

Featured Article

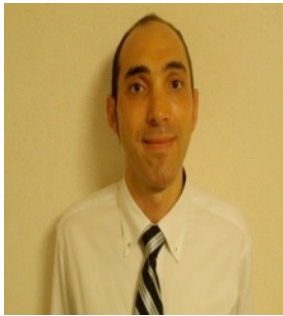
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The Role of Teacher Autonomy in Learner Autonomy

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Abstract



The goal of this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of the role of teacher autonomy in the development of learner autonomy. Firstly, the general attributes of autonomous teachers are identified. Next, the teacher's role in scaffolding and learner support was emphasized through the illustration of regular weekly homework assignments and learner goal-setting practices. The conclusion indicates that learner autonomy is an essential element for successful learning and the teacher's gradual withdrawal from the learning process is needed in order to foster autonomous learning skills in students.

Introduction

The importance of autonomy in learner development has been widely emphasized over the past three decades. Holec (1981) defined autonomy as one's own ability to take control of one's own learning. If we think about the classroom implications of this definition, we can assume that the control of learning is gradually handed over to students in order to create the right environment for them to develop their autonomous learning skills. Little (1991) suggests that autonomy can be developed and deployed in a number of ways and situations, including in the classroom.

In a traditional teacher-centered classroom environment, teachers are perceived as the ultimate authority, and it is they who are expected to control and direct the learning process. Since teachers have the power, they also have the ability to change learners' perception of the teacher's role and of their own learning process. Benson (2001) describes autonomy as an attribute of the learner's approach to the learning process. The development of this attribute can be linked to the learner's ability to reflect on their own learning. Learner reflection involves linking a current experience to previous learning which is especially important during the language learning process. Since language learners are expected to apply the new language to various daily life or classroom situations they encounter, which is how language retention takes place, their reflection on their own learning becomes essential in their language acquisition. According to Gibbs (1998), "It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential is lost (p.9)."

However, not all learners have an autonomous attitude towards learning a new language. Some perceive the teacher as the sole provider of the language, which ultimately leads to teacher-dependent language acquisition. One of the challenges many language teachers face is steering learners away from a passive role where they expect the teacher to spoon-feed them the new language. In order to change this perception, language teachers themselves need to be reflective. Being reflective as a teacher involves the process of self-observation and self-evaluation. Teachers need to think about what they do in the classroom, why they do it and what benefits learners can gain from that. As teachers continue to adopt this self-observation and self-evaluation, they can become more reflective about their own teaching and guide their students in the right direction to develop their own reflective learning skills. Once learners begin their own self-observation and self-evaluation with appropriate guidance from their teacher, they can gradually learn to reflect on their own learning. One of the effective ways to achieve this in a language classroom is to encourage learners to look back over their past experiences and make links with their current experience. For instance, if learners are learning how to make requests in English, this would mean referring to their past experiences of making requests while learning the language. Such practices can help learners gain a better understanding of how to reflect on their own learning and positively influence their language acquisition process.

Reflective language teaching is a crucial part of learner development and autonomy. As Voller (1997) stated, “The rise to prominence of learner autonomy as a goal in classroom settings, in turn, has led to needs for retraining and enhanced awareness both of the importance of the teacher in structuring or ‘scaffolding’ reflective learning and of the complex, shifting interrelationship between teacher and learner roles in a “pedagogy” for “autonomy” (p.1992). In other words, if students are to learn to “take control”, the teacher may need to learn to “let go” even while providing scaffolding and structure.

The teacher’s withdrawal from the learning process occurs partly as a result of their own autonomy. Thavenius (1990) described teacher autonomy as the teacher’s ability and willingness to help learners take responsibility for their own learning. His view indicates that teachers should reflect on their own roles and adapt to students’ new roles while supporting students’ development of autonomy. The realization of this in a language classroom would mean that learners need to be allowed freedom to express themselves in order to learn to reflect on their own learning.

