

One Reality of Autonomous Learning in Japan



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We noticed as teachers in Japanese Community Centers that we had been overlooking the influence of our more autonomous adult learners' out-of-class experiences on learning English. In fact, there appears to have been little research on how autonomous language learners create their own chances for learning unrelated to teacher influence in the EFL classroom. By getting feedback from our students from language learning histories, questionnaires, and teacher observations, we gained valuable insights into such out-of-class experiences. Most of our adult learners not only highlighted time for studying English according to particular stages in their lives, but also focused on shameful or embarrassing situations that had motivated them to actively pursue learning English. This in turn underlined a certain level of maturity on our learners' part, which also strongly supported their pursuit of English.

日本のコミュニティー・センターの教員として、自律的な成人学習者の教室外での経験が英語学習に与えた影響を見落としてきた。実際、EFL教室外の教師の影響を受けないところで、成人学習者がどうやって英語を学んできたかは、殆ど研究されていない。そこで言語学習経験報告、アンケート、また教師による観察を通して学習者からフィードバックを得ることで、成人学習者のクラス外での経験について有意義な見解が得られた。学生の多くが特定の時期における英語学習の時間を強調しただけでなく、屈辱的经验やばつが悪い状況などが彼らの英語学習への意欲に刺激を与えたと指摘した。これは言い換えれば、彼らの学習者としての成熟度を示し、学習意欲をより高めたということになる。

I HAVE AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS AND I DON'T KNOW WHY!

STACEY: BUT FIRST...

COLLABORATIVE COMMENTS FOR THE INTRODUCTION FROM THE ANTHOLOGY RETREAT AT MOMOYAMA GAKUIN

Eric and I hadn't written an introduction to our draft when we met at the Momoyama Retreat. Andy mentioned some points to keep in mind that readers might need to know at our poster session:

- How did we get together to collaborate on our teacher development?
- What are those views and developments?
- Where are those views and developments coming from?

Keeping these questions and ideas in mind as a starting point, the following conversation is actually a combination of two conversations between Eric and Stacey. One in December of 2002, when we decided to write a proposal for *Autonomy You Ask!*, and another in June of 2003, after we received collaborative feedback from Andy and others at the Momoyama poster session.

INTRODUCTION

Eric: Good morning Stacey, how's life? I hope the rainy season isn't driving you too crazy. But then you're from Seattle, so this is normal for you.

Stacey: Life? I like rain, but Seattle doesn't get this humid. My place gets moldy if I'm not careful. I don't know how some of my friends living in Japan are mold free. Do they have more time? Anyway, should we get started?

Eric: Stacey, let's start easy. What does autonomy mean to you?

Stacey: Say what? Easy? You know many people interested in autonomy first attempt to define it, but that's by no means easy. But you've asked a great question. Learner autonomy as I perceive it means learners create and participate in their studies. But it's my experience that, within the educational system in Japan, schools, and language classes, learners are both directed and expect to be directed. In these situations, there seems to be a basic assumption that teachers and educators know what is best for learners. In many traditional English classes that I have observed as well as taught, students are often simply regurgitating the words of others. I find this to be a wasted effort because learners should be given the chance to express more of their own ideas.

Eric: So autonomy incorporates giving the students a chance. I doubt if many would argue with that. But, so little of autonomy or issues relating to autonomy has been written up about

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how language learners create their own chances for learning unrelated to teacher influence in the classroom. While I understand that issues such as motivation and autonomy can defy measurement, I wish there were more reports on what autonomy realistically entails and less theoretical definitions. If more research concentrated on autonomous practices, I would be better able to help foster it by first recognizing what was lacking in my own context.

Stacey: Well, what about the ‘Jijis & Babas’ (an affectionate term for elderly men and women in Japan) that you teach? Aren’t they pretty autonomous? You told me that they were doing so much extra work outside of class and were using you as a resource. You also said that they often work together on their own accord, etc... Isn’t that a pretty good model of autonomous language learning?

