

Routine Reflections on Developing Autonomy?



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In this chapter I try to explore the parallel development of teacher and learner autonomy through following one first-year student, C, over the spring semester. The foundation for this exploration is a collaborative dialogue with Cath Malone, where we talked together on email about our projects in February and March. I use this written reflection as an anchor for examining my own assumptions and habits about learning and teaching. To understand C's development, I present detailed extracts from her learning diaries and end-of-semester portfolio, as well as question closely how they can be interpreted in different ways. This inquiry leads me to conceptualizing the development of autonomy as a dynamic interplay between the routine and the reflective. In addition, as much as we speak of linguistic fluency, there seems to be a case for understanding teacher and learning autonomy as interrelated by a principle of learning fluency.

本章では、Cという1年生の春学期を追跡することを通して、教師と学習者の自律性の並行的発達について探る。この研究は、2月、3月とこのプロジェクトに関して交わされたキャシー・マローンとの電子メールでの対話に基づいている。この文字化された思考は、私が学び、教える上での習慣や、自分の仮説を探るための支えとして用いる。Cの発達を理解するために、彼女の学習記録、学期末のポートフォリオからの抜粋を提示し、それがどのように解釈できるか様々な視点から吟味した。この研究から、私は自律性の発達を、日常と、内省との間の動的な相互作用として概念化するに至った。さらに、言語の流暢さが議論されるのと同様に、「学習の流暢さ」という原理のもとで相互に関係しあっている教師自律と学習自律性も理解されるべきであろう。

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
 Something else is alive
 Besides the clock's loneliness
 And this blank page where my fingers move.
 —Ted Hughes, *The Thought Fox*

STARTING POINTS OF REFERENCE

The new academic year begins, and I am unsure how to start this research project. I feel tired and excited, but it is tired more than excited. I get into a quandary on my PhD in April by temporarily losing a sense of enjoyment for such research. It comes down to the quantitative collocational studies that I had been writing up in March. Researcher's block from losing sight of my learners in my doctoral work: Who am I doing research for? Who should it benefit? How can I involve my learners more in what I am doing?

Time continues to rush by, and it's difficult to step back and find a space for getting into this project. Clouded intuition. After several midnight moments in the forest of decontextualised research, my fingers are moving towards a teaching diary (cf., Appel, 1995; McDonough, 1994). I decide to start writing this chapter and then repeatedly to re-write it, as a way to keep such a diary for this project. I notice, though, that I need to wait until things have settled into some kind of rhythm before I can find a specific direction.

Cath: "Noticing"—Students need to develop their language awareness to learn to notice and analyse: Is there a parallel process for teachers developing teacher autonomy? We need to find a still moment in our hectic schedule to reflect on fundamental assumptions about what we do, & start to really pay close attention. Again it brings us back to demands of time: Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy take time to develop simply. Real reflection is very time-consuming. Term time I find myself caught up in a frenzy of activity that is definitely not conducive to "noticing." I'm too busy doing stuff.

FOCUSING ON ONE CLASS

The class is a first-year integrated skills group, with 23 students, where the focus of the course is on developing academic literacy in English through researching, discussing, and presenting social, legal, political, and international issues. They have four other English classes a week, and will continue to do so in the second year too, with two classes in the third. This integrated

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skills class meets once a week for 90 minutes. The first weeks of the course are geared towards establishing initial awareness of learning goals and reflectivity, as well as some basic study skills such as reading for information and making mind-map notes clearly so that they can be used for discussion, giving short presentations, and using English increasingly actively in class.

The aim is to guide the students towards using certain integrated skills purposively, and away from their pre-university experiences of exam-based, non-communicative cramming. While the opening stages of the course are tightly structured and largely teacher-directed (cf., Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003), one key part is helping the students take greater control of their learning by writing a weekly Learning Diary (Dam, 1995). The starting guidelines for the Learning Diary are shown in Table 1 below. The example Learning Diaries A and B are composites based on diaries from previous years, designed to raise awareness of the difference between being generally descriptive or specifically detailed in reflecting on one's learning (Little, 1991, p. 51). The students structure their Learning Diaries according to these guidelines for the first four-week cycle of the term. (See the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for further materials used in this opening phase.)

