

Maintaining Control

Autonomy and Language Learning

Edited by

Richard Pemberton, Sarah Toogood and Andy Barfield



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— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

Contents

Contributors	vii
Introduction	1
1. <i>Maintaining Control: An introduction</i> <i>Richard Pemberton, Sarah Toogood and Andy Barfield</i>	3
Theories and discourses of autonomy and language learning	11
2. Making sense of autonomy in language learning <i>Phil Benson</i>	13
3. Crash or clash? Autonomy 10 years on <i>Edith Esch</i>	27
4. Discursive dissonance in approaches to autonomy <i>Philip Riley</i>	45
Practices of learner autonomy	65
5. Controlling learning: Learners' voices and relationships between motivation and learner autonomy <i>Terry Lamb</i>	67
6. Learner autonomy in a mainstream writing course: Articulating learning gains <i>Sara Cotterall</i>	87

7. Reflective lesson planning: Promoting learner autonomy in the classroom <i>Lindsay Miller</i>	109
8. The use of logbooks — a tool for developing learner autonomy <i>Leni Dam</i>	125
Practices of teacher autonomy	145
9. Learner autonomy, the European Language Portfolio and teacher development <i>David Little</i>	147
10. The teacher as learner: Developing autonomy in an interactive learning environment <i>Barbara Sinclair</i>	175
11. Defending stories and sharing one: Towards a narrative understanding of teacher autonomy <i>Naoko Aoki, with Hiroaki Kobayashi</i>	199
12. Autonomy and control in curriculum development: 'Are you teaching what we all agreed?' <i>Mike Nix and Andy Barfield</i>	217
Commentary	239
13. Autonomy: Under whose control? <i>Richard Smith and Ema Ushioda</i>	241
Notes	255
References	259
Index	283

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David Little retired in 2008 as Head of the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences and Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Trinity College Dublin. His principal research interest is the theory and practice of learner autonomy in second language education. From 2001 to 2008 he was Director of Integrate Ireland Language and Training, a government-funded unit that provided English language courses for adult newcomers with refugee status and supported the learning of English as a second language in Irish schools. He is currently chair of the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio Validation Committee. His numerous publications on learner autonomy include *Learner Autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems* (1991).

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Mike Nix is Professor in the Law Faculty at Chuo University, Japan. His research and teaching focus on helping students to use English to engage critically through research, discussion and writing with legal, political and global issues of concern to them. He is also interested in questions of identity in language learning and use, especially in relation

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Richard Pemberton is Associate Professor in TESOL in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, UK, where he teaches and supervises MA and PhD students. He taught for nearly 15 years at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, where he co-ordinated the Self-Access Centre team, and before that taught ESL at secondary and tertiary level in the UK, Zimbabwe and Papua New Guinea. He co-edited *Taking Control: Autonomy in language learning* (1996, with Edward Li, Winnie Or and Herbert Pierson) and his interests include learner autonomy, L2 listening and vocabulary acquisition, and technology-enhanced language learning.

Philip Riley is Emeritus Professor of Ethnolinguistics at the University of Nancy, France, and a former Director of the CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues). He has taught English, Linguistics and Language Didactics in Finland, Malta and France and has made extended visits to Italy, Hong Kong and New Zealand. His main areas of interest include autonomous language learning, identity studies and intercultural communication. His latest publications include *Domain-specific English: Textual practices across communities and classrooms* (2002, edited with Giuseppina Cortese) and *Language, Culture and Identity: An ethnolinguistic perspective* (2007).

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Richard Smith is an Associate Professor in the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK. His research interests and professional activities are mainly in the areas of learner autonomy, teacher development, cultural issues in ELT and the history of language teaching. He co-edited *Learner Autonomy across Cultures: Language education perspectives* (2003, with David Palfreyman) and has a particular interest in innovative approaches to language teaching 'in difficult circumstances'. He runs the DAHLA project ('Developing an Archive and Histories of Learner Autonomy') as a means of recording practice in the field of pedagogy for autonomy, oversees the online journal *English Language Teacher Education and Development* and is co-editor of *Independence*, published by the IATEFL Learner Autonomy SIG.

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Emma Ushioda is Associate Professor in the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK, where she teaches MA courses and coordinates the Education Doctorate programme. Her main research interests include language learning motivation and its theoretical interface with learner autonomy, and relevant implications for classroom practice and teacher education (*Learner Autonomy 5: The role of motivation*, 1996). In recent years, she has been exploring language motivation from the perspective of Vygotskian sociocultural theory as well as theories of social and cultural identity, and is currently developing an approach to examining how language motivation is socially constructed in discourse.

1

Maintaining Control: An introduction

Richard Pemberton, Sarah Toogood and Andy Barfield

The origins of this book lie in a major conference entitled ‘Autonomy and Language Learning: Maintaining control’ held in Hong Kong and Hangzhou (mainland China) in June 2004. That conference was the younger sibling of another important conference held 10 years earlier, also in Hong Kong and mainland China, which formed the basis of the book *Taking Control: Autonomy in language learning* (Pemberton et al. 1996).

Back in June 1994, at the time of the first of these two conferences, the concept of autonomy in language learning — together with related practices of self-directed and self-access language learning (SALL) — had been around for some 20 years, starting out from the Centre de Recherches et d’Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) at the University of Nancy in France in the early 1970s (cf. Harding-Esch 1977a; Holec 1979, 1981; Riley 1985) and spreading to the UK, Denmark, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. At the wider international level, the concept of autonomy in language learning was starting to become more popular: a Learner Autonomy Scientific Commission had been formed as part of the Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée (AILA) and had just held its first symposium. However, autonomy had not yet become part of mainstream theory and practice in second language education. East Asia, the region that the three of us are most familiar with, is a case in point. In Japan, interest was just beginning to develop, as evidenced and aided by the formation of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT)¹ Learner Development Special Interest Group in 1993, and the publication of its first newsletter *Learning*

Learning in Spring 1994 (see Andy's 'story' below and Richard Smith's 'autobiography' in Chapter 13). In Hong Kong, the concept of learner autonomy was familiar to a relatively small group of teachers involved in supporting SALL at university level (and in some companies) (e.g. Gardner & Miller 1994), but was not familiar to local language teachers in general. In mainland China, where self-access had yet to 'take off', the concept was even less well known, and to our knowledge there had been no publications or presentations on the subject.

