

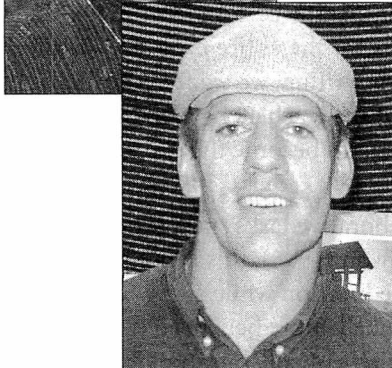
A Class Project: Collaborative Newsletters



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This newsletter centres around a collaborative group project wherein students choose positions either on reporter teams or as editorial staff in order to produce a professional-looking class newsletter on Microsoft Publisher. The newsletter is then distributed to all students and professors alike in our department. We will describe the process of making the class newsletter but, above all, with a view to exploring how autonomy has challenged and changed not only the project itself but our students and us, the teachers as well: that is to say, how we now interact, plan, and negotiate steps in the newsletter together.

このニュースレターの中心は、協同で作成するグループ企画で、その中で学生はレポーター・チーム、もしくは、編集スタッフのどちらかを選び、マイクロソフト・パブリッシャーで、プロが作るようなニュースレターを作成していく。このニュースレターは、私たちの学部 of 全学生や先生方にも同様に配布される。私たちはとりわけ、自律性がこのプロジェクトそのものだけでなく、学生や私たち教師をどのように変えていったかという視点で、ニュースレターを作る過程、つまり、ニュースレター作成の各段階で私たちがどのように計画を立て、交渉し、相互に影響を与えたのかを説明する。

For purposes of authorship credit, Joyce Cunningham is the first author of this paper.

INTRODUCTION

This project was a very very instructive project for me!! It's first time to advance class by ourself. This is a good project because students act independently. I hope we could have much more project like this. (Reporter Yoshimi Takahashi, Spring 2003)

It was a good experience for me. It helped my English very much. I could improve through this work: it helped my grammar, vocabulary and thinking about style. (Assistant Editor Saori Ogura, Spring 2003)

We could decide articles which we want to do.... Newsletter Project was very hard work, but I could have a good experience. I will treasure our newsletter. (Reporter Natsumi Masukura, Spring 2003)

This project gave me a lot of valuable experience, because I could know how to make an newsletter. If this English class studied only English, I couldn't have such an experience. I thought this project was very good. (Reporter Seiichi Tanaka, Fall 2002)

In the Department of Communication Studies at Ibaraki University, our third-year students have been involved in a challenging newsletter project for several years, but this year, we (throughout the paper, “we” refers to both authors) decided to infuse more autonomy into the process. There were several reasons for this. First of all, we believed the editorial staff needed to have more decision-making power and overall responsibility for the entire project. Second, because the newsletter represented the culmination of weeks of writing, we wanted the final product to more honestly reflect the learners’ voices, instead of the teachers having ultimate editorial control. Third, throughout our English programme, it has become the teachers’ goal to give the students more say in what and how they learn.

At first blush, it may seem that learner autonomy and collaborative tasks such as our newsletter are at odds with each other, but according to Thomson (1998), this is not necessarily the case. Learners can work together in some aspects of their education while also working autonomously. Indeed, the combination of these two ways is likely more beneficial than either one alone. Benson (2001), in fact, states that an atmosphere of collaboration is the ideal background for students to make choices regarding their autonomous learning. Project work is a great opportunity to promote collaboration, and as Fried-Booth (1986) explains, “by its very nature, project work places the responsibility on the students, both as individuals and as members of a cooperative learning group” (p. 3). Among others, Hart (2002a), a university teacher in Japan, has introduced some autonomy into group work in class: in his case, a series

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of three-week poster projects completed by first-year students, in which they reported in their weekly journals the particular strategies they had employed in the completion of their projects.

What do we mean by autonomy? Benson and Voller (1997b, pp. 1-2) include the following characteristics:

- situations in which learners study entirely on their own
- a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning
- the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning
- the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Holec (1981), however, defines autonomy as, "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), i.e.,

- determining the objectives;
- defining the contents and progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- monitoring the procedure of acquisition (...); and
- evaluating what has been acquired.

At first, our newsletter project, perhaps, didn't fit neatly into either of the above authors' characterizations of learner autonomy, and possibly didn't exactly match anybody's idea of learner autonomy, but gradually, in the changes we have been making throughout the past year and a half, it does seem to touch on more of the key areas.

Looking at the overall picture of how tasks are completed on the way to producing the newsletter, students are now working and learning more autonomously. That is, the teacher has assumed a more supportive role, and the students have greater responsibility for their own learning. Sakiko Sekiuchi, Editor of the Spring 2003 Newsletter in Class A, put it like this, "It is heavy responsibility because I must decide the deadlines and finish the newsletter. I must tell others on the editorial team what they must do... but it was good experience and I learned a lot." Collaborative tasks such as creating a class newsletter can motivate and challenge students by involving them in a whole new, fascinating, learning experience. Newsletters are invaluable projects for they provide learners with real life choices, skills and opportunities to work independently of the teacher. Not only are the students developing skills in writing for real purposes, but they are collaborating with and are responsible to their teams for a meaningful and relevant product, read by students and professors alike in the department. Reporter Tomomi Machida, in Class A 2003, writes, "We can gain a big satisfaction by completing all tasks by ourselves."

