

# Changing Attitudes: Fluency-focused Speaking Practice



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*In this research project, I wanted to help my students get used to speaking English, to raise their awareness of their own learning processes, and to facilitate their motivation to speak. I undertook the study with 28 first-year English-major students at a Japanese university. Each speaking practice took about 30-35 minutes of their weekly 90-minute class, with the students following four steps: viewing a short video, speaking about the video in English, reflecting on their own performances in Japanese, and getting feedback from the teacher in Japanese. Such practice gave my students chances to try out various strategies, with the overall process of guided practice and reflection raising my students' awareness of their own learning. I also gained interesting insights into how my students perceived the value of such classroom learning.*

本研究は、学生が英語を話すことに慣れ、自分の学習プロセスに対する意識を高め、話そうとする動機づけを高めることを目的としている。研究対象者は、日本の大学の英語専攻1年生28人である。スピーキング活動は、週一回の90分授業の中で30分から35分かけて、「ビデオを見る」、「ビデオについて英語で話す」、「自分の活動を日本語で内省する」、「日本語で教師からのフィードバックを受ける」の4つの活動を行う。このような活動を通して、学生は様々なストラテジー使用を試み、自分の学習に対する意識を高めていった。さらに、学生がこのような教室での学習をどう捉えていたかに関して興味深い洞察を得た。

## INTRODUCTION

I have been teaching first-year English-major students at Daito Bunka University for the past 5 years. Although my students were highly motivated to learn English since they chose to major in English, they seemed reluctant to engage in pair work or to speak in English with their peers. I noticed some students started speaking Japanese as soon as they were assigned to do pair work. Others just remained quiet. They told me that they could not speak English to each other because they did not know how to describe certain things in English and because they did not have anything to say to their peers even in Japanese.

My observations told me that they were simply not ready for pair work yet. They had not had enough prior speaking practice. I thought they needed an extended structured experience in which they could feel comfortable speaking in English before I encouraged them to practice speaking English more freely with their peers. I therefore started to develop a series of guided activities that enabled them to work individually and to overcome their hesitation to speak English in pairs.

I felt that raising awareness of my students' learning processes might be necessary to help them develop speaking abilities for better interpersonal communication in English. I believed that they should be given the space in which to find their own 'helpless' learning habits and to change them to better ones through new positive experiences. To decide how to design the new activity sequence, I first looked at different theoretical definitions of learner autonomy.

Holec (1981) describes autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's learning" (p. 3), whereas Little (2000) claims that "the language learner-user will become gradually more autonomous only through the practice of autonomy" (p. 15). In fact, Scharle and Szabó (2000) classify autonomy-developing activities into three groups.

First, the learners have to become aware of the difference their contribution can make, and of the nature of language learning in general (Raising awareness). Second, they need some well-structured practice in their new attitudes as responsible learners (Changing attitudes) so that, in the third phase, they will be ready to take over some roles from the teacher and enjoy the freedom that comes with increased responsibility (Transferring roles). (p. 1)

Their three-way classification was useful for me in understanding how to help students become aware of their learning processes and give them opportunities to practice new learned skills. However, I also noticed that theoretical discussions of learner autonomy make an important distinction between different types of autonomous practice. Littlewood (1999), for example, classifies autonomy into *proactive* and *reactive* autonomy, commenting that:

... the first regulates the direction of activity as well as the activity itself. The second regulates the activity once the direction has been set. Proactive autonomy is the form of autonomy that is usually intended when the concept is discussed in the West...it is useful to consider also a second kind of autonomy, which may either be a preliminary step towards the first or a goal in its own right. (p. 75)

Littlewood argues that East Asian learners "will have experienced few learning contexts which encourage them to exercise individual proactive autonomy" (p. 87), but states that such learners are ready to accept activities based on reactive autonomy.

