Insights into the Interplay of Learner Autonomy and Teacher Development

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Over the past few years of exploration into my own teaching practice, I have become increasingly concerned with the development of my students as 'autonomous' learners. This has resulted in a pull on my attention from my development as a teacher to the learning approaches used by my students and back again. I see this as a natural path for reflective teaching to follow. My chapter explores the flow of attention between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. At the beginning of the study, my knowledge of 'learner autonomy' was at a position of false understanding and has now shifted to become one of beginning understanding. In this chapter I seek to explore the dynamic interplay of teacher and learner autonomy. My hope is to gain greater insight into how teacher and learner autonomy are both illuminated by and limited by one another.

　ここ数年の自らの教授活動を振り返ってみて、大切なのは学生を自律させることだとつくづく思うようになった。そう考えると教員である自分自身の成長よりも学生がどのように学ぶのか、その学び方のほうへ関心が向かうのである。思うにそれは、内省的な教育を目指すのであれば、当然辿り着く道筋であったと考える。本章では教師自律と学習者自律に対する自分の意識がどのように変化したのかを論述する。私の「学習者自律」に対する知識は、過った理解に基づくものから的を得たものへと変わってきた。ここで私は、教師自律と学習者自律における活発な相互関係を考察する。今後教師自律と学習者自律がいかに相互に補完し合うか、また、制約し合うかについて理解を深めたいと考えている。

INTRODUCTION

Through exploration into my own teaching practice, I have become increasingly concerned with the development of my students as 'autonomous' learners. This pull on my attention away from my own development as a teacher to the learning approaches used by my students evolved naturally for me as I found that one feeds the other. This chapter traces development in my knowledge of learner autonomy from a level of false understanding to one of beginning understanding, as I conducted a limited experiment of one week in a first-year university English communication course. By collaborating with a colleague through Cooperative Development (Edge, 1992, 2002), I was able to gain some insights into how teacher and learner autonomy are both illuminated by and limited by one another. This experiment was done in a first-year university English course that meets twice a week for 100 minutes. The central task guiding course activity was inter-class debate.

This chapter details how my first encounters with Cooperative Development (CD) illuminated areas of my practice, and subsequently, led me into an exploration of the meaning of learner autonomy. The reflective process is central to my chapter as I try to describe the development of my thinking about possible meanings to the term *autonomy* in teaching and learning. Thus, my account flows from reflection, to classroom practice and observation, and back to reflection. I begin by introducing the CD model for reflection on teaching practice.

A COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT

CD helped me to select a focus for professional development activity and allowed me to investigate the experience in a way that was very enlightening. CD is a method for colleagues to talk about their teaching. More than that, it aims to extend the talk of an individual so that s/he can clarify his/her ideas. This is done through a supportive colleague who uses prescribed techniques to listen to and help focus the talk of a peer. Once focused, the ultimate aim of this talk is to reveal issues deemed as salient to professional development that teachers wish to take action on. Thus, CD is a kind of collaborative model for clarifying classroom research or action research plans. This approach to reflective teaching aims to allow teachers "to find out more about ourselves, our teaching and the relationship between the two" (Edge, 1992, p. 1). The ultimate goal is to empower teachers through professional actions based on their own understanding of their classroom teaching situation. The key difference in Edge's approach to reflective practice is the active use of colleagues as sounding boards who help an individual to formulate his/her ideas.

Edge (1992) reminds us that when we speak of professional development we mean self-development, but he expands this thought with the insight that self-development "can't be done in isolation [It] needs other people: colleagues and students" (p. 3). Yet, how can we truly *work with* colleagues without resorting to our near-universal tendencies to become opinionated and defensive? We all have deeply held values, beliefs, and goals about teaching that come out of our own individual experiences. Conversely, these personal beliefs compose the very baggage that holds us back from seeing ourselves and our situation more clearly. The response of CD to this dilemma is to promote interaction between concerned colleagues that approaches talk about teaching from a new angle by training teachers to speak and listen to each other in new ways.

