

Mapping the terrain of learner autonomy:
Learning environments, learning communities and identities

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Preface

This book project started when Sara Cotterall, one of the convenors of the Independent Learning Association's 2007 conference, approached me about the possibility of putting proceedings together. I felt that it was too much of a responsibility considering my work situation at that time, but I was also aware that a book to initiate Japanese-speaking language teachers into the field of learner autonomy had been long overdue. So I suggested selecting papers appropriate for that purpose and making them into a Japanese book. The conveners, Lucy Cooker, Garold Murray and Sara, kindly accepted my suggestion. (They subsequently decided to produce web-based proceedings as a separate project.)

What was going to be a relaxed conference for me after delivering an invited talk on the morning of the first day became an extremely busy one. I talked to many people inviting them to contribute to the project. I also talked Yoshi Nakata into being my co-editor, and Phil Benson and Peter Voller into helping with reviewing the papers.

After the conference Flis Kjisik, one of the people who had agreed to contribute, thought that it would be a pity if the book was only available in Japanese. She volunteered to look for a publisher who would publish an English edition. I thought that was a great idea. I

also thought that it would require English-speaking co-editor(s). Flis and Peter readily accepted my invitation. Unfortunately Phil was too busy with other projects. So the four of us, Flis, Peter, Yoshi and myself, became an editorial team.

This volume includes conference papers by Henri Holec, Marie-José Gremmo, Klaus Schwienhorst and Phil Benson, and specially commissioned papers by Garold Murray, Leena Karlsson and Felicity Kjisik, and David Little. Yoshiyuki Nakata and myself also wrote something different from our conference talks.

I immensely enjoyed working with all these wonderful people dedicated to the practice of learner autonomy. I learned a lot from their wisdom. I am extremely grateful for their willingness and patience in bringing this book into reality.

Naoko Aoki

Kobe, 8 June 2009

Introduction

NAOKO AOKI, PETER VOLLER, FELICITY KJISIK, YOSHIYUKI NAKATA

The past few years have seen quite a number of books on learner autonomy published for the international market (see, for instance, the following collections of papers: Lamb & Reinders 2006, Barfield & Brown 2007, Benson 2007, Gardner 2007, Miller 2007, Lamb & Reinders 2008, Hurd & Lewis 2008, Pemberton, Toogood & Barfield 2009). It is a sign of the maturity of the field and it is a welcome one. However, this expansion of existing literature has a drawback. Topics in these publications are increasingly diversified and specialized. For someone who has just started reading in the field it has become rather difficult to obtain a big picture of what it is that we are discussing. David Little (1991) and Phil Benson (2001) have written very good general introductions to the field, but what would be the third book to recommend? And for those who have been in the field quite a while it is sometimes difficult to see where we are going in the plethora of new publications. We need to step back to have a vision for the future. This book has been conceived to serve these different purposes.

We have grouped nine chapters in four parts. Part One, “Looking back and taking stock”, actually contains only one chapter. Here Henri Holec observes a wide range of different types of practice reported un-

der the banner of learner autonomy and claims that there are actually two paradigms in the approaches to autonomy in language learning. One paradigm concerns instructed learning. It aims to increase the learner's responsibility in the management of teaching programmes, but teachers always remain, at least partially, in control. In that sense Holec calls this type of arrangement co-directed. The other paradigm tries to produce self-directed learners, by reducing the amount of help provided in order for learners to make decisions concerning their own learning. Learners are expected to become able to take control of their learning without intervention from teachers. These two paradigms may exist in different parts of the world. Or one may replace the other over time in a particular place. A third possibility is that a single programme embraces both paradigms. Holec acknowledges that the implementation of the self-directed paradigm requires provision of learner training, teacher training and learning resources, which makes it more challenging than the co-directed paradigm. He maintains, however, that with the ever-expanding language learner population in response to the world-wide need for multilingualism and plurilingualism the self-directed paradigm is called for to meet increasingly diverse learners' needs. Holec concludes his chapter on a positive note, "*Where there's a will, there's a way.*"

Part Two, "Three examples", offers examples of different types of learner autonomy practice, which, we believe, are representative of the state of the art. In Chapter 2 David Little celebrates the achievement of learners who learned English at the sadly now defunct Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT). IILT provided refugees in Ireland with language training from 1999 to 2008. After laying out a theoretical foundation of their practice from the perspective of human psychology Little describes IILT's organizational framework and explains the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which was used as a tool to help learners develop learner autonomy, with some examples of how it was used in IILT's classrooms. Little then discusses the importance of read-

ing and writing in developing learner's second-language identity with some examples of learners' work. In the final section of the chapter Little describes how IILT's courses were integrated into Ireland's adult education system by having them accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council. He contends that this made it possible for learners to relate day-to-day language learning with assessment procedures, to be active participants in decision-making in "an environment in which failures do not exist", and to have access to the same opportunities as native speakers.

In Chapter 3 Klaus Schwienhorst reports on an internet-based tandem learning project between German university students learning English and Irish counterparts learning German. Drawing on the metaphor of improvisation in jazz Schwienhorst convincingly argues that learner autonomy involves reflection, interaction and experimentation. In other words learners need to interact with people and resources, experiment with their language output and reflect on the results in order to learn autonomously. Schwienhorst sees e-tandem as a learning environment that works as affordance (Gibson, 1979) for this process. By analyzing a failure in the beginning of the project and subsequent success, though, he recognizes the need for further support for learners to make the most of available learning opportunities. Feedback, such as providing a full text of learners' chats and indicating real-time the percentages of L1/L2 used during chat sessions, is necessary to facilitate reflection. Based on this observation Schwienhorst discusses the role of learners, teachers and learning environment. His argument is that whereas learners need to take responsibility in their own learning and learning environments can offer tools and opportunities for reflection, interaction and experimentation, teachers have to adjust the learning environment according to the degree of learners' developing autonomy and help learners to perceive affordances that they cannot otherwise recognize.

In Chapter 4 Garold Murray introduces two self-access centres run by Akita International University in northern Japan. One is situated on campus and serves the student population who are enrolled in English medium programmes. The other is located in the city centre and is open to the general public. Murray agrees with Cooker and Torpey (2004, p. 11) that a “state-of-the-art centre does not automatically ensure learner autonomy or independence” and emphasizes the importance of learning structure to help learners develop learner autonomy. By learning structure Murray refers to the guiding principles that support self-directed learning. These principles concern planning, engagement, support, reflection, management and personalization and inform all aspects of decisions in designing and running those centres, from physical layout and selection of resources to forms learners are invited to fill out at various phases of their learning and the arrangement of advising sessions. After explaining these principles and how they determined the role of language education professionals working at the centres and the design of the learning environment Murray walks readers through the process a learner undergoes at the downtown centre from the moment she makes an inquiry about joining. Then he describes what happens over a term at the centre on campus. These two centres accommodate the varying needs of their users and they are naturally run in different ways, but one notable outcome shared by both is that the users of these centres have developed what may be called learning communities. Students on campus informally talk about their learning outside class hours. Users of the downtown centre have developed a social network that extends to their family members and friends, creating opportunities to use English in social occasions.

Part Three, “Advisor, counsellor and teacher development”, looks at what these practitioners need to know, and how their life experience influences their professional quality. In Chapter 5 Mari-José Gremmo analyzes the discourse of advising sessions. Gremmo recognizes four important principles in language advising. First, language advising

focuses on process rather than content. Second, it does not aim to make decisions and it is not based on a power relationship between the advisor and the advisee. Third, it is retro-active in the sense that an advisor only responds to what her advisee says and it is a process of negotiation. Therefore it is not programmable and actually not programmed. Fourth, the work of advisors is informed by language didactics. Taking as an example a series of advising sessions offered by an experienced advisor to a French learner of English, Gremmo shows how these principles are reflected in the verbal behaviour of the advisor. She then traces the change in the learner's behaviour to show how the negotiation process in advising sessions triggered it. Gremmo also compares the transcript of sessions with what the advisor and the advisee said in separate interviews and finds discrepancies between what actually happened and the perceptions of the advisor and the advisee, which Gremmo explains is the result of the difference between their expectations and the kind of change that actually occurred. In the remainder of the chapter Gremmo discusses the nature of advisors' language and the communicative characteristics of advising, the nature of the advisor's expertise, and contextual conditions necessary for successful advising.

In Chapter 6, Leena Karlsson and Felicity Kjisik discuss the use of language memoirs that enable their students to become aware of their narrative learner identities, and of the kaleidoscopic nature of such identities that change as new learning experiences are encountered. They situate this experience within the context of language counselling, and show how the reading of these narratives can take the counselling dialogue to a deeper level of reflection and interaction by considering the role of affect and emotion in the learning experience. After providing an overview of their context, Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) at Helsinki University, Finland, they explain how learners' histories, written as part of the ALMS programme, came to interact with their own autobiographical knowledge as counsellors and researchers. Karlsson

explains how the conceptualization of her research as auto/biography (Stanley, 1992/1995) helped her to understand this process and how it related to one of the main aims of the ALMS programme, *knowing otherwise*. Karlsson and Kjisik then provide examples of learner stories and show how these will, through mutual reflection and relating to the counsellor's own autobiographical experiences, enrich the subsequent counselling sessions, where the mutual *remembering how* (Kramsch, 2005) helps the learner to *imagine what if* (ibid.), that is, to become an autonomous learner with the capacity to plan, implement and self-evaluate her own learning.

In Chapter 7, Yoshiyuki Nakata explains how recent changes in the Japanese educational system, both at the level of national policy and in the way that Japanese secondary schools are organized, may make it possible for the EFL classroom to become a space where autonomy might become a reality. He sees the development of teacher autonomy as a key element for such a transformation to occur. Nakata then discusses how learner autonomy develops, or fails to develop, within a school context. He uses his own narrative history to illustrate how he became autonomous, first as a learner, then as a language learner and finally as a person. He then continues his personal history as an educator to show how a similar developmental process can also inform the notion of teacher autonomy. He emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy and delineates the skills and knowledge that teachers need in order to be autonomous. This leads into a discussion of professional development for teacher autonomy, where Nakata proposes a five-step model in which collegiality, teacher preparedness and a sense of agency will be essential elements. He concludes by emphasizing that teacher autonomy should be a lifelong professional goal, and that his proposed model for professional development should enable teachers and learners to overcome constraints on their autonomy.

Part Four, "Looking ahead", discusses possible future development in research into learner autonomy to further our understanding of what

it is to be an autonomous language learner and what facilitates development of learner autonomy. In Chapter 8 Phil Benson problematizes the distinction between classroom and non-classroom settings and proposes an overarching concept of language learning in everyday life. Benson notes that recent learner autonomy literature tends to deal with autonomy in the classroom whereas from the perspective of individual learners classroom learning may only be a part of their language learning project. This is particularly true in the contemporary world where the advance of technology has created a wide range of opportunities for learning outside language teaching institutions. To understand the complex reality of language learning by a particular learner or a particular group of learners Benson introduces the concepts of setting and mode of practice. Setting refers to a particular kind of arrangement in a particular kind of place with particular kinds of physical, social and instructional relationships among the people involved. Mode of practice is a typical set of routine processes that makes use of the elements of a particular type of setting. A holistic view of someone's language learning will describe it as a configuration of settings and modes of practice. Quoting Lamb's (2004) ethnographic study of independent learning among Indonesian high school students Benson argues that the meanings of a particular configuration are co-constructed by people in a particular community and they need to be understood in their local and historical context.

In Chapter 9 Naoko Aoki focuses on the social contexts of second language speakers of Japanese who live in Japan, some two million people, and questions whether our current understanding of learner autonomy is sufficient to deal with the constraints that many of them face. She discusses three levels of social context that she calls micro-, meso- and macro-levels. At the micro-level, Aoki uses transcripts of conversations between learners of Japanese and Japanese speakers to illustrate how the Japanese speakers can help or hinder the learners' attempts to exercise their autonomy. Her conclusion at this micro-level

is that unskilled helpers can unintentionally limit the development of the learner's competence in the target language and can restrict, or even suppress, their autonomy as learners. At the meso-level, Aoki investigates what happens to second language users in their everyday interactions with native speakers. She uses a case study of a Korean woman married to a Japanese man to show how the second language user's sense of social identity can be positively or negatively influenced by her relationships with native speakers. At the macro-level Aoki looks at economic, social and political contexts of second language users. She tells the story of a third generation Japanese-Brazilian immigrant worker and the difficulties that he has in learning Japanese without financial or professional assistance, even though he is a highly autonomous learner. Study groups have been set up by volunteers throughout Japan to help such immigrant workers, yet participation in such groups is often sporadic, perhaps because of long working hours or because of the lack of training for the volunteers. Aoki concludes by arguing that researchers, teachers and advisors need to take greater account of these three levels of social context, if they really want to understand how learner autonomy works in a learner's and language user's life.

Although the contributors do not necessarily agree in all aspects of their claims we see in these chapters some common themes. One is the importance of tools, environment and structure. Learner autonomy does not exist in a vacuum. Nor does it develop simply through interaction between learners and a teacher/advisor, as many theorists of teacher autonomy believe. Tools such as the European Language Portfolio, physical and social environments that provide meaningful and manageable learning options, and structure that guides learners are all necessary for successful learner autonomy practice. The second common theme is recognition of communities. Communities of learners, communities of teachers/advisors/counsellors and learners, and communities of learners and the people they have contact with outside the classroom all play a role in individual learners' autonomy

practice. The third theme is identity. The contributors claim or imply that development of autonomy in both learners and teachers/advisors involves the development of specific kinds of identities. Finally the need for more qualitative research also emerges from these chapters. Qualitative research could be anywhere from conversation analysis to life story to ethnography. These research methods will allow more in-depth analysis of particular cases, which is expected to shed new light on learners' practice of autonomy. These themes seem to suggest that three important changes are happening in our field. Our perspective of learner autonomy is broadening to include social factors surrounding learners. We are also becoming aware of the need to find out what is actually happening at the site of learning. And in response to these two developments we are starting to use new types of research strategies.

This book is our map of the terrain. We are by no means going to claim that it is the territory. We hope, however, that it will be a useful tool for readers to explore the world of learner autonomy for themselves.

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Part One

Looking back and taking stock

Chapter 1

Autonomy in language learning: A single pedagogical paradigm or two?

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Autonomy-driven or autonomy-inspired language learning environments have been multiplied and diversified over the last decades, as amply illustrated in all the reports on experiments carried out all over the world¹, from full-fledged “stand-alone” structures, like resource centres (Lazaro 2007; *Mélanges Pédagogiques CRAPEL n°22*, 1995), providing learners with integrated learning opportunities, to more limited learning programmes, such as CALL programmes, and even sometimes simple recurrent types of activities (Mizuki 2003). Such environments display a great heterogeneity of proponent- and context-dependent variations, thus bearing witness to the richness and the versatility of the drive towards pedagogical innovation that the concept of autonomy introduced in language education.

Time and again, though, when describing their innovative practice in order to share it with one another and with newcomers, autonomy-

1. cf. relevant entries in Hayo Reinders’ bibliography of learner autonomy, <http://www.hayo.nl/publications.html>

oriented language teachers have unexpectedly discovered that the outward plurality of their endeavours was not always matched by an inward unity of their underlying guiding principles, as seemingly explicitly stated by their common reference to “autonomy” and “autonomous learning”. Such lack of unity, although often hidden by shifts in the meaning of words used to label descriptive categories, like ‘autonomy’, ‘autonomous’, independent’, results in a lack of comparability of the results enumerated, and considerably diminishes the contribution these teachers make to the pedagogical field they are exploring.

These are times when practitioners/researchers are prompted to take time out to give further consideration to the “real” meaning of autonomy, thus reappraising their “theory” on the basis of their “practice” before returning to better reasoned “practice” work.

Such a time being felt to have been reached nowadays, the overall aim of this chapter will be to clarify, not the *lexical meaning* of the word ‘autonomy’, in the hope of reaching a universal definition relevant to all variations in observed pedagogical practice, thus remaining in a “one single paradigm” descriptive framework, but, in a strictly pedagogical perspective, what the word ‘autonomy’ can be seen to be used to *refer to* in the multifarious field of today’s practice of the “autonomy” approach to language learning, thus leaving open a “more than one paradigm” descriptive option. This will, hopefully, help to clarify the fundamental issues and challenges raised by the approach and will, hopefully again, provide an analytical grid for the description of ongoing or future autonomy driven pedagogical endeavours.

As will be shown, two sets of guiding pedagogical principles can account for the numerous different learning environments that are referred to by their proponents as implementations of the “autonomy” approach. Seen in a historical and geographical perspective, these two sets of principles can be seen to be at work either in succession, set one giving way to set two over time in the same place, or independently, set one and set two being both at work, usually in different places or at

different times. Under such circumstances, existing implementations of the “autonomy” approach are best described as tokens of one of the two sets of principles, with possible borderline cases pertaining to both, these in turn being considered as the two states which the “autonomy” pedagogical landscape can be seen to have reached.

State one type of implementations

The fundamental guiding principles common to all implementations in state one of the “autonomy” approach are the following:

(i) the *reference language-learning paradigm* or framework is *instructed learning*, learning that is *guided* by teachers via their teaching, usually in face-to-face classroom interaction, or based on pre-constructed and pre-adapted teaching materials provided in various forms of distance teaching;

(ii) their “*autonomy*” focus is on the *development of co-directed learning*, that is, a non traditional type of instructed learning that allows learners to co-participate in the guidance of their learning; no particular attention is paid to the development of the learners’ ability to do this, which is thus left to ‘side-effect’ acquisition;

(iii) their *aim* is to *increase the learners’ responsibility* in the management of the teaching programme they follow by *increasingly including them, or allowing them to take part, in the decision-taking process* that shapes and guides their learning, thus producing *independent learners*, i.e. *learners who learn independently “from teacher direction”* (Pennycook, 1997).

In such set-ups, learners have *a greater or lesser say in the preparation* of the decisions concerning the choice of objectives, of resources, of

learning scenarios (when, where, who with, how often, for how long) and *participate* in the assessment of their progress and in the management over time of the teaching programme, a variable number of *final decisions remaining in the hands of the teacher or the provider of the programme*.

The table below presents a schematic description of state one learning environments, defined in terms of instructed learning with learner participation.

Table 1a. From other-directed to co-directed instructed learning

Teaching decisions	Decision maker	Quantity and quality of learner participation in the preparation of the decisions					
Definition or selection of objectives	T	T/Ø	T/L	T/L	T/L	T/L	T/L
Selection of resources	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L
Selection of learning scenarios	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L
Evaluation	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L
Management	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L

T = Teacher, L = Learner

The *degree of involvement/co-direction* of a learner is shown in the table, both by the ratio of Teacher/Learner participation in each of the fields of decision (rows of the table) and by the ratios of Teacher/Learner participation in all of the fields of decision (columns of the table). It increases from no participation at all, i.e. learners do what the teacher tells them to do and follow the programme laid down by the teacher, to (almost) full co-preparation of a teaching programme, i.e. the learners determine with the teacher, or on the basis of course books, what is to be

done and how, and co-evaluate their progress (self-administered tests). In this last case, which is typically the case with CALL programmes, the resulting individual programme still remains a “down-stream” adaptation of a pre-existing teaching programme.

Note that the *evolution of the learner’s degree of involvement* takes place over time, between the beginning and the end of the programme, for instance. The table below illustrates what the sharing of responsibility might look like for a particular learner at some stage in the curriculum, when, typically, s/he is allowed a high degree of participation in the definition of *how* s/he will learn (selection and use of the resources provided) but has no say in the choice of *what* s/he will learn at this stage, as the sequencing of learning objectives remains out of the learner’s reach.

Table 1b. Degree of participation at a given point in time.

Teaching decisions	Decision maker	Quantity and quality of learner participation in the preparation of the decisions					
		T/Ø	T/L	T/L	T/L	T/L	T/L
Definition or selection of objectives	T	T/Ø	T/L	T/L	T/L	T/L	T/L
Selection of resources	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L
Selection of learning scenarios	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L
Evaluation	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L
Management	T	T/Ø	"	"	"	"	T/L

As stated above, the reference type of learning here is instructed learning. Consequently, the learner’s degree of participation stands in direct relation with the “openness” of the teaching/learning system – from closed systems like most public education systems to open systems

like most private adult education systems. Thus, in a secondary school system where both teaching progressions and number of teaching/learning hours are fixed, flexibility of management is reduced: fast learners may be given a free hand in the choice of the additional learning they will be able to fit into the common classroom allocation of time, but slow learners, who would need, but will not get, extra time to fulfill the common progression requirements, will not be given such an opportunity to participate in the planning of their learning.

It also stands in direct relation with the teachers' (the textbook writers', the computer programme designers') type of guidance and control – from authoritarian to participatory. Some teachers willingly accept that their teaching plans should be reconsidered and changed to be better adapted to their learners' reasoned expectations, others do not; the former will invite their learners to take more responsibility in their learning, the latter will only try to enforce their own decisions, thus stifling any potential wish of their learners to become more involved in their learning.

State two type of implementations

State two, which can be observed, in some places, to have been reached after state one, as a next step in the development of the “autonomy” approach or, in other places and at other times, to have been present right from its onset, represents a fundamental shift in perspective based on a set of different principles.

(i) The *reference language-learning paradigm* is *non-instructed learning*, learning that is neither placed under the guidance or the control of teachers via their teaching, nor bounded by constraints imposed by pre-constructed learning materials, nor even controlled under subsidiarity

status whereby the power of decision is delegated to the learner by a higher authority; such learning is entirely placed under the control of the learner.

(ii) In this type of implementation, the “autonomy” focus is on the *development of the learners’ ability to self-direct* their learning programme, that is, their ability to take the decisions concerning their learning programme.

(iii) The aim is to produce *autonomous learners* (capable of self-directing their learning) by providing learning conditions integrating *language learning* and *learning-to-learn* environments.

More often than not in learning situations of this type, learners are engaged straight away in self-directed language learning carried out with appropriate materials (see below) and acquire or develop their ability to self-direct via the help, or the training, they receive for their decision-making.

It should be noted that *controlling* one’s learning means *taking all the decisions* concerning one’s learning programme, but has *no implication* whatsoever as to one’s room for manoeuvre when deciding; in other words, learners decide of *their own free will* but *not on free options of their own*, as their options in the different fields of decision are in fact given by their learning situation. Take the particularly revealing case of learning objectives: options in this field (room for manoeuvre) are defined by communicative objectives based on communicative needs; one’s responsibility in one’s learning programme is then to decide which of these objectives one will set oneself as learning objectives at each stage of one’s programme. For instance, communicative objectives depend entirely on what language competence the learners reckon they have to acquire to reach the particular socio-cultural target they are aiming at. Thus,

- if that target is extending their professional competence to foreign language environments, as is often the case with adults, then the language competence to be acquired is defined by the communicative abilities required by their professional duties; consequently, their learning objectives will have to be set in terms of these specific abilities, but what their learning activities will focus on during each learning session will then involve individual decision-making;
- if that target is getting credits in a particular curriculum, which is the case for most learners in formal educational systems, then the objectives that will have to be reached will be those objectives set by the curriculum and none other (hopefully, the authorities in charge of designing the curriculum will have defined uncontroversial objectives!), but, again, if the learning involved is set in a stage two framework, their distribution over time will remain open to individual decision-making.

More generally speaking, in stage two environments, learning decisions are taken on the basis of more or less restricted options, depending on the learner's learning situation: what is the language competence s/he wishes to acquire, what are the resources available to him/her (what materials, but also what methods and techniques s/he is familiar with), what are his/her learning situation constraints, etc.

The table below describes a self-directed non-instructed learning environment and its potential variations in terms of help received.

Table 2a. From “accompanied” self-direction to full self-direction of learning

Learning decisions	Decision maker	Quantity and nature of help received for the preparation of the decisions					
Definition or selection of objectives	L	H	H	H	H	H	Ø
Selection of resources	L	H	H	H	H	H	Ø
Selection of learning scenarios	L	H	H	H	H	H	Ø
Evaluation	L	H	H	H	H	H	Ø
Management	L	H	H	H	H	H	Ø

H = Help provided by counsellor or by counselling materials

L = Learner

The quantity and the nature of the help received by the learner are shown in the table both horizontally and vertically. They decrease over time. The help received may best be described as being not so much of the ‘scaffolding’ type as of the ‘*rigging*’ type: its objective is equipping learners with the knowledge that they require to fulfil their decision making needs. For instance, if at the beginning the learners tend to define their learning programmes in terms of teaching materials (which is very often the case with learners whose past teachers used to begin their classes with: “Today, we’re going to do lesson 17”), as we see in the following example:

Counsellor: “What is it you would like to learn?”

Learner: “I learned English at school, but I’ve forgotten everything, so what I need is a beginner’s course.”

then they must be helped to discover and acquire the notion that learning programmes are defined first on the basis of learning objectives—needed or wished communicative skills—and only then in terms of learning resources.

Sometimes, this kind of help is provided individually, in interactions between a counsellor and a learner (in face to face counselling sessions, or over the telephone, or in video sessions, or via the exchange of e-mails, etc.), or via counselling materials made available along with language learning materials. Sometimes it is provided collectively, that is, in pairs or groups, in much the same way. Sometimes again, all this takes place in a resource centre providing both language learning facilities and counselling services (cf. University of Oaxaca, Mexico, Clemente, 2003), and sometimes in classrooms, where learners work individually or in small groups on different mini-programmes, with the teacher offering help to all on demand (Gjorven & Trebbi, 1997; Trebbi, 1998; Dam & Legenhausen, 2000).

Help of this sort will diminish as the learner's ability to self-direct increases, until it is eventually no longer needed and is no longer proposed by the helper or asked for by the learner. When that stage is reached, only the provision of open-access learning materials remains to be maintained. As an example, Table 2b illustrates the degree of help that may be 'used' at the early stages of a learning programme.

Table 2 b. Typical degree of help 'used' in the beginning stages

Learning decisions	Decision maker	Quantity and nature of help received for the preparation of the decisions
Definition or selection of objectives	L	
Selection of resources	L	
Selection of learning scenarios	L	
Evaluation	L	
Management	L	

In horizontal lines, from right to left, quantity and nature of help received.
 In vertical lines, from left to right, quantity and nature of self-direction ability acquired

It should be noted that these 'quantities' will more often than not be global approximations measured in terms of amount of time needed to help. For example, in the self-directed learning with help environment provided at the C.R.A.P.E.L. ("Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues", a centre for research in language pedagogy based at the University of Nancy, France), counselling sessions have been regularly observed to vary in length from over one hour to half-an-hour, and their total number per learner to average seven (Abe & Gremmo, 1981). But they could be refined in terms of more specific criteria (cf. the criteria used to assess a learner's degree of autonomy, in Holec & Gremmo, 1987).

Mixed type of implementations

As mentioned at the beginning of this categorisation of autonomy-driven or autonomy-inspired language learning environments, some implementations can be described as being border-line cases, pertaining to both state one and state two sets of principles. These are implementations associating partly co-directed and partly self-directed language learning with integrated learning-to-learn activities.

Example one

For a number of years, evening classes organised by the C.R.A.P.E.L. offered adult learners of English a language learning environment presenting the following characteristics:

- Language learning was partly of the co-directed instructed type (two one and a half hour sessions a week), with parallel activities to be selected, done, assessed and managed in small groups with help provided by the teacher if necessary, and partly of the self-directed learning type (one three hour session every three weeks), with parallel thematic workshops (language-comprehension, language-expression, culture) led by native speakers of English acting as resource persons to be tapped by the workshops self-selected participants.
- Focus on learner autonomy led to specific activities being proposed in addition to the general pedagogical option of transparency adopted throughout (making explicit communicative objectives, purpose of activities, and all choices offered): *a posteriori* reflection on learning activities, reflection on the mother-tongue and on communication in the mother-tongue, short presentations of information (on comprehension skills or the acquisition process, for instance); moreover, participants were provided with audio and video cassettes of authentic documents and given a membership card for a

resource centre as incitements to do some self-directed learning outside the classroom in order to practise their newly acquired ability to learn.

Example two

A few years ago, the C.R.A.P.E.L. prepared and edited, in collaboration with a team of teachers of the Escuela de Altos Estudios de Hotelería y Turismo (EAEHT) in La Habana, Cuba, a handbook for the learning of French by Spanish-speaking professionals in the tourism industry (CRAPEL & EAEHT, 1998a, 1998b, 1999). Meant both as a self-study tool to be used individually by learners and as a textbook for teachers, it combines the characteristics of co-directed distance-teaching when used by learners or co-directed face-to-face instructed learning when used by teachers in their classrooms, with learner training and suggestions for self-directed learning:

- On the one hand, it is subdivided into units centred on specific objectives which can be chosen independently of one another and in no pre-established order (no built-in progression) and provides a whole array of language learning resources to choose from according to learning needs: discovery and memorisation activities, systematic and non-systematic practice activities in oral and written comprehension and in oral and written expression (skills practice). Each unit also includes a section devoted to cultural education, with presentations of cultural information (surveys, interviews, etc.) on French tourism and tourists.
- On the other hand, it also incorporates learning-to-learn information and self-directed learning hints aimed at developing the learners' ability to self-direct: the objectives of each unit are extensively clarified, all the why's and the how's of each learning activity are specified, and materials are provided for optional further self-study.

- Furthermore, each unit comprises a specific section devoted to “advice for learning”, with counselling information on themes like “Why and how to increase one’s orthographic competence”, “What is listening comprehension and how to improve this skill on one’s own”, or “What place for grammar in the acquisition of speaking skills?”, etc.

The type of implementations illustrated by these two examples may be looked upon as throwing a bridge between state one and state two realisations of the autonomy approach, aimed as they are at producing both more independent and more autonomous learners. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that they remain mixed implementations and not, as is sometimes believed, extreme cases of state one implementations, that is, instructed learning environments where co-direction would have given way to self-direction (in Table 1a, this would be represented by an additional right-hand column without any teacher participation). Instructed and non-instructed learning cannot be placed on a pedagogical continuum where the one could be seen as merging into the other without any interruption of continuity. This explains, for instance, why teaching programmes, like ready-made clothes, always have to be *adapted* by learners to fit their own specifications, whereas learning programmes, like made-to-measure garments, being tailored by the learners themselves, fit them *ab origino*.

Special features of state two implementations

As has been observed and described, state one represents a staging of the “autonomy” approach as an introduction of independence in a teaching/learning system, prompted by an interpretation of autonomy as a ‘weak’ form of self-direction, “guided self-direction”, so to speak. The main outcome of such an orientation is to increase the learners’

responsibility and involvement in their learning, which is an outcome worth seeking, be it to increase the acquisition efficiency of teaching practices or to better cope with intra- and inter-learner static and dynamic heterogeneity and variability. Furthermore, developing learner independence, preferably as a first step towards, and not instead of, developing learner autonomy has the advantage of not entailing more than a minimum of change to be brought to the pedagogical paradigm underlying existing language teaching/learning environments (even so-called 'non-conventional' environments); in particular, at most it requires eventually a modicum of specific learner and teacher training in participatory pedagogy, and allows for the continued use of existing materials.

State two opens up a very different pedagogical perspective. The inclusion of learning-to-learn objectives in the pedagogical set-up, in addition to language learning objectives, and the provision of self-directed learning facilities raise a number of issues: for learners to acquire autonomy, counsellor-teachers have to be put in charge of their training, and for them to have the possibility of practising self-directed learning, adequate material resources have to be provided. In other words, in state two implementations of the "autonomy" approach, not only will learning environments cater for learner autonomy training but they will also have to provide for specific teacher training needs and for specific material resources needs.

It needs emphasising that learner-training, teacher-training and provision of adequate resources are the three necessary conditions to be met for self-directed learning to really become a new learning option made available to learners. Whether this option will actually be chosen, and whether self-directed learning will be engaged in, remains of course a personal decision for each learner. In other words, for self-directed learning to take place, learners must be willing to learn that way (this is basically a problem of motivation), and be psychologically and socio-culturally ready to learn that way (have overcome their possible negative

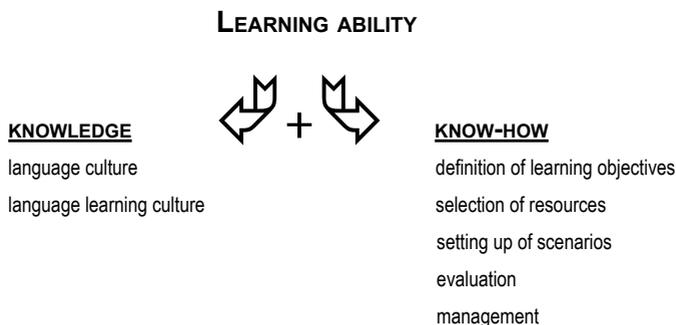
reaction to, or fear of, innovation and change, have also accepted the increase in responsibility their new social role in the learning process entails, etc.). Developing such willingness and readiness will be part of the overall objectives of learner-training, usually achieved “by rebound”, via the acquisition of learning knowledge and know-how.

In what follows I will discuss in detail what state two implementations of autonomy entail in terms of learner training, teacher training, and learning resources.

Learner training

The learning ability a learner must acquire to become autonomous and eventually self-directed can be described as his ability to define learning objectives, to select appropriate learning resources, to adopt relevant learning scenarios, to evaluate his progress and to manage his learning programme.

This learning ability involves both knowledge and know-how (skills) as illustrated in the figure below.



The knowledge in question is internalised knowledge, that is, *representations* which help learners to shape their thinking when preparing their learning decisions and to guide their actions once the decisions have been made. Examples of representations in language culture include answers to such questions as “what is a language?”; “how is it used?”; “what are the socio-cultural constraints bearing on verbal communication?”; “what sort of processes and behaviour are linguistic skills?”. Examples of representations in language learning culture include answers to questions like “what sort of process is the process of acquisition?”; “what roles can a learner have?”; “what learning techniques can be used to learn what?”; “what is evaluation and how can one evaluate one’s progress?”; “what techniques can be used for vocabulary acquisition?”.

The know-how component of the ability to learn is in fact the knowledge just described made operational, that is put into practice when the moment comes to define an actual specific learning programme.

Thus, the acquisition of learning ability entails for the learner, firstly, on the knowledge side, the ‘updating’ of his representations on language and language learning, and secondly, on the know-how side, the acquisition by practice of self-direction skills, that is, the acquisition of the skills required to take informed learning decisions.

Teacher training

As mentioned before, in state two environments the roles teachers have to play include now developing the learners’ learning competence and providing adequate resources for self-directed language learning.

Accordingly, the fundamental objective of the teacher-training provided is to equip the teachers with the professional knowledge and

know-how that they need to play these two new roles. As regards the first role, that of *learner-educator*, the training consists of:

- Training to help learners become aware of their representations, discover up-to-date information on language and language learning and modify existing representations or acquire new ones as necessary.
- Training to define and implement practice activities that will develop their learners' self-direction skills.
- Special training to assume counselling functions in situations of assisted self-direction of learning.

In addition to the usual updating of language and language learning information that is included in all teacher-training, these different types of training will be centred on the discovery and the practice of four different types of activities.

- Firstly, there are *awareness raising activities*. These include comparative study of different languages, corpus analysis, observation of one's own language behaviour in one's mother-tongue, like, for instance, this one used to help learners discover the difference between the notions of "correct text/word" and "appropriate text/word":

- a.** Write a few lines in your mother-tongue describing what you do at school every day, addressing your text to a friend you made during your last holidays; now do the same thing addressing your text to an elderly great aunt who has no secondary education; again, but addressed to a 10-year-old niece/nephew, or sister/brother.

- b.** Do you speak of the same things to all three addressees? Why? If you speak of the same things, do you describe them in the same way? Why?

c. Synthesis: a text is adapted to its addressee, both in form and content; the vocabulary is adapted to the addressee: we thus use different words to say the same thing.

Also, *a posteriori* description and evaluation of one's own learning experiences recorded in portfolios.

- Secondly, there are *informing activities* which include bringing background information on various subjects like the process of acquisition or the distinction between internal evaluation and certification, in terms one's learners understand.
- Thirdly there are practice activities, such as the definition of short learning programmes then carried out and evaluated.
- Finally, the activities will include *training* or *counselling techniques*. This will involve the *analysis of counselling interactions* to discover the differences between instructing and helping, peer *simulations* of counselling interactions, with microteaching-like features (very short video-recorded sessions watched and commented upon later); *practising the research methodology* used to gather information on learners, like the actual representations they bring with them to a new learning situation.

As regards the second role of *materials provider*, the training will include:

- Detailed information on the types and specific characteristics of the tools to be made available to the learner (see below).
- Training in the use of the different media and technologies that will be exploited.

- Practical work on how to produce robust learning materials.