From considering such theoretical claims in the light of my own experiences, I designed a simple, easy-to-follow, well-structured, video-based activity called fluency-focused speaking

practice. Like it or not, students had to follow the procedure of the activity. This activity did not allow students to choose which videos they would watch, but it did let them choose how to take notes, and what to speak about. There was, in this sense, a small but limited space for them to try out their own choices. My basic philosophy was that, once they became more familiar with autonomy development, they would be able to take much greater responsibility for their own learning. Indeed, I had conducted this kind of speaking practice in my speaking and listening classes over the last few years. Every year I changed a few points based on the students' comments, my own reflections, and other teachers' comments to make the activity more effective. So, this chapter presents my most recent understanding and development with regard to this type of structured 'reactive' autonomy.

### THE FOCUS OF MY PROJECT

My goals were to enable students to get used to speaking English, to raise their awareness of learning processes, to facilitate their motivation to speak, and to provide them with opportunities to practice skills they had just learned. I carried out my research project over a period of five weeks in June and July 2003 with 28 first-year English-major students in Daito Bunka University aged 18 - 20. Eighteen of the students were female, and 10 male.

### PROCEDURE

The speaking practice consisted of three parts. The pre-activity stage focused on explaining the reasons for introducing this new activity. This was followed over 5 weeks by the main speaking practice activity, before student feedback was gathered through a questionnaire.

#### PRE-ACTIVITY: A LECTURE

Taking about 45 minutes, the main purpose of the lecture was to motivate students to speak. In English and occasionally in Japanese, I explained various points that they should know about developing their listening and speaking ability in English.

First, I wanted to make students aware that lack of practice in junior and senior high school had resulted in their present poor speaking performances. In their junior and senior high school days, they were not trained to speak out in class; instead, they concentrated on mastering grammatical knowledge and memorizing new vocabulary to pass the entrance examinations for university. According to a survey of my students' English education background conducted in April 2003, 64 % of them had taken oral communication classes once a week in senior high school. Only 17% had had such classes twice a week. As for the content of their pre-university classes, only nine students (32 %) clearly stated they had experienced some sort of conversation class. The rest had studied English grammar, listened to what their teacher said in English, watched English movies, and studied everyday vocabulary and expressions. These students had little experience of practicing speaking. Seventeen percent of the students did not have any oral communication classes in senior school at all. That's why I needed to help them understand better ways to develop listening and speaking.

The second part of the lecture introduced two concepts for measuring speaking to help change students' attitudes toward better speaking. One was accuracy, or how precisely you can speak English. Here I explained that, when people worry about accuracy too much, they often stop the conversation to look for the right words. Sometimes this action causes conversation breakdown. The listener might then misunderstand the speaker's intent and wrongly believe that the speaker does not want to talk to the listener. I emphasized this point because Japanese

students tend to try to over-monitor their accuracy while speaking English.

The other part of my focus was fluency, or how quickly you can speak English. Students need to practice speaking in order to reach a certain fluency level. While practicing, they have to break through their hesitation, fear, and reticence to change years of speaking habits. I wanted my students to understand and accept that it is OK to make mistakes when they speak.

It is difficult for my students to monitor both accuracy and fluency at the same time. They tend to worry more about the correctness of what they are saying. This habit prevents them from speaking a lot. Thus, the fluency-focused practice was focused on speaking a large quantity of words within a given time limit. Students had to push themselves to speak as many words as possible on to a tape in individual speaking practice.

Before explaining the speaking practice itself, I showed a 2-minute *Kipper* video and asked them if they were able to talk about the episode in English. I gave them a few minutes to recall the video. Then, I played the model tape in which last year's best student spoke about the same episode. Students were surprised at how fluently the model student spoke, at a rate of 96 words per minute. I explained that, by noticing the actual number of words they each spoke, they would gradually be able to make a connection between their sense of speaking fluency and their total output. This discrete form of consciousness-raising would, I hope, also enable them to imagine how their speaking would develop by the end of the 5-week practice. I also pointed out to the students that newscasters in English news speak from 130 to 160 words per minute on average (JACET Kansai Listening Test Kenkyukai, 2000). Since students often watch English news in class, they could readily understand how quickly newscasters speak. Although the ultimate goal for all students learning English might be to reach native speaker fluency, that remains a remote point of comparison for my first-year students. That's why I told them that their goals for this speaking practice should simply focus on trying to match the model student's English speech rate.