Eric: Could be. Every week I see students who are in control of their studies, and yet I have never asked what makes them tick. In fact, I have taken them for granted, in a way. They are so pleasant, and just wonderful to teach. In over 12 years of teaching in Japan, I am almost ashamed to admit that I have never really made an effort to understand or investigate what motivates students to study English, especially in terms of internal motivators.

Stacey: No worries, that’s why we’re here today.

Eric: Why don’t we do this chapter on them?

Stacey: I’d love to.

Eric: How about also looking at the adult students in your class? You know the ones you’ve been teaching for 12 years? What are they like?

Stacey: Oh yah, my ‘Sempais’ (someone who is older or has more experience in a certain area than another), they would be interesting to include. You know, in that time, two of the three students have even become English teachers themselves. Pretty amazing! And they show signs of being autonomous like your ‘Jijis & Babas.’

Eric: So, for this project we can look at what makes the ‘Jijis, Babas, & Sempais’ different from many other learners we have taught who have, for one reason or another, no chance to participate in the direction of their own studies. So, where do we start?

Stacey: Well, what about the experts you and I’ve read. How about discussing what they have said in an informal Lit. Review for the readers out there? Maybe it would help people if we put our project into perspective.

Eric: How traditional and a little disappointing, but I see your point about making this more accessible to anyone interested in autonomy. So, what have you read recently that could apply to my ‘Jijis & Babas’?

WHAT OTHERS/THE EXPERTS HAVE TO SAY

Stacey: Well, what about this? I’m interested how Phil Benson (Benson, 2001, 2002b; Head, 2003) is focusing some of his research on out-of-class learning—where learners make efforts

to learn a language outside the classroom by their own initiative. But then I was reading something by Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 57), which seems to contradict what Phil is focusing on. They mention that teachers have a stronger opportunity to influence learner motivation than learners themselves have. The reason for this is apparently that teachers possess ‘a teacher’s mind,’ which means they have the ability to influence students to actively participate in class, express interest in the subject matter, and study frequently. I question this logic. Actually I think you and me maybe have doubts as to whether teachers have as much influence on students as they believe. What are your thoughts on this?

Eric: First of all, I’d question whether there is a concept of ‘a teacher’s mind’ when teachers recognize motivated students for the same reasons. McGroarty (1996) cautions teachers not to make assumptions about their students’ motivations without carefully assessing the multiple factors of the particular classroom situation. I am not convinced that there are opportunities to influence students’ motivation in my situation with the ‘Jijis’ and the ‘Babas.’ As Benson (2001) has suggested, I’ve also noticed that some of my students study English autonomously with no particular influence from the teacher. The students’ reasons and motivational factors for studying English appear to be more significant than any effort on my part. How about the ‘Sempais’ in your teaching situation?

Stacey: Well, the first thing that comes to mind with my ‘Sempais’ is they show compassion about studying English.

Eric: What do you mean by *compassion*?

Stacey: Oh, well this compassion reminds me of a process that Breen and Mann (1997, p. 134) term “a desire to learn” that autonomous language learners appear to possess. So, in this state of mind, autonomous learners have a desire for, and an authentic relationship to, the language they are learning. The motivation fueling the desire can be both intrinsic (meaning ‘I want to learn this’) and/or instrumental (meaning ‘I should learn this so I can get X’).

Eric: I couldn’t agree more. It seems to me that most research on learner motivation and autonomy focuses on students who lack the *desire to learn*. It looks more at how teachers can help to increase interest in the subject through various techniques and strategies than at the nature of motivation itself (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001). So, by investigating these learners that we have, might there be some useful insights to gain?

Stacey: Sure there are! But I’m just wondering, does putting a lot of work into studying qualify these adult students as autonomous language learners? If we have told them to do something and they are following our orders, then that is not autonomous learning. Or could it be that the ‘Jijis, Babas, & Sempais’ are simply trying to please us, as Breen and Mann (1997, p. 141) have described—“to put on the mask of autonomous behavior.”

