



# Autonomy facilitators speak out: Learner development SIG forum, JALT 2006

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**Forum co-coordinators:** Martha Robertson, *Aichi University* & Stacey Vye, *Meikai University*

**Facilitator:** Nanci Graves, *Columbia University Teachers College*

**Greeter:** Mayako Kakei

**Co-authors and presenters:**

Kaoru Aoki, *Urawa Senior High School*

Kazufumi Endo, *Shizuoka Prefectural High School*

Keiko Kawazu, *Asian Development Bank and Soka Matsubara Community Center*

Barry Keith, *Gunma University*

Yoko Munezane, *University of Electro-Communications*

Koichi Nishimoto, *Kyoei-Gakuen High School*

Yoshie Ochi, *St. Catalina Girls' High School*

Janell Pekkain, *Sundai College of Foreign Languages*

**Writing and editing support:**

Nanci Graves, Martha Robertson, & Stacey Vye

This year's Learner Development Forum focused upon the teacher's journey towards autonomy. As part of the Forum, teachers in a graduate program at Columbia University Teachers College, Tokyo Campus presented samples of curricula they designed and implemented to foster learner autonomy in a wide-range of teaching contexts. The teachers reflected upon their individual experiences and shared their applications of principles that promote autonomy in our classrooms and in our professional lives. This paper summarizes some of the classroom applications presented at the forum and brings together the reflections of the presenters after they had the opportunity to discuss their ideas and applications with visitors to the Forum.

本年LD研究部会は 教師の自律への道 に焦点をあてて発表した。その研究部会の一部としてコロンビア大学東京キャンパスTESOL 修士課程で研鑽を積む教師達が、様々な教育現場で学習者の自律を育てるべく考案し実践したカリキュラムサンプルを紹介した。教師たちは自身の経験を省みつつ、教師として 研究者として 自律促進を巡る取り組みについて意見交換した。本論文は フォーラムで紹介した教育現場での実践を要約すると共に、発表者達の フォーラム参加者との発表内容についての議論後の感想を 集約するものである。

**Martha Robertson** teaches in the Department of Comparative Cultures at Aichi University. Her research interests include learner autonomy, sustained-content language teaching, and teacher development.

**Stacey Vye** is currently at Meikai University. Her research interests are learner and teacher autonomy including the connections between both.

## Facilitating autonomous learning: An overview

**Nanci Graves**

*Columbia University Teachers College*

From January to May in 2006, the teachers who presented their action research studies in the JALT Conference's

Learner Development Forum participated in a course titled *Facilitating Autonomy in Language Learning* at the Tokyo campus of Columbia University Teachers College. Despite the fact that their instructional situations covered the full range of learners from children to teenagers to adults, the teachers were able to engage in a serendipitous sharing of reflections, concerns, and activities that spurred everyone to go further than they had ever gone before in their explorations of learner autonomy. Emerging from this 'synergy' was the desire to share their discoveries and their enthusiasm for autonomous approaches with other teachers, both through their poster presentations in the forum and in the descriptive reports below.

As will be seen, finding ways to reduce the overdependence that has been engrained in learners from past experiences of traditional teacher-directed approaches is a primary consideration in these studies. When, how, and how much control to turn over to learners in the classroom also remains an ongoing question, as is the issue of whether there is too much or too little teacher-direction. Maintaining overall control while gradually relinquishing it to learners at appropriate times and in appropriate ways requires a great deal of vigilance on the part of instructors in order to balance learner capacities with learner needs. When shifting the focus to more learner involvement in the learning process, both the degree and the kind of help given by the teacher need to be continually rethought. Overall, the presenters' studies reflect on the following two macro- and micro-level questions to provide a guide for this process:

1. How can principles of autonomy be embedded in the curriculum so that learners become increasingly empowered

to take over the controls for their own learning?

2. How can students be involved in autonomous activities that make sense to them and enable them to share effectively in their learning choices?

The studies below illustrate the idea that facilitating autonomy should not be viewed merely as a method, but rather that developing autonomy involves a consistent emphasis on learner-enabling skills and learner-controlled activities that serve as a touchstone for teacher decision-making in all areas. Optimistically, these presenters take the view that, while autonomy cannot be taught, it can be developed and strengthened. The task may best be seen as a form of *teacher training*, in which learners gradually come to understand more about themselves and how they learn best, so that they can become effective self-instructors in making informed choices and guiding their own learning path. The presenters share both the content of their studies and their reflections upon their own learning experience in order to convey the dynamic processes of the learner's journey toward autonomy.

**Nanci Graves** teaches at Kobe Steel. She has also been the instructor of an annual course offered at Teachers College Columbia University titled *Facilitating Autonomy in Language Learning* since 2001.

## Language development in student journals: Promoting learner autonomy

Kazufumi Endo

*Shizuoka Prefectural High School*

Recent studies show that Japanese students lack cohesive and coherent writing skills, as well as syntactic maturity at the sentence level. To address these issues, the researcher assigned 12<sup>th</sup> graders the task of writing journals approximately every three weeks on topics such as their summer vacation, favorite movies, or their evolving ideas about themselves. Since most traditional teacher feedback involves comments on the content of student diaries or correction of grammatical mistakes, improvement in the cohesion, coherence, and overall syntactic complexity of students' writing is often not measured. The researcher therefore attempted a systematic analysis of student journals by utilizing the *T-unit* (a main clause plus any type of subordinate sentence) to measure the overall complexity of student journal writing.

