Feeling my way through my thoughts on a rainy day

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Terry Lamb
University of Sheffield, UK

ABOUT TERRY

Terry taught languages in English secondary schools for 16 years, during which time, for survival reasons, he developed an interest in motivation and autonomy. He now works at the University of Sheffield, and enjoys meeting people around the world who can help him to sustain his own motivation and autonomy.

テリーは英国の中学・高校で16年間、語学教育に携わってきました。その期間に自分の生き残りのため、動機付けとオートノミーに関心を抱くようになりました。現在シェフィールド大学で教鞭をとりながら、世界各国の人と出会うことで、自分自身の動機付けとオートノミーを維持することを楽しんでいます。

PREQUEL: FRIDAY MORNING

It's raining in Sheffield today. Quite depressing really. On the other hand, I can stay at home and write. A mixed blessing as it means that I'm alone and therefore cannot be distracted from the fact that I'm nowhere near ready for the new set of students arriving on Monday. Being alone theoretically means that I can concentrate on what I need to do, but it also allows my mind the opportunity to wander and worry about deadlines. Shall I focus on this chapter, or shall I develop the new Master's course, prepare my introductory lecture for Monday, organise my initial seminars, or catch up on my emails and find even more things that I should have done?

Yesterday was different. The sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and it was so hot that people were wandering around in shorts, not knowing what to do with themselves because of the heat. (Yes, it does get hot in England!) I had to go into the university, and work around short chunks of time to do some of those "big jobs" that we are supposed to prioritise but which always seem too big to start when you've only got small chunks of time... Nevertheless, I achieved a great deal.

Why am I sharing these thoughts with you now? What possible significance can they have in a concluding chapter of a book containing reports of a broad range of teaching and research activity in Japan? Why should readers be interested in the changeable climate of Sheffield and in my problems with work-life balance?

To be honest, I don't really know where this is leading to at this point of writing the chapter. Well, not with any clarity at any rate. What I do know is that, as was the case when I read *Autonomy You Ask!* (Barfield and Nix, 2003), I am feeling liberated enough to explore my thoughts in an academically unconventional way. I feel able to, indeed I feel the need to, simply throw myself into the chapter, to make a start, in order to encourage myself, to make myself feel that I have something to say, to get rid of the blank screen. This is unusual for me, as I usually plan in detail when I'm writing, making copious notes on paper, finding the connections, organising the ideas into themes, sequencing them logically, ensuring that everything is properly referenced and "rigorous."

So, a change in approach, from the methodical to the spontaneous. (I also feel able to write in incomplete sentences, to split my infinitives, to address the reader in a direct way.) By the way, I've just noticed that the wall of my study is wet, that the roof must be leaking, so I now have an additional distraction, i.e. do I need to phone someone before the house collapses around me, and should I do it now or tomorrow when, hopefully, I'll have made some progress with this chapter, and, whatever I decide, how will I find someone good to do the work? And also, since my last sentence, my wife has come home full of how wonderful the children in her German class were today – and now the rain is dripping from above onto my computer…

Reflecting on a situation (or should it be a predicament?)

Several issues emerge from this introductory passage, and they are in some ways related to themes which have occurred to me in the second half of this book. Firstly, there is something about context, authorship, purpose, etc.… Secondly, the complexity of individual differences is reinforced; and thirdly, motivation is a strong theme. Running through all of the above, the centrality of reflection can be seen, including ways of encouraging and facilitating it.

Context

I am aware that I am sitting in England at the moment, and that I have just been reading about autonomy in a Japanese context. I am at the same time preoccupied by developmental needs on my own course, namely a nine-month initial teacher education course for postgraduates, which results in them being qualified to teach in secondary schools (for 11-18 year olds) in England and Wales. One of these needs is the introduction of reflective journals, and I will be presenting this to my new student-teachers on Monday. I have considerable anxiety about this as the students will be engaged in a highly pressured teacher education course at the end of which they will be qualified teachers of French, German, Spanish, Japanese, or Mandarin – or indeed a combination of these. They are not with me to learn languages, but, as graduate linguists already, they are learning how to teach. They will also be spending 24 weeks of the 36-week course in schools, some quite far from Sheffield. Consequently, time constraints will undoubtedly lead to complaints unless the journals are perceived as valuable to them.

