

Making It More Real: Portfolios, Teacher Training, and Autonomy



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This paper describes the use of portfolios on a teacher training course for pre-service Japanese teachers of English. It includes a case study of one student's portfolio and a follow-up interview before and after a 3-week teaching practice placement at a local junior high school.

本章は教職につく前の日本人英語教員養成課程におけるポートフォリオの使用について議論する。ここではある学生のポートフォリオの事例研究と、ある公立中学における3週間の教育実習前後に行なわれた追跡インタビューを取り上げる。

INTRODUCTION

It was 9.50 on a Tuesday, a mid-morning in June. The classroom was packed with 33 twelve-year-olds, and five observers. Each child was sitting at an individual wooden desk on a rather uncomfortable wooden chair. The desks were crammed with books, a PE kit hanging at the side. There was little room to move between the desks, so the teacher, Y, who was now in the third week of her teaching practice, generally stayed at the front on the low podium.

The period just starting was English, and for the next 50 minutes, Y took the class through a variety of activities: explanation of vocabulary in Japanese, some drilling, a quick written exercise, a group mingle and match-up activity. But what the students did constantly for the next 50 minutes was fidget: with books, pens, erasers, their bags, each other's hair, uniforms, the furniture, with everything and anything. Over on the left, I notice there's a group of girls having an animated if subdued conversation. Elsewhere, some students are doodling, others scribbling in diaries, a couple flicking through their books in a desultory fashion, one boy working intently on the next chapter. Near the front, one boy gives another a dead-arm punch and spins round to see if the teacher is watching: no, safe. Thirty-three kids with ants in their pants, and a constant fidgeting like a low hum.

Throughout the class, Y at the front was pleasant and friendly, or sometimes distracted dealing with an individual student. From my position at the back of the class, at times this felt like being stuck in a crowd when you can't quite see the parade going on at the front. After a while with the sun coming in, the chalk in the air, a lull before lunch, and you stopped trying.

After observing Y, a student from my teacher training course, teach one class during her teaching practice at a Tokyo junior high school, I find myself re-considering a number of fundamental issues about teaching, about how teachers can reflect on their own practice, and about my own role as a British teacher trainer working with pre-service English teachers in Japan. I'm convinced that the challenges that Y faced are similar to those faced in classes the world over. The problem we all have is figuring out how to engage students, and gain and keep their attention. As a teacher trainer observing this lesson, I felt that there were a number of things that I could suggest to help Y to maximize student participation and reduce the time she spent addressing the class. However, I wasn't sure whether these techniques would be considered culturally inappropriate (by a trainee teacher planning to work in the Japanese school system), or whether the 'solutions' I could offer were really just tinkering with the problem. The fundamental issue seemed that the classroom is so completely the teacher's space. The ball is so firmly in the teacher's court that it's the teacher running the show, and *that* power relationship remains the same in my classes. Whether we are novice or experienced teachers, teacher trainees or trainers, how can we learn to observe our own teaching so that we can make effective decisions about how to improve how our students learn?

This chapter is an account of my attempts to address some of these issues in my teacher training course at a university in Tokyo, by asking students to keep portfolios as a record of their developing understanding of what effective teaching entails. In using portfolios on this course, I had two parallel aims. I had to deal with a lack of engagement in my own teaching context: I too was faced by rows of antsy pantsy students. And I wanted to make their teaching practice and their developing conception of teaching the focus of the course. In using a portfolio to gather their work, I hoped to put the ball more firmly in the students' court.

The chapter starts with part of my post-course reflection with my collaborative partner, Andy Barfield, on using portfolios on a teacher training course. Through reflecting on how I had structured the portfolios in the previous academic year, I look at the strengths

and weaknesses of the portfolio in detail, based on the analysis of one student's work. This analysis leads into parts of an interview I conducted with the same student, Y, pre- and post-her teaching practice placement. This short case study of one of my students allows us an intriguing glimpse of her development as she moves from university student to trainee teacher at a junior high school. The final part of the chapter concludes with a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of my use of portfolios on the course in this process of development.

DEVELOPING PORTFOLIOS FOR A TEACHER TRAINING COURSE

TEACHER TRAINING COURSE CONTEXT

The course I taught, *Introduction to TESOL*, was the second 12-week semester of a yearlong course for trainee English language teachers. This was an elective for 18 third- and fourth-year English majors, and the class met once a week for 90 minutes in the evening. As English majors, the students can specialize in Literature, Linguistics or Pedagogy. The students on this course had all taken the teaching track, which involved taking a number of mainly theoretical courses about teaching. Although this kind of specialism does not result in students gaining a teaching licence—this happens later through on-the-job training—most of the students had firm plans to become English language teachers. They wanted to work in public sector elementary, junior and senior high schools, although a couple were considering work in private cram schools. We had little opportunity for teaching practice on the course itself, but many of these students were planning to complete a 3-week teaching practice in one of their former schools after the course ended.

DEFINITION AND RATIONALE FOR A PORTFOLIO

When I refer to a portfolio in this context, I'm referring to a working portfolio (Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997): a collection of worksheets, interview notes, and observation tasks completed over the course of a 12-week term. The purposes of the portfolio were to act as a record of work and to provide a concrete written record that would hopefully facilitate student reflection on their work. The portfolio would also offer a more student-centred means of assessment.

Among my specific reasons for choosing a portfolio format was getting the students observing language classrooms, and their own teaching, and building a reflective record of their teaching development. However, I wasn't initially sure what form the observation tasks would take. I needed to find out what skills the students possessed at the beginning of the course and how they responded to classroom tasks before I could choose the tasks that I thought might help them. So, the observation tasks evolved over the course of the term. The final list of worksheets and mini-assignments that we ended up with is shown in Table 1 below.