Many teachers consider mistake correction as one of the key elements of successful language teaching, but sometimes letting learners express themselves without paying much attention to errors will give them the opportunity to learn from their own mistakes. As a result, learners will have less fear of making mistakes and develop greater confidence in the way they express themselves. Confidence is an essential condition for effective communication giving learners the courage to take more initiative and challenge themselves. This in turn helps them to articulate their ideas and feelings using more complex language and, eventually, to develop the ability to reflect on their past learning experiences. Benson (2001) emphasizes the role of reflective learning in autonomy and suggests that the “autonomous learner is essentially one who

is capable of reflection at appropriate moments in the learning process and of acting upon the results (p.95).” This can be an extremely challenging process for some learners. Thus, the teacher’s role in the effective management of this process is crucial.

If teachers themselves know that, in order to enhance language acquisition, learners need to learn from their own mistakes, then, needless to say, teachers will have the responsibility to help learners understand this process. Littlewood (1997) identified “*Self awareness*” as a key element in fostering teacher autonomy as it leads to a better understanding of ourselves as learners and professionals, of our strengths and weaknesses. Powell and Powell (2010) claimed that teachers with high degrees of self-awareness know their strengths and their limits. They are able to make an accurate appraisal of their own talents and weaknesses, they are reflective and are able to learn from experience, they take responsible risks and, when they fail, they treat the incident as an opportunity for growth and learning (p.1991). As Little (1995) concluded “Teachers are likely to foster growth in their learners if they also know themselves what it is to be an autonomous learner (p.175).”

While students are encouraged to develop their capacity and readiness to control their own learning, they will eventually reach the point where they will be able to acquire their own independent learning skills and, consequently, will begin to reflect on their own experiences (Brown, 2001, p. 89-90).

In order to illustrate the role of the teacher in developing learner autonomy, below I have given a detailed description of a classroom practice I developed, called “Regular Weekly Homework Assignment”. I have explained my role as a facilitator in the management of these assignments and the strategies I implement in order to help my students become more reflective and autonomous in their language acquisition.

Weekly Homework Assignments

If the aim of a language class is to help students improve communicative competency in English and take greater responsibility for their language learning, then learners need to be more engaged in their own learning process and teachers need to provide support and scaffolding for this. In my own classes, I usually set three major goals with my students before giving them weekly homework assignments:

- Research and discover new target language on your own.
- Use the new target language in your writing.
- Use the new target language in spoken communication effectively.

I usually have around twenty students in each class. Firstly, I have my students research the following lesson’s target language using various resources on their own. They can either do it at home or using the university library. One of the key principles of this research activity is that I make sure to refrain from influencing their findings. As a result of their initial effort, they obtain some information regarding the target language.

In order to illustrate this activity more clearly, let’s imagine that the following lesson covers adjectives for personality traits. In the first phase, I expect the students to research

information about the use of those adjectives for homework prior to the following lesson. Some students only create a list of adjectives, while some use those adjectives in sentences or list the adjectives with their dictionary definition. There can also be students who combine some or all of the above approaches. However, in the end, this will help them gain some insights into the target language.

During the second phase of the homework assignment, students need to use the language in writing. In the case of adjectives for personality traits, this could be as simple as just selecting some people from their surroundings and writing about their personality traits. Once they have finished, they send me what they have written by e-mail, and I send them a reply with feedback. The feedback allows students to observe their mistakes and revise their usage of the language on their own prior to the following lesson.

The final phase of the activity takes place in class where students are expected to use the target language points in spoken communication. I usually start off my classes with a warm-up activity in which I put students in pairs and have them talk about their daily routines, past events, or future plans. This activity usually lasts five to ten minutes. Next, I divide them into larger groups and then each student makes an oral presentation of their homework assignment to their groups.

Below is an example of a homework assignment submitted by a first year science student:

Table 1: Example of Homework Assignment

Personality Adjectives	
Positive Adjectives	Negative Adjectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outgoing 2. Talkative 3. Sociable 4. Hardworking 5. Easygoing 6. Punctual 7. Tidy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shy b. Quiet c. Unsociable d. Lazy e. Strict f. Tardy g. Messy
<p>My best friend is called Naomi. She is very friendly and talkative. She always chats with people for hours. But sometimes she is a little tardy. She often arrives late.</p>	

These assignments provide learners with essential training that can gradually help them understand the significance of their role in their learning. Once their weekly tasks are assigned, I step back and refrain from interfering with their research and discovery. This is when the teacher's withdrawal from the learning process comes into play. My deliberate lack of involvement in the process puts them at the center of their own learning. The only time I am truly

present in the process is when I provide correction and feedback, yet as mentioned above, their findings remain uninfluenced. This also makes students realize the freedom they have to take control of their own role and encourages them to take greater responsibility for their future assignments. I believe that learners need to be given responsibility on a regular basis in order to learn to take responsibility for their own learning.

