated in the shaping of the workshops. The content was based on students' goals, and the teacher and I made analytical observations. Reflections were shared through group and one-on-one discussions, and changes in the direction of the research were made accordingly. The PAR methodology was a key element in this research: it allowed for enriching insights into the study as it developed, was beneficial to the social and linguistic development of the participants, and promoted professional development for both the classroom teacher and myself.

4.2. The Workshops: Timeline

Following Esteve et al.'s (2012) recommendations for the use of the portfolio, I strove to create a learner-centred space. In line with PAR, I present the main events and learning activities in the workshops as they developed, along with my reflections and any subsequent actions that resulted, in order to show the action research spiral.

Presenting the project, the portfolio, the CEFR and the participants. I introduced myself, including my experience as an adult school student of French as an L2, as per Little and Perclova's (2001) suggestions. I explained the concept of autonomy and the goal of the project: learning to learn with the portfolio, with an emphasis on developing oral skills. I also explained that students were to participate in shaping the project through participatory action research, that their ideas and points of view were important in order to improve their educational context. For the project to succeed, we were to be an engaged learning community. I asked for their suggestions about learning activities and they proposed games and watching videos. I then presented the portfolio and CEFR, as well as their history in Canada, and explained the *can do* descriptors in relation to the curricula (see Table 3.6).

At the beginning of the study, there were eight participants; three had also been in the pilot study and five were new. Three of the new students adapted very well, but the other two were somewhat disruptive from the start and eventually left (see Section 3.3.1.3).

Learning activities. Learning activities were developed according to student goals. At several points, we reviewed the goals of the study (awareness of the learning process and the development of oral skills). Workshops were generally divided into two parts: group work and teamwork toward goals. The main activities were:

Multilevel group work

- Surveys, games and a garage sale
- Using an electronic dictionary
- Dictation and text reconstruction
- Vocabulary, sometimes with Quizlet
- A debate
- Group discussions
- Developing listening and oral skills with videos and Flipgrid
- Guests (we had guests on several workshops; these were either students from the regular English class who wanted oral practice, or bilingual students whom we invited to enrich the conversation)

Individual work. Work on individual goals was often based on group work, e.g., after the garage sale, one student wrote about it (A2.2, *Write short descriptions of past activities*); and others discussed their opinions on the activity (A2.2, *Ask for and give opinions, agree and disagree, in a simple way…*).

A debate. October 17, 2018, was the day cannabis became legal in Canada. I had prepared a non-related activity, but students proposed a debate on this subject, with which I went along. There were guest students, including a bilingual one who helped mediate meaning when needed. I asked each team to prepare their arguments as well as questions for their opponents. I soon realized students lacked some of the skills required for teamwork such as listening, discussing in an organized way, and taking appropriate notes. In the end, though it was difficult for many to express their views for lack of the needed language structures

and vocabulary, arguments were successfully presented by both sides, which is the most favourable outcome we could have hoped for.

According to the PAR methodology, all participants evaluated solutions, so I asked them: *Did this debate help you improve your English skills?* Out of 8 students, 4 said it helped improve their listening comprehension skills, 3 their speaking skills, and one said it helped them write questions. It was certainly interesting to hear their arguments and let them express their opinions on this Canadian landmark.

A turning point. Workshop 5 was a turning point in the study. First, the two participants who were not engaged left the group; one had a difficult personal situation and the other "cannot really work in a group setting" (Classroom teacher, Interview). The learning environment for the rest of the study was very positive. Secondly, I started designing the tools we used to develop listening and oral skills with videos, including the graphic organizer and questions per CEFR level.

At this point, I reviewed my notes on the portfolio, learner autonomy, participatory action research, as well as the results from the pilot study. I also reviewed the role of listening. In order to develop oral skills, an essential prerequisite is understanding oral messages (Fischer, 1978; Cousineau, 2018); training in listening comprehension is thus crucial. Listening is an active process, for spoken discourse goes through instantaneous processing. With this in mind, I decided to use videos; apart from being of easy access, they can be exploited as the basis for comprehension, acquisition, and speaking activities (Richards, 2008). Using varied subjects, videos can prompt conversation and introduce vocabulary in authentic situations; they also allow learners to hear different accents and correct pronunciation, and can help build confidence, since students usually understand more after replay(s).

The students and I reviewed how languages are learned and the importance of listening in order to speak. Then, I designed a graphic organizer and we started to work with videos. My quest for an appropriate multilevel tool to develop oral skills in this context continued with improving the graphic organizer (Appendix 7), exploring Flipgrid, and creating the questions per CEFR level document as a guide for discussing videos (Appendix 8). These tools will be described in the section corresponding to the third research question (Section 4.4).

Experts: group discussions.

Workshops were only once a week. On Workshop 10, after a week break at school, I felt the need to hear participants' views, where they were in relation to the project. According to PAR, participants are experts in their own field. In this case, students could have suggestions to improve their ESL learning environment. I then decided to do a group discussion (Group discussion #1) and prepared some questions to help students reflect on their learning process and setting:

1. Do you think that your English will improve (become better)?
2. What is the best way to learn ESL? What are your favourite activities?
3. How can you improve your oral skills in adult school?

Group discussions, like the group interview in the pilot study, were good opportunities for oral interaction and the exchange of ideas in an enjoyable atmosphere; they were also an effective technique to promote reflection and build a sense of community. Insights gained from the group discussions will be presented throughout the chapter, and the specific contributions of the group discussion strategy to oral skills development - along with the findings for the third research question - occupy Section 4.4. In this first group discussion, all participants said they were confident their English would improve, which is essential to their progress. They were also conscious that language learning is an ongoing process and working at school is not enough. They all said they study independently, for instance, watching videos or listening to music in English, but they do not have opportunities to practice conversation. They were aware that they would lose their oral skills if they did not practice, thus highlighting the importance of creating a conversational space at school. I will discuss students' learning processes further, along with the findings related to reflection (Section 4.5).

At the end of the project, we had another group discussion (Group discussion #2), where students first answered a questionnaire about what strategies they had found *Very useful*, *A little useful* or *Not useful at all* in the workshops (see Appendix 5). The three top choices, 100% *Very useful*, were:

- o Working in a small group
- o Watching videos
- o Real situations (like the garage sale)

Items related to the portfolio were found *Very useful* (11 answers) and *A little useful* (16 answers), which I consider a positive outcome:

- o Know my level in English
- o Know what I need to learn next
- o Setting goals
- o Planning
- o Reflecting

Other elements that stood out were:

- o Speaking with a bilingual person: Very useful (4), A little useful (1)
- o Questions per level: Very useful (4), A little useful (2)
- o Graphic organizer: Very useful (3), A little useful (3)

To sum up, working in a small group was the preferred strategy, along with watching videos and engaging in real life situations. Watching and discussing videos with the graphic organizer and questions per CEFR level requires little preparation and is feasible in this context, in addition to inviting bilingual guests. These elements will be analyzed in forthcoming sections in the same manner as the answers to the other questions

in the interview: Who is responsible for taking initiative to practice oral skills - the teacher or the learner? And what are the advantages and disadvantages of working in small groups?

4.3. Findings Regarding First Research Question

What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their decision-making capacity to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning? (Principle of learner involvement)

The findings in the present study reveal that the Adult-Based Language Portfolio contributes to ESL students' autonomy regarding their decision-making capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning according to the principle of learner involvement. Learner involvement starts with awareness. With the portfolio, participants gradually became aware of where they were situated in relation to the specific linguistic requirements of their school grade curricula, as well as of the path ahead of them towards getting their secondary diploma. This awareness started with reflecting on their linguistic baggage, doing a global self-assessment, and choosing *can do* descriptors as learning goals, in turn, working towards goals helped them initiate a self-regulatory process.

Students were also involved in their learning by being alert during the workshops and participating in the shaping of various learning tasks. In terms of planning, working with the portfolio contributed to students having a general plan to reach their goals. As for monitoring and evaluating, the self-regulatory process was initiated but developing self-assessment skills requires a longer period of time.

4.3.1. Involvement and Awareness

Involvement in one's learning process requires an initial reflection that leads to awareness - knowing where we are and where we have to go. In the portfolio, this starts with a first global self-assessment, setting goals and doing the linguistic profile in the Passport, Autobiography, and self-assessment sections.

Having been introduced to the portfolio and CEFR, students did a global self-assessment and chose goals accordingly. Awareness started right away, for S1A and S2 realized they did not have the level corresponding to their school grade, and S3 knew his language level was higher than his grade (see Table 4.1). The three new students (S1A, S5A and S6A) chose A2.1 goals and, to be sure they were at the right level, they did an A1 listening test, which they all passed.

Table 4.1: Participating students, school grade and CEFR goals

ID#	School grade	CEFR goals
1A	Secondary IV	A2.1
2	Secondary V	A2.2
3	Secondary IV	B1.1
4	Secondary III	A2.2
5A	Secondary II	A2.1
6A	Secondary III	A2.1

By completing the linguistic profile and autobiography, participants gained awareness of their linguistic baggage. This reflects the fact that each learning situation is very personal. For instance, S5A and S6A proudly recorded level B2 in French, and S1A marked B2 level in French and Spanish (her mother tongue) and made a point of writing how much she used her three languages in each context, as well as her cultural experiences.

Awareness and involvement continued throughout the project. Students were alert, trying to understand all that was going on in the workshops, since everything happened in English and they were not used to it. Tasks like the debate, games, the garage sale, and discussing videos helped them get involved, e.g., they managed Bingo and participated in planning the garage sale, where all brought an item to sell.

4.3.2. Setting Goals and Planning

Setting goals with the portfolio and the CEFR, students started to gain awareness of their language level and initiated a self-regulatory process, as in these examples:

> You can know the level, you can set your goals and see what you've already done; what you can do and you can't do (Interview S3).

> It's good for *le suivi*. *Ça va bien pour savoir où on est rendu… Qu'est-ce qu'on est capable de faire qu'est-ce qu'on a plus de misère,... s'améliorer…* (Interview S4).

However, even though learners had set their goals from the start, these objectives were not always in their minds. For example, in the first group discussion, when asked about the best way to learn ESL, nobody mentioned their goals as small steps to guide their way. On the other hand, at the teacher's initiative, some learners started pursuing their goals in the classroom, working with videos, which was very useful for S5A and S6A (Classroom teacher, Interview). But a lot of mediation was still needed.

Most students had a general plan of how to reach their goals. From the first workshops, I prompted them to discuss concrete actions; their ideas were good, but not concrete. I introduced the idea of planning one's

learning like we plan other activities. Here are some examples of students' plans to pursue goals on their own:

> To reach goal A2.2 Reading #1, *Understand simple and short messages sent by friends or colleagues in emails*…: "Someone *writting* one message and I try to understand it" (Portfolio S4).

> To reach goal A2.2 Spoken Interaction #4, *Answer questions of a personal nature in an interview* …: First, study vocabulary; "then listen to movie for dialogue", then "practice the words and the sentence… and practice the pronunciation… and practice with my friend of my mother… With me, my mother speak more French, don't think to speak English, *ça pourrait être le fun*" (Interview S4).

> To reach goal A2.1 Listening #2, *Understand questions and simple information about family immediate environment* …: First, study vocabulary; then, "*la prononciation des mots, et des phrases complètes avec la bonne prononciation*"; then practice with the classroom teacher or friends from the group (S5A, Interview).

4.3.3. Monitoring and Evaluating

The study was short and, once students were a bit more familiar with the descriptors, we had only one guided space for learners to monitor themselves during the workshops. Using the reflection scale, some students saw that they had advanced in the pursuit of their first goals and set new ones.

S3 was the only participant who monitored himself on his own. After marking double checks up to A2.1, he considered he could easily understand and read at the A2.2 level and set his goals for spoken interaction and production. After some weeks of working on his goals, he reflected again and put one or two checkmarks on the *can do* statements he could already do, as seen in his checklist (Figure 9). As the project advanced, he felt more confident and set a B1.1 listening goal with a plan: "Watch a program and resume it (summarize it) in my words."

