

学習の学習

Learning Learning

JALT Learner Development N-SIG Forum vol.2. no.2. July 1994

1995

「学習の学習」第1号で、私たちは「学習者ディベロップメントとは何か」という定義をしました。それによれば、学習者ディベロップメントに関わる教師は、学習者の自律性を育てようとするか、学生が学習ストラテジーをよりうまく使えるようにしようとするか、あるいは、その両方を目指しているといえます。このような複数の視点が、JALT静岡支部と共催で5月14日に行ったシンポジウム「学習者の自律のためのストラテジー」には反映されてきました。この号では、フィル・ベンソンの論文と最終セッションにおける「ポスターによるディスカッション」からの抜粋によって、シンポジウムのハイライトの再現を試みます。フィル・ベンソンは、学習者ディベロップメントの主流に属するともいえる教室での学習者トレーニングに言及し、批判的脱構築を行っています。マイケル・ゲストによるベルナルド・デュフの *Teaching Myself* の書評は、あまり目立たないかもしれないけれど、他にもまだ、発想のヒントになりうるものがあることを示しています。この他に、吉竹ソニアによるTESOL 95でのアナ・シャモの基調講演の報告、学習者ディベロップメント研究部会のメンバーからの手紙、ステュアート・ハートレーによる IATEFL の Learner Independence SIG のニュースレター「インディペンデンス」のレポート、そして、IATEFL LI SIG の新コーディネーター、ジェニー・ティマーから学習者ディベロップメント研究部会のメンバーへの手紙も載せました。これらの記事に関係づけ、学習者ディベロップメントに関心を持つ人々のつながりを作るのは、読者の皆さんにお任せします。

リチャード・スミス、青木直子

Teachers engaged in learner development, as defined in the very first issue of *Learning Learning*, might be aiming at increasing learner autonomy and/or improving use by students of more effective learning strategies, a combination of viewpoints which was reflected both in the title of and the variety of approaches presented at Learner Development N-SIG's May 14th Symposium on Strategies for Learner Autonomy, organized jointly with JALT Shizuoka. This issue of *Learning Learning* begins with an attempt to reproduce some of the Symposium highlights in the form of a feature article by Phil Benson and extracts from the final "discussion via poster" session. While Phil Benson refers to - and critically deconstructs - a relatively 'mainstream' tradition in learner development, that of classroom-based learner 'training,' Michael Guest - in his review of Bernard Dufeu's *Teaching Myself* - shows that other, perhaps less obvious sources of inspiration are still out there waiting to be tapped. Elsewhere in this issue, Sonia Yoshitake reports on Anna Chamot's plenary at the TESOL 95 Convention, members write in with their own concerns, Stewart Hartley reviews recent issues of *Independence* - the newsletter of IATEFL's Learner Independence SIG - and Jenny Timmer, LI SIG's new coordinator, sends her greetings from IATEFL to JALT LD N-SIG members. We hand it over to you now, to make the connections!

Naoko Aoki & Richard Smith



Shizuoka Symposium : Strategies for Learner Autonomy, May, 1995

シンポジウム：学習者の自律のためのストラテジー（1995年5月）

In this and forthcoming issues of "Learning Learning" we feature articles and discussion based on papers given at the above Symposium, which was organized by JALT Learner Development N-SIG with the Shizuoka chapter of JALT and held in Shizuoka City on May 14th. The Symposium benefitted from sponsorship by Shizuoka Convention Bureau, JALT National, Creative Services International, International Thomson Publishing Japan, Meynard Publishing, Oxford University Press and Penguin Books Japan Ltd., and involved a total of around 100 participants attending parallel sessions held in English and Japanese.

この号から『学習の学習』は5月14日に静岡市で開かれたシンポジウム「学習者の自律のためのストラテジー」での発表にもとづいた記事やディスカッションを掲載します。このシンポジウムは、学習者ディベロプメント研究部会とJALT静岡支部が共同で企画したもので、当日は学習者ディベロプメント研究部会のメンバーをはじめ100人ほどが集まり、同時に平行して行われた英語の発表と日本語の発表を聞き、討論に参加しました。なお、このシンポジウムは、静岡コンベンションビューロー、JALT National、クリエイティブ・サービス・インターナショナル、トムソン・パブリッシング・ジャパン、メイナード・パブリッシング、オックスフォード大学出版会、ペンギン・ブックス・ジャパンにスポンサーとなっていました。

Feature article

A Critical View of Learner Training

Phil Benson

This article is a summary of a longer paper that I gave at the Shizuoka Symposium on Strategies for Learner Autonomy, May, 1995. In the first part of the paper, I tried to show how the current variety of learner training approaches has developed. I then looked at some criticisms of learner training and added some of my own. Lastly, I speculated on what a more critical version of learner training might involve.