How, then, did I read the chapters on reflective journals by Amanda Bradley and Jodie Stephenson? The answer is that I read them in a different way from how I would usually read such chapters; in other words, rather than considering the content from the point of view of its contribution to our academic understanding of, for example, the nature of reflection and reflective

journals and how it relates to existing literature, I read them in a far more personally engaged way, hungry for some support in my own work. Through reading them in this way, I believe that I got to know the people involved to a certain extent, noticing their motivations, their responses, their enthusiasms. As such, I found that I was able to "get under the skin" of the authors and their students, and "sense" in some small way the experience that was had of using the journals. Through the voices of the actors, I was able to learn useful lessons for my own project, such as the need to find ways of encouraging my students not only to objectivise their own experiences, but also to understand the impact of such experiences on them as people, to bend the experiences back on themselves and articulate the implications of what they have learnt through reflection not only for themselves as learners (or teachers) but also as human beings. Through Jodie Stephenson's work with class newsletters, I learned of the value of making some of the personal reflections public, and of issues to consider when doing so. Of course, I did not find ideas which could be transplanted directly into my own context, nor was it even possible to be tempted as the learners in these chapters are language learners rather than student-teachers. Nevertheless I gained inspiration, in the sense that reading about another context in this way freed up my mind, enabling me to interrogate my own situation critically, and to find new, appropriate approaches to try out. It can be argued that, without the stimulus of these chapters, I may have looked for a ready-made solution, particularly given my time constraints; but reading them has clarified my own purposes, and has challenged some assumptions that I may have had about the nature of journals. I have, in short, been supported in finding a context-relevant starting-point, influenced of course, but not constrained by, any previous beliefs I may have held. The context-specific nature of educational interventions, including those which are aspiring towards some manifestation of autonomy, has been reinforced for me, but I have also been moved to reflect not only on *what* we can learn from other contexts, but also *how* we might learn from them in a meaningful way. The spirit of the chapters, as much as the content, has reminded me that it is not necessary to remain dispassionate when reading such publications, in order to benefit; indeed, by "feeling," albeit at second hand, the experience, I am able to transfer the "feeling" to my own context, and discover what is needed for it to be adapted appropriately. This lesson was reinforced throughout the entire second half of the book, culminating in Stephen Davies' powerful allegory, which intentionally appeals to us not only as critical academics, but also as emotional human beings.

Authorship

When reading the chapters, I was also highly conscious of the significance of the authors' motivations, both in the sense of past events which had inspired them, as well as future aspirations which were driving them. In some chapters the key inspirations were very clear: both Robert Croker and Brad Deacon write about their previous experiences of peer teaching when they themselves were young learners, as well as a desire to enhance their students' autonomy, with Brad adding that the innovation was further inspired by Robert's example and by student demand. Yoko Morimoto's starting point is a problem which needs to be addressed, namely student drop-out from an already innovative course. Denise Haugh's clear passion for the dramatic arts is the inspiration for her use of dramatised role-plays in the classroom. Though Nanci Graves and Stacey Vye do not explicitly state the drivers which led them personally to the research which is reported in their deeply illuminating and significant chapter, their concern for the emotional health of English teachers working far from home, and their strong humanistic message of the need to connect the personal and professional, clearly (to my mind at least), suggests that it has grown out of their own experiences. In this way, the chapters serve to reinforce that we must read such work through the eyes of the author in order to understand it in a fundamental way; they also remind us of the importance of writing ourselves into our research, a

point which is well known by ethnographers and other qualitative researchers, but which can be "felt" in a different and somehow more powerful way through reading these chapters.

In terms of purpose, all authors have the enhancement of their learners' learning as a major aim, either directly or, in the case of Nanci Graves and Stacey Vye, indirectly through their focus on teachers' self-reflection practices. The chapters also reveal, however, that teacher clarity about the focus and intentions of the intervention enhances the experience. Denise Haugh, for example, raises the question of teacher objectives, and in so doing reminds us that autonomy can be an end in itself or a means to an end, namely enhanced learning of a foreign language. Both can be justified; what is important is that the teacher *can* justify in his/her own context.