The findings from triangulation (journal analysis, interview, and surveys) demonstrated that journal writing could be effective in encouraging students to adopt new learning strategies. Some students became aware of the significance of content schemata to enrich their journals. Other students reached the meta-cognitive stage, in which they transformed two simple sentences into a T-unit sentence by means of conjunctions or relative clauses without any direct instruction. Although the shift from simple to complex sentences was not major, the researcher received positive feedback on journal writing from the students.

The most crucial findings from the study were the shift of students' priorities and their keenness for journal writing. Students who began journal writing to obtain a better grade came to prioritize the communication between themselves and the instructor. This communicative interaction gave students greater confidence in their English skills. Students expressed happiness and fulfillment through journal writing, and some hoped to continue English journals after the course was over. As a measure of maturity and autonomy, the researcher observed that students made efforts to enrich their journals without any specific instruction from the instructor. Student interest and motivation indicate the possibility for a longitudinal study of journal writing. Therefore, the interviews and surveys in this study seem to offset the smaller results noted by the T-unit analysis.

The strongest impression I got from presenting my study at the JALT Learner Development Forum is that the interpretation of autonomy varies from person to person. Some visitors seemed to regard any type of scaffolding, even the presentation of a topic, as a breach of the concept of autonomy. Others appeared to assign journal writing without any qualitative or quantitative point of view. I feel, in that case, if teachers do not provide any sort of framework, the students will be like people who are thrown into the desert without any compass or necessities. However, I really appreciated the comments of the visitors, and I am grateful to them for sharing time and exchanging opinions with me. Their frank comments encouraged me to undertake further study on the effects of journal writing as a means of helping students become more autonomous learners.

As my instructor, Nancy Graves, reiterates, the instructor's job is to guide learners to become more autonomous and to encourage them to adopt better learning strategies. This presentation helped me to gain greater insight into the instructor's role of providing support, or scaffolding, in carrying out my responsibility to promote learner autonomy.

**Endo Kazufumi** teaches at a public senior high school while studying at Teacher's College of Columbia University in Tokyo. He is currently intrigued with effects of journal writing in terms of the development of student writing skill and the empowerment of students as autonomous learners.

## Fostering autonomy through kamishibai and collaborative learning

Keiko Kawazu

*Asian Development Bank and Soka Matsubara Community Center*

I was very happy to take part in the JALT Learner Development Forum and share my experiences in developing language skills through group discussion activities that foster autonomy. The LD Forum was my first experience in sharing my teaching approach in a purely academic environment. Through discussions with other teachers who came to the presentation, I learned many things to encourage and guide my students in becoming autonomous learners. Each discussion reminded me that it is important for students engage in the process of learning for themselves.

Earlier this year, I participated in a course called *Facilitating Autonomy in Language Learning* at Teacher's College at Columbia University's Tokyo campus (TC), directed by Nanci Graves. Exploring issues in autonomy, receiving insightful comments from my classmates, and applying the principles of learner autonomy proved to be a memorable learning experience. I had been analyzing and reflecting upon the teaching process with my TC classmates for several months, and had selected various observations and small nuggets of wisdom gleaned from more experienced instructors. Then, as part of a team of nine TC classmates, I presented a project at the *LD Forum*.

My project was a *Kamishibai*, an ancient form of Japanese storytelling that uses picture cards. Kamishibai requires

students to employ three activities: creative visualization (art work), building up detailed stories (literature), and appreciation of performance (acting and reading). I have seen some translated Kamishibai being used in other countries, and foreign teachers are trying to use Kamishibai more. However, even though Kamishibai was created in Japan, surprisingly few English teachers in Japan have introduced this great learning tool into their classrooms.

Since I became a member of *Kamishibai Bunka no Kai* (The International Kamishibai Association of Japan) in 2004, I have been quite interested in using Kamishibai in my English teaching. The Association focuses primarily upon information dissemination of the traditional Kamishibai and its proper implementation. However, I found that Kamishibai could also be very useful for language learning, fostering autonomy, and cooperative learning. When students create an original Kamishibai, the accompanying activities improve classroom dynamics. I was surprised to learn how much my students could create individually, but also how they could collaborate in groups, drawing upon and trusting their own experience.

I involved my students in a Kamishibai group project that involved cooperative learning with an eye to eventually leading my young learners toward self-directed learning. Having observed several English classes and having had discussions with parents and instructors, I have repeatedly heard the opinion that working in groups is suitable for Japanese children. Specifically, this dynamic shows itself as collaborative learning, the practice of which naturally promotes leadership roles, as certain students emerge as those whom other students trust and look to for reference.

Through a series of activities, students create their own order, seek new challenges, and stimulate self-awareness. When the students have a problem, I make suggestions, but do not provide information. Eventually, I saw my students autonomously guide themselves to find their direction in their own way. I could see leadership shared across the class in different activities. When different students took leading roles at different times, then the individual's confidence in leading could grow. Thus, a group project involving Kamishibai proved to be a valuable method for fostering both content and leadership through the different activities and roles required to complete one piece of work.