The tasks listed in Table 1 were not set sequentially as they appear there. The tasks concerning prior experience were completed in class in the first couple of weeks. The German lesson observations acted as a kind of needs analysis. I taught three 15-minute slots in the first month and used the results of the students' observations as a guide for the rest of the course. The first micro-teaching was a 10-minute slot where the participants had to teach their classmates something, not necessarily language. These happened in the first half of the semester. The observation of native speaker language teachers was set fairly early on, but the students conducted these observations in their other classes in their own time. For the final micro teaching, three or four students taught their classmates an hour's English with

material from an EFL textbook. The extended reading was a report on reading a graded reader themselves, and the final report was their review of the course and their portfolio, obviously set at the end of the course.

Table 1 Overview of Portfolio Tasks

Section 1: Prior Experience Experience as a Teacher My Most Memorable Teacher
Section 2: German Lesson Observations Observation 1 Observation 2 Observation 3
Section 3: Micro Teaching 1
Section 4: Observing Native Speaker Language Teachers 1. Interaction Patterns 2. Teacher/Student Relationships 3. Student Perspective 4. Language of Classroom Management 5. Aims of Different Activities of the Lesson
Section 5: Micro Teaching 2 1. Lesson Plan 2. Lesson Self Observation 3. Peer Observation
Section 6 Extended Reading Final Report

After the course, I discussed with Andy some of my aims in developing the portfolio component of the course.

Andy: Portfolios: What made it obvious for you? Is that connected with the range or the keenness or class size or your own experience of using portfolios already?

Cath: A bit of everything really, but this question brings us back to the objective of the course. Given such a short time frame, I wanted to give the students some first-hand experience of teaching, and to fine-tune their ability to observe and reflect on what happens in language classrooms. I think that's because I see these as key skills for an autonomous teacher, which means, I suppose, that helping my students become autonomous is my ultimate objective. Using a portfolio for assessment allowed me to make their reflective and observational skills the focus of the course. It's not the end result, but the process that is of interest to me—the practice rather than the theory.

Andy: One question that strikes me is: What would you be interested in looking for in the portfolios?

Cath: Basically, what I'm looking for is a peek into the students' heads: So much goes on in the classroom that I'm not privy to, and this is an attempt to find out a little more. It may also shed some light on the relationship between what I teach and what the students learn—there sometimes appears to be a tenuous relationship here. I would also like to see how their ideas change, if at all, in the course of the semester. The content of the portfolio is really a collection of observation tasks, where I wanted to see if the nature and quality of their observational skills improved at all.

There was also quite a range of teaching experience and language ability. I felt portfolios would give everyone a fairer chance to demonstrate their skills. The teaching experience ranged from one slightly older student who had worked as a teacher of Japanese in the U.S. to quite a few with zero teaching experience. A number of students had some experience in cram schools of one-to-one or small group teaching. For a class entitled *Introduction to TESOL*, equally important was the range in the students' command of English, as this class and their teaching practice were to be done in English. Very quickly it became clear that there was a wide range in language abilities from advanced to pre-intermediate, and that a couple of students might struggle to teach in English...

PUTTING THE PORTFOLIO INTO ACTION

I began the portfolio observation tasks with three small time slots by teaching the students some German. These 15-minute mini lessons served a number of purposes. Firstly, to get the students to re-experience being beginner learners, they were also given the experience of being taught solely in the target language. I was also modeling what I would broadly describe as communicative, student-centred, task-based teaching. In each class I modeled different techniques that we had read about and discussed (drilling, eliciting) and tried to make sure the students spent most of the class time on task rather than listening to me.

For the first two weeks the students were given a very simple observation task on one side of A4:

What did the teacher do?	What did the students do?	How did you feel?
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These initial observation tasks were very opened-ended, and my response to student performance of these early tasks was significant in the development of my thinking about the course and the portfolios. The tasks were used as a kind of needs analysis, the results of which determined the rest of the course. Reflecting on the students' observations here led me to encourage more focused observation and really make their observation of language classrooms—their own, their classmates', and their teachers'—a focus of their portfolio.

As the course progressed and the portfolios developed, I was faced with the question of whether to look across the whole group of trainees, or whether to look more closely at one individual student. I chose to look at one student, Y, in depth partly because of the sheer volume of material the portfolios generated. This would, I hope, let me look in more detail at the themes that developed from her work.

INITIAL INSIGHTS FROM Y'S PORTFOLIO

Y was a fourth-year English major at a Tokyo university. She had specialized in teaching and had plans to become an elementary school teacher. For administrative reasons, she was unable to complete her teaching practice at an elementary school at prefectural level. I had taught Y

previously and always found her to be a serious, hard working, and conscientious student. She appeared to be a typical mid-range student in this class, and her work exemplified some of the best that happened. Her portfolio shows that she had a little experience of teaching prior to this course; it also illustrates a number of interesting challenges that relate to using a portfolio.

Some of the key questions for me here are: How much should I respond to the students' observations during the course? How much should I direct or structure the observation tasks? And how can I encourage students to develop their observations into more reflective insights about effective teaching?

VOLUME

First of all, Y's portfolio generated a lot of material, which can create logistical problems for the teacher. In my case, this meant lugging around an increasingly weighty folder. More significantly, I felt there was so much that was asking for a response. During the course, we were so busy compiling the portfolio that I didn't feel as if there was time for feedback and reflection. Reviewing the folders after the course, I felt there was a much greater need for more timely interventions and, possibly, tutorials. On the one hand, it felt like reading one half of a dialogue with my half missing. On the other, I wondered if I was clinging to inappropriate teacher behaviour, in feeling the need to respond to everything they said. This for me was something of an experiment, trying to step back and let go a little. I was very conscious from the outset that a major purpose of the portfolios was to give the students space to develop their own conception of teaching, and not simply re-hash mine. This meant reigning in my automatic instinct to correct and reformulate. During the course and later in review, I still feel a little unsure as to how much response is appropriate.