FINDING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

I have worked with my colleague Gene on a variety of projects since 1994. We are both always looking for something new to spark change in our practice. I suggested to Gene that we

work through the exercises in Edge's book as a way to refresh our professional development collaborations. We completed the exercises in one term and in the following term we extended our reflections. It was during this second term of experimentation with CD that I chose a focus for action. Next, I explain the process I used to identify an issue for exploration.

The two key roles in CD are called *Speaker* and *Understander*. The Speaker talks about his/her teaching practice in order to clarify ideas related to professional development. The Understander listens to try and understand a colleague and support the development of that colleague. The label Understander for one of the key CD roles can be deceivingly simple for those new to the process. In fact listening, *truly* listening, to what others have to say and assisting them to understand what they mean, is a terribly difficult skill to master. As Edge (1992, p. 22) explains, "The ability that we want to develop is the ability to make someone feel well listened to." This sounds easy enough, but as Gene and I found, it takes great conscious effort.

As we began doing the exercises in the book, we were self-consciousness but soon developed feelings of frustration. This was due to the novelty for us of the Understander role. We discussed our sense of frustration, and I noted that I felt strained in the Understander role by my urge "to comment and ask questions and redirect the discussion to take into account my views" (Log, 4/27/01). As we later discovered, knowing more about the characteristics of a good listener means that one is also more aware of the traits of the poor listener. How then should we react to the constant buzz of opinion: with anger, disgust or sympathy; with attempts to teach others how to become better listeners? We remain unsure.

The technique of focusing helped me appreciate the purpose of CD as the movement toward action. We began to see that the supportive role of the Understander provides a strong drive for the Speaker to continue to talk and explore his/her thoughts. The first time I used the focusing circle technique, I had some trouble coming up with many points to make about an issue, but more ideas came to mind as I spoke. Gene and I continued to ponder the unnaturalness of the Understander role. "This care and concern for the views of others rather than getting our own point across has to be learnt as it is certainly not the way our Anglo-American culture usually treats exchanges" (Log, 5/18/01). This is hard work.

Discovery really is the purpose of CD because without discovering a focus, action cannot begin, and change will not result. *Action* is developed in CD through the use of goal-setting and trialling exercises. That is, developing a plan and talking through exactly how it might be implemented. Rather than going through the steps of goal-setting and trialling on separate occasions, we thought it would be more natural to combine them. This did not work as planned, though, since my own first go at goal-setting was something of a bust. Broad and vague targets were mentioned, but no actual goal was set. I felt that I needed a way to focus better, and so later, in the fall term, I used the focusing circles technique once again to organize my thoughts.

My focusing circle reflection was specifically about the first-year course that Gene and I were collaborating on in the fall, English 2. You can see in the reproductions appended (Appendix A, at the end of this chapter) how I moved in this particular CD session from talking generally about a very good group of English 2 students to considering some of the benefits of less teacher control. I noticed that I had highlighted the idea of control in the classroom environment. As I thought more carefully, I realized that I had been concerned with issues of power and control in my teaching for some time. By the end of this CD session, I had decided to make a conscious attempt to create opportunities for my English 2 learners to exercise more autonomy over their learning. As you will see, the result of this exploration led me into a deeper reflection on my practice than I had anticipated.

PRECONCEPTIONS AND REALISATIONS

I took what could be seen as an unprofessional first plunge into my investigation of learner autonomy. I really did not do any background reading or planning. Once I had decided on this focus for professional development, I was anxious to get started so I simply went ahead more or less intuitively.

With hindsight, I can see why I approached my exploration of autonomy in this way. I believe, given the pressures of daily teaching, this represents a common picture of the practitioner. Moreover, it seems to me that labels such as *learner autonomy* and *self-directed learning* have a sex appeal that makes them appear deceptively simple. Fanning the flames of acceptance is the fact that the concept of autonomy in language teaching has become "mainstreamed" (Esch, 1997; Pennycook, 1997).