Sometimes it is difficult for me to guide students without giving too much assistance, but standing back is important for independent learning. For example, I was surprised when two students came up with two different endings for a story. They negotiated and kept both endings; that was the best part of this project. They simply enjoyed engaging in the project at each stage of the process, and, as they started to think carefully about how they could make the story better, they were becoming more autonomous learners.

Comments from my colleagues at TC and from visitors to the Learner Development Forum have helped me to further refine my project. One teacher observation in particular stands out: I had developed performance evaluation forms for my students with three sections for comments from the presenter, the instructor, and peers. When another teacher mentioned a quote from the philosopher, Samuel Johnson (1750), "Men more frequently require to be reminded than informed," I felt exactly the same. So I created a simpler evaluation form with smiley faces, neutral and sad

expressions for small children who could not write much.

I received other valuable feedback from instructors at the venue, who noted that my presentation incorporated a series of elements that mirrored my own process of reflection, analysis, discussion, and observation. Better still, they offered suggestions for ways in which I could expand on my thesis, and they drew connections from my presentation that I had not considered. Through these comments, I was reminded again that self-assessment, self-reflection, and self-directed learning are valuable tools for effective instruction.

**Keiko Kawazu**, on staff at the Asian Development Bank, teaches on a voluntary basis. She recently participated in the translation of an art book of the dreams of street children, entitled *If I had the chance...* Her research interests include learner autonomy and emotional intelligence.

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## Reflections on an experiment in autonomy

Barry E. Keith

*Gunma University*

Before I learned anything about autonomy in language learning, I figured it would be the panacea to all my teaching worries. If only I used the tools of autonomy, students would be happily engaged in tasks they are genuinely interested in. In effect, there would be less work for me and my job would be easier. So I thought.

In this brief paper, I will describe an experiment in which I introduced several autonomous teaching practices into the curriculum. I will reflect on the outcomes and consider ways to improve them. A visual representation can be found in Appendix I.

### The context

I teach general English in a night-course for engineering students. Nearly 90% are male. Many students have part-time jobs during the day. Some work full-time jobs before attending the three-hour evening class. Classes are large, 50-60 students. The night-course students have a reputation as low academic performers. “They lack motivation” is a common refrain amongst frustrated faculty members. Two years of English are required. The classes meet once per week for fifteen weeks during the semester.

### The experiment

Given the challenges described above, I was interested in raising students’ awareness that they are in control of their own learning destiny. I wanted students to have more choice and control in the class. The first major hurdle was selecting learning materials that facilitate autonomy. I had taught TOEIC and various conversation textbooks, but I was always unhappy with the materials. I had been interested in authentic or content-based materials for some time, and so, two years ago, I decided to scrap the textbooks and switch to the *Asahi Weekly*, a newspaper for Japanese learners of English. Now each student subscribes to the paper for three months during the semester. A newspaper is suitable for autonomous learning as students are able to explore their interests through English. Thus, the first piece of my experiment was already in place.

Materials by themselves, however, do not make a class of autonomous learners. The curriculum must be structured in such a way that students have input in the making of the curriculum and are vested in the outcome. The framework for my experiment in autonomy was based on work by Mackenzie and Fujioka (2002). The main components were goal-setting, negotiating curriculum, and assessment.

### Goal-setting

First, I asked the students to think about the goals of the course. What is the outcome they want to achieve during fifteen weeks? Outcomes were determined by a brainstorming activity followed by a class discussion to arrive at *Our Goal*. Goals for the class were compiled via the

KJ Method, a creative problem-solving technique devised by Kawakita Jiro, in which ideas are brainstormed, collected, and then categorized into a mind-map. The students thus identified elements for our negotiated curriculum, as described in the section below. The next step asked students to consider their personal learning goals, called *My Goal*. Students developed these goals during the semester. The instructor held mini-conferences with the students to evaluate student goals and the means of their achievement. Students were allowed to revise or change their personal goals as needed.

### *Negotiating curriculum.*

Identifying what students want to study was important because it allowed me to develop several study activities around those interests. Topics and activities included games, music, movies, news, puzzles, comics, food –all which can be found in the *Asahi Weekly*. Finally, students chose topics of interest for a newspaper poster project.

### *Assessment*

Once the curriculum was set, students were asked to assign a grade percentage to attendance, participation, in-class and out-of-class activities, projects, and tests. In groups of four, each student assigned percentages as individuals. The group discussed these and finally derived a set of percentages that the group could agree upon. The percentages for each group were compiled on the board and percentages for the entire class were discussed with input from the instructor. Students voted on the outcome and were allowed to change

the figures the following week. For the assessment scheme, a combination of self-assessment and evaluation by the instructor was used.

### *Reflections*

Although we developed *Our Goal*, a statement of aspirations for the class, these goals were not effectively incorporated into the curriculum. Rather, they served as an informal guide for topics and activities that students would like to study during the semester. The goals students produced were very broad and, in fact, impossible to incorporate into such a short course. The goals should be more clearly defined as achievable objectives that can be evaluated later by students and the instructor.