During the writing phase of the activity, most students choose personally relevant situations as they generally find it easier to use the language in this way. At that stage, my goal as a teacher is to help them develop a sense of ownership of the language. This is a vital part of their learning endeavor. In order to help them gain a sense of ownership of the language, I try to allow my students the utmost freedom to use the language of their choice. In other words, I refrain from correcting every grammar error they make unless the mistakes significantly change the meaning of their sentences. Since I respond positively to what they say, this in return, gives them more motivation and confidence for the final stage, which is when they are expected to give an oral presentation to their peers in class.

Needless to say, determining the amount of error correction depends upon the teacher's own judgment and what they expect from learners. However, in my own experience, I find that I can only determine this if I have an adequate understanding of the learners' needs and expectations. Once I surely know that I have this awareness, I can make more accurate judgments about my own expectations of their learners. If the goal of the teacher is to foster autonomy in their learners, they may need to allow learners freedom with the way they wish to express themselves.

It is also important to have realistic expectations from students as overloading them with tasks and assignments may also prove counterproductive. Many of my students have little time to dedicate to learning English and they may get discouraged by overly demanding tasks. In order to manage this problem effectively, I give my students a target word count for each writing assignment. This helps me to determine how much time they are likely to spend on their English language study. For instance, if I set the word count limit for 200 and most of them can't manage to fulfill the requirement, then I lower my expectations. Through trial and error this can be easily determined.

Encouraging Learners to Set Their Own Goals

When helping learners to develop their autonomous learning skills, teachers should also encourage them to make their own learning decisions. Gaining decision-making ability is an important step for learners to start setting their own goals. This ability may also reflect positively on their motivation. A growing body of research indicates that when students are working on goals they themselves have set, they are more motivated and efficient, and also they achieve more than they do when working on goals that have been set by their teacher (Hom & Murphy, 1983, p.104). Stiggings and Chappuis (2005) suggest that, by including goal setting and self-monitoring in the daily classroom routine, a teacher can create a learning environment that increases student involvement and motivation. Having students set their own goals can be a fairly challenging task

for most educators, particularly in schools where learners are accustomed to teacher-directed learning and perceive goal setting as one of the teacher’s duties.

Rader (2005:124) emphasizes the role of teachers in guiding students to learn how to set their own goals and lists a set of principles which include:

- Decide a time when your goal will be achieved.
- Choose a specific goal and write it down.
- Develop a plan to achieve your goal.
- Visualize yourself accomplishing your goal.
- Work hard and never give up.

In order to evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of Rader’s principles, I conducted a survey on 28 Biological Science students during an English language class. I asked all the students to set a new learning goal following Rader’s guidelines. The table below shows examples of one of student’s goals created in accordance with each principle:

Table 2: Rader’s Principles and Student Goals

RADER’S PRINCIPLES	STUDENT EXAMPLE
Decide a time when your goal will be achieved.	My goal is to learn 90 new English words within one month.
Choose a specific goal and write it down.	I can achieve this by adding three new words to my vocabulary everyday.
Develop a plan to achieve your goal.	Firstly, I will keep a new vocabulary notebook. Next, I will write the definitions of all the new vocabulary using an English to English dictionary. Then I will make a sentence using each word. Finally, I will review the new vocabulary everyday and use the new words in class as often as possible.
Visualize yourself accomplishing your goal.	Once I achieve this goal, I will be able to communicate my ideas using a wider variety of vocabulary.

