

Tuning Freshmen into Autonomy Through Student- directed Language Learning Projects



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In this chapter, we investigate the impact of Language Learning Projects (LLPs) on freshmen university students' attitudes, motivation, and English linguistic abilities. We explore what activities students chose for their projects and why, and suggest ways to improve the LLPs to more adequately meet the students' needs. For their LLPs, students carried out a project of their choice outside of class over a semester. Projects included watching news programs on TV, writing a diary or reading children's books. LLP handouts provided ideas for activities, and some class time was spent to promote discussion of, and reflection on, goals and progress. Students had the choice to work independently or as a group. At the end of the semester students gave presentations on their projects. The students' final comments showed that LLPs promoted reflection on language learning, as well as increased motivation and improved English proficiency.

本章では、ランゲージ・ラーニング・プロジェクト(LLP)が大学1年生の学習態度、動機づけ、英語力にどのような影響を与えたか、学生がどのプロジェクトをなぜ選んだのか、を研究し、LLP改善の可能性を探る。LLPでは1学期間、ニュース番組をテレビで見る、英語で日記を書く、昔話を英語で読むなどのプロジェクトを学生が選び、授業時間外に活動を行なった。その資料には英語学習のアイデアが盛り込まれている。また授業中に目標の立て方、勉強の進度を討議し、考察する時間を持った。学生は希望により、個人又はグループで活動した。学期の終わりに、プロジェクトについて学生が発表を行なった。学生の感想文によると、LLPは英語学習について考える機会を増やし、動機づけと英語力を高めるのに役立った。

INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2001, we both took a *Facilitating Autonomy in Language Learning* class as part of an MA course at Columbia University Teachers College. In that class we experienced firsthand the motivating and empowering effects of autonomous learning. The class prompted us to look at ways of developing learner autonomy in the classes that we teach. Since then, we have been exploring ways of facilitating and developing autonomy in our teaching situations.

Miki started using *Language Learning Projects* (LLPs) because there was a limit to what she could do in class to accommodate the various interests of her students. In her freshman listening comprehension classes, she tries, as far as she can, to introduce relevant learning resources, materials, and media. However, she can only teach 90 minutes per lesson twice a week, and she feels she must use this time to satisfy the needs of the majority. But what about the students' individual learning preferences? What about students' bright ideas for learning English? They have great ideas that are probably of more interest to their age group than teachers' ideas. Miki wanted to make more use of her students' ideas to enrich her classes for the benefit of the students and herself. To do this and to help her students become more autonomous learners, Miki started using the LLPs in her university listening and reading classes in April 2002.

We see LLPs, in which students plan and carry out their own out-of-class language study, as one important way of doing this. These projects are intended to give students more control of their learning. Students set their own learning goals, select learning materials, reflect on their learning, and evaluate their progress. At the beginning of the semester, students choose an activity such as listening to songs, or writing a diary, and they use this activity to study English either on their own or in groups. At the end of the semester, students make presentations, explaining what they did for their projects and what they learnt. Finally, they give themselves a grade for their work on the LLP.

This chapter was created as the result of many meetings at our favorite coffee shop, with Miki explaining how she was using the LLP in her classes, and Jodie asking questions to clarify and promote reflection. It was a deep reflective process for us both; a chance to think more deeply about what students were actually learning from the LLP, as well as to suggest ways of making the project more valuable for students, and to consider how to adapt LLPs to other learning situations. We thoroughly enjoyed working together thinking and writing about autonomy, and we hope that you can savor the essence of our sessions over a cup of coffee or tea.

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LANGUAGE LEARNING PROJECTS

ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

Miki initially heard about the LLPs from one of her colleagues. After hearing how much this colleague had learned from her freshman English class when she was a college student, Miki asked to see her notebooks from the class. Impressed by the neatly kept notebooks and the amount of work she had done, Miki wanted to know more about how this class had been taught. So she made contact with the professor who had taught that class. In response to her questions, he gave Miki an old photocopy of the Language Learning Projects sheet (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix A). He explained that for a semester students could engage in an English learning activity of their choice, such as watching movies, listening to songs, keeping a diary, or writing letters. Students also kept journals on their projects and submitted them on a regular basis. Unfortunately, this professor had not been using LLPs for 6 years. Although he thought the projects were valuable and effective, he was too busy to read all the journals and give feedback. So he gave Miki the projects to work on and adapt for autonomous language learning.