In developing *My Goal*, students reflected on what learning English means to them. However, students often set unrealistic goals or did not know how to go about achieving them. For example, one student declared he would “learn 100 words” by semester’s end, but he soon became discouraged after studying word lists, a method used to prepare for entrance examinations. He eventually gave up because it was “boring”. Such cases show that students would benefit from setting achievable goals and learning study skills that enable them to reach their goals. The mini-conferences gave us opportunities to share ideas and give students personalized feedback, but in large classes, this is almost unmanageable. Students did not formally assess their achievement, thus the incentive for *My Goal* remains in question.



Students reacted positively toward having more control and choice over the curriculum. By setting the grade percentages for evaluation, students effectively became stakeholders in the outcome of the course. As MacKenzie and Fujioka (in press) warn, “this process [goal-setting] is necessarily messy.” Nevertheless, it was welcomed by students in their course evaluation questionnaires.

Was the experiment a success? In spite of the so-called lack of motivation in night-course students, students said their motivation was positively affected by setting goals and negotiating the curriculum. It is difficult to objectively say, but student comments do show that these students like to have more control and choice in their class, and, once they are given the opportunity, students do indeed take more responsibility for their own learning. Although introducing autonomy actually resulted in more work for me, I am much happier and my students appear to be as well.

**Barry Keith** teaches at Gunma University. His interests include newspapers in education, autonomy, and needs analysis.

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## From bonsai to sycamore: Students and teacher grow together toward autonomy

Yoko Munezane

*University of Electro-Communications*

*From bonsai to sycamore* is my title. Bonsai is a metaphor for the traditional, protective type of Japanese education, which takes care of children really well, but sometimes prevents their free growth. Goals are set, the curriculum is fixed, the method is unified, and children are molded to fit the needs of society. On the other hand, the sycamore tree symbolizes free-spirited, autonomous learners. Sycamore trees reach 35-60m high and their life span ranges from 250-600 years, so the sycamore image perfectly fits life-long, autonomous learners. This paper is about a teacher’s and her students’ journey from bonsai to sycamore.

Moving from high school to university is a big change for both students and teachers. University freshmen and I; myself, who had just started teaching at a university, were the participants in this study. It was a perfect time to look back and to look forward, re-conceptualizing learning and teaching. The presentation explores student autonomy from the perspective of motivation and identity, through encouraging students to participate in goals-setting, partial curriculum negotiation, group-work, generating test questions, and an e-mail community.

## Background

As a teacher at a strict, exam-oriented high school, I held a bonsai status. The schedule was always too tight, and the curriculum was fixed. Homework and methodology were unified across classrooms. Critical thinking was almost prohibited in the sense that, at an exam-oriented school, both teachers and students, were supposed to focus on the university entrance exam. Then I took a university position, and, suddenly, I had nearly the full-autonomy of a sycamore. I was very happy, but it was a somewhat daunting experience. Standing at the threshold looking into a new world, we sometimes ask existential questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Surrounded by mountains of sample textbooks, I remembered Diana Ross's old hit song, "Do you know where you are going to?" I thought of the following parody, which might inspire my students to think about autonomous learning from several different aspects:

*(Curriculum negotiation)*

- ♪ Do you know where you're going to?
- ♪ Do you like the things your textbooks are showing you?

*(Goal-Setting)*

- ♪ Where are you going to?
- ♪ What is your goal?
- ♪ Do you get what you're hoping for?
- ♪ If you look around there are many authentic materials.

*(Self-Directed Study)*

- ♪ Where are you going to?
- ♪ Do you know?

I decided to incorporate these questions into my course content.

## Methodology

In our first class, students reflected upon their own language learning by interviewing each other in pairs, based on a questionnaire with 20 questions in three sections: past, present, and future. After the interviews, students wrote individual answers. From the interview questionnaire, I formed a general picture of the class. I found that not many students had positive experiences learning English, except through music, and many had negative experiences such as bad exam grades. They studied English primarily to pass the entrance exam, and most classes were *yakudoku* (grammar-translation) classes with few opportunities for group work.

In the present section, 60% of the students answered that they didn't like English, and, surprisingly, 90% of the students answered that they were not good at English. Regarding the future, I found that 37 % of the students hoped to become engineers or researchers in the sciences. Students had a strong wish to improve their English skills, and most of the students thought that being proficient in English would be advantageous in their future careers.

I wondered if students' self-image as *poor at English* would change through taking control over their own learning. I also wondered if their motivation would be enhanced through having sense of autonomy as Deci (1996) suggests when he states that supporting autonomy is the best way to motivate people. I introduced goal-setting, partial curriculum-negotiation, group-work, student-generated tests,

and an e-mail community, hoping to encourage students to become responsible for their own learning. At the end of the semester, I asked the students to fill in a post-questionnaire with both closed questions and open-ended questions.

### Post-questionnaire findings

#### *Goal-setting*

Seventy percent of the students commented positively on the goal-setting activity, claiming that self-determination pushed them to work toward the goal and setting goals enhanced their motivation. Student A commented:

I decided to read some novels which [sic] seemed quite difficult for me. Indeed, they were difficult but I'm happy that I challenged something new. Unless I had set that goal, I would have never tried reading novels.

This student demonstrates raised awareness of the positive effects of self-determination, realizing that, because he set the goal, he worked hard to reach it.