Work hard and never give up.	I will do my absolute best to achieve this goal.
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After filling in the table, all students in class had set a new goal for themselves based on the above principles. In order to evaluate their initial reaction to their own goal-setting, I designed an informal survey including three statements:

1. I have found the principles useful for my future studies. (Yes/No)
2. I would like to set my own goals by following the same principles in the future. (Yes/No)
3. I would still prefer my teacher to set my own learning goals for me. (Yes/No)

As indicated in the table below, all students selected “Yes” for the first statement. This shows that students were convinced on the effectiveness of the principles in goal setting. Twenty-four students selected “Yes” for the second statement which also means that the majority of the students would still like to follow the guidelines when they need to set new learning goals in the future. Twenty-six students selected “No” for the final statement. This indicates that the vast majority of the students would rather set their own learning goals and not involve their teachers in their goal-setting endeavors.

Since I started this goal-setting practice with my students, it has become a regular part of my classroom routines. Before we start off a new chapter in the course book, I always allow my students sometime to set a new goal based on Rader’s principles. As a result, they can develop their self-awareness and reflective learning skills, which in return, may positively contribute to their future decision-making endeavors.

Table 3: Survey Results

QUESTIONS	YES	NO
I’ve found the principles useful for my future studies. (Yes/No)	28	
I would like to set my own goals by following the same principles in the future. (Yes/No)	24	
I would still prefer my teacher to set my own learning goals for me. (Yes/No)		26

Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to emphasize the role of teacher autonomy in the development of learner autonomy. In order to illustrate this theory, I analyzed my own role as a teacher in student homework assignments and student goal setting. As I have shown, I scaffolded both activities from beginning to end which appears to be of significant value to learners in helping them to complete the activities successfully. The teacher’s role as a facilitator here can not be understated. In fact, it plays an essential part in learner development and autonomy.

During the implementation of both activities I gradually withdraw myself from the learning

process and hand the control over to students. As other researchers have claimed, I have also found that my own gradual withdrawal from the learning process is needed for my students to become autonomous. As I illustrated in both activities, I make the utmost effort to reflect on my own autonomy by providing scaffolding and support for learners, which is the result of my self-awareness and reflectiveness. In the future, I aspire to designing more activities to further promote learner autonomy and gain deeper insights into the role of teacher autonomy in the development of learner autonomy.

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Looking Forward 今後のイベント

The stories of our success: Narratives in language development—LD SIG forum at the JALT Pan-SIG 2015 conference in Kobe

Hello to all of you! For those of you attending the Pan-SIG conference, you are warmly invited to take part in our LD SIG forum this year. PanSIG 2015 will be held at the Kobe City University of Foreign Studies in Hyogo-ken, from May 16-17, 2015.

This year's LD SIG forum for the PanSIG conference will focus on the role that personal narratives can play in making the language-learning process more interesting and enjoyable. As we have always done, the forum will have simultaneous displays and presentations, with plenty of opportunities for audience and presenter interaction and discussion. This year we will have six great presentations for your interest and stimulation.

The role of music in building narrative, grasping metaphor, and achieving expository reach in L2 writing

Lee Arnold (Seigakuin University) and Joseph Tomei (Kumamoto Gakuen University)

The narrative is defined as an account of connected events, and this presentation will show how music can be used to aid and inspire learners to create written narratives in the L2 with cohesion, range, and depth. The presenters will explore:

- 1) how instrumental music may aid learners' construction of meaning and narrative;
- 2) how the metaphoric character of lyrics may broaden comprehension and production of long-form essays.

In conclusion, the presenters will show, through learner writing samples and lesson materials, how instrumental and vocal music may provide learners with a foundation and stimulus for both factual and creative writing.

Use of narrative flags for learners to understand and make themselves understood

Helen Hanae (Toyo University)

When learners process long narratives, telltale clusters of lexical features flag their attention to hotspots where they pause to data-mine for gist and high-priority details. Just like data-mining bots, even L2 readers and listeners of lower proficiency can use these “flags” to move efficiently through poorly understood narratives. The presenter will examine the two streamlined sets of “flag” features (selected through POS tagging and manual analysis) her learners use for academic/business reading and listening. She will also demonstrate how “flagging” Story Dice narratives and interviews to attract readers' and listeners' attentions may function to take them on more easily followed and interesting narrative journeys.