Eric: Stace, I don’t think so. Heck, I definitely feel that my ‘Jijis & Babas’ are on top of their studies in terms of Holec’s (1981, p. 3) definition of “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” (see also Benson, 2001). In addition, from what I have observed with these students, the issue of the “capacity to take control of one’s learning” raised by Little (1991, p. 3) seems to be key. In fact, the need for external sources of motivation seems to me to be a secondary issue with these autonomous language learners.

First, they have decided to *initiate* their studies. Moreover, they are fully aware of their goals and what they expect from their studies. They know how they hope to achieve their goals, and yet are open to ideas from others in the classroom and often compare notes on techniques and styles. And they reflect on their learning and look for ways to improve and evaluate their progress in learning the English language. While they don't share all of this with me, they seem to know what each other is doing, and that raises the social aspect of learning mentioned by Benson (1996). Well, over to you Stacey? Are your 'Sempais' trying to please you?

Stacey: I hope not! They do show characteristics of being aware of their own responsibility for and making use of their language-learning environment in a collaborative setting along the lines of what Usuki (2002) has observed with two EFL high achievers. I think the 'Sempais' understand they are responsible for improving their English skills because they take advantage of sharing various English resources available to them. When I read the Murphey and Jacobs (2000) article on critical collaborative autonomy, I thought of my 'Sempais.' This process can be observed when learners work on guided cooperative learning with their peers to create a support system which leads to individual critical voices developing autonomously at an accelerated rate. Sometimes I feel like I am the 'fourth student.'

Eric: Or the 'Fifth Beatle'?

Stacey: Oh. Is the state of autonomy being somewhere on a continuum between steering a carload full of passengers and being a spare tire? Hmm.

QUESTIONS

Eric: Wow! Well as teachers, you and I have highly motivated and autonomous learners in our contexts and not necessarily due to any particular effort on our part. For this project we could focus on: How are we overlooking our more autonomous learners' experiences and strategies? Also, are there some insights we can learn from these autonomous learners? Do you agree?

Stacey: Yeah. I think the questions represent the project well because they acknowledge learners have experiences and strategies that we would like to learn from. I also want to keep our eyes open for other factors that might crop up in the data (Allwright & Bailey, 1993; Patton, 1987). Our students may reveal powerful insights not necessarily connected with our original questions, right? Are you interested in that, if they come up?

Eric: Sure. In my opinion, any information that pops up would be an added bonus. Not only information we can learn from, but also anything that people reading this chapter can apply to their own language context.

JIJIS, BABAS, & SEMPAS AS SUBJECTS

Eric: Okay Stace, let's see if we are thinking along the same lines about our project. The 'Jijis, Babas, & Sempais' will consist of 28 EFL adult language learners from my Culture Center courses (held once a week for 70 minutes) and your three EFL adult language learners that meet for the same frequency and time period. Is that right?

Stacey: Yes. Bingo! Do you agree that within our classes the learners' ability of English varies to some extent?

Eric: Yes. Also to find out about what has influenced or driven the ‘Jijis, Babas, & Sempais’ to learn English, I think we need a short orientation during the class period to explain the opportunity to participate in this project. One way to measure their language learning influences would be to develop a self-report questionnaire for the study. I’m also thinking we don’t have the time we need to do interviews.

Stacey: That’s right Eric. Well, I saw an open-ended questionnaire example cited in Burns (1999) that we could use for this paper. And it’ll allow for more detailed descriptions of learner perceptions and unpredicted information. Then there are always retrospective journals, or wait a minute... what about language learning histories (LLHs) that Murphey (1997, 1998b) created with his English learners to develop comprehensible language materials and near peer role models?

Eric: That sounds fine. I also think it would be better for our students if we asked them to give all written feedback in their native language of Japanese.

Stacey: Huh? In Japanese?

Eric: Well, it could reduce misunderstandings and ensure that useful information isn’t omitted due to language limitations.