But in addition to these two new teacher roles, state two implementations can be observed to rely on a third role to be taken on by the teacher for their success and even for their viability, that of *manager of change*. Introducing learner autonomy and self-directed learning in already existing teacher-directed educational environments will most certainly not proceed smoothly: the changes that have to be brought about necessarily enter into conflict with prior pedagogical thinking and practice and their introduction must be strictly monitored (Holec, 1999).

In very general terms, innovation processes have to be managed at all of their three stages:

- Firstly, at their *initiation stage*, when the decisions to introduce changed conditions are taken and their implementation is planned: for instance, the minds have to be prepared of all the actors that will be involved (learners, colleagues, headmasters, inspectors, parents, trade-unions, etc.), financing bodies have to be informed and convinced, etc.
- Then the processes will have to be managed at their *implementation stage*, when the changes decided upon are actually introduced in the educational environment: material obstacles might arise that had not been anticipated, resistance to change of one category of actors might be stronger than had been reckoned, so that additional “remedial” actions based on such observed changed conditions will have to be taken extemporaneously.
- Finally, at their *integration stage*, when the changes introduced have become institutionalised and must now be kept operational over time: new colleagues have to be convinced, trained and integrated in existing teams, financing must be made durable, resource centres have to be kept updated and alive, etc.

In the particular case of autonomy and self-directed learning, past experience tends to show that it is the teachers involved, whether acting individually or in disciplinary or even interdisciplinary teams, who are the crucial actors in the introduction of this innovation and consequently the best managers of the changes to be brought about. In short, “Where there’s a teacher’s will, there’s a way” perfectly catches the crux of the situation. This being the case, it becomes all the more necessary to consider that the management of change should be included as a full dimension of teacher training programmes aimed at state two implementations.

Learning resources

Language learning in self-directed learning set-ups, whether carried out with or without help and individually or collectively, requires specific materials which will play the role teaching materials play in other-directed instructed learning. Such materials have certain basic characteristics.

First, they are *adaptable materials*, that is, materials which each individual learner can make use of to reach his own learning objectives according to his own learning methodology. Consequently, they are materials that *have not been pre-adapted*, i.e. that have not been pre-adjusted to:

- i.** precise needs/expectations either in terms of objectives or thematic content,
- ii.** specific levels,

iii. specific methodological constraints (available time for learning, available infrastructural resources, progression, etc.),

iv. particular types of learner (learning style, pace of learning).

Second, they are *open-access materials*, available to learners when needed: as such, they are self-sufficient (do not require mediation) and easily retrievable (user-friendly cataloguing system).

Such materials fall into two broad categories.

i. *Constructed but not pre-adapted materials*: they are tools which, without being pre-adapted to specific users, are constructed with particular *learning objectives* in view. These are defined in terms of *language competence*, like “keep up with the news: understand television newscasts”, or “take part in small-talk conversations: talk of this and that”, or “take part in a discussion: put forward and defend one’s point of view”, or in terms of *linguistic knowledge*, like “vocabulary: words and ready-made expressions to express disappointment”, or “pronunciation: stress in polysyllabic words”. Such constructed materials will range from bits and pieces of existing commercial teaching tools stripped of their context and, if necessary, enlarged with missing discovery activities or systematic/non-systematic exercises, to ready-made sets of authentic or realistic documents and of suggested instructions for use that can be flexibly matched, thus allowing several possible uses for each document.

ii. *Materials to be constructed by the learner*: they consist of as wide as possible a collection of ‘bare’ oral or written authentic documents of all sorts on the one hand, and of cards suggesting learning activities on the other hand; these documents and suggestions are the raw materials which the learner uses to construct his own learning tools. The suggested activities can be grouped according to the acquisition objective aimed at (“how to improve oral comprehension”, “how to learn vocabulary”), or the type of

document used (“how to use a sound recording”) or the type of learning technique used (“games”, “simulations”, “questionnaires”), or a combination of the above criteria (“games for learning vocabulary”).

These learning materials are often made available to the learners in open-access resource centres, though not necessarily so (a cupboard at the back of a classroom can do the trick quite satisfactorily). In present-day implementations of the autonomy approach, resource centres, including ‘newfangled’ distance-access computerised centres, are the favourite chosen option.

Conclusion

Although the *philosophy* of the second state of the “autonomy approach” seems to have gained prominence in present-day educational trends, state one *implementations* of the approach remain the predominant feature of the world-wide language learning landscape. That this should be the case is no surprise, as aiming at developing learner and learning independence allows for the keeping of the paradigm of instructed learning, thus keeping down the cost of structural changes for educational authorities, limiting the resistance to changes in socio-professional status for teachers, and re-enforcing the received idea that there is no language learning without language teaching. In a way, state one interpretations (as a musician interprets a score) of the “autonomy” approach make it look and feel less challenging an innovation while still promoting the fundamental, and desirable, pedagogical development of learner responsibility.

But state two interpretations of the “autonomy” approach obey another and, in a way, more primitive pedagogical imperative. Right from its inception at the C.R.A.P.E.L., back in the late sixties and the

early seventies, learner autonomy was meant as a means of going a (big) step further than individualised teaching in coming to terms with an increasing variability of learner expectations and of learning situations. Confronted with an explosion in the demand for language education both at tertiary level and in adult education, traditional instructed learning could scarcely offer satisfactory answers to the new pedagogical problems that kept arising. In that respect, learner autonomy and self-directed learning were alternative pedagogical options that matched learner and learning variability and heterogeneity with learner and learning flexibility and selective adequacy. In addition, with the progress in the study of the acquisition process and the discovery that the relationship between teaching and acquisition was not of the cause-effect type, an idea behaviourism had more than helped to strengthen during the preceding decade, instruction gave way to education (in French: “instruction /formation”) as the best pedagogical strategy to help learners acquire new competences.

These premises still holding nowadays and their conclusion still obtaining, in particular with the world-wide growing need for overall multilingualism and individual plurilingualism, the state two interpretations of the “autonomy” approach must remain a focus of pedagogical enquiry and must foster further spreading of its practice. As past experience has amply shown, the autonomous learner/self-directed learning pedagogical option provides more satisfactory answers to language learning challenges than independent learners / co-directed language teaching. What are needed then are:

- On the one hand, upstream, investigations into the why’s and the how’s of the resistance to the introduction of this innovation into existing educational systems, carried out on a wider scale and in a wider range of fields. What are the real brakes to the implementation of the approach among the potential hypothesized ones (cf. the now debunked idea that some “cultures” preclude autonomy education, Smith, 2003)? Who are/can be/should be

the prime movers in the spreading of the approach? How can these agents be prepared for their roles?

- On the other hand, downstream, experimentation of diversified helping practices, both of the counselling and of the training type, appropriate to socio-culturally diversified learning environments, and elaboration of ranges of appropriate learning resources better disseminated so they can be better shared by all practitioners.

And for those for whom opting for the autonomous-learner/self-directed-learning paradigm remains a utopian dream, entailing what they consider as insuperable difficulties, may they be guided by the words attributed to Confucius: “*When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps*”, and find strength in the wisdom encapsulated in the saying: “*Where there's a will, there's a way.*”

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Part Two

Three examples

Chapter 2

Learner autonomy in action: Adult immigrants learning English in Ireland¹

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“I did not just improve my English, but learnt many other things about Irish society and system.”
“With IILT I learnt more than English. My teacher helped me to choose the course which best suit me. More important than everything else, with IILT I learnt how to work to rotate the circle of my life in the right way.”
(End-of-term self-assessments by two IILT students, IILT, 2008, p.10)

Introduction: learner autonomy in theory

In my view language learner autonomy is a special case of learner autonomy, and learner autonomy exploits a universal human capacity and drive. According to this view the justification for adopting pedagogical approaches that seek to develop learner autonomy derives not from technical or political imperatives (cf. Benson, 1997) but from a

1. Parts of this article were written for a case study commissioned by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. I am grateful to the Council of Europe for permission to reproduce them here.

particular understanding of how human beings are constituted. That understanding is captured by Phillida Salmon in the following description of the realities of family life (1998, p.24; emphasis added):

To parents, even babies seem to have a will of their own; they are hardly passive creatures to be easily moulded by the actions of others. From their earliest years, boys and girls make their active presence, their wilful agency, their demands and protests, very vividly felt. In every household that has children, negotiations must be made with young family members: their personal agendas have somehow to be accommodated.

Babies and small children make their “active presence”, their “wilful agency” and their “demands and protests” felt because they are cognitively and emotionally autonomous. Their perception of and response to the world around them is theirs alone, and their thoughts and emotions can never be directly accessible to parents, siblings and caregivers. None of us can escape being autonomous in this fundamental, biologically determined sense. This may help to explain why autonomy also seems to be a basic behavioural drive and emotional need. According to the American social psychologist Edward Deci, in order to have a sense of self-fulfilment we must feel autonomous, or “volitional in our actions” (1996, p.66). But our sense of self-fulfilment also depends on two other needs. We must feel competent, able to confront and overcome “optimal challenges” (ibid.), and we must feel “connected with others in the midst of being effective and autonomous” (ibid., p.88). According to this view of human motivation, the freedom that autonomy entails is confirmed by our competence and constrained by our relatedness.

The autonomy conferred on us by our biological constitution also has epistemological implications. Put at its simplest, because our cognitive processes are uniquely individual, learning is also uniquely individual. This consideration is one of the foundations of construc-

tivism, which argues that we construct our knowledge by bringing new information, ideas and experiences into interaction with what we already know. According to this view, knowledge is not a set of universal truths but a complex network of working hypotheses. In his *Psychology of personal constructs* George Kelly (1991/1955, I, p.51) states the matter thus:

The constructions one places upon events are working hypotheses, which are about to be put to the test of experience. As one's anticipations or hypotheses are successively revised in the light of the unfolding sequence of events, the construction system undergoes a progressive evolution. The person reconstrues.

In formal educational contexts pedagogical approaches that are shaped by constructivist principles insist that effective learning entails a great deal more than memorizing what one has been told. Such approaches seek to assist the involuntary, unconscious construction of knowledge by adopting procedures that are participatory, exploratory and interpretative; and they employ modes of interaction that are calculated to stimulate learners' "active presence", harness their "wilful agency", accommodate their "demands and protests", engage them in "negotiation", and integrate their "personal agendas" into the evolving learning agenda of the classroom (cf. Salmon, 1998, p.24, quoted above). In terms of Deci's three basic needs, constructivist pedagogies exploit various modes of relatedness in order to harness and extend learners' autonomy and develop new competence.

Language is the tool with which knowledge and skill are mediated and the learning process is shaped. Shaping the learning process is a matter of communication—describing and analysing the task in hand, evaluating the merits of different approaches, giving instructions, proposing alternatives, and so on. But it is also a matter of building internal representations of the task and its performance that the learner can draw

on linguistically as a prompt and guide in future acts of independent task performance. Furthermore, classroom procedures that are participatory, communal and collaborative are also of necessity reflective: every question the learner asks and every judgement she makes entails an act of self-distancing from the object, and sometimes also the process, of learning. That is what Jerome Bruner seems to be getting at when he writes of the language of education (1986, p.129):

It must express stance and must invite counter-stance and in the process leave place for reflection, for metacognition. It is this that permits one to reach higher ground, this process of objectifying in language or image what one has thought and then turning around on it and reconsidering it.

From this necessarily very compressed argument we can derive two general pedagogical principles. The first is the principle of learner involvement, which entails that teachers help learners to take charge of their learning by making them full participants in the processes of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The second is the principle of learner reflection, which entails that teachers help learners to engage reflectively with the process and content of their learning, developing their capacity for what Bruner calls “reflective intervention” (1986, p.132) in the knowledge they encounter and in the learning process itself.

The principles of learner involvement and learner reflection underpin the development and exercise of learner autonomy in general: they apply equally to all subjects in the curriculum. But the development and exercise of *language* learner autonomy require a third principle, the principle of target language use. All theories of second language acquisition, whether innatist or constructivist, assign a key role to communicative language use in the development of communicative proficiency (see, e.g., Gass, 2003; Ellis, 2003). Language acquisition is an inescapably dialogic process. Input is useless without interaction;

and output—producing the target language in speech or in writing – is especially important because it requires deeper language processing and greater mental effort than input. As Merrill Swain has put it: “Output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production” (Swain, 2000, p.99). In short, if you want to learn a language for communicative purposes, you will do best if you use it as the main channel of your learning.

According to constructivist theory, knowledge is constructed through the learner’s involvement in linguistically mediated interactions, encoded in language, and reproduced through communicative activity (speaking or writing). But besides being the tool with which we construct knowledge, language is the tool we use for the metacognitive/metalinguistic processes of “reflective intervention”. Thus when the goal of learning is the development of communicative proficiency in a second language, we must help learners to use the target language as the medium not only of task performance but also of metacognition and metalinguistic reflection. If we fail to do this, we run the risk that their proficiency will remain superficial, will never become fully internalized.

The pedagogical implications of my argument may be summarized as follows. In language classrooms where the development of learner autonomy is a central goal, the target language is the preferred medium of communication. The teacher scaffolds negotiation with and between learners, provides them with input as she draws them into interaction, and supports them in target language use even when they are total beginners. The teacher also involves her learners in a non-stop quest for effective learning activities and helps them to develop criteria by which to judge such activities. Within whatever larger agenda is imposed by the curriculum, learners set their own goals and choose their own learning activities—the teacher helps them to be focused in their aims and realistic in their choices. Individual learning goals are pursued

partly via collaborative group work—the teacher shows her learners how to support one another in collaborative discourse. Learners keep an individual written record of their learning, which facilitates a focus on form, encourages memorization, and stimulates a two-way interaction between speaking and writing. And all aspects of learning are regularly evaluated in the target language—to begin with, in very simple terms. (For a fuller account of such a classroom, see Dam, 1995.)

Finally, it is necessary to insist that the scope of any learner's autonomy is determined by the extent of his or her established knowledge and skills. In the case of language learning, the interaction between language learning and language use means that the scope of a learner's autonomy depends in part on the extent of his or her target language proficiency. Teachers who are good at fostering the development of learner autonomy know that they must not encourage their learners to take decisions or pursue learning tasks that lie beyond their present capacity, yet must ensure that they always set themselves worthwhile goals and genuine learning challenges.

This theory of learner autonomy finds additional support in socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; see Little, 2001, 2006, 2007), situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; see Little, 2005), and dialogism (Hall et al., 2005). But it is also rooted in a close study of language learning environments where a high degree of learner autonomy is a routine achievement. The implementation of learner autonomy that is the main concern of this article was guided not only by theory but by the practical examples of Leni Dam (Dam, 1995), Hanne Thomsen (Thomsen and Gabrielsen, 1991, Thomsen, 2000, 2003), and Laila Aase, Anne-Brit Fenner and Turid Trebbi (Aase et al., 2000).

Integrate Ireland Language and Training: organizational framework

From 2001 to 2008 Integrate Ireland Language and Training was funded by the Irish government (Department of Education and Science) to provide intensive English language courses for adult immigrants with refugee status.² These courses comprised twenty class hours per week and ten hours of self-access learning and homework. This structure was determined by three factors: full-time courses offered by private language schools typically consist of twenty class hours per week, and this was the model the Department of Education and Science wished IILT to follow; a total commitment of thirty hours was required in order to secure learners' social welfare benefits;³ and common sense suggested that a maximally intensive time commitment was in the

2. IILT began life in 1999 as the Refugee Language Support Unit, a two-year pilot project attached to the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College Dublin. It was incorporated as a not-for-profit campus company of Trinity College in 2001. Besides providing intensive English language courses for adult immigrants with refugee status, IILT supported the teaching of English as a second language in primary and post-primary schools by developing curricula, learning materials, assessment instruments and other resources, and by mediating these to teachers via a rolling programme of in-service seminars. From the beginning IILT's long-term prospects were uncertain. In February 2008 the directors of IILT submitted a proposal to the Department of Education and Science concerning the company's future structure and functions. We believed that our activities should be drawn into the mainstream; but we also believed that it was essential to maintain a specialist research-led unit to inform the development and support the implementation of policy. In June 2008 the Department informed the directors of its decision to transfer funding from IILT to other educational agencies. As a consequence IILT ceased all operations at the end of August 2008. It is by no means certain that the new arrangements will preserve the expertise and resources IILT developed between 1999 and 2008.
3. IILT's students received unemployment benefit, rent supplement, and all other allowances and payments that an unemployed person is entitled to. In August 2008 unemployed adults received unemployment benefit of €197 per week plus €131 per week for each dependent adult and €24 per week for each dependent child. Rent supplement, paid weekly to help with payments to private landlords, can be quite substantial as private rents are very high. Other payments are discretionary and cover the cost of clothing, fuel, school books, etc.

learners' best interests. This last consideration also explains why classes were continuous: the year was divided into four terms of three months each, the school closing only for Christmas and New Year.

The majority of students admitted to IILT's courses already had some proficiency in English. In terms of the common reference levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001), their profile typically spanned the upper end of A1 and the lower end of A2. A small number of students came to us with no proficiency in English (and sometimes no literacy skills in their mother tongue), and an equally small number came with good general proficiency in English but a need to develop specific skills in order to access further or higher education. Most students attended classes for up to one year, after which they entered employment, mainstream education or vocational training. In 2007 a total of 906 students attended IILT's classes, 478 in Dublin and the rest in nine other centres around Ireland. They came from 93 different countries in eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, so there was a rich mix of mother tongues, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and previous educational experience (for further details, see IILT, 2008).

The promotion of learner autonomy in IILT's courses began with the principle of learner involvement. This was operationalized by engaging students in the identification and analysis of their needs. In second and foreign language teaching it has become commonplace to distinguish between objective and subjective needs (Richterich, 1983; Brindley, 1989). The former are the needs that can be diagnosed by experts (course designers, teachers) on the basis of information about the learners and their situation relative to the target language; the latter are the cognitive and affective needs of the individual learner in the learning situation. In principle learners' objective needs enable us to design courses in advance, whereas their subjective needs come into play during course delivery. In IILT, however, no courses were designed in advance. Students were assigned to classes on the basis of their proficiency in

English, and at the beginning of each term teacher and students planned a programme of work that sought to take account simultaneously of objective and subjective needs. Needs analysis then guided teaching and learning on a weekly if not daily basis. As individual needs were negotiated and clarified, group needs began to emerge. Some of these could be addressed by the class as a whole—for example, all students seeking employment needed to know how to interpret their pay slip; while others were more satisfactorily dealt with by dividing the class into sub-groups—for example, not all students needed to focus on the same domain of employment. This helps to explain why there could be no pre-established learning goals, no single set of learning materials (certainly no textbooks), and no fixed pedagogical procedures. Such an approach assumed that students' language learning was inseparable from their induction into basic arrangements and practices of Irish culture and society.

Operationalization of the principle of target language use was facilitated by the fact that English, the students' target language, was necessarily the medium of classroom communication and the language in which students were mostly obliged to communicate with one another inside and outside the classroom. At the same time, the integration of reading and writing with listening and speaking followed only as the result of deliberate effort. Helping students to develop literacy skills in English was central to IILT's mission since without literacy they could not take their place as fully autonomous members of Irish society.

The principle of learner reflection was operationalized in tandem with the principle of learner involvement. The practice of ongoing needs analysis, described above, entailed that from the beginning learners were reflectively engaged in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning. However, our teachers quickly discovered that to begin with, migrant language learners are no more skilled at managing these reflective processes than language learners in any other domain. The processes must be mediated via a combination of examples and dis-

course modelling. At an early stage we adopted the European Language Portfolio as a means of supporting reflection and framing learning. This made it easier for students to compile a detailed record of their learning: objectives and plans, vocabulary to be mastered, work in progress, work completed, reflection on the learning process, evaluation of learning outcomes. Adoption of the ELP throughout the organization also encouraged teachers to share ideas, activities and materials.

The European Language Portfolio: structure, functions and use

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) has three obligatory components:

- The *language passport* summarizes the owner's linguistic identity and his or her experience of learning and using languages other than the mother tongue; it also provides space for the owner periodically to record his or her self-assessment of overall second/foreign language proficiency.
- The *language biography* accompanies the ongoing processes of learning and using second/foreign languages and engaging with the cultures associated with them. It supports goal setting and self-assessment in relation to specific learning objectives, and encourages reflection on learning styles, strategies and intercultural experience. Sometimes this reflection is a matter of filling in a form or recording one's thoughts under a series of headings; sometimes it is entirely open.
- The *dossier* is where the owner collects evidence of his or her second/foreign language proficiency and intercultural experience; in some implementations it is also used to store work in progress.

There is no single version of the ELP. In 1997 the Council of Europe published a collection of preliminary studies that suggested forms the ELP might take in order to meet the needs of language learners in various categories and domains (Council for Cultural Cooperation, 1997). From 1997 to 2000 pilot projects were implemented in 15 Council of Europe member countries and by three international non-governmental organizations (for a full report, see Schärer, 2000). In 2000 the ELP's common European core was defined as a set of Principles and Guidelines (Council for Cultural Cooperation, 2000; a version with explanatory notes is included in *European Language Portfolio: key reference documents*, Council of Europe, 2006; www.coe.int/portfolio) and a Validation Committee was established and given the task of accrediting ELPs that conform to the Principles and Guidelines. Towards the end of the pilot projects a standard version of the language passport was developed for use by adults; it has been adopted by the great majority of ELPs designed for older adolescent and adult learners.

The Council of Europe developed the ELP in order to serve two complementary purposes. The first is pedagogical: the ELP is designed to make the language learning process more transparent to learners and to foster the development of learner autonomy; that is why it assigns a central role to reflection and self-assessment. This function arises from the Council of Europe's long-established commitment to learner autonomy as an essential part of education for democratic citizenship and a prerequisite for lifelong learning. The ELP's second function is to provide concrete evidence of second/foreign language proficiency and intercultural experience. This reflects the Council of Europe's equally long-established interest in finding ways of reporting language learning achievement in an internationally transparent manner. The ELP's pedagogical and reporting functions both depend on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), which uses "can do" statements to define second/foreign language proficiency at six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) in relation to the skills of listen-

ing, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. The common reference levels are summarized in the so-called self-assessment grid (Council of Europe, 2001, pp.26–27) and elaborated in 34 illustrative scales.

In the ELP the self-assessment grid provides the overall scale against which communicative proficiency is recorded in the language passport, while the illustrative scales yield checklists, usually to be found in the language biography, that support goal setting and self-assessment. For example, in the self-assessment grid SPOKEN INTERACTION at A1 level is summarized like this:

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.

And in the Swiss ELP for adolescent and adult learners (bmlv, 2000) the A1 checklist for SPOKEN INTERACTION looks like this:

- I can introduce somebody and use basic greeting and leave-taking expressions.
- I can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
- I can make myself understood in a simple way but I am dependent on my partner being prepared to repeat more slowly and rephrase what I say and to help me to say what I want.
- I can make simple purchases where pointing or other gestures can support what I say.
- I can handle numbers, quantities, cost and time.
- I can ask people for things and give people things.

- I can ask people questions about where they live, people they know, things they have, etc. and answer such questions addressed to me provided they are articulated slowly and clearly.
- I can indicate time by such phrases as “next week”, “last Friday”, “in November”, “three o’clock”.

Working with the ELP in IILT

To begin with, IILT developed separate ELP models for learners working at three levels: Reception 1 (learners newly arrived in Ireland; A1→B1), Reception 2 (learners who had been living in Ireland for some time before beginning their course; A2→B1), and Pre-vocational/Fast track (learners moving towards work or mainstream vocational training; B1→B2). All three models had the same very simple language passport, which allowed learners to record their proficiency in English and other second/foreign languages and to briefly summarize important intercultural experiences; and the dossier sections in all three models included LEARNING DIARY and LEARNING TARGETS pages designed to support regular reflection and ensure that each learner’s record of his/her learning had a precise chronological dimension. The three models differed from one another chiefly in the checklists. These were arranged by communicative context and reflected the different starting levels of learners in the three categories. The Reception 1 ELP had checklists for THE BEGINNING (such preliminary tasks as *read aloud the letters of the alphabet, write my name and address, find my name in a list*), PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION, LEARNING TO LEARN, EVERYDAY LIFE, DEALING WITH OFFICIALS, USING THE TELEPHONE; to these the Reception 2 ELP added checklists for THE MEDIA, CORRESPONDENCE, CONVERSATION; and the Pre-vocational/Fast track ELP had checklists for SETTING COURSE OBJECTIVES, PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION, LEARNING TO LEARN, THE

WORKPLACE, CULTURAL AWARENESS, CAREER PLANNING, THE MEDIA, CV PREPARATION. From their first introduction as pilot versions in 2000 it was clear that these ELPs provided significant support for teachers as well as learners. Consequently they quickly became central to IILT's developing pedagogical culture and provided an obvious focus for the Milestone Project's exploration of common concerns in the teaching of host community languages to adult migrants.

The Milestone Project (2000–04) was funded as part of the European Union's Socrates–Comenius 2.1 Programme. It had nine partners: institutes of teacher training in Dublin and Hamburg; a language school for adults with refugee status in Dublin (IILT); and vocational schools and colleges of adult education in Hamburg, Amsterdam, Helsinki and Örebro. The Milestone ELP was developed collaboratively as a means of exchanging ideas and experience and developing a common portfolio approach to language teaching and learning. Its distinguishing features are as follows:

- The three components are presented in the order: language biography, dossier, language passport.
- The language biography is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on the owner's previous language learning and intercultural experience, important life events, and his or her proficiency in the language of the host community at the beginning of the course. Part II is concerned with ongoing language learning, helping learners to become more aware of their attitudes, expectations and learning styles, requiring them to draw up a learning contract, and (via "I can" checklists) supporting the setting of personal learning goals and regular self-assessment.
- The dossier contains details of the owner's language course and a page for recording attendance. It also accommodates work in progress and samples of finished work.

- The language passport is the standard adult passport mentioned above.

The Milestone ELP exists in five language versions—Dutch, English, Finnish, German, Swedish. In addition the project produced a teacher's handbook in four languages (not Dutch) and a substantial resource of classroom activities and worksheets to support work with the different sections of the ELP. All Milestone ELPs and support materials can be downloaded from the Milestone web site (www.eu-milestone.de).

As soon as the Milestone ELP was approved by the Council of Europe's Validation Committee in 2002, IILT began to use it instead of the three models that had stimulated its development. Previously students had progressed from one ELP to the next; now they worked with the Milestone ELP throughout their time with IILT. As the above description indicates, the Milestone ELP is more substantial and more complex than the earlier models. What is more, it makes no concession to lower proficiency levels. This means that teachers were obliged to find ways of mediating the Milestone ELP to learners whose English was still in the early stages of development. In doing so, they drew on their pedagogical experience and skills, but they also sought the advice and ideas of their colleagues. In this way IILT gradually developed an ELP culture which moved forward according to the principles outlined above, but with a flexibility that accommodated learners' different proficiency levels on the one hand and teachers' individual preferences on the other. Here are three examples:

- A teacher working with learners at low Reception 1 level (A1) introduced the ELP via a picture story of a man who went to a job centre and used his ELP to show what he could do in English. The implications of the story were explored through a series of simple comprehension questions, and students' answers to these led into an exploration of the ELP itself, its different sections and their functions. The teacher then used the ELP as a springboard for negotiating course content.

- Working with students at a somewhat higher level, another teacher began each course by negotiating course content with her learners on the basis of their individual needs. They kept the agreed course outline in the dossier section of their ELP and used it gradually to explore other parts of the ELP. Weekly learning targets were drawn from the checklists in the language biography.
- A newly appointed teacher, herself unfamiliar with the ELP, was assigned a class that mixed newly admitted students with students who had already spent at least one term in IILT. Colleagues readily provided her with ELP-related worksheets and activities, but she couldn't use these because they were already familiar to the "old" students. Her solution was to begin the course by dividing the class into two groups, students who had and students who had not already worked with the ELP. She gave students familiar with the ELP a questionnaire designed to help them pool their knowledge of the ELP for subsequent presentation to the other group; and she gave students unfamiliar with the ELP a questionnaire that focused on approaches to teaching and learning and was designed to prepare them for the other group's presentation. In this way the teacher enabled her students themselves to explore how they should use the ELP and created a situation in which she could both lead and learn from them.

The importance of reading and writing: developing learners' second-language identity

I noted above that the development of students' literacy skills was central to IILT's mission since literacy was essential to their autonomy as members of Irish society. The ELP supports this dimension of teaching and learning because it requires students to maintain a written record of their learning. It is important to emphasize, however, that we were

concerned with much more than “functional literacy”. Through writing, ILLT’s students began to express their emerging English-language identity to themselves and their fellow students; and in time some of them revealed impressive literary talent. In this section of the article I want to use three examples to illustrate something of the range of our students’ writing activity.

The first example is an account by one teacher, Davnet Cotter, of the way in which she sought to develop her students’ reading habits:⁴

I originally decided to introduce a book-reading programme to my classes in an attempt to address the students’ poor writing skills. A typical student in ILLT seemed to have particular problems in this area, even though they might also have reasonably good oral and aural skills. I felt that only a fairly strict diet of regular reading could address this properly: most students I spoke to were not in the habit of reading anything in English.

I decided that Penguin Readers would be the most appropriate material: they are specifically designed for EFL students. They contain the essential story of a classic, or modern-day English-language novel, but have been re-written in very simple English. The books are written by EFL experts and are graded according to students’ language levels, starting at grade 1 for beginners and finishing at grade 6 for advanced students. Another advantage of these books is that they provide something substantial for students to get their teeth into. Many students’ only experience of reading in English before this was simply to look at the odd newspaper headline or short article.

When I originally introduced one of the books to the class, it was as a classroom activity: the class read the same book, discussed the story and answered comprehension questions in groups. However, I soon found that many of the students were still not particularly interested in reading and were not enjoying the story. I decided to build up a library of the books instead, with

4. I am grateful to Davnet Cotter and her students for providing me with this account and the accompanying examples.

a wide range of genres available, and offered the books to students to take home and read at their leisure. Initially, I encouraged students to borrow a level 2 book to ensure that the language would be accessible. It would also make the reading experience a more enjoyable one, as there would be little new vocabulary to distract from reading the story.

This strategy proved far more successful. The majority of students quickly adopted the habit of changing their book every week; some even asked to change their book more frequently. A minority of students needed more encouragement but eventually took a greater interest in the books when they saw their classmates' enthusiasm for and enjoyment of reading. Students would return books and talk about the effect the story had had on them: they seemed to have genuinely appreciated the experience and critically, considered it a relaxing pastime and not part of their homework.

After about 10 weeks, every student in the class had read at least one or two books, some had read six or seven, and a few had read as many as twelve. The more able students had progressed from level 2 to level 5. I began to notice the impact it was having on their skills. There was a significant improvement in their writing skills, and a definite correlation between the quality of students' work and the number of books they had read. Moreover, when any grammar points were discussed in class, some students knew instinctively what was correct, simply because to them it sounded right. Consequently, speaking skills also improved. When asked directly what effect reading books had had on their English, students reported that their range of vocabulary had improved significantly. However, perhaps the most important outcome for them was the increase in their self-confidence. Many students said that they never imagined they would be able to read any book in English, and that they felt a real sense of achievement in what they had done.

Finally, in order to help students to recognize what they had achieved, I asked each of them to choose their favourite story, and complete a Book Review Form for public display. Here are six examples:

Example 1.

Title of Book:	My Fair Lady	
Name of Author:	George Bernard Shaw	
Nationality of Author:	Irish	
Born:	26 July 1856	Died: 2 November 1950 aged 94 Hertfordshire, England
Type of Story:	Comedy	
What is it about?	It was about a woman called Eliza, she was in the street selling a flower with the very strong London accent, she met a professor Higgins, the man who helped her, he decided to teach her to speak English without her accent, but something happened in the end.	
New words and / or expressions I learned:	further, mainly, that book was very easy for me to read.	
Advice for students on reading books in English:	Since I started reading books in IELTS I find my English improved a lot. Most of the time I read in the bus in my way to college because at home I'm busy in the evening, I started with level 2, and now I'm in L3, I have read 7 books. I'm very happy because it's my first time in my life. I started Learning English since	

I read like that much.

Example 2.

Title of Book:	Jane Eyre		
Name of Author:	CHARLOTTE BRONTE		
Nationality of Author:			
Born:	1816	Died:	march. 1854
Type of Story:	Romantic		
What is it about?	Jane Eyre lost her parents when she was young. she went to school and she became a teacher and worked for the rich mr Rochester, also in love with him, once they were ready to get married, she found out he has a mad wife, then she left him. After one year, she went back to him and married, but that time he became blind after a fire which his exwife started, but they were very happy at the end.		
New words and / or expressions I learned:	perhaps, lessons, immediately		
Advice for students on reading books in English:	we can learn a lot from reading English book. I think it is a good way to improve our English; before I don't like read any book, after my teacher push me read book. Now I became like reading any book. I think it's very interesting. I hope every one can enjoy the book.		

Example 3.

Title of Book:	THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS		
Name of Author:	JOHN BUCHAN		
Nationality of Author:	SCOTISH		
Born:	1875 in SCOTLAND	Died:	1940 in MONTREAL, CANADA
Type of Story:	ADVENTURES		
What is it about?	It's a great spy story with lots of action. It's about a man Richard HANNAY, who just returned to London from Rhodesia. He helps a mysterious man. His life is in danger from a group of foreign spies and his country is in danger. He finds himself in trouble from both the spies and the police.		
New words and / or expressions I learned:	Mysterious; innkeeper; coastguard; arrest; enemies; spy; chief; interrupted; cottage; cupboard; hurt; frightened. First World War; Prime Minister; Foreign Office.		
Advice for students on reading books in English:	Choose your favourite type of book. That will help you a lot because you know already about what you have to read. If possible, have notebook with you, and put all new word or expression, and check the meaning when you finish reading the book. Best of luck, and enjoy your reading.		

Example 4.

Title of Book:	1984		
Name of Author:	George Orwell		
Nationality of Author:	British		
Born:	1903	Died:	1950
Type of Story:	Nightmare story.		
What is it about?	Winston Smith lives in a world where no freedom at all. The government controls feelings, thinks, love for another person can be punished by death. He tried to fight with system.		
New words and / or expressions I learned:	Slogan, rough, entertain, dare, rid, disobedience, betray, pretend, obey, cure, admire.		
Advice for students on reading books in English:	I found reading very useful to improve grammar, spelling, writing, vocabulary, speaking. You can start read book every day a little and you will be successful.		

Example 5.

Title of Book: BLACK BEAUTY
Name of Author: ANNA SEWELL
Nationality of Author: ENGLISH
Born: 1820 Died: 1878
Type of Story: CLASSIC NOVEL
Was published in 1877 and author never knew what a huge success it became, in 1994 - recent film.
What is it about? This book is about live horse, his name BLACK BEAUTY. Four years he was happy, beautiful and liked his kind owners. He was well-trained. He always behaves well, but when he is sold, first to one, then another, then another, he learns how hard a horse's life can be, and how stupid and cruel some people.
New words and / or expressions I learned: Dealer, feed, gallop, groom, harness, hay, mare, neigh, oats, pat, pleasant, race, tight trot, strength
Advice for students on reading books in English: I like to read a book in bed every night, when finished everything, doings and troubles. I read for about an hour. All new words I write in notebook for my memory.

Example 6.

Title of Book:	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank.</i>	
Name of Author:	<i>Anne Frank</i>	
Nationality of Author:	<i>German</i>	
Born:	<i>12. Jun 1929</i>	Died: <i>March 1945</i>
Type of Story:	<i>True story</i>	
What is it about?	<p><i>Jewish Family in the 2 world war In November 1938 start violence against the Jews. Anne Frank was one of those family. The family have to hid in a secret Place called (the secret Annex). Speak about Problem. Happiness and the Hope of the Jews family. At the end, the People in hiding have been betrayed.</i></p>	
New words and / or expressions I learned:	<p><i>Violence - Escap - Suffer - Sensible - Patiently Invasion.</i></p>	
Advice for students on reading books in English:	<p><i>It was so difficult for me to read a book in English. But Some how I start to read a News Paper on the Bus for 5 minutes. It was a good thing to do. After that I start to read a very easy and thin book every night for 10 minutes. If you do that and start to read a book, you will enjoy it, and you will never stop to read.</i></p>	

Note that students began to read not on their own initiative, but because their teacher prompted them to do so; left to their own devices they might well have remained for the most part non-readers. But note also that the reading scheme succeeded only when students were given the freedom to choose what and how much to read—in other words, when reading could become part of their autonomous learning behaviour. Like the scheme itself, the Book Review Form came from the teacher rather than the students, but it too served to extend the scope of their autonomy as they used it to reflect on how reading had opened new horizons for them while also helping to improve their English.