Learner training methodologies

There is some controversy about the use of the term 'learner training' itself. For example, in a recent paper, Chamot and Rubin (1994) suggest that the word 'training' (with its lockstep implications) is inappropriate and propose 'education', 'instruction' or 'development' in its place (cf. also Smith, 1994). However, 'learner training' is a term that has been used widely, even by some who might have preferred something less prescriptive (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, 1989). Here I use 'learner training' as a general cover term,

and I will define it as an area of methodology where students are encouraged to focus on their learning.

Current interest in learner training goes back to the 1970s, and in the literature, we can see six major forms in which it has appeared (for a more detailed discussion, see Cohen, 1990):

1. Direct advice on how to learn languages independently, often in the form of self-study textbooks or manuals designed for individuals working abroad. Advice is generally prescriptive and not based on research. Cohen (ibid.) mentions Brewster and Brewster (1976) as an example of such a manual, in this case designed with missionaries in mind.
2. Methods and materials based on 'good language learner' research, which aim to convey insights from observation of strategies used by "successful" language learners. These materials also tend to be prescriptive, but they claim their authority from research, increasingly from the field of cognitive

- psychology (cf. O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Thompson and Rubin (1982) is an example of a manual based on good language learner research.
3. More open-ended methods and materials, where learners are expected to experiment with strategies and decide for themselves which ones suit them best. This approach is based on the view that there is no single set of strategies that will work best for all individuals (Cohen, 1990:15). Ellis and Sinclair's (1989) popular learner training coursebook is based on this principle (also, Oxford, 1990).
 4. 'Synthetic' approaches drawing on a wide range of sources. Wenden (1991) and Dickinson (1992) both connect learner training to wider trends in language teaching. Dickinson's book, for example, has four main chapters based on North American strategy research, European work on autonomy and self-direction, language awareness, and insights for learners from foreign language learning research.
 5. 'Integrated' approaches that treat learner training as a part of general language learning. Legutke and Thomas (1991:284), for example, argue that the aim is not to train learners first and then teach them a language. Rather, "the task is to teach them to communicate in the L2 while helping them to learn and think about their learning." Nunan's (1994) *Atlas* textbooks put this principle into practice by incorporating training activities into units with language content goals.
 6. 'Self-directed' approaches. Advocates of self-directed learning have tended to be sceptical of the idea that students can be *taught* how to learn, and they propose methodologies where learners in effect train themselves by practising self-directed learning with the help of self-access resources and counselling (cf. Holec, 1980).

These six forms of learner training are not independent of each other. Advocates of learner training have tended to modify their views and converge over the years. As research into learning strategies has deepened, practitioners have tended to become less assertive about the generalisability of learning strategies. As Chamot and Rubin's recent (1994) paper suggests, the effectiveness of learning strategies may depend largely on the contexts in which they are taught and applied. Learner training methodology has also tended to become more eclectic, and 'learning how to learn' is increasingly seen to be inseparable from language learning itself. These developments need to be borne in mind when particular approaches are evaluated.

Criticisms of learner training

Rees-Miller (1993) has made a number of criticisms of learner training. Her main point is that its value is far from proven, and she points to a lack of evidence that strategies are either teachable or effective (see also Rees-Miller, 1994). These criticisms are directed mainly at the North American tradition of good language learner research and strategy training (see Chamot and Rubin, 1994, for a response).

My own criticisms come from a different angle and are directed at learner training generally. I am less concerned with the effectiveness of learner training than with what it trains the 'learner' to *be*. I want to argue that, however open-ended it aims to be, learner training inevitably involves an implicit moulding of the learner to approved patterns of behaviour - a process I call the 'ideological construction of the learner.' In this process learners are 'positioned' by learner training, in as much as they are encouraged to conform to certain expectations if they are to profit from it. If they do not conform to these expectations, they may be left with the feeling that they are either "poor" language learners or not even language learners at all!

Learners undergoing training are, of course, not obliged to accept positions set up for them, and this is one reason why students (particularly adults) may resist efforts to "help" them "improve" their learning behaviour (Rees-Miller, 1993). Later, I will suggest that such students might be less resistant to methods where they are encouraged to criticise and negotiate received models of learning. Before I do so, however, I will discuss briefly how learner training goes about ideologically constructing "the learner." The following comments are based mainly on the more 'open-ended' types of activities and materials such as those included in Ellis and Sinclair (1989) or Oxford (1990).

