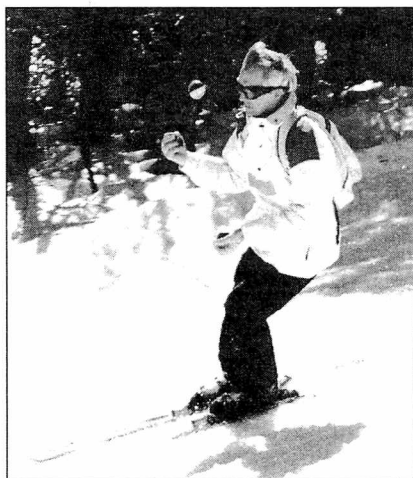


Learning to Surf: Structuring, Negotiating, and Owning Autonomy



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Looking at four resonant interconnections between the Anthology and group dynamics, this chapter proposes a co-constructed developmental view of autonomy. It seeks to show how autonomy development can dynamically change, is socially produced, develops in specific situations, and is related to both teacher and student development. Strangely enough, autonomy develops its greatest resilience in groups—groups that offer support, security, and ample modeling opportunities.

この章では論文集と集団力学の間にある4つの相互関係に着目し、自律に対して協同で作上げられた発展途上の見方を提案する。いかに自律の発展が大きく変化していくのか、社会で生み出されていくのか、特定の場面で発展していくのか、教師と学習者の成長に関わっていくのかを提示する。面白いことに、自律は支援し、安心感を与え、多くの模範を示してくれるグループの中で最も活発に育成されるのである。

Aya was confused by action logging the first day of class, so I gave her and the other students some old action logs from previous students to look at. They all felt more confident after looking at a lot of models. A few weeks later Aya asked if it was OK to draw pictures in her action log notebook. I said, "Please do!" and she later reported that if she drew pictures of the stories and idioms we were working with she remembered them better. I then encouraged all the students to start drawing more by putting Aya's comments in a newsletter of anonymous student comments. After a midterm break, Aya handed me her action log in class. Thinking she had misunderstood something, I said, "But I didn't assign anything for the break." She smiled and said, "I know," and she explained, "But I couldn't help continuing the action log during the break. It's fun to write and draw my life. I thought you would enjoy a look." And I did.

I had the pleasure of reading several early drafts of the chapters in this book before spending an enjoyable weekend at the Anthology Retreat in June 2003 talking with many of the authors about their work. In August I was able to read later drafts and some that had not been available at that June retreat. The richness that I was finding in their work paralleled some writing that I was doing at the time with Zoltan Dörnyei on group dynamics (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). In this introductory chapter, I would like to look briefly at four resonant interconnections between this anthology and my own work: the dynamic quality of autonomy development in relation to group dynamics, the social origins of autonomy, the situated appropriateness of autonomy, and teacher autonomy. After exploring those four interconnections, I conclude by providing a short list, mostly for myself, of questions for my everyday teaching that I hope will promote my own and my students' critical collaborative autonomy.

THE DYNAMIC QUALITY OF AUTONOMY DEVELOPMENT

The group dynamics literature can contribute at least two strands to our thinking about autonomy. One deals with changing leadership styles and how they can help create a safe and encouraging environment in which to invite autonomy (described immediately below). The other deals with the group's socialization into metacognitive, critical, and autonomous ways of thinking (discussed further on).

Group dynamics research has long described three types of teacher leaders: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire (or more positively stated, autonomy-inviting) (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). Recently, research has suggested that effective teachers actually use all three kinds of leadership at different times for different purposes (Heron, 1999). Effective teachers often

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to those daring students (especially Aya) and teachers who dare to question and confuse and enlighten. Bravo editors Andy & Mike, and the whole brave group! Because (and see Phil Benson's excellent depiction of this in Chapter 19), "Until you are willing to be confused about what you already know, what you know will never become wider, bigger or deeper."—Milton Erikson

start out autocratic, then segue into democratic, and later, when appropriate, into autonomy-inviting. It seems that at the beginning of a new class, generally, students *do* want to know that the teacher is in charge and has a plan. This assures students that, indeed, the class can help them learn. When students are clear about what the teacher wants, they can usually work with more confidence. However, this confidence eventually brings with it a desire to take part more in the decision-making processes of the class, to have a participatory voice, and then, when appropriate, to be given the trust to do things on their own, as well as collaboratively with their peers.