From time to time IILT arranged for past students to come and talk to one of the classes about their language learning experience and the shape that their life had taken in Ireland since they completed their course in IILT. My second example is the account of such a visit that one of our classes posted on the IILT website:

On 31st January 2006, Kira, an ex-student, came to visit our R2Upper class in IILT. This is our report.

Kira is from Khazakstan. She came to Ireland in 1999 at age 17. She didn't study English at school and she didn't speak English at all.

She studied English for three months in IILT. At IILT she talked to her teacher about her future plans. Her long term plan was to work in the legal area, but first she needed to get a general education. With her teacher in IILT she decided to study for the Leaving Cert. Kira found information about colleges and filled in an application form for Liberties College.

She studied for the Leaving Cert in Liberties College for two years. During that time she met a lot of obstacles, but she worked hard. She speaks English fluently now, because her classmates were native speakers and

she learned a lot on her own. Kira studied seven subjects. She passed the Leaving Cert. successfully.

After the Leaving Cert she got some information about Rathmines College in FAS. Then she did a Legal Studies course in Rathmines College. She was very happy with that.

Kira is now working in a solicitor's office in Dublin. She applied for this job through her tutor and passed an interview. She is also studying criminology by distance learning.

Kira has big plans for future. She has always wanted to work in the legal area and now she is on her way.

Her advice for us is:

1. Study English without a bilingual dictionary.
2. Do what you want to do and don't give up.
3. Follow your dreams.

My third example is the winning entry in IILT's 2005 poetry competition.⁵ It shows how one student was able to use English to express and reflect on traumatic experiences and at the same time establish an autonomous creative identity in a second language:

Wild

A bird caught on a child's eyelash
On a busy evening
Smoke
Bullets
And black rain falling

5. I am grateful to the anonymous author for permission to quote his poem here.

The rain does not look like my mother's plaits
Does not look like my grandfather's date palm
Does not look like a child laughing
Does not look like water
Rain like gunpowder
Black like my heart's sky
Terrified horses clatter
Dogs bark
with mindless joy
Smoke
Bullets
And rain ...
STOP BIRD
DO NOT FLY
So roared the miserable palm
The bird flies
It lands
Here and there
In a time before this one
When the sky was screeching
And gunpowder made a red lake
Swooping
Climbing
Swooping
Climbing
Noiselessly
Flying, piling
Noiselessly
Rain
Bullets
And smoke ...

The bird caught in the child's lash
The emaciated child
And a cage hung with a thread of rain.
The child's screech
The thread cut
The cage falls down
And the rain dies ...

External assessment that validates autonomous language learning

As I explained above, IILT's English language courses for adult immigrants with refugee status were funded by the Department of Education and Science. Neither the DES nor IILT ever specified a maximum training entitlement. IILT's goal was to bring learners to the point where they felt comfortable in using English to meet their particular daily needs. In practice most of them attended classes for between six and twelve months. From time to time DES officials asked informally whether IILT's learners should take a standardized English language test as a way of demonstrating the effectiveness of our courses and confirming that the state was receiving value for money. We always replied in the negative for two reasons. First, we were unconvinced that tests designed for more or less homogeneous populations of learners following internationally similar programmes of English language instruction were appropriate for an infinitely diverse population of adult immigrants. Secondly, the need to prepare learners to take a test tends to narrow the focus of teaching and learning towards the tasks and linguistic content of the test in question. Such teaching is diametrically opposed to the pedagogical culture we were concerned to nurture.

For several years we were satisfied that the ELP provided all the assessment and certification we needed. Its use, after all, depends on goal setting and self-assessment that are closely related to the common reference levels of the CEFR; and in IILT self-assessment was always a matter not only of saying but also of showing what one could do. Furthermore, students gradually gathered in their dossier examples of their work that demonstrated the range of language skills they had developed. We always encouraged them to take their ELP to interviews for educational placement or jobs, and informal feedback from placement officers and prospective employers suggested that a well-developed ELP helped to persuade them that our learners were more proficient in English than they might otherwise have been inclined to believe. But more recently we began to ask ourselves whether we were doing the best for our students by sending them on their way with nothing more than an informal validation of their sustained learning effort. This led us to explore the possibility of having our courses accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

Established as a statutory body in 2001, FETAC is the national awarding body for the further education and training sector in Ireland. It accredits a vast range of programmes across the first six levels of the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications. FETAC accreditation entails the application of three separate but interacting functions:

- (i) providers must demonstrate that they have a capacity to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of their programmes and services;
- (ii) before they are delivered, programmes must be evaluated by FETAC in order to establish that they are appropriate to the level in question; and
- (iii) once accreditation is granted, FETAC monitors and evaluates programmes on an ongoing basis.

FETAC credits are awarded for modules of learning, eight credits at a particular level earning a certificate. Some modules are concerned with the identification, development and use of transferable life skills and thus highly appropriate for immigrant learners intent on integration. Credits may be gained over shorter or longer periods, in one or more further education and training contexts. Assessment is based on student portfolios, which FETAC monitors regularly to ensure that stated standards are achieved. This system of assessment commended itself to IILT for three reasons. First, our courses were already underpinned by notions of portfolio learning and assessment, so that it was a relatively straightforward matter to accommodate FETAC modules within our existing framework. In other words, FETAC assessment was unlikely to impose inappropriate constraints on teaching and learning. Secondly, with the exception of the modules in English as a Second Language, our students were taking the same FETAC modules as Irish learners: English was the medium of their learning but not the primary focus of their assessment. And thirdly, our learners could leave us with their ELPs but also with FETAC certificates which have a value within the national system of further education and training. This would add significantly to the integration value of our programmes.

IILT became an accredited FETAC provider in the autumn of 2005. By 2008 it offered the following modules to its students: Preparation for Work (Level 3), Computer Literacy (Level 3), English as a Second Language (Levels 3, 4 and 5). Level 3 is equivalent to the Junior Certificate (the examination taken at the end of the first three years of post-primary education), while Level 4 is equivalent to the first year of the two-year Leaving Certificate (school-leaving examination) programme and level 5 is equivalent to the Leaving Certificate.

In IILT's ELP-based pedagogy learners used scaled checklists of "I can" descriptors to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning; self-assessment and reflection were two sides of the same coin. Personal learning plans emerged and were pursued within the framework of

the class curriculum negotiated between teacher and learners, and learners were themselves responsible for building up a personal dossier that illustrated their developing language skills. FETAC assessment was entirely harmonious with this approach: it requires that learning targets are recorded; self-assessment is part of the assessment process; checklists are kept with proofs for each module; a personal learning plan is required; reflections, plans and decisions must be recorded in a diary; and the learner is responsible for ensuring that all proofs are kept for assessment (in IILT's case in the ELP dossier). Work on FETAC modules was integrated with language learning based on the Milestone ELP by explicitly correlating items in the Milestone ELP checklists to descriptors for FETAC Specific Learning Outcomes. The target language was the medium through which learners engaged with learning and assessment tasks, expressed their life skills and previous knowledge, and presented evidence. However, the linguistic demands made of learners were always limited to the particular requirements of a Specific Learning Outcome.

In this version of portfolio assessment the test takers themselves have a high level of control, and self-assessment is fundamental to their success. Assessment procedures are rooted in the reality of day-to-day language learning, and assessment demands are consistent because they are highly specific. Language knowledge is not a discriminatory factor, and providing proofs is a positive activity. In this system IILT's adult migrant learners could be active participants in learning and assessment in an environment in which failure did not exist; they could gain nationally recognized certificates as a by-product of learning the language of the host community; and the fact that they had access to the same qualifications as native speakers confirmed that they had access to the same opportunities and thus promoted their integration.

Conclusion

Finally, let me return briefly to the theoretical framework with which I began. A decade ago Firth and Wagner (1997) published an article arguing for a reconceptualization of second language acquisition theory; in particular, they emphasized the need to achieve a balance between traditional cognitive concerns and social and contextual dimensions. Ten years later Swain and Deters (2007) reviewed the progress that had been made, summarizing the impact on SLA theory of four distinct if related areas: sociocultural theory, situated learning, post-structuralism, and dialogism. The theoretical framework I summarized in the introduction to this article has drawn on each of these areas and the pedagogy I have described can be easily and explicitly related to them. In the conclusion of their article, Swain and Deters (2007, p.827) describe language learning as “a highly complex activity in which human cognition and human agency develop and multiple identities are co-constructed through interaction with others, the self, and the cultural artefacts of our environments”. A little later they write: “A challenge to the field is whether the issues raised by the broadening of our understanding of L2 acquisition will find their way into current models of communicative performance [...] that affect L2 learning through pedagogy, teacher education, and assessment of proficiency” (ibid., p.828). Alas for the ivory tower! The pedagogical approach I have described in this article has been a reality for the past thirty years. Those who have sought to operationalize learner autonomy—admittedly a tiny minority of the language teaching profession—have always been responsive to the social and contextual dimensions of L2 learning. In this case it is mainstream second language acquisition theory that needs to catch up with pedagogical practice.

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Chapter 3

The art of improvisation: Learner autonomy, the learner, and (computer-assisted) learning environments

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In this chapter I will look in more detail at the relationship between the concept of learner autonomy, the language learner, and the learning environment that the learner finds herself in. This view does not neglect the position of the teacher or (classroom) peers, but rather looks at them as components of the language environment, albeit arguably more important ones than others. Some may wonder why I have used a metaphor mostly connected to jazz music in my title, but I find this metaphor fairly useful as a thinking tool for some of the mechanisms between learners, the learner and the teacher, and in general, between the learner and the learning environment¹.

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1. I am aware of the limitations of this metaphor. However, it appears that jazz improvisation has little to do with mastery of an instrument; in other words, a musician can start improvising right from the beginning when learning to play an instrument, although mastery broadens the scope of opportunities (Berliner, 1994, pp. 114-9). The jazz literature is full of examples where musicians had (at least initially) little formal training.

I will begin with a definition of learner autonomy based on Little's, Legenhausen's, and my own work. In my second section, I will look at three central approaches to learner autonomy through the metaphor of (jazz) improvisation. The third section deals with learning environments, in particular the problematic notion of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). I will then move on in my fourth section to describe not just success stories from my teaching practice but also complete disasters when I started to implement learner autonomy principles in CALL. The fifth section summarises these theoretical assumptions and empirical results in order to re-examine the role of the learner, the teacher and the learning environment in supporting learner autonomy.

Defining learner autonomy

In Little's often-cited definition from 1991:

Autonomy is a *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts. (p. 4)

In one of his recent publications, Little clarifies the point that autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are two sides of the same coin. In this 2007 article he moves from learner autonomy to language learner autonomy:

Learner autonomy is the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually enlarges the scope of her learners' autonomy by gradually allowing them more control of the process and content of their learning. In classrooms as well as in naturalistic contexts communicative proficiency in a second or foreign language is also the product of an interactive process. Thus when *language* learner autonomy is an educational goal, we must devise an interactive dynamic that *simultaneously* develops communicative proficiency and learner autonomy: autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are two sides of the same coin. (p. 26)

Although both citations are to some degree complementary views on learner autonomy, there are some interesting shifts in emphasis. The more recent quote mentions the large role that the teacher plays in the development of learner autonomy. The teacher gradually gives way to the learner's developing autonomy. There is also the focus on the development of learner autonomy as an interactive process within the classroom or naturalistic contexts. In other words, the old quote views learner autonomy from the individual learner, whereas the new quote puts particular emphasis on the role of the teacher and the classroom or naturalistic context the learner is learning in.

In spite of Little's warning in the section "What autonomy is not" in his 1991 book, learner autonomy has over the years been misunderstood in very creative ways. According to Little (pp. 3-4),

- autonomy is not "synonymous with self-instruction; that it is essentially a matter of deciding to learn without a teacher"
- Learner autonomy does not require "the teacher to relinquish all initiative and control" (organizational fallacy)
- autonomy is not "something teachers do to their learners; [...] a new methodology"
- autonomy is not "a single, easily described behaviour"
- autonomy is not "a steady state achieved by certain learners"

To clarify my own standpoint, I agree with Little's view that learner autonomy is neither a method nor synonymous with self-access work. Where exactly we should locate the term learner autonomy is not made easier by the fact that human organisms, as described by Rose (1997, p.18) simultaneously have "to be and become, as when a newborn infant must be capable of sucking at the breast while at the same time developing the competence to chew and digest solid food." The "interchange between organisms and their environments" (ibid., p. 18) is reciprocal; we can see that from a very early age human organisms are not only passively receiving, but also actively initiating interaction with their environment (Schaffer, 1977; Trevarthen, 1977). The processes of independence and interdependence are thus closely related, a fact that is also true for learner autonomy and constitutes a paradox emphasized frequently by Little (1996, p. 204) and others (Voller, 1997, p. 107).

In my own work, more recently in 2007 (Schwienhorst, 2007), I focused on three important approaches to learner autonomy: reflection, interaction, and experimentation. I still consider these perspectives to be absolutely vital in understanding learner autonomy. However, as I understand Little's more recent quote, maybe it is time to take a step back from a learner-centred view of learner autonomy (as for example reflected in Eck, Legenhausen, & Wolff, 1994) and look at the bigger picture, involving the learning environment and the teacher as a part of this.

A decade or two ago it was important to emphasise a learner-centred view, as it is today. But learner-centredness should not be misunderstood as meaning that the learner learns in isolation or that there is no role for either teacher or context. Looking at the learner alone does not tell teachers or observers how parameters in a learning environment need to be altered to support learner autonomy². So

2. I cautiously used the expression "parameters in a learning environment" thereby comprising acting subjects such as peers, teachers, native speaker assistants or tutors, but also objects such as the architecture of the room, learning materials such as books or computers, the institutional context (is this a room dedicated to language learning?), outside noise, etc.

maybe it is time now to look at how more ingredients of the learning process work together. Questions that we may ask ourselves, are in this view, for instance: What environments, both people and spaces, support the exercise and development of learner autonomy? When is learner autonomy misunderstood as chaos? When is learner autonomy misunderstood as teacher directives? What are the parameters that need to be adjusted in order to create a learning environment that supports learner autonomy? But before I turn my attention to the wider implications of learner autonomy, let me briefly recapitulate the three approaches to learner autonomy.

Three approaches to learner autonomy revisited through improvisation

First, let us look at reflection. Why is reflection important? Can I not learn a second language without reflection, by simply relying on “soaking it up”? After all, is that not what many people have done, for instance many migrant workers in Germany? Learning German without a teacher, with little or no correction or feedback? To a certain degree, this is possible. However, learners tend to repeat their errors, which gradually become fossilized and difficult to change. What is the role of reflection? An example from music may help in understanding this point. Bazzana (2004) describes how Glenn Gould, the Canadian pianist, made use of a recorder.

The revolution of magnetic tape was introduced to radio and recording in the late forties, and the Goulds were among the first people in Toronto to acquire a recorder for use at home, despite the high cost; friends’ recollections and the surviving recordings suggest that Glenn was using one as early as 1947 or 1948. He immediately recognized the value of recording, not only for

preserving his repertoire and interpretation for posterity, but for analyzing his own playing. Recording, for him, became a practice technique. (p. 125)

'The greatest of all teachers is the tape recorder,' (Gould) told a friend. 'I would be lost without it.' (p. 133)

Glenn Gould became famous with his recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations in 1955. He then re-recorded them in 1981, at an incredibly slow tempo which disturbed many of his fans. Part of his decision to slow down the tempo may have to do with his increasing focus on reflection and control. His obsession with the tape recorder and studio work in general in the latter part of his career can be ascribed to his dialogue with himself, his constant monitoring and evaluation. Judging from his own work and reports from contemporaries, this intensive way of "working with himself", of detachment, of developing observational skills, of keeping a balance between impartiality and creative energy lies at the heart of reflection.

While this meticulous mode of working may be expected of a classical musician, reflection may not be considered to be of high importance to a jazz improviser. After all, when discussing classical music, the notion is that the score is often written first, with a public performance second, whereas in jazz improvisation, the performance comes first, and a score would have to be created afterwards (for instance, on the basis of a recording). However, especially for beginners in improvisation, reflection can take several forms. Few jazz improvisers start playing jazz without reflective tools, even before the advent of recording technology. Two typical examples are mentioned by Berliner:

'When you're very young, you don't have the harmonic knowledge to create solos yourself, so you begin by copying things that sound good in other people's solos.'

Benny Bailey

'I decided the best I could do would be to write the solos down, note for note, and line them up with the harmony of the song, analyzing the notes according to the chords that were being played. Then I would learn, "Well, you can do this at this time. You can do that at that time." It was like getting your vocabulary straight.'

Art Farmer (Both musicians cited in Berliner, 1994, p. 95)

Jazz musicians often begin by imitating seasoned jazz musicians, copying and absorbing whole catalogues of solos, very much the way some language learners acquire vocabulary. They do this either by writing out scores from sound recordings or playing along with recordings. Written scores are in this respect problematic, as they may not catch the subtleties of phrasing as directly as a recording, although other aspects, such as the harmonic structures as mentioned by Farmer may be more easily discernible.

But the learning process in jazz improvisation is not just a process of imitation. Many jazz improvisers have learned by heart an endless store of complete solos which, as they become more experienced, they are able to break down into ever smaller components, phrases that "work". Many, like Farmer, actually go as far as writing down the phrases, analyzing them, and making a mental note of which ones "worked" and which could be reassembled and modified. Although it appears to happen quite rarely that experienced improvisers listen to their own recordings, many seem to be acutely aware when they repeat stock phrases from other musicians or quasi-rehearsed phrases they themselves practised or used before (see the section on experimentation below). Several books on improvisation recommend using recordings of one's own improvisations when starting to learn improvisation. Although the need for such recordings had been noted for decades before the necessary technology became available (see e.g., Southgate, 1881), the use and availability of recordings is a relatively recent development. This applies to both the contexts of improvised music and authentic oral communication.

In language learning, reflection is often associated with the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's (language) learning as a process and product. One side of the coin concerns the underlying metalinguistic and metacognitive skills, where learners receive help through "instructional conversation" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), "learner training" (Dickinson, 1992; Esch, 1997), or "learner counselling" (Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Kelly, 1996; Voller, 1997), also see the special volume of *System* Vol 35(1) on language counselling (Rubin, 2007). The reflection on meta-skills may also be combined with a reflection on current language skills, usually in the form of artefacts produced by the learner. Students need to be assisted in this process, as awareness by itself does not necessarily imply a benefit but can even have destructive results (cf. Goleman, 1996, p. 52). Goleman makes the point, by referring to Mayer & Stevens (unpublished manuscript), that if people become engulfed in their thoughts, moods, and emotions, if their emotional awareness becomes overwhelming, their thoughts move in circles. Awareness of emotions may, in certain cases, not lead to productive insights, but rather to paralyzing disempowerment such as "learned helplessness" (cf. Gordon & Gordon, 2006; cf. Petersen, Seligman, & Maier, 1996). At the Fachsprachenzentrum in Hannover, we assist students at many levels and in many classes in the process of reflection by providing them with camcorders and technical assistance of student helpers who are trained in producing, editing, and digitizing video, in order to produce recordings of themselves and then analyze them. Similarly, students are required to submit various versions of a text by electronic means (e.g. Turnitin), either producing texts on self-selected topics for specific purposes (e.g. a lab report in biochemistry) or general purposes (the outline of an argument). They expand the text from a draft to a complete text, and work with tools such as Turnitin for plagiarism detection and flexible and minimal systems of error correction. As no other form of submission is permitted, they need to get used to a process of text production and review on a regular

basis, meeting regular deadlines. In this process, it is vital for teachers and peers to provide a strong network of encouragement to avoid the danger that learners drift into pessimistic thoughts such as “I recognize clearly where I need to improve, but nothing I try helps me and I am going to fail anyway.”

Various forms of reflection need to be considered. It sometimes seems to me that while strategy training is widely discussed, educators may overlook the opportunities that they now have at their disposal for students to self-reflect on language output, in particular by using electronic means. The goal in this process is twofold: on the one hand certainly to develop meta-skills and an arsenal of learning strategies that work; on the other hand to develop the ability to self-monitor and self-assess by working with self-produced material, by carefully observing and evaluating oneself.

A second approach to learner autonomy has emphasized the importance of interaction and has often been connected to the work of Vygotsky and the “zone of proximal development (ZPD)” (Vygotsky, 1978). An unlikely source that describes the benefits of the ZPD comes, again, from jazz improvisation:

I wanted the music this new group would play to be freer, more modal, more African or Eastern, and less Western. I wanted them to go beyond themselves. See, if you put a musician in a place where he has to do something different from what he does all the time, then he can do that—but he’s got to think differently in order to do it. He has to use his imagination, be more creative, more innovative; he’s got to take more risks. He’s got to play above what he knows—far above it—and what that might lead to might take him above the place where he’s been playing all along, to the new place where he finds himself right now—and to the next place he’s going and even above that! So then he’ll be freer, will expect things differently, will anticipate and know something different is coming down. I’ve always told the musicians in

my band to play what they *know* and then play *above that*. Because then anything can happen, and that's when great art and music happens.

(Davis & Troupe, 1989, p. 220)

Miles Davis refers here to the musician who goes beyond him- (or her)self in the process of collaborating with musicians that are more experienced or knowledgeable peers. In doing so, the musician becomes “more creative, more innovative, he’s got to take more risks.” This almost sounds as if Davis had Vygotsky’s ZPD in mind; although Vygotsky talks about “problem solving”, both are essentially talking about the “collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) that enables learners to reach a higher level. In this process of adjustment, both in language learning and improvisation, one needs to combine existing elements and take risks in putting elements together. Maybe the element of risk-taking has not been discussed sufficiently in the notion of the ZPD, but I feel it deserves more attention. It is important to recognise that risk-taking involves the possibility of failure, and the more risks learners take, the more they are also likely to make errors. Unfortunately, the development of an error culture or error management culture³ (Van Dyck, 2000) still runs counter to many trends in society (cf. Althof, 1999; Oser & Spychiger, 1995; Osten, 2006), but there is, at least recently, a wide-spread recognition of their importance in second language pedagogy (see, for instance, Heift & Schulze, 2007). It is important to note here that collaborative work and interaction, in this respect, do not automatically produce positive results and do not have intrinsic value, as implied in many research articles on interaction and collaboration in SLA. Collaboration and interaction can have disastrous consequences if an error culture has not been developed. Surowiecki reports in detail how the performance of the Mission Management Team (MMT) for NASA mission STS-107

3. Interestingly, the German term “Fehlerkultur” appears to be far more established than the English “error culture” or “error management culture”, but maybe I am simply missing the right translation.

(the final flight of the space shuttle *Columbia*) turned out to be “an object lesson in how not to run a small group, and a powerful demonstration of the way in which, instead of making people wiser, being in a group can actually make them dumber” (Surowiecki, 2004, p. 175). Thus, effective interaction presupposes a learning atmosphere where errors are not only permitted, but encouraged, and where it is equally important to notice and reflect on errors. Surowiecki mentions three important lessons from the MMT performance. Collaboration and interaction needs to start with an “open mind” (ibid., p. 177), it needs to encourage “debate and minority opinions” (ibid., p. 181), it needs “cognitive diversity”, a point Surowiecki frequently emphasises in his book (ibid., p. 183), the notion that “having even a single different opinion can make a group wiser” (ibid., p. 184).

The idea of the zone of proximal development is linked to the use of the target language. According to social interactionist theories in second language acquisition, it is through socially mediated interaction in the target language that learners construct language. Thus language learning needs to be embedded in contexts that are personally meaningful, for instance, by relying on authentic resources rather than textbook language. The frequently debated question whether receiving input alone suffices for language acquisition to take place has ultimately remained unresolved, but much research and many theoretical models suggest that not only is it important to take account of output that learners produce but that learners need to interact with other learners and resources and also reflect on what they perceive and “notice”, in Schmidt’s sense of the term (Schmidt, 1990).

Interaction in a stress-free environment that allows for errors encourages experimentation, my third approach to learner autonomy.

“Sometimes it works, sometimes it fails, but that’s what we face when we’re dealing with improvisation.”

(Jan Garbarek, jazz musician, in Farach-Colton & Garbarek, 1998)

“I think the fear of failure is why I try things . . . if I see that there’s some value in something and I’m not sure whether I deserve to attempt it, I want to find out.”

(Keith Jarrett, jazz musician, in Barrett, 1998, p.605)

Only if learners experiment with new elements will they find out whether what they say is understood and appropriate. Constant encouragement, feedback, and processes of “noticing” are then necessary to facilitate intake. In previous publications, I have mostly referred to Gibson’s theory of affordances (Gibson, 1966; 1979) to emphasise how important it is for learners to perceive the learning potential of environments. Here I would like to focus on the ability of learners to take risks. Again, the context of jazz improvisation can show some examples that demonstrate what experimentation means. Barrett (1998; also cf. Bailey, 1992) discusses the differences between jazz improvisers such as Oscar Peterson and Sonny Rollins:

Oscar Peterson is a very polished, technically immaculate, performer, who—I hope he wouldn’t mind me saying so—trots out these fantastic things that he has perfected and it really is a remarkable performance. Whereas Sonny Rollins, he could go on one night and maybe it’s disappointing, and another night he’ll just take your breath away by his kind of imagination and so forth. And it would be different every night with Rollins.

(Ronnie Scott, jazz musician, cited in Barrett, 1998, p. 51)⁴

Challenging oneself often requires a conscious effort; thus my first approach to learner autonomy, reflection, also plays a major part in experimentation:

4. This may be a somewhat harsh comment. There are many recordings of Peterson which disprove what Scott writes here, recordings where he was pushed to go beyond pre-composed phrases, challenging himself. The essence, as Keith Jarrett puts it, is a struggle for musical expression: “The music is struggle. You have to want to struggle. And what most leaders are the victim of is the freedom not to struggle” (Jarrett, in Carr, 1991, p.53).

Jazz musicians often approach their work with a self-reflexiveness, guarding against the temptation to rely on ingrained habits, so that they don't repeat stock phrases and comfortable solos that contradict the goal of improvisation. (*ibid.*, p. 608)

If experimentation is defined as deliberate but to a certain extent calculated risk-taking that might involve success but also failure, then an atmosphere is needed that is at least stress-reduced to cushion the consequences. Nevertheless, an important element of experimentation is that the improviser or learner carries the whole responsibility for both success and failure.

Experimentation encompasses success and failure; it is an iterative process of understanding what doesn't work and what does. Both results are equally important for learning, the goal of any experiment and of experimentation overall. Thus, a crash test that results in unacceptable safety for drivers, a software user interface that confuses customers, or a drug that is toxic can all be desirable outcomes of an experiment—provided these results are revealed early in an innovation process and *can be subsequently reexamined*.

(my italics, Thomke, 2003, p. 2)

When successful, this is certainly motivating, but when a learner carries the whole responsibility for failure, the implications from the perspective of stress research need to be considered very carefully (cf. Sapolsky, 2004, p. 412; Seligman, 1991). This is a problematic area that deserves more attention in learner autonomy discussions. Sapolsky (2004, p. 403ff.) makes the case that a sense of having control over an outcome is not always a good thing psychologically; in fact, “[h]aving an illusory sense of control in a bad setting can be so pathogenic that one version of it gets a special name in the health psychology literature”—John Henryism, which refers to “individuals with an internal locus of control—they believe that, with enough effort and determina-

tion, they can regulate all outcomes” (ibid., pp. 404-5). The question is, for instance, whether it is “stress-reducing to feel a sense of control when something bad happens” (ibid., p. 404). In terms of our language learners, this may translate to a situation where they feel they make no progress in language learning while at the same time being in control of their learning, thus increasing stress rather than avoiding it. In other words, I would like to draw our attention to the very important role of the teacher here to assist learners in dealing with control, particularly when the (at least temporary) outcome of control may appear to be stagnation or attrition in learning.

I consider experimentation to be a vital approach to the concept of learner autonomy, as it probably concerns the role of the teacher and the whole learning environment more than the other two approaches, reflection and interaction. Learners will only begin experimenting when on the one hand they are given the freedom and control to do so in a stress-reduced learning environment and when on the other hand the learning environment provides a framework for them to relate their autonomy to. What does this mean in practice?

One practical implementation of learner autonomy principles can be found in tandem learning. The definition of tandem learning is quite clear-cut: two learners with complementary L1/L2 combinations work together, setting learning agendas and defining goals, documenting and reflecting on their learning and outcomes, using both languages in equal amounts (cf. Kötter, 2002). Here learners have on the one hand the freedom to experiment, setting agendas, defining goals, etc., in a stress-reduced environment (both are alternatively learner and expert; contact takes place in private). On the other hand they have a framework they can rely on: their partner has a complementary language combination, has a commitment to interact and put a certain effort into the partnership. To increase support, they may also be involved in regular counselling sessions and/or give and receive regular feedback on their progress, discussing learning processes and outcomes. Many tandem learning projects have

made use of telecommunications to connect tandem learners, including my own (cf. Kötter, 2002; cf. Schwienhorst, 2007). Often this has been discussed in the context of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Thus, before I move on with a description of a practical implementation of learner autonomy, let me look at CALL first.

What is CALL then?

The concept of CALL has been used to cover a variety of methods, tools, and approaches. With the increasing pervasiveness of technology in our daily lives and thus learning environments, one may well ask whether it is still useful to discuss CALL and related terms as separate fields. More than ten years ago Levy defined CALL as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (Levy, 1997, p. 1). Not long after, with the Internet taking over the hype from multimedia applications, Kern & Warschauer defined network-based language teaching (NBLT) as a “constellation of ways by which students communicate via computer networks and interpret and construct on-line texts and multimedia documents, all as part of a process of steadily increasing engagement in new discourse communities” (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 17). However, the term CALL has remained with us. What does it refer to exactly and why should CALL be different from other, well, what exactly? Methods? Tools? Environments?

A more useful justification has been put forward by Levy & Hubbard:

By pursuing research and development from a ‘CALL-centred’ viewpoint, we are likely to arrive at different sorts of generalisations and interpretations from

those whose approach is a primarily pedagogical, cognitive, or social one in which the computer is a neutral delivery system or 'just' a tool.

(Levy & Hubbard, 2005, p. 146)

They employ mainly three arguments to emphasise the necessity of CALL as a separate label for a research field:

The “uniqueness and complexity of language and language learning”;

The “recognition of the computer as a unique technology”;

The “need for a single descriptive term from the field” (where CALL is the dominant term).

The first argument would explain why there is a focus on technology and *language* learning, the third argument is a normal strategy or development when establishing any research field. What I would like to look at more closely is the second argument. Is the computer unique as a technology? Why do publications speak of CALL but not book-assisted, classroom-assisted, teacher-assisted, peer-assisted, television-assisted, mobile-assisted,... language learning? I would question whether the computer is a unique and qualitatively different technology. On its own, it does not create new opportunities for learning, but certainly facilitates a variety of communication scenarios, a variety of authentic language input, a variety of Intelligent CALL (ICALL) applications, and a variety of “cognitive tools” (the learner as *producer* of tools in the sense of Jonassen & Reeves, 1996; Schoelles & Hamburger, 1996). However, it would be easier, and probably more justified, to discuss mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) as the next “perspective” (Chinnery, 2006), as a more fundamental departure from traditional institutional language learning.

The issue of the computer as technology also becomes fuzzier the closer you look at it. Levy & Hubbard (2005, p. 145) argue that “we have moved from a finger in the sand (where writing is technology-free)

through hammer, chisel and stone, quill and vellum, typewriter and paper to the keyboard and screen/disc, both locally and at a distance (email, chat).” But then, what was the finger in the sand other than a mental operation adapting an existing tool for alternative purposes? The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd ed. 1989, online) defines technology as “A particular practical or industrial art”, and according to Wikipedia (15 July 2008)

Technology is a broad concept that deals with a species' usage and knowledge of tools and crafts, and how it affects a species' ability to control and adapt to its environment. In human society, it is a consequence of science and engineering, although several technological advances predate the two concepts. Technology is a term with origins in the Greek “*technologia*”, “*τεχνολογία*”—“*techne*”, “*τέχνη*” (“craft”) and “*logia*”, “*λογία*” (“saying”).[...] However, a strict definition is elusive; “technology” can refer to material objects of use to humanity, such as machines, hardware or utensils, but can also encompass broader themes, including systems, methods of organization, and techniques. The term can either be applied generally or to specific areas: examples include “construction technology”, “medical technology”, or “state-of-the-art technology”. [...] Indeed, until recently, it was believed that the development of technology was restricted only to human beings, but recent scientific studies indicate that other primates and certain dolphin communities have developed simple tools and learned to pass their knowledge to other generations.

(Wikipedia.org, retrieved on 15 July 2008)

While the OED definition may be restricted to humans (if we consider art as a human domain, also cf. the OED's definition of “art”), Wikipedia defines technology in much broader terms. Thus, technology does not even apply exclusively to humanity, but encompasses a large variety of tools and concepts. Even if fingers as tools are not accepted, it would certainly be difficult to distinguish between computers and

books, defining the first as technology, the second as non-technology. Thus, whether the “uniqueness” or the “technology” features of computers is pursued, neither appears to be particularly convincing.

Computer-assisted language learning could also be assumed to stand in contrast to unassisted language learning; otherwise it would not need to be mentioned. In this line of argument one could assume that the term CALL stands in opposition to language learning unassisted by a pedagogue, or unassisted by language input, or unassisted by cognitive (learning) tools. While it may be possible to construct an argument that language learning is possible without a teacher, it would be almost paradoxical to imagine any form of language learning to take place without language input or learning tools (which learners consciously or subconsciously apply).

In summary, then, the term CALL stands on relatively shaky ground as a valid perspective in discussions on language learning or as a separate section in applied linguistics. In fact, while it has blossomed as a focus of dedicated conferences, it has continued to shift between categories on the programmes of more general applied linguistics or language teaching conferences.

This discussion of CALL, however, did not serve to discredit the field. I would simply like to add a word of caution. One needs to look very closely at research results and how these can be transferred to wider contexts, from the perspectives of both technology and pedagogy. Concepts such as reflection, interaction, and experimentation should not be seen as inherently beneficial to language learning nor should the application of technology be viewed as inherently beneficial. There are examples where we have reflection, or interaction, or experimentation, and also the application of technology, and the outcomes are certainly not beneficial or desirable; in fact, the results can be disastrous. And on this cue, I return from this short discourse into CALL to practical implementations of learner autonomy.

How to fail miserably in implementing learner autonomy principles

Let me, for a moment, outline a scenario where an effort in learner autonomy and CALL failed, and at first glance, failed miserably, and compare this with a second, similar scenario. Both are, I frankly admit, taken from my own experience.

Scenario 1: A German and an Irish teacher prepare a tandem telecommunications exchange using a text-based object-oriented multiple user domain (MOO), running over 9 weekly sessions of one hour, between Irish students learning German and German students learning English. The teachers hand out brief technical explanations, and outlines of tandem principles. Students are to be put into tandem pairs in the first session, and then supposed to work on specific tasks.

The first session begins by everybody connecting to the MOO. Students are very lively and engaged, and they feel free to discuss any topic at all, although they know that all the communication is digitally recorded. However, communication is exclusively in English (the stronger L2) and quickly becomes multi-threaded, disconnected. Many students perceive this as chaotic, lose interest and begin to browse the web. Others are not sure what they are supposed to do, or still read the handouts. All the while, the teachers try to pair up students, and assign them to virtual “rooms” where they can work on their own, without success. The balancing act between managing the virtual environment and the physical classroom fails. Students are excited, but their first and lasting impression is one of chaos, disorder, disorientation, and non-guidance. At the end of the session, they still don’t know who their partner is.

Scenario 2: Both teachers plan another tandem telecommunications exchange using a MOO. Again, it runs over 9 weekly sessions of one hour,

between Irish students learning German and German students learning English. This time, the teachers work with previous MOO transcripts in class before the project begins. In groups, students are asked to reflect on tandem principles in practice, becoming aware of opportunities, but also pitfalls during these exchanges. Students are also provided with hands-on introductions to the technology before the project begins. The German students send short introductory e-mails in German and English to the Irish teacher, who in turn distributes them among the Irish students. The Irish students then choose their partner themselves. At the beginning of the first MOO session, both teachers and students have a list of tandem pairs, and the virtual rooms they work in. Students know how to get to these rooms. All students have checklists of task frameworks that need to be completed, both online and offline, with deadlines. They also make time to discuss current events, weekend activities, etc. Students know, at least to an extent, how to create virtual objects and share them with their partners. Students also know how to make entries into an online learner diary after each session, and quickly get into a habit of doing so. These entries reveal learning strategies, plans, evaluations, but also just short impressions about L1/L2 differences and learning techniques; anything they feel is worth mentioning. The first session starts smoothly, after 10 minutes all students are working quietly and absorbed at their computers. They ask their classmates for help, and explore online resources such as dictionaries. Some stay on after the session is over. Students are excited and discuss their partners among themselves. They make plans on how their partners can help them with their projects in class. After four weeks, and at the end of the project, teachers include a review session in class, where students work again in small groups to discuss tandem principles and any problems that came up during the exchange. Reactions are very positive, and students demonstrate a high level of motivation, awareness and engagement in the project.

