

July 4th 2021 Get-together Report

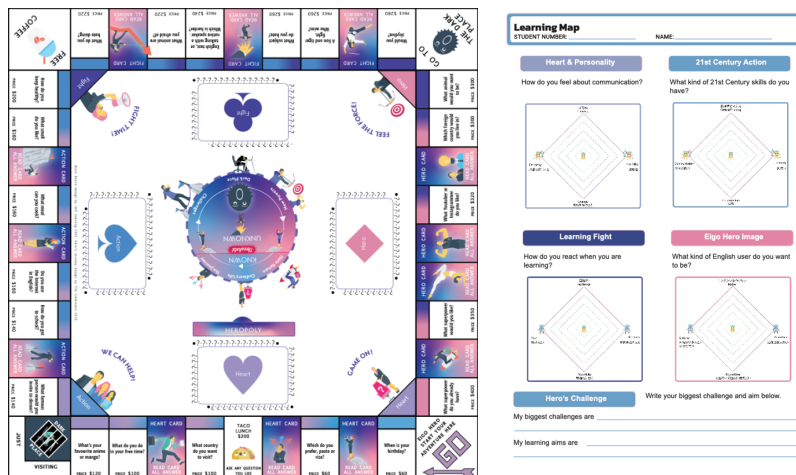
In attendance: Tim Cleminson, Cecilia Fujishima, Tetsuko Fukawa, Ellen Head, Ian Hurrell, Ken Ikeda, Koki Tomita

Discussion topics in the meeting

There were 2 main topics at the meeting. Firstly, Tim Cleminson shared the work he has been doing with exploratory practice. Then, the group discussed the possible limits of learner autonomy.

1) Exploratory Practice (EP) - Hero's Journey Game

Tim has been working on a board game for the first 'real' lesson in a class. It's a self-intro game. The board game also introduces students to a broader view of the skills and challenges related to using English. It's designed to develop more common ground and expectations between teachers and students. Like what exactly are we doing in this lesson? The game is a combination of individual and group questions. As students answer and listen to the answers of the other students, they map-out a self-evaluation



Tim also introduced an article by Judith Hanks introducing a wide range of theoretical issues related to EP. There are a lot of case studies here to see the way the approach has been implemented by different practitioners.

Judith Hanks (2018). [From research-as-practice to exploratory practice-as-research in language teaching and beyond](#)

Reflections from participants

(Ian) This was an interesting topic as I remember the workshop that Alison Stewart gave on the topic a few years ago. The idea of identifying puzzles together with the students and helping students to consider the process of learning more deeply is one that I try to implement into all of my learning programs.

However, it can sometimes be difficult to communicate some of these unfamiliar concepts to the students. The game that Tim showed in the meeting was an effective and elegant method to communicate the ideas of self-reflection and metacognition for language learning which would be perfect for orientation lessons.

I look forward to trying to implement some of these ideas in my classes next semester.

2) Limits of learner autonomy

The group discussed the limits of autonomy, the role of cooperation in autonomy - being “cooperatively autonomous.” We also discussed the role of the teacher. The teacher as an expert in language, as a motivator who can help students find their own path to a more enlightened purpose for their study, as a provider of a framework that enables them to reach higher goals. Ellen introduced the book *Maintaining Control: Autonomy and Language Learning* (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1xw9m0>) Which has many interesting ideas regarding this topic

Reflections from participants

(Ian) This is an issue that I often grapple with in my approach to teaching. I am a strong believer in developing learner autonomy; helping my students to take control over their learning journeys. However, I also feel conflicted with giving my students control and my role as an expert in language learning. For example, if I see a student going in a direction that I have experienced to be unproductive, do I intervene and try to push the student in a “better” direction, or do I leave the student go through the experience themselves.

This is a conversation that I am always having with myself when considering my teaching. Ellen introduced an interesting book, edited by our very own Andy Barfield, that seems to tackle this very issue: *Maintaining Control, Autonomy and Language learning*. If I can find a copy, I would be interested to read how others feel about this topic

(Ken) Ian and I were concerned if the teacher ought to allow students to create and develop their own ideas without guidance, especially if seemingly the same student ideas are re-created, or if the teacher could provide advice so as to foster their own development.

I think the European University Association (EUA) , which published a piece about “[promoting active learning in universities](#)”, offers a radical approach of instructors as “to change from that of a provider of knowledge to that of a facilitator of learning. Students need to be considered co-creators of their own knowledge and be given the opportunity to explore this role through, e.g. research-, problem- or inquiry-based learning and participation in decision-making processes.”

More than active learning, I regard this as active negotiation to carry over into learning, lest students think of autonomy as atomized (I credit this idea to Cecilia).
Agency.