In this chapter, first, information about the English programme at our department will be presented briefly. Next, the newsletter project in its former state and the absorbing process involved in making this project more learner-centred will be described. Comments gleaned from written feedback and interviews with students are examined to shed light upon our ongoing efforts to alter our initial structure. (Practical worksheets and sample newsletters can be found on the *Autonomy You Ask!* website.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME

This particular newsletter project has existed in its present form for several years in the third year of the undergraduate English programme in the Department of Communication Studies

at Ibaraki University. Ibaraki University is a national university, which means that the students tend to arrive with high test scores on the English section of the 'Center Examination' (used for admission purposes at Japanese universities), but not especially good English skills. Our English programme attempts to remedy that situation by focusing on using balanced skills in project-based, communicative activities.

Each year when new students are admitted, they are divided into two classes, A and B, depending on their English score on the Center Exam. The higher-scoring students go into the A class and the lower scorers into the B class. Generally, there are no major differences between the two classes (although they do develop their own class personalities and dynamics), but in the A class there are usually a few returnees or students who have similar high English ability. Each class has about 30 students, with around 240 in the department's 4-year undergraduate programme. Freshmen have an unheard of five 90-minute periods of English a week with a native speaker professor, while sophomores have three. By the third year, this decreases to once a week as students begin the arduous task of finding work after graduation.

Although not a new idea, newsletters are seldom discussed in university EFL teaching circles. However, such projects are supremely manageable. Desktop publishing has evolved greatly over the past few years and offers new, teacher-friendly programmes. Even word processing programmes like Microsoft Word have surprisingly flexible layout options for creating newsletters, and often include templates with which to start. We thus believe this project is within the reach of most third and fourth year English classes at Japanese universities.

THE NEWSLETTER PROJECT

We will first explain general procedures used in the project: preparation (such as learning about newsletters and deciding positions), as well as editorial staff work, reporting teamwork, and finalizing the whole newsletter. Here, we will compare the more teacher-centred newsletters of 3 years ago, which worked well (and might even be sorely tempting to those who try this project for the first time) with the results both positive and negative we have had in infusing more autonomy into the latest projects. Since we are two teachers in separate classes, we often see eye to eye, but there are, of course, some differences in approach. We will highlight these, as appropriate.

INTRODUCING NEWSLETTERS AND TOPICS TO THE CLASS

In the pre-task phase—both in the original project and the present one—teachers are still at the helm when introducing the newsletter. Initially, the teacher needs to build a knowledge base in order to familiarize learners with newsletters in general. To this end, a variety of newsletters can be collected and distributed to the class. Sample newsletters will be posted on our future English workshop programme website at Ibaraki University or can be found elsewhere in such books as *Knockout Newsletters* (Jones, 2000). In pairs, learners select one newsletter that catches their interest and, guided by a worksheet, they analyze its construction: the kinds of headlines, sections, content, layout, visuals, etc. (see Appendix A on the *Autonomy You Ask!* website).

In Class A, students are encouraged to select and present their favourite format, discuss this in new groups, and vote on a final format. Originally, the teachers announced what the general theme would be (i.e., Ibaraki University). Small groups then brainstormed possible topics for their class newsletter and shared these with the class. In Class B, a different strategy was employed: Students referred only to the previous semester's Class B newsletter so that positions for the newsletter could be decided, groups formed, and ideas for articles brainstormed by the end of that first class period.

In a July 15th, 2003 interview, Editors Sakiko Sekiuchi and Saori Ogura suggested another important improvement to the familiarization procedure. Saori stated:

The editorial team needs to have a more general idea of what happen with the newsletter at the beginning. At first, I was VERY confused about this. We didn't know the general procedure. Yes, you showed us the steps each day and asked us what we wanted but, before we started project and each class, we needed to know more. We didn't know.

Joyce responded:

Maybe, I could meet with the Editorial Staff before the project begins and email objectives by cell phone before each class? ... Give you general information initially to help you understand the general steps and then, prior to each class? I guess I am a details person. It sounds like different learning styles or approaches. I think you look at the forest first. I usually look at the trees but just being reminded of this is helpful to me to try to be more aware of that next time and proceed in those ways. This is very helpful.

In fact, Robinson and Barrett (1999), in a handout for their presentation *Organizing a student-centered audience-specific reporting class*, set out clear recursive phases and approximate time frames so that students quickly gain a global perspective of their project and suggested publication schedule (12 days in their case) from the very beginning of their project. Our newsletter project takes about six to eight 90-minute class periods, depending on how much autonomy is granted.

CHOOSING POSITIONS

Before starting the actual project, students should also have a firm understanding of the various positions in the newsletter. After job descriptions have been examined and discussed (see Appendix B on the *Autonomy You Ask!* website), students can decide on their first and second choices by the end of the same lesson as well as work out reasons to justify their preferences. Originally, in both classes, the final decision as to who would serve on the editorial staff was made by the teacher, after class, through considering motivation, general experience, participation, and attendance records from the previous year.