Ten years later, however, presentations at the 2004 conference in Hangzhou by both local and overseas participants were filled to overflowing, and to date more than 35 papers written by participants from mainland China have resulted from this landmark event (see Sarah's 'story' below). This growth of interest in China is part of a global trend, which, as Phil Benson (this volume) details, has seen autonomy take up a central position in second language education literature since the turn of the millennium, becoming, in Benson's words, "an idea that researchers and teachers ignore at their peril".

Similarly, Richard Smith and Ema Ushioda argue in their concluding chapter that the expansion in the 'autonomy movement' from small university-based circles scattered here and there to a much larger and more diverse grouping means that new voices need to be listened to and conflicting interpretations engaged with. But just as it is vital to keep opening out to different narratives and understandings, it is also important to understand how we got to where we are today. It is in this spirit, then, that we would like to share with you *our* stories of how the two conferences and this book came to be.

Taking control in 1994: Richard's story

In the early 1990s, when I arrived in Hong Kong, the University Grants Committee had decided to provide each of the seven UGC universities/polytechnics with a language enhancement grant, in order to improve the language proficiency of Hong Kong undergraduate students (which was perceived to be in decline) and to maintain Hong Kong's position as a regional international financial centre in the face of competition from Singapore and Shanghai. These funds, involving very large sums of money, allowed universities to employ more language teachers, so that the number of language classes could be increased and class sizes reduced. They were also a vital ingredient in the mushrooming of

university self-access centres (SACs) across Hong Kong in the early 1990s. Within a few years, each institution had set up its own SAC so that learners could develop their language skills outside regular class time; there was an active Association for Self-Access Learning and Development (HASALD) drawn largely from university teachers; and Hong Kong quickly developed a 'cutting edge' reputation for the design of SACs and support of SALL at university level.

In the early days, as we planned and started running our SACs, we were very much focused on practical issues such as lay-out, shelving, cataloguing and copyright. However, extended consultancy visits to Hong Kong in 1992 and 1993 by Philip Riley helped me make the connection between the 'what' of self-access and the 'why' of autonomy — to see why we were supporting self-access in the first place. To borrow Phil Benson's (2002b: 4) description of his own growing awareness under Philip Riley's guidance: "Ever so gently, Philip made me aware that there was not much point to self-access without autonomy".

However, in 1993, as an SAC coordinator, with our own centre about to open, SACs and SALL were still very much to the forefront of my mind. So when, in the same year, the director of our Language Centre at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) asked for volunteers to convene the next in our series of annual joint-venue conferences, my first suggestion for a theme was not 'autonomy' but 'self-access'. Luckily, our director suggested a broader theme, and so 'autonomy' it was. (Interestingly, Phil Benson [2002b] reports a similar intervention by his director, David Nunan, which resulted in the Benson and Voller [1997] book having an 'autonomy' rather than a 'self-access' theme.)

With an appropriate conference focus in mind, I then asked Herbert Pierson if the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) would be our institutional partner for the conference. At the time, CUHK had just created a very impressive open-plan Independent Learning Centre, and Herb, as ILC director at the university, had been responsible for bringing Philip Riley to Hong Kong to advise SAC teams at all the tertiary institutions about both the theory and practice of SALL. Herb agreed, and my colleague Austin Conway joined as co-organiser from HKUST. Together we set about planning the conference.

Our first decisions concerned who to invite as keynote speakers. With two sponsoring institutions and support from the British Council, we were able to fund the attendance of the following five pioneering figures in the fields of learner autonomy, self-access and learning to

learn: Edith Esch (University of Cambridge, UK), David Little (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland), Philip Riley (University of Nancy, France), Barbara Sinclair (University of Nottingham, UK) and Ken Willing (Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia). We were also lucky that David Nunan had recently joined the University of Hong Kong as director of its English Centre, and had accepted our invitation to give a plenary presentation — and so there were six keynote speakers.

The schedule we decided on for the conference was to have two days at HKUST, followed by a morning at CUHK, and then an afternoon trip across the border into mainland China to visit Shenzhen University, where the final keynote presentation, by David Little, was to be given. Cramming three locations and two countries into three days seemed like a good idea at the time, but the final afternoon trip across the border with no air conditioning in a packed coach (Austin Conway had to perch on David Little's knee) was — in hindsight — overdoing it, memorable though the trip was.

Overall, the conference was very successful, attracting some 150 enthusiastic participants from Asia, Oceania and Europe. It was one of those occasions where something occurs in the right place at the right time. Hong Kong University Press had just published *Directions in Self-Access Language Learning* (Gardner and Miller 1994), which had been well received, and offered to publish selected papers from the conference as soon as they heard about it. My SAC team colleagues Edward Li and Winnie Or agreed to join Herbert Pierson and myself as editors, and the four of us set about editing the volume that came to be called *Taking Control*.

Little did I think that 10 years later I — along with many of the participants at the 1994 conference — would be helping to bring *Taking Control's* younger sister into the world.

Maintaining control in 2004: Sarah's story

The idea behind holding the 2004 conference was not, as some may have initially thought, 'a good excuse for a reunion party', although that may have been one of its positive outcomes. The opportunity to hold a 10-years-on conference was, in fact, quite serendipitous. One afternoon in early 2003, I was called into our director's office. He wanted me to convene the next Language Centre conference and had some ideas as to the theme and potential collaborative partners. As I listened,

I decided that I would be happy to convene a conference but would prefer the focus to be on autonomy and language learning. My proposal was met with approval and I was given full control to organise the conference as I wished.