RANGE OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Looking in more detail at the portfolios, one thing that struck me initially was the range of student performance in response to the same task. Comparing Y's observations of a German class with those of her classmates, it is clear that Y can divide a 15-minute class into a number of stages and identify a number of different student activities. From this, I think we can see that Y started the course with fairly accurate observational skills. She also shows that she is sensitive to the different ways the class is organized, and can monitor her own feelings in these different situations. In comparison, one of her classmates wrote a one-line observation of the whole class, observing that, "Teacher taught, students learnt and it was fun." Such mixed results really stood out from the German observations and made me question why there was a diversity of observational insight across the class. This issue, and my thoughts about how I could develop the portfolios to address it, became increasingly important through the rest of the course.

In the post-course review with Andy, I touched on some of the issues that the quality of the finished portfolios was raising for me:

Cathy: This was a new format for a number of students and many lacked confidence in their own observations. I find it tricky to get the right balance and provide the students with sufficient support to complete the task, without over-modeling and directing their answers.

Andy: Why would that be?

Cathy: I really am not sure—it was interesting to read their final reports because it's difficult to assess from the class quite where everyone is. My instincts from the class

would be that it depends on a certain confidence to be objective about your performance and analyse what you have just done. Age and degree of social confidence with their peers also have an obvious role here. But then some of the quieter students had some very interesting observations. There were a number of students whose observation skills certainly improved, but whose reflections were rather limited. Why there's such a difference puzzles / interests me. Why does the portfolio work for some students, eliciting genuine deep reflection and analysis, while for others, although they have nominally completed all the tasks, I feel we're just skimming the surface?

STRUCTURING TASKS

Each portfolio raised very different questions, and the things that struck the students as significant were enormously varied. A massive amount of interpretation of tasks meant there were rarely two similar responses to the same task. From this, I initially concluded that the portfolio needed to be standardized with many of the worksheets and tasks much more explicitly structured. For example, I tried to structure the third observation task for the German class to guide students who were writing one-line observations for the first two lessons. So the task changed from an open-ended descriptive task to a series of questions for the learner to answer. While this offered more guidance, it also unintentionally made the task more closed, and this resulted in Y actually writing substantially less than in the first two observation tasks.

This range in student responses could simply be an intrinsic part of the nature of portfolios. I look at these comments now and think that perhaps they are part of my own disquiet at being more hands off. If you allow the students to compile their own portfolios, then it's simply unrealistic to expect a uniform response to open-ended tasks, or to expect everyone to be firing on all cylinders for all 12 weeks.

There is also the problem of developing the students' capacity to reflect more critically on their experiences, rather than simply observe them, within the limited timeframe of the 12-week course. Several teachers pointed this out in their feedback following the June Anthology Retreat at Momoyama University. Steve Brown commented, for example: "Developing autonomy may not happen in a short period of time like that—maybe it comes through reflection much later, i.e., not immediately after the experience of your course and her teaching practice." These comments made me think more about the kinds of portfolio tasks that were most effective for encouraging reflection.

IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTIVE TASKS

Looking again at Y's work, in places I felt I was really tapping into her thoughts and ideas; in other places, I looked at her limited responses, knowing that she's a thoughtful, responsive student, and came to the conclusion that somehow I had not been asking the right questions. For example, we can compare Y's initial observations of the German classes with her analysis of these at the end of term. For the earlier task, she gives a detailed observation of what took place in class and a summary of how she felt taking part in the various activities. These comments are generally positive, but also short and fairly superficial.

Lesson 1: How did you feel? *It was funny and a kind of game. I enjoyed a interesting time.*

Lesson 2: How did you feel? *It seemed a little difficult to remember the phrases and sentences we learned only one time.*

In comparison, at the end of term, I asked for a course review and left it very open-ended simply asking for 250 words. Y's feelings about these classes are much clearer here.

Final Report

What I loved most was the German lessons. I have often heard the style of teaching with only the target language, through the teaching programme classes I have experienced until now. I don't know however it is good or bad. To be sure it was fun, but there seems to be a kind of limitation only by the style of teaching. I think above all that most of Japanese students may feel anxious and uncomfortable. As for the teachers they might worry whether the students could really understand or not. It is still a difficulty that it is suitable for the Japanese students and even for the Japanese teachers.

What strikes me now is that the first few tasks for the portfolio required observation only, and the more I structured these tasks, the less Y produced. Y clearly has thoughts and ideas about relating her experiences (as a language teacher and a learner during this course) to the broader context of teaching in Japan. She seems to be anticipating her future job and constantly filtering her experiences, asking "Yes, that's fun, but will it work in a Japanese school?"

However, it is only at the end of the course, in a very unstructured assignment, that she feels it is appropriate to include these thoughts. The problem here, in Y's case then, is, I feel, the lack of explicitly reflective and more open-ended tasks in the portfolio.

SCAFFOLDING OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION

Some students like Y could already make useful observations about teaching but needed, I think, more practice looking at language classrooms and analyzing what they could see going on there. Other students, however, clearly needed some assistance in developing their observational skills before they could become more reflective. This question of how to scaffold the development of observational and reflective skills for a class of students starting with such a range of abilities was one that I had also begun to explore in the post-course reflection.

Andy: How did you set the reflection tasks for the students?

Cath: Some observation tasks were simple 'observe and record tasks.' Others were more reflective. For example, when observing *Interaction Patterns*, the students had to keep a record for one 90-minute class period of how much time was spent with the teacher talking or the students working silently, or involved in group or pair work. This was followed up by a discussion in class about teacher and student talking time. In this case, the task did not ask students for reflection and synthesis of ideas—this happened later in the post-task discussion. This contrasts with the worksheet on the *Language of Classroom Management*. For this, the students were asked to record, again in one 90-minute period, the instructions given by a teacher. They were then asked to "generalize about what characterizes effective, efficient instructions." Similarly, the *Peer Observation* task finishes with a question about what they learned from watching their classmates teach.