So going back to my preoccupation referred to earlier, why am I wanting to introduce reflective journals? I would say that there are a number of reasons. Firstly, my research into learner autonomy in young learners has helped me to recognise the importance of listening to learners' beliefs about learning and the ways in which they describe their metacognitive knowledge, and then offering them experiences to challenge the constraints of such beliefs (Lamb, 2005). My student-teachers are, of course, learners too, and they bring with them a whole host of beliefs about what it means to be a teacher and what it means to be a learner, as well as more specifically about how to teach languages in schools. Through articulation of such beliefs, a basis is created for critical reflection in dialogue with the self and with others (as highlighted by the teachers in Nanci Graves' and Stacey Vye's research). Secondly, I want them to understand better the relationship between theory and practice. My approach to this is by trying to demystify theory, encouraging the students to acknowledge that they already have personal theories about teaching and learning, which are based on prior experience, but that at the same time others have different theories which can challenge their own. In addition, I want them to recognise that their experiences on the course can be used to develop their personal theories further, so that they see the theory-practice relationship as a dynamic one, each informing the other in a constant process of refinement and a spirit of inquisitiveness. Hopefully this will help the students to bring together the university- and school-based parts of the course, as well as the language pedagogy/methodology and the general educational and professional studies elements of the course, encouraging them not to disconnect one element from another.

Thirdly, I also wish to enable them to take charge of their professional development, partly because they will hopefully learn how to be "lifelong teaching learners," willing and able to grow professionally throughout their careers, to find strategies for coping with varied teaching situations, and to develop innovative and motivating experiences for their learners; and partly as a way of them building on their own unique starting-points, coming as they do with a whole range of experiences, including in some cases considerable teaching experience in countries such as France, Germany, and Japan. I would like to think that my student-teachers will be teachers like the ones writing throughout this publication, motivated to identify their interests, to analyse their contexts, take action, and make a difference.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

The chapters in this publication reflect in many ways, albeit mostly implicit, the fact that we are all different. We see this in the motivations of the writers, in the styles of presentation, in the content of the learners' journals, and through the other types of data which are shared by the authors. This is not the place to enter into a lengthy discussion of the need to consider individual differences when we are working with students or indeed with teachers (see, instead, Jiménez Raya and Lamb (2003)). However, I am particularly moved by the clear picture which emerges that individual differences are not fixed or somehow pathological, and that, on the

contrary, context plays a central role in shaping the ways we learn (see, for example, the situation of teachers working in a Japanese context, or the learners' responses to the experience of peer teaching in Brad Deacon's and Robert Croker's chapter). As teachers we need to be mindful of this, and self-critical enough to recognise when we are labelling a learner in any way – as an underachiever, a motivated/demotivated person, a kinaesthetic learner, etc....

Looking back to the prequel of this chapter, the complexity of individual differences can also be seen in the way in which I have approached this task. Just as personal experiences and emotions are placed on the map in many of the chapters in this book, my own approach to writing, my writing style (which in this chapter is very closely linked to my learning style, given that I am learning what to write through the process of writing itself) is deeply affected by the weather, by the other commitments I have to contend with today, by my preoccupations, and by the effects of these contextual factors on my feelings, concentrations levels, worries etc.... And indeed, the nature of this very publication, and its resonances with *Autonomy You Ask!*, a book which I found compelling in its energy, has also influenced the way in which I have approached this task. In other words, our individual differences are also made more complex by the *changing* nature of context, from day to day, moment to moment. Writing this chapter has made me become even more aware that ultimately I have to take responsibility for identifying my own approach, for justifying it, for coming to terms with it, and for adapting what I wish to achieve to the specific circumstances, finding ways through the difficulties rather than being frozen by a fixed expectation of how I am to work or what I am to do.