Changes in this procedure came from student feedback such as the following: “Joyce, you need to make sure that the graphic/photographer and the inputter are good with computers. They have to work well on computers. When we didn’t know something, we worked until... we did it but this is important. Kaori [inputter] knew computers and so, we were lucky” (Sakiko Sekiuchi, Spring 2003 Class A Editor). This year too, Joyce collected the choices and preferences and considered them after class. She discovered that no-one wanted to be editor, even after she emailed those students who indicated interest in serving on the editorial team in other positions. Previously, she would have twisted some poor student’s arm (rather mercilessly) but, in trying to remain true to the process of involving students in making the decisions, the next class, she asked volunteers for the editorial team to meet and:

- a) negotiate/decide among themselves who would consider taking on the editor’s position; and,
- b) sort out who would work in the other positions.

In Class B, the students were asked as usual to indicate privately (on a piece of paper) their top two preferences for a position: editor, assistant editor, graphics/photographer, inputter,

article chief, or reporter, along with their reason. Wade then took about 5 minutes of class time to look at how the preferences stacked up. Luckily, there were at least two volunteers for each position. He then put together the editorial team first, the article chiefs second, and finally, everyone else became a reporter by default.

In both classes, the students were also reminded that, in the case where a position were contested by two or more volunteers, there would be another newsletter produced in the fall. This new freedom of choice in volunteering for jobs may motivate learners by providing them with an authentic (although sometimes difficult) opportunity to take on responsibilities drawn from real-world experience.

MORE INVOLVEMENT FOR EDITORIAL STAFF

Previously, it had always been the teachers who decided the focus of the newsletters (i.e., Ibaraki University or a particular theme). However, in remaining true to our decision to increase autonomy, we have now handed this decision over to the editors. In Class A, the editorial staff surprised us this semester when they turned this decision over to the class. Astutely, they curtailed discussion time by limiting the choice to three different areas, asked groups (of approximately 5 people) to discuss this for a short time, and called on all to vote. They used the same procedure for brainstorming and finalizing general topics, as well as forming reporter teams by allowing the clusters to remain as they happened to be on that day (although both editors later stated with hindsight that smaller groups of three would have produced better results in getting all members involved and participating more evenly).

In Class B, the editorial staff decided to have a theme-less newsletter, but to retain final decision-making authority as to the kind of articles. After the four article teams of 4 students each (assigned randomly) brainstormed possible article topics and the lists were put together on the class whiteboard, the editorial staff decided to have each of the teams write two articles, which they could request by topic on a first come, first served basis. However, this decision was made on the proviso that the staff would have veto power, in order to maintain some sense of variety and balance of topics. As Nunan notes (1988, p. 62), giving learners a say in the materials, based on what interests them, goes a long way in increasing their sense of autonomy.

One of the problems we experienced in years past was that, although enthusiastic, the editorial staff initially accomplished little until the first drafts were received. They seemed to waste a lot of time and even looked a bit bored. Joyce would be fairly busy working with reporter teams over several drafts. Wade would float around the groups, giving help when asked and making occasional comments to all the groups if he saw common mistakes or felt there needed to be some more teacher direction. It was pointed out by our collaborators in this Anthology project, at a meeting in Tokyo, that originally, reporter teams seemed to have more autonomy than the editorial staff, and that with our new way of doing it, the editorial staff was catching up in the autonomy aspect of the project. This, perhaps, could account for the fact that even with a bit of 'prodding' in the first stages of the project, the editorial team didn't seem to achieve much in the first newsletters.

Later, we discovered that it was difficult for them to envisage what the final newsletter would look like without knowing much about the articles being written, relatively isolated as they were in their corner of the room. In an interview conducted at Ibaraki University on February 12th, 2002, Tomo Ouchi and Kentaro Koike, last year's ('pre-autonomy') co-editors, had good insights and advice on how to increase editorial staff participation during the initial stage of the project. Kentaro suggested that the editors be more involved in the brainstorming

by reporter teams. In his opinion, in future newsletters, reporter teams should first make an appointment to present the outline of their proposals (ideas, formats, etc.), to the editors rather than reporting directly to the professors as had always been done prior. Indeed, this advice was excellent and was very beneficial to changing how the editorial team and the teacher worked, in a way that improved student autonomy.

Giving the editors the power to accept or reject ideas for articles from the reporter teams from the very beginning of the production has contributed to the editors becoming much more familiar with the content, and thus more engaged in making a good newsletter. The editorial team now checks not only if there is sufficient variety of style and formats but also, of content. As Tomo pointed out in the feedback interview mentioned above, “In the first joint production, there were 2-3 stories about restaurants, and not all at the same level of interest. All groups should have very different topics.” Now, keeping this advice in mind, the teacher can first work with the editorial team when deciding on possible guidelines for articles they wish to appear in the newsletter emphasizing catchy titles and subtitles, and the kind of report that will be made (descriptive, narrative, factual based on surveys and questionnaires, etc.). With such parameters in mind, the reporter teams can reflect these in their brief oral presentations to the editorial team preparing, in addition, 3-4 main ideas with a few details for each section of their article(s).