Sharing my story: learning French through storytelling in a French drama school

Yoko Morimoto (Meiji University)

To understand what a language learner may go through, and to also bring aspects of SLA, autonomy, neuro-ELT, and positive psychology into her own learning, the presenter will share her learning experiences of French to the intermediate level over the last three and half years. She will describe the most salient moments of her experience—joining a French drama school in Paris, and discovering that her

personal pleasure of open novel reading in her drama class proved lively and engaging to others. Through the recounting of such experiences as a learner, she will share further observations and analysis of what has most contributed to her progress and what may be applicable in pedagogical terms to Japanese EFL university classroom settings.

Who's holding the reins? Teachers talk about approaches to 'teaching' about autonomy

Ann Mayeda (Konan Women's University)

This presentation examines the threads from the narratives of four teachers involved in “teaching” autonomy through a three-year tutoring course designed to scaffold learners toward self-direction in setting and achieving language-learning goals within a university English department curriculum. These classes are meant for learners to gain the tools and knowledge necessary in order to increase autonomy and for the teachers to promote and support it accordingly. This discussion will center on two narrative threads—balancing the processes of discovery towards the best fit for teachers given their approaches to autonomous learning, and teaching with the increased understanding of the best fit for learners at each stage of their studies and lives. The threads seem to indicate a positive relationship between teachers and learners when there is a good match between what the teacher offers and what the learners are comfortable with.

Language identity: from minority situation to majority situation

Joel Laurier (Toyo University)

As Global English and English as a Lingua Franca movements grow in their global appeal, the native speaker model loses its relevance for language teaching. Much less talked about is the teacher as second language learner, unless it is in the teacher's homeland, despite the fact that the majority

of the world's English speakers are themselves not “native speakers.” This presentation is a first-hand account of the presenter himself as second language learner, in one of Kachru's inner-circle countries. It will show the path he took toward identifying himself as an English speaker, and how that path became even more complex as he moved to Japan. His evolving identity as a bilingual speaker in a minority situation to a minority situation in a foreign country will also be discussed.

A web of connections - learner autonomy and Web 2.0 LD SIG forum at JALT CALL 2015 in Fukuoka

Don't forget our CALL LD SIG forum right on the heels of the PanSIG! This year's CALL 2015 conference will be held in Fukuoka at Kyushu Sangyo University from June 5-7, 2015.

This year's CALL LD forum will focus on the role that Web 2.0 technology plays for language learners and teachers, with presentations and discussion on research and/or practices using Web 2.0 over a range of motivational, social and political issues involving learner autonomy. For this forum we have three lively and interesting presentations for you.

Transportable identities and social networks: a reflection on the pros and cons of out-of-class communication

Richard Pinner (Sophia University)

Accept or Decline? Some teachers encourage their students to befriend them on social networking sites (SNS), while others are understandably wary. SNS can form a very effective way of connecting with students outside the classroom, engaging their real lives and identities. It can also create opportunities for authentic and motivating communication, not just between classmates but also within a web of connections with other learners and speakers around the globe. It could also be a social and ethical minefield.

When people interact in different social contexts, they may invoke different Transportable Identities, which are either “latent or explicit” within the social context of the discourse (Ushioda, 2011). The presenter will draw on both published research and personal experience to reflect on the use of these types of Web 2.0 technology and the consequences they pose.

Affordances for intercultural learning through a Facebook exchange

Alison Stewart (Gakushuin University)

Computer-mediated exchanges offer plentiful opportunities for language and cultural learning. Facebook is an ideal medium for such exchanges because, as the world’s largest social networking service, it is familiar to many young adult learners, as well as because of the ease with which sources of information, such as text, photographs, and links, can be incorporated into dialogue. The Tokyo-Kota Kinabalu Unilink is a Facebook exchange between university students in Japan and Malaysia, in which cross-cultural pairs of students share information on given cultural topics over a four-week period. The presenter shall identify affordances for learning in one of the dialogues and consider some implications for learner autonomy and language pedagogy in university classes.

