

foreigner, and as a family member, and as a member of a cultural group, and so on.

There's quite a bit of attention at the moment being paid to the idea of intercultural communication and language learning – the current (March 2008) *EL Gazette* has an article by Barry Tomalin about teaching 'intercultural awareness', 'the fifth skill' – but the point here is that the learner himself or herself is an intercultural identity, existing between cultures, merging rules and expectations to and from and around cultures. And here I mean in the ways that a learner is situated as an outsider of the learnt/proficient community, and so is trying to develop a new or additional identity as a member of it. So a Mexican teenager learning English in Mexico with other Mexican teenagers and a Mexican English teacher is in an intercultural role. Learners learn through multiple modalities and we should try to engage with more than one of them.

Fourth is Kate Pahl's own choice of main point from this, and that's the issue of timescale.

The data I interpreted at home was part of a mass of data collected over two years, whereas the data collected in the family literacy class was collected in the timescale

of the course, twelve weeks. One of the key differences, I would argue, between research in classrooms and research in homes, is the difference of timescales.... The timescale of the family literacy class was contained by the demands of the term, and the specific twelve-week course within a term.

This seems to be the heart of the matter. 'I think the issue of timescales is key.' The point is 'that schools have particular timescales, which can be placed in contrast to other timescales.' In fact, the school year, being organised around political, religious and social constraints, 'does not allow for the complex accretion of meaning that [the boy's] meaning making over time showed.'

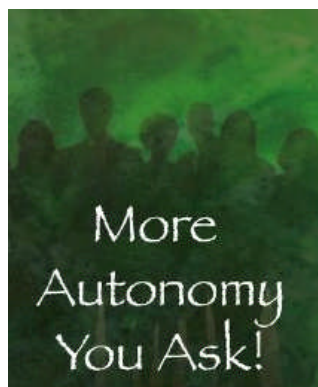
So there we have it, just as people like Adrian Mitchell have been maintaining for years: school isn't always the best place for learning.

But we believe we have to have schools, for a number of reasons, so we need to forge really effective observations of learners and crossover roles for educators to reflect the complexity and multimodality of learning. We need to support independent learning so that learners are able to cope with the institutional process of instruction properly



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Book Reviews



More Autonomy You Ask!

Edited by Eric M. Skier and Miki Kohyama. 2006. Tokyo, Japan: The Learner Development Special Interest Group of JALT

Reviewed by Darren Elliot

More Autonomy You Ask is the follow-up volume to the outstanding 2003 publication (*Everything you wanted to know about*) *Autonomy (but) You (were too busy teaching to) Ask* (AYA, for short). An excellent review of AYA, by Androulla Athanasiou, was published in issue 40 of *Independence*. Produced by the Learner Development Special Interest Group of the Japan Association

for Language Teaching, 'MAYA', like AYA, is an edited work collecting studies and reflections from teacher-researchers across Japan and beyond. There are two loosely themed sections, 'Inquiry into Language Learners' and 'Inquiry into Instructional Practices', with introductory, bridging and summarising chapters from guest authors. The reader is also assisted in making sense of what he or she has read by the critical responses at the end of each chapter, one by another contributor and a second by a well-known researcher in the field of autonomy.

What gives the book its remarkable cohesion is the truly collaborative nature of its development. Skier and Kohyama explain the process, and the reasoning behind it, in their foreword. After the initial proposals, writers gathered at a retreat to hone and reflect on their work through discussion. At the end of the retreat, each researcher was assigned two collaborative partners; one to correspond with via email, and one 'local' partner for face to face dialogue.

Besides the practical benefits to the writing and editing process, this seems to be an important conceptual, or even political, statement. The editors and authors are not writing about the value of cooperation whilst locked alone in their garrets, and this sets the whole tone of the text. 'Autonomy' does not mean 'alone', but is greatly enhanced by working with others to achieve shared goals. Less explicitly expressed perhaps, but still something that I took from the book, was the significance of teacher autonomy and its relationship to learner autonomy.

After Krashen's introduction, Head (chapter two) contributes a chapter which sets the context for learner autonomy in Japan. Her own research focused on the attitudes of

student teachers in training and indicated that her students were neither passive nor non-critical. Her historical overview also highlights the precedents for independent thinking in Japanese education. This was a vitally important point to make at the outset of the book; certainly, 'autonomy' is not a prefabricated model which can be set up in any culture or classroom, but neither is it a purely 'European' idea which can never work in Asia. Head's chapter helps the reader to pick up this thread and follow it through the book.