Learner training activities and materials tend to position their users in five major ways:

1. Through direct advice and suggestions inserted into overtly non-prescriptive text;
2. By limiting the range of options from which students are invited to choose;
3. By guiding students to discover approved norms (often located at the centre of a range of choices) "for themselves;"
4. Through visual and verbal images of "successful" language learners
5. Through modes of address (e.g. the use of singular

"you")

In these ways, learner training sets up implicit constraints on the *range* of behaviours and activities that may be seen as *appropriate* to language learning, and constructs a particular ideological position for "the language learner." In learner training materials, language learners are invariably rational and decisive. They see themselves as individuals and, when they engage in discussion with others, it is usually in order to clarify their own ideas and opinions, not to accommodate to others through collective decision. They view language learning as a cognitive activity, not as a process of social interaction, and they tend to solve social problems through the application of technique.

In this way, learner training tends to position learners in terms of a model of the rational, liberal-democratic individual. Arguably, this is an ethnocentric model. If learner training promotes autonomy, it does so only in terms of a version of autonomy constructed from a particularly Western individualist point of view (for a more detailed discussion of 'versions of autonomy,' see Benson (forthcoming); Pennycook (forthcoming). At the same time, learner training disconnects "the learner" from 'the student' as a *real* individual living, studying and working in a *real* social context. "The learner" often appears to be an entirely abstract individual with few other concerns than learning languages. Learner training seems to pay little attention

either to the social risks of learning a language (e.g. where the language is a means of education, in immigration situations, or where the language forms part of close personal relationships) or to its transformative potential for the learner. By neglecting the social contexts of language learning, learner training appears to help socialise students to a form of language learning which is disconnected from its potential for personal and social change.

Learner training, autonomy and social context

The reconnection of learning with life has been a major theme in the theory and practice of independent and autonomous learning (Freire, 1970; Illich, 1971; Tough, 1971, Hammond and Collins, 1991; Mezirow, 1991). This reconnection, arguably, distinguishes autonomous learning (where autonomy is seen as a precondition for meaningful learning) from the traditional western liberal education (where learning is

seen as a precondition for autonomy). Autonomous learning can be justified politically on the grounds that it helps students become critically and socially aware participants in their own and others' lives. It is also increasingly rational in a world where students need to be prepared for change above all else.

One argument in favour of learner training is that it helps learners become more autonomous. However, I would argue that this is only possible, if learner training pays particular attention to the social context of learning.

Language learning always takes place within a set of social contexts, ranging from the global linguistic order at one extreme to the classroom (if there is one) at the other. Literature on the classroom has suggested that we should capitalise on its natural interactional features for language learning (Breen, 1986). We are also beginning to understand more about how classroom contexts are conditioned by, and interact with, 'macro' elements of social context (Holliday, 1994). Effective learner training needs to address these elements of social context directly, since students cannot set meaningful goals or make meaningful choices without a critical awareness of wider social contexts and constraints.

The university students that I work with in Hong Kong, for example, are not "free" to choose which languages they learn. Nor are they entirely "free" to decide their purposes in learning them. They are always subject to constraints ranging from those imposed by teachers and curricula to those imposed by a linguistic order which, for example, elevates English and consigns Cantonese (their native language) to a subordinate role. While students are not free to ignore these constraints, they *are* potentially free to criticise them and come to terms with them both collectively and individually. If learner training is to be helpful to these students, I would argue that it needs to help them develop resources to negotiate goals and objectives in the light of critical awareness of the social contexts in which they learn. This awareness also needs to be fostered in an atmosphere where students are free to question not only the ways in which they learn languages, but also the wider social and ideological purposes of their learning.

The kind of learner training that I have argued for, and which I have been attempting to develop in work with students in Hong Kong, involves four main aspects:

1. explicit attention to social contexts of learning and

- questioning of accepted purposes and goals;
2. discussion of students' rights in using the languages they learn;
3. criticism of learning methodologies, materials and texts;
4. explicit attention to students' personal and collective investments in language learning.

In the past, I have attempted to implement this kind of learning training through short courses for students working in self-access. In these courses, students were encouraged to go through a process of collective discussion and decision-making, in which they worked from general considerations (the role of English in Hong Kong, the goals of language learning in the educational system, etc.) to specifying programmes of work. The objective of these sessions was to help students to develop personal goals and methodologies within an awareness of wider social contexts and constraints.