Miki has now been using these projects for a year in various levels of university classes, and with students in a number of different departments. She believes that they are a comprehensible and practical way to introduce autonomy to students of English in higher education. But she has also seen the need to understand more clearly how her students respond to these projects and how she can make the projects into a more effective framework for developing her students' learner autonomy.

AIMS OF THE LANGUAGE LEARNING PROJECT

Benson (2001) says that giving students control over one aspect of their learning is the key to facilitating autonomy, and that is the main aim of the LLPs. In the LLP, students decide what they learn, who they learn with, and how they learn. They set their own goals, select materials and activities, plan their learning, and reflect on and evaluate their progress. Through this process, it is hoped that, in addition to improving their linguistic proficiency, students also gain a better understanding of their individual learning styles and learning preferences, as well as a better idea of where their linguistic strengths and weaknesses lie. This should lead to students being better equipped for future language learning, with or without a teacher. LLPs are projects in which students do their out-of-class language learning, but use some class time to plan, reflect, and report on them. This chapter presents our collaborative exploration of these issues, focusing on two freshmen classes Miki taught in the spring of 2003.

THE STUDENTS

The participants in this study were 50 freshmen in two listening classes in the Department of Intercultural Communication at Gakushuin Women's College, a four-year women's college. English was a required subject for all freshmen, and each listening class included students majoring in either Intercultural Communication or Japanese Cultural Studies. Classes were streamed, and the two classes in this study were in the middle range. The majority of students were 18-year-old Japanese nationals, with 3 Chinese students also.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE PROJECTS

The students carried out their projects over one semester from April to July 2003 in listening comprehension classes that met twice a week. Table 1 below gives an overview of the main stages of the projects.

Table 1 Outline of the Language Learning Projects

Lesson 1	Teacher explains the purpose and procedures of the LLPs. Students set language learning goals and select learning activities (this may continue for several weeks).
Lessons 2 – 6	Students bring materials and work on LLP individually or in groups in class (30 minute sessions).
Lessons 8, 16, 24	Students write journal reflections on LLP.
Lessons 25-30	LLP presentations by students.
Lesson 30	Students complete final reflections on LLP and self-evaluations.

In the first class, after being introduced to the concept of Language Learning Projects, students decided on their learning goals. They were then asked to read the Language Learning Project handout (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix A) and choose one activity that would help them accomplish their goals. The handout lists different types of activities and materials to allow for different learning styles and learning goals. Some examples are: listening to the radio or music, reading newspapers, comics or children's books, and preparing for standardized English exams. If they did not want to use any of the materials or activities suggested on the handout, students were encouraged to create their own.

Once students had chosen an activity, they got together in groups with others doing similar activities to further discuss their language learning goals and to plan their study. Students who had not yet decided on an activity could move around among the groups until they found something that interested them. For some this process took a few weeks. Selecting an appropriate activity is important for a successful project, and Miki allowed students to come to her for advice, or speak with their classmates, as well as look around libraries and bookstores until they found an activity that they were satisfied with.

Next came materials and task selection. These should be matched to goals. For instance, in order to achieve a TOEIC score of 600, students may practice test-taking skills, listen to TOEIC tapes, but reading comic books would not help them. Following materials and task selection, students made study plans, deciding when and how often they would study. These plans were written down and handed in to the teacher. In order to check that students understood what to do and had made a start on their project work, some time in class was also dedicated to LLPs in Lessons 2-6 of the semester. During these sessions, which usually lasted 30 minutes, students brought in the materials that they had chosen, and worked on their LLP in class. For some groups Miki provided tapes, videos, and other materials on request. Other groups needed advice on where and how to obtain resources.