Shimo (chapter four) provides a good example of how 'autonomy' is being adapted to fit Japanese situations in her piece on 'Collaborative Shadowing'. In a narrow definition of the term, this fairly directed activity might not be seen as particularly autonomous, but such criticism would be churlish when confronted with the responses of the students, who felt empowered and more able to reflect on their work. Reflection is another fundamental notion that crops up frequently throughout *MAYA*, and in the next chapter (five) Wakui explains how she encouraged reflection through peer and self assessment in a presentation class. After early hesitancy she found that the students gained confidence and self-awareness that she claims is crucial to language development. Cotterall's critical response compares her own experience of a similar project, and concurs with the main piece. Surma and Usuki also deal with presentations and 'stage fright' in chapter six.

One problematical area for those seeking to foster autonomy in education is that of assessment. This is particularly true in what Davies calls the 'exam-driven, pressure-cooker Japanese school system' (p.31). Harrison (chapter seven) used the creation of tests as both a

learning and assessment tool to great effect, but in order to do so admits he had to allow the learning experience to take precedence over test validity. Nonetheless, the students were motivated and communicative, and as Nix puts it in his critical response '(is it) actually more autonomy-inviting for students to explore, deconstruct, and subvert the very conventions of test-based evaluation (?)'. Echoing Aoki's critical response to Head (p. 30), Harrison also wrestled with the uses of English and Japanese. Aoki points to the difficulties of researchers who don't speak the language of their research subjects, and Harrison decided to allow the use of Japanese in class, prioritising the autonomous aspects over language practice for certain activities. This poses the question – does language sometimes get in the way of autonomy, and does the pursuit of autonomy threaten the quality of language instruction? Asaoka summarises the previous chapters and reiterates the importance of interaction in autonomy to bring the first section to a close.

The next section begins with Deacon and Croker's discussion of their peer-teaching project (chapter nine). Giving up control of the class (or, at least, appearing to) is challenging for many teachers, and accepting responsibility terrifying for many students. These students certainly felt so at first, but with support and lightly applied guidance were immensely rewarded. This chapter was particularly resonant with me, reminding me of a similar project (on a much smaller scale) I undertook myself. It was fascinating to see the students begin to understand the teaching process, and realise that classes are not a string of random activities bundled together but have goals and carefully constructed pathways. Learners

who see this, who have a heightened level of awareness, are better positioned to maximise their learning potential.

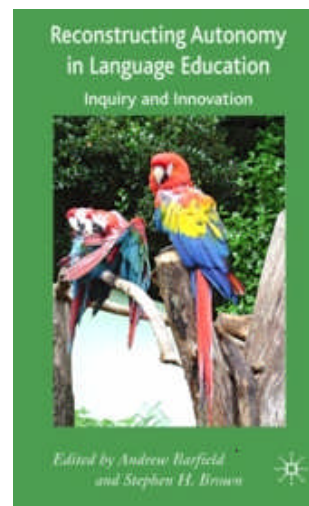
Chapter ten is an enthralling representation of a class in which everyone comes together perfectly. In her well-considered longitudinal study, Morimoto sought (and is still seeking) to discover how her failing group became one of the most autonomous and bonded classes she had ever worked with, and cites a number of situational factors which contribute to the success or failure of a group. However, what I took from the chapter is that a group of young people just clicked. Sometimes it is chastening to remember that students have lives beyond the classroom and that we as teachers have minimal influence on their success or failure as learners. Morimoto has subsequently written another paper focusing more centrally on group dynamics, which I look forward to reading. In the meantime, I heartily recommend Ann Senior's recent book *The Experience of Language Teaching* (Cambridge University Press) for an examination of the language classroom as a social organism.

