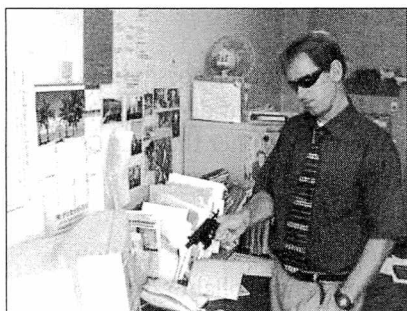


# Learner Portfolios: Who Is at the Controls?



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*Now that I've finished writing this chapter, I am writing the abstract. Does that sound strange to you? Well, maybe it is a bit odd. But, on the other hand, I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to write about in the chapter until I got started. And now that I've finished writing, I'm not sure exactly what I've said. Still, I have to write something here. So...I think I'll tell you a little story.*

*Last year I went to a conference in Korea. On the first day, I went to eat my breakfast in a small cafe on the corner of the street. I decided to have one of the tasty looking pastries with my coffee. Imagine my surprise when I bit into it and found a pickled gherkin. I decided to just act cool and finish the food. But my next mouthful was pastry, gherkin and, wait for it, a piece of fish! What was I eating? What was a piece of fish doing inside a pastry? I had no idea. But I did my best to eat it all, paid the bill and left the cafe.*

*Later, I thought a lot about that incident. Really, there was nothing wrong with the pastry; it just had some stuff inside it that I hadn't expected to find.*

私はちょうど今、この章を書き終えたところで、この概要を書いている。ちょっと奇妙に聞こえるだろうか？多分そうかもしれない。しかし、一方で、私はこれを書き始めるまで何について書くのか自分でもよく分かっていなかった。でもそれなりに、書き終えたのだが、自分でも何を言いたいのかははっきりとは分からない。けれども、ここに何かを書かなければならないので、少し私の経験談を書いてみることにする。

昨年、韓国での学会に参加した。最初の日、街角にある小さな喫茶店へ、朝食を取りに行った。そこでおいしそうに見える菓子パンとコーヒーを注文した。パンをかじり始めたときの私驚きを想像してほしい。パンの中にはきゅうりのピクルスが入っていたのだ。私は自分の驚きを人にわからないようにしてそのパンを食べてしまおうとした。しかし、次にかじったものはきゅうりと、なんと、魚だった。私はいったい何を食べているのか？パンの中で、魚がいったい何をしているのだ？私は途方にくれた。とにかく、何とか全てを食べてしまい、食事代を支払い、私はその喫茶店を出た。

その後、私はこの出来事について何度も考えた。本当をいえば、あのパンには何も不備はなかったのである。ただあの中に私が予想もしなかったものが入っていただけのことだったのである。

‘With windlasses, and with assays of bias,  
By indirections find directions out.’  
*William Shakespeare (1564-1616)*  
*Hamlet Act 2: Scene 1*

‘When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has glean’d my teeming brain.’  
*John Keats (1795-1821)*

This paper may surprise you. So before you start to read it, here are a few words to help you understand what it’s about. To begin with, I should say that I’m interested in second language acquisition, learning theory, and the experiences of learners. I’m also curious about popular culture and how it can be used in language teaching.

My first idea, put simply, was to write a descriptive paper about learner portfolios. I was going to write about the contents of the portfolios and why I thought portfolios can be an effective way of learning about language and culture.

Perhaps I should have done just that. But, somehow, I began to sense other possibilities. Rather than just writing about portfolios, why not write about the process of deciding to use the portfolios? That way I could focus on negotiation and involve voices other than my own. This, in turn, got me thinking about different genres. Would it be possible to combine academic writing with fiction?

I didn’t know, but I wanted to try. So I’ve written a story that also contains information about learner portfolios. My aim, I suppose, is to emphasize the power of collaboration and self-discovery. On another level, I’m concerned with cross-cultural communication, the dynamics of power, and the willingness to take risks.

But before I go any further, I have to give you some background information to help you understand my story. Then we can get started.

You’re probably familiar with schema theory (Wadsworth, 1989). Schemata are mental frameworks in which we store information. We are used to thinking in terms of categories because we are surrounded by many animate and inanimate things. We classify them according to their particular characteristics. For example, we know that animals have various appendages such as heads, legs, and tails. Insects have hard exoskeletons. Fish are cold-blooded. And so on. But what can we do about imaginary beings? How can we understand them if we lack the appropriate schemata?

For in my story there are three kinds of imaginary beings: the Metakin, the Clarissa, and the Naal.

The Clarissa are highly evolved ‘plants’ with exceptional mental powers. Originally, they lived as free-ranging galactic spores. Clarissa can sub-divide or fuse at will. They believe in a non-

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mike Nix and Andy Barfield for allowing me to write this paper in the way that I wanted to. Steve Brown also encouraged me, and Etsuko Shimo made some important suggestions at a crucial stage in the writing. Debra Occhi carefully read my paper several times and listened patiently to my strange ramblings about imaginary creatures. Finally, Sierra Cobb did some great drawings that made everything seem more real...

competitive, nurturing way of life. They are an ancient, intelligent species. Some researchers believe that the Clarissa may have been the first life form in the universe (Kroll, 3017).

However, the Clarissa keep no written records. All information is stored in their collective consciousness. Although 'telepathy' is the closest English equivalent to their preferred mode of communication, it is not an accurate description. The Clarissa usually access the brain through a special tentacle. They can channel thoughts through this and also receive information. They can also communicate with sound waves by using a special external membrane.

The Clarissa lived peacefully for millions of years until they were suddenly attacked by a rogue parasite.

In desperation, they visited the planet Talem'hea, which is the home of the Metakin. Eventually, they established a comfortable life of symbiosis with the Metakin and were able to survive and prosper. In return for protection, the Clarissa introduced advanced brain surgery techniques to the Metakin. Soon the Metakin began to evolve rapidly and became a highly advanced species.

The name 'Metakin' comes from a combination of 'metal' and 'kin,' and literally means 'metal people,' although they would most likely object to that description, I'm sure. The Metakin are machine/animal interfaces with both feelings and consciousness. Their position in the universe is secure. They are powerful, aggressive beings, driven by strong impulses. They especially like to explore new places.

The Metakin have no need for 'education' since, thanks to the Clarissa, they have learned how to surgically enhance their own brains. All that is required is the implanting of memory chips or other components to boost their intelligence, which increases exponentially. As a result, they are constantly progressing and making new discoveries.