Developing intercultural sensitivity in ELF through digital pen pal exchange

Simeon Flowers (Aoyama Gakuin University)

Development of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is parallel to development of intercultural communicative competence. The Internet in general and Web 2.0 in particular have created greater opportunities for gaining practical experience towards developing such competence. In a quasi-experimental study conducted at Tamagawa University’s Center for English as a Lingua Franca (CELFL), subjects were enlisted to participate in a six-week online pen pal

exchange using PenPalSchools.com, a Learning Management System (LMS) style tool for managing classroom level exchanges. The program recently expanded beyond the secondary level to include use with university students. Results of the study quantifying the effects of the digital exchange on student’s intercultural sensitivity development revealed increases in intercultural engagement and intercultural confidence after a six-week digital pen pal exchange. This study contributes to a growing body of research into the use of Web 2.0 to connect students in authentic intercultural communication.

Call For Contributions

原稿募集

Learning Learning is your space for continuing to make the connections that interest you. You are warmly invited and encouraged to contribute to the next issue of Learning Learning in either English and/or Japanese. We welcome writing in different formats and different lengths about different issues connected with learner and teacher development, such as:

- articles (about 2,500 to 4,000 words)
- reports (about 500 to 1,000 words)
- learner histories (about 500 to 1,000 words)
- stories of autonomy (about 500 to 1,000 words)
- book reviews (about 500 to 1,000 words)
- letters to the SIG (about 500 words)
- personal profiles (100 words more or less)
- critical reflections (100 words more or less)
- research interests (100 words more or less)
- photographs
- poems... and much more...

We would like to encourage new writing and new writers and are also very happy to work with you in developing your writing. We would be delighted to hear from you about your ideas, reflections, experiences, and interests to do with learner development, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

learninglearningjaltldsigsig@gmail.com

『学習の学習』は会員に興味あるつながりを構築する空間です。次号『学習の学習』への和文(もしくは英文、及び二言語での)投稿を募集しています。形式や長さを問わず、学習者及び教員の発達に関連した以下のようなさまざま文章を歓迎しています:

- 論文 (約4000字-10000字)
- 報告書 (約2000字-4000字)
- 学習者のヒストリー (約2000字-4000字)
- 自律性に関する体験談 (約2000字-4000字)
- 書評 (約2000字-4000字) • SIGへの手紙 (約2000字)
- 個人プロフィール (約400字)
- クリティカル・リフレクション (約400字)
- 研究興味 (約400字)
- 写真 • 詩 その他

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Financial Report, 財務報告

SIG fund balance February 28, 2015 / SIG資金残高2015年2月28日		
Balance in bank account 銀行口座の残高		115,484
Reserve liabilities JALT本部預け金		368,250
Cash at hand (現金)		230
TOTAL 合計		483,964
PLANNED EXPENSES March to December 2015 2015年3月-12月予定経費		
Table rental at JALT 2014/JALT2014 全国大会テーブルレンタル代	(17,000)	
Shipping LD materials to the conferences/SIGテーブル用マテリアル送料	(30,000)	
LD SIG site cost /SIGウェブサイト経費	(7,500)	
Donation for best of JALT 2014/Best of JALTサポート	(20,000)	
1 Research grant/研究助成金	(25,000)	
3 National grants/全国大会参加助成金	(80,000)	
2 National grants/全国大会参加助成金 (¥40,000 x 2)	(80,000)	
2 Outreach grants/アウトリーチ助成金	(40,000)	
JALT Pan-SIG conference grant/JALT Pan-SIG 参加助成金	(40,000)	
JALT CALL conference grant/JALT CALL 参加助成金	-40,000	
Co-sponsor a JALT speaker/JALTスピーカー共同支援金	(125,000)	
Get-together room hire/東京エリアミーティング会場費	(25,000)	
Other miscellaneous / 他の雑費	(20,000)	
SUB-TOTAL 小計	(469,500)	
PROJECTED REVENUE March to December 2015 2015年3月-12月予定収入		
Membership 194 members/会費 (194名)		291,000
SUB-TOTAL 小計		291,000
Projected SIG fund balance December 31st, 2015 / 予定SIG資金残高2015年12月31日		
Balance in bank account 銀行口座の残高		105,234
Reserve liabilities JALT本部預け金		200,000
Cash at hand (現金)		230
TOTAL 合計		305,464

Mayumi Abe 阿部 真由美

LD SIG treasurer LDSIG財務 March 29, 2015 2015年3月29日