In chapter eleven, Haugh sets out a quintessential example of a teacher facing resistance. Dramatised role-plays proved to be outside the students' comfort zone, although when the pedagogical reasoning behind the technique was clearly laid out there was a thawing of tension – something to remember. Ultimately though, as Doud points out in his critical response, autonomy cannot be enforced through methods which the students are reluctant to take up. Initially I agreed unreservedly with this, but reading chapters thirteen (Bradley) and fourteen

(Stephenson), both based on the use of reflective journals, I reconsidered. Without some pushing from a teacher, students may give up too soon on a process or method with real value. We must be cautious, though, when selecting methods or materials about which we ourselves are very enthusiastic; we can easily lose sight of the students' standpoint. This is the warning sounded by Davies in chapter fifteen, a dark allegory which reminds us that autonomy should come up from below. In between times, Graves and Vye take a slightly lighter tone on reflection, linking the personal to the professional in chapter twelve.

Lamb draws the book to a close, and the threads together, in the final chapter. To us as individuals, and to those considering the culture or context they are working in, he offers words of great hope. Individual differences are not fixed, nor pathological, but depend on context. Context, on the other hand, is constantly in flux. I see these words as hopeful because, as Lamb points out, they make us ultimately responsible for ourselves. And that, after all, is what autonomy is all about.

Ed.note: For information on how to purchase this book see: <http://ld-sig.org/publications/>



Reconstructing Autonomy in Language Education: Inquiry and Innovation

Edited by Andrew Barfield
and Stephen H. Brown.
2007. Basingstoke:
Palgrave Macmillan.

Reviewed by Zakia Sarwar

The title of this book is pleasing and its cover is attractive esthetically. Together, they catch the reader's attention immediately as the colourful parrots against a green background are juxtaposed with the word 'autonomy', which is the very opposite of the kind of parrot-like learning that is practised so often in educational environments around the world. Practitioners who are interested in remaining updated about emerging issues in learner autonomy are bound to be drawn towards the idea of 'reconstructing' autonomy and the research angle suggested in the title by 'inquiry' and the sharing of 'innovation' in this field.

This excellent book could be considered a natural sequel to

the process which led to the publication of *Autonomy You Ask!* (Barfield and Nix 2003). The editors of this previous volume were particularly interested in the question of voice, or the need to hear and respect voices of all participants in different learning/teaching/research processes. Thus, multivocality became one of the challenges in the process of creating the current volume for the editors Andy Barfield and Steve Brown. They have taken pains to include not only internationally well-known experts in the field as authors, but also others who would work with new perspectives from both EFL and ESL learning environments. So this volume can justly be termed 'an international exploration of current developments of autonomy in action in a variety of contexts in several countries' (p. vii). It includes researchers and teachers from China, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan Portugal, Thailand, the UK and the USA. Therefore, for professionals around the world, working in the field of learner autonomy, this collection of papers holds great value, because it covers many of the contexts in which teachers work world-wide.

This volume is particularly useful as it counters arguments in which learner autonomy is often looked upon as associated with Western democratic traditions and not suitable for non-Western education systems. As Maria Alfredo Morieira from Portugal says (in chapter 5), 'democratic transformation in the classroom is achieved through a shared struggle to promote students' autonomy as learners, and, in the process, increase the democratic nature of the teaching and learning process' (p. 58). So learner autonomy is appropriate in any educational system seeking to promote critical thinking skills and reflective learning which

relates reconstructed knowledge to students' real world. The rich tapestry of this book provides valuable insights into different facets of learner autonomy which can apply in different educational environments.

In the preface, Barfield and Brown talk about three challenges which the authors faced while compiling the papers for this book. They were confronted by the fundamental questions of voice, audience and power during their engagement with the research being carried out for this project. To the authors, talking about multivocality would have been only at a superficial level, unless the interplay of resources, persons and the reconstruction of knowledge was also addressed simultaneously and systematically. So authors from different geographical locations and with different (e.g. EFL or ESL) backgrounds were paired with each other. As part of the project, they were all connected to an interactive website to facilitate feedback on and discussion of each others' work. The editors hoped that 'the access to these varied local and international resources would enhance interaction and critical reflection, and would follow through in unexpected ways into written accounts that were created' (p. ix). Going through the volume, one can testify that their hopes have been fulfilled. All chapters make a fascinating reading from the point of view of research as well as classroom practice and provide great insights into both teacher and learner autonomy.

In the introductory chapter 1, David Little briefly traces the history of how learner autonomy entered into the language teaching debate at the end of 1970s. The distinguishing feature of the emergence of learner autonomy is that as against the communicative approach, this theory has mainly been developed by classroom

practitioners, teacher educators and educational researchers charged with implementing innovations. Thus, the perspectives on learner autonomy have continuously been informed by classroom practices in language teaching and learning. In this respect, the three recurring features of this volume are that: it shuttles back and forth between theory and practice; it uses autobiographical narrative as a way of tapping into individual learners' language learning experience; it recognizes that development of autonomous teachers is a pre-condition for the development of autonomous learners.