I began my experiment with learner autonomy at my university with a group of 12 first-year students in the fall/winter semester. I selected this course because it is the one that I focused on in my CD dialogue with Gene. In addition, it is the course that I feel most comfortable teaching since I have taught it more than any other course. Typically in this course students engage in two inter-class debates on the same issue where they switch positions from negative to affirmative or vice versa for each contest. Two teams debated one resolution, and two other teams debated a different resolution. In this communication course we use debate as the principal task because it is highly flexible and allows instructors to integrate their instruction of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and study skills. This exploration of my teaching practice took place in the final week of preparation for the second round of debates. In the lesson preceding this week of practice, I informed my students that the following week would be theirs to use for the preparation for the final debates. I then distributed a simple planning guide. I instructed teams debating the same resolution to sit together and make a plan for the next week of classes. I had already led them through a series of progressive activities for debate preparation (Stewart, 2003; Stewart & Pleisch, 1998), so they were familiar with the type of skill-area practice they could do to prepare.

And so I began. I was stepping into unknown territory. The sensation was like letting go of the steering wheel while speeding along the road. There was a direction, but I was not sure where I was heading. "When a teacher initially expects and encourages autonomous learning, a phase of relative anarchy typified by uncertainty of purposes and responsibilities is very likely to arise" (Breen & Mann, 1997, p. 143). I felt a sense of internal chaos, but observations resulting from my investigation do not support this inner feeling that outer anarchy resulted. As I reflect back, there was no chaos. I had set the structure earlier in the course. This was the second time through for these learners to prepare for a debate. They were familiar with the requirements of this display task. Furthermore, they had negotiated their own schedule of activities for the week. Yet, since I had not read in the area of autonomy and had little theoretical basis for my shift in pedagogy, my attitude was to treat the development of learner autonomy as just another technique fished from the "pool of common instructional behaviours" (Richards, 1990, p. 119). That is, I was operating at the surface or observable level of classroom experience.

CD Dialogue Extract 1: Pre-experiment

Understander: Speaker:	… maybe again defining what autonomy is might help a bit. I guess it's the ability to work on your own effectively. All learners have some kind of idea of what they need to be able to do so being able to do that … well? … I don't know if it has to be well or at least to your own satisfaction. To somebody's satisfaction. If it's autonomous, it probably should be to your own I suppose.

This exchange is from a CD session done just prior to my classroom experiment. My colleague had listened carefully to what I was saying and, at this juncture in the dialogue, chose to direct my talk so that I might investigate my own understanding of autonomy more deeply. This is the essence of CD, trying to understand the thoughts of a colleague, or your own ideas, with as little interference from opinionated commentary as possible. My emotional response to finding a more learner-centred approach at this stage was really just to hand over control to students and allow them to work freely in the classroom (Holliday, 1994, p. 176). My classroom observation notes taken during these lessons show I had feared a threat to my teacher role.

THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

The CD sessions with my colleague eventually led me to decide to turn over one week of my English communication course (two periods) to explore what it might mean to give over more control of lessons to my learners. My idea was to allow the students to plan what they needed to do individually and in groups as preparation for their final inter-class debate events.

I took notes sporadically as the classes progressed and also videotaped the classes. My observation notes from the first of the two classes investigated indicate that I was hoping for learners to use the time "well," use me "effectively," and ask me for "guidance." I was determined at the start to take as hands-off an approach as possible. In the back of my mind, however, was a worry that students would be confused or just not do any work. But I soon realized that I was still in control as they did ask me for assistance. Despite my fears of the class disintegrating into a huge waste of valuable time, I noted: "They are all working, thinking about the debate preparation tasks. Some more actively than others, but all appear focused" (observation notes). I am not certain where my fear of losing control derived, but it could have been related to my naïve understanding of autonomy. In truth, I was always in control.

The fact is that even with "the increase in learner-centred activity and collaborative work in the classroom ... [the teacher] still has to contrive the required enabling conditions for learning, still has to maintain and guide progress" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 189). So learning is always guided or directed with the *kind* of direction being crucial. In the CD session between the two lessons, I struggled with this realization.

