

Learning Learning 18 (2) Autumn 2011

Looking back

Personal Language Learning for Teachers and Learners: Reflections on the Learner Development SIG session at Nakasendo 2011

Andy Barfield, Michael Mondejar, Bill Mboutsiadis, Colin Rundle, Stacey Vye, Lee Arnold, & Kazuko Unosawa



The focus of the Learner Development SIG session was how we might use language learning histories and other forms of reflection in the classroom to help our learners develop their reflective control of different language learning processes. Intent on encouraging participants to think back to their own language learning histories, and to discuss how their experiences in acquiring a second language had informed/inform their own teaching practices, we started by creating an open and interactive space for people to mix and mingle as they went from one display to another. We aimed to have simultaneous poster displays for the first half of the morning and then small-group and pair discussions in the second half, where participants could draw out their own connections and insights across the different displays. In this integrated report, each presenter reports on

their own contribution to the workshop before we conclude with some reflections from workshop participants themselves.

Re-constructing learning histories, distributed cognition and lexical resources

Andy Barfield

Chuo University

barfield.andy@gmail.com

Looking for a key moment in my own language learning history (LLH), I focused on the period when I started to learn a language by using it, rather than by just studying it. This happened during a stay in France when I was 16:

... It was an extraordinary moment, the exchange homestay. Without really noticing, I found that people actually used this language that we had been busy murdering for a couple of years at school. They used it not for doing mindless translation and drills, but for talking about everyday life, about the news, and about politics; for making friends, and shopping at the market; for reading, watching TV, going to the cinema (I watched 'The French Connection' for the first time in French!), for eating, walking, and travelling. French was suddenly alive, and I was learning the language without even trying. Of course, back at school, we hardly used French any more than before, but now I was using it outside of school, listening to music, writing letters and just keeping in touch with the Demays. It had started making sense, learning a foreign language, and from meaningful activity

Looking Back

everything else followed... (Barfield, 2011)

The connection from this period in my LLH to what some of my students are doing is to do with following over this academic year how my students try out and develop different vocabulary learning practices for themselves.

In the few weeks before Nakasendo I had asked my students to make notes and write about their vocabulary histories in English. They had recalled their own changing ways of learning and using vocabulary from when they started learning English through to the present, and to their beliefs and goals about learning and using vocabulary. They also looked at several different ways of learning and using vocabulary, of connecting vocabulary up. The students had also been looking at different ways of learning and using collocations. Finally, they started keeping clearly designated vocabulary notes. This was all against the background of their doing research into different international issues in 4-5 week project cycles as the main focus of the course.

Part of my theoretical angle on asking my students to reflect on their histories and consider different possible vocabulary learning practices is the need to help them “to reflect on their lived histories, so that they may consider what needs to change and what actions need to transpire in order for that change to become a concrete reality in their lives” (Dardier 2002: 104) - that they become “subjects” of their history-in-the-making rather than objects of it. Although I am not completely comfortable with making this connection to critical pedagogy for the issue of developing different ways of learning and using vocabulary in a foreign language, it does seem necessary for (my) students to revisit their histories and reflect on them in order to have a chance of finding alternative ways for themselves. So, I am talking about

the possibility for reflection, dialogue and action in a quasi-Freirian sense here.

In June, I noticed how students started breaking out of word-by-word translation and memorization. A research log that I wrote on 16th June 2011 tries to capture this:

Each student has a different way it seems! [this person had written word associations and their own example sentences; that person had written synonyms and definitions; another person had created mini lexical mindmaps; someone else had written Japanese translations and added little drawings; a different person had written short paraphrases, example sentences and created collocation links; another student mentions wanting to listen to Lady Gaga songs and use that to help her learn vocabulary and so on]... I'm thinking also that the very diversity of ways that they have is a very strong basis for developing new and hybrid ways for themselves. I encourage the students to mix and match and not limit themselves or not to try and find only one way that works. They change partners and talk through their different ways again, and then have 10 minutes or so for making some further vocabulary notes...