(Schwienhorst, 2007)

What affected the different outcomes? Let us look at those areas where we made changes and where we felt progress was made rather decisively, especially in terms of the organisational framework. The first difference lies in the introduction to the technological tools and the pedagogical frameworks. In the first example, we did not introduce them to the technology, wrongly assuming that learners would be able to perceive and make use of the affordances (Gibson, 1979) that the system offers. We also did not introduce our learners to the pedagogical principles and goals behind the project. Over the years, I have noticed that many learners benefit from explicit discussions of SLA principles, so I have introduced these discussions more and more into my courses. The second difference lies in the absence or presence of a task framework with a specific time frame, milestones, and fixed deliverables. Many learners in subsequent projects reported that task frameworks give them a necessary structure and that this is an area where they need support. A third difference lies in the lack of reflective elements in the first scenario, which, in my view, can be and has been one of the pitfalls of telecommunication projects focused on interaction described in the literature today. In many cases, learners are embedded in interaction and are able to experiment with language, but often the element of reflection is totally missing, both from the teacher's as well as the learner's role. A fourth and last difference lies with the (non-)integration of the telecommunication exchange within regular course work and course assessment. CALL and computer-mediated communication (CMC) projects need to be embedded in the normal assessment procedures if they are to avoid being viewed by learners as an add-on.

These differences affected how learner autonomy was supported in those two projects. So how, then, do these differences relate to reflection, interaction, and experimentation? Apparently, right from the beginning my colleague and I had no problem to encourage our learners either to interact or experiment with language, although this experimentation was rather limited in the beginning. Was this CALL-induced or was

the pedagogical framework responsible? Let me start with interaction. Why did learners start interacting immediately? Put learners together with native speakers in a room, and there may only be limited if any interaction between the groups. Put them into a text-based chat room, and interaction will most likely happen, provided learners are aware that other participants are there. Why? I can only speculate, but the learners' existence in a chat room is almost exclusively communicated by typing. This involves the visual appearance, but also simple things like the location of the participants, time zone, weather, facilities, etc. Thus the technology itself may be responsible for encouraging interaction, for instance to gain information that discussants in real life readily perceive. Participants, in many chat systems, do not exist until they type⁵.

In terms of experimentation, both scenarios show that learners notice what Gibson (*ibid.*) calls affordances: "the actions a given environment affords to a given acting observer" (Smets, Stappers, Overbeeke, & Mast, 1995, p. 200). Learners were apparently well aware that the system allowed them to experiment freely with language. Stress-reduction was realized through private communication channels with their tandem partners and flexibility in communication partners. Stress-reduction was also realised through virtual environments that learners could modify in whatever way they wanted. Overall, learners reported a great sense of ownership of the communication situation and learning environment.

That leaves the apparent lack of reflection in the first scenario. Borgia and I worked on the lack of support for reflection in subsequent projects, providing a technological solution in otherwise dominantly and inherently interactional and experimental CALL environments. I am not suggesting in any way here that chat environments are much different in this respect from many non-CALL environments. I do not have much reflective support, for instance, in my desperate attempts

5. A more detailed ontological discussion would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

to buy a bottle of sparkling water from a street stall in Paris or inquire about the taxi fare in a Siberian city. Thus, it may be argued that we subsequently introduced tools that are usually not at our disposal in real life.

We began by introducing a mechanism whereby all our learners received a full transcript by email of their chat after each session. This dominantly technological affordance alone is revolutionary in its possibilities. As an example of the opportunities that are presented by the immediate availability of digital interaction, Borgia and I developed and implemented a so-called Bilingual Tandem Analyzer (BTA) for Tandem projects via text-based chat, a tool we have presented in more detail elsewhere (Schwienhorst, 2003; Schwienhorst & Borgia, 2006). What the BTA added to the chat environment we were using (a MOO) was simple yet extremely effective. The BTA was able to detect, *during* live text chats, which language was spoken at any given moment (through n-gram analysis⁶). As all users had to type in, on their initial connection, their native language and the language they were learning, the system “knew” at any given moment whether a user was interacting in the language she was learning or whether it was her native language. It was then a simple step to give real-time feedback to learners on the percentages of L1/L2 used in interaction, an important measurement of the success of a tandem pair. This feedback led to a greater balance between the two languages used and presents, in my view, a good example of a real-time combination of interaction and reflection that is unfortunately seen very rarely in CALL projects. One could easily imagine other developments, such as tagged corpora of native speaker and learner language chat interactions that are produced while learners are chatting and made available to them offline. Again, to return to my

6. N-gram models are used to determine the next item in a sequence, usually in linguistic or genetic sequences. N-grams can be composed of letters, as in our case, that would be compared to a data corpus to determine the language of the text. Thus a 3-gram such as –sch- taken together with other 3- and 4-grams may be typical of German, but not English.

original claim: I started with the conviction that neither interaction nor experimentation alone are sufficient in a language learning environment, that elements of reflection are needed to encourage processes of noticing and changes in overall learning strategies. I introduced a modification of the learning environment, a new tool, that provided reflective support and even forced learners to reflect, thus leading to a more efficient learning environment and atmosphere.

Roles in language learning

In my final section I would like to turn to the roles of learners, teachers, and the learning environment. Some may be surprised to see the combination of “role” and “learning environment”, but the history of CALL has been littered with convictions that the computer, in some ways, “does” something to the learner (after all, originally, a computer is “A person who makes calculations or computations”, as the *OED* notes). And in many ways, and following Gibson’s theory of affordances, any learning environment does.

Little reminds us that learner autonomy is “a matter of learners doing things not necessarily on their own but for themselves” (Little, 2007, p. 14). Learners do not exactly always jump at the chance to do something for themselves, as any teacher knows. I would not totally agree with Little that this is solely or mainly the result of schooling: “...learners are often reluctant to take charge of their own learning. They are accustomed to the passive role that school traditionally assigns to learners and distrustful of the idea that they should set learning targets, select learning materials and activities, and evaluate learning outcomes” (ibid., p. 17). I believe that assuming responsibility for anything that can go wrong is something that many learners and indeed people find stressful. It is worth repeating that stress research has shown

that assuming responsibility can often turn into pathological instances of self-blame, sufficient to paralyze the individual. Sapolsky (2004, pp. 300-4), for instance, refers to the cases of learned helplessness, cases where assuming responsibility has not become an option (also see Gordon & Gordon, 2006; Petersen, Seligman, & Maier, 1996). Nevertheless, assuming responsibility becomes an unavoidable and necessary part of the learner's role in situations where nobody else *can* assume responsibility as Dam so powerfully describes in her introduction (Dam, 1995, p. 2). But it also emphasises one of the important roles the teacher still has to play.

The teacher's role in learner autonomy is not easy. According to Little (1991, p. 45), the teacher may often intervene too soon. Yet in a recent publication, he mentions that

Learners cannot construct their knowledge out of nothing, neither can they know by instinct how to conduct focused and purposeful learning conversations that shape themselves to the ways of thinking characteristic of the subject in question. Teachers remain indispensable, both as pedagogues and as discipline experts.

(Little, 2007, p. 20)

One idea that is at the core of the teacher's role is the conviction that teachers need to assess where learners *can* make decisions in the learning process right from day one. The teacher thus needs to move the learning environment, as much as possible, within reach of the learner's level of autonomy, no more, no less. As the learners takes over more and more decisions, the teacher relinquishes control and identifies other areas which need to be brought within reach of the learner's autonomy. This teaching skill should become one of the major components of any language teacher education (cf. Burkert & Schwienhorst, forthcoming).

The learning environment in learner autonomy is, as I mentioned, often supervised by the teacher, at least in institutional con-

texts, although, of course, the teacher is also a part of it. The learning environment can present tools to stimulate reflection, such as tools to record and analyse language input and output and tools to record and analyse learning progress. It can stimulate interaction by presenting a diversity of communication partners in the target language, communication tools and authentic communication activities. It can stimulate experimentation through “cognitive tools” or “tools for thought” that enable learners to experiment with new language and learning strategies (Bruner, 1986). The question is whether learning opportunities are always readily perceived.

The learner is *always* situated within a learning environment in the widest sense. This learning environment by itself provides some affordances that are readily perceived by the learner (including those not perceived by a teacher!); some affordances that will need teacher assistance to be perceived; and some affordances that are beyond the learner’s (and possibly the teacher’s) level of learner autonomy already achieved (see O’Rourke & Schwienhorst, 2003). Some of these affordances have to do with technology, or more precisely, with computer tools, e.g., ease-of-use and affordability of communication media and partners/audience on the web (Skype, Podcasts, Blogs); search engines; concordancers in combination with huge databases of authentic material; or ICALL technology to analyse interlanguage and provide learner-centred error-correction and feedback mechanisms (Granger, Hung, & Petch-Tyson, 2002; Heift & Schulze, 2007). Then again, I would question whether current generations would even single out computers or the Internet as a special (marked) tool. Many affordances that are attributed to the computer or technology are *not* necessarily “computer-based”, e.g., the use of writing for communication; the non-availability of non-verbal communication cues; diaries and blogs; the lack of teacher control; collaborative group work; learner participation; or the mere fact of working with something new. Computer tools can often remain merely a potential, if the learning opportunities are not

within reach of the learner's autonomy and if teachers do not manage to relate these affordances to the three principles of reflection, interaction, and experimentation. Thus, CALL research is useful as

- A perspective that encourages the exploration of new technologies for language learning
- A perspective that seeks to go beyond traditional language learning and teaching scenarios
- A perspective that accepts that technology and pedagogy are inter-related
- A perspective that, in many cases, works against teacher control and traditional learning scenarios
- A perspective that, in many cases, works towards individual learning agendas and goals

Coda: Learner autonomy and CALL environments

In this chapter, I have first tried to define learner autonomy according to the three approaches of reflection, interaction, and experimentation, then second the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), before moving on in my third section to describe different practical learning scenarios involving learner autonomy, and fourth, the different roles for learners, teachers, and the learning environment.

As I argued, learner autonomy can be realised without computer technology, but the Internet in particular and computers in general broaden our opportunities, and broaden our learning environments.

We simply have more options for reflection; more opportunities to find authentic partners for communication; more variety in authentic materials; and more options for experimentation; and more options for combining reflection, interaction, and experimentation. More and more, however, computers and the Internet have become just an ordinary part of the learning environment: “using technology has become the unmarked, the normal and natural, way of doing so many things” (Chapelle, 2003, p. xiii).

When I looked at some of the concepts behind learner autonomy, I used metaphors from jazz improvisation. Three vital ingredients seem to me to be essential for both: reflection, interaction, and experimentation. All three are united, whether in learner or in teacher, by an acute sense of perceiving and grasping learning opportunities and interpreting the (learning) environment as an infinite collection of challenging learning opportunities. Forming and reacting to this environment, the learner hones her sense of acute perception and enters the Vygotskian zone of proximal development. This is the art of learner autonomy, the art of improvisation.

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Chapter 4

Self-access language learning: Structure, control, and responsibility

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Recently a national newspaper in Japan ran a full page feature entitled “Home-based English Learning Special” (Home-based, 2008). This is a sign of the times. Many Japanese are learning languages on their own outside of institutional settings. Recognizing this trend toward independent learning, a growing number of universities around the country are establishing self-access language learning facilities. However, as educators at one Japanese university have noted a “state-of-the-art centre does not automatically ensure learner autonomy or independence” (Cooker & Torpey, 2004, p. 11). What does afford the potential for learners to exercise their autonomy and develop their target language proficiency in self-access centres is the learning structure, i.e., the theory and research driven conceptual framework that guides the design of the centre and the programmes on offer.

In other parts of the world, universities which have been experimenting with self-access language learning for some time are now looking to pedagogical models that incorporate this mode of learning into a course-based learning structure (Gardner, 2007; Fisher, Hafner & Young, 2007; Karlsson, Kjisik, & Nordlund, 2007; Toogood & Pemberton, 2002; Victori, 2007). This chapter adds to a growing body of literature by describing the learning structure which informed the development of the programmes offered in two self-access centres operated by Akita International University [AIU] in northern Japan. After outlining the features of the learning structure, the chapter explains how it was implemented in a self-access centre situated in the business district of Akita City in order to provide English language learning opportunities for the general public. This is followed by an illustration of how the learning structure was adapted to create a course in self-directed language learning offered to students in the other centre located on the AIU campus. The chapter concludes by commenting on the learners' response to these programmes and considering the implications for educators interested in implementing this type of learning structure.

The learning structure

While the learning structure outlined here draws on the work of a number of researchers in the area of learner autonomy and, more specifically, self-access language learning, it is primarily informed by Holec's (1981) model of learner autonomy. Defining learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3), Holec calls for learners to be responsible for all aspects of their learning from goal setting to assessment. Holec notes that for learners to assume these responsibilities they must be working within a structure which enables

them to take control of their learning. While Holec's model highlights three components, control, responsibility, and structure, language educators wishing to promote learner autonomy in institutional settings will need to take great care in crafting the learning structure. It is the learning structure which determines the nature and scope of the learning opportunities available, the degree of control the learners will be able to exercise, and the extent to which they will be able to assume responsibility for their learning.

Table 1 outlines the features of the learning structure which has informed the physical design of the learning environment and served as the conceptual framework for the programmes offered in the self-access centres described in this chapter. First, in accordance with Holec's (1981) model, learners plan their learning. They begin by setting goals for their learning based on their perceptions of their needs and interests. Once learners have determined their goals, they select materials and determine how they will use them for language learning, i.e., identify appropriate activities. They also have to decide how they will assess their learning. Secondly, learners develop their language proficiency through active engagement with the target language (Dam, 1990, 1995; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). Therefore, materials take on a special importance. In addition to English foreign language materials, learners should have access to "authentic texts," in other words, materials not originally intended for use in the foreign language classroom, such as movies or television programmes (Little, 1997). Thirdly, learners need support as they plan their learning, engage with the materials, and assess their learning. Instead of delivering language lessons, teachers become facilitators and advisors (Voller, 1997) who help learners broaden their knowledge of how to learn, and provide the ongoing support and guidance learners require (Kelly, 1996; Mozzon-McPherson, 2000; Riley, 1997). Fourthly, critical reflection plays a key role as learners monitor and assess their learning on a regular basis (Dam, 1990, 1995; Little, 1991; Gardner and Miller, 1999). A fifth feature of the learning structure is that

Table 1. A Learning Structure in Support of Self-Directed Language Learning

Features	Description
Planning	Learners develop their own personal learning plans. Initially, they set their own goals, select materials, and determine learning activities. They also decide how they will monitor progress and assess outcomes.
Engagement	Learners develop their language skills through direct engagement with a wide selection of target language materials in a variety of activities. There are no language lessons.
Support	Learners develop their knowledge of how to plan and carry out their learning through whole class instruction, one-on-one language advising sessions, peer interaction, and access to printed strategy guides.
Reflection	Learners are encouraged to continuously reflect on their learning. Reflection is the key element of the planning, monitoring, and self-assessment processes.
Management	Learners make decisions related to all aspects of their learning. They also keep written records of their long term learning plans, daily learning activities, their reflections on the learning process, and evidence of learning. This information is accumulated in portfolios which play an important role in the management, monitoring, and assessment of learning.
Personalization	Learners make decisions based on their personal needs, interests, and learning styles. For example, they decide what they will do, how they will do it, and for how long. They proceed at their own pace.

learners manage their learning (Holec, 1987). Not only do they make decisions related to all aspects of their learning, but they keep records of their activities and their reflections on those activities. To assist learners in managing their learning, they maintain portfolios which provide a means of collecting and organizing their records. Moreover, portfolios have been shown to facilitate reflection and self-assessment (Kohonen, 2000; Yang, 2003). Another salient feature of the learning structure is that it promotes the personalization of learning. Learners make decisions concerning their learning based on their needs, interests, and understanding of what works best for them as language learners. From goal setting to assessment, the learning structure takes into account individual learner differences, a key concern for educators working in the area of learner autonomy and self-access language learning (Benson, 2001; Gardner and Miller, 1999; Little, 1991).

Implementing the learning structure

This section of the chapter illustrates how the learning structure was adapted to create a programme designed to meet the language learning needs of the general public in one self-access centre, while in another centre it served as the basis of a course in self-directed learning for first-year students in an English for Academic Purposes programme. While these centres embody two different learning contexts, their programmes share two main objectives: 1) to provide learners with opportunities to improve their English language proficiency, and 2) to enable learners to enhance their metacognitive knowledge and skills. The term metacognitive knowledge is used here to refer to the learner's understanding of how he or she can best learn a language. Metacognitive skills are those required to plan, carry out, and assess the learning (Wenden, 1998). Both programmes aim to help learners learn the language and learn how-to-learn a language.

Role of language education professionals

In keeping with the combined focus on language learning and learning how-to-learn a language, language education professionals who work in the centres take on the dual roles of language advisor and facilitator of learning. The main responsibility of language advisors is to support learners by providing advice or guidance. For example, language advisors guide learners through the process of developing their own learning plans by helping learners frame their goals in a clear and precise way and by recommending materials and activities. As learners carry out their learning plans, they can meet with language advisors for “advising sessions”. Language advisors also offer learners suggestions on how to monitor and assess their learning. In general, the role of language advisors is to help learners to learn (Riley, 1997) which includes providing support, guidance and feedback at all phases of the language learning process from goal setting to evaluation (Kelly, 1996; Mozzon-McPherson, 2000).

In addition to acting as language advisors, educators working in these self-access centres take on the role of facilitator. Facilitators create and maintain the learning environment and operationalize the learning structure. In other words, facilitators have to ensure that the learning environment makes it as easy as possible for the learners to develop and carry out their learning plans. This involves a variety of responsibilities including ordering materials, preparing strategy guides and “pathways” (step-by-step suggestions for how to use commercially prepared materials), displaying materials, dealing with equipment problems, tracking down misplaced audio recordings, and the list goes on. In short, the facilitator’s responsibility is to ensure that all aspects of the learning environment are conducive to learning.

Design of the learning environments

In establishing the self-access facilities in Akita, care has been taken to create an interior design which reflects the learning structure. Therefore, the centres are designed to accommodate the learners' principal activities—reading, listening, writing, and speaking—in ways that suggest a mode of learning diverging from the customary teacher-directed classroom model. For example, each centre has reading areas with comfortable lounge-style chairs and good natural lighting. Instead of placing computers on rows of tables as is often the case in institutional settings, they have been installed on round tables in the middle of the room. Work areas are available for writing and other activities. Speaking activities pose a problem because learners who are reading or listening will not want to be disturbed. In the centre on campus there are small study rooms for this purpose. In the downtown centre there are the options of reserving a classroom or meeting in the lounge area adjacent to the centre. In both centres the traditional “teacher’s desk” has been replaced with a work space enclosed by a counter. Rather than blackboards, the walls are lined with display cases for books, DVD’s, and other learning materials. A prime concern in designing these centres has been to provide learners with a comfortable, relaxed learning environment which offers easy access to materials and equipment.

The learning structure necessitates offering learners a wide selection of materials and media which correspond to a range of language proficiency levels, learning needs, personal interests, and learning styles. Materials in AIU’s centres include books and magazines accompanied by audio recordings, DVD’s of movies and television programmes, screenplays, computer software, reference books (e.g., dictionaries, grammar books, travel guides, study guides, academic word lists), test preparation materials, music CD’s, and English as a foreign language materials. Equipment needs are met by computers and media players for MD’s, CD’s, and audio cassettes. In addition to meeting the

learners' language needs, two key considerations for equipment and materials are that they be highly visible and easily accessed by the learners themselves.

A self-directed language learning programme for the general public

The self-access centre located in the business district of Akita City draws English language learners from all walks of life. The learners range from seventeen-year-old high school students, who want to pass university entrance examinations, to retirees in their seventies, who would like to converse with their grandchildren in English. In between are salaried workers who need to learn English for work, and housewives who would like to use the language for travel, community service, and leisure activities. In anticipation of this diversity of clientele, the learning structure has been adapted to produce a programme that meets the needs of learners with widely varying purposes, ages, interests, and language levels. For the busy learners at this centre, flexibility and independence are two important features of the programme. The wide choice of materials is also an important feature.

Members of the general public interested in joining the centre are invited to attend an orientation session which begins with a detailed explanation of what the centre offers: a learning environment, a personalized language learning plan, ongoing support and guidance as learners carry out their plan, and access to a community of learners. Should newcomers decide to join the centre, they pay a nominal fee for a four-month renewable membership which includes unlimited access to the facility and its programmes.

A language advisor, assisted by the bilingual staff members, guides the newcomers through the process of developing their own personal

learning plan. However, as an initial step, new members complete a *Learner Profile* (The learner profile template developed for use in the centres in Akita was modelled after the one used in the self-access centre at King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thailand. For other formats, refer to Gardner and Miller, 1999). The *Learner Profile* begins with a questionnaire designed to collect information pertaining to learners' language learning background. Among other things, they are asked to indicate their scores on TOEFL, TOEIC, or other tests they might have taken, and to outline what they have done and are currently doing to learn English, including coursework and self-study activities. The next section of the *Learner Profile* consists of a general inventory of activities involving language use, such as read newspapers and magazines, watch movies and television programmes, etc. In order to accommodate people from a range of occupations, the inventory also includes activities common to most workplaces, e.g., write e-mail messages, engage in telephone conversations, read reports and business correspondence, etc. The learners tick off the items they feel they want or need to improve. They also prioritize these activities by indicating if they want to start work on them now or sometime in the future. Learners also self-assess their current proficiency level for these activities by rating their competency according to a five-point scale ranging from weak to very good. Then, the learners choose, from those they have selected, three activities that they would like to commence work on immediately. In addition to helping learners examine their language learning needs and identify possible goals, the *Learner Profile* can provide useful information to the language advisor who will be guiding the learners through the process of creating their first language learning plan and later advising them as they work on it.

Once the learners have completed the *Learner Profile*, they are ready to develop their learning plan. To render this process as concrete as possible, they are provided with a template, a *Personal Learning Plan [PLP]*, divided into four sections: Goal(s), Materials, Activities/Strate-

gies, and Assessment (see Appendix A). The first step is for the learners to determine their goals. The language advisor guides the learners by asking them to reflect on these questions: Which skills would I like to improve? What do I want or need to be able to do in the target language? Learners are also referred back to their *Learner Profile* where they have already identified three possibilities. To simplify the task of creating their first *PLP*, learners are encouraged to limit themselves to one goal. Later, they can change their goal and add others. Furthermore, learners are advised to state their goal as precisely as possible. Clearly defined goals are more easily matched to appropriate materials and activities.

The next step is to choose materials. To help them make their selection, learners are asked to focus on these questions: Which materials will best help me meet my goals? Which materials will I find interesting to work with? The language advisor provides support by pointing out materials which would be appropriate for the goals the learners have indicated. Once the learners have decided on their materials, the language advisor suggests learning activities and strategies. Learners are also referred to printed strategy guides and leaflets explaining how certain materials might be used for language learning. Staff members are available to assist learners with equipment, answer questions and direct them to strategy guides and materials.

The Assessment section of the *PLP* is only completed when learners stop working on their plan. This usually happens when they have finished working with the materials or have decided to change their goals. At this point, learners are encouraged to reflect on their experience and to note what they have learned, including any insights they might have had concerning how they learn. As scaffolding to assist them in this process, they are provided with a document entitled “Thinking about Learning” which lists a series of questions to consider: Did the materials, activities, and/or strategies help me meet my goals? How do I know—is there any evidence? Did I see any language-related learning or improvement? How did I check to see if I was learning or improving?

What would I do differently next time? Did I learn anything about how I learn a language? When the learners have completed the Assessment section, they are ready to develop a new learning plan.

The learners keep their profiles and *PLP*'s in portfolios which serve to help them manage and monitor their learning. To assist learners with the monitoring process, they are provided with *Daily Learning Log* forms on which they record what they did during a particular visit, their reflection on the experience, and their plans for the next visit (see Appendix B). The *Daily Learning Log* also has a section requesting learners to indicate any problems or questions they might have pertaining to their learning. The support staff who operate the centre pass these questions on to the language advisors who respond in writing—often by e-mail—or in a one-on-one language advising session. Learners who would like to meet with a language advisor for an advising session can ask the support staff to make an appointment for them.

While the language advising sessions and the portfolios form the backbone of the centre's commitment to provide ongoing support and guidance to the learners, other means include workshops and conversation groups. From time to time, the centre offers workshops on reading, writing, and general language learning strategies. Other workshops focus more on the metacognitive aspects of learning, such as monitoring and self-assessment. The conversation groups which are organized according to language level enable learners ranging from beginner to advanced to consolidate the language they have been learning on their own by providing them with opportunities to use it in a communication situation. While the conversation sessions for beginners consist mainly of guided conversation activities, more advanced learners can participate in a book club, a movie club, and a discussion group focusing on news and current events.

In addition to providing learners with opportunities for metacognitive and linguistic development, the workshops and conversation groups also afford another valuable means of support by serving as

an entry point into a community of learners. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002, p. 4) define communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.” The people who come to this centre correspond to these criteria by being passionate about learning English. Furthermore, they are broadening their linguistic and metacognitive knowledge and skills at the centre by engaging in a variety of activities. The workshops and discussion groups instigate conversations about learning that are often continued outside the centre. The programme offered at the centre has acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a community of practice among learners.

In hindsight a number of elements appear to have contributed to this development. In the first place, the centre serves as a meeting place for people with a common goal. A number of the members have noted that this has had a positive influence on their motivation. Furthermore, the centre offers a comfortable and relaxed environment which encourages friendly encounters. The conversation groups bring people together and enable them to get acquainted. Also, a monthly newsletter intended to inform learners of upcoming activities has become a focal point and a link to the community. Another feature which has fostered community development is the social events which the centre organizes from time to time. Gatherings such as the Christmas party and the cherry blossom viewing picnic were organized as cultural celebrations which furnished learners, as well as their family and friends, with opportunities to use their English in social settings. In retrospect, these occasions appear to have also served as a precedent for the learners themselves to organize get-togethers in celebration of various events in the lives of other members. The initiative that learners display in fostering the social aspects of the centre illustrates their sense of belonging to a community and the importance they attribute to it.

A course in self-directed language learning for EAP students

The self-access centre located on the AIU campus serves a different community of language learners. AIU offers a liberal arts curriculum centred around two majors, Global Business and Global Studies. The medium of instruction for all courses is English. In addition to receiving their education in English, all students spend one year studying abroad at one of the university's partner institutions. As a first step toward fulfilling their degree requirements, students must successfully complete the English for Academic Purposes [EAP] Programme. One component of the skills-based EAP curriculum is a course in self-directed language learning.

In order to meet the language learning needs of the students enrolled in the EAP Programme, the learning structure was shaped into a fifteen-week forty-five-hour course in self-directed language learning. In this course students develop and carry out their own personal learning plans. Instruction, focusing primarily on learning strategies, is limited to ten-minute mini-lessons delivered at the beginning of each period. Portfolios play a key role in the monitoring, management, and assessment of learning. In class, students spend most of their time carrying out their learning plans.

During the first week the classes take the form of an orientation session in which learners are introduced to the centre and guided through the process of developing their own personal learning plans. As a precursor to this activity, students complete a *Learner Profile*. Similar in form and purpose to the one used in the centre downtown, the *Learner Profile* helps students identify their language learning needs which can be later restated as goals for the course. However, the *Learner Profile* used in the centre on the AIU campus differs in two respects. First, the inventory of language activities focuses on academic needs, such as listening to lectures, rather than workplace requirements. Sec-

ondly, there is no questionnaire pertaining to the student's language learning background. Instead, once the course is underway, students are required to write a language learning history.

When the students have completed the *Learner Profile*, they are ready to develop their learning plan. In a whole class setting the language advisor guides the students through the process of completing their first *Personal Learning Plan [PLP]*, which like the one used in the centre off-campus is divided into four sections: Goal(s), Materials, Activities/Strategies, and Assessment. As scaffolding students are provided with a handout detailing questions to consider as they focus on each section. These questions are the same as the ones outlined earlier in the description of the programme for the general public.

After the students have decided on their goal, they are ready to select their materials. At this point, addressing the whole class, the language advisor suggests materials which would be appropriate for some of the more frequently stated goals. He or she also explains why these choices could be good ones. At this point students are ready to go to the display cabinets and select their materials. While they are doing this, the language advisor circulates and discusses possible choices with students on an individual basis.

Once they have chosen their materials, students have to decide how they will use them. In other words, they need to determine their learning activities and strategies. Since most of the students are likely to choose DVD's, or books or magazines with audio recordings, suggestions for using these materials are offered during the orientation phase of the course. Throughout the course students have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of learning strategies and activities. Not only are they the topic of mini-lessons but these suggestions for strategies and activities are also available in print form in both centres. Students can choose to adopt the strategies and activities as they are presented, adapt them, or come up with their own.

Later when the students have finished work on the *PLP*, they complete the assessment section. While this usually happens when students are done working with a book or DVD, for example, students can decide to change their materials, activities, or goals at any time. In this case, they explain in the assessment section their reason for making the changes. Whatever their reasons for terminating a *PLP*, students are encouraged to note what they have learned from carrying out the plan and any insights they might have had into how they learn.

After the students have prepared their initial learning plan, they settle into a regular routine. When they come to the self-access centre, the students get their materials and find a place to work. The language advisor begins the period by delivering a ten-minute lesson which usually takes the form of a presentation explaining and modelling a learning strategy (e.g. shadowing, determining the meaning of words from context, etc.), or perhaps introducing a new material and suggesting activities for how the material could be used to meet specific goals. (Before the course begins, the instructors decide on a list of topics for mini-lessons. As the course progresses, the instructors often modify this list based on the students immediate needs which emerge in student-teacher conferences.) The students spend the rest of the time carrying out their learning plan. At the end of the period, the students return the materials and make their *Daily Learning Log* entry.

The *Daily Learning Log* is a tool to help the students monitor their learning on a daily basis. For the students in the self-directed learning course *to monitor learning* has two aspects: to keep track of what they are doing, and to reflect on what they are doing with a view to evaluating its usefulness in terms of their goals. To support their reflection and record-keeping, students are provided with a *Daily Learning Log* template on which they note their goal for the day, the materials they used, what they actually did, and their thoughts concerning the experience. As prompts to stimulate their reflection, the students are offered a series of questions: How did what I did today help me meet my goal?

(For example, did I see any evidence of learning or improvement?) Is this material helping me meet my goals? Is the material too difficult for me? If I am having difficulty, how can I make the material work for me? Are my strategies working? Do I need to try different strategies or change my materials? These questions are available to the learners in both centres in the document entitled “Thinking About Learning”. In the last section of the *Daily Learning Log* the students outline what they plan to do in the next class. The language advisor usually reads the learning log entries each week and provides feedback in the form of comments written on “post-it” notes. However, in some instances the instructor may decide to talk with the student about his or her learning. In this way, the log entries can also serve as a means of dialogue about learning between the language advisor and the students.

From the outset students are encouraged to discuss their learning with the language advisor and each other. When students arrive in the centre before the class begins, language advisors can use this time to talk to them informally about their learning. Simple questions like “What do you plan to do today?” or “Are you enjoying your book?” can open a conversation about learning. Similarly, at the end of class as students return their materials, there are opportunities to talk to them about their activities and materials, difficulties they might have encountered, or their plans for the next class. During the class, students can approach the language advisor at any time for advice or assistance.

In addition to this, after the students have worked on their learning plans for a couple of weeks, the language advisor meets with them in groups of three during class time. In these conferences, the students tell each other what their goals are, which materials they are using and, how they are using them. Students also use this time to bring up problems they might be having and to discuss possible solutions. Later in the course, the language advisor meets with small groups of students during class time in order for them to share their assessment strategies. The language advisors’ observations and the learning log

entries indicate that students discuss these and other aspects of their learning with each other informally on a regular basis.

During the second week of the semester after the students have become accustomed to the class routine, they are asked to write a *Language Learning History*, a narrative essay documenting the story of how they learned English, as a homework assignment. Near the end of the semester, they write a *Reflection on the Language Learning History* in which they examine what they have learned about themselves as language learners and how they might have changed as a result of the experiences they have had in the course. The first assignment helps them realize from the very beginning that the course is not just about learning English but also about how they learn English and who they are as language learners. The second assignment enables them to consolidate their metacognitive insights and can provide evidence they have made progress toward this course objective. Because of its potential to demonstrate that they have acquired metacognitive knowledge and skills, the *Reflection* can be very useful to students when they evaluate their learning at the end of the course. For the language advisors, the language learning histories provide information which can be helpful when they offer guidance and support to students, while the *Reflection* can offer valuable insights into the students' metacognitive development.

Students keep their *Language Learning Histories*, *Daily Learning Logs* and *Personal Learning Plans* in a portfolio. They are also encouraged to include other evidence of learning resulting from their efforts to assess their progress. For example, learners wishing to increase their reading speed might periodically time their reading and plot the results on a graph. Similarly, learners watching DVD's might view a scene and estimate what percentage they understand. After working through the scene with their predetermined strategies for learning from DVD's, they can watch the same scene the following week and estimate what percentage they understand at this time. Graphs on which they plot the results of this activity can be included in the portfolio. While research

shows that documenting learning in portfolios can enhance learners' awareness of strategy use and their overall metacognitive development (Yang, 2003), in the self-directed learning course portfolios also provide the basis for the collaborative evaluation process (Dickinson, 1987).

As the semester draws to a close, the students review the material in their portfolios and assign themselves a grade. Early in the course, the students are provided with performance-based criteria which describe the expectations for each grade, from A (outstanding) to F (failure). The criteria focus on the main objectives of the course: language learning and learning how-to-learn a language. Once they have evaluated their work for the semester, the students complete an *Evaluation Report* on which they indicate their grade and explain why they deserve this grade in terms of the criteria. Guided by the same criteria, the language advisor then reviews the portfolios and assigns grades. Should the language advisor's evaluation differ from a student's, they can meet to discuss the grade. If during the discussion the student and language advisor cannot reach an agreement on a suitable grade, a mutually acceptable third person can be asked to review the portfolio and allocate a grade.

Conclusion

Data from a three-year ethnographic study exploring the experiences of the learners in both centres show that, for the most part, they readily adapt to this mode of learning. For example, the vast majority of the students in the self-directed learning course at AIU accepted responsibility for their learning. Furthermore, evidence collected through the language portfolios, questionnaires, interviews and reflections on the language learning history suggest that the learners' willingness to take responsibility for their learning is related to aspects of the learning structure which enabled them to exercise their agency and expand

their metacognitive awareness (Cotterall & Murray, 2009). The following quote, written by a student in her reflection on her language learning history, rather cogently states ideas expressed by many of the learners:

The aim of this course is to learn English and to learn how to learn language. I was trying to learn English before I came here, too, but I had never thought about how to learn language. I used to be told to memorize new words or practice listening for exams by teachers. Therefore, it was almost first time to think about strategy to learn English by myself. However, I've found that thinking about it by myself is very important and useful because I can learn English in the way that fits me the best. I think I can learn effectively if the method is appropriate for me and no one knows me better than I.

This learner's comments suggest that the willingness to accept responsibility for her learning which she experienced during her high school years was enhanced by the opportunity to develop her metacognitive awareness. She also implies the importance of learning within a structure which makes it possible for her to exercise her agency by giving her the freedom to apply her metacognitive knowledge in ways that conform to her understanding of her identity as a person and a learner.

In the data collected from the learners at the centre open to the general public, the interplay of control and responsibility also emerges as a theme. Not only do these learners respond to this learning context by accepting responsibility for their learning but in interviews several expressed their appreciation for the flexibility and freedom the programme afforded them. When one learner was asked what she liked best about learning English at the Centre, she replied, "I say independence is the best thing because if I have to change what I want to study in other places, I have to register in another class." In addition to being able to decide what they wanted to study, other learners commented on the importance of being able to proceed at their own

pace. Nevertheless, control is balanced by responsibility, as one learner says, “It [the programme] gives you a lot of freedom, but at the same time you have to be responsible about your own study.”