CD Dialogue Extract 2: Mid-experiment

Understander:	Do you want to talk more about what you mean by autonomous learning?
Speaker:	Sure. What does it mean, autonomous learning? Because when I first started thinking about it, I thought, well that means I'm not gonna do much. But I see it differently now.
Understander:	What I hear you saying is your perception of autonomy has shifted.
Speaker:	Yes it has. It's a lot more complex than I thought. I still don't have a handle on it.... I wonder what my role should be.

I watched the video and noted my movements and actions during the two lessons. My video recording of the first lesson that week shows that at the start I was actively initiating interactions and controlling interactions with the students. By the end of this lesson, I noted that "I was holding back at times when students went off on different paths but realize their focus is as legitimate as mine" (observation notes). The same video tape showed that as the class progressed I listened in more and waited for students to initiate interactions. At times I

did remind students who appeared inactive of possible things they could be doing. Through this experience, I discovered that my role as teacher was not marginalized by giving students more control. In fact, it may have been boosted. Again, my notes indicate that I was answering student requests and providing individuals with assistance. I was also spending "more time than usual being an observer," which allowed me to see better "what they might need" and engage in "timely interventions" (observation notes). This was an unexpected development for me. I was still at centre stage but in a less dominant way. I was strengthened and reinvigorated in my role. My notes for the second class session indicate that I felt more secure in this redefined role because I did not write anything to reveal a feeling of my role being diminished.

During the second lesson, I noted that my feelings shifted from "wishing they'd get on with it, to seeing lots of useful activity" (observation notes). The video tape of this lesson reveals that I was much more patient and readily settled into a pattern of observing and intervening when asked or when I felt it was needed. I found that this intervention "often generated more talk in English and seemed to help students get over some obstacles" (observation notes). I also noted that my intervention was needed and useful. For example, in mock debate practice, some groups failed to ask follow-up questions to probe an issue deeper. I also observed on the tape that I helped students with word intonation when I heard that this was causing message breakdowns amongst group members. Just after the second lesson, I reflected with my colleague.

CD Dialogue Extract 3: Immediate Post-experiment

Speaker:	After I taught that first class, I caught some glimpses of what autonomy could be.
Understander:	Would you like to explore this thought more?
Speaker:	Umm … well, by the end of the first class and especially the second day, I think um I saw it differently because there's a role for the teacher I think in structuring things. So it's not like you go in and the students do whatever they want. I still don't see my role yet clearly, though.
Understander:	So you see a role for the teacher in the autonomous classroom but you can't yet define it?
Speaker:	Yes and I think maybe because … I don't have the background. I mean I haven't done the reading and maybe that's where I should go next.

Reflecting on what I had learnt from the two classes, I began to see that the teacher's role is not diminished when fostering learner autonomy is a goal. Quite the opposite, it seems to increase teacher responsibility, while less teacher talk gives students more time on task and increased talk time for themselves. Again, I found that this kind of lesson arrangement could help me to "observe areas that need attention for a greater number of class members" (observation notes). After the second lesson, I left the classroom with a strong sense of empowerment because I found that, while a pre-imposed structure did limit or constrain activity, it also provided guidance to students which opened opportunities for classroom activity to proceed. My feeling was that the learners had a clear idea of what they were supposed to do and why, and this helped them to go forward at their own pace.

LEARNERS' REACTIONS

This is how I felt, but what about the learners? In order to investigate this, we had a debriefing session one week after the interclass debates. I distributed a list of five questions, and we talked

for nearly 30 minutes in class about how they felt these two debate preparation lessons went. Perhaps a look at their written responses to the question *How do you feel when you are given freedom to choose activities by teachers?*, along with some of their comments from the debriefing session, will illuminate the attitudes of these learners towards learner autonomy.

With one exception, all 12 learners in the class answered positively to being given freedom to choose class activities. But a number of them qualified their answers. Two students wrote "sometimes." For example: "Sometimes it is good. However, sometimes it is needed to be given study by teachers because they are smarter than us." Another was even more specific saying: "I think it's good but not always. For me, half and half (I mean choose some activities and be given activities by teachers) is better." This sentiment was echoed in learner comments in the debriefing discussion where as a group they indicated that lessons at the university were not overly teacher-centred. The consensus was that teacher control was necessary, but that teachers need to hear and respond to the opinions of their students.