The three modes of leadership, the roles that teachers might take, and some characteristic activity types that may accompany them are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Isolated Teacher Leader Modes

Three Modes	Teacher/Researcher	Typical Activity Types
Autocratic	Engineer Creating and providing structure	Audio-lingual, grammar, translation / lecture / test, establishing set procedures
Democratic	Negotiator/facilitator Re-structuring Co-structuring Showing choices	Write your opinions Let's talk Strategy choice Collaborative assessment
Autonomy-inviting	Ethnographer Studying students	Emically evolving from students, about students, strategy creation, projects, self-assessment, portfolios

Effective teachers generally flow from the top to the bottom of Table 1 and revert back to previous modes when needed. Sometimes teachers may become temporarily stuck with limiting beliefs and ways of doing things, such as, “We must translate everything to make it completely understood.” There may also be dams to stop this flow altogether (e.g., a teacher’s fear of student initiative). It takes an openly communicating community to navigate the flow and the snags along the way.

Aya, in the narrative above, was first provided the structure of the action logs and given ample models to follow. She later negotiated the drawing of pictures, a move which, when reported to other students in the weekly class newsletter, let other students also know that changes could be negotiated. Finally, in Aya’s decision to continue with the action logging during the break without teacher direction, she became even more self-regulatory and autonomous.

As in Aya’s narrative, the control of autonomy, or agency, generally changes from teacher structuring to shared negotiation and then to student ownership. It begins with the teacher’s agency of choosing to use an autonomy-inviting structure, such as action logging, in a rather autocratic way. Later, by allowing negotiation to reshape the structure somewhat, i.e., students requesting to draw in their logs, agency becomes more shared and negotiated. Finally, the agency shifts to the students (at least some of them) as they make autonomous decisions to learn and study in certain ways (see Figure 1 overleaf).

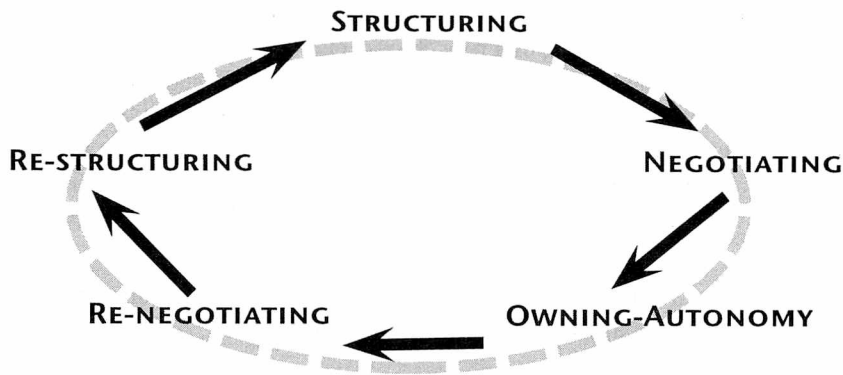


Figure 1 Autonomy-inviting processes

The fact that these moves may be highlighted for the whole class in newsletters allows individuals in the group to influence each other more because they are near peer role models (Murphey, 1998c; Murphey & Arao, 2001) i.e., psychologically easier to emulate than the teacher or other more distant models. One student's brave steps show others that they can choose or how they can make their own paths. Thus, our autonomy is co-constructed by the models offered to us, the models that dare us to think differently, creatively, and critically, and that may inspire us beyond our own self-expectations and what is available in the observable world.

Despite the teacher's general flow from autocratic to democratic to autonomy-inviting over the course of several weeks or a semester, the classroom situation will still warrant at times the teacher switching to another mode, if only for a few minutes. For example, when at first introducing a new activity, even late in the term, the teacher may want to be autocratic so students get the initial pattern down. On the first day, when allowing students to choose three things to share about themselves with others, the teacher may be autonomy-inviting at the level of choice of the actual items.