The core of this book is divided into three sets of research papers:

Part One: Teacher and learner education (chapters 2-7)

Part Two: Classroom practice (chapters 8-13)

Part Three: Self-access learning and teacher education (chapters 14-18)

The last chapter of each section is a commentary on the section's chapters, which facilitates reading by highlighting the main emerging issues, and synthesising them succinctly. These commentary chapters also raise kernel questions for further inquiry because learner autonomy is not a state to 'arrive' at, but a goal to continue striving for.

Flavia Viera in 'Teacher Development Through Inquiry: Getting started' (chapter 2) shares her concern about how teacher educators often act as expert researchers who tell teachers what they should know. She decided to let teachers create the curriculum for their needs. As this was her own choice, she calls it 'exercising power to empower' and it would demonstrate to teachers how they can both guide and step back from the process of enabling student autonomy.

Leena Karlsson and Falicity Kjisik (chapter 3) encouraged students to explore and reflect on their learning histories to be able to take control of their learning.

Imposition of pedagogy of autonomy and reconstruction of teachers' role are discussed in the next two chapters by Akara Akaranthi and Suriyan Panlay ('Tensions in Policy and Practice in Self-Directed Learning') and Maria Alfredo Moriera ('On Democracy and Learner Autonomy in Initial Teacher Education: Guerrilla Warfare?'). The authors share their experiences of resistance to the introduction to learner autonomy. In the concluding remarks of their chapter, Akara finds that the change and frustrations encouraged her to find her voice and Suriyan realized that a balance between policy and classroom practice needs to be found through collaboration and discussion. Maria Alfredo (chapter 5) discovers that the 'spaces for democracy and learner autonomy are to be found in the dialectical relationships between philosophical stances and pedagogical choices' (p. 70).

Peter Brown, Richard Smith and Ema Ushioda present in chapter 6 an exciting action research account of "Responding to Resistance" in a situation in which students asked why they should pay so much money if they had to read and learn on their own. As a result of their research they became more flexible in ways of assessment of the students' needs. The research also led them to think that resistance to pedagogy for autonomy 'should be viewed as a positive phenomenon [giving] an opportunity for teachers to reflect on core values in collaboration with students and as a basis for continual improvements' (p. 83). As a

situation often faced by those who introduce learner autonomy in their classrooms, both the action research process and findings in this chapter are extremely useful from the reader's point of view.

All the six chapters in this first part of the book challenge the notion of working towards learner autonomy as a straightforward process with predictable outcomes. And a basic contradiction which authors bring to focus is that unless teachers themselves believe in autonomy they will not be in a position to 'empower' their learners.

The second section of the book focuses on classroom practice and is bound to touch the hearts of teachers at the grass root level who struggle to achieve autonomy in their classrooms using their own and their learners' narratives and reflections as tools to guide them.

From China, Huijuan Shao and Zongjie Wu in 'Nurturing Language Learner Autonomy Through Caring Pedagogic Practice' (chapter 8) stress the aspect of 'caring' in classrooms which awakens students' hearts and helps them open up and discover their own ways of understanding the world through the knowledge they gain. In chapter 9 Teija Natri talks about the crucial issue of self and peer assessment in 'Active Learnership in Continuous Self- and Peer-Evaluation'. It is significant that a student from this study reports that self evaluation enabled him to distinguish his 'weaknesses and concentrate on them in [his] language learning.' Results also show that peer evaluation is a supporting exercise which helps raise learners' awareness of different levels of language skills.

Chapters 10 ('Seeking Autonomy in a Lecture Course'

by Hugh Nicoll) and 12 ('Telling Tales of Transformation') by Mike Nix both juxtapose the voices of learners and teachers. In these chapters, as readers, we too can listen to both sides and construct our own interpretations. In chapter 11 ('Uses of Adversity: Moving Beyond L2 learning Crises'), Rebecca Oxford et al. give tales of four learners of different ages, genders, countries and backgrounds and their agonizing uncertainties while learning a second/foreign language. Very rightly the authors conclude that 'Usually the affective side of L2 learning is ignored, or failures and crises are hushed up and made to feel shameful. Open discussions about L2 crises would help struggling learners recognize that they are not alone and that they can transcend crises'. A lot of classroom practitioners face the dilemma of hesitant learners, so the insights in and questions raised by this article are extremely useful.