### SPEAKING PRACTICE

Each speaking practice took about 30-35 minutes of the 90-minute class in a fully equipped language lab. For the rest of the class, the focus was on listening. Students practiced listening using a textbook.

The speaking practice was divided into the following four stages:

1. viewing a video (two viewings of 2 minutes each) and talking in pairs (3 minutes);
2. recording themselves talking about the video (1 minute) and dictating this (10 minutes);
3. reflecting on their own performances (5 minutes);
4. getting feedback from the teacher (7 minutes).

#### I. VIEWING A VIDEO AND TALKING IN PAIRS

While watching the 2-minute video twice, students were encouraged to take notes in Japanese or English. After the first viewing, they talked about the video in pairs in either Japanese or English for 3 minutes. What language they used was up to the pairs. They could exchange information about what they understood and what they did not. If students had words they did not know how to say in English, they could use this time to ask their partners. For the second viewing, they tried to catch words or phrases they could utilize in their own speaking.

## II. SPEAKING ABOUT THE VIDEO AND DICTATING

Using notes, students recorded the story in their own words for a minute. They then listened to their own tape and wrote down exactly what they had said. After the self-dictation, they counted the number of the words they had spoken and recorded this number.

## III. REFLECTION ON THEIR PERFORMANCES

Students were asked to reflect in Japanese on their performances and on the basic issue of how to improve fluency. In this process of self-reflection, students had to notice problems with their own speaking habits. In order to overcome such individual difficulties, they were encouraged to set an attainable goal for their next practice. In addition to this, they wrote down Japanese words and phrases that they could not explain in English. These individual lists of vocabulary became a useful resource for the whole class when I pulled them together and showed them to everyone.

In the student reflections from the previous year, some students had commented that they had something they wanted to describe, but they did not know how to say it in English. They had felt frustrated. Most of their self-reflections focused on this lack of vocabulary that hindered them from speaking more. I thought this was partially true. However, it takes time to develop working vocabulary. This was too broad a goal for a 5-week speaking practice, so I wanted them to find another small action that they could easily try. Thus, this year I decided to give them the list of words that their reflections suggested they were having difficulty with. After they filled out words and expressions in their reflection worksheet, I gave them the list of words. This enabled them to check the English words and expressions that they needed immediately. As a result, they were no longer frustrated by a lack of vocabulary.

## IV. GETTING FEEDBACK FROM THE TEACHER

The following week, I gave the students individual feedback. My feedback consisted of two parts. The first part was reflection-focused. Comments such as “*In order to increase vocabulary, what will you do? Write a concrete plan.*” pointed students to the absence of specific plans to solve the individual problems that they had noticed, while other comments like “*Next time you will focus on how to take notes, won’t you?*” helped students confirm what actions to take next. In order to share students’ reflections, I compiled a list of ideas written by students and gave this to the whole class. After reading these through, the students were encouraged to talk in pairs in Japanese and to find a suitable action to address problems / challenges / difficulties identified in the list of reflections. Both my written feedback and the shared discussion of student-generated ideas were aimed at raising their consciousness of how to manage their speaking development more autonomously.

The second part of my feedback was motivation-focused. Students were informed about both the average number of words used across the whole class and the most number of words used by the quickest-speaking student from the previous week. This information enabled them to compare their performances with their peers.

### POST-ACTIVITY: THE FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

After the 5-week practice, I gave the students a written questionnaire in Japanese (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix A). It took 15 minutes to complete. Two yes/no questions, one multiple-choice question and two open-ended questions were included. This questionnaire was designed not only to probe students’ feelings and attitudes toward the speaking activity, but also to explore their willingness to learn more.