More recently, I have been exploring ways of integrating a more critical style of learner training into more conventional classroom settings and curricula. At the Shizuoka Symposium, I invited discussion on a number of activities that I have used for this kind of training. Two examples of these are included here in the form of "recipes" for short classroom activities. However, I would emphasise that I do not see effective learner training as something that can be achieved through a sequence of activities of this kind. It is rather a question of developing relationships in which curricula and their goals are constantly open to criticism and negotiation.

Discussion and criticism, of course, can also become empty if they lack consequence. Ultimately, the kind of learner training that I have argued for can only work if it is based on a cycle of reflection and action where students' decisions have real consequences. Effective self-direction implies a much greater degree of student (and teacher) control over resources and curricula than most of our institutions would currently allow (Benson, 1994). The question of how we can achieve greater control, both for students and for ourselves as teachers, is therefore at the heart of the problem of what constitutes effective learner training.

Contact :

Phil Benson
English Dept.,
Hong Kong Polytechnic University,

Hung Hom, Hong Kong

phone: (852) 2766 7535 (office)
(852) 2688 5969 (home)
fax: (852) 2333 6569
email EGPHIL@hkpucc.polyu.edu.hk

References

- Benson, P. (1994). Concepts of autonomy in language learning. Paper given at the Conference on 'Autonomy in Language Learning,' Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.
- Benson, P. (forthcoming). The philosophy and politics of learner autonomy. In Benson, P. and Voller, P. (Eds.). *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*.
- Chamot, A.U. and Rubin, J. (1994). Comments on Janie Rees-Miller's 'A critical appraisal of learner training: theoretical bases and teaching implications' : Two readers react. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28:4, 771-76.
- Cohen, A.D. (1990). *Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Breen, M.P. (1986). The social context of language learning - a neglected situation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 7, 135-158.
- Brewster, E.T. and Brewster, E.S. (1976). *Language Acquisition Made Practical: Field Methods for Language Learners*. Pasadena: Lingua House.
- Dickinson, L. (1992). *Learner Training for Language Learning*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Ellis, G. and Sinclair, B. (1989). *Learning to Learn English: a Course in Learner Training*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Hammond, M. and Collins, R. (1991). *Self-directed Learning: Critical Practice*. London: Kogan Page.
- Holec, H. (1980). Learner training: meeting needs in self-directed learning. In Altman, H.B. and Vaughan James, C. (Eds.). *Foreign Language Learning: Meeting Individual Needs*. Oxford: Pergamon, 30-45.

Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling Society*. New York: Harper & Row

Legutke, M. and Thomas, H. (1991). *Process and Experience in the Language Classroom*. London: Longman.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nunan, D. (1994). *Atlas: Learning-centred Communication*. Books 1 & 2. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

O'Malley, J. M. and Chamot, A.U. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. New York: Newbury House.

Pennycook, A. (forthcoming). Cultural alternatives and autonomy. In Benson, P. and Voller, P. (Eds.). *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*.

Rees-Miller, J. (1993). A critical appraisal of learner training: theoretical bases and teaching implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27:4, 679-689.

Rees-Miller, J. (1994). Comments on Janie Rees-Miller's 'A critical appraisal of learner training: theoretical bases and teaching implications': The author responds. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28:4, 776-781.

Rubin, J. and Thompson, I. (1982). *How to be a more Successful Language Learner*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Smith, R. (1994). Some thoughts on the formation of the Learner Development N-SIG. *Learning Learning* 1/1, 1-3.

Tough, A. (1971). *The Adult's Learning Projects*. Ontario: Ontario Institute for Education Studies.

Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*. London: Prentice Hall International.

Appendix

Activity 1. Why are we learning English?

This is a small-group collaborative writing activity designed for Hong Kong students. Give students a copy of the following text:

The Hong Kong Language Campaign has published a newspaper advertisement which includes these statements:

"...They say money talks, but what language do you think it speaks? The language of international business: English.... Cantonese is fine at home, but if you want to compete in international business, your staff must be able to speak the international business language."

A Singaporean friend has mentioned this advertisement in her letter to you. She writes that she is shocked to discover that Hong Kong people are so money-minded.

How would you answer her?

Students write a short replies in groups of three or four, then read their replies aloud to other groups.

Activity 2 What do language teachers do?

This is a small-group brainstorming and discussion activity.

1. Ask students to brainstorm a list of *things language teachers do to help students learn languages*. The teacher should stay on the sidelines for this activity.
2. Ask students to collaboratively mark each item on their list on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means that they can do the item themselves without the help of teachers, and 5 means that they cannot.
3. Ask students to discuss the items around the middle of their scales. The teacher may join in at this point to express a personal point of view (possibly as a fellow language learner).