In the past, they had a bad record as colonizers and exploiters of other beings. However, since the signing of the Galactic Peace Concord in 4000, and the disappearance of the few remaining troublesome species, peace has prevailed throughout the galaxy. The Metakin are proud of their technology, but they are disadvantaged in one area: They lack the resources to fuel the machines that they use for deep space exploration. The engines of their vessels run on plasma, a colourless fluid derived from the fruit of seragon trees. These trees only grow on the planet Gaauron 4. This planet is the home of the Naal.

The Naal are a slow-moving species that is often in bio-stasis. This is called *nawalan* in the language of the Naal. Bio-stasis is often protracted and may last for months. It is not found in any other intelligent species.

The Naal's existence and economy depends on plasma farming.

When the Metakin scientist Robilt (4056) discovered that enriched plasma could be used as a high-grade fuel, the price of plasma rose to unbelievable heights. Speculation in the galactic plasma market increased, and many Naal fortunes were made.

This suited the Naal because they had always been a home-loving species, fond of complicated mind-games and rarely going anywhere. Their slow metabolism meant that one meal could sustain them for several months. In addition, the ability to uptake water and mineral nutrients through a feeder root system enabled the Naal to exist happily in the same spot for years if necessary.

In fact, with the increase in wealth from the plasma trade, many wealthy Naal had adopted a semi-vegetable lifestyle in certain select areas of their planet. They took delight in composing elaborate written texts, using the rich resources of their own language, before slipping back into bio-stasis.

But the trade in plasma was bringing more and more visitors to Gaauron 4. And the main buyers of plasma were the Metakin. Although some Naal linguists had mastered the Metakin language known as *Talem*, many others found it excessively difficult to learn. The main reason for this was that the Metakin communicated mainly through speech. The Naal, on the other hand, preferred writing, which they considered to be a better way of expressing the poetry of their rich inner lives.

Nevertheless, in 5007, the High Council of the Naal finally decided that all young Naal were to study Talem. To facilitate this, they set up a special experimental language institute and invited Metakin language teachers to come and teach Talem. At first, few Metakin teachers wanted to travel all the way to Gaauron 4 to work. And those that did make the journey seldom stayed very long.

Many Metakin teachers find the Naal difficult to teach. Although a special academy has been set up on Talem'hea to train Metakin teachers to teach creatively, few Metakin are willing to take many risks in the classroom. In particular, they believe in methods that allow them to control their learners. They also have strong beliefs in the primacy of speech. Since Metakin learning is now activated through implant technology, Metakin researchers often consult the Clarissa for advice about appropriate teaching methods.

But what would work with the Naal?

## THE CAST

### On Talem'hea: The Metakins and the Clarissa

Fenton	The Chief of the Language Academy
Joe Artemis	A young Metakin language teacher
Ruri Lao Tse	An implant scientist. Joe's girlfriend

The Clarissa	A plant-like species with a collective consciousness
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\* The Clarissa are many and one, and so I have used various pronouns to describe them including 'it,' 'they,' 'she,' 'he,' etc. I apologize if this causes any confusion, but the Clarissa were most insistent that I used this style.

### On Gaauron 4: The Naal

Vogon	Chief of the Naal Language Institute
Gwsang	A Security Chief. Father of Gana
Gana	A student at the Institute

**THIS STORY IS FICTION. ANY RESEMBLANCE TO REAL PEOPLE OR INSTITUTIONS IS ENTIRELY ACCIDENTAL.**

### Joe Artemis has a meeting with Fenton

'Artemis, sit down.'



‘Thank you.’

‘Anything to drink?’

Joe’s head was still sore from the night before. He’d been out on the town with his girlfriend Ruri.

‘A glass of mineral water, please.’

‘Fine. I’ll see what I have.’

Artemis noticed the Clarissa behind Fenton’s desk. It was sleek and well-fed. Judging from the colour of its ceretopox, Fenton had been stroking it regularly. Its tentacle was coiled up, but Artemis could see a drop of juice like a shiny pearl on the end.

*It’s waiting for me.*

‘Here’s your water.’

Fenton handed Joe a glass. Joe looked at the clear liquid.

*I should have drunk some water before I slept.*

Fenton looked as though he had something important to say.

‘Artemis, I’ll come to the point. You must be wondering why I asked you here today. It’s not every day you get to visit my office, eh?’

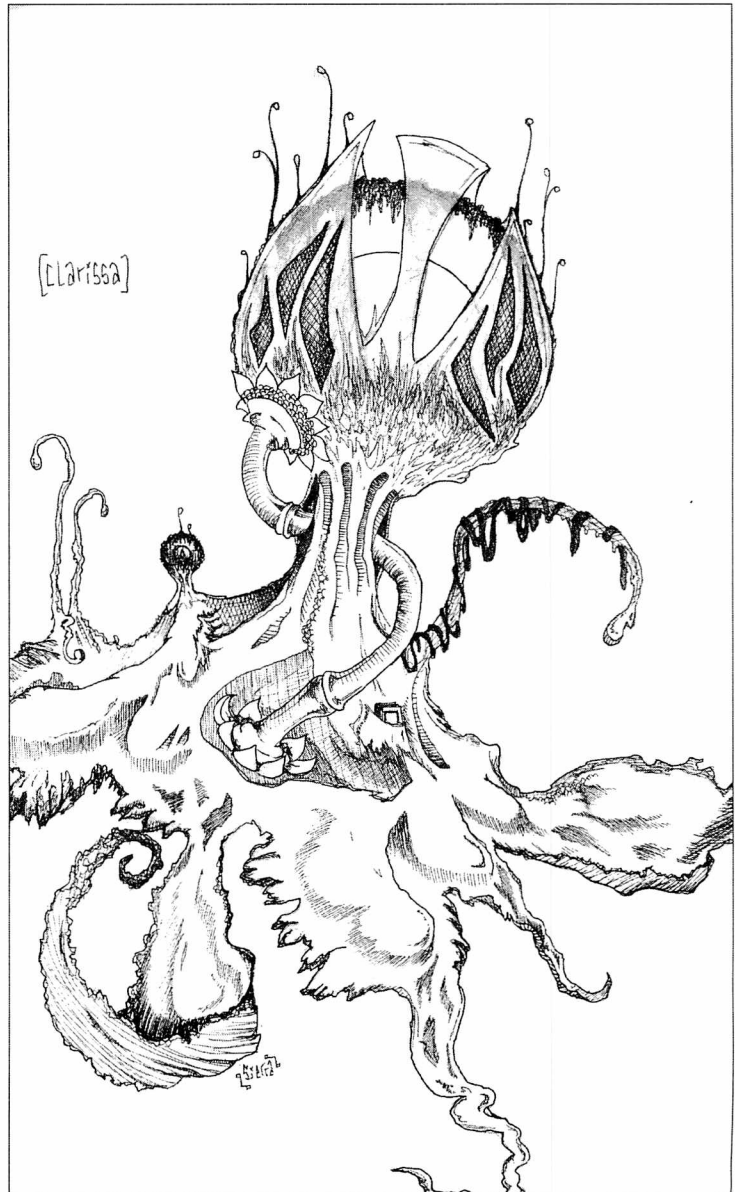
‘No, sir.’