After that class I talked with a colleague about nurturing a diversity of practices, and I was reminded of observations made by Benson and Lor in 1998 where they discuss the distributed but shared learner beliefs and conceptions of language learning and readiness for autonomy that any group of learners may have:

We assume that beliefs and conceptions do not reside within individuals. Although individual

Looking Back

learners may tend to adopt certain beliefs or conceptions in certain situations, they cannot be assumed to hold those beliefs and conceptions always and in all situations. The purpose of describing the beliefs and conceptions held within a group is, therefore, to delimit the range of beliefs and conceptions available to the group as a collectivity. It is assumed that beliefs and conceptions within this range are available to individuals within the group collectively through interaction and collaboration... (Benson and Lor, 1998: 21)

The Benson and Lor quote helped me see the students' 'lexical resources' (meaning something like: all the vocabulary histories, beliefs, goals, practices and conceptions that the students in this class had access to at that point) as potentially rich and diverse, and most probably leading to interesting and unexpected developments over the rest of this academic year. All this talking and reflecting we had done on different ways of learning and using vocabulary was leading into the very different practices that the students had already started going for.

At Nakasendo, my poster display included examples of students' vocabulary histories and of several different ways in which they were now trying to develop their ways of recording, learning and using vocabulary. For reasons of space, these are not presented or discussed here, but, over this academic year, I am continuing to track and explore with my students how they are developing different vocabulary practices for themselves. Some of the questions that currently concern me are (1) how students make changes in vocabulary practice sustainable for themselves, and (2) what factors students identify as different in their changed practices from their previous vocabulary histories. I'm also interested in trying to find

out (3) whether the changes that students report they have made are specific to the context of the course, and/or (4) whether they see such new practices as having wider implications for their continued language learner/user development in the future; and finally (5) what further questions this continued exploration leads to.

Scaffolding self-reflection through the use of visuals

Michael Mondejar

Teachers College, Columbia University MA in TESOL Candidate

mjm2229@tc.columbia.edu

Looking back at my own learning of Japanese during university, I can begin to understand how these experiences have had an impact on my teaching beliefs and practices. My Japanese courses at university provided an ideal setting for L2 acquisition. First of all, we had one hour of class plus two hours of homework every day, ensuring that students were exposed to plentiful comprehensible input. We were also encouraged to use the language we learned from reading and listening tasks, as well as the grammatical structures from lectures, in smaller oral communication classes every day. During these classes, we would often interact one-on-one with our peers and/or the teacher, who would assist us with output errors when necessary. This made the language learning process meaningful to students, and allowed us to experiment with and construct our own interpretations of Japanese. In learning about the concepts of comprehensible input, meaning-focused learning, focus on forms, and Vygotskyian interaction in the Teachers College MA in TESOL program, I have only deepened my understanding of their use and validity by reflecting upon and connecting my L2 learning experiences to

Looking Back

these theories. This, I believe, is the most important function of reflecting upon one's own language learning history as a language teacher.

I currently teach several university oral communication classes, and the vast majority of my students are beginning to low-intermediate in English proficiency. From personal experience, getting lower-level students to engage in introspection is challenging because they lack the language facility to express themselves freely in their second language. As a result, I've decided to try using student-produced pictures to scaffold the reflection efforts of my students in English. In particular, at the end of every lesson, I ask my learners to engage in self-reflection and to use their reflections to produce a comic strip.

Several scholars have noted the potential of comics to support English language learners (Ranker, 2007), foster visual literacy, (Frey & Fisher, 2008), and motivate students (Crawford, 2004; Dorrell, 1987). In my lessons, during the last 10 minutes of class, I ask students to draw a 3-panel comic strip utilizing the language that they learned during the lesson. In my observations, I've noticed several benefits of this activity. First of all, the comic strips seem to provide a creative medium for students to reflect on the language and experiment with it in a meaningful way, facilitating the connections between experience and cognition mentioned above. Also, because the comics are creatively produced, they seem to reflect student individual student personalities and worldviews, which has helped me get to know some of the students better. I've also noticed that students tend to draw the pictures first, creating a scaffold for the dialogue. By drawing the comics first, students organize their thoughts about each scene in the comic strip, freeing more cognitive resources to focus on language production.

In addition, the reflective comic strips are a potentially non-threatening medium of communication

for students, particularly those who lack confidence in their oral English abilities. Students are given plenty of time to process and plan their use of the language, and are not expected to perform in front of their peers. Creating comics also has the added benefit of providing storytelling practice to students, such as sequencing plot devices, i.e. background (1st panel), rising action (2nd panel), climax (last panel). Finally, the comics can serve as a concrete product by which student conceptualization and use of target language can be gauged by the teacher.