Table 1 Weekly Learning Diary: Starting Guidelines

At the end of each lesson, or as soon as possible after each lesson, take about 15 minutes, by yourself, to reflect on the lesson. Then write your learning diary in the Learning Diary space on the *Learning Goals and Learning Diary* paper. When you start your diary, do three things:

- (1) try to connect your diary to your learning goals;
- (2) try to be detailed in describing what you did;
- (3) try to set yourself specific practical goals that you want to try next time.

Look at these example learning diaries. In what ways are Learning Diary A and B similar? In what ways are they different?

Learning Diary A

We practiced listening and note-taking at first and made a 5-minute presentation to organize and understand our own topics. My short presentation about women's rights was better than last week. I spoke more fluently and in more detail. I got nervous before the presentation last week, but I felt relaxed for the 5-minute presentation this week. Why I was more successful is that I researched more details and understood the topic well. I want to research women's rights more and organize my presentation. I want to improve how I read and make notes in my notebook. (96 words)

Learning Diary B

We practiced listening and note-taking and made a 5-minute presentation to help understand our topics. Because I am Japanese, I can't speak English well. I got nervous before the presentation last week, and this week, and I thought that I am no good at English. I need to study grammar more so that I don't make any mistakes. My dream is to speak English fluently without mistakes, but I am no good at English. If I don't understand what someone says, I can't speak. I can't continue the conversation. I did my presentation today. (94 words)

Which Learning Diary is detailed, practical, positive and pro-active? Which one isn't?

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEARNING DIARIES

Andy: For a long time I've had students keep learning diaries, and a couple of years ago I did some action research on first-year writers who were finding it hard to get into academic writing. Their pace of development was slower than that of other students, and from what I could tell it was mainly a question of their style of reflection. They could narrate what they did (once they had remembered what they had done!), but the effort in simply recalling clearly what they had done delayed / subverted their ability to 'transform' their knowledge of their learning (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Cath: What do you mean by "ability to 'transform' their knowledge of their learning"?

Andy: To generalize and theorise from it so that they can identify more and more specific actions and feelings about learning. It is as if 'successful' students could recall and transform (i.e., be 'meta' self-critical about what they had done, what they had learned and what they do in the future), but many students could recall and narrate but not make that next step towards changed action. The learning diary is then maybe reinforcing, in some cases, their under-achievement...

Cath: Some interesting parallels with my own experience of students who can observe but then seem to stall and can't / don't take the next step of analysing more deeply.

What emerges is that both Cath and I share some concerns that learning diaries, a key means of helping students reflect on their learning, can inadvertently trap students into underachieving. I tend to construe this trapped way of thinking as 'descriptive-affective-negatively evaluative' i.e., a learner may articulate their thinking as 'I did X, I felt bad about X because I cannot / am not Z.' I also believe that one corollary to such a way of thinking is that learning decisions and actions based on such negative evaluations tend to become general and remote, outside the here and now.

FOCUSING ON ONE STUDENT

To move into the Anthology project, my first decision is to look back more closely at the first several weeks by making photocopies of the whole group's learning diaries. Initially focusing on two students, I narrow the focus to one student, C (female), who, English-proficiency-wise, is right in the middle of the group. C's two sets of learning goals and diaries for April 24th and May 1st are presented below. They give some sense of her learning in the early weeks of the course.

MY LEARNING GOALS FOR TODAY APRIL 24TH 2003

I want not to be shy and want to speak and listen actively. I'm afraid of making mistakes in English, so I couldn't speak actively. Not being shy is very important for me to touch English. I try to explain what I really want to tell him or her.

MY LEARNING DIARY FOR TODAY APRIL 24TH 2003

We practiced listening and note-taking and made a 5-minute presentation to explain in English what we want to know. My presentation about my language learning history was

not so good because of my small vocabulary. I couldn't present the topic with accuracy. In order to conquer this, I want to touch English as many times as I can. I'm ashamed to make mistakes, so I want to speak to my classmates of my own motion and enrich my vocabulary. I want to gain experience by practice.

MY LEARNING GOALS FOR TODAY MAY 1ST 2003

I want to speak English actively and listen my friends speaking carefully and nodding. I think it is important for us to show whether I understand or don't understand what she or he says. If I don't understand what he or she says, I say "I beg your pardon?" or "What do you mean?"