After discussing what to include in their articles, reporter teams in Class A now make a brief presentation to the editorial staff on the ideas for articles they wish to write. This year, in their newsletter, *Viva IBA!*, Class A reporter teams presented on their ideas for articles about *Ibaraki Prefecture Festivals and Fireworks*, *Great Beaches in Ibaraki*, *A Salute to Natto*, and *Restaurants in and around Ibadai*. The editorial staff listened to these presentations on planned articles and approved or suggested changes (in the case of overlapping topics among groups, and so on). This process in Class A took extra time as the decision about the selection and placement of articles was no longer quickly made by an experienced teacher after class. However, to our way of thinking, the increased speaking during the presentations and the sharing of information, goals and deadlines have resulted in heightened involvement by the editorial team, and are all well worth the extra time. Even so, still more change was suggested by this year’s editor, Sakiko Sekiuchi, who noted, “Yes, but I think that the reporter teams need more preparation still. Not just the focus [of the oral presentation] they are making us but they need to put more details in it before they present to us.”

Moreover, we now ask the editorial staff, after consultation with the teacher, to decide on deadlines for editing drafts and final proofing. These dates are announced and explained personally by the editorial staff to each reporter team. It might appear to some readers that the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction: that the reporter teams, initially with a certain degree of autonomy in their decision-making, have now had to bow to an increasingly powerful editorial team in order to have ideas approved or rejected. To a certain degree, this might be true, and writing this chapter has forced us to come to terms with this fact and search for new ways to help lighten somewhat the load of our editorial staff.

The teachers do spend a little extra money and ask a fellow classmate or fourth-year student with editorial experience from the previous school year to teach Microsoft Publisher to the editorial staff, freeing us to oversee the whole process instead of constantly helping the editorial team in the separate computer room. In the end, the teacher may become a little more equal in the learning because often (s)he may not know how to use Publisher as well as the students themselves, but the teacher is nearby if needed to try to help. From the experience of the instructors, it is useful to explain to the editorial team that, in addition, to their initial

responsibilities, a newsletter file complete with name of the newsletter, list of report titles, and contributors and so on should be inputted and shown to the teacher. In this way, the editorial staff will gradually gain experience in using Microsoft Publisher early on and prepare for later work on incoming articles.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

In general, through this project, reporter teams become involved in process writing for real purposes. Many stated that, prior to this project, they had mainly generated ideas in Japanese and then, translated into English. By the end of the first newsletter, however, they realize just how time consuming this method was. Moreover, in high school, they had not learned the differences between a Japanese and English paragraph nor had they worked from an outline of ideas, integrated much factual information from the Internet or used quotes. For many, too, surveys and interviews were new, and they are interested in compiling and analyzing information because it results from their own original questions. However, some realize that it is not always easy to conduct an interview skillfully to draw out useful details from a busy professor or restaurant owner for their article. Miki Suzuki wrote:

I learned a lot of things through this newsletter project. For example, I knew the difficulty of reporting information accurately, how to write quotations, include more facts, and so on. I also learned the difference in English between a more casual style and more formal style.

On this same subject, Yukino Kurosaka wrote honestly:

There are big differences between the Japanese and English way of writing. It is still difficult ... to get used to this. I have to keep trying. I could also learn not to repeat the same word in a paragraph. I could learn new vocabulary too. I hope to repeat this project.

The two classes produce their own separate newsletters in the spring, allowing more learners to attain Microsoft Publisher skills. In the fall, students are now asked to choose between continuing to work as separate classes or collaborating together. Both Tomo Ouchi and Kentaro Koike, co-editors of Class A, were strongly in favour of maintaining completely separate class newsletters. Tomo gave the following reasons:

It is difficult [for a joint editorial team] to decide on what reports should go on the front page and what reports should go on the inside 2-3 pages. Reporter teams all want their reports to appear on the front page. If separate, we can avoid this problem. In addition, there will be more competition between the two classes. Our class will say, "Oh, B class has interesting issues so we have to make a better newsletter next time."

This was the poke in the ribs that really pushed us to start rethinking the project and how we could perhaps move from the teacher who made most of the final decisions and was the true powerhouse / publisher behind the scenes to having the students themselves be much more firmly seated in the driver's seat. It was a gradual process of trial and error with each teacher discussing successes, obstacles, and challenges with the other to question, hone skills, and keep trying.

Joyce was blessed with a 'dream team' this past spring semester (although this same class had been the most difficult freshman class in her 7 years of teaching in Japan and nearly drove her to drink). However, when questioned as to whether it was autonomy which had made

the difference, the answer was not exactly what Joyce had hoped (drat!!!) but rather that the class had simply matured, that personality differences had been worked out by third year, and so on. Be that as it may, the dream team has helped Joyce experiment with autonomy in this project, and supported her so that both the editorial team and the teacher have re'joyce'd in the freedom.