As for self-evaluation and proof of reaching goals, the short duration of the study simply did not allow for that. Self-assessment with the portfolio is challenging, for learners need constant guidance in the use of the CEFR grids and checklists to gradually develop the necessary skills (Kohonen, 2004, 2012; Little, 2005; Piccardo, 2014). Time and guidance are needed for both monitoring and evaluating.

4.3.4. Involvement: An Example

S2 was the participant who best grasped the use of the portfolio in the learning process, as we can see from these excerpts from his individual interview. He was aware of his level and his final goal: "I know I'm A2 now… I need B1 for secondary five". He also knew his goals - for example, he chose goal A2.2 Spoken Interaction, #1, *Ask for and give opinions, agree or disagree…* "because you need to give your opinion generally… because a discussion is not only hello, bye… we need to *discute* about everything, the news,

TV, the price about vegetables" . He also tried to be accurate in his evaluation with the reflection scale: "Maybe between easily and with difficulty… I wouldn't say with difficulty, because some subject are more difficult than other… some subject are easier than others…".

Figure 9: A2.2 Checklist (S3's portfolio, p. 17)

Moreover, he knew how to work towards a goal: "Maybe study the word..., I need vocabulary... After that, I think I prefer to watch one or two video maybe, for some situation... about what I will do in a conversation… Other countries make this portfolio… there are maybe some activities… (Then) speaking with a friend or maybe my teacher, or other people want to speak with me…. I repeat the cycle (and set another goal when) I can do this easily. I think I can do again to see if I don't lose some aptitude. Because sometime you don't practice your English you lose some…". S2 could be a teacher's best ally, explaining how to work with the portfolio to other students.

4.4. Findings Regarding Third Research Question

What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak English in an appropriate, spontaneous and independent way? (Principle of target language use)

I will answer the research question concerning target language use (#3) before the one concerning reflection (#2) for clarity and simplicity, given that in the findings about the second question I will refer to learning activities and tasks described in the present section.

I start by reviewing the principle of target language use. The ultimate purpose of any project concerning learner autonomy is that participants can use the target language (Little, 2007). Appropriate language use in the classroom requires that learners use the target language for genuine communicative purposes. Learners must engage in tasks they can sustain in the target language; and teachers must offer scaffolding such that learners can use it to construct meaning and progress beyond their current proficiency (Little, 2004). In other words, "the principle of target language use entails quite simply that the target language is the medium through which all classroom activities are conducted, organisational and reflective as well as communicative" (Little, 2007, p. 25). And this is exactly how this study was carried out. The workshops provided the setting for oral interaction. We worked in small groups, which provided advantages such as collaboration and more speaking time for each participant. Learners participated actively from the first workshop, and I provided a language model in all activities and initiated small talk.

In Little's words (NCSSFL, 2011), the use of meaningful target language in the classroom assures two things. First, that language acquisition takes place and that students develop proficiency in spontaneous communication. It also assures that the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of language learning develop in interaction, which means that linguistic competence develops alongside students' insight of their learning processes. This is why, in learner autonomy, all is embedded in target language use.

According to the principle of target language use, the findings in this study reveal, firstly, that the Adult-Based Language Portfolio contributes to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak English appropriately. All participants spoke English appropriately during the workshops, according to their language level, since all activities were held in English and acquisition took place (Classroom teacher, Interview). Secondly, the findings suggest that the portfolio contributes to students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak English spontaneously depending on their level. Students who spoke English spontaneously, e.g., among themselves, were those pursuing A2.2 and B1.1 goals (S2, S4, S3), the same ones who had also participated in the pilot study. The new participants had set A2.1 goals and were just starting to get some confidence. Thirdly, according to the findings, only four participants used English independently in their daily lives, and only occasionally; this will be discussed, along with the findings concerning the second research question, in Section 4.5.

In the following sections, I present how the principle of target language use was operationalized in the learning activities, divided in three sub-sections: surveys, games, and Flipgrid; group discussions; and working with videos. I will thus show the ways in which the portfolio contributed to students' autonomy regarding their capacity to speak in English. The collected data come from my observations, interviews/discussions, and students' portfolios. The data from the portfolios come from the Dossier, where

learners keep examples of personal work. Dossiers include vocabulary lists, graphic organizers and questions per CEFR level for various videos, notes on work with Flipgrid, and the videos uploaded to the platform.

4.4.1. Surveys, Games and Flipgrid

The first two techniques contributed to everyone getting to know each other and building an enjoyable learning atmosphere. The survey provided an opportunity for each learner to speak with all of the others; we used them at the beginning of the study to share personal information (A1, *Provide basic personal information*) and inquire about shopping habits (A2.2, *Interact in everyday life situations*). This last descriptor was also targeted when playing *Two truths and one lie* (CASLT, CEFR inspired practices, 2015).

Flipgrid is a platform designed to strengthen social learning communities as they discuss ideas and experiences, and is known for fostering student engagement. I prepared three activities with the CEFR descriptors. For the first one, as we were learning to use the platform, I chose the A2.1 descriptors Listening #1 *Understand everyday conversation* and #2 *Understand questions and simple information about family, environment, work, leisure*, as well as Spoken Interaction #3 *Communicate in everyday situations*. The other activities were on World War II and Christmas shopping, and included an extra vocabulary component.

I first recorded questions related to the descriptors. Then learners, individually or in teams, listened to the questions, wrote them down, and made a video with their answers. At the end, we watched the videos of those students who wanted to share. Later, I gave individual feedback on grammar and pronunciation.

Working in teams with Flipgrid was interactive and fun, but learners who preferred to work individually also benefited from this tool. It was good practice for oral expression and pronunciation, and the videos were useful to analyze students' speech and give individual feedback. Here are some of the students' comments:

> "Yes (it was helpful), listening my voice, my pronunciation…" (Interview S4)
> "Very useful to hear your voice instead of only audio recordings" (Guest student)
> "Very useful mainly for everyday conversations" (Guest student).

As with any software, both teacher and learners need time and practice to learn to use it effectively.

4.4.2. Group Discussions

Group discussions provided a relaxed space to share ideas. We talked about subjects related to the ESL learning process in general and to improving oral skills in the individualized instruction setting. Apart from encouraging reflection, group discussions promoted the development of oral skills in various ways. For example, learners had to understand the questions, give their answers, and could elaborate on others' opinions. Moreover, the weakest students were able to participate at their level, asking for clarification and

modelling their answers based on other, more proficient students' answers. Participants felt at ease speaking English, even among themselves, thus gained confidence. S2 and S4, generally quiet people, were really invested in these discussions; S2 stood out with his insights, always accurate, with S4 following fast, switching from English to French to help her friend. Discussions were in English, with some additions and clarifications in French. They also provided material to analyze students' language use.

Here are some examples of clarification and modelling from group discussions:

Group discussion #1

S/R[8]: Do you think that your English will improve in the future (become better)?
S3: ...maybe.
S4: I think I'm better.
S/R: And in the future, will you be better?
S4: I think so.
S6A: I don't understand.
S3 translates.
S6A: *Je l'espère.*
S/R: How can we say that in English?
S3: I hope so.
S6A: I hope so.

S/R: What is the best way to learn ESL?
S6A: *Meilleur endroit?*
S/R: The best way
S6A: *C'est quoi* "way"?
S4: *Chemin*
S3: *Façon*
S3: For me, it's listening.
S6A: Listening the movie in English.

Group discussion #2

S/R: What did you find the most useful in this project?
S2: ...Mainly, talking to a bilingual person.
S4: ...Also, talking to a bilingual person.

4.4.3. Working with Videos

Working with videos was intended as a way for students to develop oral skills without too much preparation on the part of the teacher. Moreover, internet resources "play a crucial role when learners seek authentic information and materials for their work" (Dam, 2012, p.12). Some videos I chose, some were brought by

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[8] S/R: student researcher

the students, and some we chose on the spot. Some of the videos we saw were episodes from two international CBC series, a video game, and clips about traveling (Nunavut, Scotland, New Zealand).

The general way in which we worked with videos was as follows.

We first discussed the context and previewed vocabulary, which most students mentioned was helpful to understand the video and learn new words. We then watched the video using the graphic organizer. Sometimes we watched it twice before answering questions - first individually, then in pairs. At the end, as a group, we discussed the video and participants' opinion. For the first videos, I prepared general questions for comprehension and acquisition. I then realized that weak students needed prompts according to their level to be able to participate in the conversation, so I created questions per CEFR level. Subsequently, I generalized the questions to be used with any video, which allowed us to choose videos and work with them without preparation.

I designed two tools to work with videos: a graphic organizer and questions per CEFR level, which were both adapted, modified and simplified, according to participants' work (Calvert, 2015).

The graphic organizer. The objective of the graphic organizer was to help participants develop listening skills as a prerequisite for oral skills. I wanted a multi-level tool combining top-down and bottom-up processing strategies for comprehension and acquisition. The graphic organizer includes multi-level strategies for the A2.2 and B1.1 levels for before, during, and after watching a video. These strategies include familiarising with the context, previewing and predicting, previewing vocabulary, structured note-taking, a brief summary, and opinion (Richards, 2008; Harmer, 2007). There is also a space for reflection. In the workshops, I took care to give detailed instructions and teach these strategies explicitly. The format was gradually modified according to students' work (see Appendix 7).

Questions per CEFR level. I designed this tool to provide a guide for conversation based on a video, the idea behind it being that videos can easily provide subjects for discussion. The document has a space to review vocabulary, followed by general questions and prompts to talk about the video according to each CEFR level. The goal was for learners to engage in conversation even if they did not understand the full content of the video, so that all could develop oral skills. The other goal was to save time for the classroom teacher, as she would not have to prepare questions for each video. For example, in level A1.2, learners can name a place or an object they saw; they can describe a person or the weather; or they can say if they like or not an activity they saw in the video; whereas, in level B1.1, learners can describe, in detail, the main idea presented, or describe a similar activity; they can also discuss some of the problems they might encounter in a comparable situation or present arguments for/against it (see Appendix 8).

Linguistic development. Findings show that some of the benefits of working with these video-based tools were the development of listening and oral skills, vocabulary acquisition, and better pronunciation. Students' notes in their Dossiers reflected their processes developing listening skills for comprehension and

acquisition; there were many notes on vocabulary, as well as notes on organizing their ideas. All participants agreed that watching videos helped them learn new vocabulary and expressions:

> New expressions and different accents (Dossier S3).

> It's cool to have something to watch. It change a lot from the book. And it's good to hear different english voice and hear/learn different word. We never have to much vocabulary (Guest student)

The questions per CEFR level proved to be a helpful guide for conversation. Students worked in teams and spoke English consistently. In group, we went through the questions, noticing the differences per level. Here is a comment on how a student worked with another participant with a different language level: "S1A is not my level. She's like in the A levels. You do what you understand, that's it… She did describe a person..." (S3, Interview).

I designed this tool so that learners with different language levels could practice oral interaction autonomously. S3 understood exactly how I intended it to be used. In the final interview, I said I had prepared these questions so that they could discuss any video. He responded "Yes it's true! We can take a small group and go to the other class and just watch something and take these questions… Just (the classroom teacher) come one time or two in the period. I think we can do it like that" (S3, Interview).

The classroom teacher attended the last workshop and worked with the questions per CEFR level with some students. In the interview, she said she could use this tool: "I saw the possibilities when we did it… We can add some questions. I'm curious to try it on to see if the weakest groups would need some guiding, like I did with them yesterday… Like, if I send them to have a discussion among them about what we just saw, would that be enough for them to be able to do it?" (Classroom teacher, Interview).

Like any pedagogical tool, this one requires practice and has room for improvement. Learners should first familiarize themselves with the questions and prompts so that they know what to look for in the video, e.g., A1 *Describe a person you saw in the video*. If weak students are on their own, they should not worry if they do not understand all the content. If they stick to the questions, they can talk about what they see. The teacher must guide advanced/bilingual students as to how they can help weaker students.