MY LEARNING DIARY FOR TODAY MAY 1ST 2003

We practiced reading quickly, note-taking and how to explain SARS. My presentation was not so good because I didn't know the important words about SARS and it was difficult for me to explain SARS with accuracy. I want to examine words in fashine, for example, SARS, Wars, or environment problems. I will look up words in English-English dictionary in order to enrich my English vocabulary. I also want to communicate with many people in English. I think it is good for me to experience in various situations.

When I look later more closely at C's learning diaries, my first impression is that her reflections on her learning tend to show:

1. her negative evaluation of what she has done;
2. her focus on the difficulty of individual words;
3. her general wish to enrich her vocabulary;
4. her general sense of being able to achieve progress through practice and communication.

In an earlier draft of this paper, I comment: "*What is interesting is that C is negatively specific about what she has done, and positively general about what she might do. She finds it much easier to criticize what she has done rather than to plan specifically what she can do.*" Yet, for some reason, I am not satisfied with this explanation. It niggles.

FINDING INTERPRETATIONS THAT FIT

Through listening to the interpretation of my colleague, Mike Nix, I re-think my understanding of C's initial entries, seeing C's development moving from an affective focus on herself, where she is concerned with mistakes and accuracy, towards a pro-active way of thinking where she is concerned with understanding and presenting to others clearly.

The conversation with Mike takes place on our way down to the Anthology Retreat in June near Osaka. It is a weekend full of dialogue, laughter, presentation, and collaboration, and the positive and supportive atmosphere gives me a better sense of direction. It also helps me understand how learning is all the richer for being affective, interactive, and pro-active, and not simply individual and self-critical. The Retreat has the added effect of making me re-consider again the assumptions I had made about Learning Diaries in talking with Cath over e-mail in February and March.

I notice that I use Bereiter and Scardamalia's psychological metaphor of knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming as a stock formulation for two basic types of reflective habit.

However, the written record of the dialogue with Cath lets me see later that the metaphor itself is potentially misleading in at least two ways. First, it tends to emphasize individual psychology at the expense of social learning. Second, it prioritizes knowledge over experience by downplaying the influence of affective factors in reflection. The questioning of the metaphor is a small but important shift in my awareness that comes to me when I find space to look back with detachment at these initial discussions with Cath. Yet, several other questions remain.

Learning diaries are seen as a useful means to help learners self-monitor, self-assess, and become critically reflective (e.g., Barfield, 1993; Cotterall, 1995; Murphey, 1992; Nunan, Lai & Keobke, 1999; Usuki, 1995), but should the format of the diary be left open or should the prompt questions be fixed from week to week? An open format seems more suited to the later stages of a course once students have developed the ability to describe and analyse their learning in specific terms. In contrast, a fixed set of questions suggests that the development of reflective awareness can be fostered over time without varying the frames of reflective reference. Intuitively, this seems doubtful. So, one critical question that the reconsideration of the dialogue with Cath leads to is how to develop the structure of learning diaries to help students reflect in more effective ways.

It's also a question that my colleague, Mike, and I have been discussing over the last year. Mike suggested five steps for writing a learning diary, which we then adjusted towards five different ways of thinking (Nix, 2003). Applied to a weekly learning diary for a once-a-week class, these five ways can be summarized as:

- Descriptive: What did I do for homework? What happened today in class? What did we do? What did we talk about?
- Affective: How do I feel about what I did in today's class?
- Evaluative: What was successful? What was not so successful?
- Analytical: Why was I / were we successful today? What did I notice about effective ways of learning and communicating?
- Pro-active: How can I improve my learning? What specific actions can I take? What are my specific goals for this week?

Having used these five ways of thinking in the second semester of the previous academic year, I felt that they greatly improved the quality of the reflections that students make. Part of the effectiveness of the five ways may be that they combine reasoning and action with description, emotion, and judgment. In other words, the five ways seem to help students encompass both knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming modes of looking at their learning.

An alternative interpretation is that the five ways of thinking assist learners in structuring their awareness and autonomy at different levels. Thavenius (1999), for example, sees learners potentially reaching three different levels of awareness:

It goes without saying that the learners reach different levels of awareness and autonomy. Those who describe *what* they do and *how*, belong to the lowest level. Those who describe what they *learned* and *how*, reach a higher awareness level. And those who are able to describe the relationship between their planned learning objectives and their learning achievements, and who also reflect on *why* and *why not*, reach the highest level. (p. 160)

What the comparison with Thavenius's classification shows is that the five ways potentially offer access to all students to reach the 'highest level of awareness' over time. This seems a

plausible interpretation that fits well with my own values and concerns, and I convey this confidence to Cath.