Separating the observation and reflection was tricky—I asked the students to make notes in class as to what actually happened, and this was often done in Japanese. Then the next day or later, following a group discussion, they wrote up their observation tasks. I hoped that this time lapse and the discussion would prompt the students to begin to reflect and not simply to record.

Re-thinking later the unclear line between observation and reflection has therefore become very important for me. It could be that, rather than standardize the portfolio tasks, what I needed to do was to include more regular opportunities for reflection and evaluation. This is clearly suggested by a comparison of Y's comments on the native-speaker teacher's class in the observation tasks and in her final report. For the five observation tasks in this part of the portfolio, Y, like many of her classmates, completes the activity fully, but stops short of really synthesizing the ideas. Take, for example, her notes on the patterns of interaction between the teacher and students:

Interaction Patterns

Task: At 15-minute intervals, draw a diagram of the classroom showing the interaction patterns.

(Diagram of a lecture format)

Basically the class was done like this form all the time. He lectured, explained, and wrote on the blackboard the sample answers of the practice which we had done.

What percentage of the time was the teacher speaking? 100%

What % were the students speaking/on task? 10%

Y has clearly observed this class, but I have no real idea what she thinks about it. In the final report, however, she reflects much more clearly on what she has learned from this observation:

Final Report

The lesson observation, which I had done, was not fruitful so much for me. Because the teaching style taken in that class was completely the style of the lecture for the university students. Therefore the relationship between the teacher and the students, of course, looked one way.

We were often imposed some tasks during the class, so we had to listen the teacher's instruction to do them. I think the students relatively gave the attention to the teacher's speaking. However, this is not what I am aiming at. There were student attention, but I don't think student involvement. To get student involved is very difficult. It was not until when I tried teaching that I recognized it as real.

Having reflected on and talked through these issues, it now seems to me that the portfolio can be divided into blocks, and that each cycle of work needs to cumulate in an explicitly reflective task that is recorded. This would encourage students like Y to synthesize and build their own theories of learning and teaching more explicitly at intervals throughout the course, rather than just in the final report at the end. As my own understanding of the relationship between observation and reflection develops, so I am less convinced that being able to demonstrate accurate observation is an absolute prerequisite for reflection. However, I can see the need to offer all the students regular opportunities to reflect on their experiences.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

I felt on reading the portfolios that my students were constantly foregrounding the personal. It occurred to me again and again how sensitive the students were to the personal dynamics of the classroom. Looking in detail at some of the themes that emerge from the portfolios also raises questions for me about the differences between my perspective as an experienced teacher and that of the students as novice teachers. It also leads to questions of differences in our cultural backgrounds. I felt their perception of teaching and the experience of being in class were much more holistic than my own. In contrast, I feel much more adept at focusing on certain aspects

of the classroom and filtering out others. It strikes me that they are *interaction-focused*, while I am *teaching-focused*.

This I felt very clearly when looking at one of the early tasks where the students write about an influential teacher. From the portfolios, it appeared to me as if the students were unable to separate the activity of teaching, what the teacher does, from the personality of the teacher. Like many of the students, Y's description of her Russian teacher describes a person whose personality, in this case her enthusiasm, is intrinsically linked to her being perceived as a good teacher.

My Best Teacher

I think my Russian teacher is the best teacher I have ever met....she of course loves Anna Karenina. She loves Russia enthusiastically. When she talks to us about something related to Russia, she vividly interests and attracts us to it in the voice filled out with her love to Russia. The passion is communicated to us.

Similarly, while Y is an accurate observer of other people's classes and can distinguish different stages and activities, her evaluation of her own teaching is much more holistic. Consequently, in reflection on her own lesson of peer teaching her classmates, Y comes to the conclusion that the lesson was a complete disaster: That it was "only failure." She couldn't identify any successful parts of the lesson and only with difficulty discerned the least successful part. Almost every aspect of the class is described in negative terms: The items on the blackboard were "too few," the "purpose was obscure," "I should have improved my English," and "I couldn't do as I imagined." She maintained she "had no idea" whether the students had enjoyed the class, and she thought they seemed bored. Certainly, in my observation of this lesson, I saw that there were things that could be improved, but I could also isolate what I thought was the poor planning and find something positive in other aspects of the lesson. However, Y seemed unable to distinguish the successful from the unsuccessful and concluded that it was a comprehensive disaster. This, I think, is common for novice teachers.

This overwhelmingly negative appraisal could be a reflection of Y's lack of confidence at this stage in her teaching. Or it could be that teaching is such a precarious thing for a novice teacher that, when you lose your hold of one aspect of the lesson, it feels as if the whole show comes to a grinding halt. Indeed, from your perspective, it is a complete disaster. In looking at her focus on personality in her description of her best teacher and the undifferentiated analysis of her own teaching, I can see that Y has a very different perspective to mine. Similarly, I found her reflections on the German language lesson quite disconcerting at first. She records accurately enough what actually happened, with 80% of class time being spent with the students on task. However, in her interpretation of these events, she is unsure about their appropriacy for a Japanese context, and maintains that, "It is still a difficulty that it is suitable for the Japanese students and even for the Japanese teachers."

This is radically at odds with my own perception of the same events. Firstly, the extent to which students use the language is to me a fairly good yardstick with which to evaluate your own teaching. Secondly, I have used these techniques and seen them used very successfully in Japanese high schools. Her comments disconcerted me because they questioned some fundamental assumptions I hold about language teaching. They also brought into focus the differences of our perspectives. Not only the obvious novice teacher - experienced teacher difference, but the importance for Y of the cultural difference between us.