To sum up, the reflective comic strips are a useful tool for scaffolding learner self-reflection. The comics have many other benefits as well, as highlighted above, and seem to be an engaging and enjoyable activity for students. In the future, I would like to explore the use of visual aids as scaffolds for the construction of language learner histories (LLHs). In particular, the use of *kamishibai*, a form of traditional Japanese storytelling utilizing picture cards, has the potential to serve as a medium for creation of picture-based LLH narratives.

Giving students a reflective voice on their language learning histories through digital storytelling

Bill Mboutsiadis

**Meisei University & University of Toronto
bill.mboutsiadis@utoronto.ca**

I clearly remember my month-long Egyptian experience of 20 years past. Fresh out of university, I left to work in Europe. As many Europeans did, I soon took an August vacation to go to a national student conference and post-study tour in the land of the Pharaohs. In the sweltering heat I can recall, as if it was yesterday, haggling for a beautiful black, Arabian horse, in my minimal Arabic, within the backdrop of the

Looking Back

Giza pyramids. After securing the rental horse from some Egyptian youth, I raced with the horse renters around the Khufu and Cheops pyramids at sunset. At one moment I stopped and gazed at the town lights of Giza casting shadows on the pyramids as dusk set. I then reflected on that surreal moment I was experiencing. I felt the beauty of life and savoured it. This was a beauty of culture, history and language. I believe I had a transformative learning experience. I would not have faced this beauty on my own if I had not taken a chance, autonomously, to connect with an unknown language, moving beyond my comfort zone. The month in Egypt was transformative because I had critically reflected on changes in my understanding of self, my belief system and my behaviour. My motivation to pick up as much of Arabic as I could was a major contributing part in my transformation.

Looking back at my own language learning history (LLH) has given me a strong sense of purpose regarding the career path that I have followed for most of my adult life. I can see the causal connections that have led me to where I am at in my professional career today. I believe that a LLH can also include simple experiences of coming into contact with various communication *linguas* and their influencing environments. I now wanted to have my students investigate and critically reflect on their LLHs. If my learners could become more aware of their language learning processes and understand the causal connections through critical reflection, it would empower them to take greater active and independent control of their education.

Digital storytelling has been a great motivation for my students. They have become narrators of their stories in their actual recorded voices. The medium combines text story with illustrations, photos, voice, sound, and music. It also provides a different choice of publishing methods. I asked my students to collect

pictures from their past and or search for images online. They were to describe their personal experiences of their contacts with English in and out of school. This also included any overseas experience in travel and or study abroad. The digital stories are recorded, stored and shared with free downloadable software. The software I used was Photo Story 3 and early versions of Windows Movie Maker. My Mac users had iMovie for their projects. They storyboarded their pictures and wrote out a script that was later recorded. After going through a writing process to edit their narratives, they presented their work to classmates in pairs and gave each other feedback. I later had consultation sessions with them while viewing their digital story. We discussed their language use and the artistic merits of their digital stories, but, more importantly, I listened to their motivational experiences. Careful planning and having access to a computer lab can help prevent the technology taking over the learning opportunity.

These digital story records of “language-learning careers” (Benson, 2001) provided my learners with an opportunity to reflect upon their autonomous learning. They recalled their own independent actions that caused them to connect with English acquisition. Some had described how they forgot their motivation and are now searching for goals to create further inspirations. Many of the digital stories described the usual initial interests in English music and movies. Some had short overseas experiences during high school that left a strong impression on them. One student described his “confusing” feelings while staring at the Enola Gay bomber from Hiroshima’s bombing at a Washington museum. Others narrated about their visits to overseas relatives and their interactions with various other languages including Mandarin and Spanish. I realized that I had two students in my class who have mothers from Peru and Colombia. My

Looking Back

quietest student ended up demonstrating to me his true intermediate speaking level. One woman narrator was motivated to learn English from her visit to Holland where she attended a relative's wedding. Many described their boring high school classes that were based on the grammar-translation method for test preparation. The senior of the class remembered being inspired by watching a Japanese mineral water commercial by Sammy Sosa of major league baseball fame.