Andy: I guess the good thing about the five ways is that they allow a person a way to start seeing patterns and then change their routine way of reflection.

Cath: How do you discover a student's routine way of reflection? Do you think introducing the 5 ways of thinking actually altered the way they reflect?

It's a great question: What is routine reflection? Do the five ways of thinking really help? It's time to re-consider this because C, like the other students in the class, is asked to use the five ways of thinking to organise their learning diaries in the next 5-week cycle of learning and research.

DEVELOPING FRAMES OF REFLECTION

The second cycle from mid-May to mid-June begins with the students completing a review of how they see their skills development. The five classes in the second cycle also guide the students to working for about 45 minutes in groups during each class, which they begin by discussing and setting their own goals together. These three frames—skills self-assessment, learning dairies in a different format, and group-work—are the common external structures of the second cycle. I will limit my focus to the first two—skills self-assessment and learning diaries using the five ways of thinking—as well as consider how my own position as teacher and researcher changes in the second cycle.

SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

The skills self-assessment is designed to help the students to develop a specific metalanguage for talking about their learning with each other and to become more specific in the way they can plan and carry out their learning. Again, the earlier dialogue with Cath in February highlighted some of the reasoning behind this.

Cath February 21: About diaries confirming underachievement—I have similar experience & I must admit I wondered whether there's a socio-cultural barrier here in that in Japanese you rarely hear anyone say "I'm good at this, I did this well." As well as keeping their observations at a very general level, I feel some students were falling back on a formulaic stock response: "I can't do this, because I'm poor at English." A diary full of these kinds of comments is both untrue and enormously dispiriting. Perhaps both students & teachers need practice in dividing the mammoth task of language learning into small bite-sized chunks, achievable goals. All of this got me thinking about the pre-requisites for effective reflection for language teachers and students:

- a certain amount of confidence in your own judgment
- based on prior experience of success
- ability to de-personalize / objectify their own behaviour for analysis.

This may be particularly difficult when the student is being evaluated on this same behaviour.

Since the concept of academic literacy itself is so complex (and since the development of academic literacy is a central aim of the course, too), the self-assessment review aims to separate a basic understanding of such literacy into key macro-phases, which can then be understood as

consisting of smaller interconnecting webs of sub-skills. These macro-phases are (a) learning skills, (b) getting ready for discussion, (c) discussion skills, (d) presentation skills, and (e) research skills. The students are asked to consider how familiar and how confident they are with each macro-component and its sub-skills, so that they have a reference point for their development. The final part of the skills self-assessment frame requires students to decide and focus on six particular aspects of academic literacy in English that they wish to improve.

C's individual self-assessment follows on the next two pages. She narrows down her skills development towards presentation skills for the second learning and research cycle, choosing global population issues as her research topic. In responding to the final narrowing down focus questions (i.e., "Which 6 specific concepts/skills do you most want to develop in the second learning cycle? Why? How?"), C decided:

What I most want to develop in the second learning cycle is presentation skills. I think that it is important to refer to my opinions. I didn't have many chances to give a presentation in English, but now I have ones and I want to make use of these chances. I could explain about SARS without notes. I want to speak without notes whenever I give a presentation. I want to try to express my feelings with accuracy in order to give a good explanation.

**Table 2 Talking about Learning, Discussion, Presentation and Research:
C's Self-assessment in the middle of May**

These are some 'key terms' or 'key concepts' for thinking about learning, discussion, presentation and research. They are 'thinking tools'—a kind of language that we can use together. How familiar are these terms to you?

Concept	I understand this concept and feel confident about how to 'do it'.	I understand this concept but don't feel confident about how to 'do it'.	I don't understand this concept, or this is a completely new concept for me.
(1) Learning skills		○	
Preparing before class	○		
Meeting deadlines	○		
Making your learning goals specific		○	
Planning your learning		○	
Reviewing your learning	○		
(2) Getting ready for discussion		○	
Reading and note-taking		○	
Learning vocabulary		○	
Self-talk		○	
Mind-mapping		○	
Managing your time	○		
(3) Discussion skills			○
Using your notes		○	
Keeping going in English		○	
Listening actively		○	
Repeating key words and phrases		○	
Taking turns in a discussion		○	
Asking questions		○	
Asking for examples			○
Checking your understanding of what another person says	○		