As soon as I left the director's office, I sought out Richard and told him the news. He thought it was a wonderful idea and, being good at maths, saw an immediate marketing angle if we connected the 2004 conference with the 1994 conference that he had convened. I saw an immediate opportunity for a bit of word play. As *Taking Control* was the name of the book that resulted from Richard's 1994 conference, *Maintaining Control* was the name I proposed for our 2004 conference — with the prospect that in another 10 years, we might have fully lost control and would have a hat-trick to mark the end of our careers. Richard, weary of my puns, wasn't too keen on the idea. There was more to it, however. Having spent almost 10 years at HKUST researching ways in which to improve the support of SALL for our learners through the SAC and through course integration, my feeling was that the issues we faced as frontline promoters of language learner autonomy were now more to do with progress and maintenance rather than beginnings and taking. As Richard mentioned above, many tertiary institutions in Hong Kong had been given rich resources to set up SACs, providing learners with the opportunities required to 'take' control. Yet there were instances where some of these institutions had lost their space, people had moved on and materials were merged with the main library collections. At HKUST we had experienced a situation where teachers had begun to refer to our SAC as a white elephant. This galvanised a small group of us to propose changes to our provisions which aimed to maintain understanding, interest and collaboration among colleagues and learners. It seemed to me that the idea of maintaining control as a progression from taking control could be an inspiring concept for practitioners and researchers dealing with the need to ensure progress and continuation not only of 'set-ups' in the form of SACs but also in provisions that scaffold autonomous language learning inside and outside a SAC. Richard and I then agreed on *Maintaining Control* as a working title.

Our next step was to set up a team of committee members and, in keeping with the idea of 'one conference, more than one venue', we proposed a collaboration with Pang Jixian, vice-dean of the School of International Studies at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. Pang readily agreed to a joint venture whereby participants would be at HKUST for

the first two days and then move on to Zhejiang University for the following two days, with a day for travelling in between. The committee then sat down and discussed who to invite. We ended up with a very long list of people, not just to maintain a connection with the 1994 conference but also to represent progress in research and practice 10 years on. Luckily our Language Centre was extremely supportive and allocated enough funding to invite 12 key speakers (six plenary and six invited). This, however, gave us quite a challenge in working out our programme, given that we only had a total of four days for plenary and parallel sessions. (Andy explains how we got round that conundrum in his ‘story’ below.)

The conference proved a great success. Phil Benson (2007c: 1) calls it “the largest to be held on the subject of autonomy and language learning to date ... attracting participants from all over the world”. It’s also possibly the only conference to generate five publications (so far), including this one. On the first day of the conference it struck me that it might be a good idea if we could publish a variety of volumes instead of one proceedings. David Little (editor of the Authentik *Learner Autonomy* series) was one of our plenary speakers and the way in which we (with Phil Benson’s great help) had organised the abstracts into clear ‘themes’ headed by invited speakers seemed to cry out for separate Authentik *Learner Autonomy* volumes with invited speakers as the editors. On our way back from Hangzhou, David agreed to the idea. *Learner Autonomy* volumes 8, 9 and 10 (Benson 2007b; Gardner 2007; Miller 2007) are currently on the shelves in the form of one set of proceedings from the conference. Another volume of Chinese papers produced by the School of International Studies at Zhejiang University, entitled *Selected Papers from the International Conference on Autonomy and Language Learning: Maintaining control* (Fan & Pang 2005), came out in 2005. It’s taken a little longer for us to produce this special volume, also called *Maintaining Control*, containing the work of our plenary and invited speakers.

Maintaining momentum 2004–07: Andy’s story

I joined the JALT Learner Development SIG in late 1994 and started reading in the SIG’s newsletter, *Learning Learning*, fascinating accounts of a conference in Hong Kong that had recently taken place. Although I had missed the conference itself, I soon met Richard Smith in Japan;

and through a shared interest in teacher education and learner development, we became involved in bringing David Little and Leni Dam as main speakers to the international JALT Conference in Tokyo in November 1998. Their joint plenary lecture, delivered to a packed conference hall with people standing in the aisles and everyone listening with rapt attention, was perhaps one of those moments when the waves of interest in autonomy in language education from Hong Kong in 1994 started to gather speed, at least in Japan, and scattered groups began to surf together.

A few years later at the AILA Conference in Singapore in 2002, I met up with Richard (Pemberton) and Sarah and many others, swapping stories and different ideas for conferences and collaborative participation by speakers. I mentioned the 1998 joint plenary in Tokyo, and we brainstormed ideas for creating a different kind of format for plenary partners for the upcoming autonomy conference in Hong Kong. From these different conversations came the idea of twinning David Little and Leni Dam, Philip Riley and Edith Esch, and Phil Benson and Naoko Aoki for the plenaries. Later, together with Sara Cotterall, Terry Lamb, Lindsay Miller and Barbara Sinclair, Mike Nix and myself ended up as invited speakers. The conference was a huge success, but what about the proceedings? Having submitted our original paper two years earlier, Mike and I felt, when I rang Richard in late 2006, that a decent enough interval had now passed to ask anew about the intended publication date. "Is it...?", "Well, not quite ..." — and then I said the fateful words: "I have some free time coming up in the next few months ...".

Within a short while, Richard, Sarah and myself had worked out a tentative schedule and draft plan of action. Now, several drafts — and many draft action plans later — with free time itself fading in memory more quickly than an editorial deadline ever did, we have almost completed our editorial work. It is good to get here, and it just remains for us to say a word or two about the organisation of this volume.

Reading on

We have organised the chapters in this book into three main sections. As you read on, you will find that the next three chapters (Chapters 2 to 4, by Benson, Esch, Riley) provide the theoretical foundation for the rest of the book, looking at current conceptualisations of autonomy from a critical and sociocultural perspective. Benson and Esch highlight

problems that occur in a globalised world in which ‘autonomy’ has come to be seen either as a ‘must-have’ skill for members of a flexible workforce or as the ‘freedom’ to make ill-informed and self-constraining ‘choices’; while Riley focuses on problems that occur when autonomy means different things to different people and the discourses of autonomy diverge.