Another student felt that having more freedom to choose would be "very useful for next year." This point came up again and again during the debriefing discussion. When asked if they wanted more chances to choose what they do in classes, they were clear that this would be more appropriate in their second, third, and fourth years of study. Asked if teachers have too much control of classes, they answered that first-year students need more help from teachers. While they felt that they were capable of doing self-study, at least one student commented that it is difficult for students in the first year of our programme to choose study tasks for themselves. I asked them specifically about how they felt during the two classes described in this chapter. They agreed that it was good to have the freedom to decide. Some commented that it was useful because they could learn on their own, as well as from group members and at their own pace. One student answered that learners need some kind of basic activity guide as a "framework" to make autonomous learning work. Rather than working individually, a couple of students stressed that they preferred to work more as a whole class or in groups. In short, they saw a need for teachers to be in control, but also wanted their views taken into account, along with the support of peers.

MOVEMENT TOWARD UNDERSTANDING

After jumping into this experiment, the time had come to reflect more deeply on it. This phase in my reflection naturally took me back to my initial question about the meaning of learner autonomy. So, with the classroom experience behind me and my data in hand, I began reading the literature on autonomy in teaching in a search for expert views that might shed light on my own limited experience. Many researchers believe that autonomy is a set of study skills to be learnt (e.g., Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Ravindran, 2000). Others, such as Breen and Mann (1997, p. 134), see autonomy as "a way of being in the world." This view of autonomy imagines learners engaging with their social environment at different levels of autonomy depending upon how they define the situation. Esch (1997) believes that "there are not autonomous language learning skills to be trained" (p. 165). She goes on to say that it is crucial for learners and teachers to become more aware of language and language learning. For Sheerin (1997, p. 59), learner independence is not absolute but is "a complex cluster of attributes." More important, I believe, are her ideas that learners be made aware that they have choices in their learning, and that teachers help them to become more active and to exercise their choices. My learners had concerns about empowering students with greater choice. One student felt that not all learners would be able to take full advantage of a more autonomous learning environment: "It is not so good because when we have freedom all students will not study." But over half of the learners in the class spe-

cifically wrote that having more freedom to make choices for their own learning would make learning more enjoyable for them.

Benson and Voller (1997b) state that the terms autonomy and independence in language learning are used in many different senses, sometimes as synonyms and other times not. They argue that it is a task of the teacher to work out how these might correspond to his/her circumstance. So "autonomous learning is not an absolute standard to be met, but a goal to be pursued; what is important is the direction—towards student responsibility for learning—not the magnitude of the change in any given direction" (Boud, 1981, p. 23). Reading these varied definitions, my own monolithic view cracked. I began to see that there are degrees of autonomy, and the main goal maybe is to move students forward to take a bit more responsibility than they had previously. One of my students articulated the potential relationship between having the ability to exercise choices with a sense of responsibility for one's own learning and accomplishment: "I feel it is good thing because if we choose some activities as we want, we have to accomplish those things. We should have responsibility." Being aware that any "notion of autonomy will be very different in different educational contexts" (Pennycook, 1997, p. 44), the teacher must, in my view, work out the meaning of autonomy for a particular group of learners at a particular time. For me, thinking about this issue led to deeper questions about my teaching practice—specifically, how I needed to enhance my own professional development in order to address learner autonomy in my courses.

Different cultures can place different emphases on autonomy (Sinclair, 2000). To Nunan (1988), autonomy is about striking a balance between the social/cultural context, the personality of learners, their goals in language study, and institutional philosophy. But the teacher is an integral part of this picture. In fact, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are two sides of the same development coin, as Benson (2000) points out:

> Learner autonomy develops within the space that the teacher is able to open up for it in their interpretation of the broader constraints on the learners' freedom of action in learning. Teacher autonomy is thus concerned with the teacher's own ability and opportunity to explore and expand the boundaries of this space. (p. 116)

If we conceive of teacher autonomy as "control over one's own professional development" (McGrath, 2000, p. 100), then to open the necessary space for learners to exercise their autonomy, the teacher needs to recognize and assert his/her own autonomy (Breen & Mann, 1997). The idea of taking control of learning and becoming more aware of teaching practice is summed up in Smith's (2000) concept of "teacher-learner autonomy." This notion of a symbiotic relationship between teacher and learner development was an invaluable insight that I gained from doing this research project. As I continue to struggle with my own professional development, this insight in particular points the way forward for me.