(4) Presentation skills		o	
Giving a presentation		o	
Opening a presentation		o	
Telling the listener how many key points	o		
Introducing the key points		o	
Organising the opening, middle and end of a presentation		o	
Giving evidence to both sides of a question			o
Speaking without notes		o	
Raising issues for discussion	o		
(5) Research skills		o	
Using the Internet in English		o	
Writing research questions before you read		o	
Making your research specific		o	
Making vocabulary networks		o	
Explaining key ideas from your research	o		

Although C's most confident area of academic literacy is learning skills, she rates 'Planning her learning' and 'Making her learning goals specific' less confidently than the other aspects of this overall ability. In other words, she seems able to fulfill externally imposed tasks such as preparation and meeting deadlines for handing in work, but her sense of self-initiated learning is still not strong in her global assessment. This may underscore the uneven balance between teacher control and learner control in the initial part of the term.

One possible understanding of C's uneven development in terms of learning skills is that she is more confident about the individually controlled parts of her learning, and less confident in using her individual preparation interactively with others for presentation and discussion in class. However, it is the narrowing down of her skills focus to specific individual goals that shows C's growing confidence about how she would like to improve 'giving a good explanation.' The students complete the same skills self-assessment in mid-June as part of their review of the second cycle. (See the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for more information.)

STEPPING BACK AND FINDING SPACE

The second cycle lasts five weeks, during which the students take greater responsibility for structuring their learning. As before, the class starts with Social English, Learning Goals, and Learning Diaries, but, in contrast to the first few weeks of term, students then work in groups of three with similar specific goals. C's group, for example, is interested in developing their presentation skills, while other groups want to practice discussion or hybrid mixtures of different discrete skills. In the second cycle, as mentioned earlier, group-work lasts for around 45 minutes.

Such a change in the lesson structuring means that I observe for longer periods of time how different groups are working and that I respond more closely to my students with individual advice, too. Near the start of the second cycle (June 5th), I introduce the use of recording walkmans for group work and collect in the students' cassettes after the first recording by the students. As I listen to the tapes and transcribe C's group work, I am struck by the fact that the three students are taking very long turns in presenting their ideas to each other, and that much of their discussion centres on understanding new words. Again, something niggles with me about this.

I'm not sure what to do. On the one hand, I have the linguistic 'evidence' of the transcription, which I tend to interpret in negative terms because the group seems limited in its interaction. On the other, I have also been observing groups in class where I have the sense that the students are taking over and seem to be investing much more in what they are doing. Data-collecting in this non-collaborative manner (i.e., the students record, I listen to the tapes and notice) creates distance. Having struggled to catch up with what my students are doing in group work, I wonder whether I have caught up only to take more control of what they are doing. This dilemma brings me back to my assumed position as researcher: Is it to be 'linguistic researcher on the outside' or 'exploratory co-learner on the inside'?

To step back, I stop collecting the tapes and ask the students to continue using the walkmans, so that they can later listen to their tapes themselves—which is what they would be usually doing if I wasn't so concerned with collecting data for this project!—and choose parts of their social English conversations and presentation-discussions to transcribe as part of a portfolio of work for the end of the semester.

LEARNING DIARIES WITH THE FIVE WAYS OF THINKING

In addition to the skills self-assessment at the start and end of the second cycle, C's learning diaries for the second cycle show her using the five ways of thinking to structure her reflection and to move towards increasingly more specific individual goals.

C'S LEARNING GOALS MAY 29TH

I want to speak and explain about what I looked over as plain as I can. It is important to try to give a good presentation in order to improve my English. I will confirm whether my partner understand my explanation.

C'S LEARNING DIARY MAY 29TH

Today I give a presentation about population problems in the world. I tried to make my partner who wanted to improve presentation skills understand what I said, but I didn't bring English-English dictionary. I couldn't explain about difficult words. It is regrettable that I couldn't exact explanation, and I feel that I have to be more active. The reason for I wasn't so active is that I didn't have confidence to explain about my presentation. I think it is important to make the most of English-English dictionary. I want to get accustomed to give a presentation without being worry about making mistakes. Next time I will ask my partners whether they understand or not my presentation. When I listen to my partner speaking I want to show interest and ask questions.

C'S LEARNING GOALS JUNE 5TH

I want to be active and listen carefully. Last time I wasn't so active. It is important to be active in order to improve my English. If I don't understand what my partner say, I say to him or her "What do you mean?"