Stacey: OK, I think we can handle our data written in Japanese. So we will have three instruments: (a) our observations of the students, (b) a questionnaire, and (c) language learning histories. That should give us plenty to work with, don’t you think?

Eric: Yep, and between the three sources, we should be able to integrate our students’ voices into the paper. If we find commonalities, we can group them into themes through the instruments we’ve chosen. But by now our readers are probably getting sick of us rambling on.

Stacey: True!

ERIC: AND THEN...

Two weeks have passed and: (A) Stacey has attended my classes at the Culture Center and observed my ‘Jijis & Babas’ in action. (B) We have had the chance to explain our project to them and her ‘Sempais.’ All have agreed to participate. (C) The questionnaires and LLHs have been collected, and the juicy parts have been translated for those readers not fluent in Japanese.

COMMON THREADS IN OUR STUDENTS’ VOICES

TIME ACCORDING TO ERIC

Stacey: What caught your eye at first from your students’ responses?

Eric: Well, a few common responses or threads seemed to pop up. A number of the ‘Jijis & Babas’ reported that there were benefits to studying with people of the same age group because they enjoyed the experience:

- 同じ年齢の人達でとてもいい友達ができ楽しく勉強できます。
I made really good friends with people of the same age so I enjoy my lessons.
- 同じ年頃で楽しく英語の勉強をしています。
We are of the same age group, so I enjoy studying English.
- 同じ世代なのでクラス授業を休んだ時など親切に授業内容を教えてくれる。
My classmates are of the same generation so when I'm absent from class they kindly tell me the content of the lesson.

Stacey: I did notice they were of a similar age group. In Japan, age is quite an important aspect of everyday life, and it can play a factor in any learning environment. In their responses, one of the three 'Sempais' also expressed that she enjoyed studying with peers from her generation:

- 同じような年齢の方々なのでいろいろ話も合うし、興味、関心も似ているので楽しく一緒にレッスンをうけています。
Being of the same generation, we have a lot we can talk about, have much in common, and so studying (English) together is fun.

Eric: Well, it goes without saying that the students of a particular generation will have more in common. I know, and you saw it too, but the 'Jijis & Babas' are more or less retired, and so many of them have the time to come to class early, and particularly like to stay afterwards and have a cup of coffee or two. They even plan dinners and take day trips together.

Stacey: That's interesting. When I observed your class at the Culture Center, one of your students mentioned she has made friends, which reflects the social element of your class:

- *I liked histories... Y-san does RENSHYU (another student yells, "Practice - he does practice"). I made friends and enjoy the class so I'm satisfied. I must be like Y-san.*

Eric: What else did you notice?

TIME ACCORDING TO STACEY

Stacey: Although all three of my 'Sempais' expressed individual reasons for why they were motivated to study English in their LLHs, they unanimously described interruptions in their English studies because they were busy with marriage and childrearing. This really stood out in their LLHs:

- 結婚してから子供が3人生まれ、また病弱な子もあり、正直言って英語どころではありませんでした。それで11年間全く英語の勉強はできませんでした。
I had three children after getting married. One of them had a number of health problems, so honestly speaking I had no time for English. So, for 11 years I couldn't study.
- 二人目の子供が幼稚園に入った年に幼稚園のお母さん仲間の一人に紹介されて今現在のサークルに入会し、再び英語を勉強することになりました。
When my second child entered nursery school, another mother introduced me to this English circle, and I began my studies once again.

- 専業主婦として生活。英語とは縁がなくなる。
Upon becoming a housewife I had no time for English.

Becoming a wife and a mother can take time away from anyone's studies. During this time in my 'Sempais' lives, there was no room for English.