Educators interested in implementing this learning structure will no doubt have concerns about the components of responsibility and control. One study, documenting the integration of a self-directed learning module into a classroom-based, university language course, notes that relinquishing control of the learning was a major issue for the teachers who feared they would be viewed as not fulfilling their responsibilities (Fisher et. al., 2007). However, it is important to note that the learning structure outlined in this chapter does not call for an abdication of responsibility on the part of the teacher (Little, 1990, 1991). Rather, it calls for a fundamental shift in the language teacher’s role and subsequent responsibilities. Learners bring to any learning situation an understanding of how they learn and how learning, in general, takes place. Everybody possesses this knowledge which Bruner (1996) refers to as “folk pedagogy”. Within the learning structure of the self-access centres in Akita it is the role of the language educator to work with the metacognitive knowledge and skills the learners bring to the learning context with the dual purpose of helping them to acquire a range of learning strategies and to expand their awareness of what works best for them. The data collected in the centres suggests that metacognitive awareness coupled with the freedom to determine their own goals and to pursue them in ways consistent with who they are as language learners encourages learners to accept responsibility for their learning.

While the learning structure discussed in this chapter enables the learners to be responsible for their learning and to develop their metacognition, educators need to be vigilant about another issue concerning control—the duality of structure. While structures enable people to take action and to possibly exercise their agency, at the same time structures impose controls (Giddens, 1984). When we as educators

adapt this or any other learning structure to meet local requirements, including institutional regulations, and when we add features to support learners, we are most likely imposing controls on the learners. Therefore, our challenge as we develop and implement learning structures in self-access facilities is to provide learners with the scaffolding and tools they need without imposing constraints which can hinder their ability to take charge of their learning, and in so doing deny them opportunities for metacognitive growth.

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Appendix A: Personal Learning Plan

Personal Learning Plan
学習計画

Name氏名: Yukiko Otsuka¹

Date started開始日: 08/02/12 Date finished/stopped終了日: ___/___/___

※できるだけ英語で記入して下さい²

Goal(s)目標: To improve my conversation skills
Materials 教材: <i>So B. It³</i>
Activity/Strategies: How will you use this material to help you meet your goals? Please be specific. For example, list the activities in order: 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , etc. 学習/ストラテジー: あなたの目標を達成するために、この教材をどのようにつかっていくかを具体的に記入してください。箇条書で記入してください 1) I will take part in conversation groups. 2) I will read and listen to the book <i>So B. It</i> . 1) Read the book while listening to the MD recording. 2) Read only the same section and look up unknown words. 3) Read and listen to the same section again.
Assessment: When you finish this material or decide to change your goals, material, or strategies, please write about your experience. For example: How enjoyable did you find the activity you completed? Do you feel you learned something? How do you know? What would you do differently next time? 評価: あなたの使っていた教材が終了し、あなたのゴール、教材、ストラテジーを変えるときは、ここにあなたの学習履歴を記入してください。例: どれくらい楽しんで学習することができたか、次回は何を学習したいのか、など

1. While Appendix A and B are based on the work of an actual learner, the name has been changed to protect her privacy.
2. This sentence is asking the learner to fill in the form in English whenever possible.
3. This novel by Sarah Weeks, HarperCollins, 2004, contains a lot of conversation.

Appendix B: Daily Learning Log

Daily Learning Log
学習日誌

Name 氏名 Yukiko Otsuka

Date 日付: 03/02	How long did you spend on task? 今日どのくらい学習しましたか?	90M
Materials/使った教材	What did you do with the materials? Please be specific. どのように教材を使用しましたか? 具体的に記入してください	
<i>So B. It</i>	I read and listened to the MD. Then I read only and checked words in a dictionary, pp 34-41.	
<p>Reflection: What did you learn? Did you have any insights into how to learn? What difficulties did you have? Other comments/ thoughts?感想・反省を記入してください</p> <p>Today in the beginning, I did the listening and reading. I can follow the line, but I can get maybe 30% of the meaning. And next, some pages I can read without getting stuck, but in some pages I have to stop to check the words many times.</p>		
<p>Question: Do you have any questions about your learning that you would like to discuss? 質問: 今日学んだことで質問があれば記入してください。</p>		
<p>Planning: What will you do next time? 計画: 次回の学習計画を立てましょう</p> <p>Read <i>So B. It</i>, pp. 41 ~</p>		

Part Three

Advisor, counsellor and teacher development

Chapter 5

Advising for language learning: Interactive characteristics and negotiation procedures

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The first principle which constitutes the specific character of self-directed language learning schemes (SDLLS) is that they enable learners to have direct access to learning resources: the focus is on the learner's autonomous¹ learning activity. The second principle for SDLLS is that they offer learners direct access to a pedagogical device which allows them to become competent self-directed learners. Both principles are essential: on the one hand, giving learners full responsibility for the learning activity in terms of freedom of choice and power of control² allows them to *experience* self-directed learning to the best of their capacity; on the other hand, giving them the possibility to learn-to-learn allows them to further develop their mastery of the learning process

1. Autonomy, as defined by Holec (1979) is “the ability to take charge of one's own learning”, that is “to have the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of the learning: determining objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition and evaluating what has been acquired.”
2. Bouchard (2002)

and their own specific learning competence: learner autonomy then becomes real.

The specific pedagogical device, which deals with the second objective of helping the development of the learner's learning competence and ability to self-direct is now generally termed "language advising"³. In this article, my aim is to show the essential part that verbal interaction plays in language advising. It is through the specific interactional characteristics of the "advising conversation" that language advisers are able to help learners without taking control or imposing decisions, thus making advising sessions a meaningful developmental resource for learners. I will first give a synthetic description of the nature of language advising. Then I will illustrate it using extracts from five advising conversations that took place between a specific adviser/learner pair. Finally, I will draw more general conclusions which will discuss aspects of the language interaction for advising and some requisites for advising conversations.

The nature of language advising

Language advising is a pedagogical device based on human interaction: the interaction that learners have with a supporting "expert", the language adviser made available by the institution. Learners and advisers interact in a one-to-one relationship, and their interaction is focused on the learner's activity. Advising for self-directed learning must be clearly differentiated from individualized teaching: although individualized teaching takes the learner's specific characteristics into account and gives learners some latitude in the monitoring of their work, the pedagogical control remains in the hands of the teacher. In contrast, advising for self-directed learning is based on the fact that

3. This term is now widespread, although in some SDLLS other terms may be in use.

learners can and do take their own decisions, and make conscious and meaningful choices throughout the learning process. In other words, SDLLS are specific in that they are institutional schemes offering both learning a language “without being taught” (Holec, Little & Richterich, 1996), and learning to learn a language. As the aim of language advising is to ensure the development of the learner’s learning competence, advising is:

- a) focused on the learning *process* much more than on the learning *content*,
- b) non-decisional, and not founded on a power relationship,
- c) retro-active, negotiative , non-programmable and not programmed,
- d) dealing with a specific coherent conceptual framework, that of language didactics.

One can see that the role of the adviser is far different from the role of the teacher, who selects the knowledge to be acquired, prepares the ways in which it is learnt, monitors the teaching/learning sessions and finally evaluates the results. The adviser’s role rests not on a pro-active adaptive monitoring of learning activities (as individualized teaching does) but on a retro-active contextualised monitoring, depending on the learner’s request, bringing focused help to the learner’s construction of his/her learning competence, and taking place both before and after the learner’s work sessions. The aim of this article is to clarify the characteristics of language advising, pointing out the way these characteristics define the modalities of the adviser’s action in an advising conversation. A case study will be used as a basis for the discussion.

The case study

The extracts relate to a specific adviser/learner pair which was part of a larger research study⁴. Both are women. Lorraine, the learner, is a 24-year-old fourth-year economics student and has registered for the SDLLS because she plans to go through a selection procedure for a post-graduate diploma which includes an English test. Nancy, the adviser, is a 40-year-old experienced adviser. The advising sessions took place in French, which was the mother tongue of them both⁵. Two sets of data were collected. Firstly, the eleven advising sessions that took place between them were video-recorded. The extracts presented here deal with work on oral comprehension. Secondly, Nancy and Lorraine were interviewed separately, and asked to discuss their experience of the advising sessions. Their interviews were also recorded.

The adviser's verbal behaviour as a basis for advising

During Advising Session 1 (AS1), the SDLLS was presented to Lorraine. She discussed her learning objectives with her adviser Nancy, and together they set up a work programme with a first batch of resources. She took an active part in selecting the resources, accepting or rejecting Nancy's offers ("*OK, I will test that*" or "*No I don't think I'll use that one*").

Advising Session 2 (AS2) began with Lorraine's report of the work she had done. She had worked on two resources: a "classic" course book including oral comprehension activities which I will call BS, and a specific oral comprehension handbook, presenting working units built

4. Ciekanski (2005). The SDLLS concerned is the SDLLS set up at C.R.A.P.E.L. (Nancy, France) for French adults learning English as a foreign language.

5. I will return to this important point in the last section of the article.

around a near-authentic recording and exercises, which I will call RL. Lorraine stated at the very beginning:

1. I have tested everything (...) I like BS, it is rather simple, there are small exercises, it was not very hard and I managed well in the whole unit⁶

This evaluation did not draw remarks from Nancy and Lorraine went on:

2. (...) I liked RL too because I had the text. In fact it is very difficult for me to understand the cassette without the text, with the cassette only, I only understand a third of it all, my comprehension level is not good enough yet

Nancy then broke in to ask the following question:

3. (...) did you read the comprehension questions before?

and that gave way to a rather lengthy discussion, in which Nancy explained what Lorraine's comprehension problems could be, as for example when she said:

4. (...) as you did not know what to listen to, this made things very complicated for you because you felt you had to listen to every word (...) in many situations when you listen to someone or something, you have a listening objective and so you can focus your attention on specific elements and not on every word, it is the same in French, in one's mother tongue very often one is unable to repeat word by word what was said (...)

Nancy gave Lorraine the following advice:

6. All quotations from the advising sessions have been translated into English. They are originally in French.

5. it could be interesting for you to try not to look at the transcription too quickly, and instead to read the questions before, and to listen to the cassette for the answers to the questions, even listening several times, stopping the cassette, you see you are in a learning phase and you have the right to listen twice, even several times, looking for comprehension cues

whereas Lorraine saw things differently:

6. I think that it would be better for me to start with small texts, small cassettes which are not very long, and with simpler English

Nancy acknowledged Lorraine's decision, as the discussion was closed by the following exchange:

7. Nancy: if you find that too difficult, you have the freedom to leave it if you want to

Lorraine: yes I think I'd rather continue working with BS which I like

These extracts form a clear example of how the adviser's verbal behavior is linked to the nature of advising:

a) advising is focused on the learning process much more than on the learning content: Nancy did not check if Lorraine's self-evaluation of her oral comprehension work was correct, but she broke in when she felt that Lorraine's work procedure was not fully adequate. On the other hand, Nancy did not evaluate Lorraine's comprehension level: the important criteria for her was how Lorraine herself related the resources to her level;

b) advising is non-decisional, and not founded on a power relationship: Nancy made her point of view quite clear to Lorraine but did not impose it on her. The way she expressed it draws on the linguistic forms for sug-

gestion and advice (as in quotation 5 “*it could be interesting for you to..*”), and at the end of the discussion she explicitly states that it remains Lorraine’s decision;

c) advising is retro-active, negotiative, non-programmable and not programmed: the elements that Nancy chose to discuss were all prompted by what Lorraine chose to mention in her account. At the beginning of the session, Nancy did not know what Lorraine had actually done among the set of materials she had chosen. On the other hand, Lorraine did not seem to agree with Nancy’s suggestion, and one is led to think that, as Nancy reasserted Lorraine’s control over her learning procedures, Lorraine had reached her decision and would drop RL.

d) advising deals with a specific coherent conceptual framework, that of language didactics: quotations 4 and 5 clearly indicate that the information given by Nancy deals exclusively with concepts and tools relevant to the field of language didactics. Moreover, the information given is not presented as “the best way” to learn: it is much more focused on giving expert criteria to get Lorraine to re-assess her analysis and leave her the freedom and responsibility of improving “her own way”.

At that point, one could argue that a more clearly “directive” decision-making from Nancy, as one would expect from a teacher, would be more effective. However, it is very important to realize that the nature of self-directed learning itself makes any directivity ineffective. As the adviser’s activity is clearly separate from the learner’s activity and the advising process is clearly separate from the learning process, advisers cannot indeed impose on learners, let alone enforce, any decision they would make “in the learner’s interest”. Moreover, any decision by the adviser which gives priority to the acquisition of the linguistic content will slow down the development of the learner’s autonomy, which is essential for efficient self-directed learning.

Advisers are thus conscious that there is a tension between the objective of linguistic acquisition and the objective of learning competence development, and that the “learning to learn” objective requires time. Nancy made this very explicit to Lorraine, as in AS1:

8. (...) it is important for you to take the time to test various materials, so that we will have a better idea of what you like

The verbal interaction as a trigger for behavioural change.

The following advising session (AS3) opened with this remark from Lorraine:

9. Well in fact there is a small problem and I would like us to change the materials, RL especially, because I have a lot of problems in terms of oral comprehension and perhaps it would be better if we chose to work on oral expression, so that I will speak and surely afterwards my comprehension will improve

Nancy then engaged in a discussion of Lorraine’s comprehension difficulties, seeming to take no notice of Lorraine’s decision to drop comprehension work altogether:

10. Could you describe some of your problems to me? What were you working on? (...) and how did you proceed?

This question was answered in the following manner by Lorraine;

11. I read the questions before now, I try to find what it is about and then I try to note down everything that I have managed to understand and to answer the questions at the same time (...) then I stop [the cassette] and listen again, quite often for sure!

Lorraine indicated thus that, contrary to what she had induced Nancy (and us) to believe from what she said in AS2, she had put Nancy's advice into practice: she had indeed worked on RL again, and she had worked with the procedure that Nancy had described to her (cf. quotations 3 and 5).

During AS3, Lorraine was interactively quite active and the exchanges were more numerous than in AS2. As Lorraine did not fully agree with the procedure that Nancy had suggested, they rediscussed the information given by Nancy in AS2. Lorraine was asked to express the way in which she saw things:

12. there are many things which I do not understand and I feel that I am not getting anywhere and it irritates me

13. because of the fact that I could not understand immediately, I wasted time listening again and again

Nancy was then able to add more detailed information relevant to learning to learn, meanwhile giving Lorraine psychological support:

14. I think you are a bit hard on yourself, don't forget that you are in a learning phase, if you understood everything the material would be of no use (...) it is normal for you to find it's difficult this is how you will make progress

At the end of the episode on comprehension work, Nancy was brought to re-assert her position as adviser:

15. I am not a teacher who sets you work. If you do not have the time to do everything, you are completely free to work only on one of the materials

During the following session (AS4), most of the discussion was devoted to oral expression work, which shows that Lorraine did go through her decision to put more emphasis on improving her speaking skills. Nonetheless, towards the end of AS4, Lorraine noted:

16. I also listened to RL again and it is true that I hear better through listening again and again, and also when I know in advance what it deals with, I can fill in the answers better. And so I will keep on with RL

The extracts here illustrate how advising can trigger off behavioural change in learners through the negotiation process which is at the heart of the advising conversation. In AS2, Nancy had enforced no decision on Lorraine, but she did give herself the right to discuss Lorraine's positive account of her comprehension method (cf. quotations 2 and 3) in the light of her own didactic expertise. She then gave Lorraine information on the didactic concept of comprehension and suggested to her new methodological procedures for comprehension activities (quots. 4 and 5). In the same manner, in AS3, she allowed herself to discuss Lorraine's decision to change her linguistic objectives, meanwhile she explicitly acknowledged Lorraine's total freedom of decision (quots. 14 and 15). Her advising behaviour gave Lorraine the opportunity to reassess her own approach. One important element that the extracts show is that the negotiation that takes place between adviser and learner is valuable because it enables learners to engage in an internal negotiation procedure with themselves. When Lorraine started her self-directed work after AS2, she obviously re-negotiated with herself the decision expressed in AS2, using the information that Nancy had provided her during the advising session, and she decided on her own to try out her adviser's methodological suggestions. Quotations 12 and 13 show that

Lorraine was not fully satisfied with the experimentation since she felt irritated and found she was not very efficient, but in return she had gained an experience which allowed the advising conversation in AS3 to go beyond what was reached in AS2. Quotation 16 demonstrates how Lorraine kept on a personal negotiating process which brought her to finally internalize some of the criteria that her adviser had discussed.

This stresses another important dimension of advising. The adviser's action trusts in the learner's capacity to adapt the adviser's contribution to his/her advantage. This is why, as we see in our case study, advisers can be effective without taking decisions in the learner's place. But on the other hand, they can only be effective if they make their "expert" criteria explicit to the learners. Their action is thus neither imposition nor "laissez-faire": it is based on reiterative negotiation.

Advising as a trigger for non-programmable change.

It is obvious from what I have discussed above that some learning to learn did occur in Lorraine. But what her case study also shows is that there is a discrepancy between what the adviser hopes for in terms of learner change and the changes that really occur to the learner.

First of all, quotation 16 shows that advising is dependent on the learning context. In AS4, Lorraine briefly mentioned her comprehension work in passing: the issue of oral comprehension did not seem to be vital to her any more so it was no longer an important conversational topic. Even if Nancy had wanted to discuss it (which she obviously did not), the simple fact that it had ceased to be a cognitive focus for Lorraine would have made the discussion useless. Lorraine's freedom of choice and control goes as far as the areas where change may occur.

Secondly, a very interesting finding was uncovered through the comparison of the two sets of data⁷ : the data from the recordings of the advising session differed from both Nancy's evaluation of Lorraine's evolution and from Lorraine's own description, as revealed in the interviews.

In her interview, Lorraine showed that she had a clear understanding of the advising sessions:

17. work took place when I was alone at home (...) the advising sessions gave me help, gave me ideas for my work, small bits of advice (...) I never felt I had to follow them (...)

She saw the advising session in terms of an expert/non-expert relationship and she had trust in the adviser's expertise:

18. the advice she gives is generally useful because she knows what she is talking about. I would test the things she suggested to see how I could use them

But her own conclusion can be judged at first as rather disappointing:

19. the advising sessions helped me but they did not really change the way I work

Nancy, for her part, seemed to share Lorraine's point of view. She felt that

20. Lorraine very much kept to her own criteria, she changed a little but not much,

7. As presented above: firstly, the recordings of the advising sessions and secondly, the recordings of the interviews with Lorraine and Nancy.

and she was under the impression that her advising role was not understood by Lorraine:

21. I felt that Lorraine considered that my role was to provide her with materials and that all the rest did not really interest her

It seems to me that the difference between Lorraine's and Nancy's evaluations and the conclusions that can be drawn from the recordings of advising sessions can be explained by considering other dimensions that play a part in the advising conversation.

The analysis of the recorded sessions in fact confirms that the way in which Lorraine talked about her oral comprehension work evolved little: she kept analyzing the difficulties in terms of length, speech speed and vocabulary. It shows that her words reflect the abstract principles which underlie her conception of language learning. But her learning procedures for oral comprehension deeply changed: whereas in AS3 she said she was going to drop comprehension work altogether, not only did she continue working with comprehension resources but she also did so in more varied ways (using short and longer materials, didactic or authentic materials, sound or video cassettes). In her interview, when the researcher asked her to comment on this point, she stated:

22. It is true that at the beginning these materials frightened me, the length, the speed, but it was perhaps just a question of confidence, and through constant repetition, I managed to understand better,

and she clearly attributes this evolution to Nancy's advice:

23. Nancy insisted, she encouraged me to try again while saying " if that is really too difficult we will stop" so I kept on with this method whereas I would perhaps have given it up and finally I have started to like it

This is how she conceives of the adviser's role:

24. The adviser is there to give you a push when you can't manage to work as you'd like to

If we put quotations 17, 22 and 23 together, we can again see the importance of the verbal interaction between learner and adviser.

The difference between Nancy's rather negative appreciation of Lorraine's development and the picture that emerges from the analysis of the advising session can be explained, in my view, because it reflects a difference between what can be expected from advising and what is actually achieved through the interaction of a specific learner and a specific adviser. In terms of general expectations, Nancy's criteria for evaluation are mainly situated at the level of Lorraine's decisional principles (quot. 21). But Lorraine's evolution is on the level of her learning behaviour, for instance, putting up with her lack of performance (such as not understanding all the words), or using new procedures (such as listening several times to the same extract).

Again, the data show that Lorraine's behavioural change is founded on her understanding of the advising session, and more specifically of the nature of the verbal interaction (quot. 25), the interactive roles (quot. 26) and the expertise of the adviser (quot. 27). She also never felt either constrained or imposed upon by Nancy (quot. 17).

25. at the beginning I thought that it was like an individual class then Nancy explained to me how that went on (...) it is true that I was surprised because you have an English teacher in front of you she does not speak English to you (...) finally you adapt to that and you work at home and Nancy gives you advice

26. She gave me advice, then I would test her suggestions at home and see whether her method worked better

27. generally it went better because she knows her job, she knows more about the methods than I do

This leads me to stress two points:

- The influence that advisers have on the development of learners' learning autonomy is determined by the interaction modes which they set up during the advising sessions, and in particular by the verbal explanation of their advising role, which enables them to make the advising situation understandable to learners. Learners then feel able, as Lorraine did, to take up new options (through trial and error) and to control their learning process (through acceptance or refusal of the adviser's help);
- The evolution that learners undergo with the help of advising conversations is never exactly what advisers expect or work for, as learners' free will and understanding of the situation are the main trigger to change. Nevertheless, one can doubt if change would ever occur without the determined action of advising.

Language for advising

The case study presented here vividly illustrates how powerful an organizational tool language is for the development of learning autonomy. As I have already pointed out, the to-and-fro movement between experiencing self-directed learning and reflecting on this experience is fundamental to the whole concept of SDLLS. In advising sessions, learners and advisers do not carry out any language learning, they "talk about" language learning. But they do not talk about language learning "in general". On the contrary, they talk about the "real" and contextualised learning activity that a specific learner is experiencing.

Thus, for adequate advising to take place, there must be effective learning activity, whatever the type, the content or the quality⁸. The advising session is thus used to set an interval of time during which learners can engage in the metacognitive reflection necessary for the development of their learning competence.

The advising session is also used as an interface between the learners and their activity: the act of talking to the adviser about what they have done, or what they plan to do, creates a symbolic gap between them and their work: it is then easier for them to view it differently. The focus that advising puts on the activity of language learning and not on linguistic acquisition leads learners to give importance to aspects which they may tend to hand over to teachers or course book authors, thus becoming more aware of the control which they can have on their own learning process. But the fundamental element is that while talking to the adviser, learners are in fact talking to themselves. As we have just seen with Lorraine, learners are led to gradually internalize into their own internal cognitive processes the reflexive elements which are structured in advising through an intersubjective process between learner and adviser. One can truly recognize here that learners become autonomous, that is, fully able to decide by themselves.

The advising session provides the conditions for what can be described as the conceptual or epistemological rupture that learners need in order to engage in the transformation of their representations and behaviours. In addition, as advising sessions are concerned with the reality of each learner's specific learning experience, they allow learners to talk openly about their personal learning practices, some of which they may have kept hidden from their language teachers for

8. A "low quality" learning activity could for example refer to the situation in which a learner feels he/she did not work sufficiently. He/she then may feel that there is "nothing to talk about" but talking about why he/she could not work sufficiently is of value for the development of his/her self-directed learning competence.

fear of disapproval. Thus the verbal interaction with the adviser allows them to give legitimate existence to these practices.

One can then see how important it is that advisers and learners share a common language. Using the learner's mother tongue for advising⁹ is a deliberate choice in SDLLS. Talking about one's learning activity is something highly technical for learners: they must feel sufficiently at ease to be able to express themselves fluently and appropriately. But efficiency is not the only justification for the choice of the mother tongue: it also relates to the fact that the relationship is not founded on power, as learners will not feel at a disadvantage in the interaction. It also makes the objective of the advising sessions quite explicit: through the use of their mother tongue, learners are thus made aware that the advising sessions are not work sessions, and advisers clearly indicate that they do not use the advising sessions to evaluate the learner's communicative competence in the foreign language.

One can deduce from this that the relational modalities for advising are complex¹⁰. They require specific communicative competence and specific expertise in advisers, and specific conditions in the advising context: I will now discuss these three dimensions.

The communicative characteristics of advising

The advising conversation is a one-to-one communicative situation between a learner and an adviser¹¹ which rests on the assumption that

9. This entails that the adviser feels fluent in the learner's mother tongue. When the choice of the learner's mother tongue is not possible, the advising conversation may be in a common language in which both learner and adviser feel fluent. Otherwise, there can be no advising conversation as such.

10. Nancy's case shows that even an experienced adviser can get the impression that she is not successful, while at the same time objective data can prove that she does have a very positive influence.

11. A few SDLLS sometimes offer advising sessions for small groups of learners.

through a discussion about their learning procedures, learners will be able a) to transform the conceptions which underlie the decisions they make about learning a language, and b) to increase the methodological repertoire at their disposal when they actually work on learning the language. This is a very different situation from the teaching situation: the teacher-learner relationship is of a different nature as it links a group of learners to an individual teacher.

As I have already stated above, the difference between the adviser's and the teacher's role is reflected in the difference in the interactive modalities. In the classroom, the teacher's role is to organize the learning activities: for example, the teacher verbally gives instructions, designates pupils, and motivates their involvement in the class activities. The teacher's role is also about assessing pupil's knowledge: he/she will verbally request answers to questions, and then confirm or reject these answers. Teachers also have to organize and regulate the group's discourse: they will open and close exchanges, distribute turns and regulate interactive discipline (Coulthard, 1977).

In advising, as I have illustrated in the case study, the adviser's role relies on different communicative practices. To trigger the explanation process which will lead learners to reflect on aspects of their learning competence they may want to change, advisers in particular have to reformulate the learner's words into their own, "more expert" words, to supplement it with didactical information, give their opinion on what the learner says (that the learner may freely discuss), to make suggestions (that the learner may freely accept or reject) (Gremmo, 1995). The essential element for advisers is not to take decisions concerning learning on the part of the learner, and to adopt a helping attitude. This determines very precisely the linguistic forms that the adviser will use. For example, to make sure that the suggestions they make will be understood as suggestions and not instructions, advisers tend to use attenuating intonation and highly-modalized forms such as: "perhaps you could..", "what could perhaps be interesting for you is..".

The organization of the interaction must also seek to reflect the greater equality that self-directed learning implies between the learner's and the adviser's interactional statuses. This relates in particular to the control of the interaction. In the advising interactive modality, there is a contradiction between the didactic situation and the social conditions of the two participants. The didactic situation implies that it is the learners' role to monitor the interaction, as they are in charge of their learning and the adviser is there to help. This means that learners should for example open and close the session, or introduce conversational topics. However, the social conditions tip the scales towards the advisers. The advising sessions take place in their institution, they have professional expertise: common social rules imply that advisers have the right, even the duty, to control the interaction. So in my experience, the fact that learners take an active part in controlling the advising interaction (by actually opening and closing it, by introducing the discussion topics, as Lorraine did in the case study) is representative of their assuming the responsibility for their learning activity as a whole, and more specifically of their use of the advising session as a truly personal "helping scheme".

Thus, one function of the adviser's interactive role is to bring learners to view themselves as the person in charge of the interaction. Advisers do so by openly explaining their respective roles. They also do so by gradually refusing to assume the management of the interaction, leaving their turn as soon as learners attempt to break in, or letting learners deal with the task of filling in the silences which, without exception, do occur. As one can see, the dialogical communicative competence that is in coherence with the characteristics of advising is quite specific, and the development of such a competence is one of the significant elements at stake in the training of advisers. Without this communicative change, advising conversations run the risk of remaining teaching in disguise in which, because of the "natural" asymmetry of the learner/adviser relationship, advisers would, more or less uncon-

sciously, impose their decisions, even with the best of intentions. In a self-directed learning context, the coherence between the adviser's role and the adviser's language necessarily implies that the advising conversation should truly be a negotiative situation which enables learners to give it meaning, and in which advisers are fully aware that they only have part of the information and that they cannot pre-determine what learners will achieve.

The nature of the adviser's expertise

Throughout this article, I have used the term "advising conversation" to refer to the interactive modality. It is now time to point out that the term "conversation" here is not to be understood as "small talk" or "friendly" conversation. The term conversation here is used to differentiate advising from teaching, and to emphasize the fact that advising is a one-to-one relationship where the two participants have equal status. But it is also very important to understand that an advising conversation has a specific structure which makes it a "professional" situation.

The advising conversation has a well-defined focus and refers to a well-defined domain of both knowledge and know-how. In addition to the specific communicative competence I have just discussed, the expertise of advisers also deals with other areas of professional competence. Advisers are competent at analyzing the learner's contribution to the discourse using the specific frame of reference of foreign language didactics, as this scientific field both defines and delimits their field of action. They are competent at analyzing what the learners say in order to indicate inaccuracies or gaps in the learner's set of mental representations, cognitive sets and methodological procedures as far as they refer to foreign language and foreign language learning. They are also competent to provide information, suggest procedures, and

describe learning activities which learners would not have thought of alone. Their contribution essentially, if not exclusively, consists of helping learners to develop their language learning competence and to become more autonomous learners. It follows that the adviser's expertise comprises:

- detailed science-based knowledge about the nature of language, about the concepts which organize this field of reference and their evolution, as well as the methodological know-how referring to the didactic methodologies which constitute common knowledge;¹²
- detailed science-based knowledge of the nature of the language learning process, and especially of the nature of self-directed learning and its implications for the learner;
- detailed knowledge of the specific SDLLS in which the adviser is working, including detailed knowledge of the resources available.¹³

One can thus see that the adviser's expertise is multidisciplinary, since it comprises theoretical methodological aspects of various fields of linguistics¹⁴, psychology, and language didactics. This expertise determines the quality of the mental analysis that advisers will make during an advising conversation and that of the contributions which they will offer. This specific expertise is thus a fundamental factor for the success of SDLLS.

12. This means that advisers are not as much specialized in one specific methodology as they are able to present learners with various approaches, discussing their methodological proposals, techniques and types of activities.

13. For example: types of resources, types of equipment, etc. Again the important point is to be able to discuss the rationale of the various options which the SDLLS makes available.

14. For example, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, general linguistics, descriptive linguistics of the various languages concerned, etc.

Specific conditions in the advising context

The conditions in which advising sessions take place can have an important influence on learners' understanding of their role. First of all, it is crucial that advising sessions should be given institutional existence. Thought must be given to the material conditions in which the sessions will function: a specific place furnished with the conversational objective in view, pleasant surroundings, and privacy, are signals given to learners that the moment is seen as relevant by the institution.

Advising can only play its role fully if it is inserted between two work sessions on the learner's part. It seems to me very important that learners should be aware from the very beginning that there will be an organized alternation of periods of work and regular "reflexive intervals" of a different nature from their working sessions, so that they consider the advising sessions as an integral part of the SDLLS .

The advising sessions also benefit when they can take place within a sufficient time space: the advising relationship has developmental objectives which can only be carried out with a certain time framework, so that advising can be more than just solving material problems. On the other hand, it is also necessary to mark the limits within which it is organized and to clearly explain to learners what time space is available for them.

My last remark deals with the importance of a relational continuity. The advising relationship is a changing relationship and, in my case study, I have shown how the adviser has to balance her action between imposition and *laissez-faire* in differentiated ways according to her understanding of the learner's evolution. On the other hand, learners need time to build up the communicative routines that will make it gradually easier for them first to take part in, and then to take control of the advising conversation. There is thus a need for the setting-up of a "permanent" interactive learner/adviser pair that will ensure that a discursive, learning and relational history is established to allow for the development of the learner's autonomy.

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Chapter 6

Whose story is it anyway? Auto/biography in language learning encounters

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Introduction

The term Language Memoir, originally coined by Alice Kaplan (1994), is used by Claire Kramsch (2005) when she talks about the works of writers like Elias Canetti and Eva Hoffman. Kaplan, Canetti and Hoffman have all written personal and detailed accounts of their adoption of a new language. They are writers who are not only proficient in many languages but they “live these languages with particular intensity, because they are associated with events and emotions that they have experienced in those languages” (Kramch, 2005, p. 3). Unlike Canetti and Hoffman, our students in Finland are neither ex-patriots nor exiles, nor immigrants, and they have not been forced to learn English and disuse their own language. But they have started studying English at an early age, most of them when they were nine years old, some even earlier. They have studied Swedish and other foreign languages from

a young age as well, usually from their early teens. Finnish university students' learner identities have also been influenced by the competitive role of English in Finland: mastering English is a must, and *not* mastering English can single them out as failures. They thus have long and multilayered language learning histories which are full of intense and sometimes emotionally-wrought events and encounters. So the student reflection texts that we have collected in our research data are true examples of what Kramersch called the experiences of multilingual subjects. What characterizes these experiences, and the written and oral narratives¹ arising from them, is an attempt to express in English something concerning experiences that they have had as multilingual people².

Of course, writers like Canetti and Hoffman write their stories from the perspective of someone who is now fully in command of the adopted language, but our students too, with their relatively good level of English, can be said to share the experience of remembering when they were less competent users of English. Obviously, our students are still learning, and they are much less skilful in the foreign language than Canetti and Hoffman, but they are doing much the same thing: trying to give coherence to what were fragmented events (Kramersch, 2005). As Kramersch notes, language memoirs bring into focus the role of private memory and imagination in foreign language learning: remembering *how* (past experiences and emotions) and imagining *what if* (future scenarios for action).

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1. Narratives are here taken to be instances of storying educational and life experiences in students' reflection texts, in counselling interaction, and in research writing arising from these.
 2. In the field of autonomy in general there has been a similar growth in interest in language learning narratives which is attested to by the rising number of articles on the subject (see for example, Benson & Nunan, 2004; Benson, 2007).

Our students' texts thus yield fascinating insights into the emotional dimensions of foreign language learning. The students have experienced intense classroom episodes and/or real life learning situations in different languages but these have often been explained away without touching upon the emotional side of the experiences. When we ask our students to recount and reflect upon their past foreign language experiences and emotions, we claim they become aware of their narrative language learner identities, which are multiple and complex, fragmented and episodic because, like in the turning of a kaleidoscope, novel constellations of experience arise whenever new teachers, co-learners and classrooms are encountered. Significantly, these texts are not only tellings of anecdotal instances from individual students' learning histories but they are also intertextual and socially bound to the numerous learning encounters between learners and foreign language teachers of various languages. Thus they also speak about the collective Finnish multilingual experience.

Equally important, when the counsellors in our Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) context enter a reader role by accepting the necessity for an autobiographical *reading* of these first person texts, they can take the counselling dialogue further and together with students create new beginnings for learning more. In this chapter we are going to describe the ALMS programme, share a researcher's story of how her thinking and practice has developed, and reflect on the learner identities as they evolve in their autobiographical writing and in the interaction with the ALMS counsellors.

The ALMS Programme

The ALMS programme is a variety of English course that is offered to students at Helsinki University Language Centre. Language Centre

students are not language majors but students from all the faculties of the university who have to take a course in one or two foreign languages as part of their degree. For the majority, the language of choice is English, which they have previously studied for 9-10 years at school. The emphasis at the Language Centre is on the academic and professional skills of their own field. ALMS offers an alternative to teacher-fronted courses and is based on autonomous principles and personal study plans negotiated with the counsellor. The programme has been running for 13 years³, so what was originally a novelty, an experiment in learner autonomy in practice, has become an everyday approach to foreign language education for the team of counsellors and the generations of students who have passed through, what we like to call, the ALMS community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This chapter is not the place to describe the ALMS programme in great detail, but, as an explication, Figure 1 shows an imaginary programme followed by a typical ALMS student. The same figure appears on our ALMS homepage⁴ as an illustration for potential ALMS students as to what they can expect if they decide to enrol. No two programmes are identical, and the students are given as much support as they need in the form of Skills Support Groups, interspersed with their three obligatory counselling meetings.

The ALMS programme has always covered the two kinds of knowledge in language acquisition that SLA theory requests of us language teachers: *knowing that* (facts about language) and *knowing how to* (language performance) (Kramsch, 2005). From the beginning in ALMS, learning-to-learn was emphasized and seen as empowering the students by ensuring that their meta-cognitive skills developed. We defined learning-to-learn fairly widely: learning-to-learn implied understanding the complex and multilayered nature of language learning. To begin with, it implied choosing appropriate learning approaches, planning

3. For an overview of the first ten years of the ALMS programme see Kjisik, 2007.

4. To view the ALMS homepage go to: <http://www.helsinki.fi/kksc/alms>

Figure 1. One student's ALMS journey.