In fact, Artemis had a good idea why he’d been asked. The old cyborg at the library had passed on the news. There was more trouble in deep space with the Naal. The word was that things needed to be fixed out there. They were going to send some more teachers to sort things out. Artemis guessed he might have some extra work to do at the Academy to cover for them.

‘The thing is, we need you to do something special. Artemis, are you listening to me?’

‘Something special, sir?’

‘Yes, to put it bluntly, we’ve got a hell of a situation on our hands. The Clarissa will fill you in on the details. But before he does, I can



tell you that we need to sort this out fast. And when it's done, I'm sure we can come to some arrangement. Bump you up a bit. See about some housing adjustments. That kind of thing.'

'Housing?'

Artemis knew that good housing wasn't easy to get. If Fenton was offering housing, then something big was happening.

*Ruri really wants to buy an Orbit 2. Orbit 1 is just too small for us.*

'Sir, I don't understand.'

'It's the Naal again. You know the kind of trouble they can make. Well, things are getting out of hand. The Institute on Gaauron 4 is in a mess. They are still up to their old tricks. Refusing to learn anything. Not cooperating. Sleeping for days on end or whatever they call it. So...I need you to get out there and find a solution. Do whatever it takes.'

'Me? But the Institute is in Deep Space, sir.'

'That's right Artemis, it is.'

Fenton's cheeks were turning red. He was losing patience.

'Artemis, I know this won't be easy. Look, I'll let the Clarissa do the talking. He'll implant you, and then you'll have the details. Get back to me after you've thought it through.'

Fenton stood up, shook hands with Artemis, and left the room.

The Clarissa began to vibrate softly. She extended her tentacle until the tip touched the side of Artemis' head... *This won't hurt, at all. Just relax...*

### **Joe talks with Ruri about his mission**

Joe was back in Orbit 1. He knew that he'd been thoroughly checked over by the Clarissa. He'd been given a brain implant that contained enough information about the current situation with the Naal to allow him to complete his mission. He was sitting at his desk scanning the file, when he heard the door de-sealing.

'Ruri!'

'Joe, what happened to you? You look awful.'

'I just had a Clarissa playing about with my neurones. There's a file in my back brain as big as a bagel. Want to take a look?'

Artemis gestured at the bandage on the side of his head.

'It's probably almost healed, but you can still see something.'

Ruri thought for a second.

'No, I've seen enough at the clinic for one day. Just tell me what's going on.'

'I've been given a new assignment in Deep Space. At the Naal Institute. I have to find out why the language programme isn't working.'

'What? You mean the Naal farmers on Gaauron 4?'

'The same.'

‘That’s so far away! How long will you be gone?’

‘I don’t know. But it’s a really good chance to get ahead. And ...Fenton’s promised help with housing.’

Ruri looked at Joe for a moment.

‘That means they’re in a mess out there. What’s the problem?’

‘You know how we signed all those agreements with the Naal a few years ago? Guarantees to keep the plasma trade flowing? Well, the Naal elite soon realized that the plasma trade would make them incredibly rich. Just like oil did in the Late Middle Phase. They thought that if their kids could learn Talem, they’d have a head start in the job market. Improve their marriage prospects, that kind of thing. But, as you know, they have this unique culture. They still communicate mainly by writing. Speech came much later, and even then it was for the lower castes. Most of the kids at the Institute are elite Naal. They don’t want to learn to speak Talem and they hate the methods of the Academy. Nothing seems to work with them. But we have to do something. Nothing can disrupt the plasma trade. Shit, I’m tired.’

#### **Joe Artemis travels to Gaauron 4**

The space transporter moved silently through tracts of cold, empty space. Artemis looked at the white interior of the ship. There was a smell of plasma from the engines. No matter how much filtration was used, the smell never went away.

Artemis thought about Ruri again.

*Saying goodbye to Ruri wasn’t easy. I’m not good at that stuff. I hope she understands that I have to do this. After all, I can’t ignore an order. No way. Things will turn out okay.*

Artemis turned to the Clarissa.

‘Can I talk?’

There was a pause.

‘You know I don’t like it that way. Why don’t we change modes?’

The Clarissa’s membrane box crackled. Artemis felt uneasy.

‘I still have a headache from that implant at Fenton’s office. My brain is like chopped liver. The painkillers are no good. You Clarissa are brain butchers.’

‘All right, Joe. As you wish, I’m sorry if we were a little... er... these time words are so confusing...hasty. But why don’t you read this first, then we’ll talk.’

‘What is it?’

‘Something...that will interest you. A manuscript.’

‘What’s it about?’

‘A kind of project.’

‘Show me.’

‘It’s in my pouch.’

Artemis reached under the fleshy fold of skin and pulled out a book. The book had no title. It looked very old.

‘It’s Middle Phase right? No, before then. Early atomic.’

‘That’s right. 2003, I think.’

Joe opened the book. It was written in English. The words were still legible, although several of them were unfamiliar. It would take time to read it.

‘I’m not a medieval scholar. I can’t read this old stuff. Where did you get this?’

‘It’s from the Academy archives. Try to read it, Joe. I’ve already written some notes to help you understand it.’

‘What’s it about? Will this help me teach the Naal?’

‘Joe, you’re getting ahead of yourself. Typical Metakin. Always in a hurry.’

Joe realized he would have to be patient. No point in upsetting the Clarissa. There was a lot of work to do.

After a few seconds, the Clarissa started to talk again.

‘To put it simply, a long time ago a teacher gave some students a questionnaire to fill out. When he read their answers, he found that they didn’t like having tests. So he did some more reading and then he came up with the idea of using learner portfolios.’

‘Why the hell did he need to ask the students anything? We all know the way to learn stuff. Through implantology. It’s simple. Stuff the back brain with extra storage and implant data as needed. No different from refueling a transporter or gassing up your transit pod.’

‘Joe, have you got a history file in there?’

The Clarissa stretched her tentacle towards Joe. Joe jerked his head back.

‘Hey, no need to get so friendly. I know my stuff. I’m just a bit rusty about the time period before Marcus.’

‘Ah yes. Marcus (2777) and the cereblex. A major breakthrough. Well, before that time, the humans had no way of understanding their own mental processes. They based their understanding on observation of behaviour. Or they got people to introspect on their own thinking. Both methods were a little, how should I say this? Imprecise. But why don’t you start reading? My membranes are getting stiff.’