Eric: Three of my 'Babas' mentioned similar fates in their LLHs:

- 一方で、子育てと仕事の両立に忙殺さ、私の英語は、どんどん遠のいていきました。
Running around like crazy trying to raise kids and work, my English slowly but surely died.
- 60歳にして、第2の人生を歩みだすにあたって、さあ、これからは自分自身を磨こう！勉強をしよう！と思い立ち、一つは英会話を選びました。
When I turned 60, my second life began and I thought about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Then it hit me, I'll study! And English conversation classes were one of my choices (of classes to study).
- 3人の子供の子育ての間は仕事もしておりましたので、日常の生活では全くと言っていいほど英語に接することはありませんでした。
I raised three children and worked, so I had absolutely no opportunity to come in contact with English.

They have made many sacrifices for their families, putting many things on the metaphorical 'back burner' including English. As I said before, many of the 'Jijis & Babas' are now spending a great deal of time (of their own volition) on their English studies. One student said it very clearly in class one day with the following:

- *Becoming a housewife and having children meant doing things for everyone else. Now that they have grown up I finally have my time. I am doing what I want to do for the first time in a long time.*

Stacey: Wow. So **time** is pretty integral to the students' studies. And by the term *time* we can see that it's in reference to both age / generations and class make-up, as well as to whether or not people simply have it (or not) to spend on studying English.

Eric: Oh, but a few of my students also mentioned one more aspect relative to time, that of 'holding back the hands of time'—if you will:

- 老化防止。
(I am studying English) to stave off old age.
- 現在は半分は脳のトレーニング…
Presently, half (of my reason for studying English) is 'brain training'.

I find comments like these usually come up in class at least once a week. Like the saying, 'Use it or lose it.' My students take this very seriously.

Stacey: Interesting, so how much time did they say they put into their studies on a weekly basis?

Eric: It varied from doing 30 minutes a week to a few who put an hour a day into their studies. I'd say most (20) responded that they study 2-3 hours a week. But this time out of class wasn't only spent on homework. They also mentioned that they attempted various activities where they could use their English skills.

Stacey: Like what?

Eric: Well, here is a list of some of the activities they shared with me on the questionnaire and in class discussions:

- Listening to NHK radio English programs
- Listening to AFN (Armed Forces Network radio) or NPR (National Public Radio) news
- Planning and participating in international dance recitals / women's groups
- Hosting dinner parties for guests from abroad (related to husband's work)
- Traveling abroad on their own (as opposed to going with a tour group)
- Volunteer work (with English as the medium)
- English newspaper articles
- E-pals

How about the 'Sempais'?

Stacey: According to the questionnaire, the length of time they spent on class homework was 15 minutes for all three 'Sempais.' Two of them said they spent 30 minutes doing their own English study. The third 'Sempai' claims to spend over 6 hours a week on her studies. Here are the activities they reported:

- Reading の力もつけたいので英語の小説を読む。
As I want to improve my reading skills, I read novels in English.
- 子供の英会話教室で教えているので教材研究やレッスンプランをたてるためにマニュアルを読んだり、辞書をひいたり、ビデオやCD、テープなどを活用して勉強している。
I am teaching children English and so I am always on the lookout for materials for lesson plans. So I will read manuals, dictionaries, watch videos and listen to CDs or tape cassettes. (Note: In class she says she also uses English TV shows and movies to practice English conversation.)
- 英語を聴く機会をつくる。Vocabularyを増やしたい。NHK教育チャンネル、映画、Discovery Channel を見ます。
I am making more opportunities to listen to English. I want to increase my vocabulary. So I watch NHK (the Japanese version of PBS or the BBC) Education channel, movies, and The Discovery Channel.

I must say that, although the period of time the 'Jijis, Babas, & Sempais' study English using their own methods varies, all 31 participants have indicated that they create and spend time on their English learning without much control from you and me.

Eric: So Stacey, with our classes or shall I say ‘social clubs,’ time is a common factor in out-of-class use of English and age preferences. Is it possible that autonomy requires time? I know many of the university students I teach are too busy with part-time jobs and other classes to spend much time on their English studies. Could it be that time is a major factor in whether students become autonomous language learners or not?