### TIME ALLOCATION

I decided to spend no more than 30 minutes of each 90-minute class on the weekly speaking practice activity, since I had some other things to cover. One time, I showed 5-minute videos to students because I thought they would have more things to talk about if the video segment was longer. I wanted to offer more choices to students. But things turned out completely differently to what I had expected! Students claimed that the longer story made them confused. Because it already took 10 minutes to view a 5-minute video twice, we could not finish the whole speaking practice in 30 minutes. I decided to revert to showing 2-minute video segments only.

### MATERIALS

When I originally designed this activity, I had several choices of materials for students to talk about, including showing a picture, giving a topic, and reading to students. My students had difficulty talking with their peers in English. Thus, I wanted to give them English information they could use for their speaking. With audio-visual aids, they did not have to worry about what to speak about. In addition, students were involved in listening activities for the rest of the class. This speaking practice could be a link to other activities. English children's videos were chosen for this activity because the stories are not complicated, and everyday words are used often.

Over the past few years, I had tried using different types of videos (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix B) and had got feedback from students on their usefulness. In the selection of the videos, I have learnt that it is important to consider the difficulty of the videos in terms of vocabulary use and complexity of the plot. Since some videos like *Snoopy* used unfamiliar words and dialogue that was too fast, students understood little even if they watched them twice and checked the content with their peers. They said they had nothing to describe in their speaking practice and were very frustrated. From students' comments and my own observations, I concluded that the *Snoopy* story was not appropriate for this type of activity.

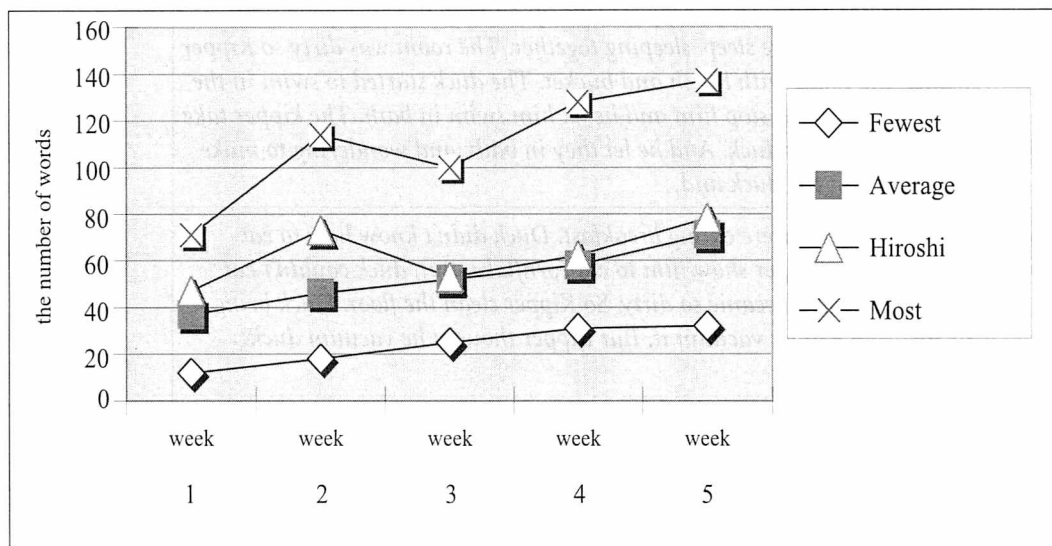
Regarding familiar stories like *Totoro*, some students commented that the familiarity of the story prevented them from concentrating on listening to English. When they spoke English, they only came up with the Japanese plot, and it took them too much time to change from Japanese to English. In order for students to concentrate on watching and listening to the video, I felt that an unfamiliar story was better than a familiar one.

Some students liked to watch an ongoing story because they became familiar with the characters and tried to predict the stories before they watched the new episode. From this study, I can conclude that suitable materials for speaking practice are ones that have easy plots, a moderate rate of speech, and continuous stories. Therefore, I chose to use the *Kipper* story this year. From Weeks 1 to 4, students watched an episode called *The Visitor*. In Week 5, they watched the beginning part of a new episode called *Snowy Day*.

### RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Three different types of data collected from students' worksheets and the feedback questionnaire are presented in this section. First, a chart of the number of words spoken each week is discussed to check students' progress. Secondly, the individual data for one student, including transcripts of his speaking, his weekly reflections, and the teacher's comments to them, give you an overview of his performance and reflection process. Thirdly, the data from the feedback questionnaire is examined to show students' reactions to this project.

Figure 1 below shows the number of words spoken each week. The highest line in the graph shows the most number of words spoken each week by an individual student. This starts at 71 words per week and rises to 137 by Week 5. In contrast to this highest speaking rate, the average number of words spoken by students is shown by the line with squares (going from 37 in Week 1 to 71 in Week 5). To see how these across-class averages closely mirror individual performance, I have included the weekly speaking totals of one student, Hiroshi (see the line with triangles). Moreover, in order to show the range of performance across the whole class, the bottom line in the graph gives the average speaking rate of the slowest speaking student (going from 12 in Week 1 to 32 in Week 5).



**Figure 1** Average speaking rates over 5 weeks

All four lines show positive development. The highest speaking rate in Week 5 reaches 137 words per minute, which is equal to the average English newscasters' speaking rate. This is quite beyond my expectations, and I feel very proud of this student's weekly performance! Looking into the individual data in Week 5, another student spoke 131 words per minute. These two students had high speaking rates (71 and 69 respectively) from the beginning. It seems that they already had some sense of speaking fluency, which they were enabled to develop more effectively. The average number of words spoken by students starts at 37 in Week 1 and finishes at 71 in Week 5—about half of highest students' rate. It seems that the average students reach the highest student's starting point after 5 weeks of practice. Overall, the increases in speaking rates indicate that such practice helps students improve their fluency.

In addition to looking at Hiroshi's speaking totals quantitatively, we can also understand the process of autonomous speaking and listening development by considering his weekly transcripts in full. This lets us see the typical development that most students go through. Hiroshi's transcripts are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Hiroshi's Transcripts from the 5-week Speaking Practice (with total number of words also shown)**

Week	Transcripts of Hiroshi's speaking practice	Total words
1	<i>One night, Kipper was sleeping in basket. It was thunder and duck come Kipper's home. So, Kipper take in duck and let duck sleep but the box was not comfortable. So, Kipper bring slipper and duck fell asleep. Then Kipper turn off the light and himself slept.</i>	47
2	<i>Morning has came. They, Kipper wake up and say the duck good morning. They were sleep. sleeping together. The room was dirty so Kipper cleaned the room with brush and bucket. The duck started to swim in the bucket. Kipper was stop him and he let him swim in bath. The kipper take in Kipper's plastic duck. And he let they in bath. and wondering to make breakfast. But the duck and...</i>	73
3	<i>Kipper and duck were eating breakfast. Duck didn't know how to eat cornflake. So, Kipper show him to eat cornflake. But, duck couldn't eat. So, the clean was became so dirty. So Kipper clean the floor. Duck bring his toys and Kipper vacuum it. But Kipper thought he vacuum duck. He...</i>	53
4	<i>Duck bring book and Kipper read it. There were sheeps, lamb, pig, chick, and goose. The duck was a goose. It could fly to the storm. And the friends of the goose come near the Kipper's house. It was like a book. And goose fly away, but come once to the Kipper and say good-bye. And fly away. Kipper feel sad.</i>	62
5	<i>It was snowing. Kipper was sleeping in his room. and woke up and open window and he said "Yes" again and again. Then he go out with put muffler and run around his house. And ate snow, make snowball. He was playing alone. And then meet his friend, Tiger and they play with using snow. They really enjoy it. Tiger said warm weather will come soon. The Kipper looks so sad. He want to play with snow.</i>	78

*Note: Hiroshi's transcripts have not been corrected.*

While we can see from Table 1 that Hiroshi has increased the length of his transcripts over the 5 weeks, it is also important to note that Hiroshi's process of development is gradual.

Table 2 below shows Hiroshi's weekly reflections and teacher's responses to them given in the following week. The self-reflections and responses were originally written in Japanese, so I have translated them into English.



