

Greetings from Learner Development SIG Members LD SIGのメンバーより

自律学習は初めて？

LD SIG会員紹介 : Steven Paydon

New to Learner Autonomy?

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I recently joined the Learner Development Sig after becoming intimately interested in learner autonomy. At first, I thought I was new to this idea of putting the learner in control of their own learning - but now I am not so sure.

Years ago my family moved to a station, what Americans would call a rather big ranch, on the edge of the Kimberly region in outback



Australia. It was remote and isolated, but that is actually an understatement. Our nearest neighbor, literally the house next door, was 12km away. The nearest town was 182km away, along 120km of unsealed, rough roads that were often made impassable by flooding rivers. In fact, the town was so far away, and so difficult to get to, that we would only go shopping about four times a year - in a big truck! We were so remote that we even had our own airstrip. The airstrip was vital for two reasons. Firstly, we received our mail once every two weeks by mail plane. Secondly, and most importantly, if in case of an emergency we needed a doctor, the only realistic way to get help was via the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). Needless to say, there were no schools anywhere remotely near where we lived. Instead, my brother and I completed our elementary school years in a pioneer version of distance learning called School of the Air.

School of the Air derived its name from the teachers delivering their lessons via HF Radio, i.e. 'through the air' (schools.net.nt.edu/ksa/).

These radio sets were another essential part of life for isolated communities. Built into a rugged, army-green metal box, they came with a hand-held microphone and a long piece of wire that you would tie to a stick and throw up the nearest gumtree for an aerial. They were mainly used for the RFDS, but so long as there were no emergencies at any given time, they could be utilized by School of the Air - or the odd communications between a very small amount of people scattered throughout a very vast region.

Other than that, about the only other thing you could rely on picking up on the HF radio was the Indonesian fishing boats chattering away at night about 1000km to our north.

Each school morning we would sit in front of these radio sets listening intently to the static in excited anticipation. Then eventually, we would hear our teacher's voice come over the radio and our class would begin. A typical morning roll-call would go something like this:

"Good morning KSA Grade 6. This is Mrs. Fitzgerald. Are you there? Over."

Suddenly the airwaves would burst to life! A multitude of young little voices would say, not in quite the synchronized unison we come to expect in a physical classroom, "Good morning Mrs. Fitzgerald. Over." The adrenaline rush was almost too much for a young boy to stand. From that moment on we were in contact with the outside world, and although our young imaginations couldn't quite grasp it, we knew that we were a part of something big.



Reflecting back now, School of the Air seems to be my first real introduction to learner autonomy. Autonomy seems to me to be having a freedom of choice. My brother and I were free to choose how much we studied and when. Just so long as we kept up to schedule and got our work finished before the mail plane arrived with our next set of lessons, mum didn't really care what we did. This was both a liberating and motivating experience for us. Writing on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Deci and Ryan (2000) identify three

psychological needs that, when met, lead to intrinsic motivation: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. School of the Air helped fulfill these needs for us. Although we couldn't see it, School of the Air gave us a sense of belonging to a community. We would check in with our teacher every school day, and we could hear the voices of other little kids experiencing the same wonder as us. We had a sense of competence because we were learning from materials designed to be at just the right level for us (optimal challenge). Moreover, seeing as there were no other kids, no TV, no video, no clubs, no shops...absolutely nothing, we were free from distractions and totally focused on completing our lessons. Not surprisingly, we also finished them in haste. And finally, we also had ample autonomy because, apart from having to be present for our morning roll call, we could study whenever we wanted.

Deci and Ryan (2000) also postulate that students in autonomy-supportive environments show higher levels of motivation and learn more than students in controlled environments. My brother and I can vouch for this, too. We were proactive and engaged. We used to burn through those materials so fast that we would finish two weeks' work in one week. There were no school rules for us, no sitting in crowded classrooms waiting for a bell to ring, either. In fact, there was no watching a clock at all. We were interested, excited, confident, and this translated into performance, persistence, and creativity. In fact, we were so creative that once we had finished all our materials, we would just check in for roll call in the morning and then knock off down the creek catching snakes and lizards until the next lot of materials arrived.

Now I find myself here in Japan. My neighbor lives only inches away from me, I have over a hundred channels on my TV, and a convenience store is always in walking distance. Like everyone else teaching in Japan, I also find myself bound by various institutional constraints. These controls are often a necessary fact of life as a teacher, but learner autonomy seems to me to offer us some balance in regards to overbearing control. That, combined with my own learning experience, makes me think that we can use learner autonomy to motivate our students to reach higher and achieve more. If we can give our students a sense of belonging, then they will work hard for their community. If we can give them a sense of success, then they will gain the confidence to push their boundaries. And if we can give them a sense of choice, then they

will be motivated to take control. My brother and I thrived on the ability to take control of our learning. We ended up being sent away to boarding school in our high school years. However, my School of the Air experience set me up to thrive at distant learning when doing my Masters as an external student. The ability to take control of my learning was a motivating experience that I hope I can pass onto my students.

References

- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78.
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Greetings from Learner Development SIG Member Bill Mboutsiadis

LD SIG 会員紹介 : Bill Mboutsiadis

Hello everyone. My name is Bill Mboutsiadis. I have been asked to introduce myself since I'm a recent LD SIG member and to discuss my understanding of learner development. I hope to meet more of you during the various events that are now being developed. As LD programme chair, I've had the pleasure to connect with some of you via emails and so I'm looking forward to meeting you in person this year. In this introduction I will also explain my ongoing understanding of learner development by specifically discussing what learner autonomy means for me and how it is realized with my learners in our shared learning environment.

I arrived in Japan in March of 2010 with my family to teach at Meisei University in the West Tokyo area of Hino City. I have been teaching in ESL environments for most of my career though my initial experience was teaching at a university in Bratislava, Slovakia. Turning down a JET teaching offer back in 1996, I started teaching English for Academic Preparation at the University of Toronto's English Language Program. Since then I've always wondered how things would have turned out for me if had chosen to go to Japan. Coming here has thus fulfilled a long-time goal to have a Japanese EFL teaching opportunity.