‘Okay, I’ll try.’

Joe opened the book and began to read. The Clarissa’s writing was highlighted in bold.

**The first part is a letter explaining what the teacher, Steve, was about to do. You see, as well as experimenting with these portfolios, he also wanted to publish an account of his work in an anthology.**

Joe looked up.

‘Hey, this is weird. My deep memory chip just activated. Suddenly, I can remember so much more. But there’s something strange here. This looks like it was published in Japan. Wasn’t ‘Japan’ a Zone 4 nation state on earth? And wasn’t ‘Steve’ a Zone 1 name? Was this a guy a neo-colonialist, or what? I mean, what was he doing in Japan?’

The Clarissa started up her membrane voice.

‘Really Joe, I thought you’d started reading. Will an old plant like me never get any rest? But to answer your question. Those old English language teachers were a bit like their Jesuit forebears who spread the word of God. Only their doctrine was the word of English. It was a tough job by all accounts, but then there were some teachers who were willing to go out and try. But ultimately, they never managed to make English the language of their planet. There were just too many different countries and too many languages. There was even an attempt to unify Europe, but that came to nothing because of disagreements about language.’

‘Wow, so the humans never settled on a common language. No wonder they died out.’

‘Joe...’

The Clarissa seemed to want to say something.

Joe thought: *She’s hiding something from me. I wish Ruri were with me. She’s so capable. Together we could pull this thing off. Why didn’t Fenton tell me more?*

Then he went back to reading the manuscript. It began with a letter:

#### 4 December, 2002

Dear Editors:

I’m writing to you with an article outline for your anthology. My idea, in brief, is this. I’m currently involved in team-teaching a class with a content partner whose field is history. The class is called ‘Japan/Great Britain Relations.’ Although the class syllabus has remained the same for a few semesters, we are currently about to make one major change by having the students make a portfolio. The exact rubric for the contents of the portfolio has not yet been decided. The change is being brought about in response to an evaluation of student needs given in the last class of the spring semester.

Now, my idea is to present an account of the genesis of the portfolio idea, the teacher negotiation about its content, the responses of other faculty to the idea, its implementation and student responses, both in terms of the contents of their portfolios, and their responses to the task itself. So, essentially, this will be an ongoing piece of descriptive writing, a verbal scrapbook, if you like, grounded in student needs, but including many other voices. In fact...

There was a slight wobble as the ship locked on to a new navigation beam. Joe stopped reading. The Clarissa seemed to be resting.

*Is this some kind of test? Why did she give me this to read? It doesn't make any sense. Am I supposed to learn something from this that I can use with the Naal? But the rules of the Academy are so strict...*

The text seemed to change in the next part. There were some diary entries. First, he read the Clarissa's notes.

**Joe, these are some diary entries about Steve's research into portfolios. In this part, you'll meet Micheal, Debra, Etsuko, and Tim. They were all Zone 1 teachers, except Etsuko. She was a bilingual Zone 4 teacher. I've highlighted a few of the more important points in bold. I hope it won't disturb your reading.**

Tuesday 17 December, 2002

5:12 pm. I'm thinking about the portfolios. I've just read an article in the English Teaching Professional about materials free teaching. Nerina Conte had her children compile scrapbooks instead of textbooks. She describes the scrapbooks as 'a portfolio of texts and illustrations that would emerge from their theme-based classroom work.' That sounds like what we're trying to do, but how much freedom can we allow the students? I need to talk with Micheal about this.

Wednesday 18 December, 2002

5:27 pm. I did a bit of research on the net about portfolios. It seems that the portfolio concept is still evolving and getting more popular. I found this definition of portfolios: "A purposeful, collaborative, self-reflective collection of student work generated during the process of instruction."

Another important word is 'reflection.' Portfolios are not really about quantifiable testing. They are about evaluative feedback and self-reflection. There are two kinds of portfolios: process oriented and product oriented. I think we should use product portfolios, but I'll need to talk it over with Micheal, although he seems busy these days. Product portfolios display students' best work, but they can include self-reflection. Process portfolios contain multiple drafts of student work. Students can view their progress by looking at the different stages that they have been through.

Thursday 19 December, 2002

1:49 pm. I just talked with Micheal about the portfolios. He suggested that we follow a process and product approach; that way, we'll get the best of both worlds. I see his point.

Tuesday 7 January, 2003

3:57 Been surfing on the web. Read an account of portfolios done in a Finnish high school. The authors stressed the usual stuff about empowerment and so on, but also included some student comments about the portfolios themselves. So, I started to think about what we might want in our portfolios. Maybe this?



1. Language Section

A personal dictionary of new words.  
(How many words? Drawings?)

## Learning Logs

To include some element of critical self-reflection.

2. Expressive Writing Section

Short responses to videos. Other stuff?

3. Japan/Great Britain Culture Section

4 pieces of writing on academic topics?

4. Reflective Comments on the Portfolios

Joe. The next documents are transcriptions of what was then called 'email.' This was produced by sending electrical signals along fibre optic cables that linked computers. The system disappeared from common use around 2050 when the first brain-pulse transmitters were developed from mobile phones.

In this part you'll meet Tim, Debra, and Etsuko. Both Tim and Debra worked with Steve. Incidentally, Tim and Etsuko also wrote pieces for the anthology.

Date: Tue, 14 Jan 2003 09:23:57 +0900

Mime-Version: 1.0 (Apple Message framework v548)

Subject: autonomy project

From: Tim Stewart <tstewart@miyazaki-mic.ac.jp>

To: Steve <sdavies@kokusai.miyazaki-mic.ac.jp>

Steve,

Saw your name on the list of contributors to this autonomy project.

That makes three from tiny Miyazaki and two from MIC!

Let's talk about it a bit when we get more info. We might want to work together. I can introduce you to the techniques that Edge has developed for talk about teaching if you have an interest.

cheers, Tim

Yes, I thought we might be heading in the same direction when I talked with you before. This confirms it.

I met the Learner SIG crew at JALT.

I think they have me paired up with Etsuko (?), as she's doing something similar to me.

Anyhow, let's get together some time.

I'm in the US from 3rd Feb for a month.  
Steve

Steve,  
Thanks for sharing your ideas. I'm curious to see how they work out in real time. Probably the closest I've gotten to the portfolio model is in the use of student notebooks used for free and directed writing, notes, projects etc. On the content teaching side, they seem to be really useful. I still feel that I need to implement the English side a little better.  
As an English teacher, I'd like your ideas about appropriate feedback including language error corrections...how do you approach it?  
Debra

Debra:

You seem to be saying that the portfolios that I'm proposing to use will be useful for picking up on student errors. Actually, I'm not really looking at them that way. I want the students to get into the habit of thinking about how they are learning (or not learning). The idea is to develop some awareness of language learning strategies and to do some individual research and increase the sense that they are responsible for their own learning outcomes. If that makes sense.