**Table 2 Hiroshi's Self-reflections and Teacher Responses**

Week	Hiroshi's reflections	Teacher's responses
1	I must get more information by taking notes in detail while watching video.	That's a good point. You will focus on how to take notes next time, won't you?
2	I had many things I wanted to explain, but I could not finish all in a minute. Thus I needed to practice speaking English words much faster. Of course, I had better start speaking as soon as possible.	Your fluency had improved a lot. In order to improve your speaking speed, you need to practice reading aloud or shadowing.
3	My total had decreased. I should study useful expressions. When I had something I could not explain in English, I need to think of other ways to express similar meanings.	What were the differences between your actions of week 3 and week 2?
4	In this episode, I could not take notes much. Moreover, I did not catch the words of baby animals. This prevented me from speaking more.	When you had the words you did not understand, why don't you ask your partner?

I thought carefully about how to respond to the students' reflections in my comments because I wanted to encourage students to continue this activity willingly. For example, in Week 2, I praised Hiroshi's effort not only to encourage him, but also to assure him that he was on the right track. Through my comments, I also wanted to suggest to individual students how they could set their own goals in a way that would make them readily achievable the following week. For example, in Week 1, Hiroshi found his problem was note-taking skills, but his reflection was too vague. He did not articulate any concrete idea about what to do next, so I wrote a comment to call his attention to something specific he could think about changing—his way of taking notes.

Table 3 below shows how useful the students felt such speaking practice was for them. Students could choose from 11 discrete features characterizing the structured practice. They were allowed to choose as many features as they wanted to; they could also add any other features that they felt were important, as well as comment freely on the reasons for their choices.

Table 3 Perceived Usefulness of the Structured Listening and Speaking

2. What activities were useful for you?	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
a) Listening to a lecture about accuracy and fluency	9	32.1
b) Listening to a model speaking tape by a former student	2	7.1
c) Viewing videos	7	25.0
d) Taking notes	13	46.4
e) Talking with your partner before speaking	8	28.5
f) Listening to your own speaking	19	67.8
g) Self-reflection	14	50.0
h) Making use of a list of difficult words and phrases given by the teacher	14	50.0
i) Thinking about a shared list of self-reflections	5	17.8
j) Receiving comments on self-reflection from the teacher	7	25.0
k) Being informed of the average number of words and the most number of words used by students in the class	10	35.7
l) Other ( )	0	0

Students judged that listening to their own speaking was the most useful experience for them, with comments from two students suggesting specific ways in which this was helpful. Student A noted that she became aware of the awkwardness of her long pauses by listening to her own voice. She concluded that this new sense of awkwardness motivated her to speak more. Student B's own voice shocked him because he realized how poor his pronunciation was. His poor pronunciation hindered him from dictating smoothly what he had recorded on his tape. Instead, he had to rewind the tape and listen to parts of it several times. This experience led him to pay much greater attention to his pronunciation.

Self-reflection and making use of difficult words and phrases given by the teacher were seen as the second most useful activities:

- *I can reflect myself and plan for the next practice.*
- *I can refresh my memory when I read my reflection before the next practice.*
- *I used to forget about the activities in class right after I finished them. It was my first time to think consciously what I did in the activities and to plan ahead.*

These comments all highlight the benefits of self-reflection in terms of students being able to remember and build on what they had done in the previous class. This suggests that my students understood the importance of reflection and that the experience of reflecting on their own speaking was of positive effect for them. Students were also positive about how the change I had made helped them with learning and using vocabulary:

- *I usually neglect looking unknown words up in the dictionary at home even if I promised myself to do so in class. My negligence prevents me from developing English vocabulary I need. In this practice, I could easily check English words and phrases I needed.*
- *With a list of words and phrases, I can remember a lot of new words and phrases.*

Whereas a lot of students still claimed that the lack of needed vocabulary prevented them from speaking more, they also reported that they had become aware of how helpful such vocabulary-building support was.

### CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

As we have seen, the number of words that individual students spoke increased. Students could easily see their progress and, using this simple measurement, evaluate their own performance. Through my feedback, students could also check their peers' progress as well. This sense of self-evaluation assured them that they were on the right track and enhanced students' self-motivation.

This gave students the opportunity to try consciously various actions to develop their speaking fluency. These included describing small parts of the story in detail instead of summarizing the whole story, skipping the parts that they could not describe immediately, and speaking faster than before. In the process of self-reflection, students recalled what they did in the last practice, judged whether their actions were appropriate, and planned what they would do for the next practice. Immediately after experiencing the success or failure of one action, they were able to choose and try a different one. If this new action worked for them, students could practice it over and over until they internalized it. This process raised students' awareness of their own learning and provided ample opportunities for practice, leading to important changes in their attitudes.

At the end of the 5-week practice, it was striking how the students no longer hesitated to speak English and how they noticed the importance of fluency in communication. In addition, they realized that the more they practiced speaking English, the better their fluency became. When they finally gain much greater fluency in the future, they will be much more confident about presenting their own opinions in English.

In order to design this autonomy-developing activity, I employed Scharle and Szabó's 3-way classification as my guidance. The activity that made students notice the importance of fluency is classified as an awareness-raising activity, whereas the 5-week speaking practice is considered to be an attitude-changing one. We can also see that students raise their awareness of their learning through reflection and change their attitudes toward learning through practice. I can thus conclude that my students were beginning to develop reactive autonomy. In order to enhance the further development of autonomy, I believe that we need to give more opportunities for students to experience the combined benefits of fluency and reflection. However, we should not forget that slower students need more time and practice to change their attitudes and achieve speaking success. Different students have different rates of development. This is something that we should always try to keep in mind in trying to develop autonomous learning.

As for myself, I have learned the following things from taking part in the collaborative Anthology project. Writing this paper gave me opportunities to reflect on how and why I designed this, and I remembered what I wanted to get from this. This process raises awareness of my teaching. Through two meetings with members of the project, I got a lot of supportive comments and critical opinions. Supportive comments encouraged me to carry out the project.

Critical opinions deepened my understanding of autonomy. My project is an on-going one. There will still be points that need further development. In order to give students a clearer sense of fluency, one of the other teachers suggested that students should time their pauses and write down the time on their worksheets while dictating their speaking. This would allow them to easily see, each time they check the worksheets, how their pauses prevent them from speaking fluently. I thought this is a splendid idea to employ. Without collaborative work, I could not think of ideas of this kind.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

## HELGA DEEG

First of all, this is a very good and interesting study! There is plenty of potential benefit here for both teachers and students. To my mind, this project is very exciting and encouraging. Why do I think so?

In this promising proposal, I appreciate very much the clear focus on learner autonomy, motivation, and the learning process itself. Having read Emika's detailed analysis of appropriate teaching material, I think the videos will be a good common basis and starting point for interesting discussions among students and possible changes in their attitudes towards using the English language much more freely and successfully as a means of communication. A video is normally a medium learners are very much interested in. Children's videos, especially, will be very helpful as the language level used in the videos is easy to understand. This will increase the learners' motivation and give them the feeling of success. I also support the idea of making the learners use a variety of strategies. This is important when your goal for a long-term learning process is to have (more) autonomous learners.

I support Emika's idea of helping the students overcome their shyness and giving them authentic assignments which make them feel a real need to communicate. The students' use of the mother tongue is discussed in a very profound and detailed way in the study. This is something a foreign language teacher always has to consider and find reasonable solutions for, and Emika has done a very good job here. Her thoughts, expressed in different parts of the study, show that she is a very reflective and professional teacher who always considers her students and their learning needs in a sensitive and considerate way. She avoids creating frustration and fosters the students' learning process by also taking into account her students' cultural background. I cannot agree more with her ideas about enabling her students to do pair work and to accept making mistakes, and encouraging them to speak English as a foreign language more fluently.