Here are some observations from students' Dossiers on how they worked with the questions per CEFR level as a guide for conversation. S5A, aware of her level, knew she had to start with the lowest level questions, and marked those she could answer, as did S6A. S1A wrote down lots of notes to support oral interaction when discussing the questions. As for S2, he wrote down his reflection: "this think is a good pratice to learne english because you listen to video an you make a orale interaction white other student. I need some pratice in oral interaction".

In brief, this study shows that the portfolio fosters learner autonomy regarding students' capacity to speak in English by integrating target language use in the classroom with some of these tools - the most effective being group discussions and working with videos.

4.5. Findings Regarding Second Research Question

What is the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to ESL students' autonomy regarding their capacity to critically reflect about their learning?

In order to answer the second research question, I followed two guidelines. First, in order to develop the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of language learning, students should reflect in the target language (NCSSFL, 2011). This was the case for the students who also participated in the pilot study. The new participants reflected sometimes in English and sometimes in French. Indeed, reflection needs mediation and time.

My second guideline was not to overwhelm learners with reflection and to discuss in group, as suggested by the findings of a large portfolio project in an urban secondary school in New Brunswick: "We found too much reflection to be a burden to students and tended to go with short check-in's at opportune moments. Also, group check-in's helped students to talk about their learning rather than always doing written reflections" (Kristmanson, 2016, Dec. 12, personal communication).

But reflection can have many faces, and participatory action research allowed me to broaden my perspective. As I discussed with the classroom teacher if reflection had positive outcomes, her answer pointed to a very concrete advantage of reflecting in the individualized instruction setting:

> ...You need to try different things…. Not to get the wrong idea: because it worked for my friend is going to work for me, doesn't work like that… People learn well with music or with movies, but not everybody likes it… Reflecting on something like that: this worked for me and this didn't… And try again; maybe the first time didn't work, maybe in another setting. I think reflection is important because you would know what you did, what you need to be working on next. Things are evolving and changing. (Classroom teacher, Interview).

In this study, participating students reflected at the micro and macro levels on the process and content of their learning. All instruments helped me access their mental process: the portfolios, group discussions, my analytical observations and the individual interviews.

4.5.1. Reflection at the Micro Level

What is important to learners is progress in the development of linguistic competency. In this way, reflection at the micro level can be useful if they ask themselves "how is this task going to help me achieve my goal?"

(Esteve et al., 2012, p. 76). At this level, reflection refers to cognitive skills and how learners decipher discourse. I included a section for reflection in the graphic organizer and the questions per CEFR level; I also asked the group to reflect after certain activities and elicited learners' reflections in individual interviews.

Comprehension and acquisition with videos. We used strategies for comprehension and acquisition before watching a video, including activating prior knowledge and previewing context and vocabulary. We did this in group when working with the graphic organizer and questions per CEFR level. These strategies helped learners make sense of the video and piece it together. Recognizing new words and expressions in a real context helped them learn vocabulary and pronunciation. Students even helped each other understand words. Here are some of their comments:

> Yes that is help me really, 'cause there are some words I don't understand… Sometime S3 my dictionary, or (a guest student)… I understand more the video… (Interview S2).

> It's cool to have something to watch. It change a lot from the book. And it's good to hear different english voice and hear/learn different word. We never have to much vocabulary" (Guest student).

> *Le scénario avant le film, je trouvais que ça aidé… avec, les mots, ils vont parler de ça… on est capable de reconstituer le vidéo après…* (Interview S4).

Previewing vocabulary is a strategy that can also be transferred to reading, as S3 realized. He had set a reading goal of B1.1, #4, *Follow simple written instructions like a recipe, a clear user manual, etc.*, and I asked if he intended to work on vocabulary before or after reading: "Before, I think. You can see the name of the pieces before you read the instructions, you can understand" (S3, Interview).

Reflection with the graphic organizer. The graphic organizer has a section at the end to reflect at the micro level, asking what students learned (new words, expressions, general knowledge) and what strategy was useful. This tool brought awareness and structure to students' learning, even when working on their own. It helped them organize ideas, summarize, and reflect on how a given video contributed to their listening comprehension and language acquisition, e.g., "The first part help me to make a resume (a summary) and to understand the movie" (S2, Dossier).

During and after the workshops, I analyzed how participants used the graphic organizer. S1A was very good with predictions, and took detailed notes of the context. S1A, S2 and S3 took precise vocabulary notes in the context of the video. S1A and S6A took notes in English and French, and S2 and S3 did summaries in English. Seeing students' work allowed me to modify the graphic organizer to guide their learning.

Developing oral skills with questions per CEFR level. While developing oral skills with the questions per level, students are actually monitoring themselves as they decide which questions they can or cannot discuss. S2 was the most insightful. When I asked him if this tool was helpful, he answered: "Oh yes! I tried this with my friend. This one I can, I can, I can, but sometimes it's more my friend speaking, like I said the essential about the question and he developed full… The more you go up in the questions you need to give

more opinion… (like) okay, I agreed because I liked… I prefer this because I see I can't do that, I can't do that, I see I make little mistakes and I see, example, I can do that" (S2, Interview).

4.5.2. Reflection at the Macro Level

Reflection at the macro level is about metacognitive skills, students' ability to reflect on how they learn ESL and their own way of controlling learning strategies. With the portfolio, this type of reflection starts when learners choose goals and question themselves as to why such a goal would be important. For example, S5A chose A2.1 listening goal #2, *Understand questions on simple information about family, immediate environment, work and leisure activities* because she realized those were subjects likely to come about in a conversation: "*Quand on rencontre quelqu'un en anglais, il se met à parler de ses loisirs, environnement, comme, hier, j'ai mangé du PFK…*" (When we meet someone in English, he talks about what he does for fun or his everday life, like 'yesterday, I ate at KFC') (S5A, Interview).

Students reflected at the macro level individually (while doing their Autobiographies), in groups (when discussing the most useful activities in the project), and interactionally (in the final individual interviews). The subjects they reflected on were how languages are learned, their preferred learning activities, difficulties encountered in learning English, strategies they used, and the purpose of reflection.

Autobiography. In the Autobiography, learners reflect on their language training, cultural experiences, and the languages they can use in all contexts: with family, in the community, in education, with friends, travelling, in their professional life, in the cinema or on TV, reading, or other. Given that opportunities to practice English are very limited in this Francophone community, students who seek occasions to use it are more autonomous and, in general, have a higher language level, as we can see from the following data.

S1A, S5A, and S6A were pursuing A2.1 goals. S1A recorded in her portfolio that she almost never uses English, and the other two participants noted down that they sometimes use English at work (at a restaurant chain) or to watch videos/films. S4, pursuing A2.2 goals, said she uses English sometimes when she goes to the nearest English town (200 km), watches films or listens to music. As for S2, pursuing A2.2 goals as well, he is aware of using French in all contexts, e.g., "I not need speek in english in my last job". S3, pursuing B1 goals, uses English sometimes in his professional and social life, for his side job requires him to read and make phone calls in English; he also watches many videos in English, which is mainly how he has learned the language. Later in the project, learners elaborated on how they used English on their own to study.

How languages are learned and preferred learning activities. We had an interesting discussion about how we learn and retain languages. S1A shared her personal experience. Since her mother tongue is Spanish, she reflected on how much she lost of it when she moved to Quebec and French became her everyday language. The portfolio pedagogy values multilingualism, and this participant was proud to show that she

spoke a foreign language. Participants agreed that learning a language requires practice, and they do not have opportunities in their milieu, e.g., "...in the future I will not very speak in English every day, maybe loose this aptitude" (S2, Group discussion #1).

In both group discussions, students shared their favourite activities for learning English which were, by and large, conversation and listening (music, videos, movies, TV) (Group interview #1). Their top three preferred activities in the project were watching videos, working in a small groups, and real situations. This led to discussing the importance of interaction for developing oral skills:

S2: Listening, and after speaking with a group because when you are in a group, the group can correct you...

Student researcher: You know if the other person understands you or not (S2 and S3: Yes)

S2: And you try to correct your sentence… sometimes… It's like that that I speak English better than before (Group discussion #2).

Participants were used to working on their own to develop listening skills. But working in a small group experiencing real situations in English was something they did not have in their community; this is why it was important to create such a space at school, and the reason why the students valued this opportunity.

Metacognition. Reflection in individual interviews helped students verbalize some of the difficulties they encountered and the strategies they used to learn English. For example, S2 admitted that playing video games was not a suitable strategy for him: "I play some game in English, that help me but no all. I don't like to play in English because I don't understand. It's complicate, but I try" (S2, Interview).

Analyzing words was a strategy S1A used in the group, and it helped her gain confidence: "*Ça m'a appris à avoir plus de confiance pour parler en anglais. S'il dit ce mot-là, c'est vraiment ce mot-là, au moins je compris ça… J'essaie… d'analyser des mots*" (Interview S1A). S6A said she learns by comparing English and French: "*Mettons, je mets mon film préféré que j'écoutais souvent en français, alors je le mets en anglais… ça c'est ça, ça c'est ça…*" (S6A, Interview).

As for S4, she said she has always liked music in English. At some point, she realized that if she was able to understand some words, she could work to understand more. Since she knew her strong points were listening and writing, so she started listening more attentively and writing the lyrics (S4, Interview). Finally, concerning S3, he started watching videos and playing video games in English when he was 15. It was sometimes difficult, but he continued. He plays guitar and sings in English. This study helped him identify and highlight his language skills (S3, Interview).

All participants agreed that reflection is useful for learning, though the reason was not always clear, e.g., "*Je crois que oui, mais je pourrai pas expliquer comment*" (S6A, Interview). This study was the first time all

participants reflected on their learning, excepting those who participated in the pilot study. Lots of mediation from the teacher is needed for students who need guidance to fully benefit from reflection.

To summarize, reflection had a significant place in this study. Reflecting with the portfolio at appropriate moments, individually or in group, helped students be more aware of their learning processes, thus developing their autonomy. At the micro level, students reflected on the strategies that helped them develop listening and oral skills, e.g., previewing vocabulary, using a graphic organizer, and having a guide for conversation in line with their CEFR language level. At the macro level, students reflected on the goals they set, on their linguistice baggage, on how they learn English, and on the importance of interaction to develop oral skills.

4.6.   Findings Regarding Fourth Research Question: The Teacher's Role

What is the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy concerning the development of oral skills with the portfolio?

The findings in the present study reveal that the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy concerning the development of oral skills with the portfolio is of utmost importance in the context of individualized instruction. This role was multifaceted, as a facilitator of learning, language model and mediator. Nevertheless, given the particularities of this context, taking the initiative of creating a setting for oral interaction was the key factor.

4.6.1. Creating a Setting for Oral Interaction

As mentioned in Chapter 2, guiding students to be autonomous requires a shift in the role of the teacher from transmitter of information to facilitator of learning (Little, 1995). In general, the use of action-oriented tasks (like games, the survey, the garage sale, and discussing videos) supported my role as facilitator, as they provided opportunities to watch students in action and see their weaknesses and strengths. I also changed seating arrangements so that students had easy access to the Smartboard, participate in the written exercises, and so that I had a less controlling role.

Creating a space for oral interaction and being a language model were the key roles of the teacher in this study. Conducting the workshops in English prompted students to practice the language, sometimes even among themselves. The best example was S3, who could easily interact in English but needed a setting, as we can see from this exchange with the classroom teacher in the final interview:

> Classroom teacher: And something that would be good for student #3 is to be talking more, because he understands very very well, it is his strength... I think he needs to improve his speaking skills…
>
> Student-researcher: Actually he speaks a lot.

Classroom teacher: Not with me.