Learners also are not always simply one kind of learner, but rather their desires shift dynamically as they develop over many weeks, and even momentarily in one class. Some students may also come from an environment where they have developed "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1990) and have little experience making choices, while others may demand more choices at the same time. These different ways of being in the world (Gee, 1996) are learned socially and intermentally (Swain, 2000a; van Lier, 2000; Vygotsky 1962; Wertsch, 1991). Thus, class newsletters (collections of student comments from their action logs) may assume importance as intermental-group-learning-tools in allowing students to hear each others' ideas, grasp an understanding of what the group is thinking, and grow from the group's explorations. After reading newsletters, many students report that they have a better understanding of the group and feel more secure (Murphey, 1993; Kindt & Murphey, 2000; Murphey & Woo, 1998). In shifting leadership styles and providing interactive structures, such as the newsletters, the teacher is at the same time co-constructing with the students a safe environment and preparing the ground for greater autonomy.

Ideally, teachers would be capable of manifesting all three types of leadership, as the need arises, and adjusting to individuals and the group—a daunting task, I admit. However, when we have open communication and students who let their wishes be known, it becomes easier. Also, setting up autonomy-inviting structures, autocratically even, assures that the doors for negotiation and autonomy-owning are open when students are ready. Many such autonomy-

inviting structures are included in the following chapters: language learning projects (e.g., Stephenson & Kohyama), portfolios (e.g., Davies, Malone, Shimo), group presentations (e.g., Mizuki, Nix, Stewart), group publications (e.g., Cunningham & Carlton), reflection/learning journals (e.g., Abe, Barfield, Malone, Nix, Takagi), self-assessment (e.g., Barfield, Evans Nachi, Mizuki), and cooperative learning formats (e.g., Stephenson & Kohyama, Stewart, Takagi). Furthermore, at a meta-level, Brown refreshingly discusses autonomy stereotypes, Carroll and Head look at structuring autonomy into textbooks for a large program, and Skier and Vye describe seasoned language learners' histories and discover their autonomous resilience. Finally, Usuki looks closely at the kinds of autonomy already present in some Japanese students to further refine our conceptions of what autonomy can be. This is just a small glimpse of the tools that authors in *Autonomy You Ask!* have been using to develop and research autonomy-inviting structures.

In one sense, such autonomy inviting tools as those above are neutral, and it depends on *how* the teacher and students use them—even the best of tools can be used autocratically to tie up learners with the specific desires of the teacher or curriculum. However, in general, these tools do seem to have more potential to invite more autonomy than many others. And the opposite is also true—the standard textbook can be an autocratic tool of coercion when used to force students straight through it with no choice as to the 'how.' Or it could be used to scaffold autonomy when teachers invite students to skim and select units they would like to cover, or when they can choose two of the five questions to answer at the end of a unit. Even with the most autocratic of structures, imaginative teachers will always be able to exercise students' ability to self-direct.

How well the shifts to democratic and autonomous processes are scaffolded by a teacher in the midst of every-day-learning may be crucial for the acceptance of more responsibility by the students. At the same time, our invitational structures are not written in stone, and, despite our convictions that they are great ways for students to manage their learning, *it is* "students managing their learning" that we seek most. It can be painful for teachers at times to change or cast aside favored ways of doing things that have served them well.

SOCIAL ORIGINS OF AUTONOMY

The variety of teachers coming together to produce this volume is itself a good example of the social origins of autonomy. Barfield, Carroll and Head, Malone, Nix, and Stewart, in particular, and others as well, give examples of how supportive and critical cooperative dialogue (Edge, 1992, 2002) among teachers and co-researchers can help them work through conflicts and confusions to better understand their classrooms. They still do not have answers for all their questions—but then the answers are actually less important than the processes of questioning and searching. Many authors also provide examples within their chapters of how their students can socialize into supportive groups and encourage reflection and innovation.