These examples may sound like photo album discussions, but the learners had deeply reflected on their causal connections to English. The consultations where I listened to their narrations opened a door into their hidden LLH's and revealed complex patterns of second language acquisition (SLA). This process has further convinced me that all of our learners have unique and varied motivational paths to learning that have brought them to our classrooms.

The benefits of using digital storytelling include practical skill development in digital literacy and exposure to multimodal literacy. Creating digital narratives of LLHs connects the higher levels in Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains (Bloom, 1956). These include analysis, synthesis and evaluation. According to Menezes (2008: 22), "The LLHs show that SLA is a complex system and that second language does not come out only as a product of formal learning contexts, but it emerges out of the interaction of different social networks (family, cultural production, school) with the individual cognitive and affective factors." Furthermore, SLA happens with various interactions among different experiences with language. The creative use of multimedia is a different interactive experience that gives a voice to our learners and puts the focus on interpreting their LLHs from their perspectives. Finally, digital storytelling opens doors for SLA educators to listen deeply to their

learners' stories.

A Personal Learning and Teaching History

Colin Rundle

Tokyo, Japan

colinrundle@yahoo.com

My approach to this Nakasendo Learner Development Forum was very close to the discussion I was involved in at the Tokyo LD SIG get-together, which the Forum grew out of. As reported in the last issue of *Learning Learning*, that discussion focused on how we teachers had learnt foreign languages. A recurring theme was the important role that rote learning of vocabulary and grammar had played in some of our learning successes, which sat very awkwardly with all of our teaching philosophies. My poster was an effort to work through this contradiction – if I had found structure and testing so useful, how can I teach successfully while de-emphasizing them?

In contrast to Andy, I reflected mostly on my formal classroom language learning history, including several intensive programs, and how that history compares with how I teach and how my students learn. The poster was based purely on my own reflections and interpretations of students' learning, without gathering or considering my students' histories, so it is a very personal story. I wanted to contrast notions of structured "methods" and individual cognitions, which had constituted my earlier language learning and teaching awareness, with sociolinguistic issues of identity and community, which I have more recently come to appreciate. While mainly featuring photographs depicting communities of learners and speakers which I had been a part of in the last 22 years, I also compared several of the yellowed hand-written notebooks and essays in Indonesian and German from my undergraduate days, my more recent

Looking Back

assignments from a distance course in Japanese Studies, and several examples of notes and assignments that my students had written over the last 10 years.

Unlike Michael, my formal language study was not based on modern methods or post-method principles (Thornbury, 2009). It was mostly in audio-lingual dominated classrooms, with some grammar-translation and literature-interpretation elements thrown in at later stages. Not that I am that old. Having studied applied linguistics as an undergraduate, I knew that the methodologies I was being subjected to in 1990 were already antiques. In spite of that, I learnt an enormous amount – the German department secretary even called me a *Sprachgenie* one day.

A constant thought throughout that period was that what I learnt was 80% due to my effort poring over textbooks and vocabulary notes, and 20% at most due to the teaching. However, when I studied Japanese by distance education, where there was no teaching as such, and only the materials and me, why was my learning so disappointing by comparison? The methodology was again grammar-translation and audio-lingual, and without classes or teachers, the results were clearly at least 80% dependent on my effort. And I made a huge effort. And I had been a linguistic genius - the secretary said so. But now I felt like a linguistic dunce, struggling to remember a dozen words a week - while living in the country!

How did my relatively unsuccessful Japanese study differ from my very successful past studies? And how did my Japanese learning differ from my students' learning, who often praised my English program highly in anonymous post-course surveys? It then hit me. Relationships and identity. As a student, I had been surrounded by bright, exciting, wonderful classmates, and indeed teachers, and we shared so many

experiences, assignments, exams, grades, jokes, parties, vacations – just like the students in my classes.

After this revelation, I appreciated how I had been inspired by my classmates, and how they provided such important peer-role models. The 80% of my learning which I had attributed to myself had been contingent on the learning communities that I was a part of, even though the methodologies seldom made use of that resource. The English program that I taught was based on collaborative learning, most directly on the concept of Critical Collaborative Autonomy (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000). The deep relationships (including two marriages) that students formed during that course, I believe, contributed greatly to its success.