Stacey: Yes, like fine cheese and wine makers, autonomous learners develop their craft over time!

TURNING POINTS IN MOTIVATION TO STUDY ENGLISH: SHAME

Eric: I was surprised at the emotional and almost depressing nature of many of the students’ responses. Throughout the LLHs, there were common threads of shame, disappointment, and embarrassment at being unable to communicate in English. The stories the students shared were sometimes pretty awful. Some were too personal to be included, but here are some examples:

- 長女の娘（一人目の孫）が4月より中学校で英語を習い始めます。孫に負けな
いように…この授業をうけております。
*My first granddaughter is starting her English classes in junior high school. So I don’t
want to lose to her... and I am taking this class.*
- この10年程、毎年1回は海外とのcollaborationです。英語圏の人ばかりでは
ありませんが、共通語はやはり英語です。事務的なやりとりからお互いの意見
交換まで通訳を通して間接的に行うより自分で伝えられたらもっとよい仕事が
できたのにと後悔したことがたくさんあります。
*For the past decade or so, every year I collaborate with people from overseas. The people
are not all from English-speaking regions, but we use English as a common language.
Paperwork as well as the sharing of opinions is all done indirectly through interpreters. I
think I could do a better job (if my English was better) and so I often regret my inability
to communicate.*
- 海外で、観光地のガイドさん（英語）の説明を十分理解できなかった。まして
や、ジョークに笑えなかった時、もっと勉強したいと思った。
*On tours abroad with English-speaking guides I couldn’t fully understand their
explanations. On top of that, when they said jokes I didn’t laugh, so I thought I want to
study (harder).*
- 10年ほど前、北海道に旅をしました…若い人たちが海外の人と楽しげに話して
いるかたわらで、私達は貝のようになってしまいました。その時『英語が話せ
たらなあ』とつくづく思いました。
*10 years ago on a trip to Hokkaido... there were a number of young (Japanese)
people talking and having a good time with some foreigners, but we remained almost
completely silent. And I thought to myself ‘I wish I could speak English’.*
- (This person replied to the questionnaire in English!) At dinner parties I had so
much I wanted to ask and as the host I wanted everyone to speak, but as I couldn’t
communicate, there was often silence and I felt responsible for that.

These **common threads** presented in the LLHs reveal that about two thirds of the ‘Jijis & Babas’ shared similar feelings of inadequacy or even shame at not being able to express themselves

as they would have liked to in English. These incidences were actually turning points that motivated the students to pursue English studies further.

Stacey: I didn't expect what the students wrote, either. But thinking of *shame*, I can understand the feeling of being embarrassed by my language skills. I have recently returned to my Japanese reading and writing course because of the overwhelming frustration I felt about not being able to remember some of the Japanese language characters written in the questionnaires and the LLHs in this study. I couldn't read some of the characters, so I had to ask someone to read them for me to understand the content. Eric, our project has motivated me to study Japanese through shame. Wow!!

Well, two of my three students had written about similar experiences in their LLHs about not being able to comprehend a language. Both of them expressed trouble communicating with native and non-native English speaking foreigners in Japan:

- 大学の工学部の研究所に秘書として務めた私は、半導体の論文や研究所の紹介のパンフレットを英訳したりしていましたがポーランドの研究者と国際電話で話さなければならなかった時やハワイの空港にいる大学の先生に連絡を取りたい時など、自分の英会話の能力のなさに打ちひしがれる(Felt overwhelmed)こともありました。読み書きは何とかあったものの、聞いて話すという訓練はとても足りないと思いました。

In my university engineering department's research facilities, I worked as a secretary to translate semi-conductor reports and the facility pamphlet in English. There was a time when I had to speak on the phone to a Polish researcher or I contacted a professor at an airport in Hawaii. I felt overwhelmed by my lack of ability to communicate in English. I was able to read and write in English, but I thought I didn't have enough training in listening and speaking.