In the second group discussion, we examined the question *Is it your responsibility or the teacher's responsibility to take initiative to practice oral skills?* All participants agreed it is learners' responsibility, e.g., "It's me because I have the project of... *voyager*… travel. I like Scotland and the language is English. I no choice" (S1A). But S2, always precise, went a little further: "It's me because we are not in primary school, *wear* in adult school. Maybe a little bit the teacher, because in the last year (in the pilot study) you see I was not very good in speaking in English, you make initiative to practice my English and I'm better. But principal it's the person...". The classroom teacher summed everything up, saying that "both can work together"; the teacher can guide and help "and the want part needs to come from you, because if you don't want to it's hard for the teacher to do it for you". In this study, the teacher's initiative to develop oral skills was fruitful, but autonomy is a two way street; the teacher has to provide the setting and guidance to practice oral skills, and the desire and effort to learn must come from the student.

Being a language model was also imperative to allow participants to try their speaking skills at their level, e.g., when I switched to English in individual interviews that were conducted in French, they did too, even if only saying some words in English (Interviews S1A and S6A). In the following example, a student summed up when I asked what she had gained from her participation in the portfolio project: "Understanding better when somebody talks to me. Given that... you speak English virtually all the time, that helped me to understand better and maybe better express myself and talk more to people. And, mostly, to be less shy" (S6A, Interview, author's translation).

The role of the teacher in creating a conversational space is especially important in a context like this one where learners do not have opportunities to use English in their community. They can practice listening and reading on their own but are at a loss without a setting to develop oral skills, as we may see from S2's comment: "Me, I think I will continue to listening, same as with you, maybe reading, but I'm sure I will lose the speaking. Because I have no other people to speak each day" (Group discussion #1). However, the individualized instruction classroom is very particular; the group is "not really a group, the group is moving, changing; it depends on the day" (Classroom teacher, Discussion). The structure of the classroom, due to an individualized schedule for each student and it being multilevel, is one of the challenges for teachers to create opportunities to speak. However, the need is real "because right now, if they [the students] are practicing once a week, that's a success…; but it's not enough" (Classroom teacher, Discussion). This study might provide some suggestions, but it is not the only way to do it. The classroom teacher mentioned the example of another adult education teacher in a nearby city who practiced conversation in group, with all students, half of the day.

As for the role of the teacher as mediator, it was important in eliciting students' reflections, as discussed in the previous section. This role was equally important in language use, as the teacher should guide students to collaborate effectively in multilevel settings, on the one hand, by reminding students to use

comprehension strategies when they do not understand and, on the other, by showing advanced students and bilingual guests how to better help their less proficient colleagues. Examples of this were asking a more advanced student to translate for a lower proficiency one, as I did in group discussions, but also asking not to translate in excess in teamwork, as the classroom teacher explained: "S4 was doing a lot of translation. I even told her not to translate for the girls because they need to listen too, they need to pay attention, and she was like *Oh!* She's doing it to be nice, not to bother, but she's doing it without knowing" (Classroom teacher, Interview).

Lastly, adult education teachers can greatly benefit from inviting bilingual guests. At *Le Retour* adult school, there are various bilingual students. We had some as guests at a few workshops, and they proved to be an excellent resource for keeping communication alive and fluent. For example, S2 invited a bilingual friend to class on a few occasions, and was surprised by his fluency: "He's really good in English I'm surprising…" (S2, Interview). The portfolio pedagogy values multilingualism, but the teacher's role is essential in creating an appropriate setting, such as a space where bilingual guests could feel proud of their language skills, and participants could profit from speaking with them.

While creating opportunities for oral interaction is essential in helping students become autonomous, it does not come easy in this educational setting. As I have mentioned, there are never the same students in the classroom and they all have different language levels. This study intended to explore new ways to work. However, changes need time, and autonomy starts with the teacher. Discussing with the classroom teacher possible options to develop oral skills, she talked about her limitations, which is positive, since awareness is the first step to introducing any change:

> So I think this is something I need to be working on myself, because I'm one of the barriers. I'm kind of a perfectionist… I need to be ready, more than ready to start something, and I feel like that's not the way to go… I should be asking them to speak, that's it. It doesn't have to be too complicated (Discussion #1).

Teachers have different styles and these educational programs are new. Moreover, there are plenty of organizational challenges to put in place a space for conversation in the individualized instruction setting – teachers have to be creative. In this study, the role of the teacher as language model, mediator, and facilitator of learning was important, and students' autonomy concerning their oral skills development depended on the teacher creating an English conversational space.

4.7. Findings Regarding Collaboration

Since teamwork is not part of the pedagogical approach in place in Adult General Education, I was not sure how to address the issue of collaboration. I knew participants had to interact in order to develop oral skills, and wondered if they could only work together if they shared the same goals. According to Kristmanson (2017, Dec. 5, personal communication), "peers can support each other in the move towards autonomy through peer interactions, and peer assessment," which proved true in the pilot study, where the group had

a positive learning environment and supported each other. One of the outcomes of the pilot study was the creation of a new category – collaboration as a means to attain learner autonomy (Murphy & Jacobs, 2000).

In the main study, I analyzed the data collected from the portfolios, observations, interviews and discussions, and compared them with the principles that support learner autonomy (Little, 2007). The following findings suggest that working in collaboration in small groups is supportive of learner autonomy, in line with the principles of learner involvement and target language use. Participants created a learning community that increased their self-confidence and helped them develop oral skills, which suggests that working in small groups is an effective learning strategy in this context.

4.7.1. Small Groups as a Learning Strategy to Develop Oral Skills

Working in collaboration in small groups proved to be an effective learning strategy, according to the principles of learner involvement and target language use. In small groups, as opposed to working individually, students supported each other and got involved in their learning. They behaved differently than when working on their own.

Participants supported and learned from each other in various ways, e.g., explaining new words, or working together toward the same CEFR goals. Support also came from the bilingual guests who occasionally participated in the workshops, for they encouraged conversation and helped learners correct their mistakes, as we can see from this comment: "He really correct me, he look at me, 'You don't do that in English', 'You don't put this word after this word…', 'You miss this one, you don't say that in English', he repeat me in a good sentence. He's really good" (Interview S2). At the same time, the bilingual students felt useful and valuable - always a plus in adult school.

Besides, six was an ideal number of learners to get involved in group work and group discussions. As suggested in Section 4.4.2, group discussions promoted the development of oral skills and helped create a positive learning environment. Moreover, as students got the opportunity to practice the target language, the classroom teacher and I noticed that they behaved differently in the workshops than in the regular ESL classroom. For example, as we discussed participants' work, it came up that S1A was not improving in the classroom: "S1A needs to be pushed, works very slowly… [She works], but she doesn't see why she's doing that… And she doesn't understand how to use it after, what she's done… I don't know what strategy to give her to help her" (Classroom teacher, Discussion). S1A's oral skills were poor and it was difficult to understand her, but working in small groups proved a relevant strategy for her. She got invested and participated eagerly, made effort to speak and, at the end of the study, was able to get some ideas through. Her teacher noticed the improvement: "At the beginning, she didn't really want to be the one talking and, when I saw her in the group, she feels very comfortable and she can do it" (Classroom teacher, Interview).

According to the classroom teacher, "having personal CEFR learning goals seemed to help students perform better as actors in their L2 learning process. Even when two students were not at the same school level, their CEFR goals could be similar and they could work together" (Classroom teacher, Interview). She also mentioned other advantages of working in small groups:

> They will be more confident, (since) they are always afraid of speaking in front of many people… I think they will become more comfortable with people in small groups, and that's an advantage for me too because, if they are more comfortable, they'll be able to experiment more and they would feel like they can speak more in English. That's a great advantage (Classroom teacher, Interview).

While developing oral skills in a multilevel group is certainly challenging, in this study, working in collaboration with the portfolio as a guide yielded positive outcomes. However, organizing the logistics of small group interaction in this type of context is challenging (see Section 5.4, Implications).

4.7.2. A Learning Community: Building Confidence

Findings show that students supported each other in developing oral skills and building confidence as they got to know each other better. All this, as suggested by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2016), "can lead to the development of a community among class members" (p. 100).

Building confidence was a key factor in the development of participants' oral skills. Many learners are self-conscious of their difficulties with communication and afraid to make mistakes, which often hinders their progress, as they are less inclined to take risks. Learning an L2 can thus be considered an exercise in humility. As the classroom teacher put it, "...to learn a second language, you need to be practicing, you need to be aware that other people will listen to you… That's the way you communicate with people. You need to be aware of that, not to be shy about it" (Classroom teacher, Discussion). Thus, it is import to create a space where students feel safe. One of the questions in the second group discussion was *What are the advantages or disadvantages of working in a small group to develop oral skills?* According to participants, there are more advantages than disadvantages, e.g., more opportunities to speak, feeling at ease, and building confidence:

> The advantage is talk more from English in a small group... (S1A).
>
> The advantage is you're not afraid when you talk in a little group… (S2).
>
> I don't see a disadvantage in a small group... (S3).
>
> *Je suis plus à l'aise dans un petit groupe… C'est moins gênant* (I'm more comfortable in a small group… It's less embarrassing[9]) (S6A).

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[9] Author's translation.

Dans un petit groupe, c'est moins stressant, peut-être… moins gêné. Si quelqu'un fait une erreur, tu le reprends puis personne va rire de lui (In a small group, it might be less stressful… less awkward. If somebody makes a mistake, you correct him and nobody will laugh at him[10]) (Interview S5A).

But familiarity and confidence grow gradually. The classroom teacher had some concerns in this respect and questioned students directly in the second group discussion:

Classroom teacher: ...Do you feel more at ease now, *à l'aise*, than at the beginning?

S1A, S4, S3: Yes.

Classroom teacher: So, do you feel that there is a time that you need to adapt before talking together… or talking in front of someone else?

S3, S1A: Yes.

S2: Because in the beginning you think, I'm not good, what the other think about me?

S3: You have to start…

S2: You see you are not the…

Classroom teacher: ...the best or the worst.

S2: Yes, you are not alone.

Finally, a community forged on positive relationships fosters the development of oral skills.

All participants collaborated to create a positive learning environment. Students worked towards improving their oral skills while socializing and making friends, assuring that the community aspect of the project had a positive impact in students' learning.

Students enjoyed participating in the study, as some told the classroom teacher: "They (S5A and S6A) talked about a small group and how they like to do that". When discussing their plans to reach speaking goals, students' first choice for oral practice was their friends from the group. Having a small learning community was especially important for low profile participants such as S2 and S4, who in particular improved their oral skills and confidence. Both had also participated in the pilot study and benefited from the social aspect of the project. In the classroom teacher's words, talking about S4, "She's interested in doing something right now. Before, she was always waiting…, never ready and never needed help either" (Classroom teacher, Interview). As for S2, who had not set a date to take exams: "I think he's just waiting until it's finished here [the study] to be sure that he does not miss anything" (Classroom teacher, Interview). As we can see, students had the opportunity to practice oral skills in the group and took advantage of it.

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[10] Author's translation.

Working in a small group also helped build student-teacher relationships, as the classroom teacher mentioned: "You developed a good relationship with those people who were working with you" (Classroom teacher, Discussion). Feeling comfortable with the teacher is a factor that positively affects students' progress. The classroom teacher only attended a couple of workshops, but was still able to get to know some students a little better: "Yes, he impressed me when we were talking about the war [Flipgrid activity, WWII]. I didn't know that he knew so much about it... [And] the answers he gave [in the group discussion]!" (Classroom teacher, Interview).

Due to a heavy workload, the classroom teacher was only able to attend one workshop, but she could see her students behaving differently in collaboration with each other: "I would have been happy to see the involvement, and to see how people react and act when they're in the group, because it is different. They are different when they are in the group than when they are by themselves" (Classroom teacher, Interview). This is the power of collaboration.

4.8. Benefits: Portfolio Pedagogy and Participatory Action Research

In this last section on the findings, I sum up the benefits of this study for all participants, including the researcher, as determined by a synergy of the portfolio pedagogy and participatory action research. Both encourage reflection, so there were rich insights throughout the project, and both seek growth for all participants. What follows is a positive outcome for the classroom teacher and myself in terms of professional development, as well as benefits for the students in terms of linguistic and social growth.