C'S LEARNING DIARY JUNE 5TH

Today I explained about "population problems in the world." I listened to my partners presenting as seriously as possible, but I couldn't understand all content because of my lack

of English vocabulary. I was nervous while I was presenting, because I had no confidence to give a good explanation. But I tried to be relax. My partner said that my mind map was good to explain about my topic. I was happy to hear that. But my presentation was not so good. There are two reasons why it was not so good. First I didn't practiced my presentation sufficiently, so I was at a loss how to explain. Second my topic is too difficult to understand and explain because "Population problems in the world" is extensive. So I have to limit the topic. Before the class, I have to practice my presentation sufficiently to give a good presentation and be more active.

C'S LEARNING GOALS JUNE 12TH

I want to make what I say clear. The topic I'm researching is difficult to explain. I try to make the most of "vocabulary networks."

C'S LEARNING DIARY JUNE 12TH

Today I tried to repeat and rephrase what I thought was important. And last time I was negative, so I wanted to be active to speak and listen. I gave my presentation first, so I learned how to repeat or rephrase watching my partners do. I repeated the phrases I thought was important to understand my topic. I think I'm getting to used giving my presentation about "population problems" because I have a knowledge about population in the world. Comparing with last time, I could take part in discussion actively. But I felt that I depended on my mindmap and vocabulary networks too much. I didn't watch my partner's eyes. So I want to give a presentation with watching their eyes not notes. And when I say number of people in my presentation I had better repeat the number slowly next time. I think that I want to give a best presentation and reflection next time.

From May 29th to June 12th, it is clear that C develops her ability to become more detailed in what she notices about her learning. The imbalance in her developing autonomy that I had noticed in her self-assessment now starts to even out through more detailed reflection each week: The diary entries become longer, the patterns clearer. What strikes me in seeing C's learning diary for this period is how she moves once more from emphasizing affective factors (May 29th) to greater analytical thinking (June 5th), and then to an interactive mode of learning (June 12th). It could be said that she does not have a routine way of reflection; rather, we could understand C's learning development as showing cycles of deepening awareness and collaborative engagement. By taking greater control of what she does, she becomes more interactive; by becoming more interactive and self-aware, she takes greater control. The space for developing autonomy seems then to be located between interactivity and self-awareness, or, between negotiation and control: A dialectic of communicative learning rather than a continuum of discrete stages of skills mastery.

The key insight for me is the cyclical nature of C's development of autonomy: It is not linear, but rather *recursive-progressive*. C pushes towards greater autonomy by simultaneously noticing both her independence (e.g., "*Comparing with last time, I could take part in discussion actively*") and dependence (e.g., "*I felt that I depended on my mindmap and vocabulary networks too much*"), so that she can re-combine these into a new integrated and interdependent learning goal: "*So I want to give a presentation with watching their eyes not notes.*" This way of interpreting C's development suggests that the effective development of autonomy is motivated by the balanced re-combination of the routine with the reflective towards new levels of awareness and action.

The term *learning fluency* might act as an appropriate description here: Learning fluency, as much as language fluency, may pivot on the re-formulation and re-combination of known elements with new insights in order to grow and become self-sustaining. But in what ways does C perceive her own development of autonomy? To understand this, I would like to move towards the end of this chapter by presenting extracts from C's end-of-semester portfolio and letting C speak for herself about her own sense of developing autonomy.

RE-COMBINING THE ROUTINE WITH THE REFLECTIVE

C: In April and beginning of May, I was so negative and afraid of making mistakes in English. So I felt nervous every class. I was confused to write my goal because I didn't know my specific aim or which skill I wanted to improve. But now I think I'm more active and take part in discussion or free conversation without being afraid of mistakes.

My classmates are kind and when I don't know English words I want to explain, they teach me. So I realized that "Being active" is most important thing and the first step. And I think my research skill, presentation skill and discussion skills were improved because of the presentation for two or three months. I wanted to improve the discussion more and I want to improve my presentation skill. Comparing with earlier lessons, my English vocabulary is increased. But sometimes I don't know words I want to say, so I want to increase vocabulary. In May I explained about SARS, but it was not good because I was not used to giving a presentation. Compared with presentation about population problem, I think the later is more better.