As you will see, we have grouped the remaining chapters into two main sections: one that is concerned largely with developing *learner* autonomy (Chapters 5 to 8, by Lamb, Cotterall, Miller, Dam) and the other dealing mainly with developing *teacher* autonomy (Chapters 9 to 12, by Little, Sinclair, Aoki, and Nix and Barfield). As is often the case, these divisions are somewhat rough and ready — for example, the chapters by Miller and Dam could also have come under the ‘Teacher autonomy’ section, while those by Little and Aoki could also have been grouped together under the ‘Learner autonomy’ section — but they serve as useful starting points.

Another way of navigating through the book is to read the concluding chapter by Smith and Ushioda (Chapter 13) — either first or last. If you read it before you read the other chapters, it will help you identify the major themes of the book, and serve as a useful introduction to the field of learner autonomy as it has changed in the last 10 years. On the other hand, if you read it last, it will offer you a delicately critical view of particular chapters and overall trends.

As learner and teacher autonomy become more mainstream in second language education, and as the waters we chart become at the same time more diverse and more congested, we hope that this 10-years-on collection will, like its predecessor *Taking Control*, inspire you to maintain control and momentum on your own voyages into autonomy over the next 10 years and beyond.

December 2007

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Hong Kong

Andy Barfield, Chuo University, Tokyo, Japan

Note: For further details of the 2004 conference, see the conference website:
<http://lc.ust.hk/~centre/conf2004/>

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Now the Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Chapter 4

1. This is not to suggest that this is the only form or source of discursive dissonance, of course. The complex of attitudes and behavioural norms usually bundled together under the label 'peer pressure' is another. The bored tone adopted by, say, a teenage male student even as he is giving a right answer to a teacher's question is a clear discursive manifestation of an attempt to reconcile his group's attitudes and values with those of the institution (cf. two further examples mentioned in the Conclusion).
2. Available at: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2006/23/MENE0601048C.htm>. This is the most recent general 'circular' on the topic. See also: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/botexte/bo010607/MENE0101172N.htm>.
3. The recent controversial prohibition against the wearing of the Muslim veil, which seems to be an important exception to this rule, results from its being categorised by officialdom as a religious symbol and not merely as clothing. Religious symbols are forbidden in the strictly secular system of public education.

Chapter 8

1. My experience derives from courses in as well as outside Denmark for language teachers wanting to change their teaching approach towards the implementation of learner autonomy.
2. Again my 'evidence' derives from my workshops with language teachers, teaching different levels of learners — schoolchildren as well as adults.
3. We are talking about 10- to 15-year-old learners in a Danish comprehensive 'Folkeskole', with English levels ranging from beginning to intermediate.
4. The data shown were collected from a mixed-ability group of 9th graders, i.e. 14- to 15-year-olds.
5. A detailed description of the structure and contents of these workshops as they developed over the years is given in Dam 1999b.

6. In earlier years I used the term ‘diary’. However, the term was often misinterpreted as being something very closed and only for personal use, which was not along the lines I envisaged its being used. I therefore started using the term ‘logbook’.
7. These ‘steps’ would to a large extent be similar to the ones mentioned by the teachers in the 1993 data. However, the introduction of learners’ logs would now in most cases have first priority.
8. For examples of successful use of logbooks (diaries) at tertiary level — often written on a weekly basis — see, for instance, Yang 1998; Toogood & Pemberton 2002: 104–5; and Barfield 2003.
9. For the use of posters in the autonomous classroom, see, for example, Dam 1995: 41–2 and 1999b: 122–9.
10. I have had this class since they started learning English at the age of 10/11 where the logbook was also introduced (see Figure 8.1).
11. The learners will by this time have had approximately 560 English lessons of 45 minutes each.

Chapter 10

1. NudistVIVO is software for the analysis of qualitative data. It helps researchers to access, manage, shape and analyse detailed textual and/or multimedia data and provides a range of tools to help clarify the data, discover meanings and patterns and arrive at answers to questions. By performing manual tasks like classifying, sorting and arranging information, the software frees the researcher to devote more time to analysis and insight.
2. UoN: Barbara Sinclair, Ian McGrath, Tricia Hedge, Ann Smith.
3. BFSU: Gu Yueguo, Wang Tong, Cao Wen, Tang Jinlan; BNU: Wang Qiang, Zeng Tianguai, Wang Guangzhou, Chen Zehang.
4. UoN: Carol Hall, Eric Hall, Lindsay Cooper.
5. UoN: Gordon Joyes, Kevin Caley, Paul Distant.
6. UoN: Luong Quang Nghi, Colleen McCants.

Chapter 11

1. Following Aoki (2002), I define ‘teacher autonomy’ as the capacity, freedom and responsibility to make choices concerning one’s own teaching in the service of one’s learners’ needs and aspirations.
2. Some theorists distinguish narrative and story whereas others use them interchangeably. I shall follow the latter approach in this paper.
3. Trustworthiness is a criterion for evaluating constructivist qualitative research.

4. This is not my invention. Qualitative researchers have been aware of these issues since the crisis of representation in ethnography in the mid-1980s. Many have become reflexive and started including their own voices in their writing (Denzin & Lincoln 2000).
5. In the constructivist paradigm, consensus is one of the conditions that contribute to establishing trustworthiness.
6. This is something similar to the distinction between ‘a’ and ‘the’ in English.
7. This story is factitious. I synthesised several ‘true’ stories with a bit of my imagination.
8. The idea of using photos in the interview came from Harrison (2002). I asked Hiroaki to bring to the interview some photos of people, things or events that had been influential in his career. In the interview, Hiroaki explained these photos in a chronological order and I asked him to elaborate on them going backwards and forwards in time.
9. To do justice to this teacher, I must emphasise that he started running ‘Basics of JSL Education’ separately with relevant content a few years later.
10. Due to the space limitation, I have had to cut the story short. Hiroaki went to Korea to teach after this, came back to Japan two years later, spent a couple of years teaching part-time at several universities, and finally got a full-time position in a university.