4.8.1. Professional Development

Professional development is fundamental in the portfolio pedagogy and action research principles. The classroom teacher and I - even if we have different training and teaching styles - were partners in this study. We both gained awareness of some of our teaching strengths and weaknesses, and our discussions helped broaden our perspectives on the adult education context. We both gained a better knowledge of students' learning process and first-hand experience of the CEFR in action.

The portfolio pedagogy helped me gain lots of insight into students' learning processes, as evidenced in the findings related to reflection (Section 4.5). In the classroom teacher's words, "It's actually interesting to get a perspective of the learning process our students go through on a day to day basis". Seeing students engaged in oral interaction, we both gained a better knowledge of their processes and shared some victories about their progress, as we can see from this comment: "I think that what we are doing is good for her [S4]; she is getting confident" (Classroom teacher, Discussion).

In addition, and as an important gain in professional development, we both gleaned understanding of the CEFR by experience, as in this example: "I find them hard to work with, to pass from one descriptor to

another one… When I read them, I wondered, can I do that? I found some examples of exams online, to see your level. I did the exam and I said, okay! Between reading the descriptor and experimenting was a big difference" (Classroom teacher, Interview). Working with the CEFR was also useful to operationalize some concepts, e.g., that not all skills progress at the same rate, as the classroom teacher mentioned: "...you can be advanced in one skill and lower in another one. That is very helpful… I like how we can evaluate someone over many levels of learning" (Classroom teacher, Interview).

Personally, working with the CEFR has also helped me better understand the progression of learning in ESL. As a researcher, my analytical observations were rich. They were a good guide to record my insights on working towards autonomy with the portfolio, and to follow the progress of the study chronologically. They also helped structure my reflections as a teacher.

4.8.2. Linguistic and Social Growth

Here, I lay out the benefits for students in terms of linguistic and social growth. In the final individual interviews, I asked participants what benefits they had received from their participation in the study concerning their English skills and working in small groups. Confidence was a big gain, and all participants reported improving their listening and speaking skills. Here are some of their comments:

Moi? Parler plus en anglais. Ça m'a appris à avoir plus de confiance pour parler en anglais… (Speaking more English. It helped me be more confident speaking English[11]) (Interview S1A).

With a group, is the first in English I take better speaking in English, make more sentence. In this project…, I *correct* my speaking, maybe I *correct* my socialization… (Interview S2).

For my English, I speak more… In a small group, is very interesting. If you're shy, it's easier, and if you're not, that don't matter (laughs)... It's easier to know the group… It's a good project (Interview S3).

About my English, I spoken more than last year… It's very interesting, this project, it helped me very good… *Je trouve ça plate que ça finisse, juste un mois et demi*, short and fast (Interview S4).

Je trouve que je parle un petit peu mieux en anglais… L'année passée, je parlais pas du tout... Je peux faire quelques phrases; j'ai de petits trucs. (I think I speak English a little better. Last year, I didn't speak at all… I can say a few sentences; I learned some tricks[12]) (Interview S5A).

As for S5A, the classroom teacher mentioned that the study helped her focus, gain motivation, and use oral English. Moreover, she gained confidence, almost finished her Secondary II book, and was very proud of her achievements (Classroom teacher, Discussion).

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[11] Author's translation.
[12] Author's translation.

As we may see from these excerpts from the individual interviews and one of the discussions with the classroom teacher, encouraging autonomy with the portfolio and working in small groups brought linguistic and personal gains for the students. In the following section, I summarize the findings in this study.

4.9. Summary

Autonomy does not come easily, for in traditional schooling learners are used to being told what to do. In adult education, with the individualized instruction method, students sometimes work on their books without really learning - that is what a student told the classroom teacher when she asked him what he had just learned: "That's what he told me, actually. That everything he'd done was for nothing, he understood nothing, he remembered nothing either… Sometimes they don't know what they're doing in the book, or why they're doing the book" (Classroom teacher, Discussion). This is a perfect example of why students need tools for learning autonomously. In this study, the language portfolio proved to be a useful tool.

To summarize the findings in this study, the portfolio is a practical learning guide that allows students to advance at their own pace in this multi-level context. It promoted learner autonomy in three aspects: involvement, reflection and target language use. To develop oral skills, group discussions and working with videos yielded promising results. However, students need a lot of guidance, as we saw how they perform differently in workshops than on their own - mediation is key.

Working in small groups with the portfolio as a guide was effective, for students developed oral skills and built a learning community. Indeed, the role of the teacher was essential in creating this communicative space. However, the programs are new and time is needed to adapt to them.

Finally, the participatory action research methodology allowed me to keep track of the research process at every stage and rendered benefits for all: a sense of community and language development for the students, as well as professional development for both teachers. These findings will be explored further in the next chapter.

Figure 10: Analysis word cloud (QSR NVivo)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the key findings that came to light from my research and comment on them in connection with relevant literature. In the first three sections, I present the ways in which the data demonstrates that the portfolio pedagogy helped students on their path towards autonomy as per autonomy's definition in this study (getting involved in their learning, reflecting in their cognitive and metacognitive strategies and, most importantly, using and developing their L2). Working in a small collaborative group with the portfolio, all participants improved their oral skills; this proved to be a valuable strategy, essential for students who need to work autonomously in the individualized instruction context (Gagnon & Brunel, 2005). It helped build confidence and speaking skills while developing relationships. However, opportunities for oral interaction in this setting are challenging to implement, hence the indispensable need for teacher guidance. This will be elaborated upon in the Implications section, along with both teachers' professional growth. I then identify some of the study's limitations and make suggestions for future research. I finish with a brief conclusion that finalizes the present research study.

Before initiating the discussion, I must put forth a brief note related to the pilot study, given that three of the pilot participants also collaborated in the main study. As I mentioned in Section 3.2.3, there is risk of contamination if pilot participants react differently than the new ones. The only way in which they reacted differently is that they were more familiar with the portfolio pedagogy and the CEFR descriptors. Indeed, they helped and supported their colleagues, for the use of the portfolio requires time.

5.1. Autonomous Learners

A relevant question upon mentioning autonomous learners is how much autonomy do adult learners actually want. I agree with Little (1991), who brought up that "by the beginning of second-level education... learners have considerable experience of institutionalized learning, and they may be strongly resistant to the idea of autonomy (p. 46). As Oxford (2008) suggested, independent L2 learning "can open the doors to control or responsibility by learners, but learners must actually want that control or responsibility and actively take it" (p. 48). As reported in this study, the willingness to learn English has to come from the students (Classroom teacher, Group discussion #2).

While L2 learning is indeed a personal journey, successful learners have always been autonomous (Little, 1995), and autonomy is essential in this educational context.

In this study, participants gained awareness of their learning processes, which is a prerequisite for autonomy. They got involved in their learning, including planning and organizing activities (such as Bingo, a debate, and a garage sale). As Allwright (1991, cited in Little, 1995) maintained, one of the aspects of accepting responsibility of one's learning is undertaking organizational initiatives. Students' monitoring and

self-evaluating were restricted by the short duration of the study. Developing self-assessment skills requires continual practice in small steps and with a teacher's guidance (Kohonen, 2004; Piccardo, 2014).

In all cases, mediation is still needed. The role of the teacher in the portfolio pedagogy is sometimes confusing, since it may be regarded exclusively as a learner tool (Kristmanson et al., 2011). But, as with any pedagogical tool, students have to gradually learn to use it effectively. As Little stated, autonomy does not mean the teacher withdraws to a corner (Little, 1995). The teacher's role as facilitator of learning, language model and mediator are essential to guide students towards ownership of the portfolio to gain control of their learning. In order to guide participants in using the graphic organizer, I followed detailed instructional steps provided in a teacher's guide (Kristmanson & Lafargue, 2014). I discussed with the group which sections were useful, and modified the graphic organizer accordingly.

Likewise, students require mediation to pursue goals (Esteve et al., 2012; Piccardo, 2014). The findings in this study reflect a gap between students' performance in the workshops and their work in the ESL classroom. They had set goals and worked toward them in the workshops, but working on their own they depended on the classroom teacher's initiative. As Kristmanson (2017, Dec. 5, Personal communication) suggested, "typically, the teacher is instrumental in creating, offering and proposing tasks related to *can do*'s".

Therefore, if students are willing to put time and effort into learning ESL, the portfolio pedagogy will guide them towards owing their learning progress and help them succeed. However, teacher mediation is vital.

5.2. Reflection

Reflection is a component of learner autonomy, the portfolio pedagogy, and participatory action research (Little, 2007; COE, 2004; Bell et al., 2004); in this study, the focus on reflection was abundant. Reflection is a way for learners to exercise their autonomy and be more aware of their learning processes, i.e., of the best resources to attain their objectives (Esteve et al., 2012).

As mentioned in Section 2.5.3.1, the portfolio is a mediation tool for reflection, awareness, and self-regulation. I am conscious that I dealt more with the reflection and awareness stages than with self-regulation. Since, according to Dam (2012), the pivot of learner autonomy is evaluation, there is still a long way to go towards learner autonomy for all participants, including myself.

Reflection is not absent now in the adult ESL classroom, for the textbooks include a section for this purpose at the end of each unit. However, even if students do write some of their reflections and teachers read them some days later, in my experience, it does not have great repercussions. Esteve et al. (2012) stated it is "not enough to provide students with instruments for reflection…; rather, the 'transfer' process must be guided by the teacher and embedded in the overarching methodological approach" (p. 76).

In this study, we saw how personal reflection bore fruit when discussing in a group, as suggested by Little and Perclová (2001): "It is our belief - and one of the central implications of the ELP - that the best learning comes from discussion with others that is informed by and leads back into individual reflection" (Foreword). This premise was one of the pillars of the present research study.

According to Esteve et al. (2012), reflection should start at the metalinguistic level (micro) and gradually shift to a metacognitive level (macro). However, in this study, discussing students' reflections related to how they learn was part of our small group discussions; it was also social, enjoyable, and led to the development of oral skills. For example, reflection at the macro level started with students doing their linguistic biographies in the portfolio, where they could write about their emotional bond to their languages, and S1A had the opportunity to share her reflections on her connection to her mother tongue, Spanish.

The teacher should initiate and support learner reflection (Esteve et al., 2012). At the micro level, for example, I prompted students to organize information from videos in the graphic organizer and taught strategies explicitly which, as suggested by Zimmerman (2002), increases motivation and achievement. Even for weaker students, who used their L1 (French) to write notes in the graphic organizer, simply articulating their thinking process helped increase their comprehension (Chamot, 2005).

5.3. Working in small groups

In Little's (1995) words, "second language development is the single most impressive achievement of successful projects to promote learner autonomy" (p. 176). We can say that this study, though short, was successful, for all participants' English improved.

According to the principle of target language use (Little, 2007), the most important aspect of this project was holding workshops where English was the means of communication for all activities. This allowed the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions of language learning to develop in interaction (NCSSFL, 2011). In group discussions, for example, we talked about ESL learning while developing oral skills, which is exactly what Little (2007) says about autonomy – roughly, use the language in a meaningful way and talk about learning.

Moreover, as reported by Arnott et al. (2017), confidence was a major gain for most participants. The same was found in an unpublished study conducted in Western Ontario schools (Majhanovich, Faez, Smith, Taylor & Vandergrift, 2010, cited in Hermans & Piccardo, 2012) where the teachers who used the CEFR stated that it built student confidence. The promotion of autonomy gives confidence to learners to use the target language which, in turn, fosters L2 development. To put it briefly, using the language appropriately builds confidence (Little, 1995).

Multilevel action-oriented tasks, with learners' *can do* goals as focal points, were key to providing motivation to communicate, enhanced by having a genuine purpose (Kristmanson & Lafargue, 2014; Curriculum

Services Canada, 2012). In addition, teaching grammar and vocabulary within the context of the action-oriented approach was effective. Students found that learning vocabulary with videos and real life activities, with a communicative objective in mind, was useful (Piccardo, 2014).