After the five in-class LLP sessions, students continued to work on their projects outside of class. They reflected on their progress in class about once a month in self-evaluation journals (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix B), which Miki collected and reviewed. Miki did not give feedback on the journals. However, when she noticed students struggling, she approached them in person to discuss their progress.

Students gave presentations on their projects in the last five classes of the semester. These presentations were intended to be a forum for students to exchange ideas and learn from each other's experience. Each student made a 5-minute presentation on what they did for their project and what they learnt from it. They could present individually or in groups, but there was a 5-

minute minimum for one person, 10 for a pair, and so on. Students were encouraged to focus on three areas in their presentations: (a) using presentation skills to make their presentations interesting and easy to comprehend, (b) encouraging the involvement of classmates during presentations, and (c) showing how much and what kind of work they did for the LLPs. Before giving their presentations, students had three 30-minute sessions in class for preparation.

At the end of the semester, students completed a self-evaluation of their learning progress in the projects, and answered final reflection questions about the LLP, focusing on their reasons for choosing their activity and what they learnt from it.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE LANGUAGE LEARNING PROJECTS

OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LLPs

As we mentioned earlier, Miki has been using LLPs since April 2002, but hadn't really had a chance to look closely at the types of activities students were choosing for their projects, and the reasons for their choices. In addition to finding out what students were choosing and why, we also wanted to know specifically how the projects helped students become more autonomous learners. We decided to frame our questions in terms of Littlewood's work (1997), which says that increased autonomy requires increased confidence and motivation as well as improved skills and abilities. We also wanted to know the types of problems students encountered, so that we could find ways to avoid or deal with them in the future. Finally, we wanted to consider how to improve the project to make it even more valuable for students. So, in short, we were trying to address the following questions:

1. What activities do students choose for Language Learning Projects and why?
2. How do LLPs influence students' motivation, confidence, and linguistic ability?
3. How could LLPs be improved?

DATA

Most of the data for this study came from students' monthly reflection journals and their final reflections on the LLPs (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendices B and C). Both journals and final reflections could be written in English or Japanese, as the students wished, but we found that the comments written in Japanese were much more detailed and provided richer information than those written in English. In addition to the journals and final reflections, we also relied on Miki's teaching journal and her classroom observations. Surprisingly, a very rich source of data came from one group's presentation in which they asked the class to free-write messages to Miki in English. In these, many students mentioned how much they learned from the LLP and how their attitudes, motivation, and confidence had changed.

RESULTS AND REFLECTIONS

This section shows the results of the study and our discussion and interpretation. We will examine the goal-setting sheets, reflective journals, and final essays, looking for answers to the research questions above. We will focus on (a) the types of activities, (b) the reasons for choosing the activities, (c) increases in confidence and motivation, and (d) increases in English ability.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

The range of activities chosen by students is shown below in Table 2 below. As students could choose more than one activity, the total number of activities is more than the 50 students in the classes.

Table 2 Language Learning Project Activities

Activity	Number of students
Read a Japanese comic strip and translate into English	1
Translate recipes into English and try to cook	1
Study for TOEIC	1
Translate a Japanese restaurant menu into English	1
Write letters in English	1
Create jazz chants	1
Read Japanese folk tales in English	2
Listen to English language learning programs on the radio	2
Watch news programs on TV	2
Create English crosswords	2
Translate Japanese songs into English	2
Keep a diary in English	2
Read English newspapers	2
Read English children's books and translate into Japanese	3
Read Japanese folk tales and translate into English	4
Watch English movies or television programs	9
Listen to English songs	16
TOTAL	52

We were surprised at the variety in activities, and the creativity displayed by students in devising unique projects not described in the LLP handout. Listening to English songs was by far the most popular learning activity (16 students), followed by watching English movies or television programs (9 students). The next most popular activities were translating Japanese folk tales into English (4 students) and reading English children's books (3 students), while 2 students chose to read English translations of Japanese folk tales. This brings the total number of students who chose an activity involving either Japanese or English children's stories to 9, which might seem strange. However, remembering that the students are all women who have just graduated from high school, and who probably enjoy reading cute books and comics in Japanese, it is not such an unusual result.