By heeding advice given to us either through written and oral feedback or in interview form, teams are encouraged to be more responsible for their projects. Motivation to work hard has increased, and our students have become even prouder of their end product. As students learn about autonomy, so do we. Autonomy becomes not just moving from the traditional front of the class to walking around the class while helping different groups, but rather, stepping back to second and support the students in their decisions and daily progress. It means finding ways to stay quietly in the background, asking the editorial team if and when they want to address the class with instructions for the next class. It also involves one to two meetings and phone calls to the editorial team before each class: planning together, preparing and checking common goals, and collaborating on final drafts. The spotlight is cast upon the students who are now the main actors. However, Jodie Stephenson, one of our collaborators, commented, "It sounds like more work for the teachers! And some people think teachers who promote autonomy just want to take it easy!"

But, no pain, no gain. For any busy teacher, contacting an editorial staff before or during class and reaching agreement as to how to proceed and conduct the class together is not always convenient, but the rewards seen in the enthusiastic smiles of the students and their increased cooperation do make this whole procedure more attractive.

As the newsletter progresses, there are ongoing meetings at all levels. Reporters are busy: discussing, analyzing data, writing and improving drafts while meeting with various members of the editorial staff to update them on progress, problems encountered, and so on. In order to do this, they have to identify, organize, and delegate responsibility to team members: Most are writers, while a few volunteer additionally as typists, proofreaders, gathers of data and sources, etc. As well, content and length of stories, tabulation and integration of survey or questionnaire results, and suggestions for the kind of visuals required are negotiated and decided on. Deadlines need to be confirmed and updated as to when drafts and revisions are to be handed in to the editors. Indeed, as reporter Yoshimi Takahashi, Spring 2003, wrote in her post feedback form, "It's very important to advance the project. If I didn't do my work, other members would be puzzled. Therefore, I tried to participate the talk and tried to work on time. Other member also did that."

WORKING ON DRAFTS

Previously, it was only the teachers who read the drafts after class and worked exclusively with the reporter teams on improvements and changes. Now, the teachers are stepping back and the editorial staff is doing the reading and commenting on each successive draft. Target deadlines for drafts are announced by the editorial team (after consultation with the teacher).

Prior to the newsletter project, paragraph writing had been reviewed in class. In their freshmen year, students had gained a good grounding in writing from a writing textbook, one of only two used in their five classes a week. However, even this review is open to question. As Wade pointed out, "Joyce, how can you be sure they need that review and not something else?" This question does need to be asked rather than assuming that the teacher knows what is best for them. However, Joyce did find this pre-newsletter review of what constitutes good paragraphs beneficial when the editorial staff worked on the drafts or when meeting with them. They did not have to

be reminded as much of these things and seemed alert and, yet, more at ease while checking for them in their drafts. However, to Joyce's surprise, in the July 15th interview, Saori, so incredible in her proofreading guidance, still called for *more* information on newsletter style explaining, "We needed to know more about how to write articles for a newsletter. For example, don't put your opinion in the middle of the article and other things... Some teams didn't know how to write good topic sentences." It would seem that still more such teaching could be given if directly related to articles in progress. Students could also be given reading about newsletter style as found in Buss and McClain-Ruelle's *Creating a Classroom Newspaper* (2000). These are good points that we need to ponder further when planning future classes with the goal of giving extra support but not interrupting the flow of progress in the newsletter.

Initially, it was with some misgivings and quite a lot of apprehension on the part of Joyce at least, that the 2003 editorial team in Class A set about reading the drafts. Joyce asked herself how they could possibly go beyond their umpteen years of conditioning in order to ignore grammar mistakes and focus rather on checking for: good titles and topic sentences, whether details were linked to the topic sentences, whether facts or quotes had been integrated into the paragraph, and so on. However, the 'dream team' completely blew her away. The corrections of Class A's editorial team were spot on and, in some cases, better than Joyce herself would have done, for they read closely for contradictions and identified other problems that she had missed. She duly noted how they very politely first praised and thanked each reporter team for their efforts, and then proceeded to suggest changes. However, the assistant editor, Saori Ogura did mention how she felt a certain amount of stress to be lifted thusly above her colleagues when appraising their drafts. In the July 15th interview, she explains, "Some students (I will *not* say their names) felt *very* confident in their English and it was difficult to try to make suggestions to them. That part was hard." Sakiko added, "It was hard to push them to write more in a paragraph when they thought they had written enough but they hadn't. So we had to push them". Joyce, however, was delighted with these remarks as they are what every person/teacher in positions of decision encounter. In a mini-meeting of our Anthology collaboration group in July 2003, Jodie Stephenson too commented on these results as coming about possibly because students had more stake in their own production.

Joyce hopes to be more sensitive to such struggles and honest reflections above. She has been trying a system of quiet, behind-the-scenes support for the editorial staff, ticking and initialing Editorial Staff suggestions she agrees with, and writing in pencil other changes they could think about. In this way, the editorial staff can either leave as is, ignore (and erase the pencil) or change to their own writing. It seems to be working so far; that, and a liberal dose of praise each time a member of the team comes in with a completed draft between classes. Later, in the July 15th interview, Saori confirmed that the system of ticks had helped a lot to support the team when approaching individual reporters about changes to be made in the articles. Hopefully, this will continue to cultivate autonomy in the future while, at the same time, allowing for teacher input. In Class B, Wade had always followed a 'hands off' approach to editing, so no major changes were necessary. In particular, he had never played the middleman between the article teams and the editorial staff; the originals went to the editorial staff and they were given the job of editing. He usually floated around the room, as a 'human reference,' to be used by students who felt the necessity to ask about certain points in their articles. However, compared with the newsletters made before this most recent one, it seemed that the students asked him for this kind of on-the-spot native speaker advice less often.