#### *Curriculum Negotiation*

Ninety-five percent of the students commented positively on curriculum negotiation. Many students said that their motivation was enhanced through choosing topics of interest and expressed satisfaction that their preferences and wishes were respected.

#### *Group work*

I received many positive comments in interviews and the post-questionnaire about group work, including student-generated testing, and e-mail exchanges with foreign students on campus. These activities contributed to the creation of a community of autonomous learners.

#### *Identity as English learners*

Forty-four percent of the students answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you like English?" This was a 14% increase from the pre-questionnaire. Those who answered, "I don't like English," dropped from 61% to 36%. Those who answered "neutral" tripled from 6% to 18%.

Sixteen percent of the students answered "Yes" to the question, "Are you good at English?" This was four times as many as in the pre-questionnaire. Twelve percent answered "Neutral," and those who answered, "I'm not good at English" dropped from 90% to 70%.

#### *Reflections*

Moving suddenly from almost zero (bonsai) autonomy to full sycamore autonomy was a little daunting, but it turned out to be an exciting experience. Similarly, my students found joy in making choices and becoming responsible autonomous learners. I was happy to see the positive change in students' self-image and identity as English learners. The research process itself helped me to be a more autonomous teacher as we, students and teachers, grew together in an interdependent, synergistic way.

**Yoko Munezane** teaches at University of Electro Communications. Her interests include global issues, English literature and autonomy.

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## “Lost in Translation”: Vocabulary building to foster student autonomy

**Koichi Nishimoto**

*Kyoei-Gakuen High School*

In Japanese middle schools, students begin studying new English words by using flash cards and repeating the words after a teacher’s model pronunciation; thus, they learn and retain many words with vivid impressions. Teachers, however, stop using flash cards for third-year students at the time when students begin to study the passive voice, the present-perfect tense, and relative pronouns. Teachers become busy explaining these grammatical items, and their lesson style focuses on the grammar-translation, or *Yakudoku*, method. Consequently, the emphasis on vocabulary gets *lost in translation*, so to speak.

### Autonomy at a glance: Is memorization of vocabulary learner autonomy?

In senior high schools, students are given a vocabulary book to memorize words at home, and each week take a quiz that helps to determine whether they have memorized the assigned words or not. This seems autonomous on the surface because students are studying independently, but I have some doubts about this way of memorizing words, especially in low-level schools. First of all, some students actually memorize words at home, take the test, and then write the mistaken words several times if their score is not good. This practice, I feel, focuses on the negativity of students doing poorly on tests, rather than on students

intrinsically studying vocabulary for pleasure. As a result, students don't study vocabulary autonomously, but from the sense of obligation.

Second, although students have memorized the words to some extent, they retain only a small percentage of these words, and forgetting seems to be faster than retaining. Finally, the teachers simply distribute books and a test paper, which means that teachers do not teach students vocabulary at all.

What I want to emphasize here is that this type of memorization from a vocabulary book never makes the students succeed in acquiring a large number of words, nor do students develop their own way of learning vocabulary. Instead of committing a set number of words to memory for the short term, I would like students to **continue** to build their vocabulary over a lifetime.

### Bringing vocabulary learning strategies back!

Then, how can students memorize and retain words? Teachers should not leave the study of vocabulary solely up to the students, but should teach vocabulary in the classroom. Teachers must teach many things during each lesson, including grammar, translation, phonetics, and questions for entrance examinations, but they can manage to spare a little time for teaching words. With five or ten minutes at the beginning of a lesson, teachers can implement carefully planned activities that promote autonomous learning and encourage students to learn vocabulary.

At the 2006 JALT National Conference in Kita-Kyushu, I demonstrated some of these strategies for

vocabulary building, such as *word origin*, *word search*, *word replacement*, and *word association*. *Word origin* has been traditionally used to explain a word's components. I particularly want to show that every suffix, prefix and root has its own meaning, and that English words are not alphabet letters lined up randomly. *Word search* is like a crossword puzzle. Students find words from their lesson on a chart and circle them with a red ballpoint pen. Then they write the word, adding its Japanese meaning.

*Word replacement* sheets have two parts. The upper half of the paper is a mix of English and Japanese. The Japanese words are the new words that appear in the lesson. The bottom half is written only in English. Folding the paper in the middle, one student reads the words on the upper half in English, translating Japanese into English. The other student checks the answers by looking at the bottom half of the paper. *Word association* consists of many ovals. Inside several of the orals, new words from the lesson are written with their Japanese meanings. Other ovals are blank. Students write a word or a phrase that has some connection with the previous word. Thus, students increase the number of words that they learn.

I occasionally implement these strategies in my English classes. The students enjoy finding, reading, and writing the words with much more enthusiasm than I expected. Each time I finish a lesson, I encourage students to memorize and retain new words from the lesson with these strategies. Some of my students make use of *Word replacement* cards at home to memorize new words for the term exam. I think these ways of memorizing words are effective even for low-level students.

## Reaching for autonomy

A teacher who listened to my presentation asked me how these strategies were related to autonomy. I could not explain it briefly and precisely to him, but what I want to emphasize is that when teachers make an effort to teach vocabulary instead of leaving vocabulary development up to the students, the students become interested in words. Consequently, they will grow to be autonomous learners. Without intrinsic motivation, learners cannot memorize thousands of words. Learning effective strategies for vocabulary building helps students to be more successful language learners, and the students' success, in turn, encourages them to want to learn more words.