Part of my poster compared essays that I had written in Indonesian and German in the early 1990s with essays and drafts written by my students from 2005-2010. The main difference between them was that my essays had been typical rushed university products – single draft essays which were more a test of the grammar that I had learnt with my peers, and full of ideas which I had never discussed. In contrast, my students' essays were products of a communal learning process. The final products had been drafted at least three times, and read and discussed by student-peers and me many times before the final product emerged. My students' essays were much more presentable than my own, and communicated the authors' ideas and interests. They were artifacts of learning and communication processes, not a test of what had been learnt somewhere else. This comparison emphasized why the process and collaborative approach, which I took for granted as a teacher and seldom experienced as a student, are so central to modern language pedagogy.

Another part of my poster emphasized identity. In

Looking Back

particular, the identity formed in relationships, which can either be based on positive interdependence, that is the awareness that mutual collaboration is needed for success (Murphey & Jacobs, 2000), or based on dependence, which is detrimental to learning. Instead of a learning community, I mostly shared my Japanese learning with my wife, a Japanese native speaker. Like Karol, the Polish man whose English learning stalled after becoming dependent on his American girlfriend (Teutsch-Dwyer, 2001, cited in Block, 2007), I did not negotiate a joint enterprise to learn Japanese with my wife. Instead, I unconsciously became dependent on her, too often relying on her to engage with Japanese society on my behalf.

While learning Indonesian and German, I never had that luxury, and vigorously avoided it in fact in order to expose myself to as much of the languages, and as many of their speakers, as possible. Similarly, while collaborative learning is a feature of my classroom, collaboration leads towards individual expression that can be identified as the property of an individual. So, while methodologies may have a role in relation to linguistic structures in the cognitions of an individual, which are crucial for communicating, those structures, and perhaps methods too, amount to little without a community to value them and share them, thereby recreating them and their users.

Who controls learning histories? The learner of course!

Stacey Vye

Saitama University

stacey.vye@gmail.com

My 10-year journey trying language learning histories (LLHs) in three classes has shifted from the perspective of the teacher who controls the curriculum to that of the learner. Specifically, I started trying LLHs

in one class to encourage learners to feel more confident about their language learning past, but at the time I did not make the connection that learners could use the information in order to actively work on their language goals. Trying LLHs in two different educational contexts, I discovered classes with similar learning experiences, such as age, gender, and the context of the institution where the learners studied varied accordingly.

Wanting to learn more about LLHs, I read articles by other teachers who have tried LLHs in their classes. What I discovered was that the histories were much more than storytelling in another language; they can be transformational in revealing future directions for the learner and experience of using LLHs can involve teachers sharing their language learning history with the students.

I then shared my Japanese LLH with a third group of learners. As the learners shared their English histories with each other, I recognized that regardless of how much the learners invest in the project, the experience itself is meaningful. LLHs not only provide clarity for future language learning goals. If the teacher also joins in the sharing of his or her LLH, a power shift in control from the teacher to the learner can also occur. For me this shift was intense, and it also led to a positive change for the learners in controlling the content of their learning and enjoying the language itself.

After studying learning histories during my MA studies, I revisited the subject at the JALT2002 conference. At Tim Murphey's (1997, 1998) presentations, he discussed the creation of published LLHs with his students in *Language Learning Histories* (1997) and *Language Learning Histories 2* (1998) and showed some ideas about how teachers can use written LLHs with prompt questions and provide peer and teacher support for the development of LLHs. At

Looking Back

the same conference, Phil Benson described findings from his advanced learners of English in Hong Kong that previous outside-the-classroom experiences with English were exclusively influential in learning English autonomously. His learners' passion for English in Hong Kong was driven by interests in English movies and pop culture, connecting with English-speaking guest workers, meeting fellow church goers, and/or having speakers (such as relatives or people they met abroad) touch their lives in English. In Benson's own words (Head, 2003: 26), "Only outside class experience is worthwhile in language learning." As a teacher who was encouraged to cram grammar at students (and which seemed to be English not worth remembering at all), I wondered about what Phil Benson said. I had been questioning whether learners learn in classrooms much at all, so I started trying to bring outside-the-classroom activities into my classes more than I had before. I also recognized that I identified with Benson's research findings as a language learner myself.