Anyhow, more later.

Steve

Hi Etsuko:

My name is Steve Davies and I'm an English teacher at Miyazaki International College. Have you ever been to Miyazaki? We don't get much snow, but we do have a lot of cold wind blowing from the north in wintertime.

Anyway, it seems that we are both working on portfolios. Right now I'm still in the planning stage deciding about what I want the students to include. I'll be team-teaching a class called "Japan and Great Britain Relations" with a teacher called Micheal Thompson. He is a historian from England.

So please email me and then we can start collaborating in more detail.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Steve Davies

Dear Steve Davies,

Hello, this is Etsuko Shimo. I'm paired with you for the anthology project. As you might have seen in my self-introduction on the list, I am now teaching at two universities in Aichi-ken. I am living in Nagoya now, but am originally from Kagoshima, and visited Miyazaki many times. I liked it there very much! The mild weather, beautiful beaches, and nice people.

The integration of portfolio evaluation into my classes is still at the **experimental** level, but I am just hoping that I could find something useful or interesting that me and other teachers could consider for our future teaching...

I am very much interested in your students' portfolios in the content-based class.

Douzo yoroshiku onegai shimasu

Best regards,

Etsuko

Joe stopped reading. The Clarissa was alert. Joe could tell that she wanted to start the telepathic link. As the tentacle extended, he rolled his eyes back slowly and waited for the implant. The Clarissa juice numbed him with a soft, sweet blow. Then she was in his mind...

'So what did you think about the manuscript?'

'Interesting. But I didn't understand some parts.'

'For example?'

'Isn't it dangerous to give students freedom? They might just mess around. It could backfire. The Academy always stresses control and discipline.'

'Yes, I know that. I've read the manual. The Metakin have categorized every aspect of learning. The cognitive and psychomotor section even includes information on manipulation.'

'What's wrong with that?'

'Nothing, I suppose. But that manual is a product of Metakin culture. That's why it isn't working with the Naal.'

'But what the hell can I do? We can't implant them. It's forbidden. The Academy sets the rules. Anyway, I still don't see the point of this Steve guy's paper.'

'Joe, let me explain more clearly. I know his writing is a little vague or 'discursive' as I believed he called it. You've just read the part that showed you how the portfolios were designed. Well, the key words were experiment, freedom, reflection, collaboration, and expression. Those are the things that will help you on your mission.'

'How?'

'Joe, maybe I could just give you another implant? You seem to be missing so much.'

'No. I like to communicate directly with you. Besides what else is there to do? It'll take days to get to Gaauron 4.'

'All right, I'll go on. The Naal love writing.'

'I know that. My job is to get them to speak.'

'Yes, but what do they write? Do you know?'

'Usually, it's that religious stuff. Copying out their sacred scriptures. Those weird, ancient mythologies. That kind of thing.'

'That's true. So you have an opportunity.'

'For what?'

'To get them to write creatively. Let them express themselves. They can work with each other. They must be bored with all that formulaic writing. Try and make your teaching responsive to their needs,' (Tudor, 1996).

'What? You mean have them write ...stories?'

'Yes, if you like. Or personal journals. They can make portfolios. Win their trust. When they trust you, they'll listen to you. They may even teach you something.'

'Yeah? Well let me teach you something. I know all about autonomy.'

'Steve didn't mention autonomy.'

'You were taking about freedom, reflection, and taking responsibility. That adds up to autonomy.'

'Autonomy doesn't mean taking "responsibility."'

'How about this: "The individual is responsible for all of the decisions connected with her learning..."' (Dickinson, 1987).

'Joe!'

'What?'

'Listen to me. You're getting carried away. I can tell that you're very tired. Let's stop arguing. Is there anything I can do?'

'Yes. Send me a simulation, then maybe I can rest.'

'Okay.'

A small, fragmented image appeared in Joe's mind. It got larger and took shape. A classroom. The Naal. Writing in books. Then there was another image, something that a Naal had drawn. A shape. Unmistakeable. Suddenly Joe was scared. He waited for the Clarissa to regulate him.

'Joe, I'm sorry, but I wanted you to see that.'

'Why? What does it mean?'

'You'll soon find out.'

'Will I be punished for this? Exiled?'

'No.'

'But why me?'

'You have been chosen. That's all I can say for now.'

'But now you must rest. I'll send another simulation. We can talk again later.'

Joe was in a forest glade with Ruri. They were sitting near a deep river pool. They could see small fish in the water. Brightly coloured insects flew past them. Together, they listened to the sound of the water.

The simulation was intense and beautiful.

Then it began to fade away...

Joe slept deeply.

#### **A hot day on Gaauron 4**

Soon the workers would be arriving at the vast plantation of seragon trees. The early morning was the best time for harvesting the plasma, when the fresh dew was still on the outside of the fruit. Plasma apples needed careful handling. In fact, a ripe plasma apple was now worth 200 krojat on the galactic market. Surveillance devices constantly monitored the plantation.

Gswang, who was the security chief, had arrived early to check the data on the surveillance system in his office. Recently there had been more rumours of plasma raiders trying to get into the plantation, although no fruit had actually gone missing. And yet...

Gwsang sighed.

*I need to get this report finished. Everything seems to be okay. I'm so lucky that the boss is in bio-stasis. I wonder how Gana is getting on?*

Gwsang looked out of the window across the plantation towards the enormous white building in the distance. His son Gana was a student at the Institute. Gana had always been a good student. He was a conscientious, polite boy, and Gswang and his wife had been thrilled when Gana had won a place there.