Chapter 12

1. ‘After the Sheep? Exploring Threads in Developing Academic Literacy at the Curricular Level’ represents our thinking up to September 2004 (available at: <http://c-faculty.chuo-u.ac.jp/~mikenix1/cd/v&v/sheep.html>). This unpublished paper includes visualisations of the curriculum development process by students, part-time colleagues, full-time colleagues and administrative staff. It also includes critical responses from Michael Lomas, Sonthida Keyuravong and Yoko Morimoto — who attended the Hong Kong conference and who were also similarly concerned with curriculum development at their universities in Australia, Thailand and Japan, respectively. We felt that it would be useful to refer to particular insights and emerging principles from the 2004 paper in the present chapter.
2. It is estimated that at least 25% of Japanese workers now work on a part-time or temporary basis (Nakamura 2007). Experts judge that this trend will continue to increase as employers keep the cost of wages and social benefits down by taking on more workers on limited-term contracts (Rengo 2007). Increased casualisation in tertiary education is part, then, of a powerful trend in Japanese society.
3. We organised large-scale surveys and small-scale focus groups to understand better why students did or didn’t take certain courses and what kind of changes they thought would be appropriate.

4. In late 2007, we are moving towards dropping all reference to *skills* in course titles to signal a much stronger emphasis on content-based rather than skills-based learning. It is likely, for example, that the 'Basic Discussion Skills' course will be re-named 'Basic Research and Discussion'. The overall course objectives will probably be framed much more simply in terms of learners developing 'comfort, confidence, control, clarity, criticality' through engaging in the three interconnected macro processes of 'Researching and gathering information and ideas', 'Exchanging and explaining information and ideas' and 'Analysing and organising information and ideas'.

Index

- academic
 - literacy 217, 220–2, 224, 232–6
 - and learner autonomy 218, 220–2
 - and teacher autonomy 218
 - incommensurable
 - interpretations of 232–6
 - see also* dissonance, discursive
 - writing 87–106
- action
 - engagement in 38
 - knowledge 33, 151
 - research 171, 249
- activity theory 43
 - see also* sociocultural theory
- agency 16, 25–6, 76–7, 199, 245
- AILA 242
 - Learner Autonomy Scientific Commission 3
- alienation 151, 152
- assessment 39–40, 194
 - see also* Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; peer-assessment; self-assessment
- attribution 79, 81–2
 - see also* motivation
- autonomous
 - classroom 129
 - language learning 7, 125–6, 129, 244
 - language teaching 125
 - learner 226
 - teacher 226
- autonomy
 - academisation of 247–8
 - and academic literacy 220–2
 - and beliefs about languages 56
 - and beliefs about teaching and learning 62
 - and culture 52–3
 - and curriculum development 245
 - and discourse 48, 62
 - and discursive dissonance 54–62
 - and globalisation 21–6, 244
 - and government policy 28, 111
 - and independence 148
 - and individualism 34–8
 - and learning content 18, 20
 - and learning management 18, 20
 - and motivation 67–86, 148
 - and power relations 235
 - and self-access 5
 - and social interaction 35, 45, 46, 148–50, 151, 244
 - see also* reciprocity
 - and teacher development 125–31, 143–4
 - and teacher education 245
 - as a goal of national curricula 151, 244
 - as a set of behaviours 25
 - as constantly negotiated 38
 - as individual rationality 226
 - as social practice 243–4, 248, 252
 - as social responsibility 184, 185
 - as the capacity to exercise critical thinking 33

- as the capacity to take charge of one's learning 14, 17–18, 19, 109, 184, 244, 247
 - associated with various forms of practice 16–17
 - awareness of 111
 - collaborative 251
 - collective 214
 - conceptions of 3–5, 9–10, 13, 15, 19, 20, 33–4, 38, 41, 42, 43, 45, 244–8, 253
 - see also* autonomy, misconceptions about
 - concrete practice vs abstract conceptualisation of 248
 - critical versions of/approaches to 41, 42–4
 - current interest in 13–14, 15, 26
 - degrees of 124
 - definitions of 13–15, 17–21, 24–6, 109, 147, 184–5, 247
 - dialogic nature of 247
 - differing perspectives on 245–7, 253
 - discourse of 10, 27, 31–3, 243
 - ethnographies of 52–3, 248
 - history of 16–17
 - in different social and cultural contexts 42–3, 47
 - in the classroom 17, 67–86, 109–24, 125–44
 - individual/personal 27, 33, 34–8, 214
 - individualistic versions of/approaches to 27, 34–8, 42, 246
 - interdependent 218, 236
 - lack of 25
 - learner 3–4, 13–26, 27–32, 33–5, 37–44, 45–6, 52–3, 62, 63, 67, 69, 71, 85–6, 87–8, 89, 90–1, 94, 103, 105–6, 109–12, 114–5, 116, 118, 123–4, 125–31, 144, 147–55, 156, 161, 163, 165, 171, 172–3, 175–6, 178–80, 181, 182, 184–5, 186–8, 192, 194, 198, 199, 214, 215, 216, 218, 221, 232, 242, 243–9, 251–3
 - liberal-humanist view of 37
 - localisation of 248, 252–3
 - mainstreaming of 4, 14–15, 17, 27–32, 244–7, 253
 - making sense of 13–26
 - matrix model of 19
 - misconceptions about 31, 35, 246–7
 - moral dimension of 34
 - outside the classroom 109
 - pedagogy for 249
 - personal dimensions of 27, 33, 34–8, 110
 - political versions of 15, 19, 20, 110
 - process towards 125
 - professional 35–6, 41, 250
 - psychological versions of 15, 19, 20
 - readiness for 90–1, 185
 - researchers and 41, 42–4
 - socially situated view of 27, 38, 41, 244, 246–8
 - suppression of 25
 - teacher 10, 171–2, 180–1, 184, 200–216, 218, 224, 236, 256
 - technical versions of 19
 - universalist view of 247, 252
 - see also* agency; autonomous; control; knowledge, metacognitive; responsibility; taking charge; theories of learning; willingness
- beliefs 46
- about language and language learning 47, 52–4, 55–7
 - about learner autonomy 178–9
 - about teacher autonomy 180–1
 - about teaching and learning 46, 58–62
 - and practice 39–41, 43
 - conflicting 58–62