Studying the chart, we noticed that students preferred 'passive' activities over 'productive/active' projects. There were significant numbers of students selecting reading and listening activities. Ten students practiced reading skills, and a total of 29 students chose activities that involve listening to English. This may be because students practiced their reading and listening skills in their high school English classes more often than their speaking and writing skills, so they preferred familiar activities, or they chose what they thought they were good at. On the other hand, students avoided more creative activities. Only 6 students engaged in writing activities, and none in speaking. Translation probably stands in the middle ground between 'passive' and 'creative' on the continuum. Twelve students chose activities that involve translation, and again we suspect influence from their high school English education, and the effect of the LLP handout suggesting translation in many places.

Although this class was actually a listening class, and more than half of the students chose activities that involve listening, 23 students chose activities that were not directly related to listening. Students were not instructed to choose something related to listening, and perhaps these 23 students felt that they were getting enough listening practice in class, and used the LLP to pursue other interests. In any case, it seems that the LLP gave students a chance to pursue their own goals for improving their English ability, and this may be instrumental in maintaining motivation in a class that is otherwise not meeting students' personal language learning goals.

As well as variety in the types of activities chosen, there was also a lot of diversity in how the activities were carried out. For example, with listening to English songs, one student listened to one song every 2 weeks, while another student listened almost every day. Some students listened to the songs and tried to write down what they heard, while others read the lyrics the first time they listened to the music, and then tried to listen again without the lyrics after they knew what the song was about.

This variety in activities and their execution reflects the diversity in students' abilities, goals, and interests. As Miki noted earlier, it is impossible to address this kind of diversity in regular teacher-led classes of 90 minutes, once or twice a week. While we were impressed that students were choosing such a range of activities, we were a little worried when we realized that most students had chosen activities from the handout, and had done them in the way that was suggested in the handout. On reflection, some of these activities might be too difficult for freshmen students, as they require quite high level skills, such as translation or dictation. We realized that we needed to change the original LLP handout (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix A) to include examples of easier activities, and provide more support for students, by, for example, giving them an idea of the difficulty level of each activity.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING ACTIVITIES

Reading through students' final reflections on the LLP, it was very interesting to see the reasons behind their choices. Whatever their reasons for choosing the activities, it was clear that all of the activities were relevant and meaningful for students in that they were enjoyable or interesting, were related to future employment goals, or helped students achieve personal language learning goals. Three different categories of reasons seemed to stand out at us as we sifted through the responses. We classified them as *affective*, *academic*, and *future-oriented* reasons. All students cited one or a combination of these as rationales for their projects.

Students who chose activities for affective reasons did so because the activities were interesting and fun, and were usually things that students enjoyed in their first language. Activities such as music and movies were usually chosen for affective reasons.

- *I chose to read English versions of Japanese folk tales because I was interested in how Japanese things were explained in English.*
- *I wasn't good at listening, and hated it, but listening to music seemed like something I could do.*
- *I have lots of English CDs. I love listening to English songs, but hadn't really paid attention to listening to the lyrics and trying to understand the meaning. I thought that this was a good chance to do that.*

Among academic reasons for choosing activities, some students stated a desire to increase their vocabulary, or the number of English expressions in their repertoire, while others wanted to improve listening skills.

- *I chose translating a Japanese comic into English because I thought that I could learn a new way of using English everyday.*

- *I chose to watch videos because I wasn't good at listening and I felt that I needed the pictures as well as the sound. I didn't have the confidence to understand just by listening.*
- *I wanted to write a diary because I could touch English every day. I could also remember vocabulary, idioms and expressions.*

Other students mentioned wanting to do something that was relevant to their major. Many of the students were majoring in Japanese Cultural Studies, and that may be one of the reasons that Japanese folk tales were so popular.