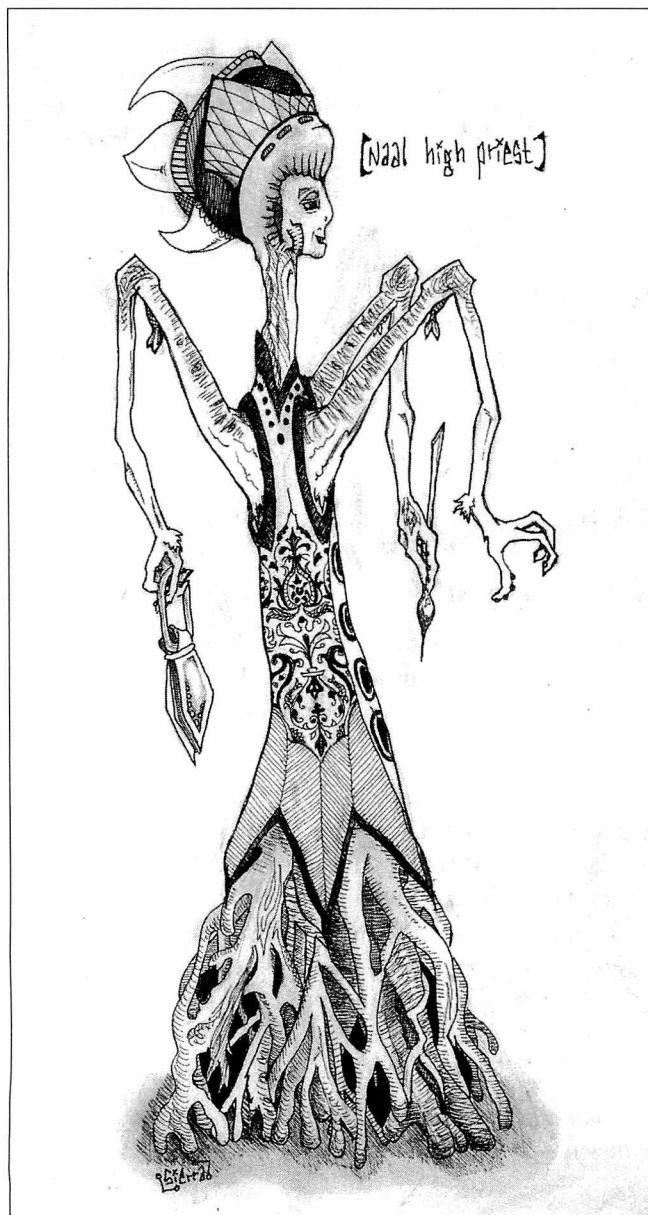
But somehow things were not going according to plan. There were a few troublemakers in Gana's class, and Gana seemed to be friends with some of them. He had even been implicated in the recent dismissal of the young Metakin teacher. Since then the study of *Talem* had been suspended, but the parents had been told that classes would soon begin again. Most of them were glad about that. Even though they mostly didn't understand *Talem*, they knew it was the language for the future. In fact, Gswang had just read in his newspaper that a new Metakin teacher called Joe Artemis was on his way to the Institute.

*Joe Artemis. That's an unusual name. I wonder what he's like? Is he a real, qualified teacher? Surely, this guy can't be as bad as the one they fired?*

Gwsang yawned. He looked back at the plantation. The first workers were arriving. The strong Gaauron suns would soon begin to dissolve the fresh dew on the plasma apples. Gwsang activated the solar shield. Its strange, long shadow began to spread across the trees. The workers looked up at the bright orange sky for the last time that day.

### Joe begins work at the Naal Language Institute

Joe's arrival on Gaauron 4 was uneventful. Apart from the usual problems with slow-moving workers at the space station, he'd had no further difficulties. In fact, he felt rather pleased with the way things were going.



His apartment was on the campus. It had a good view of the countryside. To stay in shape, he'd been taking regular early morning walks. The only problem he'd encountered was with the heavy dew, called '*sralah*' in the Naal language *Nakkachuk*. The dew could really mess up his circuits if he didn't take the necessary precautions. Luckily, Ruri had packed some lubricant cream for him.

The downside to life was all the surveillance. The Naal had cameras and tracking devices everywhere. They were terrified of plasma raiders and space vandals, who they thought were destroying the communication satellites that circled Gaauron's moon. This moon was called Gaauronya or 'Little Gaauron' in *Nakkachuk*. One of his students, Gana, had written a short poem in Talem about the moon in the first class with Joe. Joe had been so pleased with it that he'd made a copy of it and pinned it on his wall.

Bright moon, bright moon,  
I see you every day,  
Why do we hate you?  
Bright moon, bright moon  
I see you every day  
Why do we love you?



That first class had begun well. First, Joe introduced himself. He kept his Talem nice and simple. Then, he showed the students a picture of Orbit 1.

‘What’s this?’ one of them asked.

‘My home.’

‘You live here?’

‘Yes, with my girlfriend.’

There was a sudden surprised hissing in the room. Naal society had strict moral codes, and cohabitation was frowned on.

A few moments passed. Then another question.

‘You sex her?’

‘Yes!’

More loud hissing and slapping noises.

Suddenly the door de-sealed. The students fell silent.

Director Vogon walked in dragging his roots behind him.

‘What’s going on here? What’s all this noise? Open your notebooks and do some writing. Psalm 77. Mr. Artemis, this way please.’

Joe followed Vogon along the corridor.

*I’m in for it. Fired on the first day.*

‘Step inside.’

Vogon’s office was plush.

‘Sit down, Artemis.’

‘Listen, I’m sorry. I..’

‘No need to apologize to me. It’s the parents that I worry about. Can’t have them thinking we’re, umm, encouraging talk about that sort of thing. Not here.’

‘I understand.’

‘Do you? It seems that you’ve brought some unusual reading material with you from Talem’hea. Metakin archive material, if I’m not mistaken. We found this in your apartment. I assume you’ve been authorized to borrow it.’

Vogon pushed Steve’s manuscript *Learner Portfolios: Who Is at the Controls?* across the desk.

‘What were you doing poking around in my place?’

‘Just a routine search. Standard procedure with new arrivals. So where did you get this?’

‘A Clarissa gave it to me.’

‘I see. Probably the same Clarissa that I just talked to. Still it’s hard to tell with those spores. You never know where one ends and another begins. However, I do understand that your work has top-level clearance. But listen to me, Artemis.’

Vogon lowered his voice and looked directly at Joe.

‘Do what you have to do. Have them make portfolios if needs be. But I won’t have them listening to any more of your smutty stories. Do you hear me?’

‘Yes, I understand. Is that it?’ Joe stood up to leave.

‘Artemis!’

‘What is it?’

‘One more thing. Don’t forget the manuscript. I wouldn’t want the responsibility if it went missing. I know how valuable some of these ancient texts can be.’

‘Thanks.’

After a few more classes with the students, Joe decided to let them get started on their portfolios. He talked again with the Clarissa in a nearby restaurant called Mr. K’s. It was owned by a famous Naal novelist and cat lover. (After the demise of the human species, a Noah’s Ark of surviving animals had been hawked around the galaxy by deep space pirates. The Naal had taken a particular liking to cats. In fact, many Naal later became skilled as cat breeders.)