CONCLUSION

When I began this investigation, I truly had a false understanding about learner autonomy as a simplistic and universal concept. Extensive reflection has helped to clarify my thinking. This reflection was assisted by reading relevant literature in the field and by talking through thoughts with a colleague using CD techniques. The most compelling point this research has revealed is my own need for developing teacher autonomy. I can see now that I must empower myself professionally as a means to clear obstacles that impede my movement toward encouraging greater learner autonomy.

As a result, this investigation into learner autonomy has opened my eyes to inter-related concerns. Through my exploration of autonomy, I have come to see that it is not just autonomy that I need to investigate, but also my fundamental views on teaching these learners in this situation and learning about how I can do that best. I have had my eyes opened to the need for a course to learn the culture of the students, but see myself in Holliday's (1994) statement that teachers will often defend entrenched teaching methods as a way to procrastinate from the hard work of learning the student culture. As I reflect on my own practice, it seems to me that a certain preoccupation with techniques and methods may at times have led me into interactions with students that have been pre-scripted in a sense. How much of what we will say in classrooms has been somehow rehearsed beforehand? That is, with our minds fixated on a lesson plan sequence, how much space do we leave to notice? In my own exploration for increasing learner autonomy, I see that where I am heading is a search for an "appropriate methodology" (Holliday, 1994) or a development of my own theory of practice. I have thus found that the focus on learner autonomy has become a driving force for my development toward a more reflective practice. In my final CD session with Gene, I made a start on working through some of these ideas.

CD Dialogue Extract 4: Post-course Reflection

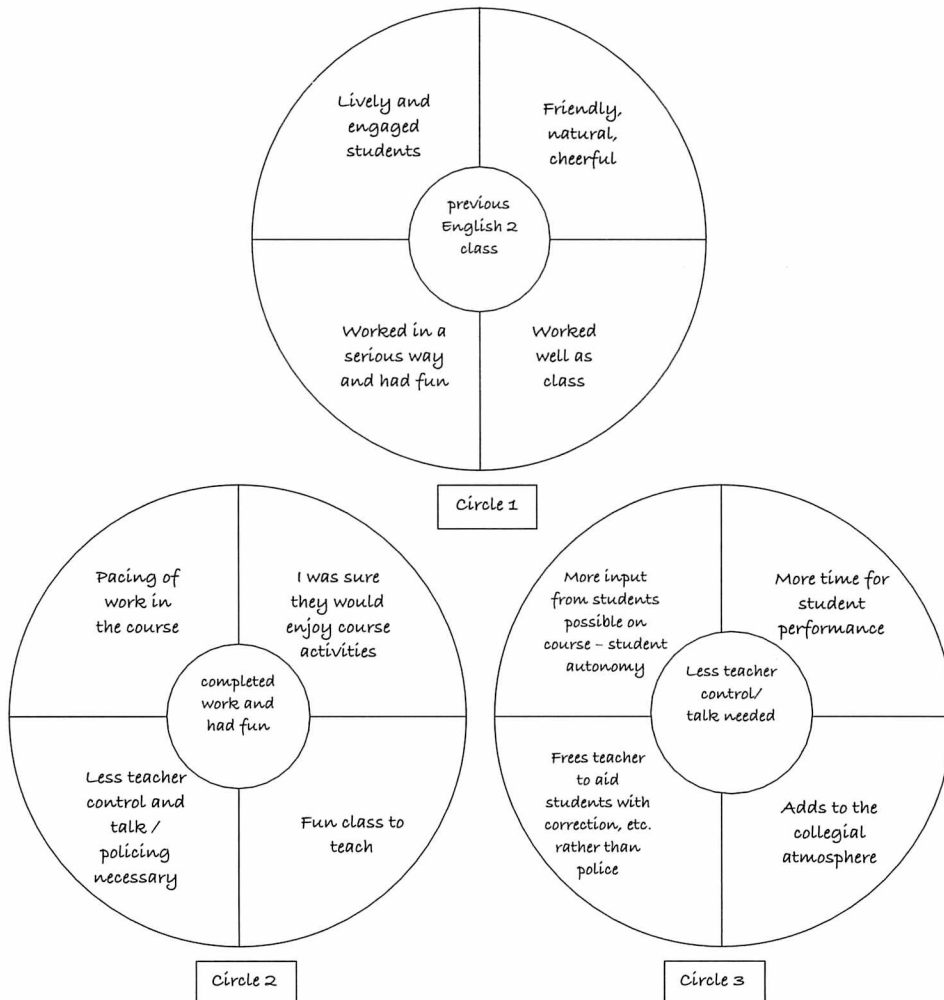| Speaker:	I was just reading Pennycook, who cautions against imposing an ethnocentric western view of education in our attempt to cultivate autonomy.
Understander:	Do you feel that is what you are doing?
Speaker:	I'm not sure. My guess is Japanese students prefer the teacher-fronted lesson.... They want you to come in prepared and teach a class.... I think you can still have a more autonomous approach, but it takes a lot more planning or a different kind of planning.
Understander:	What you seem to be saying is that when you become aware of learner autonomy, you need to structure your teaching differently.
Speaker:	Yeah. It's tricky because my learners have said that they want their opinions heard by teachers and expect that they should exercise more choice, but really only after completing their first year of studies.