For the first time, I was afraid of making mistakes in English. But during free conversation, I made many mistakes in English. I realized that being active is the most important thing: Now I'm not afraid of making mistakes because my classmates don't oblivious of my mistakes, they emphasize what I want to tell. For me it is natural thing to use English now. And I think it is better to use English as often as possible. I want to make the most of free conversation to enjoy English. I want to make the content massive in the second semester.

I think the poster presentation (June 19th / June 26th) helped me improve my English. It was a very hard work for me, because I had to research population problems in the internet every week and write mind-maps and vocabulary network and prepare before class. But I think these homework improved research skill, presentation skill, and discussion skill. For the first time, I was so negative. But Andy said to me, "Don't be afraid of making mistakes, be active." It made me relaxed. It was very good for me to be encouraged.

I think presentation will be called for in the future. So having given the presentation for two months is very valuable. I think it was good to make small groups what skill we improve most because to have clear aim is good. But I'm nervous when I record my presentation or free conversation because I awake to tape. I want not to use tapes as if I can. I don't know how to repeat or rephrase with accuracy, so I want you to tell in the second semester. I also don't know how to start my presentation and how to connect with the subject.

CONTINUING INSIGHTS FROM C

In the autumn, as the new semester starts, I show C the present version of the chapter, and ask her if she would be willing to read and respond to my understanding of how I have interpreted her development. C agrees, then later writes:

I think your analysis of me is nearly truthful. I am negative whatever I do as you analysed me. I have wanted to be able to speak in English, but I didn't have much time to do. I am good at reading English better than speaking, so I am a typical student in learning English. This unbalance makes it more difficult for me to have a confidence. As you wrote, I am negatively specific about what I have done and positively general about what I might do. I didn't notice the fact then. I think to notice my weak points help me develop my English. And writing learning diaries with five different ways also help me notice what I should do or why I could not be satisfied with my presentation and so on. While I was reading your report, I could do a disinterested analysis of the self. I think it is important for me to look back myself after every class what is better than previous class or what is worse. I didn't understand the importance of autonomy sufficiently, but now I know. Developing autonomy connects developing my English level. I still don't know the best way to learn English, but I think it's important to approach English in all its bearings.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I have tried to interweave the development of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in order to reveal parallels in both processes. Following C's development of her awareness, while at the same time making multiple and plausible interpretations of her learning diaries and self-assessments, made me think closely about my own teaching assumptions and habits. Yet, because I decided early on to keep re-writing this paper as a way of keeping an ongoing diary for this project, my interpretations changed many times; in the end, I decided that C should speak for herself without my imposing any interpretation at all on what she says. Reading C's continuing insights again opens up more questions for me, as I try to understand better ways to learn, research, and teach.

This captures a constant dilemma. Little cites Ackermann's (1996) "notion of an alternation between connection and separation, what she calls 'diving in' and 'stepping out'" in referring to the tension between using language and reflecting on our use of language in autonomous language learning (Little, 2000, p. 19). A similar tension seems to apply to the development of a teacher's own awareness of what he or she is doing. Looking closely at one student's development lets us perhaps see characteristics of becoming autonomous that would otherwise remain obscure; simultaneously, the focus on the individual risks obscuring the individual's interaction and interdependence with the group. As such, the role of negotiation and collaboration gets downplayed, and the presentation and understanding of lesson-by-lesson minutiae are partial and incomplete.

Aware of this trade-off, I have also attempted to show in this chapter how my own awareness developed through engaging in a lengthy dialogue with Cath Malone, observing C, and discussing key questions with different colleagues, particularly Mike Nix. It also grew through attending much more closely than I would have otherwise done to what was happening with this class group and other classes too. As a result, I feel that I have ended up with more questions than I started with, but I also see that my questions are becoming more reflective and less routine: Things have become simultaneously clearer and less certain, leaving an inescapable sense of skeptical self-direction. Is that what we might also mean by developing autonomy?

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

STEPHEN J. DAVIES

Andy Barfield's thought-provoking paper discusses in detail the development of teacher and learner autonomy. He develops his ideas discursively through a process of description, reflection, and interpretation, while, at the same time, foregrounding the role of his collaborators. Indeed, a sense of edgy interaction between learners, collaborators, and other researchers resonates throughout his paper.

Most of his data is drawn from a learner diary written by one of his students. This student was one member of small class that had a total enrollment of 23. All of the students were studying how to develop academic literacy in English. They were encouraged to establish an awareness of learning goals and reflectivity by keeping learner diaries.