After finishing their lunch of cat pie and bottled sralah, Joe and the Clarissa decided on the contents of the portfolios:

- 1 Vocabulary
- 2 Lecture Notes
- 3 Learner Journal
- 4 Creative Writing

This format was loosely based on Steve’s ideas. But Joe was worried by something else he’d found in Steve’s manuscript. It had been written after Steve’s students had begun their portfolios.

**Tuesday 15 April**

**Collected in the portfolios today for the first time. Realised that the students haven’t understood at all about where to put their papers. The different categories i.e., ‘class notes,’ ‘writing’ don’t mean anything to them. Another problem: We need to follow the same order i.e., following the Western style of reading from the left. Also clearly put the date on the top of each sheet that goes into the portfolio. A couple of students are using the wrong kind of binder. Also, it now occurs to me that we might need much bigger portfolios than the ones they are using because of the number of handouts in the class. I wonder whether I should have some system of points awarded for organizing the portfolios?**

It seemed as though Steve had hit on some problems he’d not anticipated. Would it be that difficult to get the Naal students to organize their own work? Would they understand Joe’s instructions?

In fact, he needn’t have worried. The students liked the idea of portfolios. Joe hadn’t expected so much enthusiasm. Especially when they found out that he wouldn’t be giving them the usual daily tests. But they were very insistent on their own ideas about content.

‘No vocabulary!’

‘Why not?’

‘Boring!’

'Come on, vocabulary is important.'

'Boring! And no note-taking!'

'Why?'

'We like whole sentence, not notes.'

Joe realised that he'd have to compromise. In the end, the students' arguments convinced him to have just two sections:

Free Drawing

Free Writing

The portfolios would be assessed holistically at the end of the semester. The trade-off was that the students agreed to speak *Talem* to Joe whenever he had a question about their work. This worked well enough with most of them, but there were a few students who mostly stayed silent.

*At least they're not disrupting the class, Joe thought as he walked around the classroom. Some of this art work is actually pretty good. I really think I'm getting better at teaching. Maybe I'll put in for promotion when I get back to Talem'hea. Ruri will be amazed!*

The Naal students seemed to genuinely enjoy creative writing and often talked with Joe in *Talem* to ask him questions about something. For example, in one class, Joe had shown the students a picture of an extinct creature from the planet Earth as a prompt for their drawing. This creature was known as an 'octopus' in English. Joe knew, of course, that in *Talem* it was called a *baraho*, but he was very surprised to find that the Nakkachuk word for octopus was *bahaho*. Why were the words so similar?

That class had been a lot of fun, because the students were amazed by the picture of the octopus. Joe guessed that they noticed some similarity between the octopus' tentacles and their own highly dextrous fingers. But, they were really shocked when they found out that the octopus had never learned to speak, and spent most of its time hiding among rocks at the bottom of the ocean.

MEMO

Date: 17:13 5777

From: Vogon, Naal institute

To: Fenton, Talem'hea Academy.

Re: Artemis, Joe.

<This teacher is not using the textbook. He is encouraging creative thinking and writing. In short, I request that you order him to return or I'll fire him myself.>

President Vogon stared silently at the screen in front of him. What did Artemis think he was doing now?

*We've never had this kind of trouble before. Hell, some of those kids are even beginning to speak Talem. If the word gets out, we'll be overrun with Metakin linguists, educators, psychologists, and who knows what else. When will we ever be free of them? They're even talking about teaching us how to grow plasma. And we've been doing it for centuries...*

'I wouldn't send that message.'

Vogon turned round sharply. A Clarissa was standing behind him.

'How did you get in here?'

'Never mind. There's no time to waste. Look at Screen 6.'

Vogon looked at the monitor. It was relaying signals from Artemis' classroom. The students were sitting in small groups all drawing in their notebooks. Artemis was circling the room, or 'facilitating,' as he called it in his teaching reports.

'So? That idiot is up to his usual games.'

'Look at the screen again, Vogon. It might be your last chance.'

Joe was now standing very still. He was staring at a picture that a student had drawn. He

picked it up and looked at it very closely. Surprise and disbelief shot across his face. He ran out of the classroom.

'I have to leave,' said the Clarissa.

By the time Joe got back to his apartment the Clarissa was already waiting for him.

'Look at this!' he said.

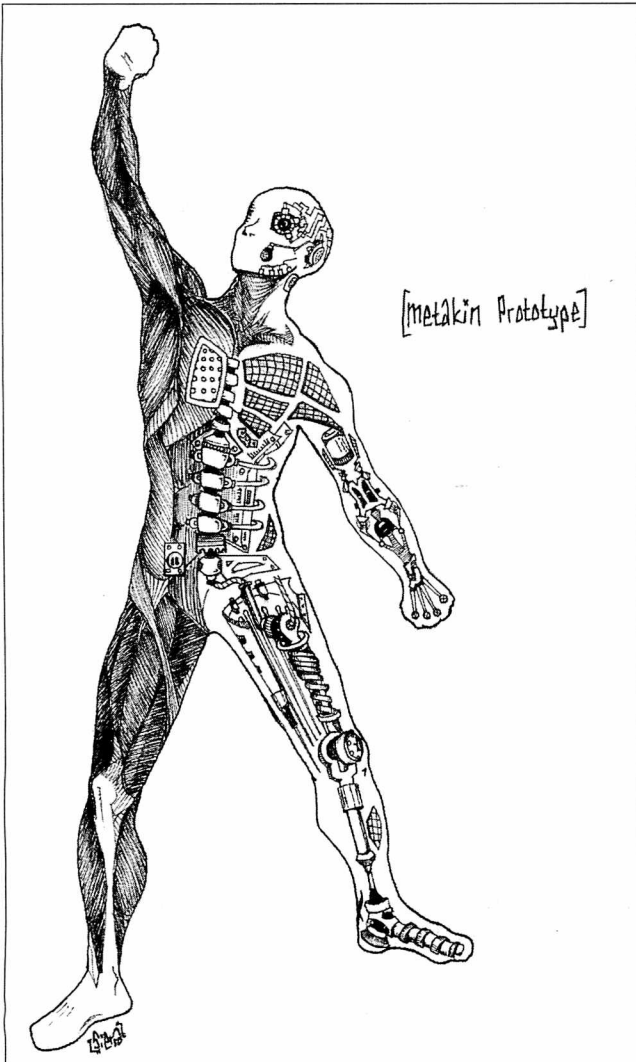
'I've seen it already.'

'What do you mean? This drawing is the same as a picture that I saw in an ancient manga text in the Academy archives. How could that Naal kid have drawn the same picture? Those sacred texts are secret. They tell of the origins of the Metakin, the first flesh/machine fusions, the trans-gendered worlds, the new consciousness...How could he know about those things?'

The Clarissa regulated Joe.