Murphey and Benson's 2002 presentations gave me some ideas about how I could use LLHs with my private non-credit female adult language class, so I proposed an option to them where they could write their own LLHs for a study. They agreed to do this. The goal was to share their out-of-class language experiences with others and reflect on critical events in their LLHs. As they had little time to write in English, they wrote their initial reflections in their L1, Japanese. In this research, all three students had to interrupt their studies due to child rearing as mothers in Japan, so finding time and space for study was a huge challenge. Additionally, two of the three expressed shame at not being able to communicate with English speakers as a motivating factor for wanting to learn English further (Skier & Vye, 2003).

In 2006, I was teaching part-time at Chuo

University Faculty of Law, and luckily the curriculum included the option of developing Language Learning Histories in a collaborative autonomous environment. These students used their histories to achieve a lot by engaging in learning, including learner bonding with peers, setting learner agendas and language goals, revealing what they want, doing a lot of note taking practice, and engaging in reflection, all of which led up to artistic poster sessions. All in all, this was the perfect teaching setting for me.

A class of primarily 25 first-year students and some second-year students shared their histories in poster sessions. Their post reflections indicated the value of getting to know their classmates better and bonding due to similar learning experiences in secondary school, including engaging with language outside their educational contexts in most cases – as well as English cramming hell for university entrance exams. Additionally, some reported that designing the poster was therapeutic because drawing gave them time to help them visualize what they had accomplished and gave them an avenue through which to reminisce about their language successes. Consequently, by trying LLHs in both classes, I learned students share similar experiences according to their age and learning contexts. They gain further support by realising that they are not alone in their language learning journeys.

From this knowledge, the learning/teaching path led me to study in greater detail about LLHs by reading what other teachers had experienced as they tried out LLHs in their classrooms. I then realised that I could share my own language learning experiences with students as a language learner myself. Oxford (1996a; 1996b) defines LLHs as introspective narratives written by students and also occasionally by the teacher. They can be powerful sources of information for all members involved, and the process of sharing them promotes authentic and meaningful

Looking Back

communication in the EFL/ESL classroom. When I then later read Barfield's (2006) study with his three students' free-flowing LLH 30-minute interviews that, it struck me that I could be involved in an activity with my students and gain a stronger sense of myself as a learner of a language:

Using such creative narrative images lets us move beyond the purely descriptive towards transforming our language histories. By understanding the past in different ways, we have a stronger sense of ourselves in the present; by strengthening our sense of self in the present, we can come to see more clearly different paths that we may take in the future. In short, such image story-telling is one therapeutic approach to becoming a more autonomous language learner and user. (Barfield, 2006: 55)

As mentioned, my students in the same programme at Chuo had designed creative narratives through using images and drawings for their LLH poster sessions, and this connection of events encouraged me to try my own LLH with 15 first-year English majors with the false-beginner level of English at a different university where I used to teach and which had a more teacher-centered curriculum.

I chose the prompt questions I might learn the most from, took notes on my history, and designed a poster as one simple example of a poster, and displayed it along with other LLH posters. Although I spent many hours designing the poster, my art ability is limited and the stick figure images on the poster looked somewhat crude. Some students commented in their daily reflections that it was strange that a teacher should share her feelings about learning a language; some reported that I was a real person like them, more than

a teacher. Others mentioned I should have tried to draw more carefully.

This particular group of learners then mimicked my poorly drawn (but for me carefully drawn after hours and hours) LLH poster and seemed not to put much effort into the project. I learned that I needed to provide more language scaffolding for this class at a lower level of English than the previous ones. Perhaps learners at this level would benefit if the activity were done in their L1? I also felt as if I were kicked off the "teacher as god" pedestal, because the students were quite casual with me, started turning in homework less and less, so I really had to work on reaching them on their terms. Later, the 'teaching' became less of a burden because they freely reflected on what worked and didn't work for their learning and began doing extra listening and speaking log entries of their choice outside of class. They eventually trusted me.

By the end of the academic year, most students put in the extra effort learning what worked for them had noticeably improved their English abilities. In this class, even though the LLHs on the surface did not seem to bring meaningful results, the power shift from the teacher to the learner controlling the learning activities and homework after the LLH activity profoundly affected their language improvement because their studies became more of a joy than a burden.