In contrast to Y's focus on the personality and demeanor of the teacher, I felt like a dry theoretician, much more concerned with methodology and with the mechanics of what's happen-

ing in the class. I also began to discern a distinct difference in our objectives. My ideal teacher is really a facilitator, because what I find admirable is the skill, efficiency, and effectiveness with which they get their students to produce to the best of their ability. There's a certain distance between teachers and students because the job of the teacher is not to inspire, but to enable and empower. My students, on the other hand, appeared to have as an ideal a much closer teacher-student relationship where the personality, demeanor, and behaviour of the teacher are much more significant. Perhaps their perspective on the classroom as novice teachers was really more that of student than teacher, and so for them personal interaction takes priority.

Cultural differences concerning tolerance of ambiguity, the tenor of the student-teacher relationship, and the desirability of certain language learning behaviours may all play a part here. However, what may also be at play are some subtle but key differences in perceptions of the appropriacy of teacher and student autonomy. It occurred to me that I had been assuming that we shared the unsaid objective of fostering autonomy in our language classrooms. This was an assumption, however, that I couldn't later assume was shared. While I looked at classrooms and saw things in terms of autonomous learning and transmission teaching, for my students the key distinction was between Japanese and foreign teaching practices. I suspected that there was a kind of tissue rejection (Holliday, 1994) of communicative teaching practices as something 'foreign.' This indicates to me the need to establish a shared meta-language to discuss student autonomy. If I want these novice teachers even to consider experimenting with and evaluating new ways of organizing the language classroom, we have to be able to talk about what goes on in language classrooms, the participants, their roles, and so on.

Whatever the root causes of this difference, one of the best things for me as a teacher about reading through the portfolios was this feeling of having my assumptions and beliefs about teaching challenged. This simply doesn't happen in class. So, in contrast to the forum of the classroom, I feel the portfolio creates a space which allows the students to begin to formulate their own ideas, and allow us both to reflect on them.

INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWING Y

Having reviewed Y's portfolio, I felt that it raised more questions than it answered. In particular, I was intrigued by her comments about the cultural appropriacy of techniques and approaches. Knowing that Y was about to embark on her teaching practice in a junior high school, I was interested to see how this would influence Y's ideas about portfolios. I also wanted to see if I could glean any insights into her own developing sense of teacher autonomy. Consequently, I decided to interview Y as a follow up to the portfolio project before and after her teaching practice, which took place the following spring term.

During interviews the following term, conducted pre- and post-teaching practice placement, Y had a number of interesting comments to make regarding the course. Before the teaching practice she had little to say about the portfolio and couldn't really assess which of the courses she had taken on her degree had helped her, other than to express a general preference for practical classes. However, post teaching, Y was much clearer about how the portfolio had assisted her.

- C: Do you think there are any benefits of using a portfolio for a course rather than a traditional exam?
- Y: Yea, it's (an) interesting idea because the exam is just (an) exam. It can't give me any feedback so probably after I took the exam I will forget. So if I make some portfolio it remains in me. It's more useful.

C: Are there any disadvantages or drawbacks to using a portfolio for a course rather than a traditional exam?

Y: Just it's hard. Usually it's just hard.

C: Do you think it helped you in any way clarify your own ideas about teaching? How? Why?

Y: It draws me more, it drives me to teaching. If I don't do this, there is nothing to encouraged me to teaching. It makes the teaching more real. Because I'm a student so I don't know the details of teaching. So what is teaching? Maybe I don't clarify what is teaching? As I make some papers for portfolio, I can recognize what is teaching.

She also developed a much clearer, more practical idea of what was and wasn't useful for her classes.

C: How well do you think the teacher training courses at university prepared you for this teaching situation?

Y: A little yea.

C: Why?

Y: Because (what) I learned from the classes is, it's (a) kind of theory. It's not designed for actual students, actual situation.

C: So you learned theory at university but the reality ...?

Y: Yes, is different. And I think that all kinds of students at university are not adapted to the theory.

C: What theories did you learn here?

Y: I was told the style of teaching, but those were designed for the good students. (When) all students are listening and pay attention to the teacher, maybe it's good working. But what I learned are not adapted the students who fidget.

C: What parts of the teacher training course were directly useful to you for your day to day teaching? Can you give me an example?

Y: I saw maybe a video she, a female practice teacher, she is so (mimes hiding something) "What is this?" and students asked. Students guess. That kind of concept.

C: What parts of the teacher-training course were not directly useful to you for your day to day teaching?

Y: As I said the theory is not so useful. And also that teaching style for the good students.

I think this excerpt clearly demonstrates how Y's theoretical idealizations about teaching had met the hard reality of a class of 12-year-olds, with concerns other than learning English. They don't simply respond to the teacher, or sit, passive and attentive, waiting to be inspired. They come to class with fully formed personalities and their own preferences, motivations, and interests.

STUDENT AND TEACHER AUTONOMY

Prior to teaching, Y had little to say directly concerning teacher and student autonomy. In the first interview, she asked me to define these terms and attempted to apply them to her own

context. There is clearly a need here to establish a shared vocabulary or meta-language to discuss these issues effectively. This is still a problem in the second interview where Y identifies a new, weekly general studies lesson as the place for developing student autonomy. Y appears to conceive of student autonomy as almost a separate subject, rather than as an approach to learning that can be applied to any learning environment. Whereas learner autonomy is being introduced at a curriculum level in Japan, I suspect that it is also being relegated to last period on a Friday, being grafted very awkwardly onto a very traditional school environment. The interviews showed that Y's concept of autonomous learning is still embryonic: She has a theoretical definition, but few practical, actual examples.

In spite of this lack of a shared vocabulary, in the second interview, Y had a lot to say about her changing perception of the students and teachers at junior high school. Obviously, it was a memorable experience. Introducing and attempting to define the terms together seemed to help a lot, and, when we revisited these definitions in the light of her experience, she had much more to say. I felt that this capacity to re-think perceptions was an element of Y's developing teacher autonomy.

Before teaching, she was given the impression that the students were "so calm," while, after teaching, she had a very different idea.