When he was calm, she extended her tentacle. She found the soft spot at the back of his head and pushed through into his soft brain core.

'Joe, there is something I have to tell



you. You have reached the end of your mission on Gaaaron 4.'

'Why? What's happening? You made me see that simulation in the transporter. You never explained what it meant.'

'Joe, try and be calm. Long, long ago things were very different. The Metakin were different too.'

'What do you mean?'

'The Metakin were mammals. Living on a different planet. On the Earth.'

'With the humans?'

'No, Joe. In the beginning you were humans. Then, much later, you evolved into the Metakin. We Clarissa were looking for a safe planet. We thought that the humans had potential as symbiotic hosts, but their world was very confusing for us. They were too aggressive. We tried to selectively breed out their dangerous characteristics, but we couldn't do it. We kept looking for a way forward, and then we found some Japanese manga comic books. That was the beginning of our interest in brain surgery and metal/flesh fusion. We bred many hybrids. Of course, most of them died, but one type mutated and developed the capacity to reproduce itself.'

'The Naal?'

'Yes, Joe. So you see you are related. We placed the Metakin and the Naal in different parts of the galaxy, but we had no idea that the Metakin would evolve so quickly. Then, when you learned about plasma enrichment, we knew you would soon discover the truth. In fact, we know that some leading Naal and Metakin scientists are already close to learning about their real origins.'

49:17: 5777

From the Clarissa consciousness:

Project DS777 is over.

1. Begin retro-evolution.
2. Recreate the Naal and Metakin as human beings.
3. Suspend other projects until work is completed.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

## RICHARD PEMBERTON

Wow! That was my reaction on finishing Steve's story, and I suspect it may have been yours as well. Unexpected stuff, indeed. How often are we transported to other worlds when reading an academic article?! And how often do images and scenes stay with us once the article is set aside? I suspect the Clarissa, Metakin, and Naal will be with me for some time.

This for me is the major contribution of Steve's chapter: It has (I think for the first time) shown me that an academic article can make me think and (*Heaven forbid*) be entertaining at the same time. As language learners and teachers, we know the importance of motivation for learning. But, Vogon-like, we tend to regard the academic world as one in which fun is somehow inappropriate. I also like the way Steve records the stages he (and Joe) went through in implementing a portfolio approach, mentioning problems faced along the way. Honest narratives such as these, which record the rough with the smooth, can provide fascinating insights into how autonomous learning has been carried out or promoted in particular contexts (e.g., Benson & Nunan, 2002; Karlsson, Kjisik, & Nordlund, 1997).

I mentioned that the chapter made me think, and that's clearly important, or we'd be left with the 'wow' factor and nothing else. For me the issues that resonated were: the controlling influences of the Metakin and Naal institutes—and how these can be worked around; the need for cultural sensitivity—and at the same time, the need to avoid cultural stereotyping, and believing that cultures are immutable; the importance of reflection (highlighted by Steve—although apparently absent from the portfolio components negotiated by the Naal students?); and the success that can ensue when portfolios reflect the aims of the learners rather than of the institution (e.g., Elbow & Belanoff, 1997). I would have liked to hear more about the negotiation involved in getting the portfolio approach accepted by Steve's own institution, or of his feelings about taking risks within his institutional culture. But there's clearly a trade-off in terms of how much 'real-world' information you can provide when creating an involving imaginary world. Perhaps that's something for future reports.

My final thought is that we may have been too restrictive about what we consider acceptable in research articles. I applaud Steve for writing the paper, and Mike and Andy for publishing it, and look forward to a wider range of genres in future learner autonomy publications. What form might such pieces take, and what is the most appropriate balance between entertaining and promoting reflection? Mm, time for a telepathic link with a Clarissa ...



## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

CATH MALONE

I really enjoyed reading this innovative approach to writing about teaching and learning. Steve's use of a narrative to explore these issues is intriguing. The futuristic setting gives him a freedom to fully explore what it really means to be a foreign teacher of English in Japan, 2003. The way he uses humour, the futuristic setting: The sci-fi story succeeds most for me in describing aspects of "cross-cultural communication, dynamics of power, and willingness to take risks" in the classroom. These are defining aspects of the context in which we find ourselves. And, in spite of his disclaimer, there's an authenticity to many aspects of his story that I am sure will ring true with many teachers across Japan.

Steve at the outset describes the evolution of the format of this paper. He describes a collaborative process of course design, which gives the students greater control over what and how they study and are assessed. By allowing his students greater freedom, Steve begins to explore creative opportunities himself. The format of this piece itself demonstrates the reflexive nature of the relationship between student autonomy and teacher autonomy. This resonates with my own experience of attempts to foster student autonomy. When teachers explore new ways in the language classroom, which allow learners greater control, this often results in a creative surge which can be infectious.

In terms of exactly how and why portfolios are used and who is at the controls, I was left with a number of questions. I was particularly curious about the process of negotiation and the position the teacher Joe/Steve is negotiating from. Original objectives regarding language study, learning to learn more effectively and the content of the Japan/Great Britain studies course appear to fall by the wayside. Why? Do these not appeal to the students? Do the students understand them? Is the teacher convinced that these are worthwhile objectives? The students determine the portfolio contents, and there's no language component, although students agree to talk in class in the target language. Does the teacher assess use of language in class? What happens with the learners who don't talk? Is it enough that this results in classes that are "fun" and that "Hell, even some of those kids learn to speak Talem," (for which we may read English). It's difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of portfolio use without more detail about the course objectives.

Similarly, Steve suggests that "portfolios don't lend themselves to quantifiable evaluation," which I would agree with. However, I would like to know more about holistic evaluation of portfolios that are based on compilations of free writing and free drawing. Again the question that occurs to me is: What is this course trying to achieve? There is a neat counterpointing of characters in the story, which polarizes the notion of control being located either with the teacher or the learners. As a function of the narrative, it seems an either/or proposition. This is where I think the effectiveness of the story may work against Steve's purpose of describing how the course evolved, how portfolios worked for him, and why were they a success.

Perhaps I perceive autonomy as a means rather than an end in itself. I conceive of autonomous learning as a means of gaining ownership of intellectual material. It is a way of helping learners grapple with new information and relate it meaningfully to what they already know—make it in some way their own. The larger objective is concerned with the democratization of learning. There is however the need to understand (and, because we work at universities, demonstrate that you understand) that material, the content of the course.

There is also an important function of becoming part of an intellectual community.

The resolution of the story suggests a need to value the 'other,' to be open to different worldviews, and different ways of learning. I would like to see closer examination of that delicate balance where a new relationship is struck between student and teacher as they decide how to learn together. *And where exactly does Joe go from here?*