- explicit vs implicit 46
- folklinguistic 46, 47, 53–4, 62
- of learners 29, 54
- of teachers 38–41, 177–82
- Benson 14, 19, 85
- blended learning 188
 - see also* e-learning
- change 125, 127–9, 233
 - classroom 128
 - introduction of 128–9
 - resistance to 35, 235
 - sustaining 125, 249
 - whole-school approach to 35–6
- child-rearing practices 48–53, 150
- children
 - development of 149–50
 - inborn capacity of 149–50
 - see also* child-rearing practices
- China 4, 7–8, 175–83, 192–3, 195–8, 245
- choice 32–3, 69–70, 71, 85–6, 114, 192–3, 194
 - and self-determination 71
- classroom 244
 - autonomous 129, 256
 - learning 67–86, 125–44, 153–4
 - organisation 128
- cognition
 - distributed 34, 37, 38, 42
 - individual 37, 38
 - see also* knowledge; understanding, collective
- collaboration 222, 224–5, 226, 230, 232, 236, 250–1
 - cross-cultural 197
- collaborative
 - autonomy 251
 - see also* collective autonomy; interdependent autonomy
 - curriculum development 217–38
 - dialogue 250
 - reflection 228–9
 - research 247
- collective
 - autonomy 214, 216
 - see also* collaborative autonomy; interdependent autonomy
 - understanding 228, 236
- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 156
 - see also* European Language Portfolio
- communication 225–8
 - authentic 130
 - learner-learner 127
- communicative
 - approach 55–7, 62
 - practices (adult-child) 51–2
 - proficiency 153, 156, 223
- communities 34, 35
 - learning 30, 34, 35, 38
 - of practice 225, 226
 - virtual 30–1, 36–7
 - see also* society
- competence
 - plurilingual 42
 - sociocultural 47–8
- connectedness 148, 151
 - see also* autonomy and social interaction; reciprocity
- conscious
 - awareness 185
 - intention 150–1
 - reflection 185
- constraints 181–3, 185
 - social 37–8
- control 14, 19, 20, 26, 34, 35, 67, 78, 86, 115, 148, 152, 185, 232, 235, 248, 251–2
 - by learners
 - see* control
 - by teachers 86, 234
 - limited 182
 - locus of 80–1, 82
 - over teachers 237
 - struggle for 85–6, 252
- CRAPEL 3, 16, 58, 243, 246

- see also* Esch; Holec; Riley
- critical
- awareness 198, 250
 - dialogue 223
 - reflection 222, 228, 249
 - thinking 33, 38
 - versions of/approaches to
 - autonomy 41, 42–4
- culture 43
- and autonomy 52–3
 - creation of 152
 - exam-oriented 182
 - individualistic 34–8
 - of autonomy 34, 36
 - see also* collaboration, cross-cultural
- curriculum development 217–38, 250
- Dam 109, 154–5, 184, 243
- Deci 71, 75–6, 147–8, 150
- Denmark 50, 125–43
- dialogue 84, 139, 152, 217–38, 249–51
- collaborative 250
 - computer-mediated 251
 - critical 223
 - internal 45, 63
 - interpersonal 45
 - intrapersonal 45, 63
 - open 218, 224, 225–6, 227, 229
 - see also* language, dialogic nature of; negotiation; teaching as dialogue
- diaries 116, 256
- see also* logbooks; records of learning
- differentiated teaching and learning 243
- discourse
- and practice 38
 - and the construction of identity 46, 50–3
 - classroom 52
 - cultural 48
 - metacognitive 252
 - of autonomy 10, 27, 31–3, 243
 - of egalitarian professionalism 224–5
 - of learning 251, 253
 - of reflective collaboration 225
 - official 55, 62
 - professional 245, 247, 250, 252
 - specialised 252
 - theoretical 244
 - Western expert 245
 - see also* dissonance, discursive; learning discourses
- dissonance
- cognitive 48
 - discursive 27, 31–3, 38, 45–6, 54–63, 253, 255
 - see also* academic literacy, incommensurable interpretations of
- education
- adult 28, 29, 157–72
 - anthropology/ethnography of 48–54
 - as transmission 151–2
 - primary 29, 131–5
 - secondary 38–41, 55–62, 67–86, 111–12, 122–3, 131–43, 178–9, 180–2
 - teacher 36–7, 58–62, 206–11, 215, 249
 - see also* teacher development; teacher training
 - tertiary 87–107, 178–82, 217–24, 229–36
- educational institutions
- as learning organisations 225
- e-learning 175–98
- materials design 188–95
 - see also* blended learning
- engagement 129, 198
- see also* involvement
- English as a Second/Foreign Language 55–7, 119–21, 125–44, 157–69