- *I chose to read Momotaro (a Japanese folk tale), as my major is Japanese Culture and I wanted to do something Japanese.*

A small number of students chose projects that they thought would help them in their futures, providing them with skills they could use in future jobs, or in their own lives.

- *I chose to translate recipes and try to cook them. It's not that I'm particularly interested in cooking, but I wasn't interested in any of the other projects, either. More than being for academic purposes, I chose it because it was something that would be useful to my daily life that just happened to involve English.*
- *In the future, I would like to work in the media and I read newspapers and watch the news everyday. I wanted to use that in my project.*
- *I like English and would like to work in a job where I can speak English, and I found out that TOEIC is necessary for that, so I chose to study for TOEIC.*
- *Foreigners often come to the place I work, and it was inconvenient not being able to communicate with them, so I decided to translate our restaurant's menu into English.*

We realized that we might be able to use these categories to assist future students in planning their projects. Those students who don't really like English or don't feel used to English could be advised to choose a fun activity that will not be too much of a burden. This activity could perhaps be something that they already enjoy doing in Japanese. Students who are already used to or enjoy English could be challenged to focus on improving a particular skill, again, perhaps using an activity that they already enjoy doing in their first language. And finally, students who think they will need English in the future, or who want to use English to accomplish some other goal, could be encouraged to focus on that.

INCREASES IN CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION

As students were responsible for choosing the activities for their projects, they said that they were motivated to work on them, and most seemed to enjoy doing the projects. At the end of the semester, many students wanted to continue working on their projects, or they wanted to start new projects, trying other activities introduced in the presentations.

- *I think my English ability has improved through doing my own project and through others' projects. My listening skills are better than they were. I want to continue this and I want to improve more.*

Although most students indicated that they were now more eager to study English, only a few students said that they were more confident in their English ability. These students had a new-found confidence as they had succeeded at something which they never thought they would be able to do. However, most students said that they did not have more confidence to use English. Perhaps these students had set learning goals that were too high, or were using materials that were too difficult. Or perhaps they need to spend another semester

on their projects to notice real change. We need more information before we can come to any conclusions on this issue. But the fact that most students did not experience increased confidence indicates a problem which needs to be addressed.

INCREASES IN ENGLISH ABILITY

For the most part, students felt that they learnt something from doing their project. We noticed different types of learning: from becoming accustomed to English, to improving a skill, to learning something about the language learning process.

At the most superficial level, students got used to, or became interested, in English, even if they didn't feel that their English ability had improved very much. Many other students reported a deeper level of learning, saying that their English ability had improved in some way. They had learned real English pronunciation and intonation, or new vocabulary, or improved a particular skill. Or they learned how to use their time more efficiently, or to make their learning more effective.

- *Honestly, I don't know exactly how much I have improved, but English doesn't feel as foreign to me now. Even just that is a big thing for me personally.*
- *I think that this project was extremely useful. This was the first time I had ever focused on listening because up until now I had only done grammar or reading. At first it was difficult because I didn't have any time to watch videos, but as I started watching, I could feel my listening ability improve. Before, English conversation and English communication were completely foreign to me, but now they feel close.*
- *My listening ability is better than it was. Now it's easier for me to understand texts that are a little fast or long.*
- *I think that this project was quite useful. My listening comprehension wasn't very good at first, but I think I'm quite good now. I realize that it's important to do even just a little each day.*

Most students felt that their language ability had improved through their projects. And for some, this increased proficiency stimulated their confidence. There were a few students, however, who were more discouraged about their language ability after their projects. They had a more acute awareness of their linguistic weaknesses, and of how far they still had to go. But, surprisingly, most of these students still had positive things to say about the project, and seemed to develop a clearer sense of how to go about their learning.