Perhaps this could partly be attributed to the fact that Wade had announced in the first class period of the 2003 spring newsletter project that the editorial staff would have more responsibilities and the teacher (in both Class A and Class B) would be making fewer decisions.

It might be worth further study to see if students do in fact become more autonomous when told there is a plan to enable them to learn that way, as opposed to students who are placed in an autonomous situation but not told so. In the new system, reporter teams, when ready, hand first, second, and third drafts in to the editorial team while the latter reads them and hands them back. However, this brought a new problem to the foreground because there then seemed to be some down time for the reporters while the editorial team read the drafts and made suggestions. Sakiko in the July 15th interview confirmed this and added:

They [reporter teams] didn't know what to do but they still needed to have a little more time to read each other's parts because, in our class, they divided up articles and wrote different parts but didn't read each others' parts before. They needed to make sections better, see they didn't repeat ideas, etc. They used different pronouns in the articles and it was confused. It will lighten the Editorial staff work if we don't have to do that for them.

FINALIZING AND ASSESSMENT

As articles are finalized and handed in, the editorial staff can withdraw to the computer lab to work on layout, inputting and proofing of articles and so on. Reporter teams, now almost freed of their responsibilities, can compile portfolios of work accomplished both individually and in reporter teams during the project. This record is an invaluable assessment tool as instructors may not know if students have all collaborated more or less equally in the project. Among other things, portfolios can contain a cover page, list of contents, a completed worksheet of the analysis of sample newsletters (see Appendix A on the *Autonomy You Ask!* website), end-of-day logs/reports, questions and data tabulated from interviews/surveys, sources, a final one-page evaluation of challenges, stumbling blocks, solutions, and so on. The end-of-day logs/reports include such information as the amount of English the student/group spoke, work accomplished in class, and what stills needs to be done for the following week.

This kind of self-assessment, similar to that advocated by Murphey (1998c) and Small (2002) is important in getting the learners to take charge of their own success. Incentives can be given to the editorial team, in view of their disproportionately high amount of work during the project. Joyce decided this year that the editorial team did not need to complete the portfolio. Wade had an indolent editorial staff his first time doing this newsletter project, and their final grades reflected this. His second and third staffs were much more diligent, and he rewarded them with ice cream parfaits and dinners at the local Australian bar and grill, respectively. Extra marks could be given if a teacher felt this were important as an incentive, but, in the third year of the Ibaraki programme, there are no specific criteria for grading the course. We both agree that it is general effort toward improvement that is most noted.

Another question that inevitably crops up is how closely the instructor should proofread and correct final texts. It goes without saying that the teacher is the best judge of the expectations of each department and how conservative or progressive other professors may be in their toleration of errors. Wade felt strongly about encouraging students (and proofreaders) to be responsible for their own work and that one should not interfere too much. He argued (and Joyce understood) that the learning gained in this project and the feeling of authorship by the students are more important than discrete point errors. However, Joyce surprised and embarrassed herself in wanting to 'polish' more, worrying about the beliefs and standards of other professors in the Department who would receive the newsletter. Would they understand that there were discrete point errors?

In fact, Joyce probably threw the baby out with the bathwater and caused a fairly lively dialogue on this very subject of corrections to occur between Wade and herself after she announced via email:

Wade, i stumbled on a great technique today. the third draft was due and the editorial staff was to do their usual checking at the paragraph level but i asked all teams to switch articles and check at the GRAMMAR level because it would save the editorial team time and effort. i said that each article should be read twice and corrected and then, it could be handed on to the editorial team. The reporter teams did a SUPER job. Saori (Assnt. Editor) was really happy about it because she said, "NOW they realize all the hard work we have done and they are appreciating it more." She was all smiles.

Wade replied anon:

Well, it's great if they know what they are doing. But I wonder how much re-editing your editorial team will end up doing... As a presenter at JALT said last year, with peer editing (in the level our students are at), all too often they will change something that was correct to something wrong. I have seen it enough in my own classes to change my mind about doing that kind of thing. I always used to do it, but especially when you have a capable assistant editor like Saori, I would leave it in her hands. I think the last time I did peer editing, I told them that they could just look at the edited parts as another opinion to consider and could keep their original words if they were sure they were correct... Actually, even students in our classes that are about at the same level of English often make quite different kinds of grammar mistakes... So you can't even assume that trading papers among fairly equal-level students will be safe! Just my two cents. Do what works for you.

As it happened, students in Joyce's class consulted her on quite a few of the sentences where they had questions. Joyce thinks Wade's idea of having the editorial team make the final decision is probably a good one, especially if one member of the editorial team with the best grammar skills were given the role of collecting suggestions and deciding to integrate them or not into the final drafts.