- English for Academic Purposes 87–106, 217, 219, 220–4, 232–5
- Esch 243
see also Harding-Esch
- European Language Portfolio 155–73, 250–1
Milestone ELP 157–73
Swiss ELP 157
- evaluation 18, 20, 84, 127–9, 134, 142–3, 150, 152, 153, 154, 158, 161, 170, 185, 187
see also records of learning; reflection; self-assessment; self-evaluation
- explicit
knowledge 151
'learning to learn' materials 175
making learning 39–40
reflection 151
vs inexplicit beliefs 46
- extensive reading 223–4
- folklinguistics 46, 47, 53–4, 62
see also beliefs
- Foucault 228–9
- France 55–62
- Freire 151–2, 155, 171, 173, 250
- French as a Second/Foreign Language 68
- German as a Second/Foreign Language 55–7, 68
- globalisation 10, 21–6, 63, 244, 253
- goal setting 18, 77, 82, 115, 150, 154, 155, 156, 158, 159, 170, 187
see also diaries; logbooks; planning; records of learning
- group work 127–8
- Habermas 38, 225–6
- Harding-Esch 13, 28
see also Esch
- HASALD 5
- Holec 3, 14, 17–18, 27–8, 31, 109, 184, 246, 247
- Hong Kong 3, 4–8, 36, 111–12, 122–3, 125, 241–2, 243, 244, 245
see also HASALD
- human experience
individual-cognitive dimensions of 149
sociocultural dimensions of 149
- identity 16, 22, 45–6, 50
and knowledge 48
construction of 46, 48
learner 16, 22, 63
personal 45–6
- independence 35, 148
contrasted with autonomy 148
see also learning, independent
- individual 45, 237
differences 179, 182
see also self; society, member of
- individualism 34–8
- Integrate Ireland Language and Training 157–73
- interdependence 244
- interdependent autonomy 218, 236
see also collaborative autonomy; collective autonomy
- intersubjectivity 149–50
see also social interaction and autonomy
- involvement 154, 218
active 129
see also engagement
- Ireland 157–73
- JALT Learner Development SIG 3, 8, 241
- Japan 3, 8–9, 204–16, 217–38
see also JALT Learner Development SIG
- Japanese as a Second Language 204–16
- knowledge
action 33, 151

- and identity 48
 - construction 38
 - control of 152
 - management 46, 47, 62
 - see also* social knowledge system
 - metacognitive 87–106, 185, 186–7, 194
 - metalinguistic 152, 158
 - person 98
 - professional 203
 - questioning of 33
 - school 33, 151
 - social distribution of 42, 48
 - see also* cognition, distributed
 - social knowledge system 46, 47–8, 62
 - strategy 89, 101–2
 - task 99–101
 - teacher 203
 - transfer
 - see* knowledge management
 - transmission of 151–2
 - see also* cognition; modes of knowing; understanding, collective
- language
- centres 28
 - dialogic nature of 150, 151
 - for migrants 157–73
 - proficiency 153
 - use 153–4
- learner
- as a cog in a machine 23, 26
 - as a social being 199
 - as technology 23, 25
 - autonomy 3–4, 13–26, 27–32, 33–5, 37–44, 45–6, 52–3, 62, 63, 67, 69, 71, 85–6, 87–8, 89, 90–1, 94, 103, 105–6, 109–12, 114–15, 116, 118, 123–4, 125–31, 144, 147–55, 156, 161, 163, 165, 171, 172–3, 175–6, 178–80, 181, 182, 184–5, 186–8, 192, 194, 198, 199, 214, 215, 216, 218, 221, 232, 242, 243–9, 251–3
 - behaviours 252
 - beliefs 29, 54
 - control
 - see* control
 - focus on 16–17, 22
 - histories
 - see* life stories
 - ideal autonomous 226
 - identity 16, 22, 63
 - role of 16, 28–9, 76–85, 86, 127–9, 152, 153, 171, 234–5, 249
 - see also* pedagogical relation
 - strategies
 - see* strategies
 - training 179
 - voices 67–86, 248, 250–3
 - see also* voice
 - centredness 22, 35, 113–15, 224
- learning
- and personal identity 45
 - communities 30, 34, 35, 38
 - content 18
 - cultures 29
 - discourses 29, 249, 251, 253
 - environment
 - controlled 249
 - learner-directed 129
 - teacher-directed 129
 - experiential 249
 - in formal contexts 150–5
 - independent 5, 244
 - management 18, 20, 21, 25, 85, 150
 - see also* self-management
 - organisations 228
 - process 130–1, 133–4, 250–2
 - social mediation of 34, 35, 186
 - strategies
 - see* strategies
 - styles 29
 - through internal dialogue 45–6
 - to learn 5–6, 38–9, 175–6

- tools 30, 40, 157, 251–2
see also tools
- transfer 102
see also theories of learning
- liberal-humanist
 approaches to curriculum development 218, 222–5, 228, 237
 model of the individual 237
 view of autonomy 37
- life stories 199–216
- listening 116, 119–21
- Little 20, 243
- logbooks 125–44, 256
 daily use of 133–5
 electronic 144
 entries in 136–40
 learner evaluations of 140–3
 teacher 130–1
see also diaries; records of learning
- Luxembourgeois as a Second / Foreign Language 57
- materials
 alternative 128
 design 175–6, 188–95
- metacognition 84, 251–2
see also knowledge, metacognitive
- modes of knowing
 narrative 201
 paradigmatic 201, 204
- monitoring 18, 20, 150, 153, 158, 161, 185, 187
- motivation 16, 22, 29, 67–86, 148, 242
 and autonomy 67–86, 148
 extrinsic 72–6, 86
 instrumental 182
 intrinsic 71, 75–6, 148
 lack of 67
see also attribution; self-determination; self-fulfilment; will; willingness
- negotiation 70, 85, 149, 152, 153, 172, 225
see also dialogue; teaching as negotiation
- New Zealand 87–107
- Norway 49–50
- pedagogical
 relation 28, 41
 tools 251–2
 tradition 46
- pedagogy
 for autonomy 249
 of encouragement 59, 61–2
see also teaching
- peer-assessment 29, 39–40
see also assessment
- planning 18, 20, 84, 86, 90, 126, 150, 153, 158, 161, 185, 187
see also goal setting
- portfolios 232
see also diaries; European Language Portfolio; logbooks; records of learning
- power
 lack of 182
 positions of 248–9
 relations 226–7, 229, 235, 237–8, 251, 253
- practice
 and beliefs 39–41, 43
 autonomy as social practice 243–4, 248, 252
 autonomy associated with various forms of 16
 child-rearing 48–53, 150
 communicative (adult-child) 51–2
 communities of 225, 226
 contradictions between discourse and 38
 teacher 249
 vs abstract conceptualisation of autonomy 248