MOTIVATION

Thus it is that I come to the theme of motivation, which for me leaps out of the chapters in a number of ways. Firstly, I have already written about the different motivations of the authors, their passions, enthusiasms, and convictions. However, it is interesting that in a book about autonomy, the connection with motivation is so apparent. Of course this is not a surprise to many of us; when we read work such as Ushioda (1996, 2003), Lamb (2001), or Dickenson (1995), the relationship between motivation and autonomy, though contested in its direction (is it unidirectional or dynamic?), is clear. And so in this collection we find that Yoko Morimoto's innovative interventions are themselves motivated explicitly by a need to motivate her learners. Nanci Graves and Stacey Vye focus to a certain extent on teacher motivation and ways in which this is affected by self-reflection, and part of Amanda Bradley's rationale for encouraging learners to keep journals has to do with motivation. All of these chapters remind us that increasing autonomy is a way of increasing motivation. However we also see that motivation is not static, that it dips and rises for all kinds of reasons, just as my own motivation, referred to in the prequel, cannot always be relied on. Recognising this is important for sustaining motivation in fact; I ask my student-teachers to plot their motivation levels so that they can see that a dip does not usually mean a slippery slope downhill, and that they will be feeling motivated again soon; and for the same reason it is important that they are not disheartened by their own learners' poor motivation as they, as teachers, really do have the power to influence this. This is another example of the ways in which a teacher's or a learner's autonomy can be manifested; taking responsibility for one's own motivation through making it explicit and then finding ways of dealing with it.

For the authors of these chapters, participation in the production of this book has itself been a highly affirming and motivating experience. I asked them to let me know how involvement in the project had affected them and their sense of autonomy as teachers, and received a number of responses. Key themes which emerged pointed towards the interrelationships between motivation, collaboration, and reflection, both for learners and for (learner-)teachers. Finding

new and appropriate ways of enhancing their learners' autonomy meant that they themselves had to be autonomous; and such autonomy, worked for through sustained reflection, led to a heightened sense of motivation, responsibility, and collaboration with their learners. In addition, working collaboratively with colleagues in the MAYA project offered different viewpoints, which was a stimulus to greater creativity and criticality, providing a forum in which assumptions could be questioned and motivation could be sustained. Indeed, there is a sense in which working with others on the research has not only motivated but also strengthened their resolve; as one author put it, it has helped to develop "pro-autonomy muscles," which offer strength to clarify purposes and commitments, to defend them if need be.

Conclusion: reflecting on my reflections

How does one conclude what could be described as jottings, a series of thoughts which have emerged from my reading of these chapters? Have I got anywhere in this, for me, unconventional approach to writing? Have any clear ideas emerged?

It would make sense to say something about the ways in which autonomy has manifested itself in this book, so that will be my starting point. Indeed the chapters contain many examples of learners being encouraged to develop their autonomy, with autonomy revealing itself more in the sense of learners taking charge of their metacognitive processes, through reflection and collaboration, than of having choices (though choices are included in some chapters). This is echoed when we consider teacher autonomy, which is largely about the teacher taking charge of his/her motivation and resolve, identifying links between the personal and the professional in an attempt to understand one's identity as a teacher; and this is, as with the learners, approached through reflection and collaboration. Furthermore, it is echoed in my own reflections on my autonomy in writing this concluding chapter: its consideration of context, purpose and motivation; its articulation of metacognitive constraints (beliefs, emotionality, resolve, prioritisation, etc…), as well as strategies for pushing through these in ways which are manageable and appropriate; and the sense that I can dare try something new gained from my own collaboration, though limited, in this project.

Benson (1997) has described three versions of autonomy: technical, psychological, and political. On the basis of my work on MAYA, I would suggest that, whichever form autonomy takes, it needs to embrace the non-logical, the passionate, the feeling, emotional, and affective in some way. Getting in touch with oneself is not just about intellect; it is also about understanding how one is feeling. And, autonomy in this sense is about dealing with how one is feeling, knowing how to adapt, supporting oneself, galvanising into action, etc… so that one is not frozen into inactivity but able to do something about it.

Reflecting on the process of writing this chapter, I realise that there are many alternative approaches I could have taken. I could, for example, have started with the final chapter by Stephen Davies, which in fact also contains all of the above themes in its pages. I'm sure that would have produced a satisfactory outcome. However, for reasons described above, I had to launch myself into writing the chapter rather than planning it more systematically, allowing it to unfold as I worked under the dripping ceiling. Having done this, I now feel very strongly that I have learnt something about myself, and, even at my age, about new ways of working, which I find enlightening and exciting, and which gives me new insights into my own autonomy.

Now where is that telephone book???