C: What were the students at that school like?

Y: The students were ... How do you describe ADHD?

C: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?!

Y: How do (you) describe the situation where this kind of thing (*mimes fidgeting*) (happens)?

C: Well this is very, *very* extreme.

Y: Kind of (*mimes fidgeting*). The students can't focus. They can't concentrate. It was difficult for them to sit all 1 hour class. They are so... (*mimes fidgeting, she looks it up*) fridget? Fidget?

C: Do you think the students at this JHS tried to concentrate?

Y: *No!* (emphatic) *Not* enough, because they *don't* like to study.

This had an impact on her ideas about what makes a good English language teacher:

C: Have your ideas about what makes a good junior high school teacher changed? How? Why?

Y: It's (a) difficult definition.

C: I think before you said a good JHS makes the students love English and is friendly to the students.

Y: To be sure I became friendly but some of them still didn't become come to like English so ... mmm...

C: So your ideas have changed a little bit, why?

Y: Because the students, the unmotivated students are not interested in the English class. So, if I love English it's not important to them. The important thing for them (is) the way how the English classes are presented. For them it's (the) important thing.

And later she made a similar comment.

Y: I thought the level was so higher than the level of the actual students. But that was in vain. The thing interesting to me is *not*, is *not* necessarily interesting for them.

Whereas, before teaching, Y defined a good teacher almost solely in personal terms, after teaching practice, the importance of personality appears to diminish somewhat. Or rather she begins to refine her concept of a “good junior high school teacher.” Personality and a good rapport with the learners are still important to Y. However, on meeting students who study English because they have to and are simply not interested in it, Y recognizes that a pleasant personality is not in itself sufficient to engage all the students. This refining of her ideas about what makes a good teacher seems to be evidence of Y’s developing teacher autonomy: Her conception of a good teacher moves away from the one dimensional ‘nice person’ definition, becomes more detailed, and incorporates skills. The focus moves away from an almost exclusive emphasis on personality to recognition of the value of teaching skills, such as being able to give instructions effectively. Consequently, after the teaching experience, Y describes the most difficult part of teaching at junior high school in the following way:

Y: It’s to convey the instructions to the students.

C: Why is that the most difficult?

Y: Because before I conducted the classes, I thought again and again how I should give instructions to them. How I could make them to understand easily, and some ideas hit me. And I thought it was a good idea. But actually, in the actual class, I told them, and I gave instructions, but they hardly understand what (*laughs*) I was saying. So I felt it was so difficult.

While Y recognizes that an effective teacher needs more than a pleasant personality, the relationship with the learners—the contact—is still enormously important to her, as part of what Y enjoys about the job. Hence, Y described the most positive part of the teaching placement as being the friendship she had formed with the students in and out of class. Y describes the students as “her friends”: They spend breaks together chatting about this and that, and she is not simply friendly to them. This made me wonder about whether I have ever seen novice British teachers in junior high school spending breaks with the students. Don’t all teachers rush off for a coffee in the staffroom at break time? I think the closeness of this relationship meant that Y feels very acutely her responsibilities to the students in class. As a result, she is extremely critical of her ability to respond to all the students in the class and to teach across the whole range of abilities in her classes. Both Y’s and my understanding of the role of affective factors are being sharpened and refined here:

C: In what ways do you think your idea of ‘a good junior high school teacher’ is the same as you? (*Long pause: I prompt by recapping her previous responses.*) So, a good junior high school English teacher observes the students, and can make the materials fit the students, and can make them get interested—how is this the same as you?

Y: I could keep students interest for English.

C: How did you stop them fidgeting?

Y: I don’t know why they stopped. Because maybe I think they tried to pay attention. Maybe I can observe but I couldn’t conduct. I couldn’t adapt any kind of students, there are the difference of level. I concentrated on the low-level students, so I couldn’t think about the higher students.

The whole process of teaching practice in a school is for a novice teacher a forum where they resolve the question of the kind of teacher they want to be. Y looked to her natural mentors in this context—her colleagues and more senior staff—to help her resolve these issues about what it means to be a good language teacher at a junior high school in Japan. However, her perception of the other teachers was less than glowing:

C: What were the teachers at that school like?

Y: (*laughs*) How can I say, so severe in some respects. They always scold. They mostly get angry and scold the students. Of course, the students are doing something bad, so it makes the teachers scold them. But I heard they are too scolding.

In fact, this led her to question whether she was really suited to teaching:

C: Do you think your ideas about teaching changed?

Y: To tell the truth, I believe I begin to lose my way to become a teacher. Because I came to know it's not fit for me to see all students, because I worry about the low level students. I couldn't pay any attention to the high level students. So I lost my way to become a teacher.

C: You lost your?

Y: I (am) confused.

C: You're not sure?

Y: Yeah, I'm not sure my future.

C: Do you still want to be a teacher? Or you don't know?

Y: Yea, I don't know. I hesitate to become a teacher. I came to hesitate.

C: Why?

Y: I know it's difficult to fit the various level students in the same class. If I become a teacher then it's a good thing for me to (be) a private teacher, a tutor.

There are a number of issues here that I find interesting. In common with all new teachers, Y faced a number of challenges in her first two weeks teaching, such as dealing with problems of classroom management, learning to teach the whole class, and learning how to give effective instructions. I think it is part of the teacher's job to establish the ground rules in a classroom in order to create an environment conducive to study. Setting rules and establishing boundaries is very challenging for many new teachers. Y looks at other teachers, her mentors, and is perturbed by the amount of scolding she witnessed. Off tape, she asked me what I thought about scolding, and whether I thought it was necessary or useful. One student apparently asked her why she didn't scold him, and, when she asked him whether he wanted to be scolded, he said yes. This she found more than a little puzzling and perturbing. Her questions struck me as very significant because they indicated that Y was grappling with the reality of attempting to establish classroom conditions supportive of learning. The force of the students and the other teachers' preconceptions about how this should be done didn't sit easily with Y's conception of herself—or of the teacher she wanted to be. Something had to give.