WEEK 1 7 hrs	Opening group session: we talked about our past experiences of language learning and I started to think about writing my personal history. Looked at Kaleidoscope and the list of Skills Support Groups. Thought about my needs and made a draft programme. I have to plan for about 80 hours of work for my 2 credits.
WEEK 2 3 hrs	Second group session: Talked about groups and my independent work. Looked at examples of ALMS Logs and visited the Self Access Centre. Formed a DIY group with students from my Faculty. Fixed my first counselling meeting. Finally finished my ALMS plan!
WEEK 3 4 hrs	Met my ALMS Counsellor for the first time and we talked about my history and study plan. It was good to come up with a plan that suits me and my needs. Later in the week our DIY group met and made plans. Started my ALMS Log and tried to reflect on what had happened so far.
WEEK 4 5 hrs	Started reading the text books I have chosen for focusing on language. First meeting of the Presentation Skills Support Group. We planned our programme and set dates for meetings for the rest of the term.
WEEK 5 5 hrs	Went skiing in Austria. I wrote a travel journal and tried to use English as much as possible.
WEEK 6 10 hrs	Our DIY went to the cinema and then discussed the film. Carried on with my reading and looked through the Reading Room website for tips with reading strategies. Reading seems to be getting easier. Made notes and a vocabulary list and wrote a summary. Went to the Self Access Centre and watched a BBC podcast.
WEEK 7 6 hrs	Presentation Skills Group meeting. I gave a 2-minute presentation of my studies. Watched a DVD at home without subtitles and wrote a review. Attended a lecture in English in the Faculty.
WEEK 8 5 hrs	Met my counsellor for the mid-term meeting. My plan hasn't changed much. We talked about log-writing and ways of evaluating my skills and learning. Our DIY group came to my flat and we spent the evening cooking in English.
WEEK 9 1 hrs	Had a really busy week with exams. Wasn't able to work or reflect on my English much but tried to watch the news in English in the evening.
WEEK 10 8 hrs	Practical Writing Support Skills Group began. Talked about writing CVs and letters. This will be very useful. More reading. Brought my Log up to date - it seems to be changing into a Learning Diary.
WEEK 11 10 hrs	DIY group met in the ALMS room. We had all read a difficult article and so we discussed the language and the topic. I practised my presentation with a video camera. Wrote the first draft of my CV for the Practical Writing Group.
WEEK 12 10 hrs	Gave my presentation to the group. Got feedback from everybody, which felt good. Last meeting of the Practical Writing group. We discussed our CVs and letters. Wrote summaries of my academic reading. Went to the Self Access Centre again - worked on listening skills and pronunciation.
WEEK 13 6 hrs	Final DIY group meeting. Discussed what we had learned and wrote reports. Prepared for my final counselling meeting. In the meeting we went through my Learning Diary and discussed what I had achieved, how I have changed as a learner and what I plan to do after the course. ALMS Module completed!

80 hrs

a language learning programme and carrying it out, and evaluating language skills and levels. However, in the course of our research efforts and our writing projects, the need to find out how educational and life experience are integrated, and to consider the role of affect and emotions, gradually became more and more significant. This means that we now, as part of the counselling, put a lot of effort into the students' *remembering how* and *imagining what if*.

The ALMS community has been an inspiring teaching environment as well. The team of counsellors, 6-7 every term, consists of Finnish, British, American and Canadian teachers of English, each with their own unique history and experience of language learning and teaching. The fact that we run the programme based on the goal of pedagogy for autonomy adds to this experience because we are all using English in a learning environment that is very different in terms of the learner-teacher roles of our own school days. The pedagogical relationship between ALMS counsellors and students differs from the past, when the teachers were the ones who knew better, and who had uncontested power and skills. The ALMS programme is based on an idea of *knowing otherwise*, knowing as an interactive action, not as *better* knowledge but as *other* knowledge (Hakala, 2007). Even if the cumulative cultural text (Weber & Mitchell, 1995) concerning language teachers in Finland would still assign us the role of knowing *better*, in ALMS we are striving for *knowing otherwise*, both as counsellors/teachers and as researchers. In both capacities we appreciate the students' everyday knowledge of language and their expertise as learners.

In ALMS, we have carried out numerous collaborative research projects. Much of this research has focussed on various aspects of counselling. This was perhaps inevitable in the beginning because the role was new to us and we hoped to discover or develop new methods, principles, and discourse which would be applicable to the unique dialogic counselling situation. As our research proceeded we became more and more aware of the complex role of teacher/researcher, particularly of our own influence on and interpretations of learners' stories.

In the following section Leena describes her growing awareness of the researcher's role and how this clearer understanding has affected our attitudes towards and treatment of our learners' written histories. This story is an example of how professional development and the development of personal or local theories go hand in hand in ALMS.

Leena: A Researcher's Story

When I read *French Lessons* by Alice Kaplan (Kaplan, 1993) I experienced what Susan Rubin Suleiman (1994) has called "strong" autobiographical reading, in other words reading a story as if it were one's own. Kaplan's book is an autobiography with a focus on the role of a foreign language in the writer's life, in her case French. For Suleiman, the notion of "strong" carries an idea of not only projecting ourselves into what we read but also a special enactment in, and implications for, specific cases. "Strong" in a way applies doubly: to a particular kind of reading and to a particular kind of enactment of such reading. In my case, the enactment on the reading was the introduction into the ALMS programme of the reflection texts. In effect, these are versions of Language Memoirs, students' first person narratives on their histories as language learners.

I read Kaplan's book and other texts in the same genre some years ago. I had already been involved in numerous collaborative research projects in ALMS and we had always taken students to be beneficiaries of and active participants in our research. This meant aiming at a non-hierarchical research relationship, for example, in the interviews. And yet, I had neglected many aspects of the research interaction. In particular, I had neglected my own autobiographical knowledge as a teacher-researcher. I had concentrated on actively and emphatically listening to the students telling me about their experiences, but I had

failed to see the role that my own autobiographical knowledge played in the interviews, both in the chosen topics and in the actual discussion, but especially in my analysis and interpretation of the emerging interview narrative.

Today, my thinking puts much more emphasis on the experiential and subjective knowledge of ourselves, that is, autobiographical knowledge (Jaatinen, 2001, 2002) of both partners in the dialogue and the interplay of these biographies. These dialogues may take place in a research interview or learning encounter, for example, in a counselling situation. Jaatinen (2001, p. 109) defines autobiographical knowledge as follows:

It is individual, lived and experienced, often incoherent, imperfect and fragmentary. It is not a direct reflection of what has happened or how things have been in our past, but it is a narrated description of the past events told or written retrospectively via memory.

In my earlier research I had not been sensitive to the fact that teaching and thus also research on teaching/counselling is storied in nature (Aoki, 2008). Moreover, I was still seeing research writing as an innocent reporting activity, not as a way of knowing and constructing knowledge, as a deeply autobiographical feeling process. Thus I was not aware of my own researcher emotions and their role in interpretation of my participants' stories. For example, the awareness and acknowledgement of the presence of emotions in the research process, that is, our own researcher emotions, is relevant to how we conduct interviews about people's lives and interpret the transcripts of these interviews. If we accept that autobiographical knowledge can also be stored in our memory in a non-linguistic form, as feelings or physical sensations (Jaatinen, 2001), then these feelings are inevitably linked to how we understand and interpret the data. Again, there is a parallel to a counsellor's and teacher's work.

Liz Stanley's concept of auto/biography (1992/1995) has been my inspiration when working on my doctoral thesis research (Karlsson, 2008a), which in turn has fed our thinking about learner histories and our counsellor readings of them. The concept of auto/biography has enormous analytic potential for teacher-researchers who try to understand the classroom experiences and memories of their learners, their colleagues, and themselves, and who additionally want to write about those experiences. Our experiences as learners, teacher trainees and teachers are bound to have influenced us deeply and, as uncomfortable as it may seem, they are a strong driving force in our interpretation of our students' educational experiences, both past and present.

As Stanley puts it, "... biography and autobiography are inseparable dimensions of the same experience" (1992/1995, p. 158). Talking and writing about life, or learning experiences, inside and outside the classroom, means that the teacher-researcher is active in constructing knowledge. Such research is auto/biography in the sense that the researcher is using her own life to understand and interpret the lives of the research participants. The auto/biographical *I* is the very agent who is actively producing knowledge: knowledge that is contextual, situated and specific (Stanley, 1992/1995, 1993). The teacher-researcher thus needs to analyse the teaching, research and writing process carefully for accumulating layers of understanding and temporally located acts of biography (Stanley, 1992/1995, 1993 and Jaatinen, 2002).

In my doctorate, a researcher's intellectual or pedagogical auto-biography (see Stanley, 1992/1995) has been an integral part of the project. I have focussed on a self-reflexive analysis of how and why my documents and data, especially the students' reflection texts, appear the way they do to me. The multi-layeredness of my research process has been tangible and visible to me all the way through: when I am attempting to re-story the students' experiences, I am also writing about my own experiences as learner and teacher, and about my experience of listening to, watching and reading the documents and data collected.

The link between auto/biography and narrative research rests on an understanding of a teacher-researcher's autobiography as interwoven with her construction and telling and re-storying of the students' biographies. The teacher-researcher's auto/biographical *I* is the producer of knowledge in this chapter, as it has been in other research texts written during the thesis work.

The other knowledge in ALMS, *knowing otherwise*, has increasingly come to mean knowing as auto/biography, especially when looked at from the point of view of doing research. This is knowledge that is situated, open to change, and produced in a contextualized sense-making process. Auto/biography thus becomes a practice and a method of narrative inquiry in that it helps bring about a textual recognition of how acts of understanding take place. This parallels with the students' writing of their learning histories and regaining a voice as autonomous language learners.

Increasingly, my research has come to focus not only on the writing of the student reflection texts but also on the reader responses, in other words, my own and other counsellors' dialogic reading, listening and responding to the texts. In my teacher-researcher's mind and daily work, the students' autobiographical writing is not primarily data but first and foremost it is a learning tool. It is a part of the interaction between learners and counsellors: learners write and tell, counsellors read and co-tell. In my view, the core of both teaching and researching teaching should be in promoting an autobiographical reflexive approach to foreign language education encounters. Any autobiography is polyphonic and it is produced by drawing on layers of personal and educational history and knowledge, layers of experience that we need to be aware of. As teachers, our decision-making in classrooms often bases itself on autobiographical knowledge and emotionally charged experiences. The same is true of counsellors and researchers of foreign language education.

When the students come to ALMS, they bring with them a collection of memories and experiences from different foreign language

classrooms. These are memories related to their teachers, methods and techniques, successes and failures in tests, and other stories. It is interesting that the experiences of writing do not often appear in their reflection texts. As counsellors and researchers, however, we do need to concern ourselves with these experiences and their relevance to what and how the students write. Many of our students carry their writing baggage with them: school memories of writing in foreign language classes can be described as a “gift” to the teacher, (Saarnivaara et al., 2004) rather than as a source of pleasure or self-expression. Their memories show that writing at school was an impersonal activity that was rarely used for understanding one’s feelings, thoughts, or experiences. The discursive practices of school are with us when we write: we do not want to be excluded, we do not wish to produce texts that are not considered worthy.

In the ALMS programme the guidelines given to the students for their reflection texts locate the texts within the wide genre of autobiographical writing, at least to my researcher eyes. ALMS counsellors see the student reflection texts as documents which the students can use to get in touch with autobiographical elements, and continue to use when planning their programmes and reflecting on the role of past learning experiences. But what about the students? How do they interpret the text instructions?

In my own counselling, I have often experienced the students’ desire to explain their texts: they have either added an accompanying note to their reflection texts, or have made a verbal comment when they hand over their texts for me to read in the meeting. They often explain how they wrote the text, or else they comment on the language, or the difficulty of the writing process, or they even ask for confirmation: was this what was wanted? The fact that students often feel the need to explain their texts could also be interpreted as uncertainty in the face of a writing assignment that, after all, is set by a teacher and thus should be carried out according to the instructions.

I have taken these metatexts to be a way of reaching out towards the reader, beyond the actual text. I feel that students want to make it known to the counsellor that they are aware of this being a writing task with a difference, and that they have taken liberties as regards school assignments. They are not writing as a “gift” to the teacher anymore.

No matter how much I would like to see this writing task as an opportunity for the students to do private, reflective work on their learning experiences and to use the writing to explore and explain their actions to themselves, it is likely that they will still compare and model their writing on the tasks familiar to them from English classes at school. However, I would claim that the invitation to reminisce is also understood by the students and that it is reasonable to interpret their texts in the light of Lejeune’s “autobiographical pacts”, too: he suggests that autobiographical writing is not only a question of a person telling or writing his or her story but also of another person reading it (Lejeune, 1989). The ways of reading autobiographical texts are part of our cultural history and when we write an autobiographical text we always anticipate these reader expectations. This is also the justification for the counsellor to insist on reading the students’ texts, as well as for inviting students to reminisce. Consequently, both as a counsellor and as a researcher I read the reflection texts with this ambivalence in mind: the writing is intended for the language counsellor, but it is also a way of giving meaning to the educational and life history of the writer.

To me as a counsellor, narrative has its beginnings, not in the text, but in interaction, in the communication between people, in this case between learners and counsellors. However, for both the learner and the counsellor, the textual aspect is of great importance, too. How the counsellor reads the texts, and how she reacts to both the process and the product is of significance. The counsellor can approach the tension between the text and the interaction via self-awareness, reflexivity and co-telling. In the end, what probably matters the most is “hearing” what the student has to say.

Student stories

The reflection texts we have been discussing are written by the ALMS students soon after they have entered the programme⁵. As can be seen in the typical journey portrayed in Figure 1, all the students take part in an initial long session of discussion and consideration of the language learning process. It is after this “priming” session that they are asked to write their own learning history, which should be ready for their first individual counselling meeting. We look upon the writing of the texts as a way of claiming ownership of the learning process and a part of the continuous reflection process in ALMS⁶. The texts are the students’ property but we sometimes ask for permission to use them in our research⁷. In these cases we try not to use the stories for our purposes without acknowledging our auto/biographical interpretation of them.

Students can write their reflection texts in one of two alternative ways. Originally, they were written as free-form texts but, since 2004, more and more students are using an online option. The free-form text has guidelines (see Appendix 1) which ask the students to focus on certain aspects, such as their personal history, their wishes and expectations, and their evaluation of their current skills. Alternatively, if they choose to do their writing online, they use Kaleidoscope⁸, the electronic tool that we have developed specifically for this purpose. Kaleidoscope aims to achieve a dialogue between the students, their peers and the teacher. Under the themes of Needs, Skills, Motivation, Personality and

5. For a recent description of the ALMS programme and especially the role that counselling plays, see Karlsson, Kjisik & Nordlund 2007, *System* 35 (1), 46-65.
6. For an account of a collaborative research project into the role of students’ reflections in ALMS, see Karlsson & Kjisik, 2007.
7. More examples of our students’ reflection texts can be seen in a database of Narrativas which has been put together by Vera Menezes as part of the Amfale project at <http://www.veramenezes.com/amfale.htm>
8. Kaleidoscope can be seen at <http://www.uiah.fi/virtu/kaleidoskooppi/intro.php>

Learning Background, the student reads a small amount of background theory and a range of comments collected from earlier ALMS students. There are also responses to these comments from the ALMS teachers. Having read all they wish, the student then writes his/her own text for each theme. On completion, the student's entire Kaleidoscope story is sent by email to the counsellor and to the student him/herself.

Two recent examples of ALMS students' reflection texts are reproduced below. Lauri, writing a free-form text, and Tatu, using Kaleidoscope, have written highly contrasting texts but they both illustrate some of the issues addressed in this chapter. Their stories, like many of our ALMS stories, contain vivid and emotional images of student-teacher encounters and of teacher personalities and perceived teacher roles. They story the world of language learning and teaching in such a way as to give teachers a very particular place of power over all other influences and motivational factors.

Lauri

FREE-FORM REFLECTION

Language learning history

Learning languages has never been an overwhelming obstacle to me. I had quite good grades already in the grade school. Consequently, studying languages has boosted my self-confidence.

There were not many language learning options in the grade school. Teachers' methods were very conservative. At the time, that didn't bother me because I couldn't imagine any other ways to learn. I began reading magazines and books in English when I was about ten years old. That helped me a lot. I wasn't always very eager to do my homework – but I was interested in reading English football magazines, listening to American rock music and watching Anglo-American movies. Therefore, it wasn't difficult for me to succeed in the grade school.

My language learning methods began to change in the upper level. I started to take school more seriously. Previously I had been a very relaxed learner. In the upper level, I suddenly changed my methods completely. I began to implement very analytical learning methods: I always did my homework and I couldn't accept making mistakes. Changing learning methodologies only improved my abilities to learn. So, I got constantly good grades in English. Having good English skills started to be part of my identity.

Another change happened when I was in college. In the beginning of my college years I studied in the same way as I had studied in the upper level. But soon I figured out that I wanted to concentrate on the subjects that really interested me. I started to think that there is no point in trying to get as good grades as possible in every subject. After realising that, I began developing my political and philosophical thinking. It meant that I concentrated on history, social studies and philosophy. After that, English wasn't anymore an aim in itself but an instrument. Though English wasn't my main focus, I succeeded in the matriculation examination. I was given L as my grade and I didn't lose many points in that exam.

After that, ironically, my position as an expert of English has waned. I haven't studied English after college. My ability to understand English has developed because I have been forced to read complicated academic texts. On the other hand, writing seems to be enormously difficult these days. I have also noticed that many university students speak a lot better English than me.

This being said, I don't think that I'm in the middle of a personal language crisis. I can cope with my English very well. I just need to practice writing and speak more often. Having good English skills is important for me since I am a political activist. Nowadays, I'm in contact with foreign activists very often. Therefore, it's necessary for me to have good skills in the lingua franca of our days.

Tatu

KALEIDOSCOPE REFLECTION

Needs:

I have to focus more when i speak and concentrate on words which i use. Because usually i just say what comes to my mouth randomly and then i try to compose sentences without thinking too much. You know what i am saying? Sometimes i speak really fluently, but it don't have a proper message in it.

Skills:

I can speak some words and write a bit too. In listening i am quite bad sometimes. Maybe i need to focus more. I want to improve my overall skills in english. I am not too academic in any area...

Motivation:

I like to travel and speak and meet with other people. It is easy to me to speak dis and dat with foreigners on the street, i don't why. Maybe because there is no bad mistakes when people you talk with know you are visitor (and lost) :) My motivation is good. I like english.

Personality:

I have a visual, auditorical, movemental and verbal style of learning in my opinion. I have learned english the best way by travelling. Accuracy and grammar are things which i lack of.

Learning background:

I have always enjoyed learning new and old languages, but teachers in lower schools have been not so good for me. Or maybe i was a bit problem child. But now it is first time different learning background with ALMS. Suits me very well!

Lauri's and Tatu's counsellor will read these reflection texts before the students' individual counselling sessions. The discussion on the student's individual ALMS learning plan, however, cannot be planned in advance because unexpected and unforeseeable horizons might open up in the counselling discussion. The counsellor can see from the texts

that Lauri felt initially passive in the face of the traditional methods of his early school years whereas Tatu feels the need to explain away his failure at school by saying that he was “not academic”. Later, Lauri, clearly a high-achiever with a strongly autonomous and strategic approach from a young age, recognizes the limitations of the “conservative” teaching approach and balances it with his own analytic and purposeful approach. Tatu, on the other hand, recognizes the disharmony he felt at school without wishing to apportion blame to anyone in particular. The counsellor’s autobiographical experiences affect the way she reacts to these bits of educational history and the students’ telling. Further stories arise from the counsellor’s reactions to the text and from the student’s need to tell more⁹. These are stories that arise in the counselling interaction between the two, when the counsellor focuses on “hearing” what the student has to say.

The counsellor will also understand from these texts that both students see English as part of their identity. Lauri took a step forward when he realised that English was not merely a school subject at which he aimed to excel, and it finally became a meaningful tool for something else. He declares, as it were, his identity as an international political activist, English being simply an essential part of that identity. At university, he has re-evaluated his skills and pinpointed areas that he still needs to develop. Tatu, on the other hand, takes a rather more modest approach to his appropriation of English as part of his identity, but he recognizes that it is part of his social self. He enjoys communicating and he likes using English for this, even though he is aware of the limitations of his skills.

Tatu also interestingly recognizes the dilemma of expressing oneself in a “borrowed” language, reminiscent of Eva Hoffman’s account. Tatu writes that sometimes he speaks “really fluently, but it don’t have a proper message in it.” In Tatu’s text, as in many of our ALMS reflection texts, there is a direct invitation for the reader/counsellor to share the

9. For a full account of an auto/biographical interpretation of an ALMS student’s story, see Karlsson, 2008b.

insights he has made for himself: “You know what I’m saying?” Because the counsellor has read and listened to numerous student stories over the years, it is possible for him/her to enter Tatu’s experience, take up his invitation and respond to the query.

Both student texts exhibit the dual role of reflection for self through autobiography whilst also being purposefully addressed to a reader/counsellor. Lauri’s text reads like a personal statement, analytical and reflective, and the overall feeling is that he is trying to convince the reader. Tatu, on the other hand, seems to be reflecting on himself, directly using the ideas he takes from Kaleidoscope but wanting to share his thoughts with the reader. We feel that it is beneficial for the participants in the language learning process to analytically look at the narratives that shape our learning encounters. Instead of painting them in the old familiar colours we should explore the possibilities of learning *otherwise*. In the counselling meeting itself, the counsellor can and should accept this invitation to dialogue, encourage the student to further explain and develop the ideas, exchange and share experiences and feelings, and thereby hopefully create a mutually respectful and balanced relationship. Through this mutual *remembering how* the student may come to *imagine what if*, becoming an autonomous learner with the capacity to plan, implement and self-evaluate his/her language learning.

Whose story is it anyway?

Our title reflects our view of the polyphony and multi-purposefulness of our students’ reflection texts. The writing process itself, as Kramersch says, helps the writer to focus on memory, imagination and experience, and in this way develop a clearer perspective on past and future. Eva Hoffman (1989/1998, p. 121) writes about this new awareness:

I learn English through writing, and in turn, writing gives me a written self. Refracted through the double distance of English and writing, this self—my English self—becomes oddly objective; more than anything, it perceives.

Hoffman (1989/1998, p. 273) goes on to consider the role of language(s) in identity. For her, it is the totality of the multilingual experience that has created herself:

Like everybody, I am the sum of my languages—the language of my family and childhood, and education and friendship, and love, and the larger changing world—though perhaps I tend to be more aware than most of the fractures between them, and of the building blocks.

We claim that these “fractures” between language and experience can be made into the “building blocks” by the process of writing and sharing stories. The story does not have private ownership. It gains its true meaningfulness in the dialogue between a student and the counsellor. After all, as Bakhtin (1981) said, the word is always half someone else’s and our students’ stories are inevitably linked to our own.

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Appendix 1

Instructions for a free text:

ALMS REFLECTION

Now that you have spent some time thinking about the process of language learning, it is time to sit back and REFLECT. You might find this useful when you plan your programme of work. Use this page to put down your thoughts about yourself as a language learner. Think and write about your experiences, your feelings and memories, your personal beliefs and views on yourself and your learning. Remember that it is your story!

Reflect and write about:

YOUR LANGUAGE LEARNING HISTORY – for example, teachers and teaching; classrooms; methods used; testing and feedback; support and encouragement; easy/difficult aspects of learning; your personality and learning style; self-study, learning outside the classroom; successes and failures and how you felt about them.

YOUR WISHES AND EXPECTATIONS – for example, your main goal for the ALMS module; your expectations of yourself as a learner of English; your expectations of the programme.

Chapter 7

Towards learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in the Japanese school context

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Introduction

In 2003 the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT hereafter) implemented a five-year action plan, the so-called “Action Plan to ‘Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities’”, based on the premise that, in order to survive in this global world, Japanese nationals are all expected to acquire a certain level of English language ability. The essence of this plan is vividly illustrated by the following statement:

In order to be able to “make use of English”, it is necessary not only to have a knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to use English for the purpose of actual communication. Thus, in English classes, instruction mainly based on grammar and translation or teacher-centered classes are not recommended ... it is important for teachers to establish many situations where students can communicate with each other in English and routinely to conduct classes principally in English. Through such opportunities, learners

can experience the fulfillment of expressing themselves and understanding others, and feel the joy of learning English. Furthermore, it is also important to devise creative teaching methods so that learners can become interested in the importance and necessity of acquiring English, which can broaden the student's world and possibilities (MEXT, 2003).

For his part, Esaki (2002) argues that we Japanese are living in the transitional period between a *traditional culture*, where we admire wonderful old achievements and which takes its lessons from the past, and a *modern culture*, where we need to be striving for progress and perpetually looking for something new. He goes on to argue that a decisive factor in making a successful and quick transition is the extent to which personal autonomy is granted, because it helps to induce personal motivation and this is undoubtedly a key driving force for creative performance.

Given such discussions, we feel that one task facing Japanese teachers of English (JTE henceforth) is to help Japanese learners of English (JLE henceforth) to become autonomous users of English. This also brings us to the reality that JTEs are standing at a crossroads, shifting their role from being conveyors of knowledge to being facilitators of students' learning, in other words, moving toward learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

In spite of the fact that the educational climate appears to have become increasingly favourable for the introduction of autonomy (on the face of it at least), it seems, however, that the current state of affairs in English language education in the Japanese school context remains little changed. It is of the utmost importance for us to delve into the factors lurking behind this scene, and to find plausible, feasible and context-sensitive ways to promote learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in the Japanese school context. To further this aim, this chapter explores the developmental process of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in Japanese secondary schools, taking heed of the constraints and limitations inherent both in the social context and the school context in Japan.

The Japanese secondary school EFL context

Early last century, one of the foremost educational philosophers, *John Dewey* provided us with a key tenet, saying “The fundamental issue is not of new versus old education nor of progressive against traditional education but a question of what anything whatever must be to be worthy of the name *education*” (1938, p. 90). This remark alerts us to the danger of misusing the notion of autonomy to promote practices or research methods that are of no real educational value; when this happens (usually as a disguised way of cutting costs), we are likely to end up with mere slogans.

It is therefore very important to clarify the problems behind the current status of the Japanese school EFL context regarding autonomy. More specifically, we have to face the reality of the present state of affairs in English language education in Japan, which is symbolized by whole class teaching, a teacher-centred approach, and a focus on the grammar-translation method. Otherwise, we cannot challenge the prevalent notion long-held by secondary school teachers, that autonomy is a matter for the Western world, and therefore is not relevant to the Japanese school context. Only on this basis can we explore the most effective ways of introducing this concept into the Japanese school context.

In all likelihood, problems inherent in any school context as illustrated by Brophy (2004) below, are likely to be globally familiar to many secondary school teachers:

School is inherently boring and frustrating. We require students to come, then try to teach them stuff that they don't see a need for and don't find meaningful. There is little support for academic achievement in the peer culture, and frequently in the home as well. A few students may be enthusiastic about learning, but most of them require the grading system and the carrots and sticks that we connect to it to pressure them to do at least enough to get by. (p. 1)

As a matter of fact, there are a number of limitations inherent in the secondary school EFL classroom in Japan that make it difficult for teachers to provide their students freedom of choice and thereby to promote their autonomy. The symbolic characteristics of the Japanese secondary school EFL classroom are the following: (1) the EFL context; (2) compulsory school attendance; (3) large class sizes (in many instances thirty to fifty in number); (4) university entrance-exam orientation; (5) teacher-fronted instruction and whole-classroom structure (the dominant mode, believed to be the most successful); (6) more high-structure teaching than low-structure teaching (e.g., the grammar-translation method); (7) the trusting relationship between a teacher and learners as an indispensable component; (8) the classroom as a social setting (humiliation in public seen as an intolerable shame); (9) the positivistic paradigm (top-down administration); (10) the heavy workload (e.g., student advising, extracurricular coaching, career guidance, and club activity coaching). Taking all of these realities and constraints on students and teachers into account, it would seem to be well-nigh impossible to introduce the concept of autonomy into the Japanese school context.

In recent years, however, we have seen a ray of hope in Japanese secondary schools: a current trend towards reducing class size in the form of *half size class* or *elective class* (e.g., down from 40 students to 20 students) in Japanese junior high school. Japanese high schools have also seen a rise in the number of elective classes with reduced numbers. This may sound like a minor change, but the implications are dramatic. The large, traditional classes typically featured whole class English teaching, conducted in the pupils' native language. The use of Japanese, the authoritarian figure and teacher-centred approach could possibly be transformed into a new type of teaching involving interactive lessons, target language use, and a learner-centred approach. Teachers, for example, would no longer continue to give their students *closed questions* or *display questions* alone, but would need to give them *open questions*

or *referential questions* because it would become more appropriate to do so in order to manage such a classroom. This could influence not only the relationship between teacher and students, but also between teachers, for it would help them to visualize what used to be invisible to them. Having looked at the learners' faces more closely, teachers could come to better understand how their learners are struggling to learn English and to realize that they are not necessarily helping their learners out of trouble, and this is sadly often due to their own lack of appropriate teaching skills and English proficiency.

Given such a teaching context, teachers would inevitably but naturally (and perhaps with less of a struggle) change their roles as teachers, irrespective of their personal preferences. If this happens, teachers are likely to begin to question their own practice and to feel more uncertainty about their traditional careers as ELT professionals, eventually reaching the point where they wish of their own accord to transform their roles as English teachers. There is a potential for the small size class to be the starting point for making autonomy a reality in the Japanese school context.

In the following section, I will discuss how learner autonomy develops, and how this developed into teacher autonomy in my own working life, the relationship between language proficiency and teacher autonomy, and what this developmental process could mean for the professional development of JTEs and their attainment of teacher autonomy.

The development of autonomy: a learner, a teacher, and a teacher educator

In his classic work *Democracy and Education*, Dewey gave a pointer to the future direction of education, saying "The aim of education is

to enable individuals to continue their education—or that the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth” (1916, p. 100). If this were true for learner autonomy, in this case—for Japanese learners of English, then the same holds true for teacher autonomy, in this case—for Japanese teachers of English. In this section, I will first discuss the developmental process of learner autonomy and then that of teacher autonomy.

Whether autonomy is a culture-specific phenomenon or not is still a major bone of contention among autonomy researchers. In the case of learner autonomy, consider, for example, EFL learners in Hong Kong. On the one hand, Chan (2001) depicts the long-standing, widespread characteristics of EFL learners in Hong Kong as follows:

Our learners are thus characterized as dependent, reticent and passive...they are reported to be syllabus dependent, lacking in intellectual initiative and inclined to favour rote learning over creative learning. Their passive learning approach is largely reflected in the constant memorization and regurgitation of information especially in examinations. Little room is made for freedom of expression, independence, self-mastery and creativity...

The educational culture conditions Hong Kong students very early and it is extremely difficult for any change in learning habit to take place when they enter university. So, it could be argued that our learners are less willing and ready than their western peers to function autonomously at tertiary level. (p. 507)

On the other hand, on the basis of the findings of his recent study, Littlewood (2000) explicitly provides a divergent view of such a stereotype, saying:

The stereotype of Asian students as “obedient listeners”—whether or not it is a reflection of their actual behavior in class—does not reflect the roles

they *would like* to adopt in class. They do not see the teacher as an authority figure who should not be questioned; they do not want to sit in class passively receiving knowledge; and they are only slightly on the “agreement” side that the teacher should have a greater role than themselves in evaluating their learning. (p. 33)

He goes on to give a lucid explanation of what is at issue: “If Asian students do indeed adopt the passive classroom attitudes, this is more likely to be a consequence of the educational contexts that have been or are now provided for them, than of any inherent dispositions of the students themselves” (p. 33).

Little and Dam (1998) argue that learners who are not autonomous in learning are not cultural products but are products of personal reaction to the educational system, such as a teacher-centered approach. They (1998, p. 15) postulate that autonomy is an innate part of human nature which is biological and psychological, because human beings have the tendency to strive after autonomy within the limits imposed by their inescapable interdependence, implying that autonomy is universal to each individual learner, whatever the educational context.

Similarly, Smith (2003) concurs in their view, saying “If learners in a particular context do not appear to respond well to a particular approach to developing autonomy, this is no reason to assert that they lack autonomy or that the goal of autonomy is inappropriate” (p. 130). In this regard, Bailey (2006) may be correct in saying “autonomous learning can be coupled with formal instruction but in such a way that learners make important decisions and take steps to further their own progress” (p. 55).

Presently, there appears to be a general consensus in the literature that autonomy is a multifaceted concept (cf., Littlewood, 1996). As far as the school context is concerned, it is useful to suggest that autonomy consists of three domains (*autonomy as a person, as a learner* in general, and as *a language learner*, including autonomy as a communicator) in

particular. In the school context, while it is true that learners are busy not only with school work but also with club activities and with study at cram school, and perceive English not necessarily as a tool for communication but merely as a subject like maths or science, and they study it for the entrance exam, it is also true that learners can be encouraged to learn English through the Internet and have some contact with native speakers of English (e.g., Assistant Language Teachers, ALTs).

As I understand it, the capacity for autonomy, which develops within the framework of these three broad, inextricably linked domains, can also be expanded through the learning experience, influenced by several contextual factors that subsume political, social, and cultural elements.

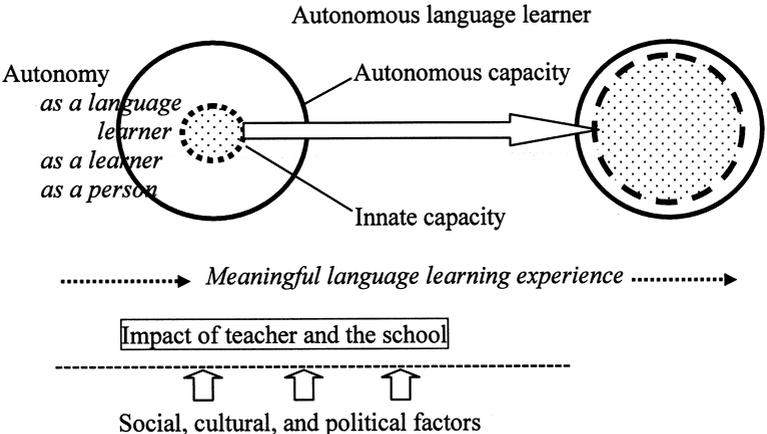


Figure 1. The developmental process of learner autonomy in the school context

Basic to this argument is the assumption that, although all learners have the same innate capacity for autonomy, their educational experiences linked with social and cultural factors either promote or inhibit the growth of autonomous characteristics, to a greater or a lesser extent. The model in Figure 1 attempts to depict the idea that the innate capacity for autonomy can be expanded and learners can become autonomous as persons, as learners, and as language learners each in a unique way, as they accumulate meaningful learning experiences. In the process of developing their learner autonomy in the school context, their learning experience is likely to be influenced by three major factors: *language education policy* (indirectly at least), *the school context*, and most probably *the teacher(s)*.

My discussion, however, should not proceed only at the conceptual level, but should be supported by empirical evidence to validate the model. Perhaps, the only plausible and safe approach to this is, in my view, to give my own story: the developmental process of becoming an autonomous language learner. Though I have expounded on it elsewhere (Nakata, 2006), on this occasion, I would like to use it once again to this end.

My own story 1

While I was in elementary school, I was not an apt pupil at all but rather a low achiever in most subjects. Occasionally, I was strongly encouraged by my teachers to attend follow-up courses after the regular classes had finished ... Tests and the grades based on them assumed scary proportions in my psyche.

The learning process itself was not enjoyable for me for several years. This began to change in the fifth grade of elementary school when Japanese history was offered. My grandmother lived with our family. She would often relate incidents from history or from her past experiences to us in the form of bedtime stories. Therefore, much of what appeared in the Japanese his-

tory textbook was familiar to me and also interesting since my grandmother had made the past come alive for us. In the class, I felt I had something to offer the other students and even my instructor to complement the text. As if by magic, memorising historical events and people became very easy thereafter. Accordingly, I got good grades in this course and no longer felt any anxiety about the coming test. The prospect of taking the test became a positive one as I was confident of my ability to do well. Interestingly enough, my performance in the other courses and even my behaviour at school changed for the better. I was excited by this phenomenal success. This was the first time I motivated myself to succeed. The impetus, though, was rather accidental.

Then, how about learning English? I have been studying English for about a quarter of a century, in fact since I was 12 years old. It was not always easy. But when I began to learn the language, I was faced with one dominant thought in the back of my head—why do I need to study English? Unfortunately, the teacher did not explain this to the students adequately. As more and more complicated grammar rules were introduced in the third year of junior high school the need to have an answer to this question became more pressing. And of course, once again I needed to attend follow-up study courses after the regular classes in English had finished. I had trouble with memorising in English all the rules and difficult lexical items that are used in the course of study in Japan. What was wrong? In elementary school, studying history was fun. My grandmother had opened my eyes to possibilities. But with English studies, something was lacking.

Nonetheless I became determined to motivate myself. I studied and memorised as much as I could – vocabulary, sentences, even the whole text for the test. I probably did not do it in the most effective way, but I spent a tremendous amount of time on it. Fortunately, I got a good result in that test. Although it may not be the best way to learn a language, I learned how to memorise for tests and how to get good results. It seemed that other

classmates who always got good grades did this also. Within the limitations of the program[me] it was an effective learning strategy. Since then, I have learned more effective ways to get good grades. With the possibility of success, learning English became much less stressful and interesting to a certain level [extent]. (pp. 14–15)

Not surprisingly, having experienced learning English, communicating with foreign students, and a stay in England, I became even more motivated and determined to learn English, irrespective of the teacher and English lessons at the university. And, as I understand it, I succeeded in broadening my autonomous capacity as a whole: from autonomy *as a learner* alone to autonomy *as a learner, language learner* and (I believe) *as a person*, as seen in Figure 1.

Having discussed in this way the capacity for and development of learner autonomy, it occurs to me that teachers are also equipped with the capacity for autonomy, and that its developmental process is likely to be similar to that of learners. In an attempt to uncover such a process, further to the story as told so far, I would like to give my new story up to the present: the developmental process of autonomous capacity as *a language instructor, an educator, and as a person*, which I believe to constitute the notion of teacher autonomy as a whole.

My own story 2

After I had obtained a B. A. in economics, I worked in a major international freight forwarding company in Japan for two and a half years. During this period, I used English for business purposes and came to know how business people with a wide range of language proficiency used English for business purposes. I learned that the English proficiency required here is not the same as the one examined in TOEFL. Instead, what matters is how well we can negotiate with others using English, and more precisely the result: to what extent we contribute to the company.

Having ended my career as a businessman, I went to graduate school in the U.S. to obtain an M.A. in TESL. My experiences in language schools in England gave me the impetus to quit my job and made me self-determined to become an English teacher. I thought teaching was the only occupation that could provide learners in Japan with English learning opportunities with a central focus on communication—the same one I had experienced in England. In the TESL programme, I was able to discuss and exchange opinions with a wide variety of English teachers, both experienced and prospective, who came from different educational contexts and countries.

When I returned to Japan, I started my teaching career in a small junior college. Inevitably, I needed to face the reality that TESOL methodologies, as they stood, were not directly applicable to the EFL classroom in Japan (As a matter of fact, it took many years for me to overcome this difficulty). What made it even more difficult was that many of the students were low achievers. They came to study at the junior college, because they wanted to learn English, knowing their low level of language proficiency as well as perhaps their low level of study skills. This was enough for me to start my research on learner motivation. The more I studied, the more I understood their inner psyche. Partly owing to my previous experience as a low achiever, I was totally intrigued by the academic field of language learning motivation. It was an eye-opening experience as an educator, because I was able to make a connection between those whom I taught and what I was researching. I was able to find a meaning in conducting motivation research, because by doing this I was hoping to contribute to the development of my students. Of course, I am not sure to what extent I succeeded in doing so.

It has been nine years since I became a teacher educator. Now, it appears that I have succeeded at long last in achieving more than my original aim to become a language teacher. However, this time, I needed to face the difficulties of being a teacher educator. Whenever I teach the theories of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy, I inevitably have to critically look at my

weaknesses as well as my strengths as a teacher educator. For otherwise, my words sound like sheer idealism to them. The more I taught a wide variety of in-service teachers of English (and some prospective teachers), the more I came to understand their dilemma between their workload and their perceptions of what they lacked in language proficiency and teaching skills. I think I came to understand the teacher's inner psyche, as I thought I had come to understand the student's inner psyche earlier in my career. Having seen some professional practitioners, I now often ask myself if I am skillful enough as a teacher (and perhaps as a teacher educator as well) and feel the necessity of improving myself further. And I became aware of the fact that one promising way to improve myself as a teacher educator is to learn from students and teachers at secondary schools. Likewise, I came to feel more strongly that I am not proficient enough as a teacher educator and need to strive to improve further, particularly in classroom English teaching. Once again, this was a driving force that led me to undertake research on non-native teachers' classroom English.

All this experience (as a low achiever student, as a university student majoring in economics, as a businessman, as a language teacher in junior college, and a teacher educator in graduate school) gives me further impetus to aim for teacher autonomy and to continue researching autonomy and professional development. While I recognize that I am still going through a developmental process, I feel I have succeeded in broadening my capacity for autonomy as a teacher, as a teacher educator, and as a person.

One may argue that this is merely anecdotal evidence. However it is not only anecdotal but also tangible evidence, for such stories in many instances merit more fruitful and meaningful consideration and give much more food for thought than a simple anecdote or vignette. As I understand it, my story both as a learner and as a teacher gives compelling evidence to suggest that it is the teacher's responsibility to understand "learners" (with regard to the problems learners are facing,

their previous learning experiences, their anxieties and motivation), and thereby provide them with appropriate support at the appropriate time. In the school context, first and foremost, teachers play a pivotal role in promoting their learners' autonomy. Likewise, it is also true to say that teacher educators play a crucial role in promoting teacher autonomy. I hope that my story provides an example of the developmental process both of learner autonomy and of teacher autonomy (and, to some extent, that of teacher educator autonomy).

Domains of teacher autonomy: non-native teachers of English

There is a growing body of literature to suggest a reciprocal relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy (Benson, 2001; Little, 1995, 2007; Smith, 2000). Little (1995) argues that the development of teacher autonomy is a prerequisite for the development of learner autonomy. There may be some cases where a teacher without much knowledge about the practice of autonomy or much experience in fostering autonomy sets his or her learners to engage in activities that are part of the practice of autonomy in the classroom. This is merely a chance case of practice of autonomy, for it is extremely difficult to expect such a teacher to give lessons to promote learner autonomy in a real sense.

Little (2007, p. 27) lists the three salient characteristics of the autonomous teacher: (1) autonomous teachers themselves need to know what it is to be an autonomous learner; (2) in determining the initiatives they take in the classroom, such teachers must be able to exploit their professional skills autonomously, applying to their teaching those same reflective and self-managing processes that they apply to their learning; (3) such teachers must learn how to produce and

manage the many varieties of target language discourse required by the autonomous classroom.

Little is correct in saying that it is a prerequisite for autonomous teachers to be equipped with the appropriate level of language proficiency required for the practice of autonomy. This is particularly true for non-native teachers of English. As a matter of fact, we see this requirement in another EFL context, China. Chen and Wang (2004) postulate that in order to develop EFL learners' language proficiency, it is a prerequisite for language teachers to have a good practical command of the target language, for without it fostering students' language proficiency would be unrealistic. Pasternak and Bailey (2004, p. 163) also argue that, although individual learners have their own goals for studying the target language, their goals may be positively or negatively affected by the language proficiency and professional preparation of their teachers.

Clearly, there is a difference between native teachers of English in an ESL context and non-native teachers of English in an EFL context like Japan, regarding the path of professional development which each should follow, and the quality and quantity of achievement which each should strive for. On the one hand, we can easily imagine that teachers can focus more on the improvement of their teaching skills alone, in an ESL context where many language teachers are native speakers of English, and where there is consequently a relatively small gap (or no gap at all) between the teacher's current level of language proficiency and the language proficiency level required in the system. On the other hand, we can also easily assume that, in an EFL context where many of the language instructors are non-native teachers of English, and where there appears to be a larger gap between the teacher's current level of language proficiency and the language proficiency level required in the system, the level of language proficiencies becomes more indispensable for professional development (see Andrews, 2007, for further discussion).

Further, regarding language proficiency, the English proficiency of JTEs is in many instances lower than that of non-native teachers of English in Europe. It is true to say that the teaching of English in Japan takes place in a difficult EFL context with extremely limited contact with native speakers of English and with a big linguistic distance between the two languages. This clearly puts JTEs at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their counterparts teaching English in the ESL contexts.

In this regard, Pasternak and Bailey (2004) provide an illuminating insight into the professional development of non-native teachers of English with regard to language proficiency, saying:

Certainly, professional preparation is not the same as nativeness, and it should not be equated with language proficiency. Whether a native or a nonnative speaker, a teacher without any formal training cannot be said to be professionally prepared. But like proficiency, professional preparation is a continuum, and there are various types of professional education available depending on the position a pre-service teacher is seeking or the kind of updating an in-service teacher needs. We believe that, as teachers we can and should continue to pursue professional development throughout our lives (p. 161)

This is certainly true in the EFL secondary school context because, in many instances, inexperienced native teachers of English (e.g., ALTs) are not skilful enough to be able to make their learners understand their English. It must be an extremely difficult task for them—novice native English teachers in particular—especially when learners can barely understand a single word of English spoken at a natural speed by a native-speaker. As far as language proficiency is concerned, in my view, autonomous teachers must be able to flexibly adjust the speed and pitch of their speech and thereby provide any level of learners with intelligible input, looking them in the face and checking their understanding of their speech. Achieving this level of language-teach-

ing proficiency does not happen overnight, either for native English teachers or for non-native English teachers.

The need for professional development clearly entails that teachers must be psychologically prepared to face up to the problems associated with their lack of teaching skill and language proficiency. However, this is true not only for JTEs but also for ALTs.

This leads me to add another indispensable attribute of the autonomous teacher. An autonomous teacher needs to be able to listen to the learner's voice, and apply what he or she has learned from the learner to his or her practice, to a greater or a lesser extent (Nakata, 2007). This is based on my assumption that it is unreasonable to expect teachers who do not know learners well to be able to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners.

Professional development of non-native teachers of English: Japanese teachers of English

There is a clear difference between the notion of teacher training and that of teacher development. The *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (Richard & Schmidt, 2002, p. 542) defines, on the one hand, *teacher training* as a process that deals with basic teaching skills and techniques (typically for novice teachers in a pre-service education programme), and on the other hand, *teacher development* as a process that looks beyond initial training and deals with the on-going professional development of teachers. Admittedly, traditional teacher education has tended to focus on the former through knowledge transmission, based on the belief that knowledge about teaching can be transmitted to teachers by experts on teacher education who have been privileged to create that knowledge, hold it, and bestow it upon teachers (Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

All too often, the concept of professional development is obscured by two essentially peripheral assumptions; first, that it is the matter of responsibility of each individual teacher alone to pursue his or her professional development; and second, that, all teachers keep pursuing their professional development in the same way without any break.

Perhaps it is true to say that we have moved beyond the stage at which we teacher educators have to transmit teaching skills to teachers by “training”, but instead have reached the stage where we help them find their own way of professional development, taking their “quality of life” (Allwright, 2005) into consideration. The following extract is a particularly vivid illustration of why a teacher pursues his or her professional development:

I intend to go on teaching as long as I feel I can learn from my students and those around me. If I feel too self-confident ... that there is nothing for me to learn, this will be my last moment as a teacher. In other words, as long as I feel that there is so much for me to learn, I am so uncertain of myself, and I always have more ... and I always have to ... do things differently ... and be frustrated and uncertain, I will continue.

(R., an expert teacher, translated from Hebrew, as cited in Olstain & Kupferberg, 1998, p. 198)

It may be high time for teacher educators to suggest more teacher-friendly directions of professional development. In fact, there are some currents of fresh air circulating among in-service teachers of English, suggesting that professional development must be undertaken of one's own accord, taking one's own teaching context and life into consideration. Bailey (2006) sheds new light on this, saying:

The idea of self-directed teachers stands in stark contrast to approaches to professional preparation and supervision that try to get teachers to follow a certain method. When we think of the traditional supervisory role of inspec-

tor, or Wallace's classic prescriptive approach to teacher supervision, we can see that one characteristic of those approaches is the teacher's lack of autonomy, contrasted with the supervisor's extreme authority ... Timing and pace are important in any discussion of teacher-supervisor relationships. Even where teachers and supervisors share purposes and goals, their view of the time needed for learning a skill or acquiring knowledge may differ considerably. (p. 56)

Then, the question arises: how we can strive for teacher autonomy? The model in Figure 2 depicts the idea of development of teacher autonomy, taking into account the extent to which (1) teachers are responsible for and in control of their professional development; (2) they are aware of their weakness and strengths (as to language proficiency and teaching skills) as ELT professionals; (3) they are collaborative in their professional development, and, as a result, (4) they have personal agency.

It is not difficult to envisage a scenario in which new teachers, coming face to face with shortcomings in their professional practice and realizing their lack of teaching and English skills, *enter into* a state of utter confusion as to how to regain energy and restart their professional development. In such circumstances, it is of primary importance to have trusted colleagues to help them in their professional development. It would be ideal if the colleagues were the experts who have successfully reached the fifth stage. *Collegiality* is not surprisingly one of the indispensable elements in successful professional development.

It is also a fact that some teachers are unable to reach even the second stage unaided, however, much they may wish to do so. To tackle this problem, it is extremely helpful for such teachers to start with knowing how their students feel about their lessons and thus learn from students, using a reaction paper (a small piece of paper on which students give a teacher some feedback about his or her lesson) (the first stage). It is a starting point for them to raise their awareness as ELT professionals, providing them with a tool of personal value for their

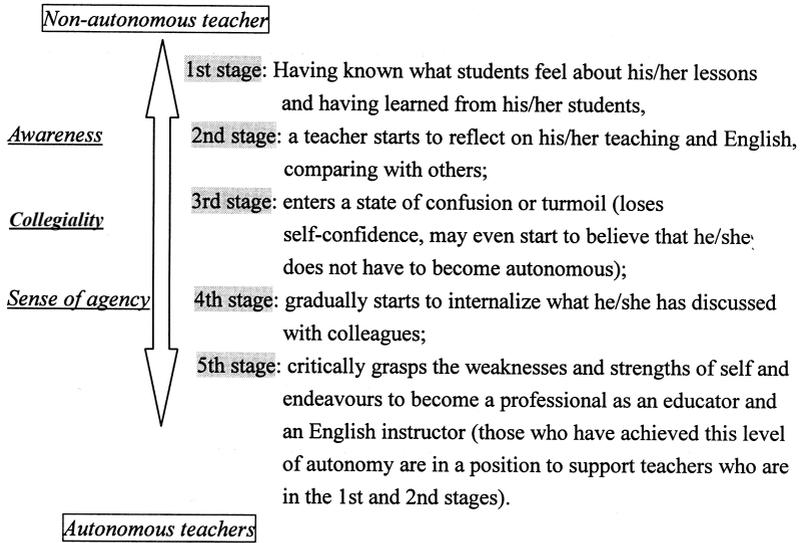


Figure 2. The development of autonomy

professional development, and thereby helping them to reach the first stage. This gives me the strong conviction that *preparedness* is another key element for their successful professional development. Knowing his or her learners triggers off a teacher's sense of *agency*, which plays a pivotal role in the process whereby teachers become autonomous. Little, Hawley, Henrich, and Marsland (2002, p. 390) define personal agency as the sense of personal empowerment, which involves both knowing one's goals and having what it takes to achieve them. According to their view, individuals who have a sense of agency try for ambitious goals and also persist in their pursuit even in the face of adversity, while those with low personal agency often do not even try to initiate goal pursuit. In the second stage, with knowledge of their learners, teachers start to question themselves as ELT professionals, feel the necessity of changes more strongly, and take the necessary actions to achieve this end. In the subsequent stages, having become aware of their actual level of teaching

skills and language proficiency, of how their students think of them, of the constraints and limitations inherent in secondary school, and of their personal circumstances, teachers feel that they would like to choose their own ways of becoming autonomous professionals through their own initiative.

All of these discussions lead me to provide a working definition of teacher autonomy as follows:

Teacher autonomy is the most desirable direction, path, and goal for teachers' professional development. It is perhaps the most advanced and ideal form of professional development, in that it has intrinsic value for teachers, as language instructors, as educators, and as human beings. In the development of teacher autonomy, as a necessary first step, teachers set professional autonomy as their lifelong professional goal, and then start the endeavor to improve "self" toward that goal – of becoming truly autonomous professionals – in their own way and at their own pace.

Non-native teachers of English become autonomous professionals through a process of first learning their weaknesses and strengths from their students and becoming aware of them, then internalizing the value of improving their language proficiency and teaching skills for their students and themselves, critically evaluating their progress both independently and interdependently (with colleagues), and progressing in their own way, at their own pace for their own purposes. *Awareness*, *collegiality*, and a *sense of agency* are three major factors indispensable for professional development and teacher autonomy.

Conclusion

To turn the concept of autonomy into reality in the Japanese school context, teacher educators and administrators first and foremost need to have their own understanding of the meaning of the word, while recognizing the significance of introducing such a concept into this context. On this basis, they should consider concrete measures for introducing autonomy from every conceivable angle, including the implementation of small class sizes, the enrichment of teacher training sessions, and the lightening of the teachers' workload. It goes without saying that all these measures must help develop learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in a true sense. Such a scheme is the minimum required to ensure that the teachers' path toward autonomy will not be jeopardized.

Earlier in this paper, I argued that there are the realities and constraints peculiar to the Japanese EFL school context and to each individual teaching context. Finally, I would like to reiterate that teachers can overcome such difficulties by developing their autonomy in the ways that I suggested—teacher autonomy. Only then will we come to see many more autonomous language learners in Japan.

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Part Four
Looking Ahead

Chapter 8

Mapping out the world of language learning beyond the classroom¹

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From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in the school. (John Dewey, 1899, pp. 76-8)

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that high levels of foreign language proficiency are seldom achieved in the classroom alone and that acquisition probably takes place most rapidly through a combination of instruction and exposure (Ellis, 1994, p. 617). We also have evidence that learners who achieve high levels of proficiency often attribute their success to

1. This article has been adapted from a paper that was originally presented at the “TESOL Symposium on Learner Autonomy”, November 8, 2008, at the University of Seville, Seville, Spain.

engagement with the foreign language beyond the classroom (Nunan, 1991; Pickard, 1995). But perhaps we should take pause to consider the implications of statements such as these. Where exactly is the world beyond the foreign language classroom? How much do we really know about this world? And, at the end of the day, can we really make a distinction between the kinds of learning that take place outside and inside classrooms?

Research on learner autonomy is one area in which we might reasonably expect to find answers to these kinds of questions. Indeed, 'autonomous learning' originally implied alternatives to the classroom, and the term is still used from time to time to refer to modes of learning such as self-access, CALL and distance learning. Within the field of autonomy, however, this usage has fallen out of favour and the term 'autonomy' now tends to refer exclusively to an internal capacity of the learner: the capacity to take charge of, responsibility for, or control over one's own learning (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981). Arguably, this shift in usage arises from a shift in attention towards classroom applications of the idea of autonomy in the 1990s (Benson, 2008). More recently still, it has been argued that the development of learner autonomy depends upon teacher autonomy and to the extent that we focus on classroom teaching and learning this may be true. But does this also imply that foreign language learners cannot become autonomous *without* engagement in classroom learning? Or would we rather argue that it is self-directed engagement with the target language beyond the classroom that makes the greater contribution to the development of autonomy?

The issues that I want to discuss in this paper arise from the somewhat problematic status of the world beyond the classroom in foreign language teaching theory and, more specifically, the theory of autonomy. One of the key issues that I want to address is how we might provide coherent accounts of a world that is apparently highly fragmented. This fragmentation was evident, for example, in a recent

review paper that I wrote, which contained two major sections covering applications of autonomy, entitled 'autonomy beyond the classroom' and 'autonomy in the classroom' (Benson, 2007). By placing the sections in this order, I was in a small way trying to subvert the assumption that classroom learning now somehow has priority over learning beyond the classroom in the theory and practice of autonomy. But I remained less than satisfied with the section on 'autonomy beyond the classroom', which included sub-sections on self-access, CALL, distance learning, tandem learning, study abroad, out-of-class learning, self-instruction, and blended learning, each containing a brief review of recent literature related to autonomy. It was particularly difficult, I felt, to make connections across these categories, partly because the literature in each of these areas now tends to be self-referential and self-contained. Each category, it seemed, represented an area of research and practice that was, but should not be, isolated from the others. Autonomy may be the idea that ties these different areas together, but the bulk of the literature in these areas is not, in fact, greatly concerned with autonomy. Research on autonomy, meanwhile, is much less concerned with learning beyond the classroom than it once was. I concluded, therefore, that in view of its importance to language learners, we perhaps need to theorize the idea of 'language learning beyond the classroom' in much the same way that researchers have theorized the idea of 'classroom language learning' in recent years. This paper attempts to begin that process by discussing some conceptual tools that might be used to map out the field.

In the quote that I have used to begin this paper, John Dewey, a distinguished American philosopher and educational reformer who is often cited as one of the father figures of autonomy in learning, deplors the separation of schooling from the daily life of the student outside the school. The need to integrate learning with the experience of everyday life is also a key idea within the notions of autonomy and self-directed learning. Yet it also occurs to me that Dewey did not find it especially difficult to conceptualise the distinction between in-school and out-of-

school experiences, and this may be because the distinction was more clear-cut a century ago than it is today. One of the difficulties that we will encounter, therefore, in getting to grips with the world beyond the language classroom lies in the fact that we are not simply dealing with the ways in which experiences of daily life might be integrated with classroom learning, but rather with complex social arrangements for learning that often straddle the distinction between the classroom and the world beyond it. What are we to make, for example, of after-school attendance at extra 'tutorial' classes or the kinds of lessons that students often attend during periods of study abroad? Both of these clearly take place in classrooms, but they also take place outside what we might think of as the students' 'normal' classrooms. And what are we to make of voluntary but formal extra-curricular activities that take place outside these 'normal' classrooms, but in school? The point here is that although classroom learning is very often separated from learning outside the classroom as Dewey suggests, from the point of view of the individual learner the two usually exist in some kind of relationship with each other.

The three central issues dealt with in this paper flow from these observations. First, I want to ask how the world beyond the classroom is related to the classroom by looking at some of the basic assumptions of classroom language learning research. Second, I want to explore how the 'setting' and 'mode of practice' might serve as useful tools for mapping out this world. Third, I want to look at the notion of language learning in the everyday life of the learner as a potential overarching construct covering both classroom learning and learning beyond the classroom.

Learning beyond the classroom and classroom research

Over the past few decades ‘classroom research’ has emerged as a distinct domain of research within the field of second language acquisition research. Since our interest is in the possibility of carving out a space for research on learning beyond the classroom, we can perhaps begin by inquiring into the scope of classroom research and asking whether our field can be constituted in a similar way. According to van Lier (1990, p. 174), classroom research “investigates what happens in second language classrooms”, while Allwright and Bailey (1991, p. 2) describe it as a cover term for a range of studies focused on classroom language learning and teaching. The “unifying factor”, they suggest, is “that the emphasis is solidly on trying to understand what goes on in the classroom setting.” The phrases “what happens” and “what goes on” indicate a focus on process, and we might reasonably suggest that research on learning beyond the classroom is concerned with the processes that take place when learners engage in language learning in settings other than the classroom. One major difference between the two fields could be that classroom processes are more likely to involve teaching than the processes investigated in the world beyond the classroom. But this will not always be the case and it would be wrong to suggest that the two fields can be defined by the presence and absence of teaching.

Allwright and Bailey (1991) refer to the classroom as a “setting” and this is, in my view, the crux of what classroom research is about: in principle it is the investigation of teaching and learning *in the classroom setting*. But Bailey (2006, p. 8) also suggests that “the classroom is both the setting for and the object of investigation in language classroom research.” What Bailey means by this is that classroom research takes place in classrooms (i.e., researchers are interested in processes within the classroom setting), but there is also interest in the classroom setting itself (i.e., researchers are interested in the nature of classrooms and the kinds of processes they support). This suggests that research

on learning beyond the classroom may also have two aspects: one concerned with the processes that take place in settings other than the classroom and the other with the nature of these settings. An important difference is, perhaps, that although classroom researchers recognize that there are many kinds of classrooms, 'the classroom' tends to be treated as a single type of setting. The world beyond the classroom, on the other hand, consists of many different types of settings, which may have little in common with each other apart from the fact that they are *not* 'classrooms'. As a field of research, therefore, research on learning beyond the classroom is likely to involve a much stronger focus on the nature of various settings and the kinds of processes they support than we find in classroom research. This is essentially what I mean by 'mapping out' the world of learning beyond the classroom. At present we are not exactly sure what we will find when we set out to explore this world.

So far so good, but before finally setting up 'the world beyond the classroom' as an alternative domain of research to 'the classroom', I want to look briefly at what I see as certain problems in the conceptualization of classroom research. The first concerns what classroom researchers mean by the classroom. For most people, the prototypical classroom will be of the kind found in a school with a teacher standing or sitting in front of a chalkboard, whiteboard or projection screen, facing a class of 30 or more students. But this does not describe all classrooms and, for this reason, it is difficult to say exactly what a classroom is. For van Lier (1988, p. 47), "the L2 classroom can be defined as the gathering, for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of instructor) for the purposes of language learning." What van Lier is trying to do here is to detach the concept of the classroom from any particular institutional or architectural setting and to foreground the teacher-learner relationship as its essential feature. But at the same time, such a definition seems to leave little room for the world of learning beyond the classroom, especially if we

assume that the two or more people do not have to be in the same physical space or if we adopt a broad view of the role of instructor. For example, a one-to-one counselling session in a self-access centre or an online distance learning session might well constitute a classroom in van Lier's sense, although I suspect that many who organize teaching and learning activities of these kinds would be inclined to resist the suggestion that they are engaged in classroom teaching and learning.

The second problem that I want to note is that classroom research is, in practice, often concerned with much wider issues than the nature of classrooms and what happens in them. Nunan (1990) states that, "classroom research can focus on teachers or on learners, or on the interaction between teachers and learners." Research that focuses on the learner, he then goes on to say, "looks at, for example, the developmental aspects of learner language, the learning styles and strategies used by different learners, the type of language prompted by various types of materials and pedagogic tasks, the classroom interaction that takes place between learners, and the effect of this interaction on learner language development." These are, of course, all important areas of research in classroom language learning, but while some are specific to the domain of classroom research, others are not. Language learning styles and strategies, for example, can be investigated both inside and outside the classroom, although most studies have been conducted among classroom learners using instruments administered in classrooms (Benson & Gao, 2008).

In this way, classroom research has, in a sense, 'captured' for the classroom many of the processes that would otherwise come under the broader heading of second language acquisition research. Clearly, research on language learning beyond the classroom is also concerned with these processes and there would, therefore, be considerable overlap with classroom research in respect to both processes and settings. We should not, perhaps, be thinking of separate fields with independent objects of inquiry, but of different perspectives on very similar objects

of inquiry. This would also seem to accord with recent work by van Lier (2007) and Allwright (2003, 2005), which also points to the need for classroom researchers to broaden their focus to take account of out-of-class learning. We may nevertheless reflect on the difficulty of finding a name for the field that I am discussing which does not use the term ‘classroom’ or describe the area of inquiry in terms of what it is not. Alternatives to the term I am using include ‘out-of-class learning’, ‘out-of-school learning’, ‘informal learning’ and ‘non-instructed learning’, all of which suffer from the latter problem. The terminology itself seems to declare the centrality of institutions and formal processes of instruction to learning. It also seems to cast doubt, in our own area of inquiry, on what countless numbers of people have been doing for many centuries: learning foreign languages without the aid of institutions or formal instruction.

Settings and modes of practice

In the last section, I suggested that, as a field of research, learning beyond the classroom is a matter of both process and setting. I also suggested that we might need a stronger focus on the nature of the various settings and the kinds of processes they support than we typically find in classroom research. In order to develop this idea further, in this section I want to discuss the notion of ‘setting’ in more detail and in contrast to the notion of ‘mode of practice’, which I use to refer to routinized processes that take place regularly in particular settings.

Earlier I referred to a list of sub-headings that I used to categorize language learning beyond the classroom in Benson (2007)—self-access, CALL, distance learning, tandem learning, study abroad, out-of-class learning, self-instruction, and blended learning, to which we might add others that were not included simply because there was no recent

literature in these areas that discussed autonomy. What exactly do these terms refer to? On the surface, they appear to describe types of learning, but on closer examination this seems unsatisfactory if only because terms such as 'self-access learning' or 'study abroad' do not really describe particular kinds of learning at all. The strongest answer we can give, therefore, is that they refer to settings for learning. Although 'self-access learning' and 'study abroad' are rather vague in respect to *how* learning takes place, they do tell us *where* the learning takes place. This is also true of terms such as CALL, which at the minimum specifies that the student is near a computer, and naturalistic learning, which specifies the setting in a very broad sense as being outside the frame of educational institutions.

Setting is, of course, a widely used term and I have used it freely up to this point. But I now want to offer a somewhat technical definition for the purpose of research into language learning beyond the classroom:

Setting = A particular kind of arrangement for learning involving one or more learners in a particular kind of place, and situated in particular kinds of physical, social or instructional relationships with others (teachers, learners, others).

This definition can, no doubt, be improved upon and my main point is really to suggest that research into language learning beyond the classroom will not get very far without at least a means of describing the features of different settings comparatively. In regard to the definition I have offered, two points need to be clarified. First, a setting for learning is not quite the same thing as a classroom in van Lier's (1988) inclusive sense, because the latter assumes the presence of at least two people with one participant taking the role of instructor, while a setting for learning does not. According to my understanding, the classroom is, even in this inclusive sense, one setting among others. Second, settings

may incorporate each other. For example, in regard to 'study abroad' there is perhaps little more to be said than that it takes place in a country other than the one in which the students habitually live and study and that it typically involves both formal and informal relationships with habitual speakers of the target language. Study abroad may also involve other settings, such as the classroom, self-access and CALL, and we might also want to consider the host family as a particular kind of setting for informal learning. Conversely, because CALL seems to indicate nothing more than the use of a computer alone or with others, it can be incorporated in a number of different settings: the classroom, self-access, distance learning, and so on. The notion of setting, therefore, provides us with a rudimentary mapping tool to make sense of the overlapping terrains of language learning beyond the classroom. But it does not describe the activities that take place on these terrains, because the potential that a setting holds for different kinds of activities is a very different thing from the activities themselves.

How then do we describe the kinds of activities that take place in various kinds of settings for learning beyond the classroom? Here I want to bring in the notion of 'mode of practice' which I have used in earlier work (Benson, 2001) and now define in the following way:

Mode of practice = A set of routine processes or interactions that deploy the elements of a setting and are characteristic of it.

Again this definition can, no doubt, be improved upon, but the point I want to highlight is the essential difference between viewing a category such as self-access as a setting and viewing it as a mode of practice. Although there are certainly many different kinds of self-access centres, if we discuss them for long enough we will no doubt be able to come up with a description of self-access as a setting for learning that covers its key features. Yet we also know that self-access centres can be used in very different ways. For example, some students may be using self-ac-

cess material freely during their lunch break without in any way being directed what to use or how to use it, while others may be part of a class which has been moved to the centre in order to use prescribed materials to complete prescribed tasks. Other students may be working alone, but carrying out some kind of remedial programme prescribed by a teacher or advisor. There are, in other words, different ways of using a self-access centre and, in so far as these are relatively routinized and typical of self-access, I would describe them as 'modes of practice'. In as much as self-access centres tend to be set up to serve a relatively limited number of modes of practice, we might also speak of the modes of practice that are supported by self-access as a setting.

The important point, here, is that any given setting is likely to support a number of different modes of practice. This is certainly true of self-access, but also true of the classroom. This is why terms such as 'self-access language learning' or 'classroom learning' can be misleading. Because settings support a variety of modes of practice, it is often far from clear what is meant when the word 'learning' is added to the name of a setting. Similarly, it does not make a great deal of sense to ask whether self-access learning or classroom learning are effective for learning, because everything depends upon the meaning of these terms, or in my terminology, upon which of the modes of practice supported by self-access and the classroom is being deployed.

This distinction between setting and mode of practice is one that I have found useful in a number of situations, most notably in dealing with questions about the 'effectiveness' of learning in various settings beyond the classroom. I have also found it helpful in thinking through certain historical developments in, for example, the area of CALL. When I first encountered this term in the early 1980s, it typically and unambiguously referred to both a setting and a mode of practice: a student sitting alone in front a computer working with some kind of language teaching software. This was, of course, the best that could be done with a computer for language learning at the time. At some point in time,

however, the idea of grouping students together in the classroom to use non-language learning game-type software came into play. Then word processors and desktop publishing arrived. Nowadays, with the advent of networking and the internet, the same CALL setting (the student alone with his or her computer) supports a much wider range of modes of practice involving both direct interaction with computer networks and mediated interaction with others through computer software. Viewed as a setting, CALL has also diversified to some degree. In my observation, students now group around computers more readily than they did in the 1980s. They can share their screens with others through networks and projectors. And with the growth of blogging and social networking, a great deal of language learning takes place on the outer limits of the world beyond the classroom away from the prying eyes of teachers and researchers. The modes of practice supported by this diversified setting have, however, increased to a much greater degree. In any inquiry into the world of learning beyond the classroom we are, in fact, likely to be dealing with diversified settings that support an even greater diversity of modes of practice. Yet because modes of practice deploy the elements of settings, this variety is necessarily constrained by settings and the diversity within them. In this sense, much of the interest in the world of learning beyond the classroom lies in the ways that settings and modes of practice interact with each other.

Language learning in the everyday world of the learner

Useful as they may be, the risk in using the analytical tools that I have discussed in the previous section is that we can easily lose sight of the reality of the language learning process as it appears to learners themselves. We may be involved in research and practice on, say, self-access or study abroad, but in the end these are really no more than

constructs abstracted from the complexity of multiple individual's lives. For example, students who are engaged with self-access or study abroad may well not think of what they are doing in those terms: they may, for example, simply think that they are going to a particular room or to visit a particular country. In most cases, these kinds of activities will also be combined with other kinds of activities carried out in particular contexts for particular purposes, the meaning of each activity being related to experience as a whole. In addition to analytical tools, therefore, research on language learning beyond the classroom also calls for more holistic constructs that can somehow capture relationships between the 'parts' and the 'whole' in specific contexts of learning.

In this respect I believe that we can learn a great deal from recent work in literacy studies, which, although it is primarily concerned with first language acquisition, is increasingly concerned with out-of-school experiences and practices (see, for example, Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Evans, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Marsh, 2005). Schultz and Hull (2002, p.11), having noted that literacy is strongly associated with schooling, suggest that:

...when we widen the lens of what we consider literacy and literate activities, homes, communities, and workplaces become sites for literacy use. It was in fact in these out-of-school contexts, rather than in school-based ones, that many of the major theoretical advances in the study of literacy have been made in the past 25 years....

Researchers in the area of New Literacy Studies, they argue, "have embraced out-of-school contexts, almost to the exclusion of looking in schools" (p.27). They have done this, moreover, not simply in order to broaden the scope of research, but because literacy practices are changing as new types of literacy and contexts for literacy practices have developed, particularly in relation to the use of new technologies and popular culture. These new literacies are also typically developing

outside the context of schooling, leaving teachers with the often difficult choice of adapting instruction to their students' competencies or simply ignoring them. Ethnographic and biographical investigations of out-of-school learning also tend to show that young people are more literate, in both the traditional and new senses, than they appear to be in the classroom.

The key question here is, of course, whether these comments on literacy also apply to foreign language learning. This is perhaps a question that I should avoid trying to answer, placing it instead at the heart of the research agenda for language learning beyond the classroom. However, it is worth noting that studies of language learning beyond the classroom do often show that there are more activities and more learning taking place outside the classroom than the researchers suspected (see, for example, Hyland, 2004; Lam, 2000; Lamb, 2004). They also show that students often display more initiative in creating opportunities for out-of-class learning than expected. The sense of surprise that we tend to experience on carrying out or reading such studies is, perhaps, the consequence of a kind of tunnel vision that we have acquired from primarily examining language learning within the walls of classrooms. Possibly, we should be less surprised by learners' ability to create language learning opportunities beyond the classroom, and more surprised by our own ability to suppress this creativity through classroom teaching!