Autonomy grows from interaction with others. Most of the time it is modeled from peers who display self-regulated behaviors, and who provide alternative ways of behaving, thinking, and choosing. In a Vygotskian sense, all learning starts out between minds, intermentally, and only gradually becomes intramental. Facilitating the socialization processes in the classroom (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) can greatly help this collaborative autonomy and lead to a more critical stance (Murphey, 2001; Murphey & Jacobs, 2000). Indeed, underlying the development of such collaborative autonomy is the power of the 'conscious collective.' Benson (1996) notes that:

Learner autonomy and self-directed learning have been strongly associated with individualization and even isolation in learning, but the implications of a more critical version of autonomy are social. Greater learner control over the learning process, resources and language cannot be achieved by each individual acting alone according to his or her own preferences. Control is a question of collective decision-making rather than individual choice. (p. 33)

For me, it is not the collective decision-making that must be noticed here, if indeed that does happen at all, but the collective massing of perspectives and mental resources and questions that come in a collaborative community such that each individual can better come to terms with their own socio-cognitive conflicts (Murphey, 1989) and questions as needed. Having everyone agree to what is right may not be needed in many cases; rather, it is the agreeing to disagree which may actually stimulate more thought. I wish to stress that the social accessing of the group's resources (questions, views, techniques, beliefs, ideas, etc.) is what I see as immensely important in helping individuals to come to a better understanding of their own particular situations and questions. This Anthology, again, is an excellent example of such accessing of a community's resources to create particular local solutions—something readers will be able to do as well.

Thus, as a precursor to our concern for student autonomy, we might find it more efficient to concern ourselves with *involving* the students in the group first, working toward group cohesion (not total agreement, but respect) as a foundation upon which students can safely explore their own versions of autonomy. In M.C. Bateson's words, "Participation precedes learning" (Bateson, 1994, p. 41). Lave and Wenger (1991) talk of increasing participation through legitimate peripheral participation, allowing one to slowly become a full participant and to own their own learning. It is this identification with the group and participation, even on the peripheral, that opens up members to the social resources that can stimulate and support them.

For example, when I ask students to self-evaluate themselves for their grades, many find it difficult because they have seldom, if ever, been asked to do that in an educational environment. To give them some idea of how they might do it, I play them a video of a student making a presentation for a grade. The student starts with "I think I deserve an A for four reasons..." This gets them thinking of the variety of reasons they might deserve a certain grade. More of their insight into self-evaluation comes from discussing their possible grades with other students in small groups, i.e., participating with the group in trying to figure out how to evaluate themselves. Finally, they are asked to fill out a self-evaluation form and state the reasons why they think they deserve the grade they are giving themselves. In doing this, they activate their learning from the group and make it more their own.

In the chapters that follow, there is ample recognition that autonomy originates from and is modeled in the social group. Stephenson and Koyama note that students would have liked to have known earlier what activities others were doing for their Language Learning Projects so they could have tried them out themselves. Both Mizuki and Takagi begin with collaborative structures in promoting autonomy, while Evans Nachi's research into self-evaluation shows that students want to know more about how their peers are evaluating themselves and how the teacher evaluates, before they can feel secure doing it themselves.

We learn autonomy in groups.

SITUATED APPROPRIATENESS OF AUTONOMY

Autonomy will have a thousand facets. I find it useful to remember that since one's sense of autonomy is constructed, autonomy can't be the same thing for everyone—that would be an oxymoron (see more on this in Naoko Aoki's chapter this volume). As we model different people and learn a variety of tools to self-regulate, our ideas of how we want to be in the world will not be the same as others. People need to be trusted to generate and manage the kinds of autonomy that best fit their needs at particular points in time. Deciding for others how they should manage or teach autonomy is anti-autonomous. The most educators can do is structure the possibilities for autonomous action at different developmental stages and offer as many choices as possible, mixed with problematizing and metacognitive development. While many of the chapters in *Autonomy You Ask!* describe autonomy-inviting structures for young university students (e.g., Davies, Shimo, with portfolios; Cunningham & Carlton, with newsletters), others recognize different developmental levels in their older and more mature students and seek to learn from them and with them (see Malone, Nix, Skier & Vye, for example).