While Y may balk at the idea of scolding and being authoritarian, when asked about the application of the idea of student autonomy, she insisted that Japanese students wouldn't be able to deal with it.

C: In the teaching situation you were in, was there any chance for the students to say

how they wanted to study or what they wanted to study in English class? Did they have any choice at any time?

Y: In my class?

C: In your class, in Mr O's class, in the school: Did they have any choice?

Y: No, they didn't have a choice. Because if it is allowed, they don't study English. Because they don't like English class.

C: Not English class or no English class. But together we have English class, about this you have no choice, but in English class the choice is not do you want to study English, but do we do listening or do we do writing?

Y: Even in English, if choice is allowed they don't study English.

C: Do you want to study this way or this way?

Y: It's the tendency of Japanese students, to be sure it's missed (=mistaken), but it's not much answer. But (if) the choice is allowed they don't want to study, probably they answer.

When asked about the relevance of the idea of autonomy to her own future as an English teacher, Y seems to agree that it is an appropriate goal, but has little idea how to effect this change. She sees the way that young people are socialized and educated in Japan does nothing to foster autonomy.

Y: Hopefully the students are more autonomous (in the future), but maybe it's impossible.

C: How can you get the students to be more autonomous—at the moment they have no choice?

Y: Originally they don't have so much enthusiasm to study or motivation to study. So if we want students be more autonomous, we teach the way to be autonomous when they were born. In the process they grew up, already they lacked the autonomy.

The traditional teacher student relationship looks pretty unpalatable to Y. Yet she's convinced that the alternatives are unworkable in Japan or are only appropriate for good students. Here I can see Y struggling with the concept of autonomy. If education fosters autonomous learning, then the consequences for society are enormous and far-reaching. But how do we go about squeezing this into the curriculum?

I can understand how Y reaches this negative assessment of autonomy, and I see that it's a long way from the simulations at college to the junior high school classroom. However, I also see in her predicament a real need to address the issues of student autonomy in education in Japan. For new teachers such as Y who are dissatisfied with current teacher-student relationships, there is a lack of viable, practical models of alternative ways of organizing language classrooms. This prevents her and novice teachers like her from being able to imagine how they can foster autonomy in mainstream education. To support new teachers who wish to foster student autonomy in their classes, there is a need for viable working models that enable them to translate the theory into practice.

CONCLUSION: PORTFOLIOS, AUTONOMY AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

At the outset of the course, I had an ambitious list of objectives for the portfolios to accomplish. Not surprisingly, the portfolios didn't achieve all of those aims, and there was

no neat linear increase in the depth and quality of the students' observations and reflections. However, the greater insights the portfolios offered into the development of the students' thinking more than compensated for this apparent lack.

In review, the portfolio acts as a record of work, although the number of tasks needs to be altered to improve accurate record keeping. The record of work is the basis for assessment, and for self-assessment, and allows you to look back and pull insights together for the final report; it also helps students remember what they learnt. Interestingly, while I was worried about providing insufficient feedback, Y thought that getting feedback was one of the advantages that using a portfolio had over a traditional exam. I thought it worked well as an alternative means of assessment, primarily because it succeeded so well, with most students, in providing a "peek into their heads." With many of the students in this class, the portfolio gave me a much clearer idea of their development as teachers. When their performance as teachers can be so shaky and lacking in confidence, a portfolio allows the learners to give an account of the thinking that underpins their classroom behaviour.

This portfolio was essentially a series of observation tasks, and at the outset I was hoping for some improvement in "the nature and quality of their observations." Now I believe that this expectation is evidence of an overly simple model that I had of how teacher autonomy develops. Y started with fairly acute observation skills, and there is no real increase in her ability to observe. The best I could say is that, with many students, there was an increase in the details of their observations, and, with some, there was evidence of critical reflection on their own behaviour. This is not a fault of the portfolio. It simply points to a need to refine my own ideas of how to encourage teacher autonomy and what is achievable in such a short time span. My collaborative reflections on this question with Andy, my collaboration partner, did alter my perceptions of developing teacher autonomy. The process that I was trying to tap into is such a complex one, much more cyclical and organic than the simple linear input-output model I started with.

Unsurprisingly, teaching practice was the real catalyst for Y's development as a teacher. She had a lot more confidence in her opinions after having tested them out in the classroom.

So, where does this leave the portfolio? By providing a combination of a record of work and a peek into the students' heads (for both me and the students), the portfolios do, I maintain, facilitate student reflection. They provide a forum for debate, a dialogue. Regularly reviewing the portfolios allowed me to accurately gauge the state of play in my classroom. The issue of deciding on the exact amount of individual feedback I still find slightly problematic. However, there was a dialogue between myself and the group in as much as the course developed week by week in response to the contents of their portfolios. Much classroom debate was also generated by my group feedback, as I responded to their portfolios at the beginning of each session.

Portfolios also act as a valuable tool to help students begin to theorize about their practice. Y's portfolio enabled her to start breaking down the classroom experience into more manageable elements. In her own words, it made teaching "more real" for her. This, in turn, helped Y to start building a bridge from the very theoretical world of the university teacher training course to the practice of an actual classroom. While working within administrative constraints, that separate teaching practice from the teacher training courses, I believe that the portfolios allowed us to bring the classroom one step closer and introduced habits of analysis that I see as key to ongoing development as a teacher.

On a personal note, I felt that, from reading the portfolios, I learnt to value a different perspective, to value the affective in the classroom a little more. The impact of the portfolios did lead me to more thoroughly question my own assumptions about the role of the teacher.