Lamb's (2004) study of independent learning among young Indonesian high school students in a provincial town in Sumatra offers us a particularly vivid illustration of the kind of complexity that emerges once we widen the frame of learning beyond the walls of the classroom and the school. In order to capture some of this complexity, I will cite a fairly long extract from Lamb's paper that sums up the broad pattern of language learning activities that he observed:

...I believe a clear picture emerges of sustained autonomous learning behaviour among these 11-12 year-old Indonesians. Much of their learning of English takes place outside of formal school English classes, either at afternoon private courses or at home. A variety of sources of exposure to the language now exist in the environment, and motivated learners can and do turn these into opportunities for study and practice, despite having had no overt 'training' in learning strategies. School lessons are also important sites of learning, and there is evidence of pupils manoeuvring to try to maximise their practice opportunities, although actual lesson content may not be so significant in the long run as the relationship a pupil establishes with a teacher, and the encouragement to continue learning independently which (s)he thereby receives. (Lamb, 2004, p. 239)

Among the many interesting issues that emerge from this extract, I would like to highlight three. First, in describing an individual's learning we are likely to be concerned not with one setting, but with learning within a configuration of several settings. Although learning may be situated within one setting at a particular moment in time (for example when we observe learners in the school classroom), the meanings of the setting at that moment will be difficult to interpret without knowledge of all the other settings in which the students learn. Second, configurations of settings are typically localized and need to be understood locally. In this case, it is of some interest that the 11-12 year-olds that Lamb observed were engaged in activities that older students in the same school had not engaged in at the same age. The configurations of settings that characterised these students' language learning efforts were conditioned by social changes that had made English more visible and more desirable to young people in the locality, apparently over a relatively short span of years. My third observation is that the elements that make up particular configurations of settings appear to be interwoven through modes of practice. In other words, the nature of each setting and the meaning of the configuration depend

very much on the kinds of activities that are taking place in each setting and how they fit together. Lamb's study also suggests that these modes of practice and their meanings are co-constructed by participants within local and historical contexts. One of the most interesting findings of the study, for example, was that although the students' school teachers believed that school lessons did not contribute much to their learning, some of the students felt that they did help, because it was their teachers' encouragement that led them to engage in additional learning outside school.

My main point here is really to suggest that settings for learning do not define the learners that we find in them. There is a general tendency, it seems to me, for researchers to place the classroom at the centre of the language learning endeavours of young people. This is perhaps because the school day is so central to their lives and to processes of socialization which are, in fact, designed to inculcate the idea that socially valued learning is primarily the kind of learning that occurs in schools. There is no *a priori* reason, however, to assume that the classroom is the primary site for language learning, simply because so many young people are compelled to attend foreign language classes in school. In the case of adult learners, this assumption would seem to be even less justifiable. Yet we should perhaps be equally wary of notions such as the 'distance learner' or the 'self-access learner', which may carry the implication that other kinds of settings are equally central to the lives of other learners. What ethnographic and biographical studies are beginning to show us above all is that we need to pay more attention to the language learning in the everyday lives of learners, and the roles that various settings and modes of practice play in these everyday lives. When we adopt this perspective, we will often find that classroom learning, or perhaps the particular type of learning beyond the classroom that is our own focus of attention, is only one of several forms of engagement with language learning from the student's point of view.

Conclusion

In writing this paper, I have been to some extent suggesting that the distinction between classroom learning and learning beyond the classroom could profitably be collapsed under more open-ended investigations of the ways in which individuals engage with language learning in their daily lives (for a somewhat different approach to this argument, see Rampton, 1999). One of the difficulties here is, of course, penetrating beyond observed or self-reported behaviours, into the ways in which people actually learn languages in different settings. However, I also want to suggest that a shift in focus from classroom language learning towards language learning beyond the classroom would be no bad thing, if only because of the need to challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the centrality of classrooms to learning. In this paper, I have outlined some possible elements of a research agenda in this area: a focus on the characteristics of settings for learning beyond the classroom and variations within them, the modes of practice that these settings and their internal variations support, and the importance of attention to what we might call the 'ecology' of settings and modes of practices within the lives of language learners as they are lived in local contexts at particular historical moments. Recent work on literacy has begun to uncover the complexities of the construct of literacy only by focusing research efforts on out-of-school literacy practices. This focus has begun to reveal, in particular, the narrowness of constructions of literacy based on what has traditionally come under this heading in schools. Similarly, through a shift of focus towards language learning beyond the classroom, we might hope to disturb school-based constructions of language learning and expand our conceptions of what language learning entails.

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Chapter 9

Where learner autonomy could fail a second language user: Three-level analysis of social context

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Introduction

It is now estimated that around two million second language speakers of Japanese live in Japan.¹ This constitutes somewhere close to two per cent of the country's total population. For the majority of adults learning Japanese as a second language (JSL hereafter), the ultimate goal of their learning is not to be a successful learner. Their goal is to achieve something in their life outside the walls of language teaching institutions. This could mean an extremely wide range of things; from a Korean-speaking working holiday-maker² getting food of his choice

1. 2,084,919 foreigners were registered as residents as of the end of 2006 (Ministry of Justice, 2007). Some of them are, however, Japanese-born old comers whose first language is Japanese whereas some second language speakers have Japanese nationality by birth or by naturalization. So it is impossible to come up with an exact number of second language speakers.
2. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.) "Working Holiday Programmes are designed to foster young people with global perspective and enhance friendly relationship between Japan and partner countries by providing opportunities for the young people to deepen their understanding about partner countries. The working holiday makers are allowed to engage themselves in part-time or full-time work to supplement their funds to travel and stay in partner countries."

at a restaurant, to an English-speaking dean heading a mostly Japanese faculty; from a Brazilian factory worker leaving a note for his colleague, to a Chinese-speaking novelist winning a prestigious literary award. In other words adult learners of JSL aim to be successful second language users (Cook, 2002) in their own way.

For the past several years I have been vocal about the need to support the learner autonomy of these people (Aoki, 2006; 2008), but I have been feeling increasingly uneasy about arguing that learner autonomy can deal with all the difficulties JSL users face in their effort to improve their Japanese. Benson (2007) notes that western liberal political philosophy recognizes freedom from two kinds of constraints, internal and external, to achieve personal autonomy. On the one hand individuals “must acquire certain psychological capacities” (ibid., p. 17-18) to be freed from internal constraints. They must, on the other hand, have “some degree of freedom from other-direction [...] and an environment in which meaningful options are made available” (ibid., p. 18). If, as Benson assumes, “the theory of learner autonomy in language learning draws its meaning for the term ‘autonomy’ from the concept of personal autonomy” (ibid., pp. 19-20), focusing exclusively on internal constraints would be a mistake. This is also true if you are, like Benson (1996), critical of the liberal concept of autonomy for being individualistic. External conditions can support our autonomy but they can also be constraints. In this chapter I will try to elaborate on my unease by arguing for the need to take into account three levels of social context, micro, meso, and macro, in order to come up with a better understanding of how learner autonomy may and may not help second language users. In concluding I will discuss the implications of these arguments for both research into and pedagogy for learner autonomy.

A micro-level argument

My first argument concerns microgenesis of language (Ohta, 2001)³, hence micro-level. To make my point, I will share two examples of conversations between native speakers⁴ and second language users. The first example is an extract of a conversation between two Japanese speakers and a JSL learner. KO and KN are student helpers in the Japanese language study group which I organize as a teaching practice (Aoki, forthcoming). KO is an undergraduate student in her second year of teaching practice. KN is a graduate student who had joined our teaching practice for the first time a few months prior to the time of recording. SM is a Korean teacher of English. She was staying in Japan accompanying her husband who was a visiting professor of our university. In this conversation SM is telling KO and KN about her experience during the past week.

[Extract 1]

1 SM: ... watashi wa--, a-- <6 seconds of silence> *honja*

2 KO: a--, hitori de

3 SM: hitori de (KN: un) n-- <laughter>

4 KN: sugoi <laughter>

5 SM: kankokugo <laughing> waka[rimasu

6 KO: sukoshi] wakarimasu <laughihg>

7 SM: <laughter> ha--

8 KO: hitori

9 SM: ya-- hai hi-- hi-- (KN: un) [hitori

10 KO: hitori]

11 SM: de, de, (KN: un) *aha*, watashi wa hitori de, itta, koto, iki koto, ga, deki kara—

12 KN: dekinai

13 KO: iku [koto ga

14 SM: koto ga] (KO: un) a, i, iki, i, ikide, iki dekiru?

3. Microgenesis refers to a moment-by-moment process of development in which a learner moves from assisted performance to independent performance through social interaction.
4. The definition of native speaker is ambiguous as well as ideologically problematic. In this chapter, for the sake of convenience, I use the term to refer to anyone who was raised in the language concerned.

- 15 KO: iku--
 16 SM: iku dekiru?
 17 KO: un iku, koto ga <with rising intonation> [iku
 18 SM: iku] koto ga
 19 KO: dekiru
 20 SM: dekiru (KO: un) iku koto ga dekiru kara--, a-- ...

Here SM wanted to say “hitori de iku koto ga dekiru kara” or “because I can go on my own”. In line 1 after starting the phrase by “watashi wa” or “I” plus topic marker she probably became aware that she did not know a Japanese expression for “on one’s own”. After a long pause she said it in Korean (*honja*). KO provided the expression, “hitori de” or “one person” plus particle in line 2. In line 3 SM repeated it and KN gave a confirmation (“un” or “yeah”). Then probably SM realized the extent of KO’s knowledge of Korean. She laughed and KN joined SM in appreciation of KO’s knowledge by saying “sugoi” or “wow” in line 4. In line 5 SM remarked “kankokugo wakarimasu” or “you understand Korean”, still laughing. In line 6 KO said “sukoshi wakarimasu” or “I understand a little” as she laughed too. The intended meaning of “ha—” uttered by SM in line 7 is not clear, but in line 8 KO returned to the original topic of their conversation by saying “hitori”. SM’s “ya” in the beginning of line 9 is probably English yeah. She uttered the Japanese equivalent “hai” next. Then SM successfully repeated “hitori” after a couple of false starts. She may or may not have been helped by KO’s overlapping “hitori” in line 10. SM then said “de” or particle to go with “hitori” twice in the beginning of line 11. After KN’s confirmation SM said “aha” in English and said “watashi wa hitori de” in one breath. The rest of her turn in line 11 is her attempt to assemble the rest of the phrase with different forms of verb “iku” or to go (“itta” and “iki”), “deki” or a form of verb to be able and some function words (“koto”, “ga” and “kara”). KN supplied “dekinai” or not be able in line 12. KO provided a correction to the verb form in line 13 by saying “iku koto ga”. SM, being unaware of the difference in the verb forms between her

production in line 11 and KO's in line 13, continued with her attempt after repeating "koto ga" in the beginning of line 14. At the end of the line SM asked for confirmation or help by saying "iki dekiru" with a rising intonation. In line 15 KO responded SM's call for assistance with saying "iku" with a prolonged vowel at the end. In line 16 SM said "iku dekiru" with a rising intonation. In line 17 KO responded with "un iku, koto ga" with a break between "iku" and "koto". SM repeated "iku koto ga" in one breath in line 18. In line 19 KO prompted SM with "dekiru". In line 20 SM repeated KO's "dekiru" and then finally managed to say "iku koto ga dekiru kara" in one breath.

What is remarkable in this exchange is SM's determination to say what she wants to say. She uses various strategies to elicit help from KO. She switches to Korean (line 1). She also uses a rising intonation to ask for confirmation (lines 14 and 16). Later in the conversation, although it is not shown in the extract, she also writes down a word she needs in Chinese characters⁵ in order to elicit pronunciation from KO. SM also takes risks and experiments with a new grammatical structure for her (lines 11 and 14). Her capacity to retain input in her short-term memory seems to enable her to reassemble phrases she wants to say with words and structures provided by KO (lines 11 and 20). SM can be said to be a highly autonomous learner for at least three reasons. First, by using the strategies to elicit help she takes control of the conversation so that it benefits her learning. Second, she takes risks. Macaro (2007, p. 60) claims that "autonomy resides in being able to say what you want to say rather than producing the language of others" and that a strategy to generate a new sentence, as well as reproduce or restructure a given formula, needs to be deployed for learning to happen. Schwiendhorst (this volume) also claims that experimentation is an indispensable component of learner autonomy. This is exactly what SM is doing. Third, she does not abandon her effort to produce when her meaning has been understood by the helpers. If the primary

5. Japanese and Korean share a large number of Chinese loan words.

aim of the conversation is communication, she would not have to say complete correct phrases, but she does so of her own will. Obviously she is regarding this conversation as an opportunity to learn and her behaviour should be contributing to internalizing these phrases.

SM's success, however, is not entirely of her own doing. When you look at the verbal behaviour of the two helpers, it becomes clear how SM's autonomy is supported by them. KN and KO seem to divide the roles between them. What KN mainly does is encourage SM to keep talking by occasionally chiming in with back channels whereas KO supplies any words or phrases SM needs. The total time these two helpers talk is much less than that of SM. KO only supplies what has been asked for. She does not explain or provide any unsolicited information. And she does not fail to respond to SM's call for assistance. KO and KN let SM experiment with a new structure by remaining silent. The topic of conversation diverts at one point, but KO steers it to the original topic so that SM can finish what she has to say.

The second example is an extract of a conversation between a Japanese speaker and two JSL learners, which I recorded for a research project (Aoki, 2004). V is a volunteer teacher giving a private tutorial to English-speaking ALTs (assistant language teachers), L1 and L2. Prior to the extract below V had switched their interaction to a chatting mode while they were working on an elementary grammar exercise book. They had been talking about L1's favourite lunch, onigiri, or rice balls.⁶

6. For an explanation of rice balls visit <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onigiri> (Retrieved on 26 September 2008).

[Extract 2]

- 1 V: a-- onigiri, L2 san mo onigiri wa suki?
2 L2: u--n, [suki-- hai, but
3 V: u--n, suki--], demo--
4 L2: L1, [daisuki
5 V: a-- suki]
6 L2: hai
7 V: tsukuru? tsukurimasu ka?
8 L2: *tsukurimasu ka*
9 V: tsukuru
10 L1: [make
11 V: oni]giri o tsuku, tsukuru, ma, make <gesture of making a rice ball>
12 L2: oh <shakes her head>
13 V: tsukuranai?
14 L2: [u--n
15 V: hu--n], hun, a-- tsukuranai
16 L2: hai
17 V: kantan desu yo
18 L1: It involves cooking rice <laughter>
19 V: xx <laughter> a-- so-- <laughter> a-- demo hajime, ne-- konbu to sake (L1: u--n) chotto omo, omoshiroi to ittara chotto warui kedo, hu--n <laughter> omoshiroi <laughter> he--sou desu ka-- hai

In line 1 V asked L2 if she liked rice balls too (L2 san mo onigiri wa suki?). In line 2 L2 replied “u--n suki-- hai but” (well, I like them, yes, but). In line 3 V overlapped L2’s turn, repeating what L2 is saying and putting “but” into Japanese (“demo”). L2 did not take up this recast. In line 4 she said L1, who is her partner, liked them very much (L1, daisuki). V took up on this comment in line 5 by saying “a-- suki” (ah, he likes them), again overlapping L2’s turn. In line 6 L2 said “hai” or “yes”. In line 7 V asked if L2 made them in two speech styles. “Tsukuru?” is a dictionary form of the verb, to make, and used in informal speech. She then rephrased it as “tsukurimasu ka?”, another form of the same verb used in a more formal speech style and normally presented first in elementary textbooks. Line 8 is L2’s private speech repeating V’s question, “tsukurimasu ka,” in a soft voice. She does not seem to have understood what it means. In line 9 V repeated the verb, “tsukuru”. In line 10 L1 prompted L2 with the meaning of the

verb in English. In line 11, overlapping L1's turn, V made an effort to have herself understood by saying, "onigiri o tsuku, tsukuru" (to ma, make rice balls) with a gesture, and added the English equivalent, "ma, make". L2 showed her understanding by "oh" in line 12 and shook her head. Then V went on to put the non-verbal behaviour of L2's into words, "tsukuranai?" (you don't make them?) in line 13. In line 14 L2 tried to say something, starting her turn by "u--n" or "well". However V overlapped her turn and articulated her understanding by saying "hu--n, hun, a-- tsukuranai" (hmm, hm, ah, you don't make them.) In line 16 L2 confirmed it by saying "hai". Then V said "kantan desu yo" (it's easy) in line 17. It is not clear whether L2 understood what V had said, but L1 seems to have understood. He jokingly explained why L2 did not make rice balls in line 18 by saying in English "it involves cooking rice" and laughed. V's long turn in line 19, said at normal speed, couldn't have been understood by either L1 or L2. This was far beyond their current ability. It roughly translates as "oh, but for the first time (you had rice balls?), (you like) sea weed and salmon. A bit fu, I'm sorry but it is funny. Hmm. So you like them."

In this extract the number of words L2 uttered is as little as four, "u--n", "hai", "suki", "daisuki" (well, yes, like, like a lot), excluding her private speech where she is saying what she does not understand. Her longest turn, line 2, consists of three Japanese words and an English word. She does not ask for help. She does not experiment with any new structure. Nor does she use the new input, "tsukurimasu", in her output. It may be argued that L2 does not have the repertoire of strategies that SM in Extract 1 has. But it can also be argued that it is V's way of talking that makes it difficult for L2 to implement these strategies. If V had waited a little longer, L2 might have been able to venture to form a sentence on her own. If V had been a little more careful in her choice of words, what she said might have become an intake on L2's part.

The two examples above were taken from pedagogical settings, but second language users learning in non-pedagogical settings also need the kind of assistance that SM was offered by the two helpers in Extract 1. In my observation, though, very few native speakers of Japanese are naturally able to talk in the way KO and KN do. Many tend to overwhelm a second language speaker by the amount of their talk. They often do not wait enough for a second language speaker to take a turn or to commit new input to their memory. They tend to offer unsolicited information and explanation and change topics at their will. Both are quite normal in conversations among competent speakers, but they make comprehension difficult on the part of a not-so-competent second language speaker (Ozaki, 2004). Native speakers also tend to sacrifice forms for the sake of communication when a second language speaker is struggling to formulate what s/he has to say. As soon as they get the meaning they go forward with their talk rather than providing language their interlocutor is searching for. These features make it extremely difficult especially for beginners to learn as they use Japanese in their interaction with native speakers. It could be argued that the ability to seek out a friend who could help like KO and KN is part of learner autonomy as a capacity. But, in a society where foreigners often express difficulty in making friends with locals, expecting second language learners to find necessary human resources on their own would be unreasonable. This is the first cause of my unease.

A meso-level argument

By meso-level I refer to second language users' relationships with people who they interact with in their daily lives. In order to show how these relationships are relevant to our concern for learner autonomy I will introduce Yagi's (2004) micro-ethnography.

M, the protagonist of Yagi's work, is from Korea and came to Japan to marry a Japanese man. She studied Japanese for 18 months at a language school in Korea before she came to Japan. Her feeling when she came was that her study of the language was over and all she had to do in her life in Japan would be to make good use of the Japanese she had learned. Yagi (*ibid.*) quotes M's mother-in-law and a volunteer teacher of Japanese who works with M as saying M had already been a fairly good communicator when they met her for the first time. Indeed, being a Korean speaker, it should not have been too difficult for M to develop a high degree of fluency in Japanese in that period of time.⁷ M's husband, however, had a different view. He maintains that M should learn to speak correctly and only allows M to watch television programmes on NHK.⁸ M talks of him as follows:

My husband seems to think he shouldn't be lenient with me because I'm a foreigner. Yeah. So if I make a mistake, even a small one, he gets terribly mad and teaches me the correct way and he wouldn't be satisfied unless I say it aloud with him in the same way. (*ibid.*, p. 163)⁹

In answering Yagi's question M's husband justifies his action as follows:

I'm much older than her. So if I die, for example, she'd have to be able to live on her own. She'd be in trouble if she didn't learn to speak correctly. (*ibid.*, p. 165)

Yagi admits that his thinking is a form of love, but it is, I would contend, also a form of oppression. M says as follows:

7. Korean and Japanese share an almost identical grammatical system on top of quite a large number of Chinese loan words as mentioned in footnote 4.
8. NHK is a Japanese equivalent of the BBC. The language spoken in their programmes is arguably considered as standard Japanese.
9. All quotations in this section are originally in Japanese and were translated by the present author.

Since I came to live in Japan I've become afraid of speaking Japanese. [...] Living in a foreign country and using their language is extremely hard. The more progress I make in Japanese, the heavier my heart becomes. (ibid., p. 163)

In this difficult situation M lost her old sense of self.

I was a funny person in my country. But I couldn't tell a joke here. I couldn't to my husband. (ibid., p. 170)

One possible reason why M carries on with her marriage is the fact that a divorce is still a serious stigma for Korean women (U.S. Department of States, 2006), although Yagi does not refer to this possibility. Whatever the reason, M endures her hardship by thinking that her self at home is not her real self. M says as follows:

If I was true to myself, if I was my real me, I wouldn't be able to live like this. I would have gone back to Korea a long time ago. (ibid., p. 165)

As Yagi does not describe exactly how M learns Japanese we do not know about the degree of M's autonomy as a language learner. However autonomous she may be, though, she will probably never be recognized as a legitimate second language user by her husband because the goal he sets for her is to speak like a native speaker. This is an impossibly tall order for someone who learned the language as an adult. Not only is M's autonomy as a second language user violated but also her personal autonomy is affected to the extent that M feels that she is not her "real me" at home.

According to Riley (2003) a human being has two primary constituents, *person* and *self*. *Person* refers to "public, social aspects of the individual" (ibid., p. 93) that are defined by social roles, group membership, and how he or she participates in on-going interactions. *Self*

refers to “private, subjective aspects” (ibid., p. 93). They are regarded as the essence of an individual. Whereas *person* may change according to the situation the individual find herself in, *self* has traditionally been thought to be constant. With the advance of technology throughout the last century, however, it has become possible, or even inevitable, for us to come in contact with more and more people than, say, our great grandparents would have. As a result *self* has become increasingly relational (Gergen, 1991).

In reporting the results of a large-scale web-based survey of bi- and multilingual speakers Pavlenko (2006, p.6) states that 65% of the respondents answered in the affirmative to the question, “Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?” Burck (2005) qualitatively analyses interviews with 24 multilinguals and finds that those who moved into a new language in adulthood developed a different sense of themselves. Both studies show that some feel uncomfortable with their new sense of self whereas others think that “doubleness” (ibid.) is a wonderful thing to have. For some, speaking another language means liberation from the past constraints or trauma experienced in their first language. Others regard speaking another language as an inauthentic performance. A changing sense of self is not unusual, nor is it necessarily a bad thing. But, in an extreme case like M’s, is learner autonomy as a capacity a sufficient condition for a second language user to come up with at least an acceptable new sense of self? I seriously doubt it.

M’s life in Japan has a bright side, however. She has a social network outside her home where she can be her true self. Yagi quotes M as saying:

In a sense (my husband) is helped by all these people he doesn’t see himself, like this teacher. I can do this at home because they support me. I sometimes think he should be really grateful to them. (ibid., p. 165)

It is not clear who “this teacher” is from what Yagi writes, but she refers to a swimming class at a local fitness centre. M had been an experienced swimmer and, with her husband’s encouragement, she started going to this class a few months after she came to live in Japan. Initially she was ignored and excluded by Japanese members, but as they recognized her swimming skills they started talking to her. Now she gives advice to other members, chats with them and even tells jokes to them. M tells Yagi what this swimming class means to her as follows:

M: I feel settled because I think everyone understands me. I have a sense of existence.

Yagi: Your [existence]?

M: My [existence]. I recover my confidence again. (ibid., p. 167)

Another significant person in M’s life in Japan is K, a Japanese man who is an acquaintance of a relative of M’s. M had met him before she came to Japan through this relative and, as he incidentally lives in the same town as M, they occasionally meet. K has visited M’s home too. M says of K as follows:

I feel confident in talking with some Japanese people, but with others I lose confidence. *Oppa*¹⁰ is the kind of person who makes me confident. The more I talk with him the more I want to talk in Japanese. (ibid., p. 168)

K is learning Korean and Yagi quotes a transcript of a conversation between M and K discussing the difference between Korean and Japanese. Yagi observes that in their relationship “not being able to speak Japanese does not position [M] in a lower status” and that “errors and failures are shared as common experience” (ibid., p. 169). She also attributes K’s significance for M to the fact that K is “the only Japanese

10. *Oppa* is a Korean word for elder brother, but unlike the English counterpart it can be used to address any older male friend.

person that knows both M in Korea and M in Japan thus being able to connect her two selves” (ibid., p. 170).

To rephrase Yagi’s claim, M needed a sense of continuity in her life to be comfortable with her Japanese-speaking self. She was able to find it in her relationship with her swimming-school friends who recognized her old social identity, or person as opposed to self in Riley’s (2003) discussion quoted earlier. According to him “social identity can be defined as ‘*the sum of the social groups of which the individual is a competent and recognized member*’” (ibid., p. 96, italics in original) and “the individual is consciously and constantly trying to affirm his/her sense of identity” (ibid., p. 104). M was a skilled swimmer and she was able to affirm that part of her person by swimming. Her Japanese friends at the swimming class recognized her as such. Language was not an issue there. K’s case may be more than a matter of recognizing an old social identity. K had actually met M in Korea. He probably knew more than her old social identity/identities, but the data shown in Yagi’s paper does not confirm this possibility. One thing worth our attention, though, is the fact that M and K seem to have developed what may be called a solidarity of plurilingual speakers of Korean and Japanese albeit with a difference in their first languages. Here language is an issue but not in negative terms. For them, knowing the two languages is something to enjoy and to celebrate. The recognition of the two languages results partly in a continuity of M’s old social identity in that her first language is valued, but also in an emergence of new identity because M is now a plurilingual speaker. What is common in these two situations is that M has been freed from a non-native speaker identity imposed upon her by her husband. The freedom gave her back a sense of authentic self and confidence.

Learner autonomy alone would not be enough for second language users to sustain old social identities and forge new ones of their choice. Again the success depends on who they come into contact with. This is the second cause of my unease.

A macro-level argument

Macro-level refers to structural conditions, be they economic, social or political, that surround second language users. It may be obvious that these conditions support or restrict learner autonomy as capacity, but let me tell a story about RC, a third-generation Japanese Brazilian man whom I met while collecting data for a research project, in order to illustrate how micro- and meso- levels of freedom may not be enough for learner autonomy as capacity to achieve its potentials.

I was introduced to RC by a Brazilian support worker who described him as a rare type of person who was willing to learn and do things on his own. RC had been in Japan for three years and already lived in three different prefectures following available jobs. He had learned *hiragana* and *katakana*, two sets of syllabic letters regularly used in written Japanese, by going to a local Kumon centre¹¹ for six months. He had also learned to recognize some Chinese characters by looking at place names and traffic signs. He worked in a confectionary factory which supplied fresh cakes to convenience stores. His shift was from twelve midnight to twelve noon. When he had a day off a Japanese colleague substituted for him. As this colleague normally worked in a different section of the company RC had to leave recipes for him. Initially he wrote them in *romaji*, or Japanese written with the Roman alphabet, but the colleague was not able to read them. So he started writing them in *hiragana* and *katakana*. Other colleagues would sometimes teach him some Chinese characters. He would use them whenever he could. He did not speak Japanese much, and he attributed his inability to the weakness of the Kumon method. That was why he had stopped going to the centre. He wanted to focus on learning to speak next.

11. The Kumon method was created by a Japanese educator, Toru Kumon. In this method “students do not work together as a class but progress through the curriculum at their own pace, moving on to the next level when they have achieved mastery of the previous level” (Wikipedia, retrieved on 10 September 2008).

After working in Japan for three years RC had saved enough money to bring his wife and four children to Japan. RC was determined to send his children to a Japanese school when they arrived. He thought that learning another culture would be a valuable experience for them. He might or might not have been aware of it, but this would pose a completely different kind of challenge for him. He would have to deal with Japanese schoolteachers both in speaking and writing. He would have to read letters addressed to parents. He would have to understand his children's teachers, have a lot to tell and probably want to ask a lot of questions at teacher-parent conferences. Would he be able to acquire these skills quickly enough?

RC is one of the some 300,000 Brazilians¹² currently living in Japan. In 1985 the number of Brazilians living in Japan was only in three figures, but it has dramatically increased since the Japanese government amended the immigration law in 1990. The new law unconditionally gives children and grandchildren of Japanese nationals a visa status that allows them to engage in any type of employment in Japan. This was in the final stage of the economic bubble in Japan, and with the Brazilian economy staggering, many Japanese Brazilians chose to come to Japan to work. Many believe that the amendment was intended to introduce much needed unskilled labour from abroad to the booming industry, although some researchers claim that the government unwittingly opened a way for Brazilians to join the Japanese work force (Kajita, Tanno & Higuchi, 2005). Either way the government was totally unprepared to deal with the sudden influx of legal migrant workers. These workers and their families faced huge problems in many areas of their lives; housing, health care, children's education, working conditions, not to mention the learning of Japanese. It has been nearly two decades since then, and the situation has improved to some extent, but it is still far from satisfactory.

12. The exact figure was 312,979 as of 31 December 2006 (Ministry of Justice, 2007).

As even the government admits (Gaikokujin Roodoosha Mondai Kankee Shoochoo Renraku Kaigi, 2006) many Brazilians work long hours, as RC does, and earn less than a Japanese worker would. They are the first to be laid off when the business is not going well. Then they would often have to move to wherever a job is available. This is not an ideal situation to learn a second language particularly when neither financial nor professional assistance is provided. Practically the only option for those who feel they need help in learning Japanese is to go to a Japanese language study group, or *nihongo kyoshitsu*, organized by volunteer workers. These study groups are local responses to the unprecedented increase in the number of resident foreigners since the late 1980's.¹³ They are now found in almost every city and town of significant size, but they typically meet only once a week for 90 to 120 minutes. This is obviously not enough contact hours. What makes the matter worse is the fact that many of the volunteers are not qualified teachers. Although I do know people who have developed expertise through many years of volunteer work, many simply do not know how to facilitate language learning. Learners seldom voice their dissatisfaction directly to volunteers, but quite a few have complaints (Aoki, 2004; Zhou, 2007). Brazilians get a lot of bad press for their sporadic attendance and tendency to quit easily. But are they to blame?

The Japanese public school system has been rather slow to recognize the needs of Brazilian and other non-Japanese children. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) provides some resources for teaching Japanese to those children, but mother tongue maintenance and bilingual education are not on their agenda. Some local governments, Hamatsu City for example, where foreigners make up about 4% of the total population, have taken some initiatives in these areas (Hamamatsu-shi Gyoozaisee Kaikaku Suishin Shingikai,

13. Brazilians are not the only cause of this increase. The phenomenon is part of global migration and there are quite a few push and pull factors working behind it. Chinese, Filipino, and Peruvian residents have also greatly increased as well as Korean new comers.

2008), but the national course of study remains unchanged. Foreign children are forced to learn with a curriculum developed for Japanese children, which makes it hard for them to find it meaningful to be in a classroom (Kakimoto, 2006). Although an exact number has never been counted nationally, a government report estimates that around 10% of school-age foreign children are not going to school (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2003). The percentage of junior high school leavers going to senior high school is far smaller in newcomer children than in their Japanese counterparts.¹⁴ Morita (2007) observes that how children fare at school in this difficult situation largely depends on the parents' proficiency in Japanese.

RC seems to have a high degree of learner autonomy as a capacity. He also has some Japanese colleagues and Brazilian friends who help him to expand his repertoire of Japanese. He may succeed in achieving his goal against all odds, but I could not help feeling concerned for him and his family.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented three arguments as to how learner autonomy of second language users could be constrained by social context. On the micro-level, the way native speakers talk in their interaction with second language users influences how the discourse unfolds,

14. The Hamamatsu City Report (Hamamatsu-shi Gyoozaisee Kaikaku Suishin Shingikai, 2008) says the percentage is 73.7 as opposed to 96.8% among the entire age cohort. This figure is thought to be exceptionally high, though. According to MEXT's School Basic Survey Results in 2007 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2007), 21,276 foreign students were in junior high schools, which amounts to approximately 0.6% of students, and 11,383, or 0.3% of students, in senior high schools. This suggests that the national percentage will be somewhere around 50 whilst nearly 98% of Japanese children go to senior high school.

making it favourable or unfavourable for learning through using the language. On the meso-level, whether native speakers accept second language users as competent members of their social group determines the development of second language users' social identities and their sense of self in a new language. On the macro-level structural conditions affect what options second language users have in their effort to improve their command of the language. These arguments have implications for both research into and a pedagogy for learner autonomy.

As researchers we need to review Little's claim that learner autonomy presupposes interdependence (Little, 1991; 2000). His claim has been very influential and few researchers would now disagree with him. However learner autonomy literature still tends to focus on individuals' capacity and behaviours. We need more balanced holistic approaches that situate individual capacity in the social context and focus on all of its three levels. As I have shown in my examples, each level of analysis requires a different research methodology. A micro-level analysis can only be conducted through discourse analysis of naturally occurring conversations. For a meso-level analysis ethnography is a powerful tool, although it needs to include life story interviews (Aoki, 2009) in order to cover a time span longer than we can realistically stay in the field. A macro-level analysis involves fact-finding research in relevant areas such as government policies, demography and economy. I am aware that incorporating these methods in one research project will pose huge challenges for researchers. Above all, it is labour intensive work. Many of us will have to stretch ourselves to find the time. It is also an extremely intrusive form of research so we are likely to face ethical problems along the way. A different research method demands a different set of research skills too. We need to be all-round qualitative researchers, as it were. Last but not least, it is important that we solve a paradigmatic contradiction among these research methodologies. Discourse analysts assume that a researcher can discover reality by analyzing data. Ethnographers and life story interviewers tend to

take a stance that reality is co-constructed by researchers and research participants. How can we make a reality claim mixing methods that belong to different paradigms (Hatch, 2002)? I do not have an answer to this question yet. In a nutshell, the kind of research I propose is not easy, but the whole picture of how learner autonomy works in second language users' lives cannot be painted until we have a body of research of this kind.

As teachers or as advisors in employment many of us, including myself, may not have a chance to directly work with second language users who are trying to learn outside language teaching institutions, but this does not mean we do not have to act to remove any external constraints on their autonomy if we are to be socially responsible educators. So what can we do? I would suggest three things that have seldom been done in the context of JSL. First, we can try to change popular assumptions about how volunteer workers should be trained. There have been two major lines of argument. One is that Japanese volunteers and learners should develop an equal relationship rather than an unequal one of those with knowledge and those without. Advocates of this ideal have claimed that both parties should learn how to communicate. They have focused on intercultural exchange activities in their volunteer training. This may sound fine, but in reality it is not working. When these activities are solely conducted in Japanese, the power imbalance between native speakers and non-native speakers inevitably surfaces. And the urgent need to learn Japanese on the part of second language users has often been sacrificed. The other line of argument is that a certain textbook is useful because of the wide range of supplementary materials and grammatical annotations in many languages and that volunteers should be taught how to teach with it. This argument is not as prominent as the first one, but there have been and still are many volunteer training workshops that are designed on this assumption. Apart from the fact that this goes against the idea of learner autonomy, it is aiming at the impossible.

The guidelines that the Agency for Cultural Affairs issued for initial JSL teacher education in 1985 prescribed that a course should be at least 420 hours in duration. Although these guidelines were revised in 2000 and they no longer specify how much time should be allocated, most teacher training programmes in the private sector are still 420 hours long. How can we expect short volunteer training programmes of 20 to 30 hours on average¹⁵ to produce competent teachers? An alternative to these unsuccessful training ideas is to sensitize would-be volunteers to all three levels of social context, invite them to listen to learners' voices to understand what their needs, wishes and concerns are and train them to speak in the way that facilitates learning. I have been doing this for the past several years with some degree of success. From this experience I would say that what we can realistically expect beginner volunteers to be able to do is to have a sympathetic attitude towards second language users, to be their good conversation partners and to facilitate access to Japanese speaking social groups that would accept them as competent members for what they can (non-linguistically) do. Second, we can try to sell the idea of self-access centres and language advising services for the general public (Murray, this volume). The centre could also arrange tandem learning (Schwienhorst, this volume). In the current economic climate securing funding would not be easy. I myself have not been successful. But a small-scale low-tech self-access centre should not be too expensive and helping experienced and concerned volunteers to acquire advising skills should be possible. This would dramatically increase the number of learning options for second language users. Third, we can engage in advocacy on behalf of second language users against those social systems that delimit their learning options. For example the government is considering making some proficiency of Japanese a requirement for visa renewal of migrant workers and several projects are going on to develop a core curriculum.

15. This is my estimate. There are no statistics on this point.

Without provision of professional and financial assistance such as those afforded to refugees in Ireland (Little, this volume) this is nothing but violence exercised by those in power. It needs to be stopped (Aoki, 2008). Some may question if these are really the responsibility of second language educators, but unless we reformulate our role we run the risk of becoming just another constraint on the learner autonomy of second language users.

Transcription Conventions

- [A left square bracket indicates the point of overlap onset
-] A right square bracket indicates the point of overlap termination
- Two hyphens indicates a prolonged vowel
- , A comma indicates the end of a breath unit
- () Parentheses contain a back channel behaviour of an interlocutor
- <> Contains a description of a paralinguistic feature or a non-verbal behaviour
- xx Inaudible utterance
- * * Stars bracket especially soft voice.

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