- reading
see extensive reading
- reciprocity 151, 152
see also autonomy and social interaction; connectedness; dialogue; social interaction and autonomy
- records of learning 154, 155–73
see also diaries; logbooks; portfolios
- reflection 20, 45, 83, 86, 94, 97, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155–73, 185, 192, 194, 195–6, 222–37, 249, 252
 collaborative 228–9
 critical 20, 222, 228, 249
 metacognitive 232
 self- 128
- reflective
 lesson planning 117–24
 teaching 118
 writing 250
- research
 action 171, 249
 collaborative 247
 constructivist approaches to 202–3, 257
see also theories of learning, constructivist
 ethnographic 43, 48, 58, 68, 248
 generalisability of 204
 into autonomy 41, 42–4
 likelihood of 201
 positivist 201
 reflexive approaches to 257
 story-based 199–216
 trustworthiness of 203, 257
 validity of 201
see also modes of knowing
- resistance 32, 84, 218
 to change 220
- responsibility 18, 20, 23–6, 34, 38, 76, 82, 83, 84, 115, 152, 170, 179, 185
 discourses on 23
 of teachers and researchers 33
 social 184, 185
- Riley 5, 242, 243
- scaffolding 186, 188, 193
- Scandinavia 49–50
- self 23, 43
 and socialisation 43
 as a reflexive project 22–3
 construction of 63
 multilingual 23
 technologisation of 23
 -access centres 4–7, 111, 244
 -access language learning 3–7, 112, 244
 -assessment 29, 39–40, 74, 155–73, 185, 187
see also assessment
 -centredness 35
 -determination 71, 75–6
see also motivation
 -directed learning 3, 14, 244
 -evaluation 83, 136
see also evaluation
 -expression 52–3
 -fulfilment 34, 148
 -improvement 23
 -management 83
see also learning management
 -mastery 34
 -reflection 128
see also reflection
 -regulation 42, 87
 -reliance 35
- social
 constraints 37
 distribution of knowledge 48
see also cognition, distributed
 distribution of language 48
 interaction and autonomy 35, 45, 46, 148–50, 151, 244
see also intersubjectivity
 knowledge system 46, 47–8, 62
 mediation of learning 34, 35, 186
 practice of autonomy 243–4, 248, 252

- responsibility 184, 185
- theory of learning 36, 37, 41
 - see also* sociocultural theory
- society
 - knowledge-creating 35
 - member of 45, 49
 - see also* communities
- sociocultural
 - competence 47–8
 - theory 29, 38, 149–50, 185–6, 234
 - see also* activity theory; social theory of learning; Vygotsky
- Spain 126
- Spanish as a Second/Foreign Language 55–7
- strategies 89, 90, 91, 93, 116–17, 179, 180, 185, 186–7, 194
 - awareness of 89, 116
 - cognitive 116
 - metacognitive 116, 185
 - see also* evaluation; knowledge, metacognitive; monitoring; planning
 - self-management 185
 - socio-affective 116
- Sweden 126
- taking charge 14, 17–18, 31, 244
 - see also* autonomy as the capacity to take charge of one's learning; control; Holec; responsibility
- task
 - awareness 114
 - creation 115
 - intervention 115
 - involvement 114
 - knowledge 99–101
 - modification 115
 - transcendence 115
- teacher
 - as adviser 29–30
 - autonomy 10, 171–2, 180–1, 184, 200–216, 218, 224, 236
 - and learner autonomy 181, 184, 218, 236
 - as control over teaching 184
 - as self-directed professional development 184
 - definitions of 184, 256
 - laissez-faire form of 224, 236
 - see also* autonomy, professional
 - beliefs 38–41, 177–82
 - development 125–31, 143–4, 171–2, 175–98, 218, 226, 249
 - see also* curriculum development; teacher education
 - education 36–7, 58–62, 206–11, 215, 249
 - see also* teacher development; teacher training
 - educator 215, 250
 - feedback 75, 139
 - histories
 - see* life stories
 - ideal autonomous 226
 - knowledge
 - as storied 203
 - plans 125–7
 - practices 249
 - role of 28–9, 59–62, 71, 76–85, 114–15, 120–1, 125, 127–9, 142, 152, 153, 155, 171, 198, 234–5, 244, 249
 - see also* pedagogical relation
 - training 125–31, 144, 175, 177
 - see also* teacher education
- teaching
 - as dialogue 152
 - as negotiation 152
 - as transmission of knowledge 151–2
 - process 251
 - reflective 118
 - see also* pedagogy
- technology 178, 179, 182
 - and independent learning 179
 - and supporting autonomy 30–1, 188

- attitudes towards 178
 - see also* blended learning; e-learning
- theories of learning
 - cognitivist 29
 - constructivist 37, 188
 - see also* research, constructivist approaches to
 - innatist 29
 - social 36, 37, 41
 - sociocultural 29, 38, 42, 43, 149–50, 185–6, 188
- tools
 - for developing autonomy 40, 125–44, 172, 198, 251
 - for developing metacognitive knowledge 194–7, 251
 - for e-learning 177, 188–9, 194–7, 198
 - for learning 30, 40, 157, 251–2
 - see also* diaries; European Language Portfolio; learning tools; logbooks; materials; reflective lesson planning; portfolios; technology
- UK 36–7, 38–41, 58–61, 67–86
- understanding
 - collective 228, 236
 - see also* cognition, distributed
- voice 241–53
 - see also* learner voices
- Vygotsky 45, 63, 149–50, 186
- will 71
 - see also* self-determination; willingness
- willingness 77, 150, 185
 - see also* motivation; will
- writing 87–106, 251–2