- *It's difficult to say whether this project had a direct influence on my English ability, however I think that one day the words and phrases I learned will be useful.*
- *Keeping a journal in English, although I am able to put sentences together more quickly than I used to, I feel that I still have a long way to go. I think it's necessary to first learn vocabulary and then expose myself to a lot of expressions.*

Sometimes the projects had a flow-on effect to other areas of students' lives. It was easier for them to understand other English classes, or they paid more attention to English that they encountered in their daily lives.

- *Little by little, I think my listening ability is definitely improving. In my reading class, while I don't understand everything that my native teacher says, I am now able to catch the key points.*
- *Because I was focusing on listening to English songs, even when I wasn't working on my LLP, I would pay attention to the lyrics when I heard English songs, and that became habit.*

LOOKING AHEAD

The students' comments made us aware of the potential impact of the LLP on their confidence and motivation, linguistic proficiency, and ability to take control of their learning. However, we also realized that we could change the LLP to stimulate more effective learning.

1. MORE TEACHER AND PEER SUPPORT

Some students set unclear or unreasonable goals, chose activities that were too difficult, or relied on ineffective learning strategies. With more support from the teacher, most of these problems could probably be avoided, or at least dealt with early in the semester, rather than waiting to find out about them in the students' final reflections. At the beginning of the semester, support could be provided through more careful explanation about goal-setting, and by checking that students had set appropriate goals and chosen suitable activities before allowing them to start working on their projects. Throughout the semester, students could make short, informal oral reports on their projects in small groups. These reports could be held once a month, perhaps on the same day that students write their journal reflections. This would expose all students to different learning activities before the final presentations. It would also give them the opportunity to talk about their difficulties and get suggestions and support from their peers.

2. PAPER SUPPORT: LLP HANDOUT

On the handout of possible activities, given to students at the start of the project (see the *Autonomy You Ask!* website for Appendix A), many of the activities are quite difficult, requiring high level skills such as translation or dictation. As these types of tasks are not suited to the proficiency level, or the learning needs of most freshmen, we want to change the handout so that it includes a wider variety of tasks, divided into skill sections, and graded according to difficulty level.

3. SELF SUPPORT: NOTEBOOKS

Students were not required to keep notebooks on their projects, but one student said that she would be more motivated to study if she had been required to submit a notebook at the end of the semester. We thought that this might be one way of providing more support for students. It might help them to be more organized in their learning, and to see their progress, while also allowing the teacher to see how much work has been done. Students could be given a set of questions to help them to reflect on their learning each time, thereby combining the journals and the notebooks. These notebooks would also be useful when evaluating students. Until now, students have been evaluated only on their presentations. For students who don't do well in their presentations, these notebooks would also provide the teacher with an alternative means of assessing their project work.

NEW DIRECTIONS

This cycle of thinking and writing about Language Learning Projects has raised new questions for us. While most students had positive things to say about the project, a handful did not seem to learn much at all. We feel that we could learn a lot by taking a closer look at those students, asking them about their difficulties with the project, and together searching for ways to overcome those problems.

We would also like to adapt the LLP so that it can be done in class. Miki's students did most of the work for their projects outside of class. They seemed happy to do this; however, we realize that not all students have the time, energy, and motivation to do an out-of-class project which may not be relevant to their major or their future careers.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We had always thought that Language Learning Projects were useful, but this research helped us see exactly how the projects enabled students to become more autonomous. We now know what we already suspected: Language Learning Projects are effective and worthwhile, and have enabled students to become more motivated and more proficient, too. Through our research and coffee shop collaboration, we have developed a much clearer understanding of how to make the projects more effective. It may seem ironic that projects intended to facilitate learner autonomy are made more effective by increasing teacher support. However, learning a language is a complex and daunting task, and initially most students don't know where to start (Nunan, 1997). Rather than throwing students in at the deep end, we think that by providing more support and adjusting as necessary, students will learn more effectively, and ultimately be better equipped to take control of their learning.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

ELLEN HEAD

For a project like this to work, the out-of-class element has to be firmly grounded in and connected to the classroom. This connection between developing autonomy in the classroom and in private study outside comes across very clearly in Miki and Jodie's account. Encouraging students to discuss their plans in groups in class provides space and time for students to 'catch' autonomy from each other. Sharing the experiences in a final presentation gives the whole sequence a climax and a clear point. It must have been very gratifying when one group of students asked the class to free-write about the project as a whole. When students are able to take the initiative in this way, they are indeed "better equipped for future language learning, with or without a teacher."