I still wonder whether these methods are certain to make autonomous learners, but, as Thanasoulas (2000) observes, autonomy is a process, not a product. I believe students will move toward autonomy if I use these strategies in my classes. The philosopher Lao Tzu said, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Suppose I meet one of my students one day in the future and find that he or she has come to be self-directed in the habit of memorizing English words. Then, I might be able to say that I gave that student "fish for a lifetime."

**Koichi Nishimoto** teaches at Kyoei-Gakuen High School. His interests include student autonomy, vocabulary building and tour-guiding in English.

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## Autonomous learning through interpreting training method and extensive reading during asadoku

Yoshie Ochi

*St. Catalina Girl's High School*

After sharing ways to introduce autonomous learning with classmates in the *Facilitating Autonomy in Language Learning* course at Columbia Teachers College, I discovered that all my TC colleagues struggled to get students to practice autonomous language learning, rather than only teaching language skills to their students. Sharing my experiences and listening to what other teachers were doing made me realize there were quite a few successful approaches to language learning in our respective teaching contexts.

Through our exchanges, I found three common threads running through the classroom strategies we employed to encourage learner autonomy. First, language learning that gives students enjoyment and courage to step forward is essential. Second, activities requiring body movement raise learner motivation and create a positive atmosphere for speaking out without being afraid of making mistakes. Third, goal setting raises students' consciousness of the processes and the content of learning, and gives students the power to overcome their limitations. TC teachers agreed that goal setting involves a detailed, step-by-step guide at the onset of the program so that students have the opportunity to branch out on their own with the teacher's support. Building upon small successful experiences, students become independent learners and begin to take action to reach their learning goals.

In order to test these three common threads and provide better support to encourage learner autonomy, I introduced the *Interpreting Training Method (ITM)*, *Cooperative Learning (CL)*, and *Extensive Reading (ER)* into my classes at Saint Catalina Girl's High School. I hoped that the project would provide insight into the broader question of whether the concept of autonomy is more conducive and practical for language learning than traditional language learning approaches.

### The setting

There are five courses in the department of general studies at St. Catalina's. One of the courses is the International course. The students in the International course are motivated to study English. Many of them aim at entering prestigious universities, thus the curriculum is focused on passing the entrance examinations. The students concentrate on passing the English Proficiency Step Exam, and getting a high score on the TOEIC. I introduced my project in the International course.

### Language learning methods in Japanese education

*Intensive Reading (IR)* has traditionally played a key role in English teaching in Japanese high schools. It is the careful reading of short, complex texts for detailed understanding and skills practice. Putting a passage into Japanese is the main aim, which is called the *Yakudoku* method. *Extensive Reading (ER)* involves the reading of large amounts of longer, easy-to-understand material for fun. It was my belief that integrating ER and IR had the potential to raise students' motivation to improve their communicative English ability.

The first method that I introduced, Interpreting Training Method, is one of the new approaches in Intensive Reading. ITM has been used to train professional interpreters and includes shadowing, overlapping, quick response practice, dictation, reproduction, translation of Japanese to English, and summarization. Intensive Reading in Japan, however, so far has just focused on translation from English to Japanese. Accurate translation of complicated passages has been the primary goal of English learning.

### The project

My objective was to introduce ITM into my International course English classes in order to encourage students to speak out and think in English while making use of the die-hard, traditional Intensive Reading. The Interpretive Training Method makes students clarify the parts they do not understand. Comprehension of the content comes first, and then shadowing, overlapping, and dictation help students concentrate on listening and writing. I also wanted them to listen to CD's and practice reading at home, and eventually start practicing on their own. In these ways, listening and reading activities are extended beyond the classroom. I found that I did not have to tell students to read at home. They practiced well at home to perform well in the class, which is one example of the gradual steps of autonomous learning.

In addition, I introduced cooperative learning, including pair work and group work, into the International course English classes. What I introduced in the class for the acquisition of the important expressions and idioms is quick response practice in pairs. After understanding the content,

students make pairs and practice putting sentences into English or Japanese. One student puts the sentence into Japanese while looking at the textbook, and the other student listens and puts the sentence into English. One student reads the sentence and the other student repeats the words without looking at the text. These activities allow students to help one another with the task as well as get some speaking practice. These kinds of physical activities also give them enjoyment and courage to step forward. Furthermore, they raise students' motivation and create a positive atmosphere.

### Reflections

The ITM approach to reading offers students a lot of advantages, such as allowing access to a variety of materials in the different fields and promoting the systematical acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. The vocabulary and grammatical knowledge gained from ITM can potentially be the basis, or foundation, for Extensive Reading. Integrating ER methods would provide students with the opportunity to read English in quantity, improve self-access studying methods, and permit students to choose and read materials appropriate for their level. Unfortunately, even though ER is said to improve learners' overall reading ability and aids the development of a variety of other language skills, it has not gained widespread acceptance in Japanese high schools.