Furthermore, working with Flipgrid facilitated giving individual grammar feedback, as after workshops, on my own time, I could watch the videos students had created. In this way, learning grammar served to communicate in real life situations and not being afraid of making mistakes (Hermans & Piccardo, 2012, p. 149). As Cousineau (2018) affirmed, "*la grammaire est au service de l'apprenant*" - grammar must serve the learner.

Collaboration. As I had learned in the pilot study, interaction and collaboration are important factors in the promotion of learner autonomy (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000), and were also key elements in the main study. Working in small groups, students supported each other and developed oral skills, which were fundamental to the implementation of the principle of target language use. As Little (2007) suggested, "group work is essential because it is only by working in small groups that learners can engage in intensive interactive use of the target language…" (p. 25).

Inviting bilingual guests was part of the collaboration strategy. Bilingualism is an asset to Canada and Quebec, as well as in this study. Bilingual guests fostered English conversation and their presence was appreciated. In a study carried out by Mackey (1999), three experimental groups of adult ESL learners engaged in different communicative tasks with native English speakers. The group where negotiation of meaning took place naturally produced better results on a post-test (Lightbown & Spada, 2011). In this study, bilingual guests negotiated meaning and corrected participants' mistakes.

5.4. Implications

Returning to the purpose of this study, my objective was to explore the contribution of the Adult-Based Language Portfolio to adult ESL students' autonomy concerning the development of oral skills.

Overall, this participatory action research shows that, as students face similar challenges, they can support each other and exchange their views on learning while developing their L2 (Walter, 1998; Bell et al., 2004; Bergold & Thomas, 2012). We can also compare it with the LAALE project (Dam & Legenhausen, 2016), where encouraging learner autonomy helped students have a high linguistic performance, strengthen their self-esteem, and create a climate of trust (see Section 2.2.2). Specifically, the portfolio pedagogy can direct students towards autonomy by expanding the awareness of the learning process. In addition, working in collaboration in small groups can result in gains in confidence, motivation and linguistic skills. As shown by Kristmanson et al. (2013), learners know that the responsibility of their learning is primarily theirs. However, given the importance of oral skills in the new curricula and the difficulty of practicing oral English in this milieu, the teacher's role in creating a space for oral interaction is vital. Considering all of this, the present study carries the following implications.

Adult school is an opportunity to gain access to college or increase one's chances in the labour market. The individualized instruction method in place has also many advantages; as Harmer (2007) asserts, individualized learning "allows teachers to respond to individual student differences in terms of pace of learning, learning styles and preferences" (p. 164). However, studying mathematics or French as a first language is not the same as learning an L2 in a community where students do not have opportunities to practice the target language. The new ESL programs require learners to develop oral skills, but they do not provide a formula to implement oral interaction in the individualized instruction setting; and both students and teachers are well aware of the lack of oral practice in the ESL classroom (see Section 4.6.1).

On the other hand, a multilevel classroom is not easy to cope with (Esteve et al., 2012), and ESL teachers in Adult General Education, having to supervise a classroom with students from Secondary I through Secondary V, have their hands full. They must create and adapt learning activities, prepare students to present exams, do individual oral evaluations, correct exams, provide grammar explanations and fulfill the corresponding administrative tasks. As the classroom teacher mentioned, there is not enough time to work individually with each student to develop their oral skills and pronunciation (Classroom teacher, Discussion). Teachers have to be creative and find ways to practice oral interaction, which is indeed a challenge when each student has an individualized schedule and the group changes daily.

Participants made suggestions about how to include more oral interaction in the adult education classroom, including doing projects similar to this one on a regular basis: "Maybe try to do something like that, try to organize a program like this, not just one person a couple of weeks" (S3, Group discussion #1). They also suggested having two teachers, "*Ça prendrait deux prof… un pour le parler et l'autre pour l'écrire*" (S4, Group discussion #1), or including oral interaction in the ESL schedule (Pilot study).

This study shows that working in small groups is a possible solution and can create a sense of belonging often missing in individualized learning (Harmer, 2007). Teachers can use the portfolio pedagogy with students to develop oral skills in small groups, i.e., discussing videos with questions per CEFR level, and learners can support each other towards reaching their goals. For example, we saw in this study that S2 firmly grasped how to work with the portfolio. As suggested by Kristmanson et al. (2013), he could explain to his colleagues how to set goals and do self-evaluation. But each group has its own mechanics. In this study, participants were invested and cooperated with each other; certainly, a positive attitude is needed for a group to work in harmony.

Given that the Adult General Education competency-based approach programs have been recently implemented, in 2016 and 2017 (see Section 1.5), time is needed to adjust. This also applies to the use of the CEFR and the language portfolio - time and effort are needed to marry principle and practice (Kohonen, 2012; Ushioda & Ridley, 2002; Kristmanson et al., 2011; North et al., 2010). In this research study, I had the opportunity to work with the portfolio and my students in the pilot and main studies - not a lot of practice, but more than the classroom teacher, who only had the chance to acquaint herself for three months. As

Esteve et al. (2012) pointed out, teachers who are not familiar with the portfolio may feel insecure with regard to this pedagogical tool.

Another consideration for the use of the portfolio, apart from the time it takes to familiarize oneself with it, is the amount of work that would be required to match the whole secondary curricula to CEFR levels in detail. It would be interesting if we could evaluate students per skill instead of giving them a general grade (Classroom teacher, Interview). As Little (2012) proposes, the biggest challenge for the widespread use of the portfolio is the lack of evident relation between official examinations and *can do* descriptors, which can be overcome if curriculum goals are directly linked to the CEFR descriptors (see Section 2.5.4).

The findings in this study show benefits for all participants –learners, educators and researcher--, as expected in participatory action research (Watters et al., 2010). As Bergold and Thomas (2012) point out, the interaction between science and practice is a demanding process, but it certainly fosters professional development (Ginns et al., 2001). For instance, I saw firsthand that the best learning comes from discussion with others and personal reflection (Little and Perclová, 2001), as I saw students developing oral skills in group discussions. Keeping an action research journal (Morrissette, 2013) was also a useful tool that helped me see my evolution as a teacher and researcher, keep track of students' learning process, set and follow guiding principles and see the research cycles in action (plan, act, observe, reflect, classify data, analyze, regroup and repeat the cycle) (Burns, 2010; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). As an instructor, I have learned to be more observant and take things more slowly. I encourage all teachers willing to grow professionally to engage in action research.

Finally, as North et al., (2010) point out, "adapting, the CEFR to their own teaching approach is an important competence for teachers" (p. 3). And that is exactly what I did. My challenge was to explore opportunities to use the target language with the CEFR and portfolio as a guide in the unique context of individualized instruction, and the results were positive. At the personal and professional level, "the use of the portfolio is not without rewards" (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002). It takes time for teachers to familiarize themselves with the portfolio pedagogy, but the payoff of helping students to own their learning process and giving them a voice is absolutely worth it.

5.5. Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations of this study is its small sample size; only six students in the main study (out of 42 registered when it began) and four in the pilot study (out of 30) participated. Students were engaged in the project, but they were also busy with life in adult school and some missed two workshops and were absent several times from the classroom during the time of the research. Four participants were in the student council and had to attend meetings and other events, which reflected the reality of adult school. As suggested by Marcotte et al. (2014), the majority of the population are more engaged in the exploration of their identity than in their studies. However, the fact that there were few participants allowed a deep

understanding of the way they used the portfolio to gain control over their learning. As explained in Section 4.7.1, a small group of six was an ideal number for students to get involved in group work and discussions.

Another limitation was the short duration of the main study; students who had participated in the pilot study saw the difference. In the pilot study, we had the opportunity to meet three times per week "and this one only one, so short, it's hard" (S4, Interview). Action research, as observed by Morissette (2013), demands an extended in situ presence - even several months. Between the pilot and main studies, this project comprised a number of 1- to 3-hour workshops during 24 weeks. Students who participated in both experienced more benefits, such as a better knowledge of the portfolio and the *can do* descriptors; they knew what to expect in terms of reflection, and had a longer period of time to develop their oral skills and confidence. Grasping the concepts of the portfolio pedagogy takes time, as does building a learning community (see Section 4.7.2).

As for future research, it would be interesting to have an entire Adult General Education ESL class working in small groups with the language portfolio to develop oral skills. Learners could work in groups during several periods of time per week, and the particular logistics of the multilevel individualized instruction classroom should be taken in consideration.. A whole school year study would be advisable, since teachers and students alike need time to become familiar with both the portfolio pedagogy and a small group setting. As the classroom teacher mentioned, learners at different school levels who share similar CEFR goals can work togerther; and having CEFR learning goals, in this study, helped students be at the center of their learning process (see Section 4.7.1).

My second suggestion for future research concerns the reporting function of the ELP. The portfolio's advantages are many and go beyond the classroom. As mentioned in Section 3.2.2.1, the portfolio has been shown to employers who, as suggested by Hermans and Piccardo (2012), appreciate knowing clearly and specifically what a person can do in the target language. Given that one of the motivations of the adult school student population is related to finding a better job, it would be interesting to ask some employers in the region what they expect of future employees in terms of their abilities in English, in relation to the CEFR descriptors. Student could then work towards reaching these specific goals.

5.6. Conclusion

When I started this study, Leni Dam's words of not wanting to be in front of inactive students "used to be spoon-fed" (Dam, 2012, p. 4) resonated well with me and guided my first steps towards researching autonomy. Acting autonomously is a fundamental competency that allows all citizens to contribute to society's well-being, for it encompasses family, the workplace, and social life (OECD, 2003; 2005). In this respect, every action taken by educators towards helping students own their learning process and develop learner autonomy will have broader repercussions.

Working with the portfolio and CEFR towards autonomy implies a new way of teaching. It involves students setting learning goals and planning to achieve them, monitoring their progress, and assessing their outcomes. All this comes with a great deal of teacher guidance, reflection and, most importantly, working in teams in the target language to ensure acquisition. The portfolio pedagogy is compatible with the theory of andragogy that says that teaching adults should centre more on the process of learning.

Learner autonomy starts with the teacher, with a shift in the teacher's role from transmitter of information to facilitator of learning (Karlsson et al, 1997; Little, 1995). From a personal perspective, experiencing this was the most important outcome of the present study, along with the rewards of participatory action research which include facilitating communication, empowering students and giving them a voice, as well as creating a positive impact at the local level. Having communicated here some of what I have learned in the past two years and being ready for new challenges, my hope is that this study contributes to empowering ESL teachers and learners in adult education.

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Appendix 1: CEFR Tables

CEFR Table 1: Common Reference Levels - global scale

Proficient User	**C2**	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	**B2**	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	**A2**	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

CEFR Table 2: Common Reference Levels - self-assessment grid

	Reception		Interaction		Production	
	Listening	**Reading**	**Spoken Interaction**	**Written Interaction**	**Spoken Production**	**Written Production**
C2	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.	I can express myself with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively in an assured, personal, style.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.	I can write clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles, which present a case with an effective logical structure, which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.
C1	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers		I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write detailed expositions of complex subjects in an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can write different kinds of texts in a style appropriate to the reader in mind.
B2	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular stances or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view.
B1	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency every day or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes & ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can write straightforward connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest.
A2	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job	I can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like *and*, *but* and *because*.
A1	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can write a short, simple postcard, for examples sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.

CEFR Table 3:

**Common Reference Levels - qualitative aspects of spoken language use**

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/ herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much con-spicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he / she needs to, though he /she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution.
B1	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circum-locutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
A2	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and, "but" and "because".
A1	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair.	Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like "and" or "then".

Appendix 2: Portfolio Contents, Dossier, Pilot Study

PORTFOLIO LE RETOUR
March – June 2018
Can do Descriptors[13]

→	I want to be able to do this.
✓	I can do this but with difficulty.
✓✓	I can do this well and with ease.