One aspect of LLPs that interests me as a future research area is the impact of this kind of collaborative development on how students articulate their goals. I have found that students tend to either express their goals in terms of activities that they will do, or to describe very broad goals such as "I want to get better at listening." When a class is able to work on individualised projects together, as they did in the LLP study, students can refine their goals in the light of what they learn from other members of the group.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

MICHAEL CARROLL

Reading through the comments made by Miki's students on their language learning projects, I heard the voices of students I've known. But in Miki and Jodie's case the depth of thought behind these comments, and the learning that had obviously gone on, made me think again about how much more my own students may be capable of. What did Miki do to bring her students to this stage? I think the answer lies in the support she gave them, and the simplicity and clarity of the program. Absolute autonomy is not easily handled alone. It can often best be fostered by creating for students a secure space, with clear limits, within which to do their own

thing. Miki and Jodie show what a delicate balancing act it is for teachers to reconcile students' freedom of choice with the right level of support, even as they are still fine-tuning that balance.

Another point that strikes me is this: Action research is often described narrowly in terms of seeking solutions to problems. Miki and Jodie, though, have taken an activity that they intuitively felt was working well, and looked more closely to confirm their impressions, to find out why it worked, and to look for ways to improve it. This kind of positive classroom research is just what is most useful to teachers because it gives us a model on which to base explorations of our own classrooms. I'm already writing LLPs into my Semester II syllabus.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 3

HAYO REINDERS

It was easy for me to relate to Miki and Jodie's interesting account. Where I work (at the University of Auckland in New Zealand) over 35%, or over 10,000, of all students are not native speakers of English. The incredible amount of time and effort expended on them to develop their language is not nearly enough to assist all of them or assist them sufficiently. Clearly, most of the work will have to be done by these students themselves. And this, as we all know, is only possible when students have the necessary skills. Miki and Jodie have found one interesting and stimulating way of developing not only students' language but also their learning skills, their knowledge about themselves as learners, their learning process, and a whole range of other aspects of learning a second language.

Interestingly, the use of projects and the way Miki and Jodie have put this into practice are surprisingly similar to the type of work we do with our students in New Zealand, even though we do not teach classes. In our Self-Access Centre, we approach learners not as groups but as individuals, and help them to identify their weaknesses, set goals, and plan their learning. We also help them to identify suitable resources and activities to participate in, monitor their progress, provide feedback, encourage reflection, and offer a range of other types of support. I was struck by how similar this is in some respects to what Miki and Jodie do in their classes. It shows that the two ways of learning and teaching are not mutually exclusive, and in fact, share a lot of characteristics. This is exciting, as personally I have always believed in the power of individualised support as opposed to the one-size-fits-all approach still found in most language classrooms. Classroom teaching, the way Miki and Jodie do it, is about developing the individual in a collaborative, supportive environment. The ideal self-access centre I try to develop does exactly the same.

Projects such as those described by Miki and Jodie can initially take up a lot of time and effort, both in terms of preparation and in providing support to students. However, they pay off in increased motivation, student awareness, improved learning, and in a myriad other ways, sometimes unforeseen, sometimes unseen. In addition, the reflective process which Miki and Jodie engaged in when developing and re-developing the projects seems to have been extremely fruitful. This is the type of reflection we would want from our own students. Perhaps they can use their 'project' and their way of working on it as a model for their students some time? Finally, projects such as this influence students well beyond the course itself. By instilling in students a view of language learning and encouraging them to approach language learning as a personal endeavour, students will be better equipped to deal with future demands on their language. Helping them develop the skills to carry through a project is surely one way of supporting them in their future learning. In short: It is time and effort extremely well spent.