A paradigm shift in how teachers view English education and how teachers regard their roles could be a step toward a successful ER program. In implementing ITM, I realized that I must do something to fill the void IR creates. ER shows that the way to supplement IR is to let students experience language in context, teach them to process ideas,



not individual words, encourage them to read massive stories and to read for pleasure. What EFL teachers have to do is to keep a good balance between Intensive and Extensive Reading. By adopting a flexible policy that allows the integration of IR and ER, more ER programs could be integrated into high schools in Japan.

### Asadoku

Since the school year of 2005, my school has introduced *Asadoku* (a short morning reading time). All the students at the school choose their favorite books and enjoy reading for ten minutes. This has allowed a chance for a paradigm shift toward ER. My American colleague had suggested that ER should be introduced into the school curriculum, and I had been wondering how this could be done in an effective and simple way. *Asadoku* gave us a perfect chance to introduce ER into our English classes.

I decided that my action research plan for my class project at TC would be to carry out ER for the International course students during *Asadoku* in order to foster learner autonomy, provide better environment for pleasure reading in English, and lead to better language learning. The study involved 59 female students, aged 15-18, studying at a senior high school. The study was conducted over a ten-month period.

### Results of the survey

To investigate the success of the reading strategies and determine the relationship between extensive reading and student attitudes, I conducted a survey. The topics of the survey included: ER; pleasure reading; content-focused

reading; the desire that makes students continue reading extensively; goal setting; and motivation for learning English. (See example questionnaire in Appendix II.)

The results were positive in several areas. A large number of students who had never experienced ER had not expected to be able to read books in English. The students' attitudes toward reading became significantly more positive. The number of students who didn't enjoy reading at all decreased drastically to zero. More than 48% of the students enjoyed reading. Thirty-nine percent of the students answered "so-so." Now they are confident in reading in English, even though they only have ten-minute reading session five times per week.

The open-ended sections of the questionnaire document the students' attitudes. Students wrote favorable comments on reading and expressed their hope to continue reading. Some students said, "I've come to enjoy reading in English." "Though I'm not so good at reading English in the text book, I enjoy reading the story." "I'm happy I have a lot of chances to be exposed to English." "I can enjoy reading more than doing in Japanese." "I can read in English faster than before." and "I think my English ability has improved." Many students expressed hope that they would like to read more and would like more time to read.

Other students said "I felt I could read the difficult books, which makes me feel I want to study English more." "I'm happy to read the real material. And I want to be a good reader of English." "I can enjoy reading as well as improving English ability. It's like killing two birds with one stone." Their comments show that they read books with pleasure and effort, which encourages them in their study of English.

One third-year student who is studying hard for entrance examination wrote, “It’s been difficult to make the time for reading English book, so I’m pleased that I can read at school.”

No one expressed negative comments toward reading. There seem to be two reasons: One is ER can be done during *Asadoku*, which does not add a heavy workload for the students. The other is that the students in the International course basically like English regardless of their ability. Integrating Extensive Reading into the curriculum gives students an opportunity to summarize and comment upon their reading. While reading and listening, students became conscious of sentence structure, grammatical points, vocabulary, and the flow of the story. They recognized the pattern of the whole story and formed images of the story, which accelerated their output.

At first, students needed to comprehend what they read and listened to. Thus, they relied upon their L1 ability. Gradually, after a great deal of reading and listening input, they improved comprehension without using the L1. Thus, integration of IR and ER has brought a lot of benefits to the classes in terms of language learner autonomy and nurturing output in English.

### Conclusion

Krashen (1982) holds that the unconscious process of language acquisition, such as what occurs during reading for pleasure, is more successful and longer lasting than conscious learning. Motivation appears to be stimulated by the satisfaction of reading. In a similar vein,

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) introduced the concept of *flow*. Flow is the state people reach when they are deeply, but effortlessly involved in an activity. In this state, concerns of everyday life and even the sense of self disappear. The joy of reading appears to stimulate a state of flow, which increases both motivation and language acquisition, as Krashen indicates. If students are motivated to learn intrinsically, they carry out learning activities for the pleasure of learning. The term autonomy may seem to imply that learners should learn independently, but I believe that autonomy also means working together with teachers and students towards shared goals. Group work and pair work create synergy. Synergy creates excitement and pleasure. Excitement and pleasure increase motivation and create success in learning.

Thus, cooperative and interdependent learning can foster autonomy as much if not more than solitary work, and a balanced combination of both interaction and self-study seem most desirable.

Autonomous learning also includes setting up a purpose for both the long term and the short term, as a map of our learning. If we do not know the destination we would like to reach, we will be at a loss for where to go, what to prepare, how to get there, what means of transportation we should take, and what we would like to do there. Once we set our purpose, we can begin to move into action. We are able to set goals for ourselves, adjusting those goals as circumstances require. If we are autonomous, we never lose sight of where we are headed next. In this sense a goal is a dream with a deadline for us. Autonomy gives us a power to set and meet goal after goal, which in turn gives us motivation to seek the next thing. When we reach one goal, it encourages us.

Then we move on to the next goal, energized by what we've already achieved. We keep our efforts focused by decision-making and setting goals based on our autonomy. These principles apply to a variety of fields of endeavor. This is autonomy and holistic learning for our lifetime.

