

## INTRODUCTION

The Realizing Autonomy Conference, which was held on October 29th, 2011 at Nanzan University, Nagoya, was a curious, Janus-faced event. On the one hand, looking backwards, the initial rationale for such an event was to mark the publication by Palgrave Macmillan of the Learner Development Special Interest Group's book, *Realizing Autonomy: Practice and Reflection in Language Education Contexts* (2012). The three-year-long project of planning, writing, and editing a book had been a collaborative venture from the start, which entailed authors coming together at a weekend retreat to plan the book and later working together as readers of each other's chapters. The idea of a conference was to provide a further opportunity to draw on and celebrate the energy and enthusiasm of that wonderful collective enterprise.

On the other hand, the conference provided not only an occasion for teachers to share current and past practices and insights, but also to look to the future and consider new aspects of and directions for enhancing learning. As Andy Barfield wryly suggested on the day, the prospect of a Proceedings of the Conference of the book seems to take the notion of "spin-offs" into the realm of the absurd. But, as we hope to show in this special issue of *Learning Learning*, each of the articles that appears in these Proceedings represents the wide range of interests and types of presentation at the conference and offers insights and departures for practice and research of autonomy and development in language education that are quite different and new.

The conference started with a plenary session by Tim Murphey, and his article, "Autonomy, Agency, and Social Capital: Surfing the Altruistic Coral Reef Cafés On a 40-Mile Layer of Life!" reflects the whimsical spirit of the talk. As the title implies, Tim's article covers a lot of ground, ranging from the beginning of the history of mankind to the cyber-communities of the 21st century, and introduces us to a model he calls the *dynamic dialectical adjustment harmonizer* that conceptualizes learning and growth as maintaining a healthy balance of autonomy and community.

Tim's initial overview paper is followed by three articles that present new research and theory. Andy Barfield's "Learners' Changing Lexical Landscapes" is a thought-provoking piece that raises questions about practices surrounding lexical development and their relation to learner autonomy. His case study of Reiko illustrates the dynamic and increasingly purposeful way in which one autonomous learner seeks to refine a method for recording vocabulary that she wants to learn.

A second research paper by Clair Taylor, Daniel Beck, Darrel Hardy, Keiko Omura, Michael Stout and Gerald Talandis Jr., entitled "Encouraging Students to Engage in Learning Outside the Classroom", describes an initiative to implement a program-wide practice involving the use of stamp cards to ensure students take advantage of the self-access facilities the university offers. A particularly interesting feature of this article is its investigation into the effects of the stamp card system over a two-year period, which not only highlights the incremental rewards

from the innovation, but also reveals the continuing resistance to change and difficulty of creating a new culture at the university.

Next, Steven Paydon introduces a new model of classroom learning motivation, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. As in his conference workshop, Steve illustrates his theory by showing how various motivating classroom practices relate to this model: from fulfilling basic needs for security through a need for a supportive community to a pinnacle of personal growth and learning.

These articles are followed by two reflections on the conference. The first by Robert Moreau and Jackie Suginaga takes the form of a dialogue about their workshop session on self-reflective practices for teacher development. The second is Naoko Harada's reflection, inspired by the image Tim Murphey presented in his plenary of a flying turtle, on the role of positive self-talk when facing challenges of the unfamiliar or the seemingly impossible.

The final paper in this collection is the second plenary session, "Practices of Criticality, Critical Thinking, and Learner Autonomy", which was given by Richard Pemberton and Mike Nix. This is a very special paper, both because it shifts the parameters of learner autonomy research towards the content of education and because it is Richard's final publication. At the conference, Richard and Mike's plenary was movingly introduced by Andy Barfield. His introduction is reproduced here in the same order as on that day. Andy has also compiled for this issue a profile of Richard's life and work, and this stands as the final entry in these Proceedings.

Although we end the Proceedings by looking back at Richard's life, we hope and trust that his legacy—his lifelong commitment to respecting learners and their development, and his enduring positive influence on students, colleagues and friends—will continue well into the future. We hope that you will enjoy the Realizing Autonomy Conference Proceedings, not only as a record of what transpired in Nagoya on the day, but also as an inspiration and motivation for developing your own understanding and practices of learner development.

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