Mike Carroll and Sarah Cotterall in their commentary in chapter 13 point out that the three strands in Part Two – narrative, struggle, and reflection -- are closely intertwined. The road to learner autonomy is full of struggles and uncertainties, but building mutual trust to overcome crises through reflection seems to be a way forward to lead to finding spaces for both teachers and learners to reconstruct their identities and knowledge.

Part Three deals with Self-access Learning and Teacher Collaboration. Here there are case studies looking into the introduction of different policies in educational settings and how the staff and students deal with the consequent changes. The bottom line is helping teachers to become agents of change but this does not necessarily depend just on teacher training, as

Pornapit Darasawang et al. discovered in the SEAR project in Thailand reported in chapter 14. Teachers involved tried to deal with innovations without fully understanding the concepts behind learner autonomy and also making an effort to keep their regular routines. This brought a number of problems for the project. In chapter 15 (Support Structures for Self Access Learning), Sarah Toogood and Richard Pemberton share a structured programme which they believed would help teachers guide learners easily towards learning autonomously. But it didn't really work out. So they recommend a more in depth look at teachers' beliefs and how they affect learners, concluding that 'teacher training is important but will not by itself ensure the success of an innovation over the long term (p. 195).

In yet another experiment recounted in chapter 16 ('Shifting Sands: Supporting Teachers in Facilitating Independent Learning' by Jean T. Young et al.), independent learning was introduced to teachers, as an essential element in the curriculum to promote accepting responsibility and fostering reflection. But the dilemma which arose in this project is similar to that of fostering learner independence with language learners, in which there are doubts leading to lack of confidence, and uncertainties about personal competence. However, teachers do need to experience autonomous learning for themselves and may thus exercise teacher autonomy as a result.

Team work and collaborative learning are comparatively new concepts in many educational climates. Judith Kennedy and Annamaria Pinter in 'Developing Teacher Autonomy Through Team Work' (Chapter 17) worked on a project which encouraged trainees to collaborate in teams and design a syllabus that would be innovative yet practical. Their conclusion concerns 'the need to establish support systems for our teams so that we can help them to deal with group processes and facilitate the collaborative growth of every group' (p. 220).

Comparing parts two and three of the book, it appears that teacher initiated learner autonomy programmes seem more successful than those initiated as 'policies' by stake holders other than the classroom practitioners. This is perhaps because teachers' own belief in learner autonomy is crucial for its success. Alan Mackenzie in his commentary in chapter 18 ('Teachers, Transitions and Time: Learning for Educational Change') concurs with this view by saying 'In order for educational programmes to develop autonomous learners, they need first to foster autonomous teachers.' (p. 230). Kathleen Toohey in the concluding chapter 19 ('Autonomy /Agency Through Socio-cultural Lenses') bases her ideas on the socio-cultural perspective of learning, and considers learner autonomy as 'socially situated agency'. She points out that 'if we are interested in education for democracy, we must ask critical questions of if and/or how specific practices, resources and

identity roles for teachers and students mirror other (actual or desired) social arrangements in larger social worlds beyond the classroom' (p. 242). In short, whose agenda is it to introduce learner autonomy and why? The important point for me is that this volume gives us an opportunity to read descriptions of teachers who interrogate the traditionally accepted beliefs about teaching and learning in a multitude of ways and give many interpretations of learner autonomy, which are thought-provoking and indicate further enquiry.

Over all, going through the book is a rewarding experience as it empowers those who read it, especially as the language is jargon free and very easily understandable. Learning about the struggles and uncertainties experienced by some authors in this book will certainly be a liberating influence for those who look upon learner and teacher autonomy as a goal to work for and are aware that it is not always achievable! Reading *Reconstructing Autonomy in Language Education* is like a wonderfully exciting journey where some spots are familiar and others seem a destination we have only ever dreamed of.

Reference

Barfield, A. and Nix, M. (eds) 2003. (*Everything you wanted to know about) Autonomy (but) You (were too busy teaching to) Ask*. Tokyo: JALT