She described a sense of being overwhelmed by English conversation, which surprised her because she was able to comprehend and express herself in reading and writing English comfortably. Similarly, her classmate explains about a situation that motivated her to want to be able to comprehend and communicate better with English speakers:

- アルバイトで外国旅行者のピックアップサービスをした。いろいろな国の人と話す機会があり、多様な英語があることに気づく。もっときちんと英語が聞き取れて、たくさん話せるようになりたいと思う。この時の気持ちが後の英会話学習への動機となる。

I worked part time at a foreign travel pick up service-company. I had the opportunity to speak with people from various countries and noticed that there was much diversity in English. I wanted to comprehend properly and speak a lot better. The feeling from that experience would later be my motivation for my English conversation studies.

This 'Sempai' pinpointed her experience of noticing the diversities of English and the demands of comprehension. This became her motivation for continuing to learn English conversation. I don't think my influence, as her teacher, was as powerful as that experience.

AND ONE TO BIND TIME AND SHAME
(THE CONNECTED CONCEPTS OF TIME AND SHAME)

Eric: Well, we have seen individual experiences that encouraged our learners' interests in English, and we have found commonalities of time and shame in our learners' drive to study the language. I think the elements of time and shame require a **maturity**, which brings us to the final component of our analysis. Generally speaking, I see maturity as the underlying current 'binding' the other two aspects.

Stacey: Explain.

Eric: From what the 'Jijis, Babas, & Sempais' have shared with us, I feel that without the ability to first consciously decide on their own to study, then make the time, and use their sense of failure / shame / disappointment as motivation, we would be out of jobs. The best way I feel I can describe this is: maturity.

Stacey: In what sense do you mean exactly? Because they are older, you think they are more mature and better able to take charge of their studies? Age doesn't necessarily mean one is wiser.

Eric: No, no, no. That isn't what I mean. I don't think (old) age is a requirement, but as we read in the LLHs, both your students and mine can invest more of themselves in their studies because they have less to distract them. They have retired, the kids are getting older in your situation and are gone in mine, and even when faced with failure, the 'Jijis, Babas, & Sempais' are undeterred from their studies. You remember how many of them mentioned that they temporarily 'gave up' their studies after high school or college because they didn't have the time to study English. Well, now they have the time and willingness to study English. I think that shows maturity on their part as they know what they want to do and are following through on it.

Stacey: And it is interesting our students have expressed factors for temporarily putting their English studies on hold that had to do with personal life-changing family experiences rather than anything to do with the classroom.

Eric: Yes, that's what our students have said. Unfortunately, it seems like a lesson that takes time, a sense of shame / failure, and maturity in dealing with a language in order for people to learn it. Thus, my belief that autonomous language learning can occur if the learners have some combination of the three: time, shame, and maturity, allowing them to be fully able and ready to take responsibility for their studies.

Stacey: Yeah. I agree. I will make more of a conscious effort to consider my students' life experiences because I think they influence their English learning journeys. Especially in light of the comments the 'Jijis, Babas, & Sempais' have reported in this project and what I have myself experienced with my Japanese studies.

Eric: The same goes for my Kendo studies and me. I have made a conscious decision to practice Kendo for myself, but God knows I have 'failed' thousands of times. Yet I don't let it get me down and instead use that sense of inadequacy to keep on trying my best. I guess we are pretty mature ourselves.

Stacey: I certainly hope so.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

KEVIN BODWELL

As a teacher who has recently joined the ranks of researchers, and as one interested in autonomy, I am inspired by Eric and Stacey's project. They identify and study an under-utilized source of information about autonomous learning, and they give us a look at the character of students practicing autonomy. Their chapter is a useful model for teachers interested in understanding students; the results give insight into their students' learning experiences, which suggest aspects of autonomy that teachers should be aware of and use.