Emika bases the purpose of this study and the development of the lessons very professionally on a well-elaborated theoretical section. I fully appreciate her way of guiding her students from teacher-centred learners to more autonomous learners who are motivated, able to take responsibility for their own learning process and also enjoy practising English. At the beginning, the teacher is making the fundamental decisions for the students, but—as in a learning spiral—step by step the teacher gives the students the chance to make choices. The term “structured ‘reactive’ autonomy” which Emika uses exactly describes the development in the foreign language classroom. The very clear structure of the whole study can be found again in the equally clear structure of the students' learning process. The reader gets very precise information on all the valid aspects of the study.

To my mind, the evaluation part is most important in two ways: to prove progression and success, and to improve the students' future learning process and the teacher's future way of teaching. Learner autonomy should focus not only on students' ways of becoming more independent learners but also on more reflective teachers. This study shows that the students get detailed information on evaluation to help them realize their own position in the learning process and to increase their motivation for future work.

I do not doubt at all the achievement which Emika describes at the end of the study. The study, and its precise analysis of the results, cannot be admired more. It is very good evidence of the success of Emika's profound and reflective way of teaching.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

## KEIKO SAKUI

First of all, I need to admit that although I think fostering autonomy is one of the most important issues in learning and teaching in general, the concept of fostering autonomy is an area with which I have been struggling. In particular, trying to relate the theoretical perspectives in autonomous learning to specific situations (such as in forms of language learning activities) does not always seem to be straightforward, and it has been difficult for me to grapple with this area.

I have been consulting students as a language adviser at the Self-Access Centre at the University of Auckland for the past five months. I am in a fortunate position to be able to meet students individually over a relatively long period of time (3 months) in order to encourage autonomous, self-directed learning. What I witness every day in my work is how different the concept of autonomous learning is to each individual student, and I keep asking myself what are the exact links between autonomy development and what students decide to do (or I advise them to do) in specific actions and activities.

Having acknowledged my shortcomings in my expertise, in this reader response, I will focus my reflections on how Emika's research resonated with my own work and also how it posed further questions regarding autonomy development and language learning activities.

Emika designed and implemented a fluency focused-activity, based on two theoretical perspectives of autonomy. One of these perspectives is the 3-stage development model of autonomy-raising awareness, changing attitudes, and transferring roles (Scharle & Szabó, 2000), and the other is focusing on *reactive autonomy* rather than *proactive autonomy* (Littlewood, 1999).

Students' responses in Emika's project show the students particularly liked listening to their own recorded speech and reflecting on their performance. This raised their awareness of their learning process and, in turn, influenced their learning attitudes positively and enhanced their motivation to learn. This process is congruent with the above mentioned autonomy development model, especially with the first two stages; this also resonates with my experiences working at the Self-Access Centre. The students I meet here also value awareness-raising activities. For example, we provide workshops in which students practice speaking skills, especially presentation and discussion skills, and we videotape their performances. Students often say they like the opportunity to be able to watch themselves objectively and reflect on their own speaking skills.

Based on the students' self-reflection and positive attitudinal changes, Emika notes, "I can thus conclude that my students were beginning to develop reactive autonomy." Emika's line forces me to face the question I have been struggling with for some time. Are these conditions (self-reflection and attitudinal changes) synonymous with autonomous learning? Do self-reflection and positive attitudinal change guarantee reactive autonomy? Where can I see clear evidence of a relationship between the practices and activities, and autonomous development? I would not disagree with the importance of self-reflection and positive attitudes in autonomous development, but, if possible, I would like to see how autonomy can be operationalised and clearly evidenced in this type of empirical research, perhaps in her subsequent projects.

Emika concludes her chapter with an argument for the importance of teacher collaboration through projects such as those appearing in *Autonomy You Ask!* (see Murphey, Chapter 1). Reading and responding to Emika's research has given me an opportunity to consider, question my understanding, and gain further interest in the topic. I greatly appreciate the chance to be a part of this project and would like to thank Emika and all the people involved in *Autonomy You Ask!* for providing me with such an invaluable experience.