The data that he analyses consists of 9 separate diary entries and an extended end-of-semester review. He accepts that there are various ways of interpreting the data, and also freely acknowledges his own feelings of uncertainty about some of his intuitions. Nevertheless, his detailed analysis enables him to posit two important ideas about learner autonomy.

First, he discusses the theory that autonomy might consist of various levels of awareness. Learners progress through these at different rates. However, progress is not automatic; for example, some learners may remain at the level of simple description without involving themselves in any critical self-reflection. Andy acknowledges the danger of negative reinforcement if learners become fixated on their own perceived inadequacies. This, in turn, raises the issue of how to empower learners so that they can "generalize and theorise" from their learning in order to be able to set specific learning goals and activities for themselves.

The solution that Andy proposes is the use of a set of guidelines for writing diaries derived from Nix (2003). These guidelines encourage students to reflect in 5 specific modes: descriptive, affective, evaluative, analytical, and pro-active. He demonstrates the effectiveness of this 5-point procedure by providing evidence of growth in reflective understanding drawn from the diary of the learner C.

However, he goes on to suggest that it may be too simplistic, in fact, to think of learners progressing toward autonomy through clearly defined discrete stages. Instead, we need to think in terms of a more cyclical, "recursive-progressive" process, that essentially involves a dialectic of communicative learning. Indeed, progress towards autonomy can best be described as the gradual achievement of "learning fluency," forged in the context of mediated classroom discourses.

This definition of autonomy as a nexus of reciprocal-recursive discourses is of special relevance for other researchers working in the field of learner development. Although a comprehensive definition of learner autonomy still remains elusive, Andy's paradigm is a significant step forward. Finally, he is not content with conceptualizing autonomy as process; his concluding paragraph hints at a new notion, that of autonomy as a mental state or "inescapable sense of skeptical self-direction."

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

MARY LEE FIELD

Teaching and learning diaries, like think aloud protocols and other records of mental processes, are attempts to ‘see inside’ the closed box of the mind—to know how the mind works, how we learn, how we conceptualize. Andy Barfield’s chapter shows us how to peek into the box. When students ‘notice’ their own processes of learning, they can become more independent, autonomous learners. By monitoring the students’ ‘noticing,’ teachers can gather data to structure and guide the students’ development.

In his discussion about the meanings of a student’s diary entries, Andy not only avoids culturally biased misinterpretation of data but also illustrates the Velcro-like nature of learning and ‘noticing’ learning. The student is both learning a meta-language and simultaneously using that language to provide metacognitive observations on her own mental process. She is being asked to write about her own learning process, skills, goals, and development even though she comes from a culture where self-criticism, not self-reflection, is the norm, and where autonomous learning has never been an avowed goal of the education system. To some degree she must experience interference from the norms of the Japanese education system, from her own level of English proficiency, and from deeply embedded cultural assumptions about the nature of learning and the definition of self (Nisbett, 2003, p. 50). That she teases apart learning and ‘noticing’ learning at all is a testimony to the meticulous scaffolding that she has received from Andy’s planning and execution of this project.

The leap from traditional Japanese educational values to valuing autonomous learning is substantial. As I read about the course structure, I wondered how much discussion of the value of autonomous learning is included in the first few weeks of the course. Do students truly see its value? The set phrases that appeared early in this student’s diary about being shy, afraid of making mistakes, learn actively, touching English, being poor at English . . . all of these arise from Japanese pedagogical practices; Japanese teachers expect to hear them, and Japanese students are expected to say them (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1998). The student who has never been praised, never learned confidence, never wanted to be independent certainly lacks the “pre-requisites for effective reflection” that Andy lists in the chapter. How much are those pre-requisites developed—indeed, how much can they be developed?—in the beginning weeks of the course?

As the question mark at the end of the title confirms, neither Andy’s nor the student’s reflections are quite routine. Andy’s reflections avoid rigidity. He recognizes the need for re-interpretation, for finding interpretations that fit, and for acknowledging that some issues are quite specific to the Anglo-American cultural values of causality, self-reflection (as opposed to self-criticism), and metacognitive awareness. The student’s reflections are most certainly not routine. She not only allows us to see ‘inside the box’ of her own learning processes, but also lets us see her removing herself from the invisible box of embedded cultural constraints that make autonomous learning processes difficult.