Watching the students conduct their teaching practice, I noticed how unteacherly their behaviour was in the attention they paid to every individual. This made me realise how much I teach on autopilot. I can give instructions and get students on task, but I have certainly lost some of that attentiveness. And it also made me realise that one of the real challenges for me is to figure out how to stay fresh and engage with each new student as an individual, rather than as just one of the couple of hundred new faces I deal with each year.

Does the portfolio foster teacher autonomy? This is a trickier question than the others, but one worth considering, and one I kept coming back to during the collaborative reflection with Andy. Using portfolios shifted the balance of power in the students' direction and achieved the goal of making the students, their teaching, and their thoughts the focus of the course. Given the context in which this course is set and Y's experiences at JHS, I think that there's a pressing need to re-evaluate what we do in class, and to keep asking these difficult questions. We have the need to determine models of student autonomy that fit a Japanese context. Through this course and my reflection on it, I have learnt a little more about how portfolios can help contribute more effectively to those processes.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

FLÁVIA VIEIRA

Cath's account resonates with my experience as a teacher educator in many ways, especially as regards power issues and the role of reflection in teacher training contexts. Some of her dilemmas reminded me of something I wrote quite recently in my professional journal while teaching a post-graduate course on Pedagogical Supervision to in-service EFL teachers:

We may say that in teacher education, and also in my lessons, there is a constant tension between the diversification and the unification of learning. Or, to use van Lier's (1996) image, there is a tension between a centrifugal force, oriented towards diversification (of ideas, perspectives...), and a centripetal force oriented towards normalisation. Although I seek to promote the former, I am aware that I do it within limits, and not in an unregulated manner. In my role as a teacher educator, reflection is the tool whereby I avoid two things: total dispersion (i.e., each person thinks as s/he pleases) and total unification (i.e., all persons are lead to think through the head of one). To avoid both situations, it is not possible to have absolute, unquestionable certainties: Each person stands somewhere between 'I' and the 'other,' between chaos and order. And maybe this is harder than I suppose it is. . . But the truth is that I feel the moral obligation to fight the authority of thought, whoever it comes from: me or each one of my students. This is why I refuse to adopt a pedagogy of transmission, but also a pedagogy that is neutral in terms of values and ideals, a pedagogy where 'anything goes.' For me, commitment to values and ideals of liberation from authority is an obligation of trainers and trainees. Only then can teacher education facilitate processes of personal and social reconstruction, only then can one build bridges between our self and others, only then can we make, stealing the title of a book by Edgar Morin (1990), 'science with conscience'.

An intentional focus on (prospective) teachers' theories and practices, as when using portfolios, necessarily entails and fosters the diversification of perspective, range, and depth of reflection. However, guidance and scaffolding may instigate critical thought and avoid an approach where 'anything goes.' Agreeing on a common language as Cath suggests, a 'grammar' to communicate about powerful concepts such as autonomy, helps to create a theoretical and ethical framework of reference that supports reflection and gives it a purposeful direction. It is also important, perhaps, to consider how that language is to be constructed. The confrontation and negotiation of ideas are probably as crucial as individual reflection. In this sense, I would say that professional talk helps to avoid reflective 'autism' and turns reflection into a social act that gives voice to different (sometimes conflicting) rationalities.

Being able to consider different rationalities is perhaps the key to deal with diversity and complexity in educational settings. This is true for teachers and their students, as it is also for teacher educators and educational researchers. Cath's inquiry itself is a good example of struggling to understand others through herself and herself through others. In a sense, we need to be like "kids with ants in their pants": We need to "fidget" with idea(l)s in trying to make sense of education and our place in it.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

TIMOTHY STEWART

Cath's research focus closely matches my own current interests in teaching. Her chapter tackles the gap between learner and teacher perspectives. It's interesting to follow Cath's insights into her practice unfold as she compares her own take on classroom interaction with that of her teacher education students. Ultimately, she aims to make her pre-service teachers aware of learner and teacher autonomy, whilst developing their observational and reflective skills. Structuring TESOL courses more around development of these skills, instead of emphasising the designer methods / approaches, is increasingly advocated.

Cath selected learning portfolios as a way to have "a peek into the students' heads." This attempt is praiseworthy, as teachers tend to assume that the way we look at a lesson will be the way learners look at it. However, there is evidence that, while we as teachers are focusing on one thing, learners are focusing on something else.

Cath admits to getting lost in the details of compiling the portfolio. Although this was her initial foray into the use of portfolios in teaching, it would be instructive to hear more specific advice to other teachers on this point. She was also concerned about the "mixed results" of portfolio entries, feeling puzzled later about whether her expectations weren't set too high for a 12-week course. Since there was such a range in the students' English proficiency, I wondered about how this might have affected success on the portfolio tasks. Observation is a skill that requires training and extensive practice to do well. Cath might consider video taping some sessions for practice in recording detailed observations.

Additional samples of actual portfolio entries would have been appreciated. Cath's descriptions were good; yet I questioned whether the portfolio was similar to a dialogue journal, portfolio, or both. It seems to me that the dialogue journal format would address the

issue that Cath raises about the portfolios not having more characteristics of a dialogue. She could choose a specific point raised by her students and engage them in a written dialogue by raising questions for them to ponder further.

The student interview adds real depth to her discussion. Through Y's responses, important questions are raised about the appropriateness of *Communicative Language Teaching* and *TESOL* methods to school settings here in Japan. The young teachers Cath trains will need to find ways to make the small changes they can within well-known constraints. From one student's expressed expectation of the need for teachers to scold learners, we could conclude that autonomy might be quite an alien concept for some Japanese. I'm reminded of the aggressive intransigence of two renowned autonomy researchers who insisted to sceptical Japan-based teachers that a particular method designed in Europe for developing learner autonomy would undoubtedly work in Japan. Cath, however, sees the challenge to be at the individual level. She muses on the importance of the personal connection in teaching and asks *How to stay fresh and engage with each new student as an individual?* She has begun an exciting piece of collaborative research here, and I look forward to seeing how future explorations will move her thinking.