When the newsletters are finished, Wade (and now Joyce) immediately asks the students for feedback on the newsletter. Because the most recent newsletter project incorporated many changes in order to make it autonomous, Wade's most recent feedback survey started with a written explanation of the change toward a more student-centred project before probing the students' feelings about the increase in autonomy. For example, *How do you feel about this way?*, *What were the good points about doing it this way?*, and *What were the bad points?* All of the comments were valuable, but below are some of the more salient ones:

COMMENTS FAVORABLE TOWARD AUTONOMOUS PROCESS, SPRING 2003

We can feel we make jurnal by ourself. We can choose topics we like. (Assistant Editor Yuki Mimori)

I agree partly. But we need a teacher's help and guidance enough. (Photographer/ Graphics Designer Norio Yamaguchi)

Teachers don't give too many commands. (Reporter Shun Komori)

We made positive cooperation each other. (Section Chief Yoko Hirata)

It's great, but I wonder if we can spare time for that. (Reporter Natsuko Sato)

It was quite democratic way. We can be attached to this paper. We can do our work with forwardness. (Section Chief Asami Kanno)

The class are lively. (Editor Yutaka Ido)

COMMENTS LESS FAVORABLE TOWARD AUTONOMOUS PROCESS, SPRING 2003

I like that teacher decides details. Doing so, work is earlier. (Assistant Editor Yuki Mimori)

There weren't enough explanations in advans. (Reporter Tomoko Funabashi)

If the editorial staffs don't have ability to do well, we can't make a good newsletter. And it takes much time to make it by ourselves, so you should give us time. (Reporter Masahiro Hiramatsu)

Editorial staffs. They have to work out of class, but they hardly work in class. (Section Chief Asami Kanno)

"I want more correction (revision) or advice. (Section Chief Chizu Sato)

Most of the students had both favorable and unfavorable comments, as would be expected from the way the questions were posed, but overall, considering the comments of all 20 students, it would appear that the increase in autonomy was very well received by the students. Some of them gave excellent advice about improving the project, mostly in the way of more teacher direction in certain areas, and these parts will certainly be tweaked in future projects. Indeed, it can be said that every class has a different 'personality,' and consequently, teacher direction may need to be adjusted.

Finally, when ready, the newsletters must be printed. For the first few semesters, our newsletters were reproduced in black and white only. However, a small sum of money has finally been found within the department budget to cover the costs of colour and better quality paper, which shows the considerable efforts of the students in a better light. If no such budget is available, volunteers can be recruited to help with photocopying.

The newsletters are delivered to each class throughout our department. We found it wise to distribute our first few productions at department meetings in which we explained the process and our objectives. The initial 'oohs' and 'ahs' from colleagues were ample reward for our endeavours. Another change in relinquishing control is that we would like our students to have the pleasure of hearing this reaction. They themselves will be invited to present the newsletter and revel in the surprise and appreciation. It is important to take time for this extra PR, as the colour budget eventually sprang from this. It is also well worth the time to explain that, although there may be discrete point errors in the texts,

the newsletters represent the students' own work, and that for this reason, they are not completely error free.

At the Anthology Retreat at Momoyama University in June 2003, we received more great ideas from other attendees. For example, these newsletters can also be used as a promotional tool at high school recruiting classes and placed in recruiting kits. The audience can include visitors to city and prefectural foreigner centres. The newsletters' importance reaches beyond the university into the community at large. This year, as mentioned above, our English workshop programme homepage at Ibaraki University will be finished, and students' newsletters will be available and read far beyond their classroom walls.

In the second semester, as the procedure for the newsletter is basically the same, we will not go into any great detail. However, it is valuable to have students first reflect on their past performance: their roles, past and present goals, suggestions for improvement at the level of the individual, group and class, etc. In addition, the first semester newsletter can be re-evaluated by the other class (if there is more than one making a newsletter) which examines, writes up, and exchanges confidential comments and suggestions about your class production. This feedback from a real target audience can then be discussed in small groups and taken into consideration when tackling the second semester newsletter.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the process of gradually relinquishing control and trusting the students to do their best, we, the teachers, have learned much. After all, our learners are in the front lines and have proved themselves capable of advising us as shown in their interviews and final feedback. It has been challenging, to say the least, to attempt to infuse more autonomy into the project. Some of the changes in the procedure and teachers' own attitudes have been successful; others are still in incubation or maturing. However, thanks to these efforts, we have enjoyed observing the exciting process of students becoming more motivated, rising to the challenge of accepting responsibility, and making their own decisions. In fact, our classes actually have gone much further than we ever dreamed possible. Finally, we feel this project stimulates students to reach their potential while working under the pressure of deadlines both in and out of class and juggling other commitments. In the first newsletter of the academic year especially, some do complain about a lack of time to complete group reports or other duties for the newsletter, but this mainly stems from a lack of experience. In the second semester newsletter project, the students are more familiar with the procedure and use their time more efficiently, even though they have quite often changed to different positions in the newsletter. In her self-reflection, Yasue Sato wrote a fitting closing comment:

The bad point in third year was that we have our zemi and many things to do. So, it was very hard to do this project but the (finished) newsletter is my treasure now. I know if I want to get something I need to sacrifice something. Thanks to a little trouble, the newsletter seems more beautiful to me.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

HEIDI EVANS NACHI

Joyce and Wade's account of one university newsletter project class shows an exciting example of negotiated course development embedded in critical collaborative autonomy practices. What is particularly striking is that as teachers promote autonomy, it's not just students who benefit—the students teach the teachers what it means to be autonomous! In this way, student autonomy is enhanced as teachers relinquish power and increase student accountability, and class goals are negotiated because student perceptions inform course design. Moreover, increasing student autonomy encourages teachers to reflect on and adjust their own teaching, as Joyce and Wade have done here.