Lastly, by writing and reflecting on this 10-year journey using LLHs in my classes and participating in the process myself, I became aware that, regardless of how the learners invest in the project, the event is meaningful in itself. First, it provides clarity for future language learning goals based on transformational language learning experiences in past. Second, the act of the teacher sharing language learning creates shift in the students' perception of the teacher as a regular person. In my third experience, using LLHs gave an opportunity for students to make a healthy power grab

Looking Back

in the class, in order to own their language learning path and improve their language skills with me as a facilitator and not a dictator. It was an amazing shift towards increased learner participation inside and outside the classroom, and I am now looking forward to using oral LLHs in my classes with my current classes.

Reflections from Participants

Lee Arnold

2011 Nakasendo English Conference - Conference Chair washizora@gmail.com

I had the great privilege, both as chair of the 2011 Nakasendo conference in the shepherding of the LD SIG roundtable on personal language learning for teachers and learners, and as an attendee at the sessions within it, to witness and participate in the thought-provoking reflections that came from it.

This forum formed a bridge from the similarly themed Nakasendo 2010 conference. Much of what I gathered from the various sessions tracked to my own thinking on reflection of my own efforts in acquiring Japanese, and resonated to the hope I had nurtured in the 2010 Nakasendo theme to have those who had attended the conference walk away with a sense that teachers' own efforts in L2 acquisition were not only meaningful, but crucial, in gaining insight into what our learners experience in the change of consciousness that comes with L2 acquisition, by way of internalizing it as an insight as much our own as our learners'. It is my view that such change need not be a threat to either learners or teachers, but an opening that makes room for both. Happily, I saw much that paid back that hope, in a sense of understanding and realization by the presenters.

As I should have expected, there were great

surprises in the various sessions. To name just two: Andy Barfield's corner on re-constructing learning histories and learner reflections on vocabulary learning and retention has made me begin to try this out as an experiment with learners in one of my university classes at present, while Michael Mondejar's insights on scaffolding self-reflection through the use of visuals reminded me all over again on the role of visual imagery in language acquisition and the power it has in forming more authentic habits of retention and recall beyond that of rote memorization.

A thread running through the sessions was a reflection on the various stages the presenters saw themselves at within their own language acquisition, be it of Japanese or other languages. The language learning history of the presenters were mainly set against a mixed background of classroom learning on various levels (mainly secondary school and university), self-study, and considered efforts at social immersion – in the case of Japanese, through friends, acquaintances, and even spouses. This very much resounded with my own experiences, with more than a nod of recognition on my part not only in the frustrations of acquisition, but also the joys of breakthrough and excitement of discovery that come about.

More work in the area of teacher's own efforts in L2 acquisition is welcome and needed, and this round table was one memorable step in the accumulation of such work – an area that I sincerely hope to contribute something to myself.

Kazuko Unosawa

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

k-unosawa@msa.biglobe.ne.jp

By considering how we might use language learning histories and other forms of reflection, we may gain new insights on teaching practices and seek new

Looking Back

directions. The five presentations in the Learner Development SIG session at Nakasendo consisted of journal entries, posters, comics and videos, contrasted teacher and student work, stimulating discussions among the participants. Listening to each presenter and engaging in Q&A, I could develop a better understanding of what the posters were designed to convey. By the time the first half ended, I had already decided to ask my students to write their own LLHs and also to share my own with them, in order to pursue future language learning goals. The pair and group discussions on LLHs in the second half of the session showed how similar as well as different our accounts could be.

Afterwards, reading the above conference reports made me further reflect on the subject. Andy Barfield discussed the “diversity of practices” regarding vocabulary learning and the importance to seek autonomy in the classroom over a considerable amount of time where change might happen. Mondejar’s account of the use of comics as a means for self-reflection and Mboutsiadis’ report introducing digital storytelling as a means to present students’ contact with English, highlighted the significance of using multimedia to discuss language learning. Colin Rundle showed how collaborative learning can be effective. Reading Vye’s section, I became aware of the importance to take a learner-centered approach, allowing not only the students to share their LLHs but also the teacher to do so, and also how an interest in the topic for a decade can expand one’s insights. All were written from different perspectives, revealing the breadth of the presentations, and I would like to incorporate some of these ideas into my teaching.