Finally, self-regulation, or the increasing ability to regulate one's own life and gain more agency in the world, is seen as emancipatory in many people's eyes. I would like to propose that this may not always be so, and that this, too, will depend upon multiple factors. In fact, for efficiency, people tend to choose their domains of autonomous action and, in other domains, depend socially on others and trust their judgment. For example, it would be neither advisable nor desirable for drivers to feel totally autonomous with regard to traffic rules. And we do not have the time to be autonomous in reference to all the information domains that surround us (politics, law, science, health, insurance, religion, etc.). Thus we tend to choose certain areas to be active in and to inform ourselves about. Being interdependent with others to act responsibly in their areas of work allows us to focus on our chosen domains and exercise our agency in a more concentrated manner. This is an advantage of communities in which responsibility is taken seriously; this creates problems when individuals do not feel this responsibility in their work. Balancing such constraints leads us directly into teacher autonomy, the final interconnection that I'd like to explore between my own work and the chapters that follow.

TEACHER AUTONOMY

In parallel to helping students self-regulate their learning, teachers are also involved with brokering their own autonomy, satisfying institutional constraints, and adjusting to individual students who may greatly differ from whatever the majority group developmental positions might be. All of this may push our understanding of teaching into the dynamic and ever changing waves of chaos/confusion theory. As John Kabat Zinn says, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." Learning to surf through the confusion, suspending judgment, and tolerating ambiguity take time and practice. And should even experienced teachers 'wipe out' (fall off their surf boards) occasionally, they should not take it too hard as there is a wide array of variables that determine the success of autonomous orientations of individuals and groups. However, research (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) is showing that the more collaborative, or collegial, groups of teachers are, the more learning usually occurs in their classes:

In the educational literature the adjective 'collegial' has been used to refer to staff and faculty who work together effectively, who share common goals, professional values and norms. More specifically, collegiality can be defined in terms of four behaviors of the adults in a school:

- having frequent conversations about teaching and learning;
- observing and providing feedback for one another;
- working collaboratively on the curriculum;
- teaching one another about teaching, learning and leading.

In order to test the validity of these reports, Wheelan and Tilin (1999) set out to examine the relationship between staff/faculty group effectiveness and the actual level of productivity in ten American elementary, middle and high schools. Their results fully confirmed that a strong relationship exists between staff/faculty group functioning and student outcomes. . . This points to the conclusion that the quality of the teaching a school can provide is related to the maturity and collegiality level of the staff/faculty group. (p.175)

If, indeed, the “maturity and collegiality level of staff” leads to better student learning, as reported above, and autonomy, for teachers and students, is modeled best in well socializing groups, then perhaps we need to pay more attention to teacher groups to improve student learning. This is also the conclusion of Kleinsasser and Savignon (1992) who described two types of cultures of teachers in their research. One was “routine/uncertain cultures,” in which teachers were uncertain about their instructional practice and thus engaged rigidly in routines. They had few conversations about instruction and relied on traditional approaches. The other was “non-routine/certain cultures,” where teachers were confident about their instruction, and their daily practices were not predictable. Kleinsasser and Savignon concluded that, in the non-routine/certain groups, teachers collaborated across departments and incorporated more communicative activities.

What the above research reports emphasize is the importance of secure environments for exploration, in which learners and teachers are not simply implementing a method or routine, but rather using their security to dare to explore with flexibility, to establish extraordinary learning cultures. As we promote *learning fluency* (Barfield, this volume) among students, we equally need to promote *teaching fluency* among teachers.

A major element of this fluency is a safe environment in which teachers can have professional discussions. Although it sounds like a contradiction, security is the foundation of autonomy and innovation. Insecure teachers and learners tend to opt for conventional ways (no matter how much they may dislike them, see Usuki, this volume), and this in turn can lead to isolation:

Idealistically, whatever administrators can do to help construct a coherent, consistent framework which teachers can count on for support, without overly constraining them, will help teachers feel secure enough to experiment and use the flexibility necessary for improvement of teaching. Perhaps one of the most important contributing elements is the development of rapport and respect between people engaged in communities of learners. (Murphey & Sato, 2000, p. 9)

Unfortunately most institutional groups of teachers are far from collegial and safe. We sorely need descriptions of teacher groups that become supportive of teacher development and how they become so (Murphey & Sato, in progress; see *Call for Papers* in bibliography). When teachers do not have a collegial environment to work in, they often seek it elsewhere, in a variety of professional groups both formal and informal.