**Yoshie Ochi** teaches at St. Catalina Girls' High School. Her interests include learner autonomy, the Interpreting Training Method in English education, and Extensive Reading.

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### Conclusion

The proceeding papers document the the intricate progression of the learner's journey toward more autonomous language learning and language teaching. The presenters' diverse teaching contexts and their individual experiences as teachers and learners show that autonomy cannot be approached as a practical set of skills to be taught, but must be recognized as an continuous, spiraling process of self-actualization in which learners engage with self, others, the material to be learned, and the context in which learning takes place. The presenters questioned how they could involve learners in activities that made sense to them and that would encourage them to become more involved in their own learning. They recognized the necessity of supporting students in the journey towards autonomy, and pondered how the principles of learner autonomy could best be imbedded in the curriculum so that students would assume increasing control over their own learning. Finally, the presenters faced their own fears of relinquishing control of the classroom and entrusting students with responsibilities that have traditionally been assigned to the teacher. In meeting these challenges, the presenters supported and guided one another in their personal journeys toward self-actualization and autonomy.

This concept of autonomy as a communal process is shown to be a crucial component of the teachers' own self-development, and, by extension, is also an essential feature in promoting autonomous learning in their students. Likewise, the symbiotic processes of teaching and learning and the symbiotic relationships that develop between teachers and learners are also vital to autonomous learning.

As these presentations evolved from the participants work at Columbia University Teachers College, it is fitting that their voices conclude this paper. Barry Keith of Gunma University summarizes the parallel journeys that he and his fellow classmates embarked upon as teachers and learners at Columbia Teachers College:

As participants in a university course about facilitating autonomy, we experienced the self-actualizing potential of autonomy first-hand both as learners and as teachers. As the class was founded upon the principles that were being studied, what might have remained merely an academic exercise became a research task that evolved into a presentation, and, now, a collaborative paper to be shared with our colleagues.

From our experience as autonomous learners and as facilitators of autonomy, we have determined that, for autonomous learning and self-actualization to be possible, there must be *choice* within a curriculum. If students have options to choose from, they became stakeholders in the outcome. Secondly, and this is inherent in the idea of *choice*, we as teachers must relinquish a certain amount of *control* to our students. To do so, required a leap of faith for some of the participants, but we learned to believe in our students' power and potential to become autonomous learners, and, as our reports show, we were rewarded by greater enthusiasm for learning and greater progress from our students.

We also learned about the challenges we face, especially in those situations where learner and teacher autonomy is stifled, such as in the codified curriculum of a high school. When a tightly regimented curriculum must be followed,

psychological factors as well as institutional constraints pose obstacles to effective learning and limit students' capacity to *be* autonomous and to *act* autonomously. Knowing how to learn effectively is not innate, and clear guidance in developing self-directed learning skills, as well as the regular opportunity to practice such skills, is essential. Therefore, we must continue to find ways to integrate self-reflection, learning strategies, choice, and decision making into the curriculum so that students become increasingly empowered to guide their own learning, for our choice to take up an autonomy-facilitating approach is the foundation upon which our students' autonomous development is being constructed.

Just as in the previously quoted proverb by Lao Tzu, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for life," teachers have an opportunity to provide students with tools that will sustain learning throughout life. In so doing, we teachers also become more active participants in our own journey toward autonomy.

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Lao Tzu quotes. *Brainy Quote*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2007 from <[www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/laotzu121559.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/laotzu121559.html)>

## Appendix

Ochi, Yoshie. Autonomous Learning through Interpreting Training Method and Extensive Reading during *Asadoku*.

### A Survey on Extensive Reading

Year ( ) Class ( ) Number ( ) Name ( )

#### A. Reading in English

1. No Yes. (when where )
2. How much do you enjoy reading in English?
  1. not at all
  2. not very much
  3. neither yes nor no
  4. enjoy
  5. very much
3. How do you enjoy reading in English? (choose two)
  - ① read books in English which I have read in Japanese
  - ② read books in English which I have not read
  - ③ read English books as I do in Japanese
  - ④ read what I want to read
  - ⑤ enjoy a story in English
  - ⑥ skip the hard part and feel relaxed
  - ⑦ others ( )
4. What part do you think it difficult to read in English? (choose two)
  - ① how to select books
  - ② don't use a dictionary
  - ③ take time to put it into Japanese when reading
  - ④ others ( )

5. What effects do you think ER brings about? (choose two)
  - ① gain English words and phrases
  - ② be exposed to a lot of English
  - ③ read faster than before
  - ④ read while guessing the story
  - ⑤ not be allergic to English books
  - ⑥ read as if I were reading in Japanese
  - ⑦ read for pleasure
  - ⑧ others ( )
6. Write English books which were interesting

#### B. Do you read besides Asadoku?

1. No Yes (when where )
2. If you answered yes How often do you read?
  - almost every day ( ) minutes
  - 2 -3 times a week ( ) minutes
  - once a week ( ) minutes
  - twice a month ( ) minutes
  - ⑤ others ( )

#### C. What activities do you want to do?

- 1 report what I read in a group
- 2 write book reports
- 3 have a meeting where I can listen to the book

4 others ( )

D. Write whatever you want about Extensive Reading

*Thank you for your cooperation.*