I look forward to future Learner Development sessions where we can explore our language learning practices.

References

- Barfield, A. (2006). Image story-telling: Co-authoring new worlds of learning and using language. *Hakumon*, 58(3), 46-55.
- Barfield, A. (2011, 9 March). From Latin to French with some art on the way. Blog post. *Exploring Learning*. Available at: http://tokyogettogether.blogspot.com/2011_03_01_archive.html
- Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research, post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(5), 863-76.
- Boud, D., Keough, R., & Walker, D. (eds). (1985). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- Benson, P. & Lor, W. (1998). *Making Sense of Autonomous Language Learning*. English Centre Monograph, No 2. Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong.
- Bloom B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay.
- Candy, P. C. (1991). *Self-direction for Lifelong Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Crawford, P. (2004). A novel approach: Using graphic novels to attract reluctant readers and promote literacy. *Library Media Connection*, 22(5), 26-28.
- Dardier, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy Of Love*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Dorrell, L. D. (1987). Why comic books? *School Library Journal*, 34(3), 30-32.
- Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2008). *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension*

Looking Back

- and Thinking Skills*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Head, E. (2003). Phil Benson: Teachers' and learners' differing perspectives on learner autonomy. *Learning Learning*, 10(1), 24-26.
- Menezes, V. (2008) Multimedia language learning histories. In Kalaja, P., Menezes, V. Barcelos, A.M.F. (eds), *Narratives of Learning and Teaching EFL*. London. Palgrave Macmillan (199-213). Available at: <http://veramenezes.com/>
- Murphey, T. (1997). *Language Learning Histories*. Nagoya: South Mountain University Press.
- Murphey, T. (1998). *Language Learning Histories II*. Nagoya: South Mountain University Press.
- Murphy, T., & Jacobs, G. M. (2000). Encouraging critical collaborative autonomy. *JALT Journal*, 22, 228-44.
- Oxford, R. (1996a). When emotion meets (meta) cognition in language learning histories. *International Journal of Educational Research*. 23(7), 581-94.
- Oxford, R. (1996b). Language learning histories: Learners and teachers helping each other understand learning styles and strategies. *TESOL Journal*, 6(1), 20-3.
- Ranker, J. (2007). Using comic books as read-alouds: Insights on reading instruction from an English as a second language classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 61, 296-305.
- Skier, E. & Vye, S. (2003). One reality of autonomous language learning in Japan. In A. Barfield & M. Nix (eds), *Autonomy You Ask!* (27-40). Tokyo: JALT Learner Development SIG.
- Thornbury, S. (2009). Methods, post-method, and métodos. *Teaching English*. Available at: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/method-s-post-method-métodos>



Looking Back

Realizing Autonomy Conference at Nanzan University, Nagoya

Alison Stewart, Gakushuin University

To celebrate the imminent launch of the new book *Realizing Autonomy*, a one-day conference was held at Nanzan University in Nagoya on Saturday, October 29. The event featured posters, presentations, and workshops, as well as two great plenary sessions: first the intriguingly titled *Autonomy, Agency and Social Capital: Surfing the Altruistic Coral Reefs* by Tim Murphey and then, a trans-global dialogue on criticality and autonomy between Richard Pemberton who joined the conference by skype from Nottingham, UK, and Mike Nix who was there in the flesh.

There was a big emphasis on *reflection* during the conference. The conference programme had been designed with plenty of empty space inside to encourage and facilitate written responses to other people's ideas and practices for promoting autonomy in language learning. The conference ended with a final Reflection session where everyone got the chance to share what they learnt.

Another feature of the conference was a ceremonial donation of royalties that the book's 28 authors and editors elected to give away to a good cause. The cause in question is Shanti Volunteer Organization, an NGO that has been publishing materials to promote literacy in developing countries and, more recently, helping the relief efforts in the earthquake and tsunami-stricken areas of Tohoku. A representative was at the conference to receive the donation.

However, it doesn't stop there. Presenters and audience alike are encouraged to write up not only articles based on what they presented, but also extended reflections on an insight they gained during the day and submit them for publication in a special Conference Proceedings issue of *Learning Learning*, which we hope to bring out around May 2012.