Writing this opening chapter, spending a weekend at the Anthology Retreat in Momoyama with many of the writers, and watching the Anthology grow with the many reviewers and

collaborators has engaged me in numerous professional reflections and conversations. This has involved us all in a collegial community of like-minded professionals seeking to improve education. *Autonomy You Ask!* has proved to be a priceless opportunity for collaborative development for those of us involved, and readers will feel this shared excitement in the chapters that follow.

LIST OF PRACTICAL REMINDERS TO MYSELF AS A TEACHER

I understand in theory the flow from autocratic through democratic to autonomy, social modeling, and the social situated appropriacy of developing autonomy, and find I can go with the flow sometimes. However, I also find myself getting hooked by snags and not wanting to change certain beliefs and give up control at times (a dilemma oft described in the following chapters). I am not always sure that I can operationalize my understanding of the situated appropriateness of autonomy and its social origins. Reading the chapters that follow has helped me to see different ways of socially approaching and co-constructing autonomy in classes, and, indeed, in our profession. To focus more on these things, I have made a list of statements and questions, mostly for myself, to help me be more self-regulatory and to remember to keep adjusting to the dynamic variety in autonomy development. As you in turn read the Anthology, you may want to write down your own reminders, puzzling questions, and challenges about autonomy.

Set up structures. Recently, how much have I set up autonomy inviting structures and done exploratory research (Allwright, 1997)? How can I remain calm when my efforts don't work, students do not see them as helpful, or they find them constraining rather than freeing? How can I adjust them? [e.g., action logging & newsletters.]

Get student input. Recently, how much have I gotten students to give me ideas for autonomous structures and remained open to receiving these and recognizing them? Are there ways for me to hear their voices, and places for them to express what they prefer, to be involved in participatory action research (Auerbach, 1994)? [e.g., some students mentioned in their action logs that they were teaching their parents the songs we were learning in class.]

Negotiate critically. Recently, how much have students attempted to negotiate elements of the pedagogical classroom organization? [Not much? Check that they know they can. Remind them how their voices can be heard.]

Study the students. Recently, how much have I, as an ethnographer of my own group of students, noticed their new ways of learning and acting (student excellence) that I can perhaps amplify for more students to use?

Encourage reflection, choice, modeling, and initiative. Recently, how much have I invited and encouraged: (a) reflection about their individual choices (see Hasan, 1996, about reflection literacy), (b) more metacognition, (c) modeling others, (d) exploring options, (e) owning their own autonomy, and (f) creating new ways to learn?

Collaborate with colleagues. Recently, how much have I collaborated with colleagues in my institution and outside of it for my own professional development in order to increase the choices I can offer my students?

Surf. Enjoy the waves, especially the wipeouts (there's something to be learned!).

After the break, Aya gave me her notebook to look at. I was amazed. She has described two of her friends who are very close to her, with whom she has begun “playing with English,” i.e., speaking English for fun frequently outside of class. She has described a wide number of ways that she interacts with English and continues her learning beyond her university classes, accompanying many of them with drawings of how she does them. In most of her drawings and descriptions are her two best friends who stimulate her study and the many ways that she has found to study. She is not autonomous alone. In fact, her socially collaborative autonomy seems to make her self-regulations immensely richer. In my mind, I am already asking myself how I can find a way for other students to read her notebook and learn from it. I want the options she has discovered to be shared with others, to increase their choices.

I reflect further, realizing that I did not necessarily inspire Aya in her endeavors, but I did provide the space for it. I know there are other students who have not recognized a space for themselves, and others that still feel overly constrained by the action logs and my teaching. I understand now that I-alone may not be able to show these spaces to all students, but Aya, and classmates like her, might be able to do what I-alone cannot. Surfers collect around places where waves are breaking and watch carefully.