A1.1

Listening

#1	Understand numbers, price, time expressions	

A1.2

Spoken Production

#2	Provide information about everything I do in everyday life using simple language	
#4	Say if I want or do not want to do something	

A2.1

Spoken Production

#2	Express simply and comprehensibly what I like or do not like and why	
#4	Describe my daily personal or professional activities	
#6	Briefly describe my plans for the weekend	

Spoken Interaction

#1	Ask or answer simple questions about a past event	
#2	Ask and answer simple questions about home, work and free time, likes and dislikes	
#6	Discuss plans with other people	

A2.2

Listening

#1	Understand when people talk to me about everyday things as long as I can ask for help	
#3	Understand main information in the news (TV or radio) if spoken slowly and clearly	

Spoken Interaction

#4	Answer questions of a personal nature in an interview if asked in simple language, with a slow and clear flow	
#5	Give simple directions and instructions	

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[13] Poirier & Clavet (2017)

Appendix 3: Student Group Interview, Pilot Study

Pilot Study: Validation of Data Collection Tools

Guiding Questions

Validation des instruments
La recherche action nécessite discussion, évaluation des possibilités et examen des contraintes. Dans ce cadre, la validation des instruments est essentielle à ma démarche de recherche, car un des instruments, le Portfolio des langues pour adultes, est nouvellement construit (Samson & Toussaint, 2004)

LEARNER INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR LEARNING: PLANNING, MONITORING, EVALUATING

Setting goals

1. Is this the first time you set English learning goals?
2. Is it useful to work with descriptors of what you can do in English?
3. Has this project helped you reach your English goals at school?

Self-evaluation

4. The reflection scale (p. 9): does it help you to monitor (step by step) and evaluate your progress? Would you modify it?
5. Please compare self-evaluation tools: in your book, grids, CEFR descriptors. What do you prefer and why?
6. In this project you have to evaluate yourself. Is this accurate? Is this stressful? Why?

LEARNER REFLECTION: REFLECTING ON THE LEARNING PROCESS AND CONTENT

7. Is this the first time you write your reflections about learning English?
8. Writing about how and what you learn: has it helped you or not? If yes, how?
9. Tell me about the advantages/disadvantages of working in a small group like this one.
10. Do you see the portfolio as a guide for learning English even if you were not at school?
11. Is the progression from one level to the other clear all the time?
12. Did you find learning material to attain your goals (i.e., at A2 level) on the Internet?

TARGET LANGUAGE USE

13. This group is an opportunity to use English (listen and speak). Have you tried to speak English at all times in this group? Why, why not?
14. Has your English improved?
15. Are you proud of your progress in English?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

16. In this project, I have taught grammar explicitly. Is that helpful?
17. How can we handle working with the portfolio and working on a textbook here in adult education?
18. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix 4: Analytical Observations Grid, Main Study

OBSERVATION PARTICIPANTE
GRILLE D'OBSERVATION (adaptée de Aldana, 2005)

Notes d'observation au sujet de la façon dont les participants utilisent le Portfolio. Par _____(name)

Date:	One grid per workshop (student-researcher)			
Student's name:	One grid per student (classroom teacher)			
Actions or goals	**Students responses**		**Teacher's role**	**Analysis**
	Plan / Monitor / Evaluate / Reflect / Use English / Collaboration	Other observations		

Appendix 5: Interviews and Discussions, Main Study

DISCUSSION AND INTERVIEW WITH THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

DISCUSSION
November 21st, 2018
35 min. length
Subjects

- Her situation this year, teaching English and French
- The individualized instruction method and ESL teaching
- Students' performance, motivations and goals
- Possible ways to develop oral skills
- Working with the portfolio
- Reflection for learning
- The pilot study

INTERVIEW
December 13th 2018
70 min. length
Guiding questions

Learner involvement in their learning: planning, monitoring, evaluating

1. Did you find students' self-assessment accurate?
2. What are your observations about students working with *can do* goals?
3. What are your observations about students' use of the reflection scale for monitoring and evaluating their goals?
4. Are your students proud of/confident about what they have learned along the project?

Learner reflection: reflecting on the learning process and content.

5. How can students benefit from reflecting on their learning?
6. Did students bring some of their own material (i.e., videos, music)
7. Has working with the Portfolio and the CEFR helped you be more aware of certain aspects of your teaching?
8. Has working with the Portfolio helped you realize which language skills your students should improve?
9. Do you see the portfolio as a guide for learning English? How?

Target language use

10. Tell me about your students' progress in learning English with the project.
11. Has working with the portfolio helped your students improve their English oral skills? How?
12. What do you think about some of the tools we used in the project to develop oral skills, specifically the graphic organizer and the questions per CEFR level?
13. Tell me about the advantages/disadvantages of working in small groups.

Professional development
14. Has working with the portfolio helped you support your professional development?
15. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH THE STUDENTS

GROUP DISCUSSION # 1

November 28th 2018
20 min. length
Participants: S1A, S2, S3, S4, S6A (S5 Absent)
Guiding questions:
- Do you think that your English will improve (become better)?
- What is the best way to learn ESL? What are your favourite activities?
- How can you improve your oral skills in adult school?

GROUP DISCUSSION #2

December 12, 2018
20 min. length
Participants:
S1A, S2, S3, S4, S6A (S5, absent), one bilingual guest and the classroom teacher

QUESTIONNAIRE

What did you find useful in this project?

1	2	3	4
Very useful	A little useful	Not useful at all	I don't know

1. Know my level in English
2. Know what I need to learn next
3. Setting goals
4. Planning
5. Reflecting
6. Collaborating with others
7. Developing oral skills
8. Questions per level
9. Watching videos
10. Talking to other people
11. Working in a small group
12. Organizing ideas with a graphic organizer
13. Preview vocabulary before watching a video
14. Learn the vocabulary I need to reach my goals
15. Study vocabulary with Quizlet
16. Learn about the CEFR for Canada
17. Making a video with Flipgrip
18. Real situations like the garage sale
19. Speaking with a bilingual person

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1. What did you find the most useful (1) in this project? Name your top 3 points.
2. Is it your responsibility or the teacher's responsibility to take initiative to practice oral skills?
In adult school, we don't generally work in groups. What are the advantages or disadvantages of working in a small group to develop oral skills?

STUDENT INDIVIDUAL FINAL INTERVIEW

GUIDELINES

PORTFOLIO PROJECT

First of all, thank you for participating in this project.

LEARNER INVOLVEMENT

Setting goals and planning.

- Let's review your goals…
- Please choose one and tell me some of the specific actions you can do to achieve your goal when working on your own (i.e., do a vocabulary list, study a situation with a video, practice orally with someone)

LEARNER REFLECTION

- Do you think it's useful to talk about how we learn? Why?
- In this project we watched videos.   Before the video we identified some of the vocabulary needed to talk about the video.   Do you find that this is helpful? Why?

TARGET LANGUAGE USE

- Cultural goals: Do you use English out of school?
- To discuss videos, we worked with questions per CEFR level. Are these questions a good guide to help you speak according to your level? Why?
- We had some guests who speak English. Was it helpful to develop oral skills? Why?

GENERAL
What did gain with your participation in this project?

Appendix 6: Informed Consent Letters

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT ÉTUDIANTS

TITRE DU PROJET DE RECHERCHE : AUTONOMY FOR SUCCESS: CONTRIBUTION OF THE ADULT-BASED LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO TO ESL STUDENTS' AUTONOMY

NOM DES CHERCHEURS ET LEUR APPARTENANCE : Beatriz Rojas Guiza, étudiante à la maîtrise en éducation.

DIRECTRICE DE RECHERCHE : Maria Lourdes Lira Gonzales, Ph. D.

COMMANDITAIRE OU SOURCE DE FINANCEMENT :

CERTIFICAT D'ÉTHIQUE DÉLIVRÉ PAR LE COMITÉ D'ÉTHIQUE DE LA RECHERCHE DE L'UQAT LE : 8 AOÛT 2018

PRÉAMBULE

Nous vous demandons de participer à un projet de recherche qu'implique apprendre à être plus autonome dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais avec le *Portfolio des langues pour adultes* ainsi que pratiquer l'anglais oral dans un petit groupe avec l'étudiante-chercheuse de l'UQAT (Beatriz Rojas) et votre enseignante (_____). Avant d'accepter de participer à ce projet de recherche, veuillez prendre le temps de comprendre et de considérer attentivement les renseignements qui suivent.

Ce formulaire de consentement vous explique le but de cette étude, sa méthodologie, ses avantages, ses risques et inconvénients. Il inclut également le nom des personnes avec qui communiquer si vous avez des questions concernant le déroulement de la recherche ou vos droits en tant que participant.

Le présent formulaire de consentement peut contenir des mots que vous ne comprenez pas. Nous vous invitons à poser toutes les questions que vous jugerez utiles à l'étudiante-chercheuse et à lui demander de vous expliquer tout mot ou renseignement qui n'est pas clair.

BUT DE LA RECHERCHE

L'objectif de cette étude est d'explorer la contribution du *Portfolio* à l'autonomie des étudiants d'ALS du Centre de formation générale Le Retour (La Sarre, QC). Les quatre questions de recherche sont :

Quelle est la contribution du *Portfolio* à l'autonomie des étudiants par rapport à :
- leur capacité à prendre des décisions: planifier, surveiller et évaluer leur apprentissage?
- leur capacité de réflexion critique?
- leur capacité d'utiliser l'anglais de façon appropriée, spontanée et indépendante?
Quel est le rôle de l'enseignante dans le développement de l'autonomie des apprenants avec le Portfolio?

Nous travaillerons avec tous les volontaires majeures (+18) qui désirent participer au projet.

DESCRIPTION DE VOTRE PARTICIPATION À LA RECHERCHE

Vous devez participer à 13 rencontres de septembre à novembre 2018 : une rencontre par semaine, d'une durée de 3 heures. Les rencontres, conduites par votre enseignante et l'étudiante-chercheuse, consistent à apprendre à utiliser le Portfolio des langues en tant que guide pour étudier l'anglais, ainsi qu'à pratiquer l'anglais oralement.

À la fin du projet, vous devrez participer à une entrevue individuelle d'une durée de 50 à 90 minutes, qui sera enregistrée en format audio. L'entrevue, avec l'étudiante-chercheuse, sera en anglais ou français, selon votre choix.

Les rencontres et l'entrevue auront lieu à l'école.

AVANTAGES POUVANT DÉCOULER DE VOTRE PARTICIPATION

En participant à cette recherche, vous aurez l'occasion de développer davantage vos compétences orales en anglais. Vous contribuerez aussi à l'avancement des connaissances sur l'apport du *Portfolio des langues pour adultes* à l'autonomie des étudiants.

RISQUES ET INCONVÉNIENTS POUVANT DÉCOULER DE VOTRE PARTICIPATION

Le fait de choisir de participer ou de ne pas participer n'aura aucune incidence directe sur les résultats obtenus dans vos examens finaux.

La participation à cette recherche ne comporte aucun risque ou inconvénient à part le temps investi. Dans les rencontres, qui se feront durant vos périodes d'anglais, vous travaillerez sur le développement de votre autonomie et vos compétences orales en anglais.

ENGAGEMENTS ET MESURES VISANT À ASSURER LA CONFIDENTIALITÉ

Toutes les données liées à la recherche resteront confidentielles. Les renseignements seront codés, c'est-à-dire que l'on en retire les identificateurs directs pour les remplacer par un code (ex., un numéro) dans les documents de recherche, incluant les retranscriptions d'entrevues. Uniquement l'étudiante-chercheuse, votre enseignante et la directrice de recherche auront accès aux données recueillies. Cependant, étant donné que la population de l'école des adultes n'est pas nombreuse, il pourrait être possible que l'on vous identifie lors de la divulgation des résultats dans des articles scientifiques ou professionnels.

INDEMNITÉ COMPENSATOIRE
Aucune indemnité compensatoire ne sera accordée.

COMMERCIALISATION DES RÉSULTATS
Les résultats ne seront pas commercialisés.

CONFLITS D'INTÉRÊTS

Dans une première étape de la recherche (l'année passée), l'étudiante-chercheuse (Beatriz Rojas) était votre enseignante. Dans l'étape de la collecte de données, de septembre à novembre, votre l'enseignante (Annick Dubois) participera à la recherche.