Finally, let me turn to how the CD approach to self-development might assist me in moving forward. It occurs to me that a 'built-in' motor for teachers to learn about their classrooms can be created, at least partially, through the active use of CD. Noticing is the first step to learning, and talking about teaching through CD helps one notice. In every session with my colleague, some point that I had not consciously noticed before was brought to my attention. In CD, the Understander tries to assist the Speaker's process of development as a teacher in his/her own terms, so ideas are constantly evolving (Edge, 2002). What I discovered was that by opening up space for learners to control their actions in lessons, I also gave myself space to observe more. So, paradoxically, it is as if I ended up with greater control of the learning environment. Perhaps I need to learn when and how 'to let go' and support my students as they gain autonomy—and learn how 'to take hold' and be aware of how and why they learn (Page, 1992).

Teacher development is about challenging the relevance of our beliefs in a continuous search for deepening insights. The key thing that CD has taught me is the importance of trying to

listen to others without prejudging them or filtering their ideas with my own. I have yet to master this, but I believe this vital skill of listening can be applied, in a different way of course, to our interactions with students. That is, some of the rewards integral to the CD process might also result if we can learn to interact with students and observe classroom activity honestly, with acceptance, respect, and empathy. Being a reflective teacher means enhancing our own autonomy as learners too.

Breen and Mann (1997) believe the realisation of a pedagogy for autonomy is a nearly impossible challenge, yet argue that, just by attempting the exploration, new possibilities in language pedagogy will be revealed. Simply put, teacher learning involves asking questions and continuously discovering imperfect solutions. To develop a more reflective practice, teachers need to become good observers and interpret classroom interaction in meaningful ways. Before action can occur, pedagogical issues must first be noticed. Only then can new possibilities for teaching and learning be imagined.

Appendix A: Focusing Circles

Circle 1

Lively and engaged students

Friendly, natural, cheerful

previous English 2 class

Worked in a serious way and had fun

Worked well as class

Circle 2

Pacing of work in the course

I was sure they would enjoy course activities

completed work and had fun

Less teacher control and talk / policing necessary

Fun class to teach

Circle 3

More input from students possible on course – student autonomy

More time for student performance

Less teacher control/ talk needed

Frees teacher to aid students with correction, etc. rather than police

Adds to the collegial atmosphere

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

MIYUKI USUKI

FROM MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Tim's chapter reminds me about setting Project Work for my EFL class in 2000. Before setting up the projects, I was afraid of failing to manage my classroom teaching. After starting the projects off, I had more chances to have personal contact with individual students than before, and the class atmosphere gradually became more active.

Tim mentions in his chapter the importance of the interplay between learner autonomy and teacher development. My attempt to initiate learner development also resulted in my own development as a teacher. The more I was involved in the development of learner autonomy, the more I became reflective about my own teaching and relationship with my students.

Tim also notes the teacher's need for his/her own autonomy. In my opinion, individual teachers may have their own way of developing learner autonomy. For sure, there might not be one particular 'best' way of developing autonomy. So, above all, teachers need to foster their own sense of autonomy.

FROM MY LEARNING EXPERIENCE

I had a chance to attend a community English class in Australia in 2002. Being in the position of a learner allowed me to understand learner autonomy in new ways.

Tim describes learner autonomy as "the ability to work on your own effectively." I can say that learner autonomy involves the learners' awareness to motivate themselves to learn effectively, instead of just following what teachers say. However, learner autonomy does not mean that the learners decide and manage all the process of learning by themselves. The point is what and how learners are aware of to do with their own learning.

From my own ESL learning experience, I could notice that classroom learning enhances learners' own learning. Learners can confirm their understanding and expand their own learning through interacting with others. Self-directed learning itself is not enough for the learners to develop their language skills; they must also have opportunities for interaction with others. Both learners and teachers need to be aware that classroom learning is a part of the whole process of language learning.

In the process of language learning, the teacher's role is important as well. Tim indicates that his interventions were needed and generally useful. I had the same experience as a classroom learner where the teacher's feedback on my work and her positive expectations towards me were very important factors. In my opinion, the framework should be set by the teacher, and this must be considered in relation to language acquisition.

Quite often, it seems to be the case that interactive classroom learning is considered as a way to avoid teacher-centredness. Because the teacher wishes to break the silence and expects positive reactions from his or her learners, learner-centred activities become the overriding focus. However, as Tim suggests, in order to develop effective classroom learning, we have to consider our students' own needs and expectations for their language skill improvement.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

JULIAN EDGE

Tim,

This is how your chapter resonated with me.

As you point out, *autonomy* is a chameleon concept. I go along with those people who find it useful to distinguish between *autonomy* and *independence*. My own version of that distinction is to equate autonomy with freedom of choice, and independence with standing alone. If I want to do something independently, I want to do it by myself. When I am acting autonomously, I may decide to do something by myself, or to seek advice, or to ask for explicit instructions, or to cooperate with other people. To help my students become autonomous is to help them take on that responsibility of aware choice, in the knowledge that they (like their teacher) are (socially and culturally situated) individuals and groupings with their own strengths and needs.

All this, of course, is based on the premise that autonomy, as defined above, is a Good Thing. I hold this to be the case, and plead lack of space to argue the fundamentals of it here and now. One has to recognise that we are talking about fundamentals, however: The parallels between learners and teachers run so deep exactly because we *are* talking about differing realisations of the same profound values, not necessarily specific to any one culture, but not necessarily shared, either.

This approach to learning, teaching, and living values a desire to inform ourselves about what is happening, to involve ourselves in conscious decision-making, and to take responsibility for our actions and their outcomes. These values themselves are, of course, also open to dispute, which is not to say that they are not passionately held and will not be defended.

I think we agree about the parallels between what we could just as well call learner development and teacher development: Both need to be self-energised, both can be supported and facilitated by others, both belong to a certain style of world-view with regard both to what '*works*' and what is worthwhile.

To end on a slightly dissonant note, there is one socially-rooted distinction between the two that is problematical, and which I think we are a long way from resolving. Everyone expects students to come to know more, to become able to do more, and to get better at what they do. But how many people feel that way about teachers? To feel that way about teachers is to affirm that it is appropriate that there are things that they don't know and can't do as well as they might. It is to affirm that a classroom is an appropriate arena for the teacher to be learning. How many people are ready for that, and ready to support the process?

We need, as a profession, to learn to communicate better to those outside education in order to win more support for the autonomy and development that we hold to be important. I think that work such as yours, filled with intelligence and passion and humility, is an important contribution to this need. Thank you.