The first characteristic Eric and Stacey found was the availability of time. In my experience with Japanese university students, I have often noticed that even those with the best intentions toward English can be thwarted by lack of time. Most students take four or five classes nearly every day in addition to pursuing other activities. I'm tempted to recommend that curriculum people let students have more time. But it may well be that professors' asking for more time for their own subjects is what has made students' class loads so heavy in the first place. If students need time to be autonomous, the implication may be that they, and teachers, should not expect more than schedules will allow. Or, students who are really interested could be allowed an extra year to concentrate on language learning. At least some schools currently do allow students to go abroad for a year. My own students who have gone abroad report good learning experiences.

Eric and Stacey's students reported embarrassment as a motivator. I really identify with that point. As I am now newly relocated in the United Arab Emirates, I get frustrated with myself when I can't explain to the taxi driver where I want to go. Frustration and need have forced me to learn enough Arabic to get around in taxis in spite of my lack of time. When I've studied languages in the classroom, I've noticed that, though I often ignore great models of language the teacher expertly presents, it's the things other students say that I really remember and use because I wanted to say the same thing and couldn't. Envy may not be a noble emotion, but it sure makes me study. Perhaps teachers can tap that motivational force by, for example, reminding students to notice all sources of language as models, ranging from songs and movies to other students.

Of the three aspects of autonomy Eric and Stacey discuss, maturity may be the area where teachers can have the most influence. If maturity is, to paraphrase Eric, knowing one's goal and pursuing it, then the teacher's role can be one of fostering that pursuit. Learners may know they want to learn, but they don't always know how to learn. Teachers have some expertise in learning processes, and can share it along with encouragement, guiding students to their own best learning styles. There is a certain paradox here, in that 'teaching' can imply non-autonomous students, but a mature approach from the teacher should encourage a mature approach by the students.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

ETSUKO SHIMO

I noticed one important process through Eric and Stacey's intriguing dialog with their students' voices in it: Engaging in communicative activities not only in the classroom but in the 'real' world also had led to their students' enhanced motivation. I had a question about what had made them continue studying English in spite of experiencing language shame. I then found it helpful to consider that such experiences resulted from their actual attempts at authentic language use.

Authentic language-use activities put the learners in situations that evoked various emotional states. The shame that they felt through such activities seems to have driven Eric and Stacey's students to more autonomous learning. This is just a speculation, but perhaps the Japanese cultural aspect *hansei* might have led them to focus more on their embarrassing experiences in this study. ('Hansei' means to reflect repentantly on one's actions in order to discover what is wrong and can be improved on one's own part.)

I would say that joy is another motivational force that may be stronger. Learners may often adopt the 'no pain, no gain' perspective, but when they experience gain, they feel happiness that motivates them even more. The students also mention fun parts of language learning (e.g., socializing, and making friends).

In addition, other factors appear to have an influence on how learners deal with negative experiences, i.e., whether they yield to them or change them into positive ones. Maturity and time, factors discussed in this chapter, are also influential. Furthermore, it seems that some of the students' words imply that a collaborative learning environment and a strong awareness of the purpose of learning also contributed to their motivation. Further investigation of these factors would be interesting.

Eric and Stacey's chapter also made me wonder why some high school or university students eagerly study English, even though they seem to be disadvantaged in terms of time availability. They are busy with club activities, part-time jobs, or homework from other classes. Would it be OK to say that when they find it interesting, useful, meaningful, and/or necessary, they try to create time for it? If so, what can make students think this way? My own language learning and teaching experience suggest that authentic language-use activities and practical or personal learning objectives are among the most effective.

What made and kept Eric and Stacey's students interested perhaps also provides some answers to the above question. The students could have chosen to learn *chigirie* (pictures made with torn paper, often with beautiful traditional Japanese paper) or Japanese calligraphy to "stave off old age," as my grandmothers did. Is learning English instead of *chigirie* the same as drinking apple juice instead of orange? Would getting someone interested in learning English be the same as getting someone interested in football? This chapter has shown me that motivational factors are not simple. The investigation of such questions will continue, though the answers should not stop teachers from being flexible in all different contexts.