Quand un enseignant participe à une recherche, il est en situation de double rôle. Ce double rôle crée un conflit d'intérêt potentiel, car les enseignants et les étudiants entretiennent de relations de confiance. Afin de préserver la confiance et d'éclairer votre choix de participer ou pas, soyez assuré que votre participation est libre en tout moment. Aussi, soyez attentif à l'explication du projet et posez toutes les questions qui vous intriguent.

DIFFUSION DES RÉSULTATS

Si vous le souhaitez, lors de la publication d'articles professionnels ou scientifiques sur les résultats de la recherche vous recevrez par courriel une lettre de remerciements, ainsi que le lien internet pour accéder aux articles.

Si c'est le cas, SVP indiquez ici votre adresse électronique :

_____

CLAUSE DE RESPONSABILITÉ
En acceptant de participer à cette étude, vous ne renoncez à aucun de vos droits ni ne libérez l'étudiante-chercheuse ou les institutions impliquées de leurs obligations légales et professionnelles à votre égard.

LA PARTICIPATION DANS UNE RECHERCHE EST VOLONTAIRE.

Votre collaboration est entièrement volontaire et vous avez le droit de refuser de participer.

Vous avez le droit de vous retirer en tout temps du projet et de demander la destruction des données vous concernant.

Un refus ou un retrait de votre part ne modifiera en rien la qualité ou la quantité des services que vous recevez à l'école.

Pour tout renseignement supplémentaire concernant vos droits, vous pouvez vous adresser au :

Comité d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains
Vice-rectorat à l'enseignement, à la recherche et à la création
Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
445, boulevard de l'Université, bureau B-309
Rouyn-Noranda (Québec) J9X 5E4
Téléphone : 819 762-0971 poste 2252   Courriel : cer@uqat.ca

CONSENTEMENT

Je, soussigné(e), accepte volontairement de participer à l'étude *AUTONOMY FOR SUCCESS: CONTRIBUTION OF THE ADULT-BASED LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO TO ESL STUDENTS' AUTONOMY.*

_____

Nom du participant (lettres moulées)

_____   _____

Signature du participant   Date

_____

Nom du représentant légal (lettres moulées) [à conserver lorsque cela s'applique]

_____   _____

Signature du représentant légal   Date

Ce consentement a été obtenu par :

Beatriz Rojas Guiza_____

Nom du chercheur ou de l'agent de recherche (lettres moulées)

_____   _____

Signature   Date

QUESTIONS

Si vous avez d'autres questions plus tard et tout au long de cette étude, vous pouvez joindre :

Beatriz Rojas Guiza,_____

Veuillez conserver un exemplaire de ce formulaire pour vos dossiers.

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT : ENSEIGNANTE

TITRE DU PROJET DE RECHERCHE : AUTONOMY FOR SUCCESS: CONTRIBUTION OF THE *ADULT-BASED LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO* TO ESL STUDENTS' AUTONOMY

NOM DES CHERCHEURS ET LEUR APPARTENANCE : Beatriz Rojas Guiza, étudiante à la maîtrise en éducation.

DIRECTRICE DE RECHERCHE : Maria Lourdes Lira Gonzales, Ph. D.

COMMANDITAIRE OU SOURCE DE FINANCEMENT :

CERTIFICAT D'ÉTHIQUE DÉLIVRÉ PAR LE COMITÉ D'ÉTHIQUE DE LA RECHERCHE DE L'UQAT LE : 8 AOÛT 2018

PRÉAMBULE

Nous vous demandons de participer à un projet de recherche qui implique explorer la contribution du *Portfolio des langues pour adultes* à l'autonomie des étudiants d'anglais langue seconde (ALS). Les étudiants participeront à 13 rencontres, conduites par vous et l'enseignante-chercheuse de l'UQAT (Beatriz Rojas), et développeront des compétences orales en anglais. Avant d'accepter de participer à ce projet de recherche, veuillez prendre le temps de comprendre et de considérer attentivement les renseignements qui suivent.

Ce formulaire de consentement vous explique le but de cette étude, sa méthodologie, ses avantages, ses risques et inconvénients. Il inclut également le nom des personnes avec qui communiquer si vous avez des questions concernant le déroulement de la recherche ou vos droits en tant que participant.

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Quelle est la contribution du *Portfolio* à l'autonomie des étudiants par rapport à :
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- leur capacité de réflexion critique?
- leur capacité d'utiliser l'anglais de façon appropriée, spontanée et indépendante?
Quel est le rôle de l'enseignante dans le développement de l'autonomie des apprenants avec le Portfolio?

Nous travaillerons avec tous les volontaires majeures (+18) qui désirent participer au projet.

DESCRIPTION DE VOTRE PARTICIPATION À LA RECHERCHE

Avec l'étudiante-chercheuse, vous devez conduire 13 rencontres de septembre à novembre 2018 : une rencontre par semaine, d'une durée de 3 heures. Les rencontres consistent à guider les étudiants participants dans l'utilisation du *Portfolio* pour apprendre l'ALS, spécialement le développement de leurs compétences orales.

Durant ou après les rencontres, à l'aide d'une grille d'observation (ci-jointe), vous devez prendre des notes d'observation au sujet de la façon dont les participants utilisent le portfolio, ainsi qu'au sujet de votre rôle dans le développement de l'autonomie des apprenants avec le Portfolio.

À la fin du projet, vous devrez participer à une entrevue individuelle d'une durée de 50 à 90 minutes, qui sera enregistrée en format audio. L'entrevue, avec l'étudiante-chercheuse, sera en anglais ou français, selon votre choix.

Les rencontres et l'entrevue auront lieu à l'école.

AVANTAGES POUVANT DÉCOULER DE VOTRE PARTICIPATION

Votre participation à cette recherche est une opportunité de développement professionnelle, ainsi qu'une occasion de contribuer à l'avancement des connaissances sur l'apport du *Portfolio des langues pour adultes* à l'autonomie des étudiants.

RISQUES ET INCONVÉNIENTS POUVANT DÉCOULER DE VOTRE PARTICIPATION

Votre participation à cette recherche ne comporte aucun risque ou inconvénient à part le temps investi.

ENGAGEMENTS ET MESURES VISANT À ASSURER LA CONFIDENTIALITÉ

Toutes les données liées à la recherche resteront confidentielles. Les renseignements seront codés, c'est-à-dire que l'on en retire les identificateurs directs pour les remplacer par un code (ex., numéro) dans les documents de recherche, incluant les retranscriptions d'entrevues. Uniquement vous, l'étudiante-chercheuse et la directrice de recherche auront accès aux données recueillies. Cependant, étant donné que vous êtes la seule enseignante d'ALS à l'école, vous serez facilement identifiée lors de la divulgation des résultats dans des articles scientifiques ou professionnels.

INDEMNITÉ COMPENSATOIRE
Aucune indemnité compensatoire ne sera accordée.

COMMERCIALISATION DES RÉSULTATS
Les résultats ne seront pas commercialisés.

CONFLITS D'INTÉRÊTS

Dans une première étape de la recherche (l'année passée), l'étudiante-chercheuse (Beatriz Rojas) était l'enseignante du groupe d'ALS. Dans l'étape de la collecte de données, de septembre à novembre, vous serez l'enseignante.

Quand un enseignant participe à une recherche, il est en situation de double rôle. Ce double rôle crée un conflit d'intérêt potentiel, car les enseignants et les étudiants entretiennent de relations de confiance. Afin de préserver la confiance des étudiants et d'éclairer leur choix de participer ou pas, nous devons les assurer que leur participation est libre en tout moment; nous devons aussi être disponibles afin de répondre à leur questions et inquiétudes.

DIFFUSION DES RÉSULTATS

Vous êtes invitée à participer en tant que co-auteure à la publication d'une Chronique de la recherche étudiante dans la revue Formation et profession du CRIFPE, ainsi que d'un article dans le bulletin de l'Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes.

Si vous préférez ne pas publier, lors de la publication d'articles professionnels ou scientifiques sur les résultats de la recherche vous recevrez par courriel une lettre de remerciements, ainsi que le lien internet pour accéder aux articles.

Si c'est le cas, SVP indiquez ici votre adresse électronique :

_____

CLAUSE DE RESPONSABILITÉ
En acceptant de participer à cette étude, vous ne renoncez à aucun de vos droits ni ne libérez l'étudiante-chercheuse ou les institutions impliquées de leurs obligations légales et professionnelles à votre égard.

LA PARTICIPATION DANS UNE RECHERCHE EST VOLONTAIRE.

Votre collaboration est entièrement volontaire et vous avez le droit de refuser de participer. Vous avez le droit de vous retirer en tout temps du projet et de demander la destruction des données vous concernant. Un refus ou un retrait de votre part ne modifiera en rien votre relation avec l'école.

Pour tout renseignement supplémentaire concernant vos droits, vous pouvez vous adresser au :

Comité d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains
Vice-rectorat à l'enseignement, à la recherche et à la création
Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
445, boulevard de l'Université, bureau B-309
Rouyn-Noranda (Québec) J9X 5E4
Téléphone : 819 762-0971 poste 2252. Courriel : cer@uqat.ca

CONSENTEMENT

Je, soussigné(e), accepte volontairement de participer à l'étude *AUTONOMY FOR SUCCESS: CONTRIBUTION OF THE ADULT-BASED LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO TO ESL STUDENTS' AUTONOMY.*

_____

Nom du participant (lettres moulées)

_____   _____

Signature du participant   Date

_____

Nom du représentant légal (lettres moulées) [à conserver lorsque cela s'applique]

_____   _____

Signature du représentant légal   Date

Ce consentement a été obtenu par :

Beatriz Rojas Guiza_____

Nom du chercheur ou de l'agent de recherche (lettres moulées)

_____   _____

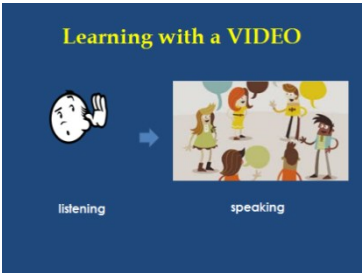Signature   Date

QUESTIONS

Si vous avez d'autres questions plus tard et tout au long de cette étude, vous pouvez joindre :

Beatriz Rojas Guiza,_____

Veuillez conserver un exemplaire de ce formulaire pour vos dossiers.

Learning with a VIDEO

listening   speaking

A2.2 Listening: Understand short simple stories
Video: Graphic Organizer

PREPARATION

CONTEXT: author, place, characters, etc.	PREVIEW AND PREDICT: fast forward, partial viewing

VOCABULARY

WATCH (2) AND TAKE NOTES

WHO	WHAT

WHERE	WHEN

SUMMARY – level B1.1

MY OPINION ON THE VIDEO

WHAT I LEARNED: new words, general knowledge, expressions WHAT STRATEGY WAS USEFUL: context, predict, vocabulary, who/what/where

Appendix 8: Questions per CEFR level

VIDEO + ORAL INTERACTION: QUESTIONS PER CEFR LEVEL

VOCABULARY

A1.2

Where are the people in the video (city/country)? What countries are mentioned?
How's the weather?
Name some of the activities they do in the video. Do you like…?
Name some of the objects (ex, food) we see in the video. Do you like…?
Describe a person: hair / eye color, voice, qualities, height, etc…

A2.1

Do you understand the dialogues/explanations?
Describe one of the places you saw in the video.
Have you been to a place like that? (a place in the video)
Would you like to…? (some of the activities in the video)

A2.2

What is the subject in this video?
What is the main message?
What do you think about this video?   What do you like and what you don't like?
What do you think of _____? (some activity in the video)
Describe briefly a similar activity you've done.
Compare this video with another one.

B1.1

Describe in detail / the main message presented in the video / a similar activity.
What are some of the problems you might encounter in a similar situation?
Describe in detail your arguments for and against a similar situation.

OPINION