In the English Language Program (ELP) at Kwansei Gakuin University where I work, student feedback is highly valued and used to promote ongoing curriculum innovation. In Joyce and Wade's context as well, feedback elicited from evaluations and interviews has a critical impact in shaping an emerging course because it's cyclical and ongoing: Students and teachers are developing the project during the project itself in some cases, or developing the project on the basis of feedback from the previous project. Doing so allows teachers to respond to student concerns in a timely manner, so students experience the benefits from their own critical course reflection. Joyce and Wade's students don't just 'own' their newsletter—they 'own' the class.

The newsletter project class both fosters student autonomy and promotes lifelong learning behaviors with skills transferable to other courses and their post-academic careers. Students are engaged in more than process writing with a purpose—they take on tasks previously managed by teachers (i.e., selecting editors and narrowing topics), and participate in various meaningful, 'real life' scenarios requiring a host of skills, such as critical thinking and analysis, evaluation and revision, decision making and meeting management, and speaking and presentation skills, to achieve course goals. Like Joyce and Wade, ELP teachers foster similar skills through group work, and students expand on these skills in their Japanese courses, upper level English medium courses, and their future careers. I think it might be fruitful for Joyce and Wade to survey their students a few years after graduation to investigate how this project course may have impacted their post-university lives.

Developing a newsletter project class has been one of my dreams, but I've always thought it would be too much work. Joyce and Wade show indeed that it is work, but work that has enormous pay-offs—students *and* teachers emerge with unforgettable memories and a class *omiyage* (a 'souvenir' or 'memento')—the newsletter. Like Joyce and Wade, I have witnessed how student motivation skyrockets when students are given choice and responsibility, and I think teachers can learn how to 'let go' from Joyce and Wade's experiences. Ultimately, when students write about topics they have selected, when they produce work that has a wider readership beyond the classroom, when they are given decision making opportunities and responsibility, and when teachers can maintain a role as consultant and guide as Joyce and Wade have done, magic happens. Does this mean autonomy is magical? Maybe; maybe not. But after reading this chapter, I'm convinced Joyce and Wade have co-constructed with their students a learning environment that promotes creativity, critical thinking, thoughtful reflection, and lifelong learning. And I think there's something magical about that.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

CHITOSE ASAOKA

I read this chapter with great interest. I particularly respect the authors' courage and effort in letting their students take the initiative and give them more decision-making power. As we are all aware, we often feel more secure and time-efficient when decision-making power is in the teachers' hands. However, learning should take place through a meaning-negotiation process between students, as well as between a teacher and students. In addition, students should be more responsible for their own learning. Furthermore, I agree that students should engage in "a learning experience that involves English" rather than acquiring English language skills as the only goal. Thus, it is very important that the students' final products be shared beyond the classroom and into the larger community.

I question which kind of academic writing training Wade and Joyce's students had to take prior to the project. They explained that, during the first year, their students "gained a good grounding in writing," and before the start of the project, "paragraph writing had been reviewed in class." However, as one of their students revealed, some students seemed to have still struggled with academic writing in English. In order to make this kind of project more successful, students need to be aware that there is a "sufficient variety of style and formats" as well as "contents" in English writing, which might be quite different from writing in Japanese. The dual constraints of inexperienced writers, both in content areas and in L2 writing skills, can often be a very frustrating challenge for our students (Gosden, 1996; Asaoka & Usui, in press). In this project's case, their students seemed to have multiple constraints: writing in a new genre (newsletter writing), writing about specific content areas and academic writing skills. As the student editor pointed out, they might need more "preparation" about style and formats in newsletter writing prior to the project—for example, in their second year of the program.

In addition, just as Joyce and Wade recursively questioned each other, I also often question myself in terms of how much I should proofread and correct students' final texts. Since students may adhere to teachers' suggestions in order to please them (Asaoka & Usui, in press), Joyce and Wade should probably leave it to their students if the purposes of the project are to work collaboratively and to take responsibility for their own writing. Of course, the assessment criteria of the project should be clearly emphasized so that students have a firm understanding that their grades are based on their participation and commitment in their own learning, rather than on writing correct sentences. If this were done, then students might not complain that they would prefer more correction and advice from teachers, as in the case of Chizu.

In these sorts of collaborative tasks, students should learn to shoulder the responsibility of their own learning, whereas teachers also need to learn to trust their